



Title: Automata I & II: Generative art as a language of the socio-political

Artwork

Topic: Art

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<https://cinema.usc.edu/>

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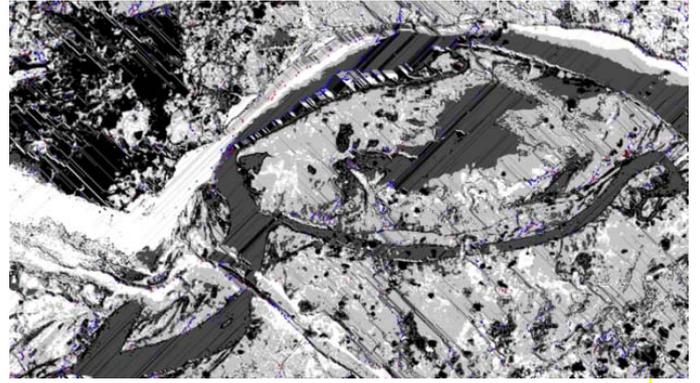
Abstract

Automata I and Automata II are two parts of an arts research piece that attempt to connect socio-political ideas to computation using the aesthetic expression of generative art. The artwork explores the idea of reverse engineering a social issue – in this case the gaze of a street surveillance camera – back through a particular algorithmic logic – in this case cellular automata.

The piece presents different perspectives on a scene: the algorithm's view and the human's view, whilst creating a generative redesign of its landscape. It is an opportunity to think through the difference between the simplified data and rules that an algorithm operates with, and the higher-level image that we see, and which might hold cultural or social meaning.

This generative visual thinking is applied to computer vision processes and the image of a surveillance camera: breaking down an image, making it algorithm readable, isolating state changes. The resulting animations are generative expressions of movement and stillness, revealing and concealing oneself in relation to an algorithm. This work is conducted in the context of ideas of algocracy [1], which is a form of power that takes place through the design of algorithms and the way they tacitly shape behaviours and assert authority without our conscious awareness. Jentery Sayers proposes a reframing of the essentializing binary modes of technologies of vision by using strategies that promote ironic or ambiguous vision [2], to which I would like to look to the generative arts for those strategies.

The work is about using generative art techniques to think through computational ideas, to consider seemingly foundational and neutral systems like cellular automata in the context of more complex social issues. Can such an aesthetic expressive process-based work enable access to these computational issues? What is the scope for using the visual language of generative art for critical argument?



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Key words: cellular automata, computer vision, critical code, creative code, algocracy

Main References:

[1] A. Aneesh, “*Virtual Migration*”, Duke University Press, 2006

[2] Jentery Sayers, “*Computer Vision as a Public Act: On Digital Humanities and Algocracy*, in *Disrupting The Digital Humanities*”, Punctum Books, 2016