QUBE 2: OBJECTIVE CLARITY

TOXIC GAMES: *Q.U.B.E 2 (Xbox One version)*. [digital game]. Preston Park House : Trapped Nerve Games, 2018.

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This review article will explore the application of Objective Clarity in the first-person puzzle game Q.U.B.E 2. Objective Clarity will be defined as the effectiveness of communicating the game designers' intended goal for the player. Toxic Games summarizes their game as follows: "In Q.U.B.E. 2, players step into the shoes of Amelia Cross, a British archaeologist, who has awoken on a strange alien planet. With the help of fellow survivor, Emma, players must face the challenging puzzles of the Q.U.B.E. in order to try and find a way back home". Q.U.B.E 2 is a first-person perspective puzzle game. The player's main objective is to navigate through confined geometric spaces to solve contrived puzzles in order to reach the main objective. The main objective is either a switch or an entrance to a new section. As the player progresses through the game, more levels of interactivity and abilities are unlocked which directly increases the puzzle complexity. The game enables the player with five core abilities: jumping, interacting, creating blue square; creating green squares and creating magenta squares. Jumping is limited to the height of an in-game cube. Interacting allows the player to interact with elements either remotely or within arm's reach. Blue squares push game entities in a specific direction with high initial velocity. Green squares generate a single instance of a cube. Magenta squares extrude the surface of the base square block to create a platform.

First person perspective games allow for players to navigate virtual 3D space from the first-person perspective, and relies on a combination of two core control mechanics. The left analog of the controller is used for movement on the X and Z axis, and the right analog of the controller for rotation along the X and Y axis for freelook. This makes up the basics for most first-person perspective games. The player is tasked to manage these two controlling mechanisms. Mastering these mechanisms are needed for successful 3D space navigation. To add a greater level of aiming precision, most first-person games rely on a reticle at the center of the screen for aiming. This perspective choice comes with a certain level of disorientation. For players new to this game type it, can be more disorienting. With Q.U.B.E 2 being a first-person game that is solely hosted within a confined geometric space, disorientation can become more problematic. The concept of Objective Clarity is demonstrated within the game; the designer's intention are effective at communicating with the player. Q.U.B.E 2 utilizes light, rectangular shapes, symbols, color and cables for Objective Clarity throughout the game. Many of these techniques are layered to enable stronger world building and overall design aesthetics.

Controlled light placement gives the player direction and enhances spatial awareness, as the light serves as an anchor point. Light used as an anchor point, allows the player to move relative to the light's location. This application of light serves as a landmark to which the player can rely on for better awareness of their placement in the world. Picture 1 shows an application in which light is used to guide the player forward. The scene relies on the opening of the space with god rays to direct the player forward. The light is also being used as a focal point to which the player is drawn as an escape from the confined space. The use of light in both instances, relies on strong contrast to draw the player towards a specific direction without the need for explicit instructions.

Picture 1: Light as the guide of the player
Source: author's screenshots

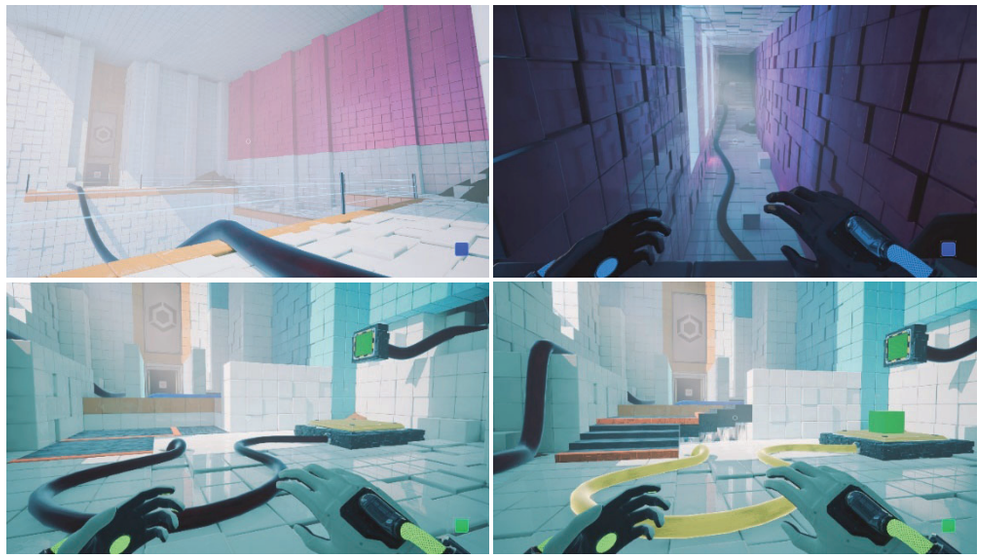
The use of a horizontal rectangular light that is partially visibly shown in Picture 2, aids in directing the player. The portion of the light that is occluded by the wall gives the player a strong suggestion of continuation. This technique relies heavily on implication and works similarly to the function of a directional arrow, while maintaining the aesthetics of the game. The player's inability to see the entire shape subtly informs them, that there is more to see; the player then move towards and then along the rectangular lights. Another application urges the player forward and up the stairs. The vertical lights are placed in a natural ascending order that not only matches the flow of the level, but allows for implied instructions to the player. In this level composition, the lines are not occluded by any assets, but they are placed to amplify the perspective. The perspective conveys the illusion of a forward pointing arrow.

Picture 2: Horizontal and vertical use of lights aiding in directing the player
Source: author's screenshots

The placement and contrast of light source can also create a hard-focal point (see Picture 3). In this example, the red lights aid in directing the player's attention. The contrasting white vertical light source creates an artificial visual constraint. This method frames the scene despite the player's ability to freely look.Combining multiple techniques to achieve Objective Clarity, can create not only clear non-verbal instructions to the player, but aids in connecting spaces in the world. It also gives the player strong spatial awareness. Light, color, and lines are used to communicate direction, and spatial interest (see Picture 4). The cable creates a connection to the different spaces in addition to indicating the player's progress. When the player completes a designated area, the cable changes from black, to an energized color. The magenta color on the back wall to the right

separates the space, and strengthens the player's placement in the world. The cable is also used to communicate direction and show relationships between pressure pads, and the devices that are affected in the game.

Picture 3: Lights as hard-focal points aiding in directing the player's attention
Source: author's screenshot

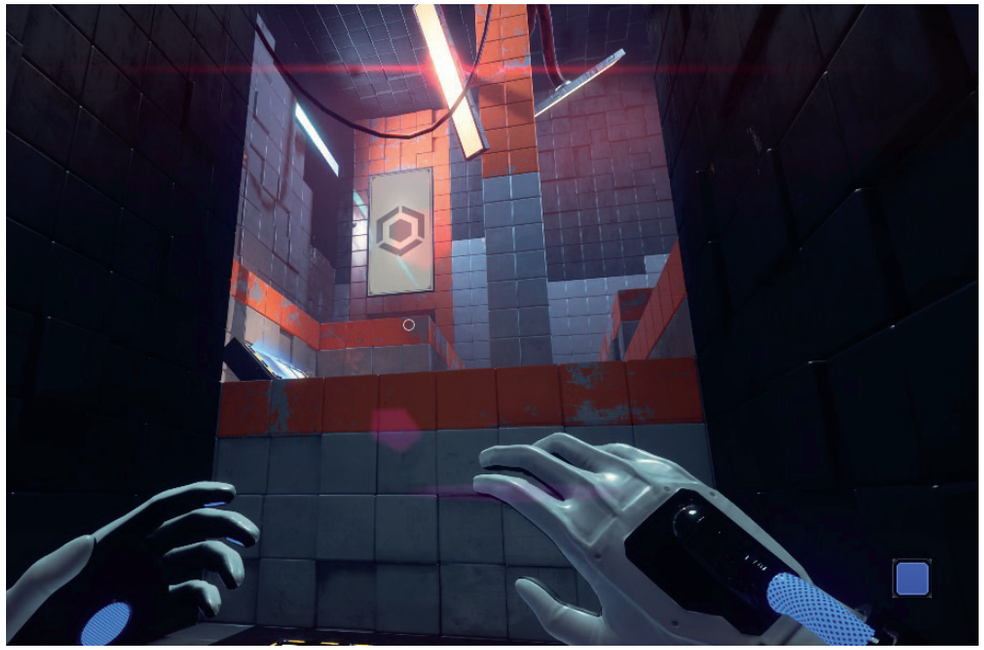


Picture 4: Multiple techniques to give the player strong spatial awareness
Source: author's screenshots

The final technique used is symbolism. This is a more explicit application that utilizes icons that are both game specific, and culturally familiar. For example, the square frame and cube symbols are used to communicate one of two messages: a lit square frame communicates the area is accessible, an unlit square communicates inaccessibility (see Picture 5).

Picture 5: Lights as symbols communicating messages
Source: author's screenshots

A reoccuring cube symbol communicates to the player the end goal of a section, and also a beacon of forward progression (Picture 6). The use of this symbol can be found in all puzzle segments. It indicates to the player where to go at the start of every puzzle room.



Picture 6: Lights as symbols communicating the end goal of a section
Source: author's screenshot

The use of common symbols, such as fire and target symbols, are also used to communicate game mechanics (see Picture 7). These symbols are never explained, but rely on pre-existing knowledge outside of the game world. For player's that are not acquainted with these symbols, the Objective Clarity would be lost, leading to player confusion. The game assumes acquaintance with these symbols, and for most players these symbols would be intuitive.

Picture 7: Lights as symbols communicating game mechanics
Source: author's screenshot

Q.U.B.E 2 excels at applying design fundamentals that aid in creating Objective Clarity, for the player. At each junction within the game, Objective Clarity is maintained, and relies on layering a variety of techniques to excel in this area. The player is guided through each experience without undermining the core puzzle mechanic. Q.U.B.E 2 is a very strong template for Objective Clarity in level designs for games.

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