Monument Public Address System AR

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Figure 1: Monument Public Address System AR, documentation 1, 2022, Meredith Drum, animation and augmented reality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Monument Public Address System AR is a multi-platform interactive documentary project centred around a growing collection of audio interviews about the past, present, and future of confederate and colonial monuments. Formally and technically the project is a place-based augmented reality app accessible on a participant's mobile device. The goal of the project is to engender critical and thoughtful social experiences in public spaces through the presentation of narratives that offer truth and justice-centred perspectives and anti-racist visions for our shared future.

2. MONUMENT PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM AR

Monument Public Address System AR is a digital media documentary revolving around an expanding collection of audio interviews about the past, present, and future of confederate and colonial monuments across the United States. The interviewees include activists, scholars, students, planners, community organisers, and other artists. Some have discussed feelings of anger and exclusion when they encounter confederate and colonial imagery. Others have evaluated the symbolic violence of the monuments in relation to ongoing racist systems, and/or described potential liberatory sculptural works as replacements. Their generous narratives enable the project’s main goal: to engender critical and thoughtful experiences in public spaces.

The AR app invites participants to open Monument Public Address System AR on their mobile device to discover 3D virtual objects and animations superimposed on the world around them. When they interact with these objects, short sections of the audio interviews are triggered and play. As they listen to the narratives, participants can explore the virtual animations in relation to the surrounding physical space (Figures 1 & 2).

The app is designed to be as accessible as possible. While the augmentations are geo-located, and the intention is for participants to circumnavigate confederate and colonial monuments – and the empty spaces where they once stood – when experiencing the AR, the app can be opened anywhere. Moreover, the app is mobile AR, which can be used on a large variety of hand-held devices and is not dependant on expensive technology.
2.1 Digital placemaking and AR

The project is situated within a growing body of research regarding digital place-making. The production has been inspired by other practice-based research initiatives that share the goal of facilitating positive social change while employing emerging mobile technologies to investigate real-world civic challenges. Two exemplary artists within this realm are John Craig Freeman, including his 2-16 Wuhan Wet Market, (Freeman 2016) and Teri Rueb and her 2017 Fens.

2.2 Monuments and social impact

Concurrent with reading about placemaking and augmented reality, this project is also inspired by scholarship regarding the social impact of monuments. The interviewee’s narratives align with much existing writing about racism and confederate and colonial monuments. Ana Lucia Araujo, historian and professor at Howard University, writes:

When black and brown people open a textbook, visit a museum, or look at the statues displayed in major squares of the main European and American capitals, they only see images of white men, who were wealthy, who had power and who very often were slave owners or slave traders. Then when black men, women, and children are challenging proslavery statues, they are denouncing this past that remains alive in the present. . . . All monuments emerge and disappear because of political battles that take place in the public arena. Likewise, public memory is always political (Lucia Araujo 2020).

3. CONCLUSION

Monument Public Address System AR is offered as a platform for visual and aural expressions of frustration, anger, sadness, fear, and confusion regarding the racist, unjust and violent narratives that have shaped and continue to shape our present and future. It is also built for the enunciation of anti-racist hopes, activities and initiatives. As a cis-gendered middle-class white woman from the United States, the producer of this project, Meredith Drum, recognises that her position and perspective regarding the racist history carried by these monuments is limited. She has initiated the project as a way of discovering, and unpacking her blindspots. She sets out to support critical thinking about the future of public monuments in the United States.

For more information: https://vimeo.com/648323257

4. REFERENCES


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Figure 2: Monument Public Address System AR, documentation 2, 2022, Meredith Drum, animation and augmented reality.