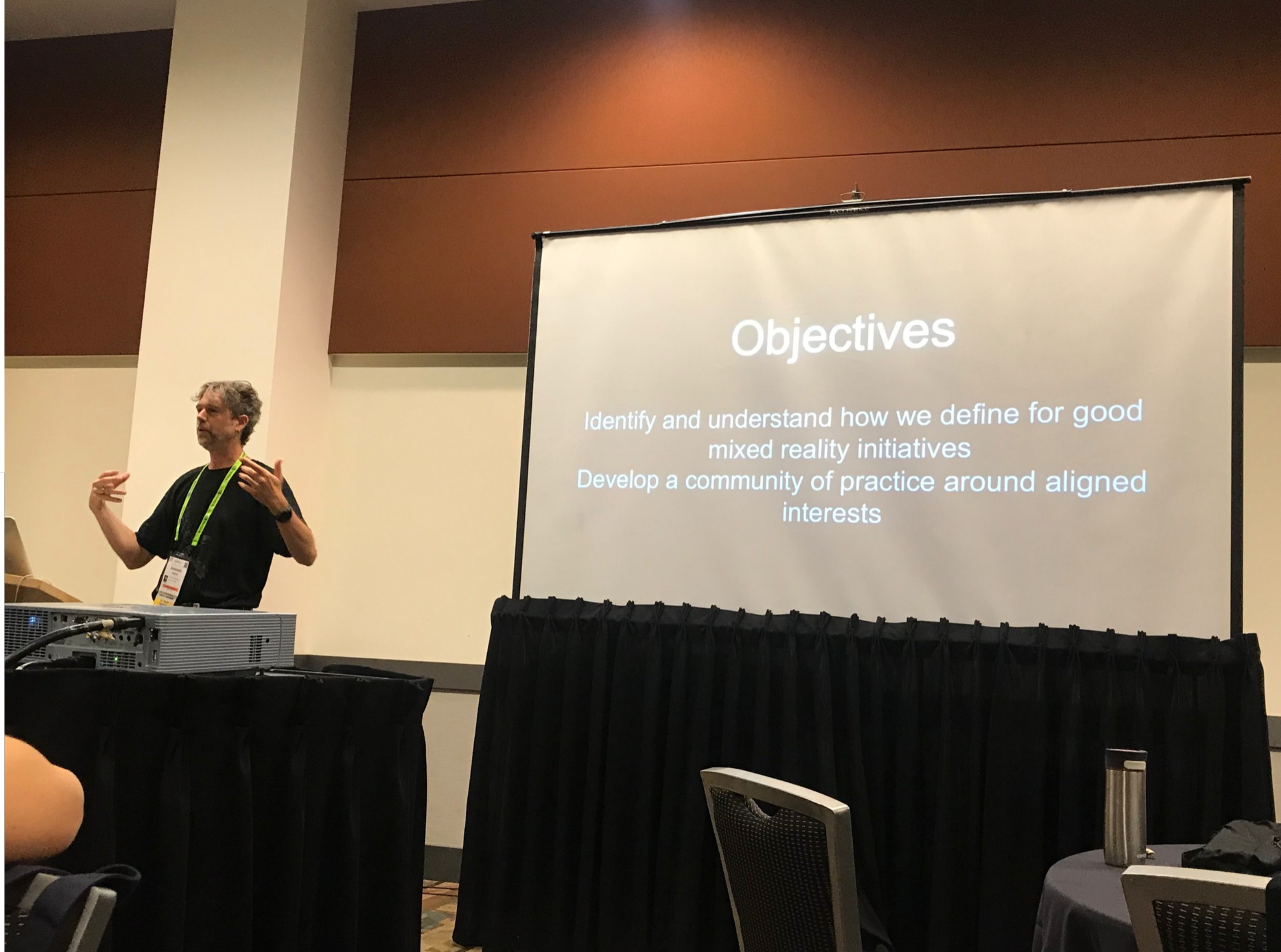


VR-AR-MR For Good: Siggraph 2018

BOB FREDERICK

With **SIGGRAPH** 2018 behind us, we've had time to reflect on the experience. This year, we were reminded the great things about being part of this community. Aside from the amazing emerging technology demos on the exhibit floor, there are also intense conversations happening in the rooms behind the exhibits among peers and colleagues and public and private industry about the state of technology and the impact on society, labor, and art.



Bernhard Riecke, SIGGRAPH 2018

One of the discussions that really stood out was a "Birds of a Feather" session where like-minded participants gathered to talk about an umbrella topic. In this session—hosted by **Bernhard Riecke**, **Denise Quensel**, and **Patrick Pennefeather**—we broke into smaller groups and convened several times to discuss broader topics. We heard from Anthropologists, professionals in the Museum and Education space, people working with disabled Veterans, those working with Senior citizens and the aging population, artists, creatives in the film industry and so many more.

After identifying common themes and interests among the groups we re-organized around these topics:

- Health and Accessibility
- Storytelling
- Education
- Social Interaction
- Ethics

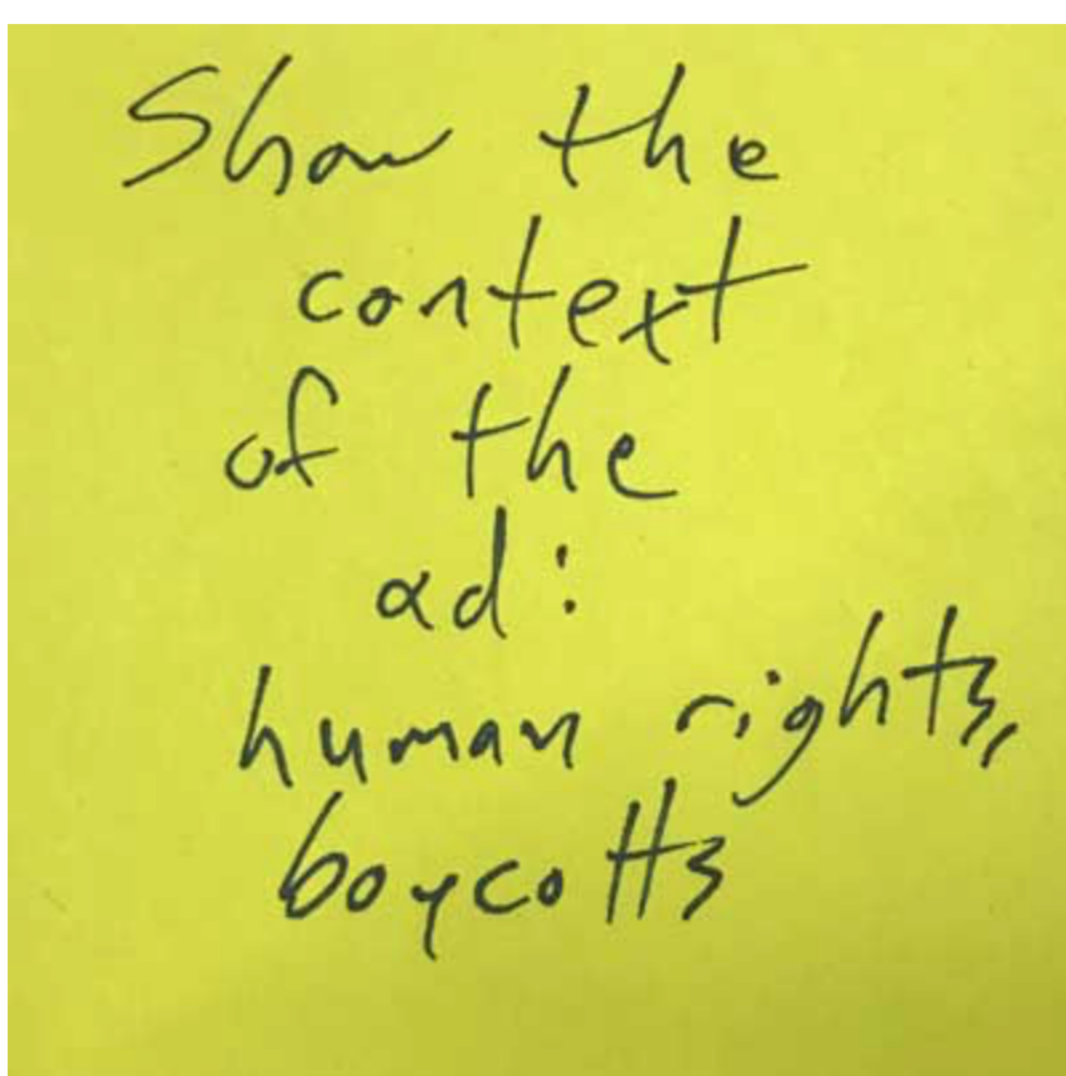


HYPER-REALITY, Keiichi Matsuda, 2016

I joined the Ethics panel, out of interest in hearing a broad scope of ideas on these mediums from practitioners in the field. We discussed a range of topics that categorized themselves on a spectrum from things that were likely very easy to implement today, to the broader, more structural and difficult ideas that would take a continued effort to implement. Our conversation started with a common dystopic trope that often reoccurs when thinking about XR technologies, this idea that we won't be able to escape the ubiquity of advertising and the collective thought of isolated micro-communities. Some of us were reminded of Keiichi Matsuda's Hyper-Reality **video** and this became a point of departure for the discussion. I'll talk about just one of those related ideas here and some of the initial ideas the group offered as potential thought-experiments for the medium.

Awareness & Context:

This idea developed around the discussion about the cases in which contemporary mediums and social networks isolate their users. As a comparison to VR we can look at how **Leopoldoni Fortunati** has explored the mobile phone and its social relationship in this way. She wrote about the social behavior—our choice to shift inward toward our chosen interactions on the mobile phone rather than our choice to experience chance social interactions with strangers. She describes our draw to the former by the mobile phone's ability to create a safe, intimate, and predictable environments. Unfortunately these aspects create an isolating discourse, the contemporary "echo chamber" we hear about so often.



We talked about ad re-marketing and a bit about the irony of targeted ads originally meant to be useful in serving ads which were relevant to the user. **Justin Berry** a professor at the Yale School of art reminded us of the self-fulfilling prophecy of re-marketing and consumer targeted ads. From the initial "Do I need this product" to the fourth time seeing the ad and thinking "Yes, I definitely need this." to "I need this today."

So how can XR attempt to overcome its shortcomings? Our group discussed the importance of context and awareness for users in our contemporary media landscape. We discussed the idea of a design framework, a way of thinking and creating for a VR environment that would allow the user to identify the distortion that is created by these mediums. We abstractly called this framework a "lens."

AR Software Engineer **Tom Meyer** considered the idea of a contextually aware ad, whereby a user could reveal any affiliations. In the context of architectural design we spoke of empathy and using VR to take a cognitive perspective. Perhaps from that of children or those with disabilities. While incomplete, these ideas seem useful to explore.

Participation & Inclusion:

The ability of VR/AR/MR to offer unique perspective is one differentiation of this new medium. One example of how we are looking to transforming our design practice is our application of Augmented Reality to amplify the storytelling within our physical models.

In our own studio, with the **Academy of Media Arts project**, we decided there was the perfect opportunity to create an interactive experience in which the stakeholders could participate. Using **3D models created by the students**, we were able to develop a virtual component to our physical model that would showcase the student's actual work in relationship to the conceptual proposal.



Rios Clementi Hale Studio, Physical Model, 2018

This type of engagement deepens the narrative by allowing the users to have an active and participatory role in the design dialogue. Most importantly, it places cultural value on their contribution as an element of the design rather than as simply objective users with data.

Until next year!

SIGGRAPH is one of the conferences that really engages both the science and the art of new technologies by offering practitioners a common ground to ideate and instigate. We are already looking forward to **SIGGRAPH 2019** here in LA. If you're going, drop us a line at ... we'd love to join you in a future Birds of A Feather conversation!