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Homework 1: Dive into VR

The first VR app I downloaded and used with Google cardboard was called VR skydiving. As the name implies, there are multiple videos in the app of skydivers who wore 360 degree cameras while skydiving. This app exploited the strengths of VR by allowing you to feel like you are experiencing something in first person that you would only experience in real life if you were a thrill seeker. Through watching the videos in VR and having a full range of motion in my head direction, I could see angles of skydiving that are not normally focused on in traditional media forms. For example I saw that the skydivers, at least in the videos included in the app, used a device to slow themselves down before deploying their parachute. It was a long tubular shape that seemed to allow the skydivers some directional control of their falling while slowing them down slowly. One way this app made me feel present while viewing the videos was the interaction the skydiver had with other skydivers around him. They came flying in and out close to the main skydiver, making me feel like I was right near real people.

Another VR app that I used that was along similar lines to my first one was called VR Diving. It also provided a list of 360 degree videos for me to be able to experience what it's like to scuba dive. I've never scuba dived before, so it was actually a really interesting experience. It made me want to experience it in real life, which I wasn't expecting. This made me think that adventure tourism companies should be making use of VR technology as a form of advertising, even if they just release 360 degree videos on YouTube. During the experience I had a shocking moment when the music had died down and the ocean seemed really calm when suddenly a tiger shark popped out from some of the reef and swam by. The videos were engaging because of the density of life and things to look at at any angle.

The final VR experience I had was a very popular game called Beat Saber. I used an HTC Vive to play this game, and it amazed me how much more real everything felt. After playing for about half an hour, I almost forgot where I was in real life. I was completely involved in the game with little outside input other than the floor of the room I was playing in. In this game you use the two remotes included with the HTC Vive as sabers to destroy certain objects to the beat of different songs. The two sabers have different colors and you have to hit objects with corresponding colors to destroy them properly. The game and experience in general were both very compelling using the HTC Vive.

Playing Beat Saber on the HTC Vive was my first experience with high-end VR since the earliest Oculus that I had used when it first came out. I wasn't expecting such a jump in the quality of experience, so I was astonished when I put on the Vive and started using it. High-end VR systems are in an entirely different category now in my mind than cheaper systems like Google cardboard. The quality of the graphics used on the apps that I used with Google cardboard on my iPhone were mostly uninteresting and simple. This is why I prefer simple 360 degree video on cheap VR systems over full games. On the Vive, since you are only limited by the computational power of the computer you use, you can play games with graphics as good as

any new pc games out there. Having the remotes while using the Vive was such a good addition to the experience too. Being able to point and click with your body instead of a keyboard and mouse was key to building that experience. It is great that the Google cardboard and comparably cheap systems exist out there, especially to introduce people to the concept of VR. But by just using those cheap systems, you are missing out on a lot of the nuances in perception that are accounted for in the higher-end systems. I'll definitely be suggesting that my friends who haven't experienced high-end VR recently do so as soon as they have the opportunity.