Procopia

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Procopia is a virtual expressive environment inspired by the city of the same name from Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cites, along with two of the other “Continuous Cities,” Penthesilia and Trude. It is a dark, austere constructed interior of concrete and metal from the Brutalist school of design. Notably, all surfaces in the space are walkable, and the orientation of the world the city resides in is unclear. The space is unlit with the exception of windows where light spills in, throwing hard shadows and accentuating the angular nature of the space, and the denizens, which are all inhuman automaton like figures with lit light bulbs for heads. The NPCs occupy the space and mill about without any care for the player. They are also capable of walking on the walls or ceiling, relative to the player’s perspective. The city is made up of a seamless repeating room that can be walked through infinitely. The further “into” the city the player walks, the more crowded the room becomes, until the player is trapped and unable to walk due to the mass of NPCs crowding them.

# Speed Project

“One Room”

A plain cube that will serve as the starting point of the environment proposed above

A note on the textures of the bulb heads

* They are textured with a random rusty metal texture found with a favorable license that was heavily compressed, and some abstract procedural pbr textures. The mesh is poorly unwrapped by blender Smart UVs function. The combination of these specific textures and the nonsensical UVs and seems leads to a noisey, glitchy texture with lots of edges to catch the light. Looking at it, you can see the method used to produce it. You can see the texture smearing and the seems of the mesh. These things are often purposefully hidden to make things look more photorealistic.
* This approach is in the spirit of brutalism, which is an obvious inspiration to the piece as a whole. Brutalism focuses on the materials used to construct building and typically uses unfinished surfaces and exposed raw materials like concrete and steel. The methods used to construct brutalist buildings and the substances they are made of are on display and an intentional part of their form. Similarly, the methods and assets used to construct these characters in the world are exposed in a harsh, unconventional way.

Scratch Notes:

* Very blocky environment, irregular grid, lots of sharp angles
* Very dark, areas of pure darkness
* Hard shadows
* Bulb heads could make some weird noises?
* Maybe some glowing will-o-the-wisp type things floating around for some dynamic lighting
* Soft glowing particles floating around??
* Lots of stair cases going nowhere
  + Escher type stuff
* Can walk on all surfaces
  + Gentle camera transition animation
  + All designed to be ambiguous as to which way is “up”
  + Very disorienting
* Lots of tight claustrophobic spaces juxtaposed with open space that is mixed up and disorienting
* Tiled space that allows for infinite traversal
* Start in an empty iteration of the space or with one bulb head
  + More and more bulb heads crowd space as you move through it
  + In first room it shouldn’t be obvious that you can walk on the walls (bulb heads only on the same surface as you)
* Light spilling in through holes on all surfaces in a way that makes distinguishing where the sun is impossible/seemingly random
* Put it in VR????
* Low ominous hum/foreboding ambient soundtrack
* Player starts in symmetrical location that they will eventually loop back to, except upside down, maybe without noticing it initially
* Maybe things subtly change as you loop through the space
  + Bulb heads in new places
  + Rearranged stairs/geometry

**Timber Hearth Report**

From a design perspective, Timber Hearth, the hub world and most iconic level of Outer Wilds by Mobius Digital, is greatly successful in setting the tone of the game and creating an engaging environment for new players.

As an example, consider the layout of the town you wake up in. It is a large spiral that requires the player to walk up and around it, passing through a quaint Appalachian village of fellow aliens, which at its end loops back around to the firepit that the player wakes up at. This cyclic structure immediately evokes the core mechanics of the game, which take place in a time loop. It also creates a very natural tutorial sequence for the player that requires very little in the way of non-diegetic communication to the player. As they make their way up the spiral, they serendipitously run into NPCs that teach them various controls and tools at their disposal. Lastly, the layout of the level makes it very easy to navigate and remember. There’s some branching paths but they all converge into the same upward spiral, which is important for a space that the player *has* to navigate in order to start the game. The rest of the game is very open, allowing the player to define their own path, but Timber Hearth is a purposefully linear experience, and it is more effective for that. Its simplicity also makes it easy to memorize, which is also important because it serves as a hub world that the player returns to over and over in the game, talking with the same NPCs to reveal more of the story.

Beyond layout, this space features many smaller details that reinforce the experience that the developers want to create. As the home world in a oftentimes tense and even scary game, Timber Hearth provides a suitably cozy environment for the player to feel safe in. It does hint at the danger of the world it resides in, however. The lethal ghost matter that the player is free to walk into gives the player a glimpse at the strange and uncaring world they explore throughout the game. Similarly, the drone shooting machine that allows the player to explore the rest of the planet gives the player a taste of the exploration that is at the core of the game.