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Presented by ANAT

AI Grano: Augmented-Cereals

Augmented Reality Public Intervention in Dominik's supermarket, Rogers Park, Chicago
Android and iOS mobile devices with an augmented reality app
Credits: Chris Wille, project AR research collaborator

ISEA2013, Sydney - Eco-Activism - in conference project presentation
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<http://www.isea2013.org/tag/pat-badani/>

“AI Grano: Augmented-Cereals” is an Augmented Reality experience created to specifically activate breakfast cereal aisles in a supermarket located in the low income neighborhood of Rogers Park, in the USA. Consumers can use Android and iOS mobile devices with an augmented reality app to interact with the project. The project integrates geolocation and image recognition technology.

Tagged breakfast cereals become Augmented Reality portals to maize seeds and their narrative content on current Mexico/USA debates about Genetically Modified maize. The Augmented Reality seed overlays link to additional narrative content about maize.

Supermarket chains are the largest food providers for the average American family who shop in them for their daily meals - with breakfast being the meal that helps begin the day for adults, and the meal that sets children off to school. Breakfast cereals have a long tradition in the USA with an abundance of brands and flavors that claim to combine nutritional value and tastiness. However, the cereals boxes display only schematic information about their ingredients, a matter that led me to dig deeper.

My investigation throughout the course of two years has revealed that many of these cereals contain corn in some form or other: corn cereal, cornstarch and corn fructose syrup. Reports that I have found claim that the corn used in these ingredients has been genetically modified, and the worry is that consumers are blindly raising their children and starting their day eating cereals with ingredients whose long-term health consequences have been questioned. Of equal importance is the fact that there seems to be a disassociation in the consumer's mind between the microcosms of supermarkets, the foodstuffs offered for sale, and the larger picture related to agribusiness, land use and food security issues across borders.

So, the aim of the AR project is to galvanize the seemingly orderly world of supermarkets by disrupting the idealized facade of its products, and to furthermore enhance the viewer's experience by bridging the gap between seen and unseen realities - the real cereal boxes containing GM maize in USA supermarkets, and the unseen impact on the human and the natural ecology associated with GM corn.

This is how the piece works:

- You arrive at a supermarket equipped with the AURASMA app on your mobile device.
- You walk to the cereal aisle.
- You scan numerous cereal boxes that we have tagged because they reportedly contain GM corn.
- An overlay image of a domesticated maize seed hovers over each box. The seed is "etched" with an inscription appropriated from the novel "Men of Maize." Seven different domesticated maize seeds with different inscriptions have been scheduled to emerge as an "aura" overlay for every day of the week, on a rotating basis.
- By tapping on the seed overlay, you are directed to additional content that contextualizes the project.

These virtual seed overlays are always potentially there, waiting to be called upon by mobile technology so that they can emerge as 'auras.' It is interesting to note that the AURASMA app has named these image overlays "auras." Interestingly, in mystical beliefs, an **aura** is a field of subtle, luminous radiation surrounding a person or object and the depiction of such an aura often connotes particular power. Curiously, it is said that auras can embed themselves in our space, just as a static field attracts lint and debris, and that these forces may take on parasitic qualities or influence the vibratory state of their hosts; a characteristic of auras that is not inconsequential in my motivation for using the domesticated seeds as Augmented Reality 'auras' in the project "**Al Grano: Augmented-Cereals**".

Pat Badani