Art Direction. Making Game Worlds Feel Alive
Upcoming deadlines

- Friday, February 15
  - Team status report due, via team status report tool

- Friday, February 22
  - Sprint 2 ends
  - 11 full days until the end of the Sprint (including President’s Day holiday)
Team meetings

- Will be meeting:
  - Pixture (3:30pm today, Wednesday), Asterogue (4:30pm today, Wednesday)
  - We’re Screwed (11am, Thursday)
Lab Cleanup Schedule

- This week: 10 Days Left to Live
- Next week: Biogenesis

- Team duties:
  - Ensure overflowing trash cans are emptied to bin outside in 3rd floor courtyard (anytime during week)
  - By 5pm Monday and 5pm Friday (unless things get out of control, then more often):
    - Pick up food containers, bottles, etc.
    - Pick up stray craft materials, pens, etc and return to drawers
    - Clean off tables in conference rooms and big circular table
    - Report any major soda/food spills to me, so we can call cleanup crews
    - Put controllers/game boxes/etc. away (tidy up game area)
    - Report any cleaning materials needed
This week’s meetings: Art Direction Review

- Starting with next week’s meetings, want to review the art direction for each game
- Please come to meeting with examples of concept art, artwork for items in the game, etc.
- Artists are welcome and encouraged to attend
Developing Art Direction – Reference Art

- Several ways to approach this question

- Reference art
  - This is art, from whatever source that is similar in some way to what you want to see in your game
  - Ideally 5-10 pieces of art
  - For each piece, should be able to identify what it is about that art that you think is good for your game, and what is not appropriate
  - Finding this artwork is very valuable for narrowing down exactly what you mean when you use terms like “cartoony”, “steampunk”, “pixelated retro” etc.

- Use images.google.com (Google Image Search) or search for images on Deviant Art, Flickr, etc.
Another approach is to answer the following question:

- If the player views the first main gameplay screen as a work of visual art, not capable of any interaction, what emotions do you want the player to feel?

This is related, but different to the question of how you want the player to feel while playing the game.

- Art response could be: somber, dark, foreboding… while…
- Gameplay response could be: feel powerful, destructive, etc.
Developing Art Direction – Style Driven

- Sometimes art direction comes from picking a particular visual style and going with that.
  - For example, perhaps you want the feeling of watercolors
  - Or, maybe you really want to use art papers, or super thick oil paint, or chalk, or claymation, etc.

- However, should double-check that the chosen style is consistent with emotional response
- Still important to have examples of reference art, to be able to communicate the chosen art style
For Art Direction Review

- Want teams to have examples of reference art for each visual style in your game art

- Until you have this, and have discussed this with your artists and team, your art direction is not settled

- Want teams to be able to articulate the emotional response they’re seeking with their art
Bringing Game Worlds to Life

- A common problem in many games is the game’s world feels static, not alive.

- The game starts, and if the player doesn’t use the controls:
  - The player avatar is completely still
  - There is nothing moving on screen
  - The visual image given to the player is completely unchanging
  - The game might as well be a still image, instead of an interactive experience

- Symptoms of a game world that feels **static** and **dead**
Ideal: Game worlds that feel alive

- The game world should feel like it is alive, with interesting activity that makes the player want to explore the world.

- Typically this does not mean you want a detailed simulation of the game world.
  - No need to create a detailed simulation of plants, insects, animals, weather, etc.

- Instead, you wish to create a symbolic, or metaphoric representation of a living world
  - For example, add elements into the game world to reinforce the themes of the game, or to make a particular point about the world of the characters
Motion brings worlds to life

- Once there are elements on-screen that are moving, the eye is drawn to these.
- In real life, things that are alive tend to move
  - When we see motion, we sense that things are alive

Rule of thumb
- Any situation where the on-screen image is completely static should be changed to add some motion.
- May wish to violate this rule if stillness is the desired effect. Typically stillness is an unwanted and unintended side-effect.
Class discussion

- What kinds of motion have you seen in computer games that communicates that things are alive?
Sound brings worlds to life

- Sounds of ambient activity can also bring a world to life.
  - In the real world, places filled with activity are typically also filled with sound.
  - Sound can convey action taking place off-screen, or emphasize motion visible on-screen.
  - Sound is also very powerful at communicating emotion, creating an overall feel to a place or situation.

- Consider using ambient sound effects to convey a sensation of activity and life, or to convey emotional tone.
  - Be careful not to overdo this: a little sound goes a long way.
Class discussion

- What kinds of sound have you seen in computer games that communicates that things are alive, or sets an emotional tone?
Game Videos

- In-class showing of gameplay videos to identify ways they succeed and fail at creating the impression of a living game world.

- SNES
  - Lion King
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2EF5CPCq2M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2EF5CPCq2M)
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww3fpKFGuec](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww3fpKFGuec)

- Xbox 360
  - Rayman Origins
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_YOaQKLVo0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_YOaQKLVo0)
Visual Polish

- **Polish is an effect that creates artificial cues about the physical properties of objects through interaction.**
  - Steve Swink, Game Feel, Chapter 9 (Polish Metrics)

- Distinction between polish and simulation
  - When two objects collide
  - **Simulation:**
    - Determines that if both objects are solid, they rebound with certain force in specific directions.
  - **Polish:**
    - Visual: a spray of particles shoots out of the collision point
    - Visual: the two objects squish and then rebound
    - Audio: an emphasized “crunch”, “whack”, “thunk” etc. noise to emphasize the magnitude of the collision
    - Polish items may not be realistic but they make the player feel the interaction more
The “feel” of game objects

- It is important to explicitly design the characteristics of objects in your game worlds.

- These characteristics together contribute to the player’s feel for these objects, and will lead to the use of specific visual, audio, and vibratory effects.

- Example: Shadow of the Colossus
  - Giant bosses are massive and heavy
  - Foot slamming into ground:
    - Visual: screen shaking when near, clouds of dust and sprays of gravel
    - Audio: deep booming noise, sound of debris being thrown
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o47_iwbb5nU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o47_iwbb5nU)
Elements of game objects

- Some aspects of game objects:
  - **Weight**: heavy? light?
  - **Texture**: soft, hard, fuzzy, sticky, slimy, furry, smooth, rough, dry, wet
  - **Rigidity**: stiff, bendable, limp, floppy, bouncy
  - **Robustness**: durable, fragile, brittle, deformable

- It is especially important to determine these characteristics for your player avatar, and for common NPCs
Conveying mass and texture

- Combination of visual, audio, cinematic and tactile effects
- Visual
  - Animation can convey qualities of motion, speed, weight, etc.
  - Effects can convey interactions between objects
  - Ex: Blurring movement of fast moving objects
- Audio
  - Sound can convey surface texture aspects
  - Can also convey magnitude of actions
- Cinematic
  - Can convey mass (shaking screen), importance (focus, temporary slow motion)
- Tactile
  - Can convey impact (shooting recoil), surface texture qualities (rough surface yields more vibration)