ART
ANOTHER ME AND MY SHADOW

Imagine those first tottering steps on an ice rink, people bunching and giggling. Only here no one is skating – they're shadow-shuffling, searching for 'video portraits' that loom beneath their feet like mirror images of somebody else.

It's the first night of Under Scan, a £1m public art installation funded by EMDA, the East Midlands Regional Development Agency, which combines the age-old amateur dramatics of shadow-play with high-tech street surveillance. It works by turning up to 2,000 sq m into an ad-hoc amphitheatre of light, using a powerful 12kW projector. Then, a computer tracks people's movement, and triggers 14 smaller projectors to throw the video portraits (short film loops of another person) into their path: they pop up within the shape of their shadows.

'If you pay no attention to it, the portrait is also not interested and disappears,' says Under Scan's creator, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. 'If you engage, it'll come alive and look up at you, maybe send kisses or make questionable proposals, whatever. It's completely uncensored – people were invited to do what they liked.'

From its opening in Lincoln, it's now in Leicester (until 22 January), and then heads to Northampton, Derby and Nottingham, finishing 22 March. Local interest compares to that generated wherever Spencer Tunick shoots his mass nudity photographs. More than 1,000 volunteers were filmed last summer for the video portraits, except – this time – they kept their clothes on.

As you might expect, the man behind the scenes is a bright spark. A 37-year-old Mexican-Canadian artist, Lozano-Hemmer has

staged similar events around the world. Most involve mischievous interplay between the built environment, clever software and some great lights. The East Midlands should feel pleased to have him: he's a multimedia magician with a beef about urban design, a digital sculptor of the radio spectrum, a lord of misrule for the iMac generation.

Under Scan is number 11 in a series called Relational Architecture, each one a temporary technological takeover of public space, exploring the artist's ideas about the civic realm. 'Design in public space today is all about getting us from work to home as quickly as possible,' he maintains. 'Or else being exposed to the largest advertising displays, but I'm interested in designing the social sphere so that, all of a sudden, you're invited to relate to people in a different way. It's really important to give agency to people in public space, and think of ways to occupy it other than shopping. Projects like these are eccentric experiences.'

His most stunning piece, Vectorial Elevation, played in Lyon for a UN summit, in Mexico City during its millennium celebrations, and in Dublin to mark the EU expansion. Yet Lozano-Hemmer was hardly pandering to officialdom. Vectorial Elevation enabled anyone, via a website, to design skyscraping patterns by controlling 18 robotic searchlights, visible from 15km away. In total, around 1.5 million people took part, with the results archived on personalised webpages.

Searchlights, as Lozano-Hemmer points out, have associations with Albert Speer's 'fascist spectacles of power' and authoritarianism generally. 'I tried to introduce interactivity to transform intimidation into intimacy,' he explains. If his theories sound didactic, in

practice his work is good fun. Another project gives people the chance to scan shortwave frequencies, using their bodies as antennae, so that they eavesdrop on mobile chatter, air-traffic signals and, police bands. It's hacker art, and his democratic instinct draws him to Buckminster Fuller, too.

'He did many things,' Lozano-Hemmer enthuses. 'But what I'm really excited about is that he was the pioneer of networked architecture. You know, no central point – the centre being the romantic view, or the modern 'centre/suburbs' view – his was a true network, a mesh of interconnected nodes. To us in the internet age, it's completely logical, but he came up with this long before anyone else.'

Back with Under Scan, I see what Lozano-Hemmer means when he declares 'locality, like identity, is a performance'. Waving at the camera is nothing new, and the eagerness with which people look for their portraits reminds me of those observational films by Mitchell & Kenyon in the early 1900s, and how folk queued to watch themselves, and their towns, on screen. That's why 'people think twice about being too moronic' in the videos, he suggests: unconsciously, it becomes a source of civic pride how they behave.

Perhaps the later venues, where Under Scan is more covert, will be different; at the 'petri-dish' in Lincoln, however, a traditional culture was revived. Technology made its observers take their time, talk, linger – without having to be somewhere else. Like leisurely Edwardians, they were promenading, surely?

'Yes,' Lozano-Hemmer says, gleefully. 'That's such a good word. I've been saying "meandering", but rivers meander, people promenade!' *Richard Clayton*
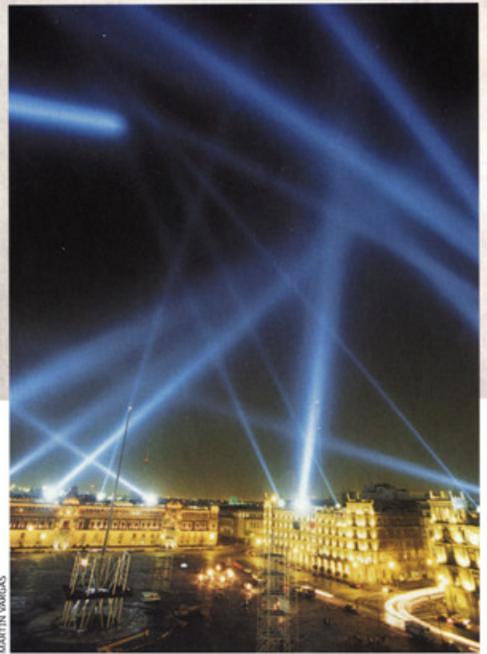
In Under Scan, people's 'video portraits' fit into others' shadows, above and far left. Right, Vectorial Elevation, in Mexico City, uses searchlights. Left, patterns are drawn on specific buildings in 1000 Platitudes, in Linz

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