

Exegesis

Using Virtual Reality to Examine Patriotism
in American High School Education

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This paper will look into the work that authors such as O'Leary, Winter and Winter, have done. How they have examined American patriotism and how Westheimer and Ishio looks at American patriotism in the education system. Examining the different types of American patriotism in the American educational system and how different types of exposure can affect the young people in the high school system and want to make people aware of how patriotism can take different forms can affect someone who is in high school. This will be done through a Virtual Reality experience where a user will be able to explore a virtual high school with classrooms with different levels of patriotism and want to make the user aware of this. O'Leary examines the very core of American Patriotism:

"In the United States, where being an American is seen as a choice rather than a birthright, control over nationalists discourse has far-reaching consequences. For patriots, loyalty and family, friends, church, and place are subsumed under allegiance to one's country on the assumption that each citizen's welfare can best be realised through the preservation and expansion of the nation-state". (O'Leary, 1999)

The meaning of O'Leary's statement is that being an American is a choice you can make rather than a birthright, which links to the way America was built through immigration. O'Leary discusses the history of how American patriotism was founded, which he believes emerged during and after the American Civil War.

"Although the civil war determined the survival of the United States, what it meant to be a loyal American or disloyal 'un-American' remained an open question until the matter was settled, albeit temporarily, during World War 1". (O'Leary, 1999)

During the first World War, there was a lot of debate about what symbols, traditions and songs should represent the American culture to the rest of the world. American patriotism is still new as it is one of the youngest nations in the world. O'Leary also examined the foundations of the creation of the nation-state

and its culture. During the War of Independence, the nation was founded but not with a true national spirit, therefore, O'Leary argues that:

"The problem of forging a unified national identity began with the War of Independence. As Americans, colonists shared little in common beyond their opposition to British Tyranny. Newspapers urged them to 'join or die' using the symbol of a severed snake to demonstrate their plight if they refused to support the fight against Britain". (O'Leary, 1999)

From O'Leary's work, it defines that it was not easy for the birth of the American nation and that's why it struggled with national identity for a long time. O'Leary states that the roots of American patriotism are still fresh but are very strong in the present day, even though it was born in difficult circumstances.

In the paper, *Sowing Patriotism, But reaping Nationalism? Consequences of Exposure to the American Flag* (2008) Winter and Winter discuss the American flag in detail, the meaning behind it and what it means to Americans. Winter and Winter write about the effects that the flag has on nationalism and culture:

"In the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States experienced an outburst of patriotism. As is often the case in times of crisis or war, Americans' attachment to their country is most clearly visible in the frequent display of the American flag, the prime symbol of a highly patriotic nation". (Winter and Winter, 2008)

Winter and Winter discuss the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and how that ignited a very strong sense of patriotism that was visible to the entire world, much like O'Leary argued, this shows how patriotic a nation can get in times of a national crisis. A national crisis brings people together to support their country. Winter and Winter go on to discuss that there are numerous national symbols:

"National symbols are central to any nation-state. They provide an outward representation for a collective, its history and its achievements. Given the very idea that a nation has to be regarded as a social construction". (Winter and Winter, 2008)

This connects with O'Leary's work, which argued how America was built and had developed national symbols over a period, through different conflicts. While there are numerous symbols that Americans identify as patriotic, this justifies different ways of looking at these symbols in a non-biased way and having more than one way to identify a sense of patriotism.

In *Politics and Patriotism in Education* (2006) Westheimer analyses the politics of American Patriotism. Westheimer argues that there are two types of American patriotism, democratic patriotism and authoritarian patriotism:

"Democratic patriotism aims to remain true to these principles. A few historical examples illustrate this position. In 1950, Sen. Margaret Chase Smith (R-Me.) was the first member of Congress to publicly confront Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.). She prepared a Declaration of Conscience urging her fellow senators to protect individual liberties and the ideals of freedom and democracy on which the United States was founded". (Westheimer, 2006)

Democratic patriotism is the democrats and republicans and how they protect the liberties and freedoms of the citizens and protect democracy by letting every voice be heard. Westheimer continues with Authoritarian Patriotism, which is a blinded following of someone's national identity and for unwavering loyalty to one's country.

"To say that authoritarian patriotism comes only from the ruling authority would be too simplistic, however. The social psychology of authoritarian patriotism (especially in a democracy) depends on a deliberate and complicit populace. Following September 11, an abundance of American flags and bumper stickers suddenly sprouted in virtually every city, suburb, town and rural district in the country. While the flags signalled understandable solidarity in a time of crisis, other public expressions of national pride carried more worrisome messages". (Westheimer, 2006)

This more controlling sense of patriotism can be dangerous and can take its form in the far left, or far right. I intend to engage the user of my proposed Virtual Reality experience in these forms of patriotism to allow them to explore this in an interactive virtual world. This is explored in the production folder. Westheimer gives historical examples of both views which will link to the elements I will create.

"Schools were no exception, and students soon witnessed adults showcasing authoritarian responses to issues of enormous democratic importance. For example, in 2004 more than 10,000 high schools, community colleges, and public libraries were mailed a free video called "Patriotism and You" by the Washington, D.C. based group Committee for Citizen Awareness. The group boasts that the video has now been seen by 30 million children and adults nationwide". (Westheimer, 2006)

This shows the persistence of authoritarian American patriotic propaganda and how it is embedded in the lives of children at school.

Ishio's work links with Westheimer on patriotism in schools and education, explaining this is where you learn the history of national symbols:

"Schools are important agents of socialization. By teaching a country's basic values, history, political system and citizenship expectations, schools have the potential to greatly influence individuals' perceptions towards their country. However, formal schooling may encourage or discourage patriotism. Some argue that public compulsory education in the US promotes patriotism". (Ishio, 2010)

American schools can influence pupils on the path of national identity and a sense of patriotism, or it could have no effect if there was no teachings or exposure to them. With what Westheimer and Ishio have stated, it gives a perspective that there are real issues in the American education system and arguments

have developed with the way people think that patriotism should be embedded into the school system throughout the country.

In *the Social Bases of American Patriotism* (2010), Ishio examines the social statuses and socialisation of American patriotism. Ishio argues how different elements such as religion and family can have an impact on national identity. Ishio also analyses how different schools teach patriotism, some having just the pledge of allegiance, while others include more complex patriotic elements in the educational environment, while other schools would have no sense of patriotism in their system. Different types of socialisation can affect the pupil's sense of national identity and patriotism. Ishio explains the group dominance perspective, and this will be used in my proposed Virtual Reality experience that will get users engaged:

"The group dominance perspective in its original framework attempts to explain differences in patriotism between racial/ethnic groups in a country (Pena and Sidanius, 2002). According to exponents of this perspective, members of dominant racial/ethnic groups tend to have strong patriotism, while members of subordinate groups tend to have weak patriotism". (Ishio, 2010)

This breaks down the different racial/ethnic groups and is a reminder to try and include a range of perspectives in my proposed Virtual classrooms. The group dominance perspective and social structures with different levels of patriotism breakdown the perceptions of a person's country. These perceptions are important to embed in the proposed Virtual Reality experience as they will help make it more authentic in the elements I create, by following these 5 perceptions for each detail will create a more meaningful experience (see page 26-27 in production folder).

Moving from American patriotism, I used literature about games as they are set in a virtual world, similar to my proposed Virtual Reality practice. In the paper, *Persuasive games* (2007) Bogost explains how video games stand in our culture, how persuasive they can be to the player and also have different forms of expressions, with most games now intentionally wanting the player to form a deep emotional connection with the game which would keep the player entertained and have a bond with the game.

"Videogames are an expressive medium. They represent how real and imagined systems work. They invite players to interact with those systems and form judgments about them. As part of the ongoing process of understanding this medium and pushing it further as players, developers, and critics, we must strive to understand how to construct and critique the representations of our world in videogame form". (Bogost, 2007)

Arguing that the priority for modern game environments is experience is important for the proposed Virtual Reality experience, as each player will have a unique experience through their engagements with the interactive elements that I intend to create. Video games are a powerful medium to represent political views, but they can also be used for educational purposes. Bogost argues for the importance of the design in games, sound and graphics also play key roles in the creation of a game. Sound and graphics are fundamental to providing an atmosphere that the player will enjoy and feel that they are being immersed in that world.

"Visual rhetoric offers a useful lesson in the creation of new forms of rhetoric in the general sense. One would be hard-pressed to deny that advertisements, photographs, illustrations, and other optical phenomena have some effect on their viewers. To be sure, visual rhetoric is often at work in videogames, a medium that deploys both still and moving images". (Bogost, 2007)

Since the proposed Virtual Reality experience employs similar images, sound and graphics into the game, its other key role is to engage the user in the politics in American patriotism and I would argue that my Virtual Reality experience is a form of Bogost's 'Visual rhetoric'.

Avant-Garde videogames playing with technoculture (2014) Schrank explains the importance of immersion in video games, and explains the importance of the elements in video games such as the graphics, sounds and the story which connects to Bogost's work:

"In the world is a strange negotiation. You walk around and atonal music is spawned when you brush through the diaphanous lattices. Turn around to glimpse hypergeometries transforming in your wake; if you stop, so do they". (Schrack, 2014)

Schrack also explains the political aspects of games and the impact of game and the player. Many action games have a political narrative which engages the player to take a side. This paper explains how politics can play a role in gaming and how politics can be portrayed in many ways through game environments.

In the article *Empathy and embodied experience in a virtual environment: To what extent can virtual reality stimulate empathy and embodied experience?* (Shin, 2017) Shin explains what Virtual Reality is and how it works. Shin also explains how effective interactive storytelling is, either having a recreated scenario or a fictional one if the storytelling is effective and immersive enough for the user. This would give them an emotional connection with the game, which in turn could make the user make emotional choices throughout the narrative, changing the way each user plays the game as they will all have a different type of emotional connection.

"Virtual reality (VR) is often used in storytelling. As it is considered an effective medium for interactive storytelling, the industry seems keen to introduce an interactive element into every VR piece. VR storytelling allows the user to enter a virtually recreated scenario that represents a story". (Shin, 2018)

Shin explains the importance of creating an environment where the user can fully explore and interact with anything that has been created in the world. Bogost's paper links with Shin's paper as they both discuss the virtual environment and the importance of it.

Methodology

The methodology of my project starts with the Virtual reality build. Designing 2D elements on Illustrator, that then could be added to a 3D elements I have created on blender, then these elements will be imported

into Unity. Unity is the main focus of my project, from collecting all the textures, 2D and 3D elements I have made outside of unity on Blender and Illustrator, putting them into use. Designing elements in unity is also good, from designing the school itself, it gives me more flexibility instead of going between different software's all the time.

The genre this Virtual reality experience will fall under is 'educational'. I want the users to be able to go through the virtual world at their own pace and interact with elements they want to interact with. This should make each user experience different, but I want the user to see what impact patriotism has in the education system in America. The overall goal of my experience is to have different types of exposure and different political views. The structure of the building will be shaped and designed similar to a typical American high school (see page 28-31 in production folder). The user will spawn in a blank room, with different UI menus that they will be able to interact with, for volume, brightness or to restart the experience. Another UI menu will be displayed for the simple controls of how to move around and how to also interact and pick up objects. Each virtual classroom will have the same layout but will have different experiences and different elements to interact with. Each user experience will be different, some of users might not interact with the different parts of the world and spend more time in the environment they relate or agree to the most.

To start the development of my project it will require creating 2D elements and textures in Illustrator and creating 2D plans of the building. The second stage is on blender where I will create simple 3D models. The next stage I will import everything into Unity, which will allow me to put textures on the models and also to scale them to the correct size. Unity is the main software, I will use to create the virtual environment from scratch, focusing on the sky and the sun to make it look like natural light and to give it a more realistic feeling. Creating the structure of the school, starting with the spawn in a room, adding the UI menus in it and also creating the different classrooms and adding audio sources and video sources into different classrooms. Then adding all the elements that consist of a typical American classroom. That would be all of the design work that makes my virtual world look realistic.

I propose that for my user testing I would have used a qualitative method and it would be a focus group of people with different political views. Using Bogost's work it will help me acknowledge the importance of the design in my experience. Seeing if people interact with the elements or not explore a classroom. I have to be persuasive in the design so that I can convince the user to explore every element. Using Shin's work, I would be able to acknowledge how people interact in Virtual Reality with the world. Having examined all of the aspects of the project I believe that the knowledge that I have obtained will be enough to help me create an effective project that gives the user an understanding of American patriotism. The more democratic view and the more authoritarian perspective. Having a good understanding of virtual reality will help make it more immersive and feel authentic. Having a focus group to test the user experience and different elements of the game. The data that I will collect from them could help shape the experience and make it more user friendly, such as Bogost's work on the design of the game to make it more persuasive, Steuer's work on 3D audio, and how that their work is very important to my experience. Key information from the focus group such as the movement and interactions and how they experienced it. The focus group will also help me understand my methodology, Using Blender and Unity to create elements, and how effectively I have designed the elements.

The work I have looked at for American patriotism would help the realism of the experience and give it a meaning, while the work I have examined for games would help the design and the flow of the user experience which would form my full Virtual Reality experience which. Virtual Reality would be the best way to engage users and help them connect with the experience better. I would have limitations such as very short time frame.

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