Data Library
Colin Rosati
Curated by Adrienne Crossman
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"The simulacrum is never what hides the truth, it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true."

- Baudrillard, Simulation and Simulacra[1]

Within our increasingly immersive digital landscape, it can be difficult to define reality, and differentiate between what is "real" vs. what is simulated – and at this point, whether it even matters. What does it mean to experience digital versions of familiar everyday objects within a virtual context? Is a social interaction any less genuine if it happens online instead of in person?

Colin Rosati's *Data Library* is a single channel 3D animated video. With an aesthetic reminiscent of an HD version of a Windows 95 screensaver, the video displays an assemblage of 3D artifacts placed within a fabricated virtual environment. *Data Library* is just that, a collection of data taken from or made to reference "real life" and inserted into the context of a completely artificial digital environment, one that would be impossible to replicate IRL (in real life).

Rosati is exploring the notion of authenticity of "the digital" vs "the real" by challenging Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura: the idea that a work of art is uniquely present in

[1] Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 1994

time and space, and that only the original can possess this authentic presence; replication destroys uniqueness.[2]

During the video, the viewer is invited to observe a kind of digital wonderland filled with 3D rendered technological artifacts that reference both the artist's physical and digital selves. The assemblage of artifacts includes found 3D objects sourced from online databases, much like digital warehouses, that contain a wide range of pre-created digitally rendered pieces. Databases such as these are often open source, allowing users to build and upload their own objects that are then made available by download to the wider public. Found objects used in the work include furniture, cell phones, and various other pieces of technology. The open source nature of these digital objects abandons the idea of authorship and ownership and their seemingly important presence in our 'real lives.' These objects, and the landscape they inhabit, call into question whether these digital spaces are ones that can be colonialized, as the possibilities of acquisition, ownership and control become ever more complicated in a sphere removed from physical tangibility.

In addition to those found online, Rosati generated a number of objects though use of 3D scanning, digital manipulation, digital painting and 3D generated text. He explored different methods of 3D scanning; an Xbox Kinect to scan a bunch of bananas, and a freeware application downloaded to a smartphone to scan a friend – a lo fi process that resulted in distortion and visuals noise, creating a skewed version of the scanned original. Rosati also altered the data of scanned objects in a way that rendered them unrecognizable, such as that of a Nokia cell phone that has been morphed into an indecipherable shape. If a digital object is easily rendered meaningless by changing its data makeup, what significance does any object truly hold if it is only understood within a specific context or presentation? By juxtaposing found 3D objects with those created by the artist via digital and physical means (Cinema 4D, Photoshop and 3D scanning), the work further complicates the possibilities and/or relevance of authorship and authenticity within a digital sphere.

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[2] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Penguin, 2008. Print.

Another strategy used by Rosati in the exploration of digital authenticity is the choice to make visible the material and processes of the technology itself. This can be seen in the lo- fi 3D scans that are rich in imperfections. Rosati uses these glitches, and emphasizes them by further distorting the shapes that have been generated. To the artist, it's important to show traces of the tools used for creation within the work itself. These traces are made evident through the jilted POV (point of view) style camera movements created in the program Cinema 4D to navigate the space. Intended to reference how one may physically view an environment, the result is a cold and mechanical style of looking with movements that could not be easily replicated by a human body.

Rosati also employs the use of multiples, a kind of copying and pasting of data of particular objects, for example a potted plant, and layering them on top of one another in a way that is only possible within a digitally simulated setting. This replication is a form of cloning in which each version is identical, making the importance of the original irrelevant and rendering the notion of an aura meaningless.

It is important to note that, although it may appear arbitrary, much thought went into the choices made when designing and populating the environment of *Data Library*. Rosati has intentionally chosen to reference objects and signifiers that simultaneously possess both physical and digital connotations. These objects include cellphones, an iPhone charger as well as other pieces of technology, and the use of the colour blue as the video's background is a direct reference to a blue screen used in the process of Chroma keying. The blue (and often green) screen, usually found in a shooting studio, is a physical object that, after being video recorded, makes possible the digital process of altering the background of the footage in post production – a physical object created for digital manipulation. Rosati has also included a digital painting he has created, placed within a found digital frame and positioned in a kind of still life inside the environment; an attempt to resolve the reoccurring challenge of how one appropriately displays screen-based artwork.

Data Library poses more questions than it answers. How do these objects function in a digital space? Do they function? Do they need to function? How can we define authenticity within virtual reality? Rosati highlights these dilemmas by bringing to light

the absurd notion of originality in relation to data while simultaneously showcasing the traces and imperfection of his digital tools in hopes of maintaining a kind of sincerity. With no attempt made to create the illusion of physical reality, the result is much like a game of telephone of representation. With each replication, multiplication and re-contextualization these objects become divorced from their original meanings, further complicating the idea of an aura within the contemporary digital landscape.

- Adrienne Crossman