

# The Narrative Role of Music in Role-playing Games: Final Fantasy VII

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## Immersion and Engagement: Musical Narrative in Digital Media

Final Fantasy VII is one of the most successful videogames in the role-playing genre as recognised on various Internet review websites such as Gamespot and IGN and in publications such as *Game On! The 50 Greatest Video Games of All Time (2006)*. The videogame role-playing game (RPG, as it is generally known as a genre), has been central to the Square Enix Co., Ltd. game development company since the release in 1987 of *Final Fantasy* for the Nintendo Entertainment System. The company produced more videogame RPGs under the *Final Fantasy* brand as well as under other names such as *Chronotigger (1995)* and 1997 marked the release of their first three-dimensional videogame RPG production on the Sony Playstation games console with *Final Fantasy VII*.<sup>1</sup> It is study within this videogame as a model which forms the basis of this presentation of music and its narrative role within the role-playing game genre.

The transition of the role-playing genre to a digital media form involves the changing of a number of aspects to the original systems on which the videogame RPG is based. Although the Nintendo games console company's latest console the Nintendo Wii is evidently built with multiplayer functionality at the focus of its design, the nature of videogames in the 1980s created an enjoyable experience that required no more than one player. In his discussion about who plays games, Poole (2000) quotes Martin Amis who noted that 'Kids like the computer because it plays back [...] it's a pal, a friend, but doesn't get mad, it doesn't say "I won't play", and it doesn't break the rules'. With regards to digital versions of the role-playing game Poole describes the characteristics which are shared by all videogame genres.

Final Fantasy VII...updated the milieu to one of magic futurism. Yet it is still based on a remarkably old-hat 'turn-based' system of combat, with roots clearly in the dice-throwing game played by unsocialised boys...the player 'becomes' a character in the fictional world. On a basic level, nearly every videogame ever made is a role-playing game.<sup>2</sup>

Square Co., Ltd., later to merge with the Enix Corporation, adapted the table-top fantasy role-playing game to fit a single player experience. The exclusion of the Game Master created a more linear experience as events, settings and systems were pre-programmed. Aspects of location, character and action were now transmitted visually through videogame dialogue and on-screen imagery and through music which, on the Nintendo Entertainment System, was restricted to the abilities of its 8-bit processor. Sound quality was improved for the Super

<sup>1</sup> Square Enix Co., Ltd., 'HISTORY | SQUARE ENIX' (2007), <http://www.square-enix.com/jp/company/e> [accessed 25 April 2007].

<sup>2</sup> Poole, Stephen, *Trigger Happy* (London, 2000), p. 54

Nintendo Entertainment System released in 1991 and *Final Fantasy* games IV to VI benefited from the 'MIDI' standard which increased its polyphony capabilities and number of instruments available to the game developer.<sup>3</sup> The release of the Sony Playstation in 1995 represented a large improvement in standards for audio and video was the first time the *Final Fantasy* series of videogame RPGs could be developed as a three-dimensional videogame.<sup>4</sup> Although the character models were still incapable of visual subtleties such as facial expression, *Final Fantasy VII* succeeded in matching a powerful narrative of important parallels in the real world with an appropriate game genre.

Superficially, gameplay is an experience which is similar to many other forms of media consumption. Owing to the production of visual and aural stimulus we can draw parallels between videogame consoles, cinema and the concert hall. With the larger storage capacity of CD-ROMs employed by consoles such as the Sony Playstation and the Sega Saturn, the provision of CGI cut-scenes meant that at certain points any particular videogame might be indistinguishable from a film. These visually kinaesthetic rewards, although aesthetically pleasing, can often be self-defeating in that they interrupt the flow of gameplay which is highly dependent on the player's level of immersion and engagement.

Immersion is...to be blissfully unaware of one's surroundings and the passing of time as one escapes into the pleasure of reading...the experience of being engaged with narrative (or any other semantic object or expression) involves an abstracted level of awareness.<sup>5</sup>

The role-playing game genre benefits from the communication of a narrative being integral to its original concepts. Developing a relationship between player and player-character is so central to the role-playing game genre that the interaction between music, action and dialogue effectively defines the level to which the player is immersed in gameplay. To fully place a player in role of their player-character, videogames attempt to control as many available human senses and with vibrating joysticks the Sony Playstation was capable of affecting sight, sound and touch to effect a feedback loop. Immersion can only be attained through the careful manipulation of the available controls and whilst some games rely purely on the engaging aspect of gameplay, role-playing games require each element of visual and aural stimulus to be as immersive as possible if the game is to be capable of successful narrativisation. In *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), Janet Murray uses the example of a perfectly immersive virtual reality world, as

<sup>3</sup> Nintendo of America Inc., 'Company History', <http://www.nintendo.com/corp/history.jsp> [accessed 25 April 2007]

<sup>4</sup> Poole, Stephen, *Trigger Happy*, p. 18

<sup>5</sup> Whalen, Zach, 'Play Along – An Approach to Videogame Music' [e-journal], *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 4/1 (2004), [unpaginated text]

demonstrated in the television series 'Star Trek', to show the complex issues raised by immersion and its affects on human morality and ethics whilst describing an ideal way to experience a narrative minus the narrator. Ryan explains that

...even though the interactor is an agent, and in this sense a co-producer of the plot, he or she is above all the beneficiary of the performance...The entertainment value of the experience depends on how the interactor relates to her avatar...our participation in the plot is a compromise between the first-person and the third-person perspective.<sup>6</sup>

As will be explored in chapter two, the inclusion of music in a videogame automatically imposes it with kinaesthetic and narrative roles depending on the visuals and events on-screen with which it is associated. Ryan lists ten definitions of narrative and in *Final Fantasy VII* music conveys elements of 'narrative representation...of a world (setting) situated in time, populated by individuals (characters), who participate in actions and happenings (events, plot)'.<sup>7</sup> Chapters three, four and five explore events in the game where the use of music communicates aspects of landscape, the passage of time and characterisation.

The association between narrative and videogames that Ryan makes is 'The most prominent reason for acting in life...problem solving', a feature of plot devices that are central to narratology and ludology.<sup>8</sup> The former involves the analysis of videogames through existing techniques from traditional forms of literature whilst the latter argues that videogames need new forms of understanding as they are 'not a conventional text at all but an activity more akin to play or sport'.<sup>9</sup> Much like in the case of the virtual reality Holodeck, it needs to be understood that ludological space incorporates all the systems and narratives which as gameplay which Aarseth (2001) reminds us are more simulation based than purely discursive. The player is presented with two kinds of play, ruled based ludus and free and exploratory paidia, the combination of which creates the experience of narrativisation by the player.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, Marie-Laure, 'Beyond Myth and Metaphor – The Case of Narrative in Digital Media' [e-journal], *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1/1 (2001), [unpaginated text]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., [unpaginated text]

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., [unpaginated text]

<sup>9</sup> Dovey, Jon, and Kennedy, eds., *Game Cultures: Computer Games as New Media* (New York, 2006), p. 22



# Chapter 1

## Roles and Role-playing: Becoming a Character

Keith Hurley describes [the] relationship between psychology and role-play, concluding that role-playing skill is an important part of social cognition, communication, and interaction, and reflects an underlying empathy – the ability to imagine oneself in the shoes of another person – in the role-player.<sup>10</sup>

The process by which a human engages with a computer or videogame console involves interfaces between the visual, aural and physical senses. In order to ‘play’ a game, the person must use this sensory information and react physically in accordance with rules set up within the programming code effecting gameplay. The videogame as a form of new media can be defined accurately as a popular form of computer program which is predominated by interfaces requiring the manipulation of a character. There are many established genres within the term ‘videogame’ that describe and distinguish between the experiences and alternate realities that they simulate. The view of the videogame as a simulation, as proposed by Aarseth (2001), is a necessary perspective in understanding their unique narrative functions without the assumptions which are traditionally associated with narrative structure and theory as derived from literature. Similarly, traditional music analysis may impose structures that are not relevant to any particular interactive ludic space. The role-playing genre of videogames alerts us to the presence of the game player in multiple spaces and conceptual domains in their existence digitally as a character in role and as a player controlling that character by virtue of control pad or joystick.

The role-playing experience, as Hurley describes, exists in videogames as involving not only communication and interaction, but also cognitive processes such as empathy, which allow the medium to construct a narrative through aural as well as visual elements. These narrative abstractions manifest themselves as a

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Nephew, Michelle, ‘Playing with Identity’, in Williams, Hendricks and Winkler, *Gaming as Culture* (North Carolina, 2006) p. 121.

variety of videogame genres including (but not restricted to) fighting, adventure, platform, survival horror and the first-person shooter (comprising all the videogames from that perspective, regardless of the employed projectile weapon). In many games the rules and defining characteristics of genres coincide; for example, in Eidos Interactive's *Deus Ex* the interface is visually identical to a first-person shooter but the process of character development follows statistic building and item collecting exercises that are central to progress in a role-playing game. Across all of these genres, videogames tell stories, a feature of variable quality that often decides whether a game is successful in product sales. The type of narrative which a game tries to discourse relies heavily on the genre of videogame with which it is associated where an incorrect match or attempt to impose incompatible literary texts can lead to a loss of entertainment value despite the intrinsic quality of the gameplay.

The dynamic form of narrative present in a videogame, unlike literature, is essentially decided by the processes that are intrinsic to the game genre. Aarseth explains that games are a 'radically different alternative to narratives as a cognitive and communicative structure. Simulations are bottom up; they are complex systems based on logical rules'.<sup>11</sup> This applies in the same way to how videogame music, unlike its classical counterparts, is constructed in tandem with the narrative as gameplay discourses it. The eighty-five tracks which comprise the *Final Fantasy VII* soundtrack, although orchestral in their MIDI imitation, rely on foundations of repeatable loops of musical themes and material. The triggering of these samples is temporally dependent on the result of the interactive relationship between the videogame and the game player.

The product of this relationship that exists in all game genres is the real-time construction of narrative which originates from the gaming culture of fantasy role-playing. Traceable as early as the turn of the nineteenth century, war-gaming involved hypothetical and historical battle re-enactments represented by strategic manipulation of miniature figures. Development in the 1960s led to the popularisation of controlling specific heroic figures 'to get inside their heads' and to the creation of a standardised tabletop fantasy role-playing game (TFRPG)

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<sup>11</sup> Aarseth, Espen, 'Computer Game Studies, Year One' [e-journal], *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1/1 (2001), [unpaginated text]

known usually as the RPG.<sup>12</sup> The first of these codified rulebooks was released by Tactical Studies Rules in 1974 and was entitled *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D).<sup>13</sup> The game required the assuming of two roles including the player-character and the Dungeon Master who is responsible for setting every aspect of the game in terms of setting. The player-characters then, 'collectively engage in protracted storytelling' until specific quests are completed or until the demise of all player-characters.<sup>14</sup> Although fantasy role-playing games can include competitive situations, the player-characters normally form a co-operative 'Party' which does not require the elimination of one another to create a successful game session. The culture promotes in gameplay the provision of a narrative experience as opposed to the ultimate concerns of winning and losing in competition based games. The final aspect of these role-playing games which set them apart from pre-composed literary narratives is the random element, usually controlled by the dice roll. All actions within the game require a dice roll which determines, according to the probability associated with a particular outcome, what happens next in the story. In videogames these outcomes may be associated with kinaesthetic rewards in the form of graphical cut-scenes or even musical fanfares. On a basic level parallels can be drawn between chance music like that of John Cage with the rules applied during gameplay which decide what music will play, usually 'victory' or 'game over' music.

Games of chance, meanwhile, seem to have originated from a belief that divine will could be glimpsed through seemingly random machinations; the *I Ching*, for example...But most 'games of chance' are not totally aleatory: a player...must still use skill.<sup>15</sup>

Players must create and assume the role of a character within the confines of the Game Master's system rules and setting. Since there is little or no physical representation available to the game players in terms of imagery the role-playing game world must be conveyed in a consistent manner to all player-characters almost exclusively through language. Although the visual element of videogames appears to resolve this, its reliance on dialogue and event shows the continuing

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<sup>12</sup> Williams, Hendricks and Winkler, eds., *Gaming as Culture*, p. 3

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Poole, Stephen, *Trigger Happy*, pp. 174 – 175

need for the medium to present the core narrative consistently throughout visual and aural aspects of its presentation. It is different to staged drama in that a player-character may need to speak during the game as player, in character or both. Hendricks explains dialogic speech as

...when one experiences a novel and reads the spoken utterances of a character within that novel, one is not only hearing the voice of the character, but also the voice of the author who wrote the work and put the words to paper.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, parallels with silent films can be drawn here in videogames that use character action and incorporate text dialogue as a method of constructing a narrative. The imagined voice that the player-character hears can be used as an analogy for the sound heard in terms of music associated with more abstract elements of the narrative. The music or lack of sound in any given situation within a videogame can carry the messages insinuated within a dialogue text. The individual mindset of a game player will affect the actual reception of sound and how it relates to the narrative which is presented.

As videogame technology develops and product budgets increase, more cinematic approaches to game design are taken resulting in a visual media that can be described more accurately as an interactive film. The use of recorded dialogue requires a different form of interpretation to that of the speech bubble as used frequently until the arrival of the Sony Playstation 2 in 2000. The series of *Final Fantasy* videogames VII, VIII and IX represent some of the last digital role-playing videogames to utilise the speech bubble as the main vehicle for dialogue on a home games console or personal computer.

The changes that the role-playing genre undergoes in becoming a videogame accompany a necessary understanding of what is defined in this relatively new field of study as narratology and ludology. Whilst existing narratological methods of analysing texts may apply still for the improvisational drama in fantasy role-playing games, a ludological perspective allows for more flexible interpretation of the elements which constitute gameplay. In the case of *Final Fantasy VII*, the game world, its characters and narrative aspects remain a

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<sup>16</sup> Hendricks, Sean, 'Incorporative Discourse Strategies in Tabletop Fantasy Role-Playing Games', in Williams, *Gaming as Culture*, p. 44

part of its ludic space whilst the relationship between a player and the videogame interfaces make up the ludic system. Music as an abstraction associated with the various characters and settings falls into the ludic space whilst its specific videogame functions and aural manifestation is a part of the ludic system through which a narrative can be conveyed to the game player.

Narrative construction in this videogame revolves around the interaction between player-characters and non-player-characters and is divided into exploratory and discursive sections. The game begins in the middle of what appears to be a raid of a corporate power facility by a rebel alliance known as 'AVALANCHE'. The objective of their mission is not conveyed visually or aurally to the player-character until after this initial sequence. The effect adds to the confusion and hectic atmosphere that is set up on-screen. Immediately a player-character is allowed to roam free and discover more about the gameworld with which they are visually presented. These exploratory sections are interspersed with discursive sections which are comprised mainly of dialogue between non-player-characters and the player-character, and among non-player-characters. Cinematic techniques, such as the third-person viewing of conversations between Non-Player-characters, form part of discursive sections.

Music accompanies both exploratory and discursive sections and its role changes depending on the situations created by the role-playing game system. These situations include battles, mini-games, scripted sequences where movement and control is relinquished from the game player, cinematic sequences not focused on characters and cut-scenes which animate the characters in a more detailed three-dimensional space. The opening sequence to the game is synchronised to the first music track entitled 'Opening – Bombing Mission' on the videogame soundtrack. On-screen we see the face of a female character who is looking at a stream. This scene pans outward to reveal that she is part of a much wider sector which is in turn part of an entire city at which point the videogame title '*Final Fantasy VII*' is emblazoned on-screen momentarily. The camera zooms back into the city but on a different sector to reveal the rebels leaving the train they have hijacked at which point the previous orchestral fanfare cuts immediately to a much faster paced section built upon an ostinato in the bass (see Fig. 1.1).



The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Fighting'. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 180$ . The score is arranged in four staves. The top staff is for Brass, the second for Strings, the third for Synth bass, and the bottom for Cymbal and Snare Drum. The Brass and Strings parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with various accidentals. The Synth bass part consists of a steady eighth-note bass line. The Cymbal part has a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating cymbal hits. The Snare Drum part has a similar eighth-note pattern. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.

Fig. 1.2 'Fighting'

This usually occurs every time the party is attacked by enemies and hence a strong association of this music is built up between it and the battle sequence. The starting of this music signifies the beginning of a sub-rule set of gameplay which applies only to this specific situation. When enemies have been defeated the music stops and a 'Victory' fanfare signifies the end of battle.

Upon return to the opening action sequence, the music changes back to the 'Opening Bombing Mission' ostinato in the Electric Bass as the party successfully overcome enemies and enter the power facility. The character of the music is so different that the paradigmatic shift from exploratory to battle areas is made obvious and establishes this relationship of music to place early on. Characters begin to talk among themselves, an event later in the game becomes a semiotic signifier that the system has now reached a discursive section and the threat of enemy attack is gone. However, after the characters have completed a conversation the exploratory freedom is returned to the player-character and battle is assumedly a possibility at any time.

The save point is introduced here as the device within the *Final Fantasy VII* ludological system which allows a game player to remove himself from the role-play and return to the real world. The area just beyond the save point is the centre of the power facility and obviously the final point of the current quest to infiltrate and destroy the power core. It is at this point that the videogame makes changes to the system which is has only just set-up. Upon attack by the enemy, the music that begins is not 'Fighting' and is instead the fast paced bass line as introduced during an exploratory section earlier in the game. The urgency associated with Barrett's tone of voice returns however, the rules of battle do not rely on any aspect

of making decisions quickly. The desired effect on the game player is made apparent and how the Player-character receives it is part of the narrative construction in real time.

The end of battle occurs as usual but this time without the 'Victory' music track. Its exclusion represents a conscious removal of the music by the game designers though they do not exist within the ludological space of *Final Fantasy VII*. The power of the soundtrack over the narrative experience of gameplay appears to rest within the semiotic aspects of music. The continuing urgency associated with the triplet quaver bass line in Fig. 1.1 is joined on-screen by a ten minute countdown timer by the end of which the Party must escape the exploding power facility in order to continue the story.

The many features specific to the role-playing experience combine in the videogame RPG and provide the basis for a form of narrative that is unique to this genre and it requires appropriately tailored structural theory for analysis. As a form of media which incorporates systems of control into audio and video, the limitations which come with traditional texts should not prevent the complete understanding made possible from exploring the narrative function of music. The videogame experience must be treated as a self-sufficient ludological system that borrows from, but is not reliant upon, the techniques employed by superficially related mediums. This study analyses not only the way that music holds symbolic functions within semiotic systems, but also suggests the potential of a new digital media to formulate academic and educational associations usually recognised only in traditional art forms such as classical music and literature.

## Chapter 2

### Aural Control: The Narrative Joystick

Sephiroth: You are just a puppet...  
 You have no heart...  
 And cannot feel any pain...  
 Do you understand?

Cloud: I don't want to understand.

To the main player-character, Cloud, the knowledge that he was created five years before this encounter renders his supposed memories mere illusions. All we can hear are the tolling of bells which usually precedes the theme of Sephiroth, 'Those Chosen by the Planet' which confusingly does not appear. It is in this confusion that the player can truly relate to the player-character they control. The dynamic nature of this relationship allows the player to use the player-character as a vehicle for temporal control over the discourse of the narrative. Similarly, through this shared view and character agency, music is given a continuously meta-diegetic status which allows for the completion of the feedback loop between player, joystick and audio/visual stimulus. Although Cloud's nemesis is referring to the fact that he is a tool through which a Planet destroying prophecy will be fulfilled, his use of the term 'puppet' is not far from the truth in terms of his existence within the semiotic system of the video game.

Using structuralist narrative theory we can classify the levels upon which our semiotic video game subsystem is acting within the Final Fantasy VII ludological space. We can then form an understanding as to how audio in a game relates to narrative discourse and what role it has in matters of control over agency both of the player and the player-character.

Perhaps it is interesting to say that the interactor steers the player character...steering, rather than playing, suggests that the player character is a sort of vehicle from which a world can be seen and otherwise experienced...this character both constrains us...and also opens up possibilities.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Montfort, Nick, 'Fretting the Player Character', in Harrigan, Pat and Wardrip-Fruin, eds., *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (Massachusetts, 2007), pp. 140 -

If we view the videogame character as part of a drama, the player-character is the actor and the player is then the interactor, functioning somewhere between audience and the player-character. Unlike a film, the agency experienced is not that of the actor, but of the player himself. This means there is less need to convey how the actor is feeling as the player can experience events first hand, however in *Final Fantasy VII* Cloud retains some ability to speak in order to influence how the player should feel. First hand engagement through the constraints of the player-character, player-character dialogue with non player-characters and the selected music track playing are the only factors that can effectively control how the player experiences the narrative.

In ludic systems, narratives are created on four levels of temporal structure which include the discourse level, performance level, simulation level and at the base, the generative substrate.<sup>19</sup> Each level depends on the one below it and presents itself in some form in the level above it. The generative substrate, comprised of all the programmed systems of logic in the game, is realised as a simulation experience in the level above. In interacting within the simulation the player accesses parts of the narrative through their actions which appear in the form of events in the performance level. Above that, events combine to form the narrative plot which is experienced as narrative discourse, usually in an episodic manner. When applied to human speech, this structure equates speech with the generative substrate and its organisation as language as the simulation level.

Acting on all four of these temporal structure levels simultaneously within a ludic system are three semiotic subsystems. Lindley proposes that these cover simulation, game and narrative and that any game can possess some or all of these elements to an extent. In *Final Fantasy VII*, the simulation based actions include character movement and visual exploration, the game based actions involve the navigation of menu systems in battle and in the field and narrative based actions include the reading of dialogue and watching of video cut scenes. Depending on which area of the narrative the director chooses to affect with music, audio is placed into these three categories. As in chapter one, the omission of

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<sup>19</sup> Lindley, Craig A., 'The Semiotics of Time Structure in Ludic Space as a Foundation for Analysis and Design' [e-journal], in *Game Studies: The international Journal of Computer Game Research*, 5/3 (2005), [unpaginated text]

victory music at the end of battle affects the narrative experience of battle in the game semiotic subsystem. It acts structurally on the simulation level as a reactive element to the current position in the ontological order of the narrative. This aural manipulation of kinaesthetic elements such as battle sequences demonstrates the power of control over narrative which Darley believes to be too concerned with creating a virtual reality which contradicts the discourse of an engaging literary narrative.<sup>20</sup>

digital visual images have been manipulated mainly for the purposes of creating a form of vicarious kinaesthesia, directed to impress the gamer and encourage him/her to play on...the sense of narrative continuity and coherence becomes secondary and subordinated to the simulation of an immersive virtual environment

To which the counter-argument proposed by Sawyer, Dunne and Berg is that

The very notion of interactivity means that the decision and skills of the player will move the story in a certain direction. Thus, the game becomes the interface for the story. The player interacts with the game, which then results in the game presenting the actual underlying story back to the player.<sup>21</sup>

The implication of *Final Fantasy VII* being a role-playing game further confuses the spatial domains in which the player exists. As the player is given direct control of Cloud, the agency experienced is that of the player. The player now experiences events of the narrative in a digital space on the performance level, experiences gameplay physically on the simulation level and translates the whole experience to a place where it all assumes meaning mentally. If we view the music in the game as meta-diegetic then its realisation is both physical through the loudspeaker and digital to the characters. Its presentation in the player's mental space is where it combines with narrative elements to form meaning. The music is real to both the player and the player-character, a relationship where 'you are supposed to "become" [the character] – it is that immediacy and responsiveness that makes the game so exciting'. The duality of this relationship allows the player to engage in events first hand whilst experiencing it from outside any character. When

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<sup>20</sup> Darley, Andrew, *Visual Digital Culture*, (London, 2000), p. 155

<sup>21</sup> Sawyer, Ben, Alex Dunne and Tor Berg, *Game Developer's Marketplace* (Arizona, 1998), p. 112

comparing third-person perspective with a first-person shooter game, Newman notes that the former are 'less immersive but help the player build up a stronger sense of identification with the character he is playing'.<sup>22</sup> The potential of this situation is explored uniquely in a courting event between Cloud and Aeris. Aeris pushes Cloud into going on a midnight date in the Gold Saucer theme park which leads to a ride on the gondola during a fireworks display. The player is actually partially denied full control over Cloud's movement, reduced simply to lean forward and lean backward. The music track playing on the gondola, 'Interrupted by Fireworks', is heard beneath Aeris's poetically brief sentences and resembles a love song (see Fig. 2.1).



Fig. 2.1 Interrupted by Fireworks

Aeris's speech acts as the lyrics to a song to which Cloud is the mute subject. At this stage in the game speech is translated from text to subvocalisation within player, the imagined sound of her voice mixing with the music in the player's mental space.<sup>23</sup> When Aeris asks questions the player is unable to respond which reflects this situation.

Aeris:           ...beautiful isn't it?  
                   ...first off,  
                   It bothered me how you  
                   Looked exactly alike.  
                   Two completely different people,  
                   But look exactly the same.  
                   The way you walk, gesture...  
                   I think I must have seen him again,

<sup>22</sup> Newman, James, 'The Myth of the Ergodic Videogame: Some thoughts on player-character relationship in videogames' [e-journal], *Gamestudies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 2/1 (2002), [unpaginated text]

<sup>23</sup> de Linde, Zoe, and Kay, eds., *The Semiotics of Subtitling* (Manchester, 1999), p. 19

In you...

Cloud. I'm searching for you.

This music is new to the player at this point in the game which makes its association with the courting scene more powerful as a referential tool later in the game. Using music to suggest and foreshadow events is the key role of a track entitled 'Trail of Blood' which is first heard in the Shinra Company Headquarters when the party is mysteriously released from captivity only to realise that the dead bodies on the floor lay a path to the top floor where President Shinra has been murdered, evidently by Sephiroth by the nature of the stab wound in his back (see. Fig. 2.2)

The image displays a musical score for the track 'Trail of Blood'. It is set in 4/4 time with a tempo of 60 beats per minute. The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes a 'Low drum' part with a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and rests, and an 'Orchestra' section with 'Strings' playing a melodic line in the upper register. The second system features a 'Perc.' part with a similar rhythmic pattern and an 'Orch.' section with a melodic line in the lower register. The third system continues the 'Perc.' part and the 'Orch.' section, ending with a double bar line.

Fig. 2.2 Trail of Blood

This theme is thinly orchestrated for strings and is punctuated periodically by a low drum, a sound produced in the video game that resembles a heart beat. This music always accompanies areas populated by dead bodies and frequently acts as a narrative device to guide the Cloud in his quest to settle his score with Sephiroth. A particularly good use of this is at the entrance to a cave filled with undead warriors. The music immediately sets the tone even before Bugen has spoken

Bugen:            Everyone here was a member of the Gi tribe.  
                          The vengeful spirits of the Gi didn't disappear,  
                          And couldn't return to the lifestream...

At this point the music receives an extra association with the unsettled spirits which cannot complete the circle of life process which involves returning to the lifestream the nature of which of which Bugen has just explained in the previous scene.

Music is also used to control urgency and passage of time. Although the latter will be explored further in chapter four, sometimes the music is visually associated with a causal process in the game. When a scene requires a heightened sense of movement, the music employed is the track entitled 'Hurry!' (see fig. 2.3) . The first use of this track is after the player has set a bomb in a reactor as part of another terrorist operation.

The image displays a musical score for the track 'Hurry!'. It is set in 4/4 time with a tempo of 162 beats per minute. The score is divided into two systems. The first system features a Percussion part with a 'Wood Blocks' instrument playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with rests. The Orchestra part includes an 'Electric Bass Guitar' playing a steady eighth-note bass line. The second system features a Percussion part with a triplet of eighth notes. The Orchestra part includes a 'Brass' section playing chords and a bass line. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Fig. 2.3 Hurry!

The wood blocks literally reference the ticking clock which appears on screen with the start of the music. The clock is a ten minute countdown timer which allows ample time to walk calmly out of the Mako Reactor, however the important point made is that the gameplay remains easy since this is part of the first mission of the game. The combination of the fast music with the supposedly short fuse of the bomb sets up a mood which is urgent but does not prevent the game from being accessible to the novice player in its early stages. The music successfully controls the mood without forcing the gameplay to punish the player.

## Chapter 3

### Game Worlds: Landscapes in the Living Room

in engagist media...familiarity solves simple problems, such as explaining to the participant how personas travel from one town to another, and allows for much freer use of irony, symbology, metaphor, and other literary conventions that depend on cultural comprehension.

- John Tynes<sup>24</sup>

Tynes uses the example of the tabletop role-playing game, *Tékumel*, to illustrate an extremity of fantasy world detail. The game features its own codified social structures and bureaucratic systems, the author's documentation covering language use treatises, military unit histories and guides covering the use of specific magic in battle situations. It requires 'a high degree of cultural literacy for a culture that does not even exist'.<sup>25</sup> The game world of *Final Fantasy VII* potentially encompasses no less in terms of detail having spawned a sequel in the form of a feature-length CGI animated film, numerous games and character cameos on the Sony Playstation consoles and even on Japanese 'i-mode' enabled mobile telephones. However, the original *Final Fantasy VII* game existed initially as a stand-alone product related only to previous *Final Fantasy* games in the series by its turn-based battle and exploration gameplay structure.

Any game world can be described in terms of its visual and aural features, but to understand how it is created we need to divide it into stages. The constituent parts of the *Final Fantasy VII* world can be categorised into place, landscape and location. The journey which the narrative takes the player and player-character on is unique to that particular game and explores ludological space both in the forms of virtual places and environments imagined conceptually by the player. Within this space, places exist and are realised on screen visually and aurally as landscapes owing to their necessitation of perspective and aspects of time. The combination of perspective and time defines landscapes as constructive processes rather than object based entities. Finally, these perceptions are geographically mapped in the

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<sup>24</sup> Tynes, John, 'Prismatic Play: Games as Windows on the Real World', *Second Person* (Massachusetts, 2007), p. 222

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223

player's mind into locations as they are associated with the narrative. This may include chronological and ontological order, narrative connections with specific characters, placement relative to other locations in the game world and allusion to real world places particular to each game player.

The establishment of a place through perception in a game world depends on its presentation visually and aurally. Rather than the view that perception is a result of the mind reorganising chaotic sensory information, an ecological approach to our acoustic environment assumes that such information is part of a well formed structure which the mind is sensitive to. In such a framework 'sounds provide an organism with information that allows it to locate, identify and successfully interact' which can be applied to a game world in which the sound is programmed to react to player action such as entering a new location.<sup>26</sup> The reactive dynamic relationship between the player and the ludological space of the game world can thus be said 'to provide the grounds for the direct perception of meaning' especially in terms of location within a narrative.<sup>27</sup>

The geographical mapping process of location amounts to the overall creation of a game world and the completion of narrativisation. The separate places which form the landscapes the player constructs in time are presented and accessed in a number of different ways. The main method of movement within *Final Fantasy VII* is in the form of exploration of different world map locations. Each place on the map can be visited and is presented as a collection of pre-rendered backgrounds which can be explored in three dimensions. This allowed for the creation of detailed areas which are navigated from a third person perspective. Although the game begins in the middle of a terrorist bombing mission, the event takes place in a 'sector' of Midgar which in turn is one of many cities on the world map. The world map covers a fully three dimensional, spherical 'Planet' which features oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains and a mixture of large and small land masses upon which there are a variety of cities, towns, farms and other places to visit throughout the course of the game. Depending on the complexity of the events which occur at each place, there is specific music associated with nearly

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<sup>26</sup> Windsor, Luke, 'Through and around the acousmatic: the interpretation of electroacoustic sounds', in Emmerson, Simon, ed., *Music, electronic media and culture* (Hants, 2000), p. 10

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

every location. All of these places can be further classified by whether random attack by enemies is a possibility. This is a property of any place and but is never specified explicitly to the player. The table below (Fig. 3.1) details the main places the player visits along their journey not including all sub-quests.

Place	Multiple instances	1st Music Association	Key Event
Mako Reactors	Corel, Midgar, Nibelheim	Mako Reactor	
Train	Midgar	On That Day 5 Years Ago	
Just above the Plate	Midgar many times	Anxious Heart	Meeting Aeris 1st time
7th Heaven Bar	Midgar	Tifa's Theme	first arrival
		Barret's Theme	morning departure
Sector 5 Slums	Midgar	Underneath the Rotting Pizza	
Sector 6 Slums	Midgar	Oppressed People	
Aeris's House/ The Church	Midgar	Flowers Blooming in the Church	First meeting
		Aeris's Theme	Elmyra's Past
Don Corneo's Mansion	Midgar	Don of the Slums	
Shinra HQ	Midgar	Bombing Mission	
		Shinra Company	
		Infiltrating Shinra Tower	
Train Tunnels	Midgar, Sewers	Lurking in the Darkness	
Dead Bodies		Trail of Blood	
Just Outside Midgar	Midgar/World Map	Holding My Thoughts in my Heart	Leaving Midgar
World Map		FFVII Main Theme	
		Great Northern Cave	
Town of Kalm	Under Junon	Ahead On Our Way	
	Keystone House		
	Mountain Ice Cabin		
	Nibelheim Flashbacks	(Anxious Heart)	
		(Tolling Bells)	
		(Those Chosen by the Planet)	
Nibelheim	3 Flashbacks and real	Anxious Heart	
Nibelheim Mansion		The Nightmare's Beginning	
		Tolling Bells	
Real Nibelheim	4th Flashback	Who Am I?	Discovering the true past
		On the Other Side of the Mountain	Tifa's Mother dies
Character's Subconscious	Tifa's, Cloud's	Who are you?	

Junon	Above Junon	Rufus's Welcome Ceremony	Heard down below as well
		Weapon Raid	Weapon Raid
Cargo Ship		It's Difficult to Stand on Both Feet	
Costa Del Sol	World Map	Costa Del Sol	Port to other half the world
North Corel	World Map	Mark of a Traitor	
	Corel	Mining Town	
	Desert Prison	Sandy Badlands	
Gold Saucer	1st visit	Gold Saucer	1st visit
	Midnight Date	Debut	2nd visit
	Ghost Hotel	On That Day 5 Years Ago	2nd visit
	Cable Car (Gondola)	Interrupted by Fireworks	2nd visit
Cosmo Canyon	World Map	Cosmo Canyon	
	Bughenhagen's observatory	Lifestream	
	Campfire	Anxious Heart	
Gongaga	World Map	Anxious Heart	
	Turks	Turks Theme	Turks Show up
Rocket Town	World Map	Oppressed People	1st visit
		Cid's Theme	Cid's Story of past
		Sending a dream into the Universe	Shera's Story of past
		Steal the Tiny Bronco	Stealing Cid's Plane
Temple of the Ancients	World Map	Forested Temple	
		Those Chosen by the Planet	Sephiroth
Sleeping Forest	World map	Flowers Blooming in the Church	Cloud's Dream
		Chasing the Black Caped Man	Real Visit
Forgotten City	World Map	You Can Hear the Cry of the Planet	
		Anxious Heart	Aeris is missing
		Who am I?	Cloud goes Crazy
		Aeris's Theme	Aeris's Death
Mideel	World Map	Parochial Town	
		Off the Edge of Despair	
Highwind	Junon	Highwind Takes to the Skies	
	World Map	The Great Northern Cave	(on map and on ship)
	World Map	Highwind Takes of the Skies	after Cloud recovers

Fig. 3.1 Table of places and their associated other places, music and events

The triggering of specific music tracks in places has the dual role of imbuing a place with initial musical character intrinsic to the semiotics of the musical composition and of creating an association that a place shall retain throughout the course of gameplay. The order in which the player is presented with these places and their corresponding music is part of the construction of the landscape visually and aurally. Through the view of the player-character, Cloud, that landscape is realised by his perspective. The place that Cloud is in is realised

also as a landscape in the player's mind which is formed by a combination of the current music playing with the player's knowledge of other music tracks. This may include music previously associated with that place or with the specific combination of characters in the room. A common occurrence of course is the conflict of character themes, the most frequent being the musical theme and presence of Cloud's nemesis Sephiroth.

As Midgar is the largest city on the Planet and is the setting for the first events in the game, it has the largest amount of music associated with it. Although the player visits many other places during the course of the game, Midgar is where it begins and where most of the important musical themes are established. Many character themes are also stated here but the themes that recur throughout the game that refer to places in Midgar are the Shinra Company, Aeris's Church, Just Above the Plate and the world map theme. Shinra Company, headed by President Shinra and his team, is under attack for draining the Planet's resources for power in the form of electricity among many other services. At the centre of the circular city of Midgar is Shinra Headquarters where we are introduced to the Shinra Company music (Fig. 3.2).

F  
3.2

The musical score for 'Shinra Company' is presented in two systems. The first system includes an Orchestra part with a treble clef and a piano part with a bass clef. The piano part features a rising melodic line with a sharp sign on the first note. The percussion part includes snare and bass drum patterns. The second system includes an Orchestra part with a treble clef and a piano part with a bass clef. The piano part features a rising melodic line with a sharp sign on the first note. The percussion part includes snare and bass drum patterns. The score is labeled 'F' and '3.2' on the left, and 'ig.' on the right.

Orchestra

Piano

Percussion

Snare

Bass Drum

Strings and Synth Choir

Orch.

Piano + Trombone and Tuba

Perc.

ig.

#### Shinra Company

The orchestration is very bare and focused on a combination of low sustained sounds with the haunting quality of the synthetic choir doubling the rising theme. This theme accompanies the arrival of President Shinra as he introduces himself to the 'AVALANCHE' rebel assault which includes the main player-

character. At this point in the game, Shinra are trying to kidnap Aeris Gainsborough whom they need in order to find 'The Promised Land' which will unlock even more power. The player's first encounter with Aeris is in a church after Cloud falls through the roof and is saved by Aeris's flower garden. A track entitled 'Flowers Blooming in the Church' is playing as Cloud awakens from his fall.

<The screen is white, we assume this is first person perspective>

Aeris: (text only) You alright? Can you hear me?

<The screen clears and is Cloud lying on a flowerbed>

Aeris: They say flowers won't grow here in Midgar...but they have no trouble here.

Immediately the church is established as a mystical place and becomes synonymous with a safe area as it has saved Cloud's life. This is not a place the player chooses to come to and fits directly into a scripted section of the game's narrative. Being part of a scripted sequence is important as it asserts itself as integral to the storyline and often follows a battle sequence to reward the player. In narrative based games, scripted movement to new places and cut scenes have 'often come to replace the classic videogame reward system: points'.<sup>28</sup> The music we hear is not the full statement of 'Aeris's Theme', but the melodic line suggests it (see Fig. 3.3)

The image shows a musical score for the track 'Flowers Blooming in the Church'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is for the 'Orchestra' and features a 'Flute' part. The bottom staff is for the 'Orch.' (Orchestra) and features an 'E. Piano' (Electric Piano) part. The tempo is marked as '♩ = 40'. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/8. The score is divided into two sections by a double bar line. The first section has a melodic line in the flute and a piano accompaniment in the electric piano. The second section is marked '(echoes)' and features a similar melodic line in the flute and piano accompaniment. Dynamics are indicated by *mf*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp* throughout the piece.

Fig. 3.3 Flowers Blooming in the Church

After this sequence the player must direct Cloud away from Shinra's special agents known as the Turks who also have their own theme which usually overrides

<sup>28</sup> Howells, Sacha A., 'Watching a game, Playing a movie', in King, Geoff, and Krzywinska, eds., *Screenplay: Cinema/videogames/interfaces* (London, 2002), p. 113

other location music. Upon bringing Aeris back to her home in Sector 5 we are asserted by the repeat of 'Flowers Blooming in the Church' that Aeris, the character, is in a familiar place which is real to her, virtual to the player, and safe in both instances.

The music track entitled 'Anxious Heart' is used in the largest number of separate places and is introduced early in the game as Cloud is escaping the first bombing mission. Whilst various non-player-characters run about in a confused manner, one man knocks Aeris over but does not help her up. This is the first time the player sees Aeris but she is not properly introduced until later. The music sets a tone which will be associated with pain and confusion for the rest of its usage in the game (see fig. 3.4)

The image shows a musical score for the track 'Anxious Heart'. It consists of two staves: Flute and Orchestra. The Flute staff is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line with dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*, and a triplet of eighth notes. The Orchestra staff is also in 4/4 time and features a string accompaniment with dynamic markings of *p* and *f*. The score is divided into four measures, with the first and third measures starting with a *mf* dynamic and the second and fourth measures starting with a *f* dynamic. The Flute staff has a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure, and the Orchestra staff has a *p* dynamic in the second measure and a *f* dynamic in the fourth measure.

Fig. 3.4 Anxious Heart

The slow but frequent rather unsatisfying resolution to the D minor chord every other bar echoes the constant sighing one could imagine in the helpless scene which accompanies this music. A parallel can be drawn between the descending minor third motif and similar use in the 'Oihme! Se tanto amate' from the sixteenth century in Claudio Monteverdi's fourth book of madrigals. The 'Oihme' quite literally translating as a sigh.

The last binding theme introduced before departure from Midgar is that of the 'Final Fantasy VII Main Theme' which binds the game together. It is alluded to when Cloud is first shown the computerised map of Midgar by a fellow 'AVALANCHE' member. (see Fig. 3.5)

The image shows a musical score for 'On That Day Five Years Ago'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a Harp part (treble and bass clefs) which is mostly silent, and an Orchestra Strings part (treble and bass clefs) with a melody in the treble clef. The second system starts at measure 5 and features a Harp part (Hp.) with complex chords and an Orchestra part (Orch.) with sustained chords and a melodic line in the treble clef.

Fig. 3.5 On That Day Five Years Ago

At the end of the events in Midgar, the party of characters is arranged outside the city walls. The upper string melody from 'On That Day Five Years Ago' is incorporated into another music track which is played here just before the player is presented with the world map. Fig. 3.5 shows the incorporation of the same theme, albeit now in Db Major, into 'Holding My Thoughts in My Heart' with a much less static accompaniment.

The image shows a musical score for 'Holding My Thoughts in My Heart'. It features four staves: Oboe (top), Harp, Oboe (middle), and Harp (bottom). The key signature is Db Major (three flats) and the time signature is 3/8. The Oboe parts play a simple melody, while the Harp parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes.

Fig. 3.5 Holding My Thoughts in My Heart

The modulation to a major key and the removal of the slow harmonic rhythm of the strings is placed with a scene in the game that matches the

movement with character motivation to explore the world and begin the long quest ahead of them. The theme finally presented, 'Final Fantasy VII Main Theme', is the music that will play on the world map (see fig. 3.6)

Fig. 3.6 Final Fantasy VII Main Theme (first section)

After the theme is played over static chords similar to the excerpt above for eighteen bars, a loop point is set at which point the six minute track begins (see Fig. 3.7)

Fig. 3.7

The game is cued to play these music tracks when the player reaches certain places. Unlike a film score, the music cannot be synchronised with the on screen visuals. Narrativisation through the creation of a landscape visually and aurally in real-time, although built upon pre-composed MIDI data, is still constructed through a composition-like process. The order and frequency in which the player hears the separate music tracks forms a soundtrack unique to the individual game player. Of the music tracks we have covered, the battle themes are heard the most. An enemy strikes roughly every ten seconds in dungeon areas.

In terms of frequency after battle themes it is the 'Final Fantasy VII Main Theme' that is heard the most as it is heard on the world map every time the player-character leaves a location. However, the repeat use of any particular theme in varied places creates the most effective narrative links. The theme that seems to haunt Cloud the most is 'Anxious Heart' and his struggle with his unclear past results in a nervous breakdown. The use of this particular track in Midgar has been mentioned, but it also plays in the hometown of Zack in Gongaga, a friend whose memories Cloud mistakenly assumes are his own after he escapes from captivity as part of an experiment. The music also returns when Cloud is the only one out of his party that is not depressed about the current situation at a campfire in Cosmo Canyon and each member shares their sad memories with Cloud. The most important use of this music track, however, is the association it has with Cloud's hometown of Nibelheim. The player is brought to Nibelheim once along the journey and three separate times as a part of flashbacks and each successive time the experience changes as it is told by a different character. Cloud remembers it incorrectly, Sephiroth lies and Shinra employ people to rebuild the town and deny its destruction years before. Finally Tifa and Cloud jointly combine their hazy memories together to form an accurate past. The scene has the characters finishing each other's sentences romantically.

<Whilst in flashback, Tifa asks why she didn't see Cloud that day>

Cloud: this was the day...

Tifa: the day mom died...

I want...to see...mom...

<Cue music track 'On the Other Side of the Mountain'>

It is this final presentation of Nibelheim that we know is true not only because it makes sense, but also because the music track reassures the player by introducing a new theme (see Fig. 3.8) and leaves behind the 'Anxious Heart' music which was associated with many illusory pasts.



The simplicity of the solo guitar line makes the moment ever more poignant and strengthens the creation of the true past that Cloud has been striving for since the beginning of his journey. Visually, the town looks the same each of the four times it is visited, but it is this final change of music which locates Cloud in the true Nibelheim and the firm placement of himself in the past, present and future that allows the player to truly understand the player-character. As the party reassembles after Cloud returns enlightened by his past, Cloud repeats Barret's oft-repeated, now tiresome, 'There ain't no gettin' offa this train', the rest of his journey now clearly mapped out.

## Chapter 4

### Passage of Time: Temporal Shifting

Unlike traditional narrative, you cannot sustain a single, linear, driving arc. Instead, with the best hypertext fictions, you ultimately have explored enough of the narrative tree to reach some kind of epiphany.

- Costikyan<sup>29</sup>

Although the narrative content of a role-playing video game may lie within a hypertextual domain, the actual modes of discourse which are implemented can still be balanced between linear and non-linear forms. Within the space that contains all the semiotic systems and ludological elements of *Final Fantasy VII* there exists a story abstraction which is presented both chronologically and ontologically through a combination of dialogue, scripted action, ergodic gameplay and exploratory sections. Whilst sub-quests and goals guide the narrativisation of a journey which leads the winding path to the climactic end, the actual events' gradual revealing of back-story through free navigation creates a non-linear discourse which links the various narratives together in ontological time until completion resulting in a perceptual finish. It is important to note that the game can be played until its chronological narrative end without having fully realised the ontological story one discovers via exploratory means. The structure of the narrative discourse is further complicated by what Janet Murray terms the 'replay story' implicated by the nature of kinaesthetic challenges which effect gameplay.<sup>30</sup> Although this appears to apply more widely to arcade style games designed to be played from the same beginning point every time, re-play story stems from the necessity for a game of extensive length and narrative form to utilise a 'save' feature. The placement of such points of release from gameplay represents the literary equivalent of chapters in a novel, as well as providing indications as to when a re-play section has just passed or lies ahead. Characters and their own personal stories act as the pieces of the elaborate puzzle which form the overall

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<sup>29</sup> Costikyan, Greg, 'Games, Storytelling, and Breaking the String', in Harrigan, Pat, and Wardrip Fruin, eds., *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (Massachusetts, 2007), p. 7

<sup>30</sup> Murray, Janet, 'From Game-Story to Cyberdrama', in Harrigan, Pat, and Wardrip-Fruin, eds., *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (London, 2004), p. 6

narrative. Specific areas of overlap between back-stories and conflicting information create an entirely separate web of history. This creates not only a long chronological timeline, but also an illusion of depth and complexity which contributes to the creation of a compelling narrative which is widened beyond the boundaries of a two dimensional timeline. It is, however, largely unrecognised that aural stimulus implies the speed and acceleration of the narrative passage of time in an interactive space. Jesper Juul notes that <sup>31</sup>

While movies and theatre do not have a grammatical tense to indicate temporal relations, they still carry a basic sense that even though the viewer is watching a movie, now...the events told are *not* happening *now*. (emphasis in original)

However, he goes on to conclude that narrative requires tense, therefore <sup>32</sup>

...when the user can act, they must necessarily implode: it is impossible to influence something that has already happened. This means that you *cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time*. (emphasis in original)

Juul's point, that performance of events in narrative media such as film imply a tense implicitly, is well taken, but it does not account for a concept of constructed narrative within ludological space like that of narrativisation. Literary forms such as the novel utilise techniques with which the author controls the passage of time. This widely ranges from the description of many events in fewer pages, to the accelerative effects of describing many events which are supposedly happening quickly or simultaneously like the classic film montage. In a video game where you have control of a character or even direct camera control, the roles of narrator and director are transposed to other mediums such as dialogue and music which the game designers can use to manipulate the player such as their feeling of urgency (as described in chapter two).

A video game RPG such as Final Fantasy VII, although based on concepts of table-top RPGs, contains a linear story which manifests itself ontologically as a world, and chronologically as a discoursed narrative. Whilst the single experience

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<sup>31</sup> Juul, Jesper, 'Games telling stories? A brief note on games and narratives' [e-journal], *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 1/1 (2001), [unpaginated text]

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., [unpaginated text]

of any individual player may be recorded as a sequence of events, the order of events as they supposedly occurred in the story of Final Fantasy VII constitute the ontological order of narrative which can be experienced in full through thorough exploration. The chronological timeline pieces the most important parts of the ontological space into an order to construct what amounts to a completed game experience ending with the final boss and ending cinematic sequences. The key differences between these two narrative experiences are that of absolute and referential plotting of time. The dialogue exposes information which locates the characters exactly when manipulating the time of the present.

Barret:           You'll feel better. You've been asleep  
                          a long time

Tifa:             How long have I been asleep?

Barret:           Let's see...musta been about 7 days.

Which correlates directly to the discovery of Cloud's whereabouts;

Tifa:             (to a stray dog)  
                          You got lost didn't you?  
                          Separated from someone you love?  
                          Silly thing...

Old man:         (elsewhere)  
                          I guess its been about a week since  
                          he washed up here on the shore

This speech locates the player in time as it is currently passing. To increase the effect of immersion, the game also features a clock on the menu screen through which the player must navigate in order to access their inventory and character equipment. Interestingly, after three tests a comparison between real world time and the in-game clock showed that one minute of real world time equated to twenty-five seconds of in-game time. The clock in the game supposedly measures and records how long the player has been playing the game between start and the current save point. Nonetheless, it still measures a chronological time which is affected by the path the player takes and how much exploration they choose to engage in between. It asserts that time consists of a past, present and a future.

The main musical feature which asserts this fact is the rest music which accompanies it (see fig. 4.1).

The musical score for 'Good Night, Until Tomorrow' is presented in 4/4 time with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 60$ . It features three staves: Flute, Ocarinas, and Harp. The Flute part begins with a melodic line in the key of D major, consisting of eighth and quarter notes. The Ocarinas part provides harmonic support with chords in the right hand and a descending line of notes in the left hand. The Harp part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a descending melodic line.

Fig. 4.1 Good Night, Until Tomorrow

The unmistakable influence of jazz closed chord voicings and accompanying series of descending seventh chords (F#7, DMaj7/9, Bm7, GMaj7 and F#7) is typical for the music of this function in other *Final Fantasy* games. The music signifies a replenishing of health and the screen fades to black merely to make this recovery process appear to be part of the real lives of the characters. When the screen fades back in the party is usually assembled beside beds which the player must assume were used overnight. The game also uses music kinaesthetically to frequently reward the player in acknowledgement that a challenge has been overcome (see Fig. 4.2). This accompanies a data screen of animated status bars which rise in accordance with the progress made by each character after a battle.

The musical score for 'Fanfare' is presented in 4/4 time with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 130$ . It features a single staff for the Orchestra Brass. The music is characterized by a series of descending chords and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Fig. 4.2 Fanfare

When travelling through a dungeon area or world map battles may occur as often every ten seconds, resulting in roughly ten battles when walking from Midgar to the town of Kalm for example. Such kinaesthesia is a requirement to motivate the player to continue on and develop their character's statistics as is

central to any role-playing game. Events such as these are categorised by Eskelinen into six terms of temporal relations including order, speed, duration, frequency, simultaneity and time of action.<sup>33</sup> The order factor of the victory 'Fanfare' has a kinaesthetic role which normally follows a successful battle in terms of chronological time.

Music is not limited to association with aspects of the game which appear to further the characters on a chronological timeline. The complex relationship between towns, cities, mountain caves and other locations allows for exploration in many possible orders. As the player progresses, full access to new areas increases through vehicle tools such as the automobile, the boat, the submarine and finally the 'Highwind' airship, the only vehicle capable of reaching locations separated by deep ocean. *Final Fantasy VII*, continues a tradition of chocobo pet creatures which allow the player to engage in racing games through a pet breeding mini-game. This ultimately leads to raising better and faster chocobos with the secret benefit of allowing the player to travel to secret game areas where further parts of the back-story are exposed. Through the limitations of each specific vehicle the player is given varying amounts of free-roaming capability. The ontological narrative can conclude when the player has all the information stored mentally to form opinions based on the events they have completed, dialogue they have read and music they have heard. The story of Barret's past is told only when the party has left the town of North Corel. Upon arrival there the local town villagers recognise Barret but react aggressively.

(Barret has run up ahead and is already being punched by local villagers)

Local villager 1: Well, lookey here! Never thought I'd ever see your face again.

Local villager 2: They kick you out of another town or somethin'?

Local Villager 3: You destroy everything you touch  
Look at this place! It's all your fault North Corel turned into a garbage heap!

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<sup>33</sup> Eskelinen, Markku, 'Towards Computer Game Studies', in Harrigan, Pat, and Wardrip Fruin, eds., *First Person*, p. 40

^%\$#! You ain't even worth the effort.<sup>34</sup>

The player could notice many different things here which fill in back-story. Firstly the villagers' use of language is similar to that of Barret who's sentences always utilise a multitude of slang terms and, evidently, colloquialisms. The player is left only to suspect the relationship between Barret's personal vendetta against Shinra, the ruins of North Corel and Barret's bad relations with the local villagers. There is nothing to do in this town because it has no money and exists only to sell goods to travellers on their way to the amusement park 'Gold Saucer'. As the party leaves North Corel for the cable car stop that leads to Gold Saucer, Barret tells the story of what happened in the past, this time associating a new music track with North Corel albeit this time with a healthier memory of how it used to look. Fig. 4.3 shows the music of the present day state of North Corel.

The musical score for 'Mark of a Traitor' is presented in 4/4 time with a tempo of 57 BPM. It features four staves: Orchestra Strings, Orchestra Electric Piano, and Orchestra Electric Bass. The Strings part begins with a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking and consists of a melodic line with various intervals and accidentals. The Electric Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. The Electric Bass part features a steady, rhythmic bass line.

Fig. 4.3 Mark of a Traitor

Fig. 4.4 shows the music which plays as Barret tells the story of how he feels responsible for North Corel's ruin.

The musical score for Barret's story is presented in 3/4 time with a tempo of 120 BPM. It features three staves: Strings, Guitar, and Orchestra. The Strings part is mostly silent, indicated by a series of dashes. The Guitar part features a melodic line with a prominent arpeggiated pattern and a sharp accidental. The Orchestra part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

<sup>34</sup> Censoring in original

The image shows a musical score for a track titled 'Mining Town'. It consists of three staves: 'Str.' (Strings), 'Gtr.' (Guitar), and 'Orch.' (Orchestra). The score is marked with a '5' at the beginning and a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) instruction above the first staff. The strings play a rhythmic melody of eighth notes. The guitar plays a single note with a long sustain. The orchestra provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords in both the treble and bass clefs.

Fig. 4.4 Mining Town

We notice that despite major changes in style, noticeably the solo guitar melody and reduction in synthetic instruments, the violins remain playing pizzicato. The character of this sound, not used frequently in other tracks in the game, gives North Corel a sense aural continuity. The introduction of the new music track informs the player visually and aurally that North Corel was a very different, thriving place before it was destroyed. White text appears over the flash back to signify Barret's narration to the character party. This signals to the player that it is not speech which can be read slowly as it proceeds to the next line without the player pressing any buttons as with normal dialogue. Dialogue replaces this white text and we assume that it is still be narrated by Barret.

Dyne:           The coal's been ours for generations. Our fathers,  
                    And theirs before them, risked their lives for it.

Barret:        It'll be all right, Dyne. Shinra, Inc. will guarantee  
                    your livelihood once the Mako Reactor is  
                    completed.

I don't want my wife, Myrna, to suffer anymore.

As a flashback, this dialogue is particularly strong in assisting the music to show how different times were. Barret's speech elocution appeared far more proper and he refers to Shinra by its full name, Shinra Inc. and does not swear in the process as he does in the present day. We are also given a reason for Barret's desire for revenge because the wife he speaks of, Myrna, has made no appearance in the present day, the only person Barret cares about appears to be a child named Marlene who is taken as a hostage later on. Dyne, mentions that the town took pride in its mining tradition which is swept aside by Mako Reactor power plants

despite the legacy attached to North Corel's coal miners. When the flashback has completed then returning to the town causes the game to play the present day music 'Mark of a Traitor', again asserting the change of the times. Although the town has now become small and derelict, its aural presentation changes over time to reflect this which gives the town history and age as well as placing it within the wider quest against Shinra for Barret. In terms of chronological time the flashback has also caused a change in speed. The narration of events from many years ago and how they caused the ruins today fills many holes in the ontological narrative and results in a perceptual acceleration of time.

Speed is dealt with in a number of ways in *Final Fantasy VII* and affects the experience of the chronological timeline as well as creating location awareness. In an event sequence in Midgar we approach many of these different musical effects. As Cloud and Tifa approach a city pillar, the sector 7 slum villagers are all running aimlessly in a panic and the battle music 'Fighting' is playing. The pillar is what holds the upper class "plate" level homes above the city slums with corresponding sector numbers. At the base of the plate has appeared a save point which very much suggests that an important event is about to occur regardless of difficulty. Murray comments on this particular feature of gaming.<sup>35</sup>

In a game, the object can be master to the script, to perform the right actions in the right order...it also can reflect our sense of the multiple possibilities of a single moment, the "pullulating" moment...in which all the quantum possibilities of the world are present.

The acknowledgement of the save point by the player adds to the momentum being built by the battle theme. Continuing past the save point will mean moving forward in time, leaving an exploratory section and realisation of one of these possible futures. Importantly this can lead to life or death of the player-character so there is also a heightened sense of danger. The music playing is that which normally only plays during battles entitled 'Fighting'. The quick tempo and immediacy of the melody imbues battle sequences with the sense of urgency that is required. Usually the start of this music is associated with random battles which may happen an unlimited number of times in an enemy filled 'dungeon'

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<sup>35</sup> Murray, Janet, 'From Game-Story to Cyberdrama', *First Person*, p. 6

environment. Using Eskelinen's categories, we would approach the effect on the passage of time in these sections under frequency. Frequency involves a game's repetitive elements and can be described in terms of its determination (span), specification (rhythm of recurrence) and extension (duration).<sup>36</sup> During this event, the determination factor now spans the entire event of getting to the top of the pillar rather than the normally random occurrence of battles as isolated incidents.

Although using this music may actually cause the player slight paradigmatic confusion, it nonetheless gets the point across that instead of a single battle, the event becomes a much wider battlefield where many smaller fights are won and lost. The visuals confirm this as previous non player-characters, also part of the AVALANCHE team, fall to their deaths whilst fighting Shinra away from the pillar. As Cloud and Tifa encounter battle after battle in this section they see their team mates die who give their last words.

(After falling to his death)

Wedge: sorry I wasn't much help...help Barret!

(Hanging off the staircase)

Biggs: Go help Barret!

(Lying on the steps)

Jessie: Because...of our actions...many...people died  
this probably...is our punishment.

The urgency to reach Barret is of course increased by these dialogues with dying team mates. Like in the opening mission of the game, victory music 'Fanfare' is omitted to create a large, singular kinaesthetic event. Upon reaching the top of the staircase we not only discover that Aeris has been kidnapped by special agents, the Turks, but that a special time bomb will send the plate crashing down into the slums and AVALANCHE will be blamed by Shinra as an act of terrorism. During this dialogue a large amount of information is conveyed in a small amount of time and is accompanied by the music track 'Hurry!'. The tick-tock sound of the

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<sup>36</sup> Eskelinen, Markku, 'Towards Computer Game Studies', *First Person*, p. 41

woodblocks causes the time bomb's presence to be ever more real to the player. Just before the Turks leave they place Aeris's capture in context.

Tseng: Oh I wouldn't do that, you might injure our special  
guest.

...he's taking her because she's an Ancient.

It's taken a long time but now I can finally report this  
to the President.

Aeris: (to cloud) Hurry and get out!

Tseng has been chasing down Aeris ever since Shinra's discovery that she was a descendent of the alien race that will lead them to the Promised Land. Aeris had been running away from Shinra since childhood and this final speech confirms this event as the end of one phase and the beginning of the next. As the pillar explodes and the plate collapses, President Shinra watches from his window at the top of the tallest tower in the centre of Midgar. As the music cuts out we hear diegetic radio music coming from his room when the camera changes to his office and he is listening to what sounds like a piece of sacred vocal music. Although the character of the music is in opposition to the action we are seeing, the act of listening to a domestic radio whilst part of the city explodes places this event into the context of Shinra lifestyle. The destruction of entire communities and the end of life in a place where player-characters grew up is made equivalent to a day's work for the Shinra executives and the Turks. The large number of events that have occurred are placed into perspective as Cloud and his party will discover after they first leave Midgar, the beginning of their real quest.

In a location which represents quite the opposite in every respect, the music that is playing at a holiday resort called Costa Del Sol directly reflects the lazy atmosphere and ignorance of the dynamic world conflict surrounding it. In the event immediately preceding entry to this area, Sephiroth has just hijacked a ship and killed most of the crew with members of 'AVALANCHE' being the only survivors. However, as soon as the party walks onto the shores of Costa Del Sol everyone's mood has changed with many members making jokes. Cloud describes Barret in his sailor outfit as 'a bear in a marshmallow' and Aeris asks Cloud whether he prefers a girl with a tan or fair complexion. Briefly Shinra

appear in a helicopter which is accompanied by the Shinra Company music. However, even the local information desk staff sound tired and bored.

Information Desk Girl: Costa Del Sol is the gateway to the West, and is a prominent world renown resort, which has been around for ages.

Come on I don't care about that! If you want a good time, go to the beach!

Innkeeper: ...SNORE...SNORE...

The music is again jazz influenced but the chord sequence is fairly slow and does not appear to be moving anywhere structurally or melodically (see Fig. 4.5)

The image displays a musical score for the track 'Costa Del Sol'. It is set in 4/4 time with a tempo of 115 beats per minute. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a Vibraphone part (top staff) and an Orchestra part (middle and bottom staves). The Orchestra part is further divided into Electric Piano (middle staff) and Electric Bass Guitar (bottom staff). The Vibraphone part features a melodic line with a lazy, mellow feel. The Orchestra part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and bass lines. The second system continues the Vibraphone and Orchestra parts, with a measure number '4' indicated at the beginning of the Vibraphone staff.

Fig. 4.5 Costa Del Sol

Time has come to halt in as is replicated in the lazy rhythm and mellow tone of the vibraphone. Musical factors such as these imbue the places with character in addition to representing musically, the general aura surrounding the location which is only partially communicated by visual stimulus and dialogue. Arrival at this particular place is part of the chronological narrative and its placement between specific events is a technique which is used throughout the *Final Fantasy VII* to control pace and momentum to effect immersive gameplay.

## Chapter 5

### Musical Characterisation: Personifying Pixels

Rather than YOU being the main character, you had the opportunity to role-play the main character, exploring “your” personality as a detective, a spy, an AI, etc., even while exploring your environment...there were many “you” roles to explore.

- Jeremy Douglas<sup>37</sup>

The process by which a player becomes their player-character in a role-playing game involves understanding the character’s history, strengths and weaknesses, special abilities and various other statistics specific to the game. Transferring the genre to an interactive medium such as video gaming further complicates the player to character relationship by introducing a dynamic symbiosis of agencies as well as the associations that popular culture has built between music and visual media. The many applications of leitmotif and the *idée fixe* in classical music have been extensively explored in programmatic orchestral pieces and staged forms such as opera. In linear media such as film, the extensive use of character themes can lead to complex thematic development that spans multiple parts of a trilogy, but the frequent exhaustion of such techniques can result in obvious relations between sound and screen which can effectively insult the audience.

Video games are often structured around short kinaesthetic challenges where a piece of music under ten seconds may never be heard in full, thus rendering any intricate thematic development futile. In Capcom’s *Street Fighter* series of fighting games, characters each have their own musical theme which typically associates them with the country they represent. With bouts limited to a maximum of sixty seconds, the average fight requires the music to associate the character with their nationality quickly as rounds are potentially over within ten seconds. Without the ability to synchronise music directly to an event on screen, game designers need to be careful to allow for enough dialogue or scripted non player-character movement if the composer’s music is to have the desired effect on characterisation. Although the video game medium presents the potential to

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas, Jeremy, ‘Enlightening Interactive Fiction: Andrew Plotkin’s *Shade*’, *Second Person*, p. 129

create characters with depth limited only by the amount of time a player has, the culture associated with it has clearly established genres. As a role-playing game *Final Fantasy VII* utilises various techniques to avoid the constraints of digital media to facilitate the presentation of a compelling narrative. A mixture of careful event timing, association of music with actions dependent on frequency and development of characters through multiple themes and arrangements can be attributed to the continued popularity of the characters in independent fan-fictions, memorabilia and spin-off games and movies which is unique to this particular instalment of the *Final Fantasy* series.

Despite the linearity of the story in terms of plot, *Final Fantasy VII* still tries to provide an element of decision making. This may have the effect of allowing the player to engage in a sub-quest but is generally limited to altered responses from other characters. This contributes to the presentation of realistic characters as Perlin describes.<sup>38</sup>

...story is about conveying character. To do that interactively would require some sort of plausible psychological agency on the part of somebody within the interactive narrative...we respond by agreeing to pretend that the actor has become that character, responding to the psychological challenges of the moment

As digital narratives offer us 'the opportunity to enact stories rather than to merely witness them', the player no longer relies on the directorial control of camera angles and human acting conventions to convey emotions and mental states usually shown through physical gestures or facial expression.<sup>39</sup> Owing to the unique relationship between player and player-character, music represents audibly the inner responses to people and places that the character cannot verbally narrate to the player. This may in part be due to a similarity of the relationship superficially between sound and screen in film and video games which causes the interactor to impose music in the latter with the role of communicating character traits usually delivered through acting. In *Final Fantasy VII*, this individual response is that of the main player-character, Cloud, through whose eyes and ears the player visualises everything from his perspective. The player is, in the absence of human actors,

<sup>38</sup> Perlin, Ken, 'Can There Be a Form Between Game and a Story', *First Person*, p. 15-17

<sup>39</sup> Murray, Janet, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (Massachusetts, 1997), p. 170

correspondingly filtered a mixture of partial information and conflicting messages as presented to the player-character by the various non player-characters in the form of audio. Cut-scenes allow for the rendering of more convincing acting whilst providing graphically spectacular kinaesthetic rewards to the player, but they cause a jarring effect in gameplay which disconnects the player's joint agency from the character. Howells comments on the ineffectiveness of FMV sequences:

As the game strives to make gamers believe the imaginary, computer-generated – and often blocky and pixelated – game world, the transition to full-motion video reminds gamers that this is, in fact, not real, breaking the suspension of disbelief.<sup>40</sup>

Character development in video games thus appears to require the reduction of discontinuous elements which interrupt gameplay, restricting controlled visual splendour to the necessary detailing of narrative where in-game techniques are insufficient. Future releases in the Final Fantasy series suffer from balance in this way as many other developers are also pressured to display the power of console technology such as Sony's 'Emotion Engine'. Conversely, complete immersion in a video game can sometimes rely on immediacy which only 'exists at a second-order level: presence within another form of mediation' such as film.<sup>41</sup>

Music, then, is particularly useful in the conveying of character through association with their speech and movement. As the player sub-vocalises dialogue on screen it merges in their mental space with the corresponding music which allows the individual player to form an interpretation of how the character, Cloud, responds to other characters. This happens both directly and indirectly through the use of diegetic, non-diegetic and meta-diegetic sound. In the town of Junon, Cloud resuscitates a drowning girl and the local Innkeeper accommodates the characters overnight. In his sleep, Cloud converses with an unknown entity, supposedly his conscience through a mixture of grey and white text:

Grey text:     ...that reminds me  
 White text:    You again? Who are you?  
 Grey text:     You'll find out soon.

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<sup>40</sup> Howells, Sacha A., 'Watching a Game, Playing a Movie: When Media Collide', *Screenplay*, p. 115

<sup>41</sup> King, Geoff, and Krzywinska, 'Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces', *ScreenPlay*, p. 4

...but more importantly, five years ago...

White text: five years ago...Nibelheim?

This is accompanied by a track entitled 'Who Are You?' which is meta-diegetic in function but the melody is processed by a delay effect directly mimicking the second voice Cloud hears in his head (see Fig. 5.1). The following piano part and echoes are doubled on what sounds like a 'Crystal' MIDI sound.

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is labeled 'Piano' and contains two measures of music. The first measure is labeled 'Part 1 on C#' and the second is 'Part 2 on D'. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60. The second staff is labeled 'Echo' and shows a delayed version of the first part of the piano, with a bracket labeled 'Delay of part 1'. The third staff is labeled 'Echo' and shows a delayed version of the second part of the piano, with a bracket labeled 'Delay of Part 2'. The fourth staff is labeled 'Echo' and shows a delayed version of the first part of the piano, with a bracket labeled 'Delay of Part 1 on A'. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 5.1 Who Are You?

Part 1 utilises a dotted crotchet delay and Part 2 a semiquaver delay. The cross-rhythms result in an effect of constant semiquavers based on the delay of a quaver theme.

Upon awakening, the music becomes overtly diegetic as the town appears to be celebrating something. It turns out to not be Cloud's earlier heroics, and that the sound is coming from above the town on the adjoining Junon airstrip. Once Cloud reaches the celebrations, two comical soldiers demonstrate how to sing the song for 'Rufus's Welcoming Ceremony'. The music is a one minute looping fanfare which is not only excruciating after the thirtieth loop, but the lyrics contain no reference to Rufus's particular strengths and instead promotes blind worship of Shinra Company (see Fig. 5.3)

Soldiers: We'll sing!  
Quiet now...

(Music stops)

Soldiers: Ahhh, aah

(Music restarts)

Soldiers: Rufus, Rufus Shinra  
 We---are---Shinra Company--  
 The new----- President----  
 Oh Oh Shinra  
 Oh Oh Oh Shinra Inc.  
 Realization of the new era  
 Oh Oh Shinra  
 Oh Oh Oh Shinra Inc.  
 Building--the new era  
 Shinra Forever

Fig. 5.3 Rufus's Welcoming Ceremony

In the game these lyrics are presented as speech bubbles coming from the two comical soldiers and the effect of reading their speech along to the repetitive music is made more amusing as it exposes the repetitive, aimless glorification that these endless enemy soldiers display.

Other forms of direct association of music with a character include Vincent's and Red XIII's themes. Although not diegetic, we can still assume the music played in Red XIII's home in Cosmo Canyon is part of the tribal character echoed in his feather headdress accessory. The melody is played on a flute and makes use of acciaccaturas to give it folk music inflexions (see Fig. 5.4). This music is heard outside of Cosmo Canyon only once which is when Red XIII joins the team after being freed from his experimental cell in Hojo's laboratory.

The musical score for Rufus's Welcoming Ceremony is presented in two systems. The first system includes a Flute part and an Orchestra part. The Flute part begins with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 64$ . The Orchestra part features a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of Tambourine and Low Drum. The second system continues the Flute and Orchestra parts, with a measure rest in the Flute part.

Fig. 5.4 Cosmo Canyon

The initial playing of a theme with a character at the naming stage is the most direct form of music association in *Final Fantasy VII*. For the characters which share a more intricate relationship with Cloud, two and three stage theme development is used. Although Barret is given a theme at an early stage in the game, his eventual return to North Corel leads to a flashback which makes associates him with two themes, past and present. The music for Cid is also a two-stage process but this time it is not location specific and applies directly to the development of the character. Upon running into Cid on a rocket launch pad, the music coincides with Cid's first words to Cloud (see Fig. 5.5)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for 'Cid's Theme'. The first system is marked with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 88$ . It features three staves: 'Orchestra' (top), 'Electric Bass' (middle), and 'Percussion' (bottom). The 'Orchestra' staff contains a brass line with a firm, steady melody. The 'Electric Bass' staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth-note patterns. The 'Percussion' staff includes a snare drum line with a regular pulse and two bass drum hits. The second system, labeled 'Orch.' and 'Perc.', continues the arrangement with a similar structure, featuring a brass line with a melodic phrase and a consistent percussive accompaniment.

Fig. 5.5 Cid's Theme

Cid gives a small speech describing how his dream was taken away from him despite being such an excellent pilot. The theme played by the brass is firm and supported by a regular pulse from the percussion. Cid's speech is similarly proud yes spiteful.

Cid: They chose the best pilot in Shinra

No, in the world – me.  
 ...the launch got messed up.  
 That's why they became so anal!  
 Shinra nixed the program  
 After they told me how the future was Space Exploration  
 And got my damn hopes up...DAMN THEM!

The story of his past however is missing vital parts of information which explain his temper. The second part of this story is provided by the engineer who lives with him, Shera. As Cid leaves the room, the music stops and Shera says, 'I'm the one who ruined his dream' at which point a different music track is played which uses the same theme as Cid's Theme. This track, 'Sending a Dream into the Universe' is less obvious with the actual leitmotif itself only appearing after a solo guitar introduction (see Fig. 5.6).

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Acoustic Guitar' and the bottom staff is labeled 'A. Gtr.'. Above the top staff, there is a tempo marking '♩ = 90'. The music is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The top staff contains a series of chords and melodic lines, while the bottom staff contains a similar but more complex arrangement of chords and melodic lines, starting with a '5' above the first measure.

Fig. 5.6 Guitar Introduction to 'Sending a Dream into the Universe'

The music stops when she reaches the climax of the story as Cid saves Shera's life but ruins the rocket launch in the process.

Shera: At the very last second Cid pulls the plug  
 (music stops)

Shera: He pushed the emergency engine shut down switch to save my life  
 That why...it's all right. I don't care what the captain says,  
 I'll live my life for him

Cid: Shera! You still haven't served 'em tea!

After this touching story and a less stern version of Cid's leitmotif played on a solo clarinet, his character has an added dimension of time which allows the player-character to understand him on a deeper level. He was heroic in saving Shera's life, but not the iconic hero he had dreamed of becoming in outer space.

Aeris's Theme is one stage more complex in that music develops her character within tracks as well as in three separate stages. When Cloud first meets her she is selling flowers in the slums and her name appears on screen as 'Flower Girl'. The music playing is the track entitled 'Anxious Heart' which plays in many parts of Midgar. The second time Cloud meets Aeris his fall is broken by her flower garden in a church and as he wakes up the music that plays is 'Flowers Blooming in the Church' which contains a partial statement of Aeris's leitmotif (see Fig. 5.7)



Fig. 5.7 Aeris's leitmotif from 'Flowers Blooming in the Church'

It is in triple metre and remains incomplete. As explored in chapter three, this music track is used again to reassert locations of safety as it reappears in Aeris's house where she is looked after by Elmyra. Later in the game Aeris exchanges herself for Barret's daughter who is being held hostage and Elmyra tells the character party the story of how Aeris's mother died and left the child in her care. As the flashback begins, Elmyra explains that she is not her biological mother and that Aeris descended from an alien race known as the Ancients who can communicate with the Planet. The story is accompanied by 'Aeris's Theme' which completely states the leitmotif (see Fig. 5.8).

The image shows a musical score for the track 'Aeris's Theme'. It is written for an Orchestra in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (D major). The tempo is marked 'J = 70'. The score consists of four staves: Piano, Flute, Brass, and Strings. The Piano part begins with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The Flute part begins with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The Brass part begins with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The Strings part begins with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4.



Fig. 5.8 Aeris's Theme

Aeris is unexpectedly killed after a series of events which build up the importance of her relationship with Cloud. Along with the event sequence which takes the couple on a midnight date at Gold Saucer, Aeris's disappearance and death is preceded by a difficult scene where Cait Sith tells their fortune. Upon reading the result, the music played on their date entitled 'Interrupted by Fireworks' reappears.

Aeris: Tell us how compatible me and Cloud are!  
(Tifa turns away annoyed)

Cait Sith: This isn't good. I can't say it  
Poor Tifa.

Aeris: No! I promise I won't get mad!  
(Aeris never usually exclaims and shouts)

Cait Sith: Is that so? Then I'll tell you.  
Looks good. You are perfect for each other!  
Aeris's star and Cloud's Star!  
They show a great future!

Aeris is killed by Sephiroth whilst she is summoning a power that will help prevent his destruction of the Planet. Aeris's Theme begins in the middle of a cut-scene as she dies by Sephiroth's sword and continues afterward. The delicateness of the melody and simplicity of the chords in Aeris's Theme has the most powerful effect when she dies as it continues through the battle with the JENOVA monster and Sephiroth escapes. There are multiple battles with JENOVA and each is usually accompanied by a music track entitled 'J-E-N-O-V-A' but this time Aeris's Theme

plays through the battle and directly represents Cloud's continuing emotional response whilst being forced to fight immediately after Aeris's murder. Although he feels anger toward Sephiroth, he does not immediately release it and the music reflects this submission to his grief rather than immediate revenge. As Aeris collapses in his arms he continues to speak to her.

Cloud:       Aeris is gone  
                  Aeris will no longer talk, no longer laugh,  
                  cry...or get angry...  
                  What about us...what are WE supposed to do?  
                  What is this pain?  
                  My fingers are tingling.  
                  My mouth is dry.  
                  My eyes are burning!

Being forced into battle means reassertion of the relationship between the player and the character which is why the application of another character's theme has the powerful ability to allow the player to fully sympathise and experience 'exploring "your" personality' in the character of Cloud.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas, Jeremy, 'Enlightening Interactive Fiction: Andrew Plotkin's *Shade*', *Second Person*, p. 129

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