Augmented Irreality

Jennifer L. Milkey

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AUGMENTED IRREALITY

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Jennifer L. Milkey
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of Art

We hereby approve the thesis of

Jennifer L. Milkey

Candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Kevin Turner, M.F.A.
Associate Professor of Art, Advisor

Susan Palmisano, M.F.A
Professor of Art

Nathan Heuer, M.F.A
Associate Professor of Art

ACCEPTED

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Augmented Irreality is a collection of ceramic objects that examine the layers of simulation blurring our perceptions of reality and how consumerism, mass-media, and technological advancements contribute to this seamless integration of alteration. These works explore how technology changes how we interact with the world, and how a craving for reality can only be satiated with a false version we have defined as real. The intent of the exhibition is to call attention to the blurred line between the hyperreal fabricated by technology and the reality based-process of creation by a human hand, drawing parallels to the ways technology is distorting our perceptions of reality.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the post-modern world, technological advancements have propelled society into an era of innovation and interconnectivity that previous generations could only dream of. From the first color televisions installed with cable access to supercomputers capable of fitting within the palm of a hand, accessibility, connectivity, and use of information have soared to heights previously unimaginable. As with the introduction and implementation of anything new, unintended consequences are ever-present. While new technologies are coveted and hailed for innovative features, their development is so rapid that they often outdate themselves upon release, and these technologies often come with unanticipated consequences.

From data collection algorithms and targeted advertising of large corporations to interactive and informative applications that augment an individual’s perceptions of their surroundings, the use of these devices creates an altered or “hyper” reality. No longer are we simply experiencing the actual world around us, but rather we are navigating through additional layers of simulation as boundaries between what is real and what is virtual continue to blur. Within the MFA thesis exhibition, Augmented Irreality, the early digital aesthetic of pixels is embodied within ceramic objects that examine how a hyperreal state drives and influences society by perpetually furthering the cycle of innovation, dependence, and obsolescence of technology.
Jean Baudrillard and Hyperreality

The work of Jean Baudrillard provides the key conceptual influence for Augmented Irreality. Baudrillard was a noted French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist whose work is closely associated with post-structuralism. One of the primary focuses of his work was media consumption and how this consumption alters our perception of reality. According to Baudrillard, postmodern society has substituted meaning and reality with representations, signs, and symbols, which he referred to as simulacra (The Implosion of Meaning in the Media). Of all the simulacra present in our society, technology is most abundant. The use and implementation of this particular media has extended into all aspects of postmodern society; no longer can we distinguish between any former realities and the ‘reality’ that is current within this media-saturated society, thus constructing a realm of hyperreality (Selected Writings).

In his book, Simulacra and Simulations, Baudrillard begins by recounting “On Exactitude in Science”, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges:

. . . In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome, and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the
Rigours of sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered Fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar; in the whole Nation, no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography. (Borges 131)

Baudrillard utilizes this short story to preface his ideas and illustrate the four-staged “precession of simulacra” that subverts and replaces reality (“The Precession of Simulacra” 1). Though Borges’s tale is sufficient on its own, reference to works within Augmented Irreality supplement the story while contextualizing Baudrillard’s theories.

The first stage of the precession occurs when a sign or symbol reflects a profound reality and is generally believed to be a faithful copy (“The Precession of Simulacra” 4). In Borges’ tale, the commissioned map of the kingdom is the sign believed to be the faithful copy. In the second stage, the sign masks the underlying reality and denatures the image, thus creating an unfaithful copy that is incapable of encapsulating reality (“The Precession of Simulacra” 4). Building upon Borges’ example, the map covers the kingdom on a one to one ratio, thus obscuring the ground from actual view. Consequently, the map is a snapshot of what once was rather than a real-time reflection, thereby making it an unfaithful image. Photography is a contemporary example of Borges’ tale, as it visually captures a singular moment in time. In Augmented Irreality, each half of the piece entitled Mirror (fig. 9) is believed to be a faithful reflection of one another, additionally utilizing digital photography.

The third stage masks the absence of a profound reality, where the sign masquerades as a faithful copy without an original; the sign portrays itself as a representation of something real, though it actually obscures the nonexistence of such a reality (“The Precession of Simulacra” 4).
Within *Mirror* (fig. 9), it is unclear which half is the true original or whether an “original” existed, thereby revealing the absence of reality and making both an unfaithful copy.

The final stage of the precession happens when images no longer have a connection to reality, merely reflect from other images, and cease to be signs; they exist as pure simulation (“The Precession of Simulacra” 4). To conclude the combined Borges’/contemporary example, a physical reproduction of a digitally altered photograph of the original map would serve as its own simulacrum, as it consists of signs referencing other signs as opposed to something real. Both *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) and 418 (fig. 14) are perfect examples of this final stage.

Within these works, traditional imagery has been replaced with QR codes and incorporated into the surface decoration, creating “signs” or simulation as visual design. Without access to the appropriate technologies, this new decoration references only itself as opposed to the true image. Conversely, *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) fully encapsulates Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra. This ceramic object reflects the reality of a vessel; it is an open tubular form with a closed bottom, therefore is believed to be a faithful copy. However, the base of this vessel has begun a process of digitization, transforming the smooth rounded surface into a sharp cumbersome form. Not only does this no longer accurately reflect the physical reality of a vessel, but it also portrays an excerpt of the process forever encased in time. When traditional imagery has been replaced with a sign that references only itself, this sign is no longer purely decorative. Utilization of QR scanners reveal an additional layer of information within the surface decoration, returning function to the imagery. In doing so, *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) relates back to itself both visually and physically, making the object an ideal representation of Baudrillard’s theory.
In *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard questions, “But what becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra?” (“The Precession of Simulacra” 3). The answer, revealed through the precession of simulacra, is the destruction of what an image represents and the genesis of simulation. According to Baudrillard, the postmodern media-saturated society experiences “the death of the real,” living our lives within the realm of hyperreality (Baudrillard and Maclean). In this postmodern society, individuals abscond from what Baudrillard terms as the “desert of the real” (“The Precession of Simulacra” 1) for the wonders of hyperreality, such as computers, media, and technological experience (Kellner). While there are a variety of explanations for the suspension of reality and simulation, looking back to Marxist theory builds the structure for Baudrillard’s theory.

Marx believed that all commodities have a “use value” or a value in use that relates to the tangible features which serve a useful purpose: for example, a screwdriver is utilized for screwing or unscrewing screws while a clock is used to measure and keep time (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* 20; *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* 42). However, within a capitalist society, everything is converted from use value into exchange value or commercial worth in the marketplace (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* 21; *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* 43); ergo a screwdriver might sell for $10 while the clock sells for $50. Baudrillard further breaks from material reality by suggesting that commodities within our consumption-based society have moved beyond use value or exchange value to a symbolic value that encapsulates an achieved status and hence, power (Baudrillard and Maclean). Certain commodities within post-industrialist societies, specifically the United States, are created purely for their symbolic value, lacking any use value whatsoever.
While fetishism can be defined as an object of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion ("fetish," entry 1b), even fetishes, which are commodities with a primarily symbolic value, still must be sold to consumers through the fabrication of desire. Desire drives consumption for these commodities and mass consumption creates a status quo, which in turn stimulates desire for a new commodity to stay ahead of the masses; thus, starting the cycle anew. To keep such a system active and producing, new information must be amassed and supplied in a constant flow. As more and more information is generated, ironically, less meaning is attributed to the excess. Within “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media”, Baudrillard seemingly foresees the advancement of a social media age following an influx of now meaningless information (Baudrillard and Maclean 580). In the article, he states:

This is our destiny, subjected to opinion polls, information, publicity, statistics: constantly confronted with the anticipated statistical verification of our behavior, absorbed by this permanent refraction of our least movements, we are no longer confronted with our own will. We are no longer even alienated, because for that it is necessary for the subject to be divided in itself, confronted with the other, contradictory...The social becomes obsessed with itself; through this auto-information, this permanent auto-intoxication, it becomes its own vice, its own perversion (Baudrillard and Maclean 580).

Baudrillard is referring to the quantification of information, where emphasis is placed on producing choreographed data objects rather than individualized beings. It should sound familiar, as this is how countless social media platforms utilize our data today.
Companies like Facebook, Google, Instagram, and Twitter invite users to create online identities and share personal data, from which a home feed is generated. This personalized feed arranges an understanding of the societal reality, reinforcing what is already thought and validating users with aimless simulation. Overflowing with reiteration and rampant with targeted advertisements conditioned from every keystroke or mouse click, this closed-loop system of simulated reality exists solely for the user. Social media not only provides pleasant “irrealities”, they actively encourage users to contribute. The more an individual participates, the better catalogued that user becomes, allowing increased commodification of the user through tailored hyperreality.

**Umberto Eco and *Travels In Hyperreality***

Umberto Eco is an Italian theorist of simulation who posits his experiences in America, where he describes bearing witness to imitation and replica displayed in museums and theme parks. Within his work, *Travels in Hyperreality*, Eco recounts his trip to Disneyland, which he argues has been created to be “absolutely realistic” (Eco, 1990). Looking beyond the performance of Disneyland, Eco describes contemporary culture as being “full of re-creations and themed environments” (Eco, 1990), believing the culture to be one of realistic fabrications that aim to create something better than what is possibly in reality. Eco refers to this notion as “the Absolute Fake”, where imitation doesn’t strive to reproduce, but rather enhance. Eco sources the desire to increase sale and profits as main motivation when creating and maintaining a hyperreality.

While Eco’s explanation of hyperreality conceptually relates to both Baudrillard’s theory and the manifesto of artist Shepard Fairey, it also contributes to the technical formulation of
work for *Augmented Irreality*. The notion of an “absolute fake” served as a challenge while fabricating this exhibition, inspiring the development of techniques that enhanced the forms and surface treatment as well as imagery utilized as decoration. As the work became more and more manufactured in appearance, the boundary between real and virtual blurred further. The effort culminates in a series of work whose smooth surfaces and crisp edges appear machined at first glance. Upon closer inspection, slight irregularities open a discussion as to the true formation of the pieces. This uncertainty of handcrafted vs. machined serves as a physical representation of Eco’s concepts of hyperreality and “the absolute fake”. In *Augmented Irreality*, the piece *(Re)produce/Consume* is a perfect example of Eco’s ideas. From a distance, the form as well as the text appear crisp and manufactured; however, closer viewing reveals irregularities in the lettering that expose the use of hand while exhibiting Eco’s “absolute fake”.


CHAPTER III

VISUAL INFLUENCES

Julian F. Bond

Julian F. Bond is a British national who is well known for mixing the hand-crafted with industrial design. While embarking on the MA Product Design course at the Royal College of Arts, Bond devised the Pixel Machine for his graduation show in 2010. Comprised of over 1300 rectangular plaster blocks attached to metal rods and housed within a clear acrylic casing, the Pixel Machine breaks the standard of traditional static plaster casting molds. Due to the nature of the machine, the rods are free-moving and can be individually pushed or pulled to create the desired mold shape. Once casting slip has been poured and set, the machine must be reset to release the cast. This novel casting machine allows Bond to explore the relationships between commercial design, mass production, and consumer authorship by providing individuals, regardless of their skill or familiarity with ceramics, the opportunity to create a unique work from traditional methods of mass production.

Though Bond has chosen to explore mass production through the implementation of casting slip and plaster molds, his approach helped influence the choice to utilize semi-continuous clay extrusions to comprise the work for *Augmented Irreality*, thus exploring another traditional method of mass production. For the exhibition, two dies were used in the extruder: a commercially produced circle and a custom-fabricated polygon. Once produced, the extrusions were firmed to a leather hard state before being cut to the appropriate size and angle. Pieces were then reassembled and cleaned up, much like digital imagery in Photoshop. While Bond’s work is endlessly customizable through the method of production, it operates as
an open-loop system, as the output or slip castings are constantly changing. To better reference theories of hyperreality, work for the exhibition utilizes a closed-loop system through use of the extruder. While this allows for continuity and accurate reproduction of the form, by restricting the width and depth of the extrusions, the works in Augmented Irreality also reference one another dimensionally, acting as signs or simulacra.

Sin-Ying Ho

Sin-Ying Ho is a contemporary Chinese contemporary ceramic artist best known for her mastery of traditional ceramic techniques. Within her work, Ho examines intersecting Eastern and Western cultures, exploring new vs. old, communication vs. language, and technology vs. tradition. Also within her work, Ho examines symbols of ornamentation and semiotics, the study of signs, symbols, and their interpretation. To accomplish this, Ho capitalizes on her extensive on-site research at the Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute of China learning about clays, underglazes, glazes, and firing methods and combines them with innovative processes. By incorporating new technologies that allow digitally rendered imagery, Ho includes corporate logos, such as Coca-Cola® and McDonald’s™, to add a layer of contemporary imagery to her traditional forms. This allows Ho to re-contextualize cultures and traditions of the West within the economic globalization of the East.

A focal point of Ho’s work is the use of visual signals and linguistic symbols. She draws from binary coding, international signs, patterning of computer circuitry, and written languages to use as ornamentation. By juxtaposing these decorative motifs onto traditional porcelain vessels, Ho blends the two cultures visually. Ho further expands on these concepts within the series Meeting Places. Moving beyond just visual decorations, Ho applies the blending process
to the creation of new forms. By creating multi-part molds of traditional vessel forms, Ho begins deconstructing and reassembling into new shapes that explore old vs. new and better illustrate the intersection of East and West. This construction method can be witnessed best in her work *Fractured Unity*, as a newly amalgamated form showcases traditional cobalt glazes while contemporary decals of corporate logos contrast and consume the form they inhabit.

Ho’s use of technique influences much of the surface decoration for the work in *Augmented Irreality*. Decals, which can be fit to scale and endlessly reproduced, reflect the visual culture and cultural iconography within a media-saturated society. Barcodes and QR codes, both of which are standardized methods of encoding, storing, and recalling data, are used throughout the body of work. The imagery has been abstracted, demonstrating how an excess of information ironically leads to the degradation and eventual annihilation of meaning. The visual imagery also serves to reference mass production and a consumerist society, as the intended purpose of these devices is to streamline industry. While Ho adorns traditional pottery forms, work for this exhibition showcases tightly structured forms that suggest both the industrial process of manufacturing and the digital process of rendering. Though the forms initially are fabricated with a simple machine, as opposed to Ho’s use of a complex machine, assembly and finish are done by hand, referencing Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra. The process of segmentation and reassembly witness within Ho’s *Fractured Unity* is also present throughout all the sculptural forms of *Augmented Irreality*, though it is utilized to examine the divide between real and virtual.
Shepard Fairey

Shepard Fairey is an American contemporary activist, graphic designer, illustrator and street artist widely known for founding OBEY Clothing and his “Hope” poster during the 2008 U.S presidential election of Barack Obama. Within his work, Fairey explores the theories of Jean Baudrillard, Martin Heidegger, hyperreality, and phenomenology. Beginning with a sticker campaign in 1989, Fairey utilizes phenomenology, the process of letting things manifest themselves (“phenomenology”, entry 2a) in effort to expose hyperreality by enabling viewers to clearly see something that “is right before their eyes but obscured; things that are so taken for granted that they are muted by abstract observation” (Fairey, 1990). Most notably from this campaign, Fairey crafted the stylized image of Andre the Giant, placing the imagery above the text “OBEY”. Within his own manifesto, Fairey describes the intention of the work:

Because people are not used to seeing advertisements or propaganda for which the product or motive is not obvious, frequent and novel encounters with the sticker provoke thought and possible frustration, nevertheless revitalizing the viewer’s perception and attention to detail. The sticker has no meaning but exists only to cause people to react, to contemplate and search for meaning in the sticker. Because OBEY has no actual meaning, the various reactions and interpretations of those who view it reflect their personality and the nature of their sensibilities. (Fairey, 1990)

In addition to Heidegger’s advancements in phenomenology, the 1988 science fiction movie They Live serves as inspiration for the series. The film follows a drifter who discovers that the ruling class are aliens and concealing their appearance to manipulate people into accepting the status quo via a hidden reality of omnipresent subliminal stimuli to conform, consume,
obey, and reproduce. It is from this work that Fairey takes several slogans for his own work, including “OBEY” and “This Is Your God”. Also within his work and the manifesto, Fairey confronts the “conspicuously consumptive nature” (Fairey, 1990) members of society possess and states:

For those who have been surrounded by the sticker, its familiarity and cultural resonance is comforting and owning a sticker provides a souvenir or keepsake, a memento. People have often demanded the sticker merely because they have seen it everywhere and possessing a sticker provides a sense of belonging. Whether the reaction be positive or negative, the stickers existence is worthy as long as it causes people to consider the details and meanings of their surroundings. (Fairey, 1990)

This correlates directly to Baudrillard’s theories, particularly of symbolic-value and fetishism.

While the Giant sticker campaign is still operating and in existence, Fairey has expanded on this work to take on a more political stance. He utilizes similar phrases and applies them to images in the effort to raise awareness of contemporary issues hidden in plain sight: abuse of power, apathy towards the environment, and corruption within politics/political systems.

Contrary to Ho’s passive exposure of hyperreality, Fairey actively participates in its existence, contributing to the mass media machine by constructing his own meaningless simulacra and plastering it onto the surrounding real world. Through the application of his repetitive imagery and confrontational text, Fairey explores hyperreality by adding to the noise. Continuing this exploration within his own practice, Fairey blurs the distinction between commercial and traditional art through the incorporation of text and imagery. Work for Augmented Irreality similarly investigates hyperreality by blending the machined and man-
made, resulting in simulated forms that engage and further the unreal while paradoxically submitting to their ornamentation.

**Barbara Kruger**

Barbara Kruger is an American contemporary artist best known for utilizing language to communicate consumption and desire’s effect on society. Her distinct style of layering text over imagery served as visual inspiration for my work, *(Re)produce/Consume*, while her critiques of post-modern society helped contribute conceptually to the remainder of the exhibition. Stylistically, her works are comprised of bold text on black and red backgrounds that is placed upon visual imagery borrowed from magazines. While the specific language changes from piece to piece, underlying messages of the aggressive phrases examine mass media and consumerism. While considering various words to adorn *(Re)produce/Consume*, the direct and suggestive nature of her work ultimately influenced the decision to select the word “consume”.
Unlike a virtual reality, hyperreality is a more seamless integration of simulation that distorts the reality it appears to portray. This thought was ever-present when considering the materials and processes employed to comprise the work for Augmented Irreality, which includes: key characteristics of the medium, use of digitally altered imagery, analog vs. digital methods, repetition of imagery, and commercial goods.

The medium itself serves as a perfect vehicle to explore these blurred boundaries, as clay has the unique ability to simulate any other material. The white clay body is comprised of fine particulate matter that is excellent for use in a variety of techniques, leaves a smooth surface when fired, and works well with commercial glazes and other surface decorations. These characteristics are best suited for the work as the digitally influenced forms aim to capture pixels in particles, blending untouchable visual data with tangible three-dimensional structure.

Despite the digital appearance of the works, fabrication of the forms consisted of low-tech, analog methods utilized specifically to further manipulate the boundary between manufactured and man-made. The forms were manually extruded through a wall-mounted extruder, a simple machine comprised of a barrel, die opening, lever, and die customized specifically for this exhibition. From there, the extrusions underwent the first stage of refinement. By implementing a small wooden block and utility blade, the pieces are further shaped and removed of any defects in the surface before segmentation and reassembly into the new form. After a second round of cleaning, works are then bisque fired to an approximate
temperature of 1480° F, strengthening the clay enough to enter a final stage of refinement. The works are then sanded by hand, ensuring a smoother surface for glaze and decal application while providing a sharper edge that better imitates a machined object. In addition to promoting a discussion as to how these forms were produced, the low-tech fabrication methods were deliberately chosen to offset the higher technology processes of kiln firings and surface decorations.

Commercial glazes are used to color the work for Augmented Irreality, as they have a higher consistency in appearance and application while also available in brighter fluorescent hues that better reference the digital style serving as inspiration for the exhibition. Lastly, decals are applied to the surface of works to complete the pieces. Imagery is crafted using Photoshop, an application that blends user ability with computer programming. This process allows for customization of the imagery while also providing the accuracy needed to precisely render coding which can be scanned via smartphone. Use of these decals provides viewers the opportunity to utilize the technology carried on their person and requires them to do so, should they elect to experience the full exhibition.

While these selected materials and processes are essential to Augmented Reality, their use is also prevalent within contemporary ceramic practices. Many facilities now capitalize on the convenience and efficiency of technology, from the use of unmonitored computerized electric kilns to full color decals created within the studio space. So long as these processes continue development and innovation, their use is all but guaranteed.
CHAPTER V
EXHIBITION ANALYSIS

*Augmented Irreality* is a collection of ceramic works consisting of nine pedestal-based objects and one wall hanging piece that examine how consumerism, mass-media, and technological advancements create layers of simulation which obscure perceptions of reality. Resulting from the culmination of research, technical and conceptual influence, and artistic inspiration, the exhibition intends to challenge its viewers to consider the impact of hyperreality within a contemporary society. Sculptures for *Augmented Irreality* have been designed and crafted to appear digitally rendered; however, closer inspection reveals subtleties of the human hand that spark conversation as to the actual method of fabrication, paralleling intentions of the work.

Initially within *Augmented Irreality*, the vessel form was to be the foundation for all the work, metaphorically serving as a container of information and referencing ideas of consumption while also acknowledging the history of the ceramic medium. Traditionally, functional utilitarian ware is created in the round, either formed by hand or thrown on a wheel. This process allows smooth, consistent surfaces that are comfortable, convenient, and practical to use. As the primary use of a vessel is physical storage, I selected this form with the intention to hinder and/or remove functionality, directly comparing how technology and digital medias affect our corporeal reality. Reminiscent of the early 8- and 16-bit videogame aesthetic, this distinct pixelated style is repeated throughout the three-dimensional forms, acting as a physical representation of the digital world as well as simulacra of actual vessel objects. Through pixelation of the vessel, comfortable surfaces become sharp and awkward while the additional
weight and thickness is clunky and unwieldy to use; directly referencing the limited capabilities of early visual technologies.

Just as innovation interrupts status quo, further stretching and manipulation of these digitized forms relates to the power technology has in permanently altering a society, both in foreseeable and unintended ways. Of the work included within Augmented Irreality, Signal Intrusion, Simulacrum, (Re)produce/Consume, and A .jpg by Any Other Name utilize a digitized vessel form.

In a study of American media habits, television remains the dominant source of entertainment and news with 57% of participants receiving information through this platform (Pew Research Center). Research showed that those who prefer television over print, radio, or online medias tended to do so exclusively, making it their only source of information (Pew Research Center). Dependence on a single media source is especially damaging, as it can bias a perspective or, if access to the source is interrupted, remove that perspective entirely. Signal Intrusion (detail); stoneware, glaze. 3.5” x 3.5” x 12”. 2019 (left) and Fig. 2. Simulacrum; stoneware, glaze. 7.5” x 4” x 4”. 2019 (right)
Intrusion (fig. 1) and Simulacrum (fig. 2) explore this dependence, utilizing characteristics of visual imagery from the breakdown of television transmissions, such as broadcast signal intrusion and “snow” or TV static, in tandem with physical “glitches” or separations to compare the manipulation of digital technology on the tangible world. By removing the physical functionality of these vessel-like forms, they create a parallel to the interruption in communication and consumption that occurs when access to television programing is disrupted with the physical consequences this has on an individual’s reality. (Re)produce/consume (fig. 3) expands on this notion, examining how mass media and consumerism combine with technology to influence consumers’ perspective and fabricate a false sense of “need”.

Of all the work in Augmented Irreality, (Re)produce/consume (fig. 3-6) drew the most influence from Barbara Kruger, who is best known for her use of language to communicate the impact of consumerism on society. Stretched to fit the undulations and edges of (Re)produce/consume (fig. 3-6) is the word “consume”, and, while there are multiple definitions of “consume”, three are explored within (Re)produce/consume (fig. 3-6): “to eat or drink
especially in great quantity” (“consume,” entry 3a), “to engage fully” (“consume,” entry 4), and “to utilize as a customer” (“consume,” entry 5). The first definition relates to the digitized vessel form, referencing the literal act of imbibing, while the second definition helps to explain the word’s placement on the form. In this piece, I capitalize on the multiple planes that comprise the digitized vessel form, and, in doing so, create a level of distortion by wrapping the text around the many edges and corners. This application intends to provide enough information for viewers to recognize a decorative design, but not enough to determine what that pattern depicts without closer examination, thus requiring them to walk around and engage the piece fully. The third definition speaks to the content of consumerism within both Kruger’s and my work. This definition is the most open to viewer interpretation, as it can be viewed as an active command, demanding its engrossment and utilization, or as a passive statement on the behaviors of our consumption-based society. While the white lettering on the red background of (Re)produce/consume (fig. 3-6) is visually inspired by Kruger, actual application of text within this piece was influenced by a combination of Kruger and Fairey. The stretched and distorted figure relates to the manipulation of a consumer’s mindset into increasingly spending more and more, while the seemingly endless black interior of the form communicates the perpetual nature of this hyperreality.
Fig. 7. A .jpg by Any Other Name; stoneware, glaze, decals. 3.5” x 3.5” x 9”. 2019.

*Fig. 7. A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) is the last ceramic object within *Augmented Irreality* that utilizes the vessel form to explore the layers of simulation created by technology. Similarly to Ho’s juxtaposition of corporate branding on traditional pottery forms that examine the clash of new vs. old, the intention of this piece is to better explore the relationship between man-made practices and digital innovations. Like all the sculptural work included within *Augmented Irreality*, the structure of *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) is created via extrusion. However, unlike the previously discussed works, the exterior of *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) is not fully pixelated; rather, the physical form is caught in digital transition. The base of *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) has been completely pixelated, relating to the permanent inclusion of technology within our post-modern society. As this pixelation continues up the form, more and more of the traditionally-worked surface undergoes conversion. By providing a physical
transition between analog and digital, the intention of this form is for viewers to consider the influential and manipulative capabilities technology has on society.

Tradition also served to influence surface decoration of *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7). The blue and white coloration as well as the floral design are inspired by delftware, a style of pottery prevalent in the 1600’s and 1700’s. Rather than directly reproducing imagery from this era, opportunity arose to further incorporate technology and blur the boundaries between new and old. While traditional pottery immediately presents the final imagery to viewers, this piece additionally explores how technology restricts access to this information. Though benefits of QR codes and other data recall methods include the potential to store a far greater amount of information within a smaller space, the downsides are that they are quite exclusionary and often the additional information is superfluous. Only those with the desire and wherewithal to use QR code readers can access the full picture and determine for themselves if the additional information is necessary to their experience or not. Within *A .jpg by Any Other Name* (fig. 7) all viewers are presented with the same small blue design, comprised of a QR code surrounded by floral patterning, that is replicated over the exterior surface; however, only those who access the additional information will reveal a high-resolution image of a blue rose (fig. 8).
As research and development of the work progressed, the limitations of using a repeated vessel form were quickly realized. While there are a variety of shapes and sizes in traditional utilitarian ware, using an extruder to produce a form limits all dimensions beside length. While this level of repetition is beneficial in creating works that appear machined, it is not as visually interesting when repeated indefinitely. Additionally, other shapes were needed to further explore the various layers of technology that affect reality. By removing the base of the vessel form and focusing on the tubular body as a new foundation for works, exploration of and reference to the flow and consumption of information could still occur. The remaining sculptural objects, Mirror, Concentric, and the series Personalization I / Impersonal / Personalization II explore the potential of this tubular structure.
Similar in scale to the previous works, Mirror (fig. 9) pushes degradation of the digitized vessel and marks the end of smaller open forms. Comprised of two pieces that reflect one another both in shape and ornamentation, the intention of this piece is to explore dependence on technology as communication and the breakdown that occurs when that technology fails or becomes outmoded. In this work, physical segmentations are utilized to represent internal technical glitches while the clean slice symbolizes a more drastic effect that innovation and obsolescence has on existing technologies. Just as a reflection is dependent on the object it echoes, a change to one half of Mirror (fig. 9) directly affects its likeness. By reflecting the pieces equally and opposite one another, a dependence is established between the two; any
change made to one directly impacts the other. As technology becomes further ingrained within our society, the same dependence is established as exhibited in *Mirror* (fig. 9). To visually communicate the breakdown of technology and information within the surface decoration, glitches and barcodes are employed as imagery. As before with the physical degradations, computerized malfunctions relate to the internal failures of technology while the barcodes correspond to external interruptions that compromise a system.

Fig. 10 *Concentric*; stoneware, glaze, decals. 18” x 12” x 12”. 2019.

*Concentric* (fig. 10) is the first piece of the exhibition that ventures beyond a linear form and examines the cyclical nature of innovation and dependence on technologies. The tubular extrusions have been angled and assembled into a spiral form, serving as a metaphor for technology’s slow decent down the drain into obsolescence. Though technology falls out of use,
traces of it linger. Surface decoration for *Concentric* (fig. 10) is compiled from now obsolete data containment methods, with the main body comprised of stacked symbology code structures and bullseye barcode adorning the end caps. Though Code 49, Code 128, and Code 16K, were variations of universal stacked symbology encoding methods, their structure required too large a space and too much memory to efficiently recall data. For this shared inherent flaw, they were utilized across the main body. The bullseye barcode, of which all modern data classification methods are derived, are cyclical in design and best reference the endless cycle of innovation, dependence, and obsolescence. It could not be more fitting that the very first barcode would so accurately depict its decedents’ future.

As technology continues to improve, so too does its implementation. Where in the past corporations and advertisers have relied on informed and compensated focus groups for their research, in our post-modern society, data is acquired through formulated algorithms designed to track and analyze individuals’ online interactions, often unbeknownst to the user. *Personalization I / Impersonal / Personalization II* (fig. 11-13), examine how the application of targeted advertisement through online sites masquerades as chance and happenstance. For this series of pieces, I implemented a circular form to represent the cyclical operation of data collection and the permanence of internet data, as well as the nature of a closed-loop system that forever feeds back into itself.
Personalization I (fig. 11) uses a circular form as foundation for surface design and additional content. The blue stripes that adorn the digitized section of the work reference barcodes and physical commodities while imagery on the smaller segment is derived from Facebook’s “personalized” advertising. To experience firsthand how pervasive this targeted advertising truly is, I created a new Facebook account that would collect data over the course of the research and initial construction of the work for Augmented Irreality. An estimated 20% of the collected data was converted to decals and applied to the surface, providing viewers the opportunity to identify various brands and glimpse of the simulation without fully overwhelming the surface. Personalization II (fig. 13) employs a similar process in surface decoration to examine Google’s data collection strategies. The form of Personalization II (fig. 13) is altered to appear more pixelated and incorporate a more gradual transition between the segments, relating to the blurred boundaries between simulation and reality. Coloration of the work references Google’s logo while the “barcode” decals are comprised of the personal data collected during the research for this exhibition. Impersonal (fig. 12) sits juxtaposed between the Personalization I and II (fig. 11 and 13). The grayscale form, devoid of any additional
information or imagery, serves to inform viewers that it is possible to limit participation in the targeted advertising machine and reduce the layers of simulation that alter reality.

418 (fig. 14) is a wall-hung piece and the last to be discussed from Augmented Irreality.

While all previous pieces underwent a man-made, as well as a manufactured process, this work is comprised entirely of the later. As research for the exhibition led further into technology’s integration and use within a hyperreal state, the final work was intended to be almost devoid of the human hand, referencing the ever-blurring boundaries of the hyperreal. To explore the higher level of technological integration within ceramics, commercial tiles were purchased to serve as the foundation. These tiles are manufactured within a facility that utilizes technology to streamline production of commercial goods and limit human involvement. With this in mind,
personal physical involvement was limited, instead focusing on mechanical methods when developing the decals. Like the rest of the imagery for *Augmented Irreality*, decals for 418 (fig. 14) were produced via Photoshop and Illustrator, further removing myself from direct touch. In fact, the only hands-on to this piece was in the application of decals onto the tiles, and tiles to the backboard.

418 (fig. 14) is comprised entirely of QR codes that overwhelm the viewer with visual data. While each code, including the larger aggregate, will scan to reveal an additional layer of information, access to this data is limited by design within 418 (fig. 14). Traditionally, QR codes are created with a buffer zone so the code can be read faster and easier; alteration and removal of this buffer, however, makes the codes harder to process and reduces an otherwise useful technology to its limitations. Not only is the assemblage of data meant to be visually overwhelming, but also difficult to process in terms of relevance. Both Baudrillard and Fairey describe as more information in generated, ironically, attributed meaning steadily decreases. This concept has become better known as “infoxication” or information overload. Applying this to 418 (fig. 14), the QR technology can access a considerably larger quantity of information within each of the individual symbols, though not all the information is as pertinent or useful. This application mirrors the realities of information overload within our post-modern society.
Augmented Irreality challenges viewers to examine the reality that is the hyperreal state of our post-modern world. Works featured within this exhibition examine the layers of simulation that consumerism, mass-media, and technological advancements all contribute to. We exist in a world forever altered by their entanglement; no longer do we experience the real and actual, but rather variations of it as we navigate the blurred boundaries of hyperreality. By presenting the viewer with opportunities to fully interact with the exhibition, they can contemplate the degree to which they participate and subject themselves to other altered realities beyond the gallery walls.

For better or for worse, technology and innovation will forever be present in our society. This collection of ceramic sculptures and visual data are not meant to advocate for their hindrance or removal, but rather, the aim is to foster a dialogue through visual depiction as to how these developments alter the interaction with and perception of the surrounding world. Such a conversation is paramount as the lines between reality and simulation continue to blur, possibly until they are entirely inseparable.
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