

## **When We Dream We're Dreaming**

Rachel Clarke's Liminal State

"When we dream that we are dreaming, the moment of awakening is at hand."

J.M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country*, 1940

Rachel Clarke's interactive multimedia installations are subtle dreamscapes that traverse the intersections of reality and simulacrum. Clarke's technological agility and interest in the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Carl Jung make her work especially relevant to the recent explosion in personalized technology and its implications for how we think about reality. Clarke's exhibition, *Between*, which includes solo works and collaborations with sound artist, M. Azevedo, delves into a hybrid interactive world in which reality and virtual reality are delicately interwoven.

Clarke's life-sized assemblages are prisms of real and unreal experiences. There are real physical objects, videos of real people talking about real dreams, videos of real technology, and videos of videos. The dreams remind us that when we redefine reality, we must also redefine dreams, the unconscious, fantasies, imagination, hallucinations, superhuman acts, meditation, delusions, daydreams, and miracles.

Works, such as *Time Piece*, speculate about the nature of time. A circle of human-scale vertical structures with video monitors perched atop display videos of assorted ordinary clocks. Every 5 minutes an alarm goes off. The videos are clock illusions; the clocks are time illusions---attempts to make time comprehensible and tangible. The videos are illusions of illusions. The sounding alarms suggest a demarcation between dream time and real time. But how can that border be defined when "real" time is not real?

Clarke's work asks us to consider what distinguishes dreams and fantasies from reality when reality has vanished

as a reference point. We, the interactors, are the only real presence in the room, but this is a room where we are not where we are. As Clarke describes:

*"I am exploring the edges of human consciousness, that liminal state between the rational and the irrational. In psychology or philosophy the notion of a liminal state is that of experiencing a threshold between different existential planes, whereby normal limits of consciousness and understanding are expanded. The dreams bring the 'reality' of the dream world into the viewer's conscious awareness. In the dream narratives, 'reality' is an altered place with a borderless sense of possibility."*

Quaint vestiges of recently antiquated technology figure prominently and symbolically in many of Clarke's works. They are nostalgic decoys that defuse the threat of technology with their banal familiarity. In *Book of Hours*, we are seated at a comfortable old scholar's desk as we turn the pages of a journal. But, it is not a journal. It is an interactive video image of a journal. These familiar things entice us to enter the labyrinth and serve as a kind of spirit of times past---speaking to us from an era when we were far less vulnerable and far more innocent. Clarke explains:

*"The dissolving of rationality through the blurring of the real and dream worlds, the unreal environment of the installation created by the oddly familiar nostalgic setting, and the trompe l'oeil projected objects invite the viewer to transition across the permeable boundaries between what is knowable and unknowable."*

We sink into a chair with an electronic device held in our hand. At that moment we are transformed into a cultural symbol, an archetype. We are part of what Jung described as the collective unconscious, that fundamental realm of thought beneath our conscious awareness. It is a realm that is both extraordinarily unique and extraordinarily ordinary, a subterranean location we share with others through the universal experience of fear, anxiety, longing, and aspiration.

In contrast to the more foreboding prognoses of some social critics, Clarke has chosen to focus on the potential of technology to link people together creatively and meaningfully within a network of shared symbolic and personal experiences.

*"I am attempting to present an expanded form of self awareness, beyond the predictable mediated aspects of human experience...ultimately my use of technology seeks to affirm human connectedness, to bring technology into the realm of expressing our shared emotional experience and deeper commonality"*

Yet, Clarke's work purposely plays down technology. It is everywhere and nowhere. Perhaps this is to suggest what has already occurred, that technology has become an intimate personal augmentation, not only of what we are, but of who we are. It has been integrated into the body-mind-social complex so closely that it has disappeared.

Cheri Ibes, 11-23-09.

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