

AR on AR: Future Museums Now – Augmented Reality Musings

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Statement

Since 2012 I have given a series of performance lectures around the world titled *AR on AR. Future Museums Now – Augmented Reality Musings* is part this lecture series and it was presented at the 2013 Yeongwol International Museum Forum in South Korea. The video documentation linked below, is the output of the piece as performed and projected 'live' for an international audience of museum educators, curators, and researchers. The piece was

camera augmented with custom software.

In these presentations I use new Augmented Reality technology to mediate the performance lecture in real time. This is achieved via a special deck of cards that are printed with 52 individual markers. When presented to a live camera, the cards are superimposed with pre-recorded video in the projection screen placed behind me. I do not physically talk in the *AR on AR* presentations – the lecture is presented and performed through the Augmented Reality cards and software, and a superimposed, pre-recorded performance.

Through this series of lectures I investigate Augmented Reality's nascent principles as well as the medium's relationship to art and performance. My goal is to expose within an academic forum some of the techniques intrinsic of self-reflexive essays and video art. I draw from previous explorations such as *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud (1993) who postulates a thesis on comic book forms, using the comic book form as a vehicle. I also draw from videos such as *Steps* (1987) and *Three Transitions* (1973) by Zbig Rybczynski and Peter Campus who delineate a phenomenology of the video medium through transparent manipulations of that very medium. Along similar lines, in my particular case, the thesis and the medium is AR – an emerging medium that, thanks to electronic technology, both expresses and changes our contemporary relationship to the virtual.

Augmented Reality is typically and insufficiently defined as a medium in which 'real' places and objects are combined with virtual content. Yet, one can claim that physical spaces are already frequently augmented with image, sound, and text without any special technology, such as within a museum where an artifact might be complimented with a text, a captioned image, and explained by a museum docent. AR on the other hand, refers specifically to an augmentation done with new technical gear and furthermore, in almost every instance, the

'real' places and objects that are subject to augmentation are seen through a screen. To such a degree, AR relies on a current technological novelty that also happens to be tinged with an air of techno-utopianism and fantasy. In my project *Future Museums Now*, I draw upon these attributes and I reference the ARtSENSE Project that for me exemplifies an AR fantasy in a museums setting. The ARtSENSE project was a major European Union venture to develop AR technologies in museums with the intention to seamlessly deliver commentary on artifacts based on users' emotions and attentions.

AR is an attractive medium for use in museums because digital databases challenge existing archives with obsolescence, and the ever-growing tide of digital information can be reconciled with traditional, physical databases through the promise of AR. But the dream of providing a complete AR media commentary for museum objects – a commentary that is simultaneously immersive yet at the same time invisible – is spurious. My work responds to these proposed enhancements of the museum which I see based upon an anxiety of obsolescence and what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "ekphrastic fear" (*Ekphrasis and the Other*, Mitchell 1994). In my view, media and mediation are never truly invisible, and commentary can displace the objects of commentary, potentially covering up not just the mystery of the object but also the experience of it. These are precisely the main problems facing the contemporary digital world, problems now plaguing the museum from which they used to stand as a respite.

AR on AR: Future Museums Now – Augmented Reality Musings, 2013, Geoffrey Alan Rhodes, augmented reality performance, ©G.A.Rhodes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A69odckykoo>

Bio

Geoffrey Alan Rhodes is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Visual Communication Design at the School of the Art Institute

of Chicago. He works across disciplines to create, for viewers and users, experiences that challenge the borders between the real and the virtual, the cinematic and the actual, fine art and popular experience. His works involve feature films, gallery video art, photographic and new media applications, and these share a sense of play in apparatus and traditional structures such as actual subjects performing roles, transparent media machinations serving as 'stage,' and collisions of one medium with another. His feature films, media installations, and augmented reality publications have been screened, exhibited, and published internationally.