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Immersive Media: XR History, Theory: XR 5010
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I Am You

Introduction:

In our take on a VR point-and-click adventure, players must comb through the environment, and find hidden photos to try and piece their fractured life together. Embark on a journey through the forest's hidden trail cameras and direct your body to find your lost memories which can be in the form of photos. This is a journey of VR disassociation where the player and the character are controlling the body's actions from an outside perspective to try and pull themselves back into harmony. You are puppeting yourself. The player is the camera watching as they direct the body of the main character around the scene. Both commenting on what playing a video game must feel like in VR, and asking if a player can connect with a character that they do not directly embody but still empathize with.

Story Set Up:

a. Slenderman-style Lost in the Forest game where you have to collect some sort of item of importance to progress.
b. In this game, the player will venture through the dark forest and explore the depths of their past.
c. Life has been hard. You've lost your passion for life, and the awful office job you have feels like it's sucking the life right out of your veins.
d. As an amateur wilderness explorer, you constantly dream of returning to your safe space; the Cityville National Forest.
e. One Friday evening you decide you've had enough. You call in your vacation days, you've gathered all your supplies, food, water, your trusty compass, and the old Polaroid camera your mom left for you.
f. On your way there you make a stop at Jasken & Bobbin's Iced Creamery where your old pal from school gives you free stuff from the back door due to your insufficient funds. But as you make your way to your favorite spot, you feel the regrets piling on.
g. After setting up camp you sit in silence and realize. This doesn't fix anything. You watch as the ice cream you bought melts into a soupy mess, too empty to enjoy it. You take out your old photos to try and relive you and your mom's last hike together but. Uh oh. Nature fucking hates you. The wind rips them away from you and scatters them through the forest.
h. The ice cream you wasted spills over and enters the fire pit. The flames slowly burn down and suddenly burst purple from mixing with the flavor of BooBerry. The ice cream and fire begin to merge and suddenly, the ghost of Jasken & Bobbin's Iced Creamery appears, a physical manifestation of your regret. your inability to enjoy life
i. Now you have to find the photos you took the last time you felt happy and try to reclaim what this place once meant to you. All while escaping your regrets and your depression (aka the Ice Cream Man)

Anatomy of a Context Scenario: Key Elements

Protagonist/Participant:

- Hiker and Amature Photographer who is trying to find happiness in nature.

Context:

- In the forest isolated at a campsite, with the ability to use trail cameras (old school version), searching for old photos.

Job-To-Be-Done:

- Collect all the photos lost in the forest.

Diachronic Perspective:

- Learning more information about the level layout such as how the trail cameras work in order to properly navigate the space from this unique perspective. One side to be entertained and enjoy, the other is to gain a form of meaning and reflection on their own interaction nature and/or the harsh reality of the world.

Synchronic Perspective:

- The interaction zones are that you actively choose which trail camera to use and collect the photographs without being "*gooped*" by the Ice Cream Man.

Outcomes:

- The protagonist is able to understand themselves better emotionally and has changed their view on life by understanding the value of things once lost and taken for granted.

Course Context/Readings:

Week 5: Immersive Media Psychology: Blascovich & Bailenson: Infinite Reality -

Reality is a product of our perspective and shapes both our social identity and the identity of ourselves. How does playing in 3rd person affect how we view the character we play? Are they an extension of ourselves, or someone we must direct? Changing a person's perceptual systems is easy (as shown in the goggle experiment) by altering how they perceive their control over their avatar. But will this change how they embody the avatar? Will players mirror the character's dissociated state? Edgar Mitchell stated, "The right viewpoint can upend the way we see the world." Bailenson (2018). Forcing players into an outside perspective, when they expect to be inside the character's body, allows them to judge their actions more objectively. This places players both squarely within and further removed from the horror of the game.

The character is dissociated from their life, struggling to regain a sense of reality and happiness. Meanwhile, the player is forced to experience this journey alongside the character—directing their actions without fully becoming them, metaphorically walking a mile in their shoes. We have to ask, Is it okay to force players into a state of disassociation? -Rueda, J. (2023). Doing Good with Virtual Reality: The Ethics of Using Virtual Simulations for Improving Human Morality.

Week 6: DeVeaux, C. ., Han, E., Landay, J., & Bailenson, J.: Exploring the Relationship Between Attribute Discrepancy and Avatar Embodiment in Immersive Social Virtual Reality –

Our game explores dissociation by placing the participant in the role of a disembodied observer, controlling the hiker from a distance. This aligns with Deveaux et al.'s discussion of avatar embodiment, which examines how discrepancies between a user's real and virtual self affect their

connection to the experience. In the context of our game, the player's separation from the protagonist mirrors this lack of embodiment, creating an eerie and unsettling environment. By designing the interaction zones so that the player directs the hiker from outside their body, we aim to evoke a strong sense of disconnection that reinforces the narrative themes of fragmentation and emotional distance.
Deveaux et al. also discuss how discrepancies between an avatar and the user's real self can cause discomfort and reduce embodiment. This insight supports our design decision to use a fragmented control system where the participant operates as a trail camera instead of directly inhabiting the hiker. This unique perspective reflects the protagonist's fractured emotional state while creating psychological discomfort for the participant. By presenting the job to be done through this lens of alienation, we immerse participants in the hiker's emotional struggles and amplify the tension of the game's horror experience. This forces us to consider whether the Proteus Effect occurs when players can directly see their own actions.

Why Does this project call for working in a group [teamwork approach]? List reasons and plan out work plans:

- Why This Project Requires a Teamwork Approach
    - The project involves exploring and implementing advanced concepts (e.g., dissociation, avatar embodiment, and perceptual systems). These elements require interdisciplinary skills such as game design, programming, art, and psychology, making it more manageable to divide tasks based on expertise.
    - Collaborating as a team allows for brainstorming and diverse perspectives. This enhances the project's depth, as team members can challenge and refine each other's ideas.
    - Certain tasks (e.g., implementing mechanics, designing levels, creating art assets) can be worked on concurrently by different team members, leading to faster development and a more polished result.
    - Each team member can focus on their strengths. For example:
        - One person could handle narrative design and player immersion. The other could focus on coding and technical implementation.
    - Game development in the industry often requires teamwork. This project mimics that environment, helping both team members develop collaborative and communication skills critical for their careers.

What do you require to create this scene?

- Physical Environment: Meta Quest 3 and Controllers
- Software: Unity Engine (Meta All-In-One SDK, OpenXR, Meta OpenXR, XR Interaction Toolkit)
- Digital Assets: Forest Environment, Camp Site, and Equipment, Trail camera shader/effect, photograph models, a tub of ice cream model, Ice Cream Man model, player model, Sound Effects, Unity Store Assets

- Talk more about the introspective of the real world, be specific.

Core Game Mechanics & Features

a. Trail Cameras:
   i. The player can use trail cameras to keep track of their body, look for hidden photos, and make sure they aren't being followed.

b. Evade the Ice Cream Man!
   i. Players will have to tread carefully and keep an eye out for the Ice Cream Man. If he's spotted stalking the player on the trail camera's player must run away before he reaches them, or else…

Movement:

   ii. The player's camera position will be based on the position of the trail cameras in the game. The player can still have 3DOF when rotating their head position.
   iii. The locomotion system will be a form of smooth locomotion that controls the body of the main character (NOT the player camera).
   iv. Players have limited in-game movement and must use their own bodies/head movement to look around the scene but can still control their hands and arms through 3DOF for functionality such as using the flashlight in their hands (this enhances the Proteus Effect since the player sees themselves through this unique perspective).

Work Plan and Schedule

- Team Communication
  - Every other day check-ins via discord

- Phase 1: Research and Planning (Nov 22th – Nov 28th)
  - This document

- Phase 2: Development of First Iteration (Nov 28th – Dec 5)
  - Objective: Create a functional prototype for the first submission.
  - Tasks:
    - Nandita V.:
      - Creating the visual effects for trail camera perspective (Shaders & Effects)
      - Design placement for trail cameras
      - Prototype Campsite Level Design
      - Develop AI Navigation System
    - Tomme D.:
      - Implement core gameplay mechanics (e.g., controlling the avatar from an external perspective).

        - Prototype Forest Level Design
        - Responsible for getting models of Ice Cream Man and player characters from Tom (external artist).
    - Deliverables:
        - First prototype with basic functionality for Dec 6 submission.
- Phase 3: Refinement and Presentation Prep (Dec 7 – Dec 9)
    - Objective: Improve the prototype based on internal playtesting and prepare for the demo.
    - Tasks:
        - Refine gameplay mechanics for smoother controls and transitions.
        - Add basic assets and effects to enhance immersion.
        - Add narrative dialogue and tutorial for controls
    - Deliverables:
        - Refined prototype for Final Project Presentation/Demo on Dec 10.
- Phase 4: Final Polishing and Documentation (Dec 11 – Dec 12)
    - Objective: Finalize the project and complete documentation.
    - Tasks:
        - Debug and polish gameplay (smoother transitions, aesthetic improvements).
        - Prepare detailed documentation, including:
            - Overview of the project goals and inspiration.
            - Technical details and challenges faced.
            - Screenshots and/or diagrams to illustrate key features.
    - Deliverables:
        - Final submission of project and documentation by Dec 12 at 5 pm.

Conclusion:

This VR experience explores the concept of dissociation, inviting participants to navigate the hiker's body from an external perspective (Fixed 3rd Person Perspective). As the player becomes the camera, directing the character's movements, players are encouraged to reflect on what it means to interact with a character they cannot fully embody. This Raises a thought-provoking question: can players truly connect with a character they do not directly embody, yet deeply empathize with? The game is designed for fans of indie horror and experimental VR, particularly those drawn to innovative gameplay mechanics and psychological depth. We hope that the over-the-top psychological concepts and slightly silly monsters come together for a fun and cohesive experience that leaves the players thinking.