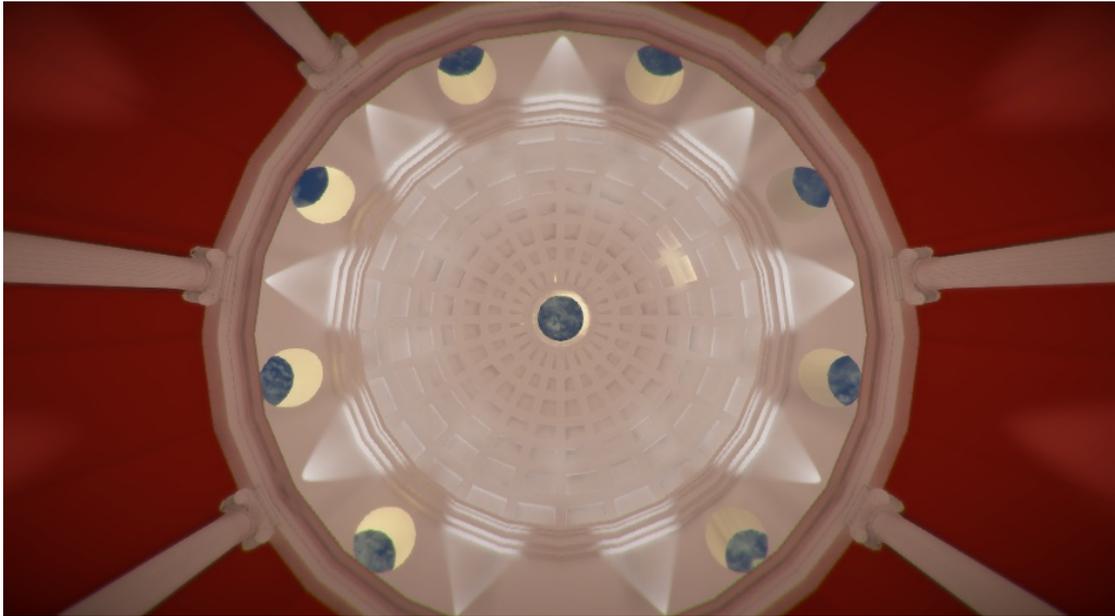# Cryptoporticus

Paradata

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Cryptoporticus is a brief game about museum architecture.

One of my favourite paintings is Stubbs' 'Whistlejacket'. I'm not a 'horse person' and I'm not into racing, but the painting draws me in, nonetheless. Whenever I have an hour to kill in London I always stop by the National Gallery to look at it. An important part of the joy I feel when visiting 'Whistlejacket' is the National Gallery building itself. I love the building because I love the painting. I love the painting because I love the building.

I love museum architecture. The more monumental the better. But it can be a barrier for many – whether in terms of physical accessibility, intimidating grandeur, a warren of corridors, or cold authority. However, once the visitor engages with the architecture it becomes accommodating, providing a familiar backdrop to exhibitions, extending a warm welcome.

'Cryptoporticus' is one of the Latin words that can be interpreted as 'gallery'. But not a public gallery – a private or hidden one – like a cloister. It is, on purpose, difficult to access. But, once admitted, it surrounds the visitor with a sense of belonging.

Cryptoporticus, the game, places the player within an initially empty and hostile architecture. It is composed of endless galleries and passages, all empty and without any guidance. The museum does not welcome the player's intrusion.

But, after some experience with the building, the player will notice patterns and symbols. The player will begin to engage with the building; will begin to learn its internal language. Eventually, the player and the building will cooperate and the museum will reveal its collections. It will literally open up. The endless warren of galleries will settle-down to a knowable, definite shape. Finally, the museum will invite the player into its most hidden, inner chamber where together architecture and player will look outward together, contemplating their experience.

Audience
The game has been created for anyone who enjoys exploration and puzzles. If you are a fan of 'first-person-walkers' (such as *Dear Esther*, *Proteus*, *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*, *Gone Home*, etc.) then you will feel very welcome here. If you are a heritage professional its themes and setting may strike a particularly relevant chord. I would be delighted if players got the idea that museum spaces are rewarding, if you're willing to engage with them.

Purpose, use and accessibility
Cryptoporticus was created in response to the 2015 Heritage Jame theme and was developed between the 2nd of September 2015 and the 23rd of September. Its purpose is to invite players to engage with museum architecture, even if it seems unwelcoming. Currently, the game is accessible via free download from my personal Dropbox folder. It is a standalone application for OS X and Windows platforms. If anyone thinks it's interesting and would like to extend it or build on its themes or mechanics, I'd be delighted to talk.

Why a game?
Games are particularly suited to conveying ideas and message directly through experience. The player is invited to 'walk in someone else's shoes'. I chose to make a game about museum architecture because architecture has to be experienced in realtime to be fully understood. Also, it was a fun challenge and I learned a lot.

Source material
Cryptoporticus draws on a range of source material. The inspiration for the architecture itself has been taken from many museums including the Yorkshrie Museum, the British Museum, and particularly the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery.

The objects in the museum's collections have been drawn from a group of open-access sources. The North Gallery exhibits 3d models taken from the Stanford 3d Scanning Repository (http://graphics.stanford.edu/data/3Dscanrep/) which provides a set of 3d models as 'base datasets' for computer graphics research. The most famous of these is the 'Stanford Bunny'. Also included in the gallery, but not a part of the Stanford Repository, is the 'Utah Teapot' – one of the first digital 3d objects ever created. It has a long and glorious history in computer graphics research (http://www.sjbaker.org/wiki/index.php?title=The_History_of_The_Teapot). The paintings in the East Gallery have all been drawn from the open access NGA Images site (https://images.nga.gov) which makes available high-resolution images of over 5000 items from the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The paintings themselves were chosen somewhat at random based on my own preference for self-portraits and for paintings I remembered from my childhood visit to the NGA. Finally, the illustrations and objects exhibited in the West Gallery have been drawn from two archives deposited with the Archaeology Data Service: The Society of Antiquaries of London Catalogue of Drawings and Museum Objects and The Virtual Amarna Project. Again, items on exhibit have been chosen somewhat arbitrarily based on what took my fancy when I dipped into the archives.

The items exhibited are all linked by the Open nature of their distributors and are intended as a fond and enthusiastic endorsement of this practice. My beloved 'Whistlejacket' does not appear in the exhibitions because the National Gallery does not have an open access policy – thereby providing another barrier to engaging with their collections. I guess the game is a bit of a protest aimed at those institutions whose policies make it impossible for them to contribute freely beyond themselves.

Other source material, such as sound effects, some game code, and the Ionic column models were drawn from other Open sources and are fully referenced in the game's credits.

Development

The game was developed using the Unity game engine. It makes use of several proprietary add-ons (and so I'm not free to distribute the source project itself). There were quite a lot of technical challenges during Development because I'm bad at reigning in my ambitions. This shows in the final product. Some of these challenges and issues I'll blog about someday, as they may be helpful for others.
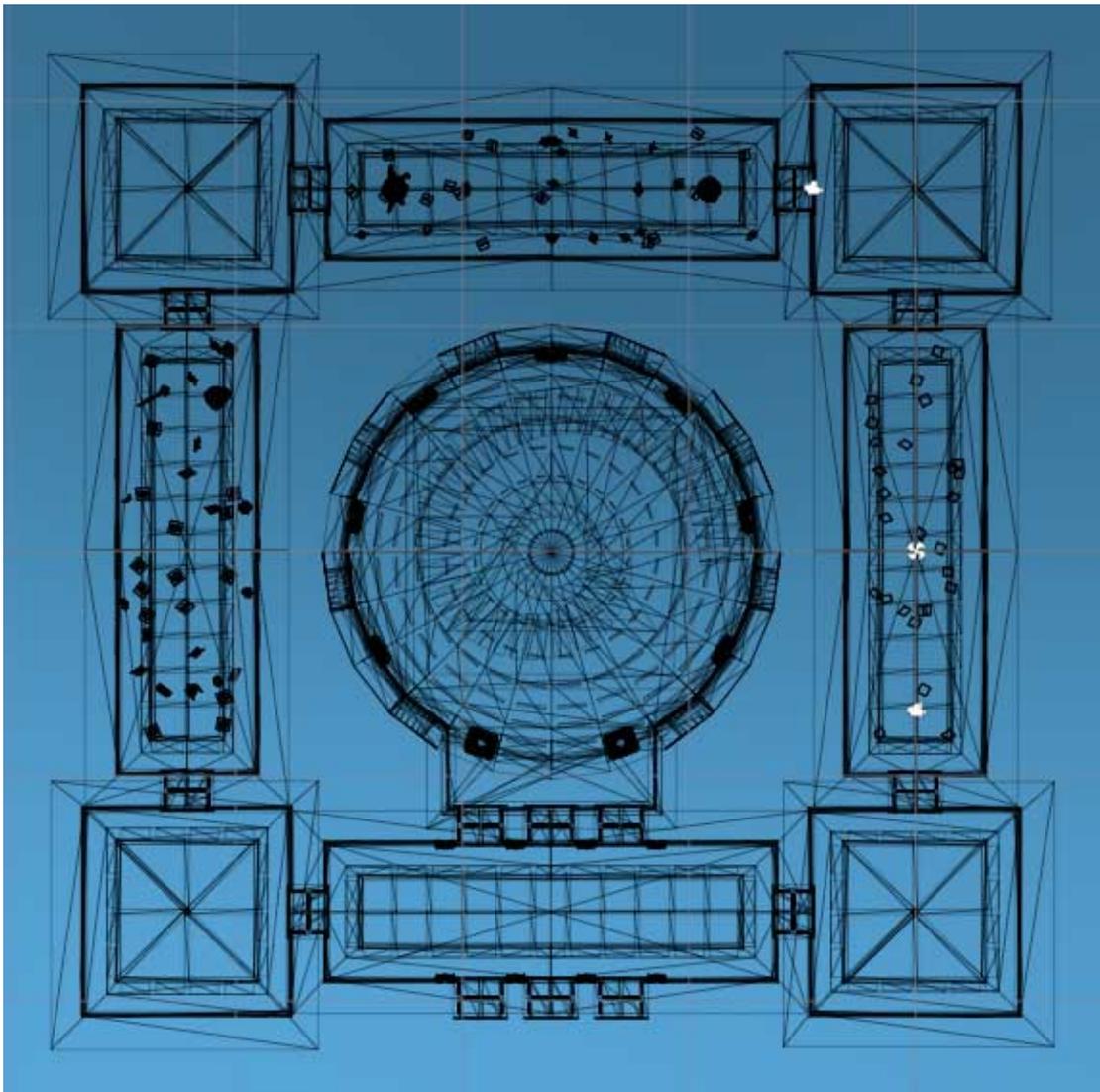
Uncertainty

Because this is a creative project rather than a strict heritage visualization, there is nothing but uncertainty in the project. It is uncertain how the player will react. It is uncertain that the build is stable enough to get out of the player's way and let them enjoy the experience. It is uncertain that the objects on display are appropriate. None of this is explicitly represented in the final project (because,

like museum architecture, the game is bluffing). But there was lots of uncertainty as it developed! The problem is, with something that is all smoke and mirrors, how do you represent uncertainty without spoiling the illusion?