

Applying Cinematic Techniques & Conventions

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Year / Block: Year 2 Block D

Project: Akuma no mori



Overall Goal

Do research into framing, and apply this research in my level designs.

Why do this? Get better at guiding the players, and foretelling a story by creating an elegant level structure.

I started by doing research into a large variety of subjects related to framing. In doing this research I collected notes that would guide me in the development of my levels. The primary topics I looked into were framing and Environmental storytelling (which uses cinematic techniques):

- CMGT Storyboarding Course
- [Environmental Narrative: Your World is Your Story](#)
- [“What happened here?”](#)
- [Environmental Storytelling](#)
- [Build Architectural and Gaming Environments That Create Presence in VR](#)
- [Making the World of Firewatch](#)
- [The Art of Journey](#)
- Writing ‘Nothing’ (Indievelopment Matta Haggis)

And the main thing I found was that I was doing it all wrong...

This is terrible framing.



Research

Having done this research, and having taken notes on all of these talks, I now have a much better understanding of how to properly frame and guide the player. Additionally, the notes I took provided me with a lookup table for when I needed to take a framing based decision.

CMGT – Story boarding

Balance: maybe make the first jump more interesting. who feels underwhelming, no playfulness. goes through death - can be seen from other side of wall (emotional death). moves when looked at from the top. high performance cost. legacy shots/office. dead symmetrical. high density of info. placing in rest area. gambler pit.

Balance with gravity: don't become predictable - contrasting - repetitive. moment vs calm. symmetrical creates an easy balance. negative and positive space.

Points, lines, planes, angles, shapes, focus, depth, tone, color, rhythm, symmetry, balance, contrast, action, texture.

avoid contradictions: flat and calm vs decent vs ascent.

rotational symmetry: can lines - contours of the object, of energy lines following audience eye movement.

Framing: can prevent the audience's eyes from remaining off the screen. left side of the soldier. action doesn't to happen.

Line Types: dynamic instability, conflict, brightness, layered acclamation, solemnity, tranquillity. transitional lines can generate abstract forms. stable, almost stability, contains the unity, size, force, informality.

Strength and density: strength, speed, formal or vitality, delicate, slow the eyes action gallery. body and melody. quick restfulness or speed. strength and density. action energy and violence.

Weight: weight is added by isolated forms. light forms have greater pull. objects near edge have greater leverage. objects on the right. moving mass carries weight.

Movement: movement, aspiration, growth, danger, little resistance, assist the grain. shows, battles, characters. mercy, softness, fear. Mismatched movement attracts most attention. water's heavier. resolve shapes are heavier than irregular. pacific shapes heavier than normal. focused aspects are heavier. formal balance - symmetry. informal balance - asymmetry.

Balance: rarely should the centre of interest be in the centre.

Writing 'Nothing' (Indievelopment Matta Haggis) (based on characters but very applicable to environments)

Writing 'Nothing': discipline with initial leads and unreliable narrators. make people feel a reason why they are here. Don't compromise realistic graphic information. make people feel a reason why they are here. make people feel a reason why they are here.

Clues: look, acting, automation, interactions & interface. Audio marketing (A.R.G.S.). may non-see need to be extremely consistent (background). have well developed characters. - more more see: by than you expect. writes overarching plot with emotional keynotes. learn to feel these characters inside you. how much do you worry if people don't see it. Don't expect everybody to get it like it. - best if. getting across is aggressive, paralytic with friends.

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http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1355894/environmental_storytelling.php

Lets me go somewhere I could never go.
Lets me be someone I could never be.
Lets me do things I could never do!

manipulate an audience's expectation, based on experiences in the physical world. Play on memories and expectations. Everything has to make sense to the theme, create the rules and universe and DON'T BREAK THEM!

"Where am I?" (2-5 seconds), "What is my relationship to this place?" (begin have an idea based on initial location, come to conclusion as you go) - self discovery is boss!

Cause and Effect (remains of a fire) help player understand where they are and what might happen later. - Don't put in something just because it is cool.

"Following Sakussemu." breadcrumbing

Designing the familiar " If your goal is to create an environment that is totally alien, it pays to periodically give your audience something familiar to anchor them themselves to." Give players periodic reference points, where am I?

This is a Theatre! refrain from cluttering, use details as architectural arrows. Most decorative elements form areas of attention. Use light only to draw attention.

Using Contrasting Elements to Your Advantage
cool to warm, disorder to order, and asymmetric.

The Paradox of Designing Environments for "Gamers". Make the game playable, but use your knowledge and Story to support the enjoyment of your game rather than confusing it.

http://www.gdcvault.com/play/2012/122/Environmental_Narrative_Your_World_is
Environmental Narrative: Your World is Your Story

2 parts of story

Plot,

Character,

Setting

Little stories told by the world itself

The story the world would tell us matter who is there.

First step: Have a story to tell: what are my themes? what are the tones and mood?

A good example: Bloodbuck (story consistently reinforced), Far Cry 3 (beauty of environment combined with savagery of man).

Do some real world research (Ideally first hand). Allow players to buy in to the world. Starting price.

The last Express - Game. (Making off)

Take enough liberty

Location: back story instead of what you want to communicate, what happened here? who was here? what are the key things that can communicate this visually?

Pipeworks is a good example of env. story telling.

How do you get players to see it?

Shots, reveals, and framing. Where is the player looking?

Can use movement, and lighting.

Having the player turn: because of an event can make things more impactful.

Start with a macro shot, setup all elements. Then as the player moves in: re-reveal it.

Very up your pacing. Give the player time to look at the environment. Slowing down for it can be really powerful. Puzzles can do the same. Resource collection.

Patience your steps. As the player goes back and forth they can see more elements and get different perspectives.

"what happened here?" http://www.gdcvault.com/play/2012/122/What_Happened_Here_Environmental

1. A game environment does a lot of things...
 - a. Clutters and guides player movement through physical properties and ecology
2. Uses player references to communicate simulation boundaries and affordance
 - a. Reinforces and shapes player identity
3. Provides narrative context

Use player references to communicate affordances. Player understand the purpose and what resources they might find.

Communicate simulation boundaries

Reinforce player identity: games ask the player to assume an identity, contextualize this identity within a game environment, which in turn often implies or encourages social norms and behaviors. The environment contextualizes experience and even exerts influence over the identity the player takes during play.

Narrative context

- the history of what has happened in a place
- who inhabits it
- their living conditions
- what might happen next
- the functional purpose of the place
- and the mood

Environmental Storytelling is the art of "shaping player-space with environmental properties that can be interpreted as a meaningful whole, furthering the narrative of the game."

subtext - something with a deeper meaning. Players have to make a connection.

environmental storytelling

"Fundamentally integrates player perception and active problem solving, which helps investment."

interpretation - players will bring their own experiences and come to a different conclusion. It's active, gains personal meaning!

Telegraphing can help the player navigate

meaningful narrative is inferred by players if you give them cues but leave them space to imagine.

Implying a larger world

practical techniques:

- establish a discernible chain of events
 - Cause and effect, flow charts. When placing pieces of set dressing figure out how pieces of set dressing connect
- Ensure that event engages the player

In good environmental storytelling the elements combining to a larger picture, but have individual significance as well.

• Echo the world at a large

Make sure that all ES moments

draw from your story premise, echoing the world at large. Every anonymous ES moment wastes the opportunity to say something about the game.

By tying the storytelling moment into the premise, we create a narrative positive feedback loop:

- Premise spawns events
- Events remind player of premise

*Create characteristics.

*Minimize disconnects between the player's possible actions and pre-scripted setups

Create situations that are clearly outside the player's gameplay domain.

Don't create situations we would want to create ourselves

Dynamic history making - Decals and breakables

Linear/Circular story-based games ("Of course you have to cache out bodies, debris and decals, due to memory constraints. But remember that's also a design decision. Players get value when they see that their acts are persistent in the world. It's memorable to come back and see your own mess.)

Use Cases

I will now show off some scenarios where I used the research I have done, and explain how it has guided me to make the decisions I made. I will also mention what I would have done differently if I had more time.

Entrance to cemetery – Transitional area.

Higher level of detail in the lower area, rocks trailing towards it. Roots slightly pointing in the direction to go, roots only on one side of the wall -> It feels safer to follow the left wall.

Ideally I would have liked to already show the entrance to the next area, but this was not possible due to time constraint, and memory/level streaming constraints.



As the player progresses through these areas the opening to the next area becomes wider and wider -> progression.

Vegetation, rubble and terrain creates a path



As the player reaches the opening they see the main point of interest, a heightened platform. This heightened platform is the way to go, it is placed at about 1/3rd of the frame (the second POI revealed slightly later is at 2/3rd of the frame).

The root covering this area is placed straight up, it's stable, it's been there for a while.

It is placed on the left of the screen, which is lighter. It might feel like a happy place, the player wants to go there.



As the player steps down the other area of interest is revealed (at $\sim 2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the frame) this place looks like a path. At this point I want the player to be slightly conflicted on where they want to go, the path should be less appealing.

Due to changes in the plan this area to me feels less strong than it could have. I would have liked this sense of conflict to be clearer.



When the player reaches the path, it is clearly blocked, but still looks like the exit. The player has to find another way!



Use Cases

Stepping stones up to the higher area. Using vertex paint and rubble to show this as a possibility.



Hinting to what might happen next, interrupted movement of the player to heighten their attention (player has to rotate the camera and character), the player approaches a key story element.

Clear open path on the left of the screen, blocked in the middle, hint on the right (the heavy area of the screen). Generated movement by using foreground and background elements.

I would have preferred those hanging vines to not be there to keep the path more obvious.



Player can see where they should go next -> clearly indicated by the ramp, firefly, and the environment pointing towards it.

As they walk the dead growbot is at roughly 1/3rd of the frame, slowly revealed, once again generating motion.

Foliage guides the player.



Environment points towards the exit, exit is a ramp.



From the ramp the player can see the exit of this area, it looks as a gateway, however the backdrop to it is dark, it doesn't look like it will lead to a better or wider place, but it is the only way out.. (What did the player get themselves into?!).

The placement of this exit is not ideal screenspace wise. However, because of this it is always visible when the player is progressing towards it.



Use Cases

Visible silhouette in the background, there is something there, and it is not very pleasant.
I would have liked to use more smoke in the background to make it pop out more.



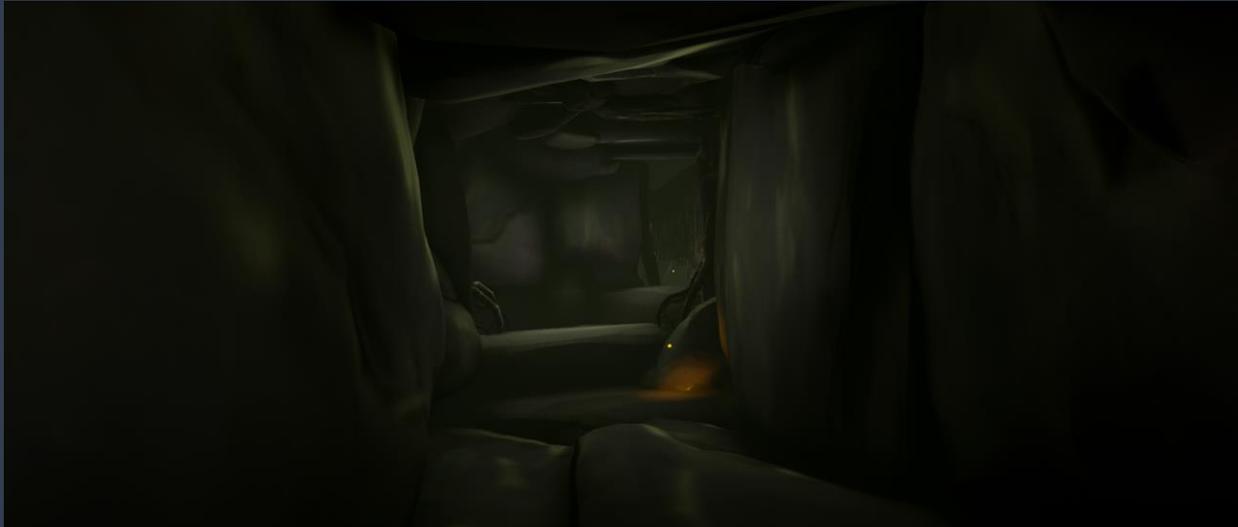
Slowly revealed what the silhouette entails, player is forced to climb it.

The roots embrace it adding to the grim nature of the roots.

Visible figure on the top of the hill indicating where to go.



Area of interest (teaching new mechanic) illuminated, showing off it's importance. Wall curves in the direction the player has to go, and next area already visible -> guiding the player.



Very clear where to go -> transcendent, very different visual style.

Sub-objective plants very visible, but still hidden behind objects, causing motion when the player moves -> more likely to draw attention.

Exit path slightly obscured, making it not instantly obvious how to get to the exit, slowing the player down. Path to take is slowly curved, making it delicate.



Reflection

I'm very happy that I decided to spend some time on researching. Having done the research, I now feel that my palate has improved. As a level designer I can make better decisions, and back them up with better reasoning. I have more tricks up in my sleeve to control the player in the necessary ways.

What I'm doing might not be perfect yet, but it is already a lot better, and I hope to improve further during year 3.