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CS 491 – VR Design

Week 12: Cang Le's "Birdly" VR Student Choice Review

To start things off, Birdly is a VR project. This means a couple of things. In a VR project, the environment is entirely controlled and thus safety is restricted to the area the VR is used in. This also implies that there should be minimal real-life/external interactions the user must take to modify the world view in the VR world.

This is not the case in Birdly. As we can inspect the project involves the same headset as the usual HTC Vive, but the user must also interact with some external mechanisms in to play the game. The user is mounted on an aerial flying device where the user is lying prone facing-down. I am not entirely sure how this device feels or how comfortable it is but from the video it suggests that it might be a little unpleasant to use. I am sure that the developers fully understand that this device may cause some motion sickness and thus probably has a whole list of complications the user must be aware before using this product.

Usability

Complications aside, the product looks fun to use – only if the user can successfully use the product well. I can imagine that the user will initially be confused on how to use this product and thus crash and burn multiple times before getting it right. If the user expectedly crashes however, I can imagine that the user will jerk back or freak out, which may put the user into some danger relating towards their position on the aerial device. If the user freaks out too much they may fall off, injure their wrists, or otherwise damage the aerial device.

Price

Although this product may seem expensive, at $189k, there are probably other more expensive VR products around as well – just as like Andy mentioned, there exists a VR flying simulator which involves using an Vertical Wind Tunnel which of course comes with its own complications – such as safety insurance for users, professionals who need to know how to operate the Wind Tunnel, etc. This product will likely not be bought by private citizens, but rather a public game that people can play with. Thus its price alone may not stand out much. I can imagine this product being used in amusement parks or malls where people can witness and experience this product with their friends.

Realism

Of course, many things can become more realistic depending on the graphic use in the application. So assuming if they were to use the best of graphics engines and hardware to produce the VR environment, how does the aerial device feel? The device comes with a fan which adjusts with the speed of which you are traveling. The device itself also orients itself to the angle the user is in the game. In terms of realism, this product may have it all in terms of being a controlled environment, with minimal chance of injury. Things I can imagine being added to this device is the ability to move more parts/joints of the arm, as currently the arms must be spread out at all times to play. What if the user wants to nose dive?