

ARTH 661A Contemporary Art and Criticism II. Augmented Reality Art: A Matter of Destination

Fall 2009

Prof. Christine Ross

Tuesday 14:35 – 17:35, Arts W220

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Seminar content and objective:

Since the early 1990s, the progressive confirmation of augmented reality (AR) over virtual reality (VR) in a variety of domains—medicine, military training, robotics, education, communications, entertainment, tourism, design, and art, to name the most obvious—has increased awareness of how the real and the virtual exist in a continuum. The real-virtual continuum is the foundational assumption of any AR system. As computer scientist Ronald Azuma has observed, augmented or mixed reality is a system which “supplements the realworld with virtual (computer-generated) objects that appear to coexist in the same space as the realworld.” AR was developed primarily to compensate for the restrictions of VR, namely its purportedly “total” immersion of the user in a synthetic world. Yet AR does so not by discarding the virtual but by connecting it to the real, adjusting as it were the virtual frame of reference to what the user sees and hears. It does so, moreover, not simply by adding computer-generated information to space but by adding data to the user’s sensory perception of space. Mixed or composite reality is, fundamentally, a perceptual paradigm. The perceptual motivation underlying AR research carries therefore several technical challenges, the most difficult one being the requirement for the computer to track where the user is looking and determine what s/he is seeing in order to augment his/her view.

In the realm of art, augmented reality is a perceptual *and* a positioning paradigm whose main operation (or promise) is expansion: the virtual expansion of space in real-time. A derivative of installation art and virtual art, AR art expands site by de/un/re-specifying it. It does so by integrating virtual images, video projections, light, different forms of data (digital and non-digital), layers of sound, even smell irradiations to real-time environments, and by connecting spectators to these sites through networking systems (mobile phones, GPS, the Internet), sensing, tracking, and surveillance technologies, as well as robotics. The status of the spectator in these types of settings is quite unique: s/he is expected to be enhanced perceptually but also to evolve interactively, often polysensorially and collectively, with the work. But the sites are persistently searching for participants—sensing, seeking and tracking bodies for the sake of communication, collectiveness, and interactivity. Let us think, for example, of: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s *Pulse* works (2006-) composed of sensors that measure the heart rates or voices of passers-by to convert them into light beams that interact in the public space as other passers-by engage with similar sensor devices; Christian Moeller’s recent robotic arms, built to move a ship propeller (*Daisy*, 2008) or a theatre spotlight (*Mojo*, 2007): connected to surveillance cameras, these robots follow and face passers-by in an attempt to establish contact; and Mathieu Briand’s *UBIQ: a Mental Odyssey* (2006-), where head-mounted display devices are worn by users who can then click on a button to instantaneously swap their views of the environment with other participants, seeing as it were through the eyes of the other. AR expansion is ultimately a desire for—and not necessarily an achievement of—intersubjectivity through participation, an intersubjectivity activated by positioning and identification technologies of surveillance and detection.

This seminar examines the paradoxical nature of *destination* as one of the key features in AR art. It calls attention to the special status of the spectator whose “participation” is both a prerequisite and an uncertainty, a prediction and an unpredictability, a localization and a questioning of that very capacity to localize. It asks: does the expansive impulse of AR produce a shift in the status of the image, of representation, of the spectator’s experience, of art per se? In other words, to paraphrase W. J. T. Mitchell’s famous question about contemporary images: “What do augmented reality artworks *want*?” **Artists whose work will be examined:** Mathieu Briand, Kazuhiko Hachiya, Stelarc, Seiko Mikami, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Isabelle Bordoni, Marie Sester, Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau, Blast Theory, Christian Moeller, Lincoln Schatz, Usman Haque, Scott Snibbe, HeHe, Olafur Eliasson, Anthony McCall, and David Aitken.

Seminar requirements:

- **October 13:** One-page outline of your research topic (to be submitted to all members of the seminar) ... 10%
- **November 24 and December 1 (alphabetical order):** 20 min. oral presentation discussing the subject, hypothesis and corpus of your essay 30%
- **December 8:** 20-25 pp essay on the work of an artist of your choice, dealing with the topic of the seminar ... 60%

Please note that late essays will be penalized (5 points per day) unless a medical certificate is presented.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information). L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity)

Program—list of readings (all texts are included in the course pack, except for: Kwon, Bishop (*Installation Art*), Bourriaud, as well as Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* and *The Emancipated Spectator*), which are available *as books* at the McGill Bookstore. Please note that most books are also on reserve, except for Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. See (R) in Bibliography for Reserve):

- **September 1:** Introduction
- **September 8:** Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
- **September 15:** Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 2-23; 52-71; 81-89; 105-113; 132-135; 193-211.
- **September 22:** Lev Manovich, "The Poetics of Augmented Space," *Visual Communication*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2006, 219-240. <http://vcj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/5/2/219>.
- **September 29:** Chrissie Iles, "Between the Still and Moving Image," in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2000), 33-69.
- **October 6:** Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
- **October 13:** cnt'ed
- **October 20:** Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998); and Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110, fall 2004, 51-79. <http://roundtable.kein.org/files/roundtable/claire%20bishop-antagonism&relational%20aesthetics.pdf>.
- **October 27:** Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), *preface*, chap. 1, 2 and 3 [*Le partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: éditions La Fabrique, 2000), *avant-propos*, chap. 1, 2 and 3].
- **November 3:** Jacques Rancière, "The Future of the Image," in *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 1-31 ["Le destin des images," in *Le destin des images* (Paris: éditions La Fabrique, 2003), 9-39].
- **November 10:** Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, Sept. 2009) [*Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: éditions La Fabrique, 2008)]; and Raymond Bellour, "The Pensive Spectator" trans. Lynne Kirby, *Wide Angle*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 6-10 ["Le spectateur pensif", in *Photogénies*, no. 5 (Paris: Centre National de la Photographie, 1984)].
- **November 17:** cnt'ed
- **November 24:** Oral presentations
- **December 1:** Oral presentations

Note: In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.