

AFI FEST 2016 State of the Art Technology Showcase

Description

AFI FEST 2016 presented by Audi has jumped on the virtual reality (VR) bandwagon in a big way on Saturday, November 12th, with its State of the Art Technology Showcase Presented by Google Spotlight Stories. Keynote Speaker, Anthony Blatt, Co-Founder of Wevr, kicked off the Showcase at 11:00 A.M inside the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotelâ??s AFI FEST Cinema Lounge.

Blatt spoke extensively on where VR is today as behemoths Google and Microsoft are investing billions of dollars in an uncertain VR future. Nevertheless, VR filmmaking is presently bringing together filmmakers as they explore emerging VR technologies including 360 degree VR. It is Blattâ??s hope these new technologies will continue to bring together filmmakers, introduce them to what is possible and that they will collaborate to present stories in years to come.

Some Hollywood directors have been outspoken and semi-critical of the new VR



Hollywood Director Steven Spielberg at 2016 Cannes Film Festival (Photo: The Guardian)

filmmaking that attempts to arrange circumstances with bits of code that give the viewer agency. This differs from traditional filmmaking where one view is presented by the director. At the 2106 Cannes Film Festival, veteran Hollywood Director Steven Spielberg was quoted saying, â??I think weâ??re moving into a dangerous medium with virtual reality,â• he said. â??The only reason I say it is dangerous is because it gives the viewer a lot of latitude not to take direction from the storytellers but make their own choices of where to look. â• (The Guardian)

While Spielberg may have a point, most legitimate VR filmmakers have techniques to gently guide the viewer in a linear or specifically designed narrative through either sound, color schematic or lighting. One intriguing aspect of VR viewing is its capacity to immerse a viewer in the presentation. Once a headset or goggle are in place, peripheral vision that occurs in a theatrical experience is removed. Blatt stipulates this will create a more â??realâ• experience and, in addition, will stimulate lucid dreaming about the experience.

To illustrate and to help substantiate his claims on the VR experience, Blatt related a story of Jon Favreauâ??s first VR viewing experience. Favreau was so overwhelmed after donning the VR goggles that upon their removal he stated he had to make a story and began sketching right away.

VR stories are similar to traditional film stories as both initially start in the writing process in script format, proceed to story-boarding and then to analysis. However, as noted earlier, the VR viewer has some agency. So, the VR experience is still a narrative story. However, VR also adds additional aspects of gamesmanship and puzzles. Another aspect under development in VR is the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI). The introduction of AI turns a viewing experience into an interactive experience potentially. Here again, is where production design aids the filmmaker in gently leading the viewer towards the pre-defined narrative. Blatt refers to the process as story to puzzle, puzzle to story. And, he strongly asserted that the focus for VR filmmaking needs to be on the story versus the technology or the medium.

In addition to storytelling and production design, Blatt discussed issues in editing VR and some of the challenges filmmakers are facing. He also mentioned the various uses of photogrammetry in storytelling. Ultimately, Mr. Blatt believes VR is a better experience. When asked why a viewer would want to choose VR rather than the traditional theatrical experience in the brief Q & A following the presentation, Blatt cited curiosity. Blatt culminated his remarks saying VR has the power to transform and change lives with its immersive storytelling techniques much like his 1977 Saturday afternoon

matinee viewing of George Lucasâ??s first installment of the *Star Wars* saga.



VR Viewing Room at the 2016 Venice International Film Festival (Photo credit: Larry Gleeson/Hollyw

Recently, I attended a 40-minute segment viewing of what is being marketed as the first feature-length VR film with human actors, *Jesus VR*, set for release on Christmas Day. The portion I viewed contained a scene where a parable was used to illustrate a teaching point. To me, I believe the application of VR for storytelling and teaching is astounding. The issue seems to be how to get there. Currently, the technology costs associated with VR filmmaking are prohibitively high.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, VR is here to stay. So lace up your boots and hop on. Youâ??ll be glad you did. Itâ??s going to be quite a ride!

Category

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