AR AND THE CINEMA OF ATTRACTIONS

By

Geoffrey Alan Rhodes

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G. Alan Rhodes
Assistant Professor
Department of Visual
Communication Design
School of the Art Institute of
Chicago

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The HUMAN takes the podium. His laptop camera on the podium
is being streamed live to the projector so there are two of
him: one real, life-sized behind the podium, and one huge
projected onto the screen behind him. The HUMAN speaks...

                    HUMAN
          I do not normally speak 'live' in
          these presentations, but my AR
          performance essay today requires an
          explanation. I have been
          performing these self-reflexive
          essays on Augmented Reality in the
          form of Augmented Reality for a
          little more than a year now, first
          at the Art Institute of Chicago,
          where I teach, where I talked about
          AR's validity as a performance and
          protest medium, then in Cluj,
          Romania, where I spoke about the
          relationship of AR to the Cinema of
          Attractions and proto-cinema, then
          just a few months ago in Milwaukee
          at the Society for Literature
          Science and the Arts conference on
          the subject of 'un-human'
          performance in AR. And now here...

          So for this fourth presentation I
          have curated my past three. We
          will be moving back and forth
          through time, in a sort-of Saragosa
          Manuscript experience. To server
          as guide-posts: in my first
          presentation in Chicago I wore a
          light-blue shirt and a brown
          spotted tie, at the second, I wore
          a white shirt and a blue tie and my
          hair was longer; at my last
          presentation in Milwaukee I wore a
          dark blue shirt and a striped tie
          and my hair was again short. The
          need for these historical details
          will be evident shortly. So let's
          begin with the introduction to my
          second AR presentation a year
          ago...

The HUMAN reveals for the camera CARD#0. CARD#0 appears in
the video feed as a MEDIUM SHOT of the HUMAN a year younger
and in a white shirt with blue tie. His hair is a little
longer.

                    CARD#0
          So... This will be my second
          presentation on Augmented Reality
          in the form of Augmented
          Reality. My first, just a few
          months ago, focused on new spaces
          for art and performance created
          through Augmented Reality. Today,
          I'm going to take a more historical
          focus-- but first, let me quote my
          previous presentation to lay out
          the territory... so this is me a
          few months ago:

CARD#0 is discarded. The HUMAN turns over and reveals for
the camera another card. CARD#1 displays the HUMAN in light
blue shirt and brown tie. His hair is shorter.

                    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' content is overlaid
          on or mixed with 'actual'
          content. Already, just using those
          two words, I have 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.
            (gesturing off-card to the
            Human)
          So, a card please.

The HUMAN presents for the camera CARD#2 which shows a video
of Jeffrey Shaw's interactive art work 'Golden Calf'
installed at Ars Electronica, 1994.

                    CARD#1
            (cont'd)
          We can at least go back to 1994 and
          Jeffrey Shaw's exhibited work, The
                    (MORE)

                         CARD#1 (cont'd)
               Golden Calf. Quoting a description
               from the art website Leonardo...

CARD#1 is discarded. A new card is drawn. CARD#3 shows the
Leonardo quote and the quote is read out loud.

                         CARD#3
                 (O.S.)
               In The Golden Calf, an object in
               real space--an empty
               plinth--becomes the location and
               ground for a synthetic sculptural
               object in electronic space--the
               Golden Calf.

CARD#3 is discarded. Another card is drawn. CARD#4 displays
the HUMAN again in the same costume.

                         CARD#4
               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.

CARD#2, displaying The Golden Calf installation is discarded
and another card drawn. CARD#5 displays the mentioned
diagram of AR experience by Azuma. While CARD#4 continues
to speak, in quick succession CARDS#6-10 are drawn and then
discarded illustrating different AR apparati and gear.

                         CARD#4
                 (cont'd)
               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 a window,
               I describe the lives of the people
               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--

CARD#4 is interrupted by the drawing of CARD#11 which
displays a clip of Sylvester Stalone drammatically turning
to the camera as the musical score swells from 'Rambo III'
(1988). As CARD#11 is discarded, the HUMAN re-appears in
re-appears.

>   CARD#4
>   (cont'd)
>   ...so the gear is important. And I
>   don't think this is totally
>   arbitrary.

CARD#4 is discarded, another drawn. In this one, the HUMAN
is wearing a helmet with an articulating arm ducktaped to it
at the end of which is a screen which feeds-back the same
video image. As they are mentioned, CARDS#13&14 are drawn
to show the cover of 'The Magician and the Cinema', by Eric
Barnouw, and the face of George Méliès.

>   CARD#12
>   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 Méliès describes--a
>   chase that led straight in to the
>   film camera, cinema, and the
>   extinction of the stage magician.

CARD#12 is discarded. Another is drawn; the human now
appears in his white shirt and blue tie with longer hair,
the same as CARD#0. When mentioned, CARD#16 is drawn which
shows a lithograph of the Pepper's Ghost stage illussion.

>   CARD#15
>   Ok... let's stop there. What was
>   an aside comment in my earlier
>   presentation--the comparison to the
>   Pepper's Ghost Illusion and early
>   adoption of film technology by
>   stage magicians such as Méliès--is
>   now the subject of discussion. Eric
>   Barnouw's book, 'The Magician and
>   the Cinema', was adapted into a
>   (MORE)

                    CARD#15 (cont'd)
          quite good short story by Steven
          Millhauser, which was in turn
          adapted in to a fairly poor feature
          film.

A card is drawn. CARD#17 displays the theatrical poster for
the film 'The Illusionist' (2006). This is then discarded
and another card drawn; CARD#18 plays clips from George
Méliès' 'Tchin-Chao, the Chinese Conjuror' (1904) and
'Herrmann, the Great Conjuror' (1902).

                    CARD#15
            (cont'd)
          The gloss of Milhauser's story,
          'Eisenheim the Illusionist', is
          that a turn-of-the-century Viennese
          stage magician invents the illusion
          of virtual images, until he, too,
          becomes an image that
          disappears. It is the extinction
          of stage magic Eric Barnouw
          describes--a "This Killed That"
          thesis on the sudden turn when
          magicians using the magic of cinema
          realized that the one role no
          longer required was the magician
          himself.

          Chasing the technological edge was
          not new. Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin
          used electro-magnets in 1856 to
          create the illusion of spiritual
          power in Algeria. In the 1860s,
          John Henry Pepper used new rolled
          plate glass techniques for the
          fabrication of the clean reflective
          plain required for the Pepper's
          Ghost illusion. And the long use
          of magic lanterns in stage magic
          led intuitively to the adoption of
          Lumiere's new technology at the end
          of the century. Gunning quotes
          Méliès naming it, "A trick
          extraordinaire."

CARD#15 is discarded, another drawn. CARD#19 uses the
Méliès-style effect of triple exposure to display the HUMAN
with three heads. CARD#20 is drawn, which shows the seminal
Méliès clip of a rocket piercing the moon's eye from 'A Trip
to the Moon' (1902).

                    CARD#19
               (each head takes a turn
               speaking)
          The camera usurped the role of the
          magician. Illusion was fundamental
          to the filmic medium and almost
          immediately the illusion itself
          became a stage, enfolding illusions
          within illusions, establishing
          diegetic reality and breaching that
          reality with effects, tricks, the
          magician resolutely behind the
          camera, unseen.

CARD#19 is discarded, another drawn. CARD#21 shows the
HUMAN, again in his white shirt and blue tie. Six example
cards are drawn in succession presenting clips from the
popular films: 1954 'Godzilla' and 'On the Waterfront', then
1993, 'Jurrasic Park' and 'Schindler's List', then 2008
'Twilight' and 'The Hurt Locker'.

                    CARD#21
          I don't think cinema ever resolved
          the two vectors of Lumiere-like
          mediated simulacrum and Méliès-like
          mediated illusion. We can look at
          contemporary pairs of popular
          films: 1945, Rome Open City and
          State Fair; 1954, On the Waterfront
          and Godzilla, 1973, Mean Streets,
          Enter the Dragon, and another
          Godzilla. 1993. 2008. It seems to
          me more a popular tug-of-war,
          between the mediated-image as real
          and the mediated-image as "theater
          of illusions" as Tom Gunning puts
          it.
          But there is in the past two
          decades a certain coming together
          as digital effects move towards
          simulacrum. Effects have gone from
          this... to this.

CARD#28 & 29 are drawn which show King Kong as
costumed/rendered in the same-named films of 1933 and 2005.

                    CARD#21
               (cont'd)
          It is no longer a representation of
          fantasy but a simulation of
          it. Not so much a trick within an
          illussionistic medium, but a
          seamless illusion in which you
                    (MORE)

                                                        (CONTINUED)

                    CARD#21 (cont'd)
          don't know the boundaries between
          mediated-actual, and
          synthetic-virtual. And using
          similar technology, over the past
          decade Augmented Reality is
          bringing about a renaissance of a
          territory left behind with stage
          magic: actuality.

All cards are discarded, a new one drawn. CARD#30 shows the
same human, but now in a dark blue shirt, striped tie and
one year older with short hair.

                    CARD#30
          That was me a year ago. Recorded
          for a presentation which I
          performed the next day, with this
          same set of cards. I will return
          to my previous talk and let him
          finish, but I want to first pause
          and look at the nature of this
          media phenomenon-- the one that I,
          the person inside the card, has
          performed and which I, myself in
          the future, am now performing in a
          sort-of 'Oz-behind-the-curtain'
          off-stage manner. There are three
          spreads of time here: me recorded a
          year ago, me recorded in this
          moment I am speaking, and me
          performing here now, live. And
          that live picture, as the term
          suggests, is temporally tied to the
          actual me. Me here in actual
          flesh.

CARD#30 is discarded; a new card is drawn in which the HUMAN
sits in front of a large screen which presents a live
feedback loop of the self-same image. As they are mentioned,
CARDS#32 & #33 are drawn which show Peter Campus' 1974
installation 'Shadow Projection' and the photo of Roland
Barthes' mother which appears in 'Camera Lucida'.

                    CARD#31
          That's not what makes this
          unique. That's just the electric
          image, just as it was explored in
          the 70s by artists like Peter
          Campus and Nam Jun Paik, and not
          far from the folding of time in the
          mechanical image generally, like
          Roland Barthes in Camera Lucida
          falling into the vertigo of his
          mother's image.

CARD#31 is discarded. Three cards are drawn which show a
closeup of the HUMAN's face divided in cubist fashion into
an eye, a mouth, a nose... When mentioned, CARD#37 is drawn
to display a clip from the documentation video of GARhodes'
2009 project, '52Card Psycho'.

                    CARDS#34-36
          Here, things are made stranger by
          the spatial montage of these
          images-- it takes on a sort of
          Cubist collage, daring us to not
          resolve these boxes in to a single
          form. Like the project of 52Card
          Cinema which realizes the cubist
          dream for cinema of flattening time
          into space-- in this case the time
          it takes Janet Leigh to be stabbed
          into the space of a deck of cards.

The cubist cards are discarded; a fresh card is drawn
showing the HUMAN in normal fashion with dark blue shirt and
striped tie.

                    CARD#38
          But there is literally another
          layer here-- and this is the
          special territory of Augmented
          Reality. There is a real man
          teasing an imagistic world from the
          machine. A sort of
          backwards-interface man, like the
          nerd in 90's television whose sole
          role is to interface the real
          players of the narrative into the
          machine, or like stage magic of the
          occult-- a 'medium' in that sense
          who is a special servant of a power
          and can draw on that entity to
          manifest the hidden... but maybe
          not so romantic.

CARD#38 is interrupted by the drawing of CARD#39 which shows
a short clip from the T.E.D. talk, 'Marco Tempest: A Magical
Tale (with augmented reality).'

                    CARD#39
               (Marco Tempest)
          Augmented Reality is the melding of
          the real world with
          computer-generated imagery. It
          seems the perfect medium in which
          to investigate... MAGIC!

CARD#39 is rudely discarded.

                                              (CONTINUED)

                     CARD#38
               (cont'd)
     There's an enfolding of mediation
     and performance. We're made aware
     of a past pressed on to us-- but we
     are also aware that this past
     imagined this present. That, in
     fact, the past constructed itself
     such that it wouldn't be complete,
     or even manifest, without this
     present performance, and this
     current performer has to function
     like a machine-- a film projector
     to draw back out the motion there
     in the medium.

     It is a mechanization of
     performance, and we can't help but
     be titillated and disturbed by the
     touching of a flesh and a virtual--
     even if just presented to us
     through live video mediation. He
     is holding himself in his own real
     hands, and all the lilliputian
     humor of that-- the accidental
     conflation of images, textures,
     perspectives, scales... images ripe
     for parody and metaphor but also
     overflowing them, because like the
     photo's mechanical dennotation,
     this collage was constructed by
     machine. It is too much and not
     made with any knowledge of us.

     It can be compared to stage
     illussion like the photograph can
     be compared to the painting; the
     key player has been transformed--
     the magician leaving behind his
     secret cabinets and mirrors which
     continue the show on without him.

     It is a 'This Killed That' thesis--
     like Victor Hugo describing the end
     of architecture and Erik Barnouw
     describing the end of the magician.
     In AR, cinema has finally enfolded
     itself back on to the reality
     outside the theater from which it
     hid. In its realization returning
     the human to the performance, but
     now, ironically, not as magician
                    (MORE)

                          CARD#38 (cont'd)
                    but as the machine of illussion...
                    the mirror.

CARD#40 is drawn which displays the 2012 official demo video
of Google Glass.

                          CARD#38
                       (cont'd)

                    It is simultaneously utopian and
                    distopian. Like a perversion of
                    the Allegory of the Cave in which
                    the freed prisoners do not bother
                    to leave, but simply ape more
                    shadows on to the wall, fascinated
                    by their power. Finally we are
                    allowed to play a role in the
                    machine-- bring it to our places,
                    our images, our flesh; but the
                    price of entrance is the
                    transformation of the human to the
                    machine. Like this performance
                    happening now... the human given
                    the function to reveal each image
                    to the machine... to be seen.

                    So what does this mean for art and
                    performance? So what? Who
                    cares? ...Here I return to my
                    previous talk...

All cards are discarded; a new card is drawn. CARD#41 shows
the HUMAN, now again in his white shirt and blue tie, longer
hair and one-year younger.

                          CARD#41
                    For a century of cinema, audience's
                    bodies were in comfortable theater
                    seats and darkened chambers with
                    luminous screens regularly framed,
                    no conflation of performing bodies
                    with media challenging the viewer
                    to find the border between actual
                    and illusion.

CARDs#42-44 are drawn which show clips from 'Three
Transitions' (Peter Campus, 1973), 'WHERE WHERE THERE THERE
WHERE' (Zoe Beloff, 1994), and 'San Marco Flow' (David
Rokeby, 2005).

                         CARD#41
                    (cont'd)
          This abandoned arena was adopted in
          the art gallery. 70s video art,
          like the tapes and installations of
          Peter Campus, created mediated
          stages for performance that had to
          be puzzled out, confounding the
          mediated-real and the virtual. In
          later interactive work, much of
          which referenced phantasmagoria and
          magic, artists like Zoe Belof, Toni
          Dove, and David Rokeby created
          machines that combined live input
          with illusion. Live video stands in
          for the stage-- a mediated actual,
          within which tricks are played with
          the borders between real and
          illusion. This type of live media
          augmentation returns the actual--
          albeit mediated. It has more in
          common with Pepper's Ghost than
          with The Train Leaving the Station.

As the works are cited, CARDS#45-47 are drawn showing 'The
Amazing Cinemagician' and "Who's Afraid of Bugs?" (Helen
Papagiannis, 2011, 2010) and then 'Level Head' (Julian
Oliver, (2008).

                         CARD#41
                    (cont'd)
          The AR art & design work of Helen
          Pappagianis of York University's
          Future Cinema Lab takes a direct
          fascination with the Cinema of
          Attractions and magic. She created
          a Toronto science center
          exhibition, The Amazing
          Cinemagician, which presents
          viewers with ghostly images of
          Méliès films based on their
          interactions with AR markers on an
          installed screen. Her more recent
          Augmented Reality Popup Book
          creates phantasmagoria-like
          illusions of virtual bugs crawling
          across real hands and pages through
          an iPad viewer. Julian Oliver's AR
          object, Level Head, resembles in
          function more than anything a turn
          of the century automaton-- a real
          object that simulates life-like
          behaviors when viewed through your
                         (MORE)

                              CARD#41 (cont'd)
                    webcam; it is both a toy to be
                    marketed and an art object. And on
                    stages, illusionistic performance
                    has adopted the new technology,
                    again, like stage magicians,
                    confounding ontological borders
                    between actual, virtual, and
                    mediated. Where, even just this
                    month, the Pepper's Ghost Illusion
                    makes major headlines in giving
                    life to dead rapper.

CARD#48 is drawn which shows video of the performance by a
'holographic' Tupac in 2012. CARD#41 is discarded, another
drawn. CARD#49 shows the HUMAN now mediated by a live video
stream to an iPAD. CARD#50 is drawn which displays the
credits: 'AR Presentation powered by SNAPDRAGON, developed @
The Future Cinema Lab, York University, Toronto.'

                              CARD#49
                    I do not know if the enthrallment
                    of AR is just a temporary
                    fascination with our changing
                    distinctions between objective and
                    virtual. Maybe it is just a way
                    for the audience to work through
                    their changing perceptions of an
                    ever more mediated world. But it
                    makes me think of a question I hold
                    of the Plato's cave allegory: If a
                    person raised on shadows as reality
                    were given their freedom, would
                    they really run around in the
                    sunshine of Plato's
                    ideal? Wouldn't they instead see
                    their own shadow against the wall,
                    take that as reality, and call
                    themselves god? Isn't that
                    allegory closer to the experience
                    of our contemporary mediated lives?

Inside CARD#49 the HUMAN lowers the iPad screen. The HUMAN,
live, behind the podium, discards the final card. The screen
displays only him, long standing mute behind the podium,
which he then exits.

END