

SCRIPT FOR PRESENTATION ON AR AND ART, 2/24/12, @ S.A.I.C
'SPOUTING OFF' BY G.A.RHODES, ASST. PROF. VISCOM, SAIC

THE HUMAN SPEAKS

HUMAN

Hello. I am going to let my audio-visual aides speak for me, for this presentation. You can rest assured that they speak for me in all respects, or, actually, I have spoken for them. You can trust in them as you would in my own actual presence, and I ask that you treat this live video stream, coming from my laptop camera through to the projector, as if it were reality itself. ...Whatever that means.

(adjusting camera)

Let's begin.

The Human turns over and reveals for the camera CARD#1. CARD#1 appears in the video feed as a MEDIUM SHOT of The Human in identical shirt and tie. (in all further character notes, CARD#1-12 show video of the same human but changed in posture and props, EX.CARD#1-12 show illustrative images).

CARD#1

(clears his throat)

I'm interested in one newish medium in which the context and circulation of artwork is transformed.

Self-evident in the mode of presentation, this is what's called either Augmented Reality or Mixed Reality. It is where 'virtual' context is overlaid on or mixed with 'actual' content. Already, just using those two words, I have already confounded any critical description of what we are talking about. 'Actual' and 'virtual' are ontologically and epistemologically loaded-- especially when the actual, as it is now, is presented as live mediation through video, and the virtual, is just pre-recorded video of that same subject earlier. But we can rope things in a bit through some examples.

(snapping fingers)

A card please.

EX.CARD#1 shows an image (or video?) of Jeffrey Shaw's 'Golden Calf'.

CARD#1

We can at least go back to 1994 and Jeffrey Shaw's exhibited work, The Golden Calf. Quoting a description from the art website Leonardo...

CARD#1 is discarded. EX.CARD#2 shows the Leonardo quote and it is read out loud.

EX.CARD#2

In The Golden Calf (1995) (Above), an object in real space---an empty plinth---becomes the location and ground for a synthetic sculptural object in electronic space---the Golden Calf.

EX.CARD#2 is discarded. Another card is drawn.

CARD#2

The description then goes on to describe the apparatus--something really essential to the delineation of the medium--and then notes, "The calf has shiny skin, and the viewer can see reflections in it of the actual gallery space around the installation." So it is specific to the site and the screen's manipulation within that space. The usual apparatus we might diagram like this 1997 diagram by Ronald T. Azuma.

Inside CARD#2 the Azuma diagram is held up to the camera, covering the human's face. Another card is drawn. While CARD#3 below speaks, a quick succession of cards is drawn in illustration: EX.CARD#3&4 showing AR gearish setups. EX.CARD#5&6 showing a view out a window and my voice saying, "She picks her nose, in public," EX.CARD#7 a Janet Cardiff snippet, EX.CARD#8&9 scorish selections from Rambo and Psycho.

CARD#3

The diagram is full of gear. Gear is essential. Otherwise we start to ask what isn't augmentation of the real... we both look out the window, I describe the lives of the people I know walking below-- isn't my voice and language an augmentation. What about Janet Cardiff's audio walks? So it quickly becomes everything-- even the score in a movie-- so the gear is important. And I don't think this is totally arbitrary.

CARD#3 is discarded, another drawn. In this one, the human is wearing a helmet with an articulating arm ducttaped to it at the end of which is a screen which feedbacks the same video image. Below, EX.CARD#10&11 show the cover of The Magician and the Cinema and the face of George Melies respectively.

CARD#4

There is something about the novelty of technology that is part of the particular experience we're referring to. It evokes, not just for me, pre-cinematic stage illusion performances, where the whole idea of smoke and mirrors-- Pepper's Ghost and automatons--was not knowing exactly where and what the technology was. A certain novelty of wonderment always chasing the technological edge. As Eric Barnouw describes--or as the life of George Melies describes--a chase that led straight in to the film camera, cinema, and the extinction of the stage magician.

CARD#4 is discarded. Another is drawn; the human is returned to normal appearance.

CARD#5

So... what's happened recently is
the technology has become personal
and portable.

CARD#5 holds up a cell phone to the camera, a video plays
inside it.

CELLPHONE VIDEO

Smartphones! Live video, GPS,
gyroscopic orientation, realtime
networking and processing. ...So
we've gone from this,
(holding up the Azuma diagram)

Another card is drawn, it shows a diagram of smartphone AR.

CARD#6

To this.

(lowering diagram)

The major players right now in this
area are two apps out of Europe,
Layar and Junaio. This has created
the possibility of creating AR
content in virtual space without
directly knowing or engaging with
the audience. So artists and groups
like Mark Skwarek and Manifest.AR
can create exhibitions at the MoMA
and the Venice Biennale, without
being curated, and without breaking
in to or violating the laws of
private, physical, actual space.

EX.CARD#12&13 show Manifest.AR at MoMA and the Venice
Biennale. CARD#6 is discarded. Another is drawn.

CARD#7

So, of this fairly new phenomenon I want to ask two questions... two questions given to me by the curator and critic, Michael Prokopow at the Ontario College of Art & Design. 'So what?' and 'Who cares.'

Another card is drawn. CARD#8 first shows the title, 'SO WHAT?' This is appearing in a mirror and as the mirror turns it reveals the human.

CARD#8

I don't take this question lightly. There is something shallow and ephemeral about virtual objects; it is, really, a tautology. Does it matter to invade controlled spaces if they are not legally invaded and if the content is only viewable if someone with a smartphone chooses to view it? There is, certainly, a connection with performance art, where the larger life of a project is in its press and the knowledge of its occurrence (or in the case of AR, its existence). So we can see that such projects as Mark Skwarek's Korean Borders project, or even Craig Freeman's BLAH BLAH project mainly find their meaning in the fact of their existence, more than their experience by a handful of people. But there is something fascinating in this idea of a performance which endures... which is not only archived but continues to exist. I find Mark Skwarek the greatest proponent and dreamer of this. His project, The Parade to Hope, launched a little group of roughly drawn animations in to the streets of New York on a parade, a never ending parade that is still continuing on a never ending journey. Like some shopping channel or C-SPAN, you could launch the layar now and go find it. It does, in a sense, exist, even though no one's looking for it, because somewhere a server is still counting out coordinates.

Another card is drawn. In this one the human is wearing his 'negative' attire.

CARD#9

But it is performance largely without a performance, and can be like a lonely tree falling in the forrest. In the sense that these installations are created remotely, on a computer, and any experience by an audience is delayed. This isn't really an answer, yet I think the answer to 'So What' lies some in the answer to 'Who cares'.

CARD#9 holds up the title 'WHO CARES?' Below EX.CARD#? shows images of Tank Man app, Abu G

CARD#9

People care about images. Ask Youtube. Ask China. The Tank Man. Twin Towers. Abu Ghraib. Cartoons of Mohammed. Censorship. Copyright. Information space is also controlled space-- or space that some want to control. In an age where everything written is copyrighted, everything posted is published, this suddenly infinite space is quite new. And, I think, the attraction of AR is to tie that space to the finite, to the finite locations and objects... bodies.

MORE MORE MORE

CARD#9 is slowly pushed in towards the camera as the human talks. The view cuts to a view from the webcam of the laptop mimicking the view from the actual laptop. Next to it EX.CARD#? is held up to play credits: 'AR presentation powered by SNAPDRAGON AR, developed @ The Future Cinema Lab, York University, Toronto.'

CARD#9
(closer)
Questions?

CARD#9 is discarded leaving only the live video view from the laptop.