

# Royal College of Art

## MA Digital Direction

### MA Information Experience Design

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The master's courses: Digital Direction, Information Experience Design (IED), Visual Communication, Animation and an interdisciplinary Masters in Research (MRes) complete the Royal College of Art's School of Communication, within which three vibrant mixed studios are located. This paper addresses some of the key research imperatives these courses embody, including the status of virtual and augmented realities, two technologies that are ontologically unstable, raising urgent research questions for staff and students alike.

#### 2. DIGITAL DIRECTION & INFORMATION EXPERIENCE DESIGN

The authors of this paper teach on MA Digital Direction and MA Information Experience Design (IED). For IED Information can be quantitative or qualitative, numerical data, personal narratives, or socio-political issues. These are examined through investigative and experiential research, through a range of methods, to create transformative, immersive and multisensory experiences, with emphasis on content, context, materiality and atmosphere. For MA Digital Direction, the catalysing impact of digital technologies associated with time based media are addressed, in particular the course is concerned with both experimental and established approaches to production, direction, content creation and communication, in order to create innovative forms of storytelling and narrative experience that engage audiences in new ways.

Both courses deploy augmented and virtual realities, with MA Digital Direction devoting a term

to Immersive Adventures. In IED teaching and research approaches to VR/AR are diverse and students explore and critique both media and content through digital and physical techniques. And yet, the status of VR is still uncertain and has been a challenge for some years (Hillis 1996, p.70). Like the photograph, it is not clear exactly what VR is, whether it is a medium, a tool, an event or an extension of cinema. The ontological status of what it feels like to encounter VR, is also an enigma, in line with Dennett's (1991) assertions about ineffable, subjective experience, or qualia.

These and other questions about VR/AR technologies, as well as teaching strategies, are at the core of a new research hub established by academics within the School of Communication. The hub aims to address the question of how we can best teach a subject which no one truly understands, identifying some of the possibilities inherent in our own uncertainty and disorientation.

#### 3. CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact the Royal College of Art School of Communication at: [soc@rca.ac.uk](mailto:soc@rca.ac.uk)

#### 4. REFERENCES

- Dennett, D. (1991) *Consciousness Explained*. Penguin, New York.
- Hillis, K. (1996) A Geography for the Eye: The technologies of virtual reality. In R. Shields (ed.) *Cultures of the Internet*. SAGE, London.