

<h2>Turning FACT Inside Out</h2><h3>at the FACT, Liverpool until 15th September 2013 </h3><h3>Reviewed♦by Denis Joe July 2013</h3><p></p><p>FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in Liverpool celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The centre houses three galleries, three cinemas, including the most uncomfortable cinema I have ever been in: The Box, where they show the more interesting films. Over the decade the galleries have housed some interesting and provocative exhibits including the excellent Nam June Paik exhibition, which was the subject of my first review for the Manchester Salon web site.</p><p></p><p></p><p>To celebrate, FACT have put on an exhibition which they describe as turning FACT ♦inside out♦, testing the way in ♦which the cultural centre will extend beyond the walls of the physical container, moving outside and online♦. </p><p></p><p></p><p>The first work that one encounters is Nina Edge♦s Ten Intentions. The work is a communications experiment that attempts to discover what people will say to a robot that turns talking into writing. The work uses Apple♦s voice recognition technology, Siri, which allows writing to be produced at the speed of speech. It also ♦mishears♦ speech, producing misunderstandings.</p><p></p><p></p><p>Throughout the 13 week experiment, conversations and ideas on what the future will look like will develop online, at venues across Liverpool, and in a special tent at FACT created by visitors. The tent that provides a place to discuss the subjects covered in the work and points to a future where ♦tent dwelling will increase as climate and political change force people out of solid structures and into temporary shelters♦.♦</p><p></p>
<p>The idea of temporariness suggests that the artist has already made up their mind about the future; and it doesn♦t look good. As Edge has stated: ♦But in a context of dwindling resources everyone is forced to re-imagine the future and be prepared for change. Political, economic and climate change are already forcing some people out of solid walled structures and into tents.♦ I couldn♦t help imagining that the inspiration for this piece came from Cormac McCarthy♦s novel The Road and there seemed to me to be an irony (intended or not) of using the latest technology to paint a future that has civilisation in retreat.</p><p></p><p></p><p>Diminished City, a work by Mark♦Skwarek, allows viewers to erase the♦Liverpool cityscape surrounding FACT. Using what he terms diminished reality (similar to augmented reality) viewers can delete things from the scene of the area on the tablet. To erase their surroundings, participants simply touch objects they wish to remove on the mobile device. As they touch and erase buildings, trees, etc., the city ceases to exist, leaving an empty landscape. The point of this escapes me. I can see a use for this technology for, say, architects, but as an installation it does nothing beyond, perhaps reinforce a feeling of

pessimism about the future (and, I suppose, the present as well).

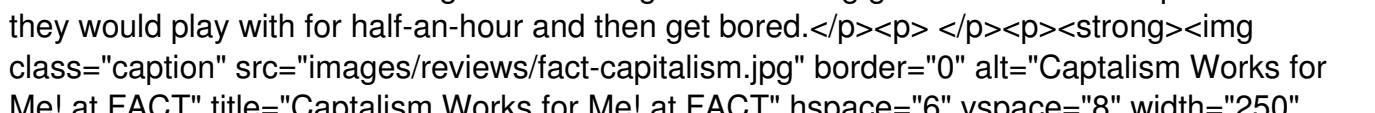
Diminished City is part of the collective **Manifest. AR**, an international artists collective working with emergent forms of augmented reality as interventionist public art. The works cannot really be called **Art**. In fact **Manifest. AR** describe the pieces as **games**. One work, **I Must Be Seeing THINGS**, by **John Cleater**, uses a book with outlines of objects on the pages and an iPad Mini viewer. When the viewer turns a page a picture appears and fills in the outline. As a game it is pretty dull, as are all the exhibits by **Manifest. AR**.

The exhibits themselves are works in progress. **Working with Stephen Fairclough** (Professor of Psychophysiology) and **Kiel Gilead** (Researcher in Physiological Computing) at Liverpool John Moores University, **Manifest.AR** is exploring artworks that link augmented virtual objects with audience responses translated through compact wearable bio sensing devices. The displays seem to be concerning themselves with finding neurological explanations for our reaction to art, with the viewer acting as a guinea pig. Whilst the technology may well be **cutting edge**, the thinking behind the works is conservative, falling in line with the current fashion of try to explain our behaviour through biology.

At least **Uncoded Collective doesn't seem to see themselves as artists. As they say, they are a transdisciplinary team that works creating realtime interactive technologies. Masters of rapid prototyping tools and big believers of open source technologies and knowledge. The piece on show called **TransEurope Slow Route 1** is basically a virtual bike ride. A screen has a video of a route where you pedal to make the video move. Whilst the piece is quite clever I have to wonder **What is the point?** It is rather depressing to think that new technology is being utilised, not just to make things easier, but to take away from us our ability for decision making. It is rather like the depressing trend for universities to create mobile phone apps which allow the student to know if a computer is available on the campus, or when the buses run and even if a washing machine is free in the laundry. Likewise with **TransEurope Slow Route 1**; which is nothing more than a simulation game; we are encouraged to **travel** without leaving the confines of our home (or in this case the FACT building). This pre-programming of our lives reduces human activity and interaction, to the mundane.**

We are told:

TransEurope Slow negotiates modern cities and finds places that tell contemporary stories which move beyond tourist attractions, stereotypes, and city brands. Your journey will seamlessly switch from Liverpool to Rotterdam and Madrid, linking the cities and highlighting their differences, and similarities. But the attempt to make this piece meaningful does not convince. I could imagine something like this being given to a child as a present which they would play with for half-an-hour and then get bored.

Steve Lambert **Capitalism Works For Me! (True/False)** at least gives a nod towards something that is artistic, but it is a lazy and unimaginative work. At 20-feet long and

situated above the rear entrance to fact, the piece is hard to miss. It is a neon lighting which asks the question and then allows the viewer to vote. The ♦Yes♦ and ♦No♦ votes then appear on either side of the question.

What is noticeable about the exhibits so far is how much they rely on the viewer to participate, pandering to the fetishism of opinion. Instead of confronting the audience and forcing them to engage with the work, these pieces appear to have already answered any question and simply seek approval. Lambert's piece is a perfect example; by posing the question: Capitalism Works For Me! (True/False), there is an implied rejection of Capitalism in the gaudy presentation of the piece and Lambert seems to seek confirmation of his views (Actually, the ♦Yes♦ vote was three times greater than the ♦No♦ vote, when I saw it).

Likewise with the work that is central to the exhibition. **HeHe's** *Fracking Futures*, whilst it is suggested that the ♦artists♦ are neutral on the issue, the reality is that their portrayal of the fracking process is not so far removed from the dystopian world of *Bladerunner*. The piece is installed in Gallery 1 and we are asked to put on a safety helmet before entering, though there is no reason why we should.

Once inside we are presented with a scaled down model of the extraction process. It is difficult to keep an open mind on works that want to raise awareness about an issue, and HeHe's installation is certainly that. The process lasts about ten minutes in that time we see the drilling, excavation of waste disposal and we feel the tremors that the process is said to create (in fact the vibrations could be felt in my ribs). The work shows a great deal of **engineering skill**, but it would probably be more impressive if it was created by a 12-year-old with a Meccano set.

Personally I find these rigs to be impressive. Driving down the M53 and passing the oil refineries near Ellesmere Port is one of the most pleasant sights I can think of - especially at night. But I appreciate that not many will share my aesthetics and *Fracking Futures* feels as if it is playing to the fears of that section of the population which opposes a return to industrial manufacturing.

As with much of the other works, *Fracking Futures* could hardly be referred to as ♦Art♦. It is nothing more than a display of what it could be like to have fracking extraction on your doorstep. In taking this approach the HeHe Collective are appealing to the **NIMBY mentality** and ignoring the potential benefits of cheaper fuel and potential job opportunities. So the piece cannot really be as ♦neutral♦ as the creators intended. However impressive *Fracking Futures* appears, it is really just a spectacle. There is nothing imaginative about the work, and, as with the rest of the works in this exhibition, they tell you what to think rather than allow you to develop your own conclusions.

Katarzyna Krakowiak's *Chute*, in Gallery 2, is the only piece that I could define as an art work. However it is not a work that can be classed a groundbreaking or cutting edge. We find ourselves in an unlit room, making it difficult to appreciate the artists' approach to the angling of the space. The sounds of the world about us are the ones we supposedly have not noticed - in essence it is not much different from Aleatoric music. There is something lazy about presenting a work that takes on the sound around us and represents it as a piece of cutting edge art. It is nothing of the sort.

All in all it is fortunate that *Turning FACT Inside Out* is a free event. To see this as an exhibition of art works, would be grossly misleading. What we are given is a demonstration of technological innovation, which may, in itself, provide something novel, but it doesn't provide something that is challenging or an exhibition that suggests any respect for an audience. In short it is a pretty

miserable show to celebrate FACT's anniversary.</p>