

Still wearing a real mask this Halloween? Team suggests latest in augmented reality

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Halloween costumes can be so... analog. Until this season. Artist and Polytechnic Institute of New York University (NYU-Poly) augmented-reality researcher Mark Skwarek has teamed with one of his grad students to create 3D digital masks more appropriate to the year 2013.

Skwarek, an NYU-Poly instructor of integrated digital media, and Animesh Anad, a computer science graduate student, developed the

virtual masks to launch an augmented reality game that turns the entire planet into a futuristic reality game in which real people and locations morph with fantasy.

Wearers print out "markers," which are a kind of colorful barcode, about four inches square, to clip or tie into their hair or hat. By holding up a mobile device loaded with an app, the wearer suddenly appears wearing a digital mask – from cute kitty to ghoul, skeleton, or pumpkin-head. Through the 3-D wonders of augmented reality, the viewer can walk around the masked wearer and peek around the sides to try to find the wearer's identity—just as one would at a costume ball.

The masks are part of what the augmented reality set call "wearables." For the Brooklyn Art Fair, some 4,000 kids "wore" virtual dinosaur and monster costumes as their loving parents watched them on iPads and iPhones, tromping as frightening creatures in real time through the real Prospect Park.

Skwarek predicts augmented reality technology will soon boom as future generations of Google Glass and competitors emerge. Gamers will no longer stare, nearly stationary, at video screens, but instead visit parks and other common areas, which have been mapped by game developers using GPS, where they will physically interact with others in realistic-looking settings overlaid with the creators' imaginative additions, such as forts or castles. The same technology, already developed for mobile phones and pads by Skwarek, allows an interior designer or architect to walk clients into an unfinished building and see in 3D what the finished project will look like, while moving and turning to get different views.

Skwarek is teaching the cutting-edge technology in classes and in a new augmented-reality lab opened at the NYU Media and Games Network (MAGNET) facility in the heart of Downtown Brooklyn's Tech Triangle. In the spirit of NYU-Poly's commitment to what it calls i-squared-e, for

Invention, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Skwarek and Anad are founders of the company Semblance AR. Its first offering is Play AR, the world's easiest augmented reality video game-creation software in a mobile app. Play AR lets people with no programming experience create highly interactive augmented reality (AR) video games with just a few clicks—absolutely no programming knowledge required. In AR Battlefield, any real location on Earth transforms into a futuristic, multi-user augmented reality game. Its wearables include full body armor. To launch the game, the startup is offering the AR Halloween masks for a donation of as little as \$5 to its Kickstarter campaign.

Skwarek has been active in the creative and industrial sectors and has also worked on locative solutions and information delivery for the public, private, and governmental sectors. He has a long record of international [augmented reality](#) artwork, ranging from "erasing" the DMZ battlements between North and South Korea (a piece he did on site), to the virtual elimination of the barricades between Palestine and Israel, at the Gaza Strip. His work has been featured by the New York Times, Art in America, WIRED, the Boston Globe, NPR, and the BBC, among other major outlets.

More information: semblancear.blogspot.com/

Provided by New York University

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