

It's Now or Never: Presentism in Mobile Augmented Reality (AR) apps

Liron Efrat

The Department of Art History, University of Toronto

Today, Augmented Reality (AR) apps for museums, archives, and other cultural heritage sites enjoy increasing popularity among visitors and institutions alike. While such mode of cultural production makes a significant impact on our engagement with historical narratives and cultural memory, it inevitably influences our cultural perception of time. Nevertheless, these mobile AR projects are usually understood as a primarily spatial practice. Endorsing Nanna Verhoeff's perspective that the representation of space in mobile AR platforms always develops over time (Verhoeff, 2012), and recognizing that AR technology possesses a strong temporal aspect as it emerges through real-time synchronization of virtual and actual elements, this paper adopts a different approach as I focus on the temporal (rather than on the spatial) paradigm promoted by AR mobile apps in cultural contexts.

In many navigable mobile AR projects, pasts and futures are actively included in the present through the AR platforms. This allows for a constant reconstruction of cultural, collective, and personal memories and narratives. Analyzing AR projects such as John Craig Freeman's *EEG AR: Things We Have Lost* (2012-2015), alongside AR apps for archeological and cultural heritage sites, I will show how AR manifests a temporality based on repetitions of decisive moments. Accordingly, I argue that in mobile AR, time is practiced as Kairos rather than as Chronos. Building on and comparing AR temporality with traditional concepts of media presentism such as Frederic Jameson's (1992) and Marshall McLuhan's (1970), I will also show how AR mobile apps facilitate what I understand as a *Dynamic Presentism*. This is a reciprocal temporal form, in which dynamic data streams representing pasts and futures are not only converged within a present experience, but they are also used to shape it while simultaneously being (re)shaped by it.

My discussion of these in-situ, synchronized mobile interactions aims to illuminate specific spatio-temporal politics through investigating the mix of virtual and actual pasts and futures. Ultimately, I propose that AR produces a convergent spatiotemporally, in which the physical boundaries of spaces, and the well-established perception of linear chronology, are expanded and transformed.

Selected bibliography:

- Ernst, Wolfgang. *Chronopoetics : The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*, trans. Anthony Enns. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.
- Verhoeff, Nanna. "A Logic of Layers: Indexicality of Iphone Navigation in Augmented Reality." In *Studying Mobile Media: Cultural Technologies, Mobile Communications, and the Iphone* edited by Jean Burgess, Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, 118-32. London, New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Ross, Christine. "Real Time, Lived Time: AR Art, Perception, and the Possibility of the Event." In *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*, edited by Johanne Lamoureux Olivier Asselin, and Christine Ross, 328-51. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008.
- Grau, Oliver. Coones, Wendy and Rühse, Viola, ed. *Museum and Archive on the Move: Changing Cultural Institutions in the Digital Era*: De Gruyter, 2018.