



Reaching the Shore

Llegar a la orilla, 1994

by Guillermo Lavín

translated by Rena Zuidema

and Andrea Bell

Don't ask for guarantees. And don't look to be saved in any one thing, person, machine, or library. Do your own bit of saving, and if you drown, at least die knowing you were headed for shore.
—Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Name of Project:

REACHING THE SHORE: An Emblematic Group Virtual Reality Narrative
by Nonny de la Peña and Alex Rivera

List 3 words that describe your proposal:

Virtual Reality Experience

One sentence description of the work for which you are seeking support:

A linear virtual reality experience based on a short story titled “Reaching the Shore,” which will push the limits of VR storytelling technology and provoke critical thought about issues of access and power in regards to technology.

Full description of the proposed project (500 word maximum):

“Reaching the Shore” is a four minute virtual reality fictional narrative piece based on a short story written by Guillermo Lavín in 1994, and published in Cosmos Latinos, “An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain”. Published by Wesleyan University Press, 2003. (Rights acquired)

Using virtual reality technology, the viewer will be transported into the world of a factory worker in Mexico named Frago and his ten year-old son Jose Paul, as they struggle with issues of access, addiction, and power in relation to an intense, near-future technology.

In this near future, wealthy consumers in the United States can buy and sell memories through “memory chips” that can be installed directly in the skull. These chips are manufactured in Mexican factories and Fragoso has a unique job in his factory: he’s a ‘product tester.’ He spends his days putting the chips in his skull, making sure they work, and along the way, viewing the opulent memories of the wealthy customers for whom the chips are designed. The experience of these ‘virtual memories’ is so lush and rich that it has become addictive for Fragoso, who, on his low wages, can’t afford to buy the products he tests. The story revolves around Fragoso’s relationship to his son, who wants a new bicycle for Christmas. The narrative has a surprising conclusion when the son, unable to afford a real bicycle, steals a memory chip, in order to experience the virtual feeling of having one.

In terms of form, our telling of this story will experiment with POV and agency: First, the user will simply “be” on scene, watching while linear and unalterable narrative elements unfold. However, whenever the characters place a chip in their head, the virtual reality game engine will allow the user to manipulate and interact with the game play. The visceral connection to the virtual world which has been explored powerfully in de la Peña’s previous work, coupled with the story skill of filmmaker Rivera, will deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between the United States consumer and the factory workers around the globe who produce the technologies we consume.

In order to experience “Reaching the Shore,” users will wear virtual reality goggles and, ideally, walk around a designated space. By creating a full body, fully-tracked environment, users can walk freely without controllers, creating a duality of presence that enhances feelings that go beyond any other platform available today.

Please include a bio of the principal artist or collective who will be responsible for this project:

Nonny de la Peña was named One of the 13 People Who Made the World More Creative by Fast Company for pioneering immersive journalism and changing the way people experience nonfiction narratives. Using cutting edge virtual reality technology, she immerses viewers in documentary stories, allowing them to feel an extraordinary emotional connection as witnesses. A graduate of Harvard University, and a former correspondent for Newsweek, she has more than 20 years of journalism and award-winning documentary filmmaking experience. Her work in virtual reality has been featured by the BBC, Mashable, Vice, Wired and many others. Screenings and showcases around the globe include the Sundance and Tribeca Film Festivals, Victoria and Albert Museum, Moscow Museum of Modern Art and other renown venues. In conjunction with her doctorate, she currently heads the MxR Studio at the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts.

Please describe the artist or creative merit of the proposed project (250 word maximum):

The power of a virtual reality narrative piece (when well done) is that it transforms the consciousness of the viewer directly into the content of the story in a way that no other

medium could ever do, acting as a sort of empathy generator. In “Reaching the Shore”, viewers will essentially inhabit the life of a Mexican factory worker as he struggles to navigate his conflicting roles in the world, as ‘worker,’ as ‘father’ and as someone who has become addicted, in a sense, to the technology he produces but cannot access. Through virtual reality, the viewer will feel a sense of presence that will go beyond just viewing and will reach a level of awareness that simulates actually being in that situation thereby generating a high level of empathy and emotional response to the content.

While the story itself is fictional, it hits on many real world issues and offers insights into our relationship as technology consumers with the factory workers who make our technology consumption possible.

Why do you consider this project to be a meaningful exploration of emerging technology? (250 word maximum):

Virtual reality is only just becoming appreciated for its potential as an impactful storytelling platform. While the gaming industry has experimented with many design options, the understanding of how embodied experience can inform *meaningful* content in virtual reality is still nascent. Nonny’s work has been the most advanced to date in taking important nonfiction stories and bringing them into the virtual environment. This is particularly important as younger audiences who are familiar with virtual worlds and digital representations of themselves may not be turning to traditional sources for important content. By providing virtual reality experiences that touch on real world issues, these younger audiences are afforded new avenues for participating as informed citizenry. Moreover, having knowledge of our world is at the heart of responsible governance. Artists have long tried to inform through art, as a way to tackle these issues. When employed properly and with this idea in mind, virtual reality technology offers an astonishing embodied platform to continue that project.

On the technology side, we design and build our own virtual reality headsets. Our headsets allow the user to not only see the virtual reality content but to also physically walk around these spaces as though they are there.

In what ways does your project inspire dialogue about the issues at hand, including the relationship between technology and culture? (250 word maximum):

“Reaching the Shore”, although a fictional piece, delves into the very real subject matter of the exploitation of workers in “third world” countries. It can also encourage conversation of media access, addiction, and how it affects families.

Please describe your proposed plan for public engagement. What opportunities do you foresee to share prototypes, demonstrations and process with the public? (100 word maximum):

Our technology is specifically designed for public exhibits. We can show prototypes along the way of our progress through physical setups at gallery locations as well as temporary exhibits that not only show our progress but our process.

What data will your project produce that may be of interest to other artists, technologists, or arts organizations? (250 word maximum):

In terms of actual production of data, we will exhibit 'Reaching the Shore' both in a site-specific context, and over the web for display on consumer VR headsets, and we will gather data around user interaction and engagement in both forms which we will make available to other artists working in this medium.

However, we believe the biggest contribution to the field will consist of pushing the form to new places, and investigating the intersection of fictional story telling, and social-issue research.

At its heart, this project explores how we convey critical ideas in a 360 degree environment using spatial narrative. Our discoveries in this field will help inform future storytellers as they explore VR and 360 degree storytelling techniques in their own projects.

Please list any other sources of funding for this project, including in-kind support, and, if applicable, any conditions related to that funding or support:

We have a small amount of "seed" funding through the Rothenberg Ventures River Incubator that could help with development. There are no conditions that might interfere with our development.

Total amount requested: [REDACTED]

Detailed project budget (please include direct costs, including materials, software licenses, etc. and any artist fees as well as fees for any other contributors to the project):

Creative Director	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Producer	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Co-Producer	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Environment Artists	2	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Character Artists	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Character Technical Director	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Character Animator	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Audio Engineers	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Purchased Assets	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Programmers	2	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Motion Capture	1	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

Personnel Subtotal				
Payroll/accounting		1		
Demo Staff		1		
Story Rights		1		
Unity Pro License		2		
Facial Capture Software		1		
Subtotal other				
Margin				
Total other				
GRAND TOTAL				

If appropriate, please include up to five images, schematics, renderings, etc. that represent the idea for your project embedded in your document in jpeg format. Video files should be of less than 5 minutes in length and included as hyperlinks to in the proposal. Supporting media files are not required.



Image of a viewer immersed in one of our pieces.

Please provide an implementation plan delineated in a chart similar to the one below:

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

KEY MILESTONES	START DATE	FUNDS NEEDED
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<i>Major steps in the Project Development</i>	<i>Estimated date for each step</i>	<i>Amount of funds needed</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design Phase. All core design documents complete. 2. Art goal document defined. 		■
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1st Playable 2. Able to progress through a rough version of the project on target platform. 3. Intent is clear, artwork is 50% 		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2nd Playable 2. All art placed, still rough 3. All scripted events placed, able to clearly progress through the narrative. Still some temp assets 		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alpha, Polish Pass 2. All art, engineering and animation placed 1:1. 3. Lighting and shaders polished 		—
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beta, Final bug fixes 2. No new art or other assets. 3. Stabilize and prepare the project for delivery. 		■