



LUND
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A MUSICAL JOURNEY

Music as Gameplay, Meaning and Narrative in Digital Games

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Höstterminen 2013

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Title: A Musical Journey – music as gameplay, meaning and narrative in digital games.

Year: Autumn 2013

Level: Bachelor degree

Department: Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University

Course Code: MUV K01 - 15 högskolepoäng/ECTS-credits

Supervisor: Mats Arvidson

ABSTRACT

Key words: Digital Games, Video Game Music, *Journey*, Narratology, Hermeneutics, Meaning, Play

This essay presents a detailed analysis of the music and its relations to gameplay, meaning and narrative in the interactive digital game *Journey*. Combining theories from hermeneutic musicology, musical narratology, narrative ludology and aesthetic theory, it provides a new perspective on music in digital games. Intended as a musicologically inclined complement to the existing studies of digital game music, it applies Jean-Jacques Nattiez's musical semiology and Nicholas Cook's model for analysing musical multimedia to digital games. As a development of the visually-inclined studies of digital game theory and ludology, it expounds upon the work of Graeme Kirkpatrick to take into account the dimension of sound.

*KEM**Aina*

INDEX

INTRODUCTION	4
Background	5
Theory	9
Method	13
ANALYSIS	15
Exposition	15
Play	17
Meaning	25
Narrative	30
CONCLUSION	34
Reflection	36
APPENDIX	38
Synopsis	38
Terminology	41
The Monomyth	41
REFERENCES	43
Source Material	43
Reference Literature	44

Dedication

I am very grateful to Ellen Måsbäck, David Smidelik, Ylva Måsbäck, Hanna Ekstam, Nina Moritz and Esteban

Soto for their help in playing through and discussing the game. I also wish to thank [PSN-user names]:
fsfaccioli, Iousm, Katx3x, sharanx182, Eduardo_Nacho, Vaiollette, Sadbummy, Rikrdo011, Smurf_Ninja_Max,
MicroBeasT, psykikzebra, Levrin2, Rastastien, tholapz, Dimi_Baitanciuc, TouchedPrawn, tschimub_f17,
pedroandrade99, Manwendil, SuezzyQBrown, Koopardon, rillirousku88, MrAwic, Lazzulious71497, Slayshi3,
sikitella, Rengenus, Slifs, Wolf-G4n, Rasmus-1556, ASideOfChidori, Alexandre-PR, wickey-kentackey and
lavender-elf for sharing their journeys with us.

INTRODUCTION

This essay looks to explore in greater depth an intersection of theories present in the study of modern digital games. It aims to combine, and study that very combination of, video game theory, musicology and narratology, and each chapter of the essay will follow the subdivision of play, meaning and narrative. The proposed object of study is the 2012 Playstation 3 game *Journey*, by thatgamecompany. The choice of subject matter has been made on several grounds, all tied to central issues pertaining to the validity and artistic value of the medium of digital games, namely, why do games matter, and why does music matter to games?

WHY GAMES MATTER

The be or not to be of games as art is a recurring and somewhat redundant discussion,¹ as the aesthetic and artistic merits of the medium become increasingly apparent with technological innovation bringing fidelity closer and closer to that of other mediums. However, it is not by virtue of appropriating conventions and techniques from film, literature, music or even narrative that games maintain importance. It is, fundamentally, because they are games, and as such offer a unique experience, not only to every player but at every playthrough. The interaction between play and rules, *paidia* and *ludus*,² subject and system is unique, and is what makes games interesting as entertainment, aesthetic objects or just tools for self-expression.

That is not to say that games are all about their mechanics, which is where *Journey* fits in. It is not all about its mechanics; it has no technological innovations at its core, and has actually simplified many of the conventions available to it. By doing so, it has enabled the synergy of different media within the medium to go that much further, and music is only one of the impacting and impacted parameters.

WHY MUSIC MATTERS TO GAMES

In much of the debate about games, music has received unduly little coverage, except within the genres for which it is the primary motivator, such as dance and music games, although there has been great improvement in the general debate (as described by Karen Collins, 2013: pp. vii-ix). Nevertheless there have been countless studies, from the psychophysiological

¹ One which is covered considerably more eloquently and unforgivingly by Kirkpatrick (2011: pp. 1-10).

² As defined by Roger Caillois (1958) and covered in more detail in the section about theories of play.

(Lennart E. Nacke, 2009; Nacke et al., 2010 & 2011) to the more content-oriented and affective (David Bessell, 2002; Pieter Jacobus Crathorne, 2010) illustrating the power and importance of sound and music in games.

With the study of game audio on the rise, the discussion is afloat, yet it all too often becomes just that, a discussion about audio and not music. There is no denying the immersive value of sound effects, and the extremely important role of soundscapes when constructing the virtual, yet often the musical dimension is simplified, or taken for granted when discussing these aspects.³ This is what I am interested in rectifying, and *Journey*'s subject matter caters to this aspect beautifully, as even its sound effects may be construed as music, with the overt music being all-pervasive and integrated into the very core of the gameplay experience.

Background

In order to make this analysis as full-fledged as possible, I shall endeavour to make an account of existing theories in not only game studies and game sound studies, but also in the aesthetics of play and the role of music in the creation of meaning and narrativity occurring in an instance of multimedia.

STUDYING GAMES

The academic study of digital games has been steadily increasing in both breadth and depth since shortly before the turn of the century, and the most defining discussions in its earlier years was tied to the advent of *ludology*. A school of thought centred around Scandinavian universities, the term was coined by Uruguayan researcher Gonzalo Frasca (1999), and was founded upon the concept of *ergodic* text launched by Espen Aarseth shortly before.⁴ The idea was, in short, to highlight games' intrinsic nature as simulations based on rule-systems, and their fundamental nature as play, making the study of digital games an heir to theories of play proposed by cultural historian Johan Huizinga (1945) and sociologist Roger Caillois (1958) rather than media, film or literary studies. Much of this work was in direct opposition

³ A very functional, workmanlike attitude towards music often shines through, not only in general video game literature such as Mark J. P. Wolf (2001 & 2008), but also in many books about music, that fundamentally do not actually talk about the music itself (G.W. Childs, 2007; Jeannie Novak & Aaron Marks, 2008).

⁴ Ergodic literature is explained by Aarseth (1997) as such where "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (p. 1). This is mainly argued in relation to what he calls nonergodic literature, where the sequence of events are fixed, unlike in an adventure game where player input changes the sequence and above all excludes some possible events from being experienced by the player (pp. 97-128). Although Aarseth's perceived passiveness of the traditional reader is a somewhat provocative simplification, he makes many valid points that have since been further developed.

to a perceived colonisation of the field by established theories, most prominent among them narratology, often exemplified by digital media theorist Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the holodeck* (1998).

The reactionary and somewhat aggressively defensive nature of the first ludological theories led them to take extreme positions, focusing on rules and systems to the exclusion of all else, in order to negate the influence of what they called "narratologists." In the end, their proclaimed adversaries were largely straw-men,⁵ and mostly served as a contrast against which new ideas could be formulated.⁶

Since then academic debate has been considerably more multifaceted, and most writers at least partially concede the importance of both play and narrative functions. The only consistently polemic part of the field has been the debate on ethics and morality in games, focusing on research of varying degrees of rigour exploring the link between digital games and violence, or other socially abhorrent behaviour.⁷

Meanwhile studies have tried to keep abreast with the continuing evolution of the medium, defining and redefining the limits and possibilities of digital games. In most definitions, as well as anthologies, histories and technical analyses, there is at least one conspicuous absence; sound.⁸ When discussing the art of videogames, Grant Tavinor (2009) explicitly defines it as a visual medium, barely acknowledging the existence of sound-based games, let alone the importance of sound within conventional games. The more reflective, aesthetic reasoning of Graeme Kirkpatrick (2011) points out the incongruence of the epithet "video" on a medium including multiple sensorial inputs, stressing the importance of touch (in relation to input devices, i.e. the controller), only to nearly completely omit sound from the equation. Indeed, Mark Grimshaw (2011) opens his valuable anthology of game sound with taking a stand against this misrepresentation by refusing to use the term video game, instead preferring the more factual and neutral "computer game" (this text adopts the term "digital game," following similar reasoning).

⁵ Discussed by Jenkins (2004: pp. 118-119), and summarised in a sober manner by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith and Susana Pajares Tosca (2013: pp. 214-216).

⁶ Markku Eskelinen (2001) was quite confrontational; texts by Aarseth (1997), Jesper Juul (1999 & 2001) and Frasca (1998) were also firm.

⁷ A brief summary of the frequent fallacies in this debate can be found in Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013: pp. 255-277).

⁸ This is true both of exhaustive works, such as those by Wolf (2001) and Bernard Perron & Wolf (2008), and introductory anthologies, e.g. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013).

PLAYING MUSIC

These omission and elisions do not mean that studies have not been made, as there are excellent overviews of game sound history as well as in depth functional investigations.⁹ The field, young as it is, has so far had an inclusive focus on all of game sound,¹⁰ limiting the analysis of music to a highly practical description of when and how it is deployed, with limited borrowings from film music theory to explore some of its affective qualities.¹¹

Problems have been encountered within game sound and music studies, when many of the dictums applicable to the cinema and its music are simply not relevant in the context of digital games. The unheard melodies espoused by Claudia Gorbman (1987) are only one ideal for the digital game composer, for whom not only underscoring, but clear semantic communication, interplay and reactivity are part of the equation (Collins, 2008a: Chapter 8). It is arguable that the magic function music has embodied in film, described by Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler (1994/1947: pp. 75-77) as bridging the gap between the spectator and the ghostly images of the lifeless screen, is even more present in the current state of the digital game industry. With an audience firmly accustomed to the peculiarities of film, some of the latent unrealism can still very much be found within the world of games, not least because of their overt nature as simulations of realities (rather than facsimiles of actual reality, as film tends to be viewed). The nature of the relation between picture and music, and the rhythmical correspondences between them (as highlighted originally by Sergei Eisenstein)¹² persists in the digital game, but in a modified manner, and supplemented by the dimension of action from the player. In this situation, audio and music also become feedback and plaything, enforcing the sense of environment, clarifying the rules and confirming and reinforcing player action.

What has been primarily lacking is a musicological perspective, introducing the academic analysis and interpretation of music to the somewhat technologically biased study of game sound.¹³ Musicology, and with it ethnomusicology and musical anthropology has

⁹ Functional here refers to the music function within the digital game, in programming and affective terms; when and how it is played back. Not to be confused with the functional analysis of music theory.

¹⁰ Or "game audio," as in the seminal works by Collins (2008a, 2008b & 2013).

¹¹ Aaron Oldenburg (2013) provides an intriguing exception, discussing sound and music in games from a sound art perspective.

¹² The views of the Russian director and film critic are related and discussed by Adorno & Eisler (1994/1947: pp. 65-70), as well as Nicholas Cook (1998: pp. 49-56).

¹³ Most literature, (G. A. Sanger, 2003; G. W. Childs, 2007; Novak & Marks, 2008) are more geared toward production than analysis, while many articles touch on the difficulties of indeterminacy in analysis, but do not sufficiently problematize interpretation (a good example being the anthology edited by Grimshaw, 2011).

inspired a couple of studies,¹⁴ but hermeneutic and semantic perspectives on music, especially the focus on narrativity in music, have so far largely been absent.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Narrative has been a hotly contested subject within both musicology and video game studies, essentially reflecting a resistance to external story-conventions being applied forcefully to the medium – a form of appropriation of semantics. The fault often lies in a narrow conception of narrative, and what may generate it, as well as the forms that it may take. In his article “Musical narratology: a theoretical outline” (1991) Lawrence Kramer argues against the existence of the very same, posing as a “cardinal fact that music can neither be nor perform narrative” (p. 143). It is not quite as straightforward as all that however, as Kramer later makes clear that it is the structuralising aspects of narratology to which he objects. Here is where our paths meet, for as much as it is an indication of structure, narrativity first and foremost represents a force for meaning (p. 161). It is in this sense that it is highly relevant to discuss digital games as “narrative architecture,” as is posited by comparative media theorist Henry Jenkins (2004) in his article on the subject. The article is mostly geared as a consolidation between the ludological and narratological extremes within game studies, but also serves for opening up the debate on music and narrativity. Even within linear, pre-composed music, narrative may be experienced not only as an authorial will to exhibit a sequence of events, but also as an invitation to explore a soundscape, or sonorous space, letting the listener define and arrange narrative elements subjectively, thus creating a temporal narrative from a spatial architecture.¹⁵

This can be taken one step further in conjunction with digital games, as the player often moves around in a virtual space where music reacts to the movement as well as temporal events, thus making the player the composer of their own timeline through exploration of space. Jenkins (2004: p. 120) observes that “if some games tell stories, they are unlikely to tell them in the same ways that other media tell stories,” the implication of which will prove crucial.

¹⁴ Online interaction through music especially has been discussed and will be touched upon later.

¹⁵ Most notably seen in the development of the late 20th century occidental avant-garde art music, and the creation and growth of sound art as a creative field (Oldenburg, 2013).

Theory

To study the way that play, meaning and narrative interact and intertwine, a limited selection of theoretical perspectives informing the analysis process will be presented. These have been gathered from a myriad of different scholars and fields in order to gain as wide and interesting a perspective as possible.

THEORIES OF PLAY

The aforementioned ludologists opened up an interesting connection between digital games and their analogue predecessors, and the link made to earlier researchers of games and play in different cultures provides an enlightening perspective on some of the intrinsic properties of games. To date, the categories identified by Caillois (1958: pp. 30-51) are still both relevant and inspiring. They are a continuation and criticism of the reasoning put forward by Huizinga (1945) outlining the impact games and play had to different activities within human societies, and Caillois tries to define the different type by grouping them into four categories; *Agôn* (Competition), *Alea* (Chance), *Mimicry* (Simulation) and *Ilinx* (Vertigo). These four fundamental categories are then put into relation to the two contrasting states of *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* is defined as the free form of play, spontaneous and unbound, while *ludus* denotes the strict rule-bound and systematic nature of games (1958: p. 27). Any given activity of play can be defined somewhere along an axis between these two poles (see figure 1), and Caillois further discusses how each category of play relates to this continuum (pp. 52-65).

Figure 1.¹⁶

	<i>Agôn</i>	<i>Alea</i>	<i>Mimicry</i>	<i>Ilinx</i>
<i>Paidia</i>	Non-regulated Racing/Wrestling Athletics	Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails	Children's imitation Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks/Disguises	Children "whirling" Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing
Kite-flying Solitaire Crossword puzzles	Boxing, Billiards, Fencing, Checkers, Football, Chess	Betting Roulette	Theatre, Spectacles in general	Volador Traveling Carnivals Skiing Mountain climbing Tightrope walking
<i>Ludus</i>	Contests, Sports	Simple/complex/ continuing lotteries		

All digital games have fundamental elements of *ludus* integrated, simply for the necessity of scripted rules in programming, but may have varying degrees of *paidia*-

¹⁶ This is a slightly modified version of the table used by Caillois (1958, p. 64) with translations by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013, p. 32).

motivation for different types of games. Although criticised for some suppositions, especially Huizinga's isolating concept of the "magic circle,"¹⁷ the concepts identified by Caillois hold relevance today, and will serve as pillars in the analysis to come.

When Kirkpatrick (2011) posits digital games as aesthetic objects, the central terms are play and form, which he argues have been at the core of aesthetic theory throughout its foundation (p. 21). Play itself, and the rules of play, dictate interaction and expectation, and constitute the defining feature of digital games as a medium. Throughout a thoroughly exhaustive discussion about the parameters of digital games, with a deep exploration of the tactile dimension and the meaning of the controller (pp. 87-118), music and sound are only briefly touched upon. It is my intention to bring Kirkpatrick's keen analysis of the tactile into touch with the duality of sound and image, and demonstrate how music not only interprets, but also guides and dictates the actions that are conceivable.

THEORIES OF MEANING¹⁸

As a basis for the interpretative analysis I will use Jean-Jacques Nattiez's concept of a semiology of music, based on the tripartition of three different levels: the *poietic*, the *immanent* and the *esthesis*.¹⁹ The *poietic* level is the process of creating the object for interpretation; in terms of music it is the ideas, intentions and material methods of composing. The *esthesis* level is the process taking place in every listener, the active interpretation of the work. The *immanent* (or neutral) level is called the trace, being the material work of music in and of itself, analysis of which rests primarily descriptive (pp. 12-14, 28-32). What is fundamentally important about the two processes (the *poietic* and the *esthesis*) is just that; they are processes and not fixed entities, and they occur simultaneously at all junctures in the production, reception and analysis of a work.²⁰ Following these definitions, the analysis will be made describing the immanent level, while presenting the information available about the *poietic* process, and focusing on the active process of *esthesis*; Nattiez's theory thus acts as framework rather than as detailed tool.

¹⁷ The magic circle was coined by Huizinga (1945: p. 20), but only as one of several potential delineations for play. It was appropriated by digital game studies as the idea that games take place in an isolated space not affecting the outside world (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013: pp. 29-31)

¹⁸ "Criticism – the study of the meaning and value of artworks – does not figure in the explicit programmes of musicology and theory" reads Joseph Kerman's provocative statement in the introduction to his confrontational book *Musicology* (1985: p. 16). Whether or not his assessment of the academic world of the time is astute it has led to developments of several critical methodologies with meaning particularly in the headlights. The modification and adaption of existing models of analysis into the creation of a personal analytic methodology is suggested as a necessary element in a critical process (p. 146).

¹⁹ This tripartition is a development of semiotic concepts from Ferdinand de Saussure, through Charles Sanders Peirce, to Jean Molino (Nattiez, 1990: pp. 3-16).

²⁰ Nattiez discusses this, as well as the somewhat problematic placement of the musical score in the relation to it all (1990: pp. 74-82).

Exploring the connotative and combinatory nature of multimedia, Nicholas Cook (1998) discusses the creation and emergence of meaning in the intersection between different media, especially focusing on the opposition of music and image. Meaning, he contends, arises from the interaction between elements, and although his analysis has been pointed out as limited in its focus on synchronicity and linearity,²¹ the theoretical concepts outlined are encompassing enough to remain relevant, although I will effect some slight adaptations in order to actualise it for the purpose at hand.

Cook defines three models of multimedial relationships; conformance, complementation and contest, each exploring the relationships between constituent media in the process of projecting and creating meaning. *Conformance* occurs when the media project the same idea, while *Contest* is the opposite, where rather than embodying a pre-existing unifying meaning, the media vie for the interpretative space, projecting different meanings resulting in the *emergence* of new meaning. Meanwhile, *Complementation* refers to instances when the differences between media are not at odds, but rather complement each other (Cook, 1998: pp. 98-105). Cook argues that nearly all instances of multimedia,²² at least when analysed globally, are examples of the *contest* and *emergence* principles of meaning.²³ On a local level it is nevertheless profitable to identify different instances, wherefore I will make use of it to study specific instances of interaction between different media present in *Journey*, focusing on music, sound, image and action.

THEORIES OF NARRATIVE

The theoretical framework behind this essay takes as its base the conception of narrative as an abstract sequence of events (Kramer, 1991: p. 143) or a change of an object or state of affairs (Eero Tarasti, 2004: p. 283) taking place in time, but also as a fundamental hermeneutic activity, central to the human existence in, and experience of, the world (Ricoeur, 1988). I therefore see music as inherently narrative, and a creator, modifier and intensifier of meaning.

This focus on temporality recalls Nattiez's reasoning surrounding what he calls the "narrative impulse" (1990: p. 127-129). Nattiez states (as does Kramer) that music cannot be narrative in and of itself, but that the very fact of it taking place over a period of time invites

²¹ Primarily by Collins (2008: pp. 3-4).

²² IMM, or instance of multimedia, is Cook's invented term to denote a single "work" of multimedia.

²³ Elaborated upon in a later article by Cook (2001: pp. 181-184), the central tenant of emergent meaning is termed conceptual blending, where attributes from separate media combine to form new meaning. The media involved need to have certain enabling similarities, essentially making it plausible for the mind to make a connection; it is their differences that are then interpreted and reinterpreted within a "blended space."

the audience to create, or interpret a narrative sequence of events. The main argument against music's own narrative potential is the fact that it cannot be precise, it may indicate a movement but not who or what is making that movement, nor towards where (p. 128). I would argue that this very quality gives music a highly potent narrativity, and that it is merely an extension of the already active and complementary activity that any recipient is involved in, even in the most detailed and clearly structured narrative. Both Nattiez and Kramer argue for a heightened awareness of the subjective in an analysis, and of the active process of interpretation, of which this creation of narrative could be seen as a pinnacle.

When discussing the relationship between games and narrative, and the ineffectual division between the concepts, Jenkins (2004) explores the spatial nature of narration in digital games. Rather than following a pre-scripted narrative, much narrative meaning in games is derived from exploration of the simulated space. Narrative can, according to Jenkins, appear in four main ways.

In *evoked narratives*, the game garners meaning through references to already established genres or stories, thus “borrowing” an external narrative and appropriating it to the gaming experience. *Enacted narratives* may also include external associations, but situates the player in a clear situation as an actor within the narrative space.²⁴ Games can also have *embedded narratives*, where the game world becomes a fount for information that the player moves through, slowly uncovering different aspects of the world and the stories present there in. The iconic genre for this method would be the detective story. Lastly, *emergent narratives* (being a much debated and sometimes idealised subject of discussion) are what may appear from an unscripted interaction of the game elements or rules (2004: pp. 123-129).²⁵

It can be very hard to distinguish between an *emergent narrative*, and one simply constructed by the player imbibing essentially static and unrelated objects with meaning, and for this reason *emergence* will only be discussed briefly in the conclusion. *Journey* primarily displays tendencies of *embedded* and *enacted narrative*, whilst *evocation* appears more in content external to the game itself (soundtrack titles, director's commentaries), so these two will be more present in the analysis.

²⁴ Jenkins (2004: p. 125) compares enacted narratives to the *commedia dell'arte* where established narratives and archetypes are played out repeatedly, but with an improvisational element in each retelling.

²⁵ Compare and contrast to Cook's concept of *emergence* as it relates to multimedia. In the one differences between constituent media blend together to create new meaning, while in the other architectural elements of a simulated space (in itself an instance of multimedia) combine in complex and unpredictable ways to create narrative. The core idea of emergence remains quite similar, complex and unforeseen results stem from combination, though it is active on different levels of meaning in each case.

Method

PRACTICAL PREMISES

I have based my analysis on the downloadable original version of *Journey* (thatgamecompany, 2012a), with additional information and perspectives having been acquired through the official soundtrack release (Austin Wintory, 2012), piano reduction of selections from the score (Wintory, 2013), the *Journey: Collector's Edition* director commentaries and developer diary (thatgamecompany 2012b), and the annotated soundtrack published on composer Austin Wintory's official YouTube-channel ([Austin Wintory], 2013-03-03).

The game, which has a duration of approximately 1.5 to 3 hours depending on play style, was played through a total of 10 times by me, with different playthroughs focusing on different elements. An important part of the process has also been to observe other players' behaviour, and for this I have acquired the help of half a dozen testers. I have observed a total of seven playthroughs, through discreet observation of complete uninterrupted game sessions, as well as repeated chapters and gameplay variations. When talking to test subjects, the main focus has been the overall experience, with the narrative arc, symbolism and multiplayer aspect central topics. I have also consulted online forums on thatgamecompany's website to find inspiration and information about game states and glitches from players who have a vastly greater experience than mine in this respect.²⁶

This analysis presents what is essentially a qualitative case study, and it is important to remain conscious of the problematic role of the analyst in this scenario.²⁷ Even under traditional circumstances the subjectivity of the observer is cause for concern and careful monitoring, but the malleable nature of the gaming experience complicates the matter further. It is for these reasons that I have included observation of other players, as well as assessment of other players' discussion about their experiences online, to balance out my own perspective somewhat. However, the study itself relies on my own experiences, and is therefore anchored to my subjective perception and interpretation. I have approached the analysis through repeated playthroughs with detailed note-taking, verifying those structural elements that I

²⁶ It is appropriate to thank a number of contributors, whose observations have greatly furthered this research (even though they may not be aware of it), among them the forum user names of *Klowny*, *Aquari*, *ChirpyCloud*, *Flokati*, *KBABZ*, *KitKatPurrpurr* and *lisasunny*.

²⁷ A case study is used to gain thorough insight into the object (Göran Wallén, 1996, pp. 115-117), but also to enable certain generalisations about digital game music as a field. (Rolf Ejvegård, 2009, pp. 35-36). The nature of digital games research implies a certain degree of participant observation (ibid. pp. 76-77), that I have attempted to address, as well as complement with other's experiences. The qualitative approach is unavoidable, as the analysis depends on description, interpretation and discussion of meaning in the object of study. I have strived to be as transparent, structured and methodically aware as possible, to offset the pitfalls of subjectivity (Wallén, 1996, pp. 73-79, 94).

could ascertain, and attempting evocative and informative description to provide insight and understanding.

Because of the nature of the medium, it is important to engage with a technical discussion detailing the different possible ways that the music may interact with and react to the player throughout the game. This requires us to make some assumptions regarding the programming behind the music and sounds based mainly on my own esthetic process, and interpretative analysis. I have made use of as much material as I could glean about the poetic side of things as well, in order to determine what the actual immanent nature of the game is. With that said, there will more than probably be some conjectures that are less than completely accurate, but the conclusions drawn still have value, considering that the esthetic process is what finally actualises meaning.

THE DIEGETIC DILEMMA

An important part in discussing music in games is the concept of diegesis and interactivity. It has been argued that the traditional lens through which film music has been analysed has a number of considerable flaws when applied to game music analysis.²⁸ At the very least it becomes restricted in its usefulness, and needs supplement of some kind. Kristine Jørgensen (2011) has argued that the inherently informative aspect of game audio in the relation between player and game makes the traditional distinction of diegetic/non-diegetic problematic, on the verge of untenable. She proposes a set of five distinct categories,²⁹ focusing on game sound's functionality as an interface with which the player can interact and learn information about the game state.

Jørgensen's model is mostly adapted for analysing sounds rather than music, and shall thus be a sort of first raster of reference. Following the nature of *Journey* and the use of music therein, I have chosen to also make use of Collins' (2008a) definitions, due to their focus and applicability on game music in specific (as opposed to game audio in general). To this a number of perspectives and definitions need to be clarified, the first of which is one of the cardinal elements of film music analysis, too long haphazardly reproduced in game sound theory; diegesis.

²⁸ For good discussions about game audio and levels of diegesis, I recommend Collins (2008a: chapter 7), Jørgensen (2011), Axel Berndt (2011) and Ulf Wilhelmsson & Jacob Wallén (2011).

²⁹ These categories are, in ascending order of diegetic integration: Metaphorical (nondiegetic), Overlay (static user interface), Integrated (related to user interface elements present within the diegesis), Emphasised (system generated sounds disguised as diegetic sounds) and Iconic (fully diegetic sounds) (2011: pp. 92-93).

Collins uses the diegetic-nondiegetic divide as a springboard to set up more defined terms relevant to the medium of digital games. These two possible states (which may also be blurred by sounds and music existing between states of diegesis) are further augmented by the level of dynamism in the sound, separated into three levels: nondynamic, adaptive and interactive (2008a: pp.124-128). Nondynamic music proceeds completely independently from the players action, while adaptive changes according to predefined moments in time or space. Interactive music acts responsively, and can be consciously manipulated through player action. The six resulting categories, which will recur in the analysis, are seen in figure 2.

Figure 2.

Nondiegetic nondynamic	Diegetic nondynamic
Nondiegetic adaptive	Diegetic adaptive
Nondiegetic interactive	Diegetic interactive

ANALYSIS

Exposition

Journey opens with a white screen. The first active element you perceive is music; slow, meditative notes on bass flute and cello guide the player into a slowly expanding environment of glistening sand dunes. As the visual perspective expands from individual grains to take in the immense desert landscape, the music (now given force by a string orchestra and electroacoustic ambience) rises to an all-consuming climax, and finally abates as the first visual impression of the player character is seen on screen.

Formally, it is an adventure game with platform elements, taking place in a simulated world with three dimensions.³⁰ Its main player character (presented in third-person view) is an androgynous armless avatar clad in a loose-fitting cloak, which doubles as an interface for in-game progress as it gains a scarf that can lengthen or shorten according to the player's abilities. These definitions, while accurate, fall short of describing the essence of the game, and the experience of playing it.

³⁰ An adventure game being defined as one where the player participates in or uncovers a narrative (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013: p. 49), while platform games include an element of navigation between platforms situated in the simulated space (ibid. pp. 70-72).

As is common in certain adventure games, focus lies on exploring, along the eponymous journey towards the far-off goal of the glowing peak of a mountain, revealed simultaneously as the opening credits. The game is divided into nine sections (including the end credits), each having a slightly different focus, alternating between exploration, imitation and vertigo.³¹

This alternation between gameplay types is one foundation for the fundamental narrative, which will be discussed further on. The last and potentially most important parameter of the game is other players. Through the use of the Playstation Network (PSN), each time you play the game your console will attempt to connect you to another person playing at the same time, anywhere in the world. When connected, they appear as an identical character as you, except for small details such as the embroidery of their cloak (indicating number of completed playthroughs) and the symbol they emit when “singing.” No nametags, no character customisation, no information whatsoever to indicate age, nationality, gender or any other personality trait than their experience level in *Journey*, and the manner that they move and act within the game world.³² This feature is one of the most remarkable in the game, and will be explored more fully when reviewing the aspect of meaning.

MAP OF THE JOURNEY

Before we go into any more detail about the way the game plays and the interaction between image, sound and action, a brief summary of the stages of the game is appropriate (a more detailed layout is available in the appendix, including notes on the visuals, play-type and music for each chapter).³³

The game follows the outline of the *monomyth*, as presented by comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell (1949). The monomyth is a generalisation and distillation of mythological narratives from across the world, identifying common themes and focusing on the different developmental stages that a protagonist typically goes through in coming-of-age stories. The overall arc sees the protagonist leave the normal world, aided by some supernatural entity, going through trials and temptations until finally reaching conciliation with their supreme purpose, and atoning for their mistake, reaching a state of apotheosis from which several possible conclusions are possible, the important one for our purposes being a

³¹ The latter two referring to Caillois' terms *Mimicry* and *Ilinx*.

³² A quick note on titles: within the game each section remains unnamed, which has resulted in several naming conventions among game aficionados and reviewers alike (thatgamecompany forums, Extra Credits). I have chosen to base my naming convention on that of studio director Jenova Chen (Variety Media LLC., 2013-02-08), because of their focus on simplicity and architectural features, changing a few when their symbolic nature would unduly impact the analysis.

³³ It is not until you have completed the game and watched the entire credits that a screen identifying the PSN-user names appears

return to the normal world to share the acquired knowledge/enlightenment/maturity (a mapping of the monomyth to the chapters of *Journey* can also be found in the appendix).

Journey's protagonist begins by moving toward the distant mountain peak (*Chapter 1. Introduction*), traversing a vast desert littered with ruins of a fallen civilisation (*2. Bridge* and *3. Desert*), before sliding through a city half-submerged under sand leads to them falling down to the underground (*4. Canyon*). While exploring this underground, they travel through a blue/green world reminiscent of the bottom of the ocean and encounter vicious flying machines (*5. Cave*) before reaching a temple-like tower (*6. Tower*). Ascending this tower takes them to the snow-capped slopes of the mountain, from which they struggle to reach the summit before collapsing in the snow (*7. Mountain*). The first six chapters all end with a vision relayed by mysterious beings robed in white, which give a broad historical narrative. These beings now reappear, granting a spiritual boon to the traveller who is revived, and is now granted greater powers than ever, enabling them to finally reach the peak, walking into a white light (*8. Summit*).

Play

The core game mechanics of *Journey* are simple to grasp, but nevertheless offer a complex array of possibilities when it comes to interaction, and when studied closely are not quite as simple. The key interest for this analysis is the fact that all actions have not only sonorous effects, but often also musical implications, as the sounds produced have a deep relation with the music surrounding them.

HOW TO ACT

The basic actions available to the player are *walking*, *flying* and *singing* (they are also able to control the rotation of the camera, which is a significant feature, but in terms of intent and usage will be grouped with walking). Each of these actions, apart from forming the basic array of options available at any time, is also deeply imbedded with variation, pleasure and meaning. Additionally, they are combinable, as the mastery of the three types of action can create new subsets of the overarching category of movement.

Walking is the first mechanic formally introduced to the player. It involves manipulation of the left analogue stick to make the player character move, and the right analogue stick (or the tilt of the controller) to rotate the camera perspective around the player

character.³⁴ When first encountered, this form of movement will cause the player character to walk in the indicated direction through the projected three-dimensional space. The input is in relation to the player's point of view (left, right, away from or towards the camera), which facilitates several different techniques of movement, depending on the degree of manipulation of the viewing angle and the character's own motion.

As the player starts navigating the depicted environment, it will gradually become apparent that the player character's movement is affected by the surface upon which they travel. Walking up a slope will slow down the character, whilst trying to walk down the slope causes the character to start sliding in a surf-like manner, creating a forwards momentum that carries them until the ground levels out again. The character is also able to climb shallow steps and jump small ledges, all of which it does independently as soon as such an obstacle is encountered. All of this gives the environment a tactile dimension, as it immediately affects the player's ability to move the character, and thus the level design itself creates a form of ebb and flow in momentum and movement, profoundly influencing the pace of exploration, and thus of experience. Each type of walking is also marked by the sounds, from softly crunching footsteps in the sand, to the wind-like rustling when surfing down a dune. Except for the ambient sound effects, this form of player interaction is among the least musical, though the music is often matched in pace and tempo to the expected form of locomotion, which will be further explored at the end of this section.

When jumping up to higher plateaus and down from rock shelves, the latter results in the character's cloak billowing out to slow the fall, creating a sensation of *flying* through the air. This hang-gliding technique can be further exploited by the use of the **X**-button. The ability is introduced at the moment when the player character receives the first part of their scarf, a tail-like piece of cloth woven into the fabric of the character's cloak, billowing out behind it from shoulder height. This scarf may then be lengthened or shortened by encountering glowing glyphs, or by failing to avoid dangerous obstacles.

It is no coincidence that the two concepts are introduced together, as experimentation will alert the player to the fact that the ability to jump is intricately linked to the length of the scarf. When in contact with other pieces of cloth, made from the same fabric as the traveller's cloak, encountered in many different shapes and sizes throughout the game, the scarf is

³⁴ The basic (DualShock or Sixaxis) Playstation 3 controller is a wireless motion sensitive controller with a control scheme including four symbolic buttons (**△**, **○**, **X**, **□**), four directional arrow buttons (up, down, right, left), four "shoulder buttons" (L1, L2, R1, R2), two analogue sticks (joysticks controllable by each thumb) and three central menu buttons (start, select, PS). As will become apparent, *Journey* utilises only a small subset of these buttons actively.

gradually filled with glowing glyphs. These glyphs are then depleted upon using the jump ability. The longer the scarf, the further you can jump (or hang-glide).

The interaction with cloth-based objects and glyphs is a decidedly more musical activity, as the small chimes and glistening electronic sounds that occur upon contact are very musical in nature, as is the tingling sound made when flying with help from the scarf. Both types of sound intermingle almost seamlessly with the background electronic element of the game's early music, thus creating a sensation of unity in harmony, but also aural illusions where phrases in the music sometimes can give the impression that another player is present and either flying, or singing in the vicinity.

No activity, however, is as musical as *singing* (or chirping/talking/shouting), which the player can engage in by pressing the **O**-button. Available from the very beginning of the game, its mechanical functions remain only partially explained throughout the experience, depending on what areas you discover.

Each button press causes the character to nod its head and emit a somewhat birdlike cry,³⁵ which creates an expanding translucent sphere, or sound-field, with the character's identifying glyph symbol rising within it. The player may also control the amplitude of the chirp, by holding down the button for various lengths of time (if holding it down for longer than two seconds, the character automatically emits a loud chirp). Not only the amplitude is changed by different inputs, the make-up of the sound is also varied between three modes: fast, medium and long chirp. The fast chirps are a more clearly articulated note, that is always in tune with the background music,³⁶ and changes in an aleatoric manner (the player cannot control which note is played; rather the game randomly selects a note from those in the main scale, with a preference for the tonic).³⁷ The longer chirps have a fewer selection of notes available, but on the other hand appear with slightly different timbres, each group having at least two different versions, which in turn sound the tiniest bit different for each iteration.

This timbral variation together with the mechanics for indeterminacy gives the mere act of "singing" both a musical and a creative sensibility. Enjoyment can be had simply by repeating the action in different manners, exploring the relations of chance and of harmony,

³⁵ It is in fact a combination of "animals (mostly various birds), flute, cello and electronic sounds. And the tiniest bit of human voice" ([Austin Wintory], 2013-03-03, 04:39-05:32).

³⁶ A feature noted by several reviewers as well as players (Clements, 2012-03-01; thatgamecompany, 2013: *Little details that mean a lot*), resulting in cases of players singing for each other, and accompanying dance with "song". The most common term to refer to this kind of behaviour among players is *chirping*, due to the mix of birdlike and musical qualities of the sound (thatgamecompany, 2013).

³⁷ The main scale changing somewhat through the game, but resting largely in a Dorian mode with either B, F# or A as tonal centre.

even more so when another player is present, with whom the chirp becomes the principal form of communication.

Apart from its allure as an aesthetic feature and activity, the singing also carries significant mechanical importance, as it is the main way of interacting with other cloth creatures and elements in the environment. Through such interactions it enables the player to surge upwards, release other creatures, call such creatures to aid and solve different puzzles, depending on context. It is thus not only a reactive sound effect, but also a form of communication, a gameplay-changing form of interaction and the only arguable source of truly diegetic music.³⁸

Another way to interpret the sound making qualities of singing is through Collins' idea of kinesonic congruence, following which the sounds made by the player character forms an extension of the player's own sense of self (2013: pp. 41-43). Being in short an extension of the notion of tools being viewed conceptually as part of a person's own body (the cardinal example being driving a car, wherein the driver mentally turns themselves rather than the steering wheel), the sounds made with a character in a digital game informs and defines that virtual tool. Through the intermediary of the physical controller, the player character or avatar is integrated into the player's perceived self, becoming one of the frontiers through which the (virtual) world is experienced. This distinction gains considerable significance when considered in conjunction with the very syncretic nature of the relationship between the player character's sound and the surrounding music.

PLAYING MUSICALLY

The dynamic nature of the music changes throughout *Journey*, with different levels of adaptability often paired with different expectations of freedom of movement in any given gameplay section. *Journey*'s degree of kinesonic synchresis³⁹ has already been touched upon with the sound effects appearing either as a reaction to the player's or environmental changes (the crunch of sand/snow when walking),⁴⁰ or as a direct effect of a player action (chirps, flying). The playback of these sounds follows many of the conventions established of variation to create a random element, evade boredom and increase the sense of a realistic

³⁸ It ties into discussions about diegetic music making between players through online play, and the community and identity creation involved in such activities, for a general overview see Collins (2013: pp. 89-121), and for a more specific study of the virtual musicianship in *Lord of the rings* online, I refer to William Cheng's (2012) study on the subject.

³⁹ See the discussion above regarding the synchronicity of image/action/sound (Collins, 2013: pp. 35-38)

⁴⁰ In these instances, the associative process is very much like that in movies, except that it is enforced by the perceived cause-effect between the player's own input and the game's feedback. The sound production uses similar means as that of movie production *foley*-artists, using other sounds to evoke a specific effect, strengthened by the audio-visual connection, e.g. the footsteps in the snow in *Journey* are actually variations of a microphone thrust into finely ground dust from potato chips (thatgamecompany, 2012b: director's commentary).

dynamic sonic environment (Collins, 2013: p. 37). This is most notable in the chirps, with variations in volume, timbre and duration giving it a sense of being a living sound. All other sound effects, such as wind and cloth interaction, are similarly aided by the chaotically changing details, giving the impression of a breathing world, rather than a continuous playback of audio files. This is key to the feeling of immersion, and in the prolongation to the pleasure derived from interacting and escaping into this world and its music.

The diegesis of *Journey* is our first port of call for analysing the role of music. The game presents us with what at once is both more straightforward and more complicated than traditional game music. For one part, it is formally quite clearly nondiegetic (in that there is no obvious source of music within the diegesis), yet it is affected (and affects) the player's behaviour. It fulfils none of the more direct functions of interface discussed by Jørgensen, since the game itself lacks the different layers of diegesis (or interface), and presents everything visually as though a part of the game world (the one exception being the pictorial instructions in the beginning). This is a conscious design choice made by the creators, and foregoes the vast array of information often available to players in digital games.

The very lack of overt interface and conventionally codified communication leaves much room for the music to take on a symbolic and guiding function, thus not merely resting in a metaphorical position of creating an environment and accompanying mood, but actually driving the player forwards, indicating the objectives and the possible interpretations of meaning. The matter is further convoluted by the fact that the sounds emitted by the player character have such a musical quality, and rests in harmony with the music, somewhat shrouding the issue of the music's existence within the game world. Thus the exact nature of the music and its relation to the game world remains somewhat undecided, especially so since the player's relationship to the music does not remain fixed, but changes throughout the course of the game. The conceptual blurring⁴¹ between boundaries of sound and music only help in bringing the metaphorical nature of the music to the fore, and thus highlighting some of its potencies for interaction and interpretation.

To illustrate, I shall provide two short examples of analysis, one of the relatively restricted yet non-dictated Bridge section (otherwise known as Broken Bridge or Threshold), and the more linear and fast-paced Canyon (also known as Sunken City).

⁴¹ Not to be confused with Cook's term "conceptual blending". By blurring I here mean the erasing of strictly defined boundaries between what is experienced as "foreground" sound effects, and what is considered "background" music.

2. Bridge

The player has just passed through the game's first grand archway, possibly having seen the suggested optical illusion of another traveller at the end of the tunnel. As the music surges, the screen fades into white, and the music disappears. The diegetic world is far from silent however, as the rush of falling sand reaches the ears as the player is shown a valley full of tumbledown bridges and archways surrounded by sandfalls.⁴² The traveller runs to the end of one such bridge segment, being given a clear point of vantage to survey the area. Littered across the sand dunes are pieces of some metallic machinery, and an occasional glint of cloth and glowing glyph. Here, the player is mainly guided by the architectural layout to figure out the way forward. The pillars and broken bridge segment are prominent in the middle of the valley, and apart from the allure of the glowing glyph (appealing to the sense of collectability and accumulation of ability), the metallic elements with cloth sticking out of them are a natural first point of interrogation. Should the player attempt to explore the limits of the basin, the bordering sandfalls will, with the assistance of incrementally increasing wind, keep the traveller from traversing the formal boundaries of the space. An integral sensation of being forcefully blown back rests on the overwhelming noise of falling sand and force of wind conveyed through sound.

The lack of music and the high starting point contrive to give the player a sense of calm; all of the visual space is known and nothing within the aural is giving any sense of temporality. As the player starts to move around, it becomes evident that gusts of wind direct the potential directions of surfing throughout the section, leaving the traveller to either walk or fly limited distances if not following the direction of the wind. The slow pace of gameplay in this section is here a way for the designers to indicate that the player can take their time, hopefully discovering some of the fundamentals about flying and activation in the process, and most importantly allowing the network ample time to connect to another player via Internet.

When one of the correct cloth-banners has been appropriately sung at, it will retract into the metallic piece and reappear as a myriad of small scraps of cloth that will then fly towards the bridge, completing one of the lost arches. As soon as the first such cloth is activated a discreet electronic drone starts up with several small phrases articulated by chime-like musical voice. This melodious segment bears strong resemblance to sounds made by

⁴² Think waterfalls with an elemental change.

travellers, and further anchors the possibility of another person appearing in the player's sphere. Should another player be connected, the music would then add an additional layer (in this case the harp), a process that occurs at many points throughout the game. These subtle changes in the music guide the player through the solving of the puzzle, and nudge them towards the concept of multiplayer interaction.

As the rebuilding progresses more elements are added to the music, most notably an accompaniment of cello pizzicato to variations of the theme played by the base flute, the symbolic importance of which will be covered later. At the moment when the traveller starts traversing the bridge, two things happen nearly simultaneously. The traveller is subtly lifted, floating above the cloth, being supported and constantly recharged by the cloth, giving a potential for continued flight unattained previously in the game. At the same time a distinct percussion beat appears in the music, willing the player on, thus complementing the changes in gameplay to give the sense of flow and forward direction. The intended effect is to goad the player into advancing headlong across the bridge, relishing the sensation of speed and vertigo in *conformance* with that communicated by the music, although returning players (and more reflective or curious first timers) might very well pause halfway up the bridge to survey the area just passed. In the latter cases it will quickly become apparent that the music cue is linear and quite short,⁴³ resulting in near silence reasserting itself, profoundly changing the nature of the final climb to the altar activating the second vision.

4. Canyon

After an even more unrestricted form of exploration (chapter 3. *Desert*), the traveller is lifted by flying cloth-creatures and transported to a gilded slope in a massive canyon, with ruined archways, towers and buildings mingling with rock outcroppings and dunes.

Unlike at the bridge, the player regains control of the character already in motion, as the slope inexorably pushes the traveller forwards and ever down. A plucked arpeggio and percussion start off an interweaving of soloists with cello and harp going first in playful A-Dorian. With a lively tempo of 152 BPM it conforms to the unavoidable momentum of the character to project a sense of haste but also enjoyment and playfulness. The vertigo of movement and the perceived simulation of surfing or snowboarding are increased as the character encounters natural ramps of different shapes and sizes, projecting them into the air flying short stretches (that can be prolonged through use of the character's own flying ability).

⁴³ Most of the music cues in the game can only be activated once, asserting a form of linear finality.

Throughout the level, music and gameplay combine pace and mood to convey a whole, that gives the visual stimulus a sense and direction. The partially submerged buildings alternate between obstacle and scenery, providing both backdrop to and interactive elements of the experience. The travellers rapid descent through the city is halted at two junctures; first as they are exiting a church-like hallway into a basin containing another puzzle similar to that of the bridge. Here both music and gameplay slow down, as the player is given a break from the fast-moving gameplay to focus on problem-solving, and some limited exploring. In terms of multiplayer this also allows for more relaxed communication than the frantic rush down the slope. The second such interlude is prefaced with one of the defining moments of the game, when the player races along a colonnade and the camera swerves (one of a few chosen times when the camera is forcefully directed by the game) to show the character gliding along in profile, with a spectacular sunset cresting the horizon, bathing the silhouettes of buildings in deep golden light. At this moment in time, the music loses its sense of pulse and drive, inviting a more pensive perceptive approach. In contrast to the preceding area where gameplay and music combined to form the visual experience, here the visuals and the music conform to create an awareness of beauty, while the gameplay retains its speed and inertia, mediated by the change in angle, to complete the composition of serenity and movement.

DISCUSSION

The relatively restricted means of play, essentially three actions and their variations, provide a wide variety of play types depending on context and atmosphere. From the tightly structured headlong rush of *Ilinx* in the canyon, to the *exploration* of uncovering the world, whose simulated beauty both represents and invites *Mimicry*. The presentation of the game and its constituent parts strives towards these types, also emphasising the sense of immersion and *paidia*, as opposed to conscious problem solving and contest. Lack of interfaces and nondiegetic information, except for the music, promotes the sense of coherency, as well as the continued development of the tactile sense. The controller becomes central in the experience of the world when the connection between the movement of fingers and thumbs, coupled to the audio and visual feedback, becomes a source for understanding and education.

Meaning

When immersed in the playful activities described previously, the player is nevertheless constantly involved in the process of construing meaning from the experience. In a first playthrough, much of this sense-making attention will be directed at understanding the actual mechanics of play. New features are introduced gradually, but at the same time new elements of the diegetic world are also introduced, creating a parallel in the learning of new techniques and the discovery of new aspects of the narrative.

In terms of visuals, the game presents an intriguingly compelling and aesthetically pleasing diegetic world. In theory all of the different space could be interpreted as harmonious, as well as threatening or intrinsically dangerous. The gameplay in its variations is also able to remain unchanged while still projecting fundamentally different experiences, if the atmosphere permits. A sense of urgency would have completely altered the flow of exploration in the rebuilding of the bridge, while the same could be applied to the Canyon where the heady sensation of rushing along the dunes could equally have taken on the characteristics of flight from danger, despite the alluring nature of much of the visuals.

The reason why none of these things happen is straightforward and obvious to most, but still deserves attention and study, for it is indeed the music that primarily makes the difference. Without music the golden sunset would not have achieved the same degree of spiritual beauty, and neither would the first flight across the completed bridge be quite as elated, nor satisfactory, without the music egging the player on. Similarly, the music contributes to interpreting and creating meaning throughout the phases of the journey, three of which shall be explored, compared and discussed in this chapter.

1. Introduction

In the beginning there is light, and after the light a rushing towards the place of beginnings, and as the orchestral crescendo reaches its pinnacle in unison with the electronics, the traveller appears. Then, there is silence.

The symbolism of birth and release of energy is present throughout the visual and audial presentation, before the player even gets to press a button.⁴⁴ This *cinematic* (a term for short film clips separating gameplay sections) serves as a disorienting first view of the desert, a presentation of the milieu and character, and a surge leading to the first important point in the

⁴⁴ Except the obligatory “start new journey”, equivalent to pressing play on a DVD-player.

game; movement. The music contributes to this rush towards the beginning, that then through silence and immobility becomes all the more motionless, still and peaceful, awaiting the action at the player's own pace. But, the solitary flute note over a white screen, followed by cello and growing *tutti*, does more than that, as it steadily saturates the spectrums of amplitude and pitch, overcharging the perception so as to leave it cleansed, empty, before any move has been made. It prepares the player for the experience to come, and leaves it to the game to fill this blank canvas, and the first thing that appear are the simple pictorial instructions on how to move.

Next, a hill on the horizon, not far off, beckons the player with its two steles feebly waving scraps of fabric in the wind. Once a player has crested this hill, the camera pans upwards to show the figure of the distant mountain and its beckoning, shining peak with the game's title displayed prominently alongside it. And with it, the cello proclaims the game's main musical motif, a combination that indicates the traveller themselves.

Figure 3.



(Wintory, 2013: *Nascence*)

Throughout this tutorial phase, more and more elements are added to the music as different aspects are explored and discovered, there's the first glowing glyph that gives the traveller their scarf; the abandoned ruin whose mural may be activated to yield its pictographic secrets, soliciting a flurry of overlaid bass flute trills as a symbol of the society once lost, and there's the mounting excitement in the music as the player makes their way toward the first altar, and subsequently the first of several visions hinting at the civilisation that has gone before.

6. Tower

After the taxing trials of the underground (chapter 5. *Cave*), the traveller reaches a grand indoors tower, reaching up towards a large dome. An alcove containing a mural is revealed by illumination and as the traveller activates the mural through contact or song, a shimmering field of gold rises from below the ground, submerging and setting them afloat. Within this field, their scarf remains infinitely charged, and they are free to move around through floating. The parallels with being underwater, beginning in the previous chapter, reach a zenith at this point, as each subsequent mural that is activated further raises the surface of the

golden field, and conjures up several creatures already encountered, including the scraps of cloth (now more than ever alike a shoal of fish) and the floating mushroom-shaped pads (unequivocally resembling jellyfish). The high point is the release of a gigantic cloth creature, resembling a cross between a whale and a hammerhead shark, upon whose back the traveller may freely ride, until activating the final mural and accessing the altar at the very top of the tower, and the final vision before accessing the mountain.

This part of the game has fundamental aspects communicating a sense of completion of training, ascent and spirituality. The soundtrack piece associated with the level is called *Atonement*, mirroring the phase within Campbell's monomyth within which the hero comes to terms with, and accepts the wisdom of a divine figure of authority.⁴⁵ Regardless of the possible interpretations, the gameplay and visuals in themselves present a literal ascent, combined with a review of techniques and features encountered so far. The field of gold also presents a definite sense of security and tranquillity, as it prevents the traveller from falling very far if they make a mistake.⁴⁶ The choice of colour palette, returning to the familiar orange, brown and yellow of the beginning (even though it is darker and somehow more profound than before) signals this space as a safe-haven from the threatening and cold hues of blue, white and sombre black of the preceding trawl through the underground.

As a deep bass drum introduces a slow, meditating rhythm while the cello slowly picks out a continuous melodic line derived from the main theme, bells chime in to create a decidedly ritual feeling, placing the large circular space in a world of temple-like associations. Following the surge of the golden field, the music gradually becomes richer and richer strengthening the sense of fulfilment and completion experienced as the player perfects the techniques already learned. The slow pulse leads the ascent and establishes a mantra-like atmosphere as the player, devoid of any real risk or tension of failing, may enter a state of flow⁴⁷ as the practices they have been taught during the last hour are honed, and used to attain ever greater heights.

The metaphorical, physical and spiritual ascension is completed at the top, with the final of six visions grouping the murals passed on the way up to visualise the travellers journey up to this point, illustrating each stage of the way, also indicating whether or not each stretch of

⁴⁵ This phase is called *Atonement with the Father*, although compelling arguments can be made to see this section more as a representation of *Meeting with the Goddess*, or possibly the *Road of Trials*, some of which are presented by James Portnoy (in Extra Credits, 2012-07-25).

⁴⁶ A tradition has been formed by experienced players however, where they will climb the tower without activating the murals, thus introducing a player defined narrative and condition for victory, as well as larger penalties for failure.

⁴⁷ The theory of flow, and optimal state of experience and activity introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has been declared as central for thatgamecompany's design process (Variety Media LLC., 2013-02-08), even though their conception of it is somewhat simplistic.

the journey has been made alone or in company.⁴⁸ The music here also reaches a high point in thematic material, as the harmonic world of the visions reaches new heights as it intertwines with the main theme, rising to the highest registers of the string section and fading into bell-induced mystery as the mountain's peak is revealed, and the vastness of the foreboding task becomes apparent.⁴⁹

8. *Summit*

Emerging into a disparaging and merciless world of snowy wind, the traveller expends their last efforts to navigate it towards the ever-elusive peak, and on a seemingly endless expanse of snow, they finally collapse from their effort, and fall lifeless into the snow (chapter 7. *Mountain*). The screen fades to white for an interminable moment, and then slowly soft tones of flute, followed by cello, reveal a white landscape where six tall white-robed figures observe the prostate form of the traveller. They grant it a kind of benediction and the traveller's body is lifted from the ground, and their previously non-existent scarf extends into never before seen lengths. A gilded light becomes visible far off in the sky, and the music rises in pitch and abates in anticipation, as one button-press by the player sends the traveller soaring through the clouds and ineffectual harassments of the stone guardians, until finally emerging in the first clear blue sky of the entire experience.

Variouly labelled the Summit, the Peak, Jenova's Peak, Paradise or simply Apotheosis (after the corresponding music track), the traveller has now reached a state of transcendence. The shackles of the old existence are gone; not only is the scarf longer than ever, a translucent mist covers all valleys impeding any fall downwards, and both the chirp and flight of the traveller are stronger and more potent than ever. Spread throughout the mountain peaks are cloth-creatures of all shapes and sizes, urging the player onwards and upwards, everything accompanied by the triumphant string orchestra, finally alone and resplendent with the soloists, leading an ascent through the registers in an elegant 108 BPM. The music remains, through small excursions, in a solid tonality of B-minor, which by sheer dint of energy, instrumentation and rhythm conveys an unyielding sense of joyful ascension tempered by introspection and reference to the journey thus made.

⁴⁸ For each mural section there are either one or two robed figures, based on data collected by the Playstation Network about when and where you were connected to another player. However, this may not always be reflective of the player's experience. Because of technical limitations it is quite possible that a traversal that has seemed completely solitary to the player, may in fact be depicted with two figures if another player has been connected to your session without you noticing (because of them being too far away, or simply not interested in interacting).

⁴⁹ Just before this climax, the robed figure/s are shown exiting the temple tower into an unforgiving windy landscape, and faltering, falling to their knees; an important piece of foreshadowing.

Upon reaching the peak, the final destination, the traveller lands on a patch of snow, with the music quietly fading to a ritual pulse given by low bells. Again, they are stripped of their scarf, but this time the music, environment and progression clearly indicate that it is not a bad thing. Having traversed the threshold of death and returned exultant, the second loss of power is almost voluntary, and expected. It is the conscious shedding of earthly gains before the last journey.

DISCUSSION

While the introduction focuses most of the attention of the player on learning and figuring out the control scheme and basics rules of the simulated world, it also contains important catalysts for meaning. The introduction of the mountain, and thus the motivation for the whole game, coincides with that of the main theme being asserted in its most distinctive manner; a low solo cello. This nearly gives it the status of leitmotif, although the theme's ubiquity throughout the game may later be reinterpreted as the leitmotif rather being the specific orchestration; the cello represents the traveller.

Meanwhile my other examples highlight the differences between two similar instances of gameplay; they both exhibit an ascending nature, and recap much of the techniques learned in a more comprehensive manner than most other sections. In the first the earthly and warmly glowing tones of the visual environment indicate a certain internal development, with the ritualistic nature and references in the music completing a sense of spiritual atonement. Soaring through the open skies in the last section visually evokes openness and the vast freedom of reaching the peak, and the music is more relentless than in the tower, the ascent though joyful is hurried along, it is the sensory experience and exultation of *Ilinx* that should rule, neither overt reflection nor slowing down is endorsed until the very last moment, granting a sense of deliverance.

In much of these relations the constituent media (to use Cook's term) correlate in *conforming* or *complementing* ways, with little explicit conflict or *contest* between agendas. Through triadic *conformance* visuals and audio often try to convey the same emotional content, while the content of the gameplay switching somewhat, but being put into context largely by the other two. Much of the nature of meaning derives from the sequence through which it is experienced, closing the gap towards a sense of overall narration.

Narrative

All aesthetic activity can be conceived as beginning in play and ending in form (Kirkpatrick, 2011: pp. 21-24, 27), and the formal structure of *Journey* is both the end point and the beginning of meaningful play. As has been shown, each chapter may have several intended types of play but they may equally contain several types of narrative, all of it tied variously to the musical development. The music exhibits several interesting and relevant features of narrative in and of itself. In terms of instrumentation, the entirety of the game is a slow appropriation of the musical space by the physical orchestra, from what was originally a mainly electronic soundscape. This happens gradually, and the timbres and layers change intermittently, and often resemble each other, but the fact remains that a largely “artificial” score progressively becomes “human.”

On top of this sort of sonorous foundation, five soloists interweave throughout the arc of the game, bringing in more direct forms of symbolism. The five solo instruments are, in order of appearance: Bass flute (occasionally C flute), Cello, Harp, Viola and Serpent (an ancient type of wooden brass instrument). We have already seen the association between cello and the main character, whose main partner in crime becomes the bass flute, who is tied to the remnants of the mysterious lost civilisation. Harp and viola are often used as a supplemental layer to indicate the presence of another player, and thus take on a significance as avatars for connectivity, other life and a sort of energy, while the serpents low resonances come to the fore in the underground segment; a portent of the post-apocalyptic nature of the world.

These aspects are all formally fixed, they are associated through staging of the player’s progress, yet are not necessarily evident to any single individual. The understanding of the overall narrative, and the typologies represented by the soloists, depends on what artefacts and sections are discovered throughout the journey, the most important being the murals.

Each chapter of the game, up to and including the temple tower, end with a vision experienced through a cinematic, where a white-robed being sends out a cry (similar to, but deeper than that of the traveller) followed by a pan across a symbolic mural depicting the rise and fall of a civilisation based around the harnessing of cloth power. This backstory is musically associated with the flute, taking over the main theme and tying it to several murals that you can find throughout the desert when exploring.

3. Desert

Being the most open-ended section of the game, the (pink) desert presents the largest degree of embedded narrative, waiting to be uncovered by the player, who is also at full liberty to ignore it. There are two main sources for embedded narrative, and they are only discovered if nonlinear exploration is undertaken. The first is ubiquitous throughout the game; it is that of murals spread out in different places on levels. These murals form a parallel to the story told through the visions of the beings in white. Similar symbolic pictures, they offer a more detailed episodic take on the development and downfall of the previous civilisation. The activation (through singing) of these murals coincides with a low susurration of bass flute phrases overlaid, thematically linking them to the musical identity of the lost civilisation.

The second narrative thread present in this chapter is that of rebirth and the shooting star. It is not fully understood until completing the game, and even then it leaves much room for interpretation. At irregular intervals one shoots up from the mountain and crosses the sky above the player, an event accompanied by a barely audible, tingling electronic sound. Additionally, while exploring the traveller may find what appears to be a hollowed out derelict tower, where they will encounter a low-flying shooting star, pirouetting swiftly within the shell of tower and finally “landing,” becoming a glowing glyph. This star is far from discreet, as its tingling, chiming audible tail fills up the traveller’s world and becomes a very real presence.

Within the structure of the level there is also an enacted narrative, designed to be followed easily, and it details the liberation of cloth creatures.⁵⁰ Advancing straight toward the mountain from the start of the level leads to running in to the remains of a war machine (similar to those previously encountered at the broken bridge). Singing to it frees a flying cloth creature, which will insistently guide the player onwards towards other flying creatures. These acts of emancipation cue music at several points, complementing the erratic and energetic movements of the creatures with a light accompaniment of flute and viola melodies intersecting over the cello marking a 3/4-rhythm with *pizzicati*.

5. Cave

The underground passage is important as one of the trials undergone throughout the arc of the journey, but also as a chapter of thematic development, being submerged in another colour

⁵⁰ These have been variously dubbed “dragons”/“dolphins”/“flyers” in online forums, evoking different aspects of their animal-like demeanour. This type of interpretative guessing games as to the nature of in-game objects and symbolism has stimulated online discussion since its release (thatgamecompany, 2013).

palette and deep within the ruined buildings of the fallen city. The nature of the cloth's and traveller's movements, especially flying, are re-contextualised as the sombre blue and green hues and shining dust mites suggests water filled with bubbles, and the algae-like cloth waving upwards in the air suddenly take on aquatic meaning. This is strengthened through encounters with the previously mentioned aquatic cloth-creatures.

The serpent makes its grand entrance in this chapter, having been heard fleetingly in reference to white-robed figures throughout the visions, now reigning supreme with overlaid melodies throughout the first short section.⁵¹ Soft strings then take over, with ascending figures guiding player movements through floating undergrowth, providing background for a harp solo.⁵² The music is paramount in this (thematically and literally) dark chapter of the game in providing a sense of alienating yet peaceful beauty. The harmonious nature of the music invites peace, yet the lack of cello and flute combine with the new visuals to convey the sense of a foreign space.

Establishing tranquillity in this exotic room is vital, for shortly after comes the introduction of the first real danger in the game, the war machines (a flying, serpent-like creature with a solitary glowing eye). These are the only physical enemies of the traveller, and actively attempt to attack the traveller, diminishing the length of their scarf. Once again music takes centre stage in the interpretation as to how to approach this challenge, and rather than egg on towards confrontation, it chooses to establish tension, with a slow irregular heart-beat of drums, with lingering long notes of electronics, viola and serpent. Rather than a chase or a fight, the music conveys the sense of hiding, of progressing with care and caution.

The tension is released in a final incline, recuperating the gameplay from the canyon when the player slides downwards, but this time chased by war machines and percussion pushing forwards in to a wall of light, and the entrance to the temple tower.

7. *Mountain*

The Crossing and *Nadir*⁵³ are the names of two of the soundtrack pieces corresponding to this part of the game, hinting at the narrative significance of this chapter. It is, paradoxically, the zenith of the aesthetic experience. After the recapitulation of the journey thus far enacted in the temple tower, the final leg awaits, and it is the most demanding for the traveller. The

⁵¹ According to the annotated soundtrack ([Austin Wintory], 2013-03-03: 22:15), this is a processed five-part chorale with every part played by the serpent.

⁵² The string parts here are also overdubbed to provide a sense of aleatoric blurring (ibid.: 25:15). It is highly effective at a memorable section where floating downwards through the weeds causes a shift in the music toward solo clarinet, and ascending brings back the strings.

⁵³ Referring to its figurative meaning as the lowest depth of a person's spirits or the lowest point in a narrative.

chapter oscillates between letting gameplay, visuals and music take their toll on the character, demonstrating the inhospitable surroundings that must ultimately be crossed. Wind, strongly represented through all three media (restriction of movement in one direction, blurring of vision and overpowering noise), snow, represented in two (gradual depletion of scarf power, icicles and snow covering the cloak), form the main environmental barriers. Additional attacks by war machines complete the continuing submission of the player character, all of it underlined by the orchestra slowly moving from warm melodic material to fractured and agitated on the bow tremolo.

This chapter has the strongest narrative pathos, as it tells of the slow weakening of the protagonist, and their eventual, prophesised, death. It becomes all the more (potentially) poignant as the real gameplay effects of companionship become increasingly apparent. Since the weather is now so hostile as to actively deplete the life force of each traveller, banding close together becomes the only way to reliably regain and retain warmth and strength, encouraging players to rely upon each other, and severely hampering any solitary travellers. The sole respite from the cold is a small sanctuary, accompanied by the third and last piece for this chapter, *Reclamation*, with harmonious orchestra, viola and electronics. The last climb after that is an endless incline where the wind rips at the cloak until the scarf is totally eradicated, and the sound of storm threatens to overthrow the insistent, frantic playing of the orchestra. As the player is then striped of virtually all power, unable to fly, walking infinitely slowly, and barely being able to sing (in fact the chirp is only seen as a very faint glyph, the sound no longer heard) the last crunching steps through snow are met with musical silence.

What is remarkable about this sequence is the way the player enacts the central narrative of struggle and final surrender to the elements; the music heightens this narrative, while also adding the continuity of instrumentation, as it becomes more and more analogue.

9. End Credits

While an extended cinematic is played in the background, the main theme of *Journey* is presented as a melodic song, presenting the first human voice, and the first possibly intelligible words of the game. But even at this late stage, symbolism and the universal nature of the narrative are not lightly relinquished, and a first time player (and thus listener) would be hard pressed to decipher what meaning is articulated, much less what language is being sung. It is performed in five different languages, quoting several mythical texts and sayings,

culminating in a refrain proclaiming that *I was born for this*,⁵⁴ all the while following the backwards progress through the game of a shooting star, on its way to be born again.

CONCLUSION

Music is present at nearly all times throughout *Journey*, and the few instances when it is not, its absence speaks volumes. Be it through accompaniment, motivation, atmosphere or symbolism, music relates to everything that is experienced, and vice versa. To conclude I propose to briefly go through the different types of interactions we've seen, and touch upon the uniqueness of the relationships thus experienced.

When looking closer at the music itself, it is now useful to switch over to Collins' terminology of dynamic music. The game exhibits several different degrees of dynamic nondiegetic music, here listed with examples of chapters in the game where they occur:

- nonlinear adaptive music (arguably anytime multiplayer is available)
- nonlinear interactive music (Desert)
- linear adaptive music (Bridge)
- linear interactive music (Canyon)
- linear nondynamic music (Credits)

The sudden inclusion of linearity and nonlinearity in the terminology is a slight evolution of the terms used by Collins (2008a: pp. 142-147) to indicate a difference between different levels of linearity. Linear dynamic (adaptive or interactive) music exists in a state of indeterminacy (the duration of each segment is not fixed, and variable according to game states and player interaction) with clearly defined linear progression (the sequence of musical events *is* fixed).⁵⁵ These different modes of linearity and interactivity profoundly affect play, in conjunction with the nature of the music itself, dictating and guiding the flow of events.

⁵⁴ Sung in French, quoting Jeanne d'Arc, while other quoted sources include Beowulf, the Aeneid, the Iliad and Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō, the libretto having been compiled by Jeremy Howard Beck ([Austin Wintory]. 2013-03-03, 52:43-57:31).

⁵⁵ It is useful to note that I have made these categories considering a normative type of gameplay. When I state that a piece of music is semi-linear, and thus fixed in its chronology, this does not exclude that a player might circumvent this affixation through extremely nontrivial effort, subverting the game's formal boundaries of space and movement (i.e. making use of glitches to access areas out of normal sequence).

What about the relationships between media? The sunset showed us how sound and image can combine to re-contextualise action (even if the music was not cued synchronously), while the intensity of music only worsened the sense of powerlessness as the character slowly perishes on the snow-capped mountain.

Lacking both written and spoken text, *Journey* remains a fundamentally narrative experience. There is a thread to follow, there is a subject and its travels mirror those of Campbell's universal heroes. Including departure from the safe homestead, learning to play and explore the world, traversing the paths of trials as well as temptations, descending into the belly of the beast and resurging with transcendental energy. The moments are all there, and the architecture of the game prove the foundation, the colours and environments provide a thematic indication while the music clues the player in to the relationships between the here and now and the long abandoned past, as well as between the dimensions of danger and safety. Music thus becomes the main narrator and *evocation* of the monomyth, especially so when considering its soundtrack titles.

However, this macro structure becomes backdrop, foundation as previously mentioned, to the myriad of possible miniature narratives that occur thanks to the inclusion of the most indeterminate of parameters; other human beings. From freely structured play, leading, learning and complex cooperation to simple companionship, the other player becomes a defining feature of every journey undertaken. This relationship too has a designed narrative arc; the open sections of the beginning encourage shared joy and play, while the underground provides ample opportunity for development as danger is faced and overcome either together or separately. The atonement of the temple tower can range from a contest in ascendance to the coordinated cooperation of tandem-flying to the top. No section defines the nature of the multiplayer relationship as much as the mountain, where the only shelter against the elements is that of the companion, both keeping warm and recharging the energy stored in each other's scarves.

All of these experiences are lived without a single word, other than "start new journey," a statement of intent. The communication between players is limited to that of movement, flying and singing. For singing is indeed the most suitable term, as it is a highly musical sound, in tune to the aural environment, and able to express meaning primarily through two means: dynamics and rhythm. Every new encounter engenders new means of expression, as

every person reacts to the chirps differently, and standardised modes of communication are discouraged by the very design of the game itself, and voluntarily so.⁵⁶

Instead of relying upon the imposition of a predefined, detailed and formulated narrative, *Journey* presents an emotional arc, heavily underpinned by the music, and a stage upon which this arc can be played out. The players do not know each other, and improvisation might lead to any number of subversions of the general narrative, yet it is still undoubtedly there, and in this manner engenders the creation of new narratives through the modification and adaptation of itself (a combination of *emergent* and *enacted* narrative). The game provides the setting and the movement, but not the specific details, and in this way gameplay and music are wed closer than often seen, as the inherent potential for meaning in music mirrors this concept of thrust (and emotion) without subject. The subject is the player, the interpretant, and their actions determine the pace as well as the details of the narrative, yet the form remains. In many ways this filling out of the details, these interpretations of the events, and sequence of events, are at the very core of the experience, especially when exploring, and exploring with, a companion. *Journey* builds its foundation on a number of clichés, chief of which remain “life is a journey, not a destination” and “it’s not where you travel *to*, but who you travel *with* that matters.”

These central tenants are never uttered expressly, but rather enacted through the gameplay, music and visuals, by parts in conformance, complementation and contest. In the end, the player is neither shown nor told the spiritual meaning behind the work, rather they are free to act, react and interact, and thus may very well experience it first-hand.

Reflection

Any unity between film and music has been described by Cook (1998: pp. 57-65) as being essentially spiritual (following Wassily Kandinsky), emotional (Eisenstein) or gestural (Eisler). The relationship between sound and image could thus be related through a spiritual connection, an emotional affect or a gestural relationship. With *Journey*, Austin Wintory’s music exhibits all three forms, in relation to different parts of the experience. The unique nature of digital games as a medium, and the unusual degree of co-creation present at the

⁵⁶ Jenova Chen explains in detail the different modes of interaction attempted by the game developers, describing their search for a model which would encourage emotionally meaningful connections while discouraging normative online discourse (taunts, competitiveness and vitriol). The solution was to minimise interaction and information, stripping down the experience of the other player simply to movement and sound, making them truly anonymous, and also (importantly) unable to thwart another player (Variety Media LLC., 2013-02-08).

poietic level of *Journey*, has made for some exceptionally illustrative examples.⁵⁷ To study it is to acknowledge that music, at both poietic and esthetic level, is not mere compliment to the visual realm. *Journey* begins and ends in music, and music affects every part of the experience in between, even in its absence.

Audio and video combining to give context to the actual presses and manipulations of buttons and analogue sticks is ubiquitous enough to be unremarkable; it is defining of the medium.⁵⁸ Music in *Journey* does not just contextualise, it is not solely occupied with simulating this artificial world, it is also central to the ideas expressed; it signifies the spiritual, embodies the emotional and guides the gestural nature of the experience.

The departure and destination for any analysis of *Journey* is unavoidably the journey itself. It is undertaken not only with eyes, but with both hands and ears, and it is archetypal, it is symbolic and it is nonspecific. Despite the freedom awarded and the indeterminacy built in to the work, it is nevertheless undeniably the story of journey; every step has to be taken by the player themselves, and through touch, sight and hearing, the journey is not so much told as it is felt.

⁵⁷ The relationship between the composition of the score and the design of the game is regrettably unique, with composer Austin Wintory involved from the very start, making it possible for the music to affect the development of visuals and gameplay, and not only vice versa (thatgamecompany, 2012b: director's commentary).

⁵⁸ Despite what Wolf (2001) and Kirkpatrick (2011) may claim, it is not only the visual stimuli that inform and construct the simulated space and time, as I hope to have somewhat stressed throughout the essay.

APPENDIX

Synopsis

1. Introduction

(The Call / Nascence / First Confluence)

A tutorial segment, introducing the player to the traveller (*subject*), the vast desert (*context*) and the looming mountain in the distance (*motivation*). It explains the basic functions of moving and “flying”, and has hints about using “singing” to interact with objects in the game world. It ends with the first of six “visions” including an imposing white-clad figure with similar clothing as the traveller, who then traverses a grand gate to progress to the next area.

2. The Bridge

(Second Confluence)

A valley between sandfalls and cliffs with a prominent bridge-like structure in the centre. This is the first of several puzzle sections, also being the first area where it is possible to connect to another player. Ends with the second vision, and another gate.

3. The Desert

(Threshold / Third Confluence)

A larger patch of desert, representing the least linear area of the game. Several ruins and landmarks are spread out through the

Gameplay: Slow, walking-oriented exploration; gradual exposure to different gameplay techniques and glyph-gathering. Single player only.

Visuals: Unending desert, many yellows and oranges, blotted by ruins in reddish-brown tones and brown steles, like gravestones.

Music: Nonlinear, layered adaptive music, fundamentally circling B-minor. Largely overtly electroacoustic sounds, with drones and surges of noise prominent under a contemplative melodic layer of solos (cello bass flute).

Gameplay: Problem-solving and limited exploration, multiplayer and some surfing.

Visuals: Mostly sand in orange hues, more detailed up-close white architecture, red cloth.

Music: First none; cues depending on rate of completion; electronic ambience, cello pizzicato, bass flute and lastly percussion.

Gameplay: Free exploration, with possibility of guidance. Surfing and flying possible, as is multiple multiplayer encounters.

Visuals: Vast desert, now in pink, with an afternoon sun, and clear (green) sky. Brown,

landscape, including flying cloth creatures, which can be freed by the traveller, providing guidance and flying assistance. Ends with a sandstorm-enveloped sinister-looking tower ruin, the third vision, and a flight over the walls by means of cloth-creature.

4. The Canyon

(Road of Trials / Fourth Confluence)

A vertiginous surfing through a city partially submerged in sand. Speed, exhilaration and a sense of grandeur and beauty. Ends with a long drop into a dark hall, where the fourth vision opens yet another gate

5. The Cave

(Descent / Temptations / Fifth Confluence)

Navigation through a dark cavern, first through serene cloth-filled environments, later with dangerous stone-serpent creatures (the first real enemies encountered). A final escape to a fifth vision, and a gate.

6. The Tower

(Atonement / Final Confluence)

An ascent through activation of inscriptions, in an ever-rising tide of golden light, which replenishes the scarf's power. The murals depict the traveller's journey thus far, with a final vision prophesising the last climb.

hazy and ominously mechanical in the last section.

Music: Playful solos over a $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm, adaptive to which areas are visited. Some drums, harp and viola are added. Soft chords by string section soften the electronic feeling.

Gameplay: Exhilarating surfing, speed and forward momentum, with two slower areas.

Visuals: Imposing city ruins, seen through the golden colours of a sunset.

Music: Over orchestra with soloists keeps pace, with two calmer sections, with insistent drums punctuating the fall.

Gameplay: Serene exploration of cloth-aided flying, hide-and-seek and a final dash.

Visuals: Blue, sombre, underwater-sensation Later threatening, lamenting.

Music: Layered serpent solos, strings and harp giving rhythm. Ominous electronic/orchestra background.

Gameplay: Flying, and activation of cloth, introduction of replenishing field.

Visuals: Golden, brilliant, spiritual, temple-like. A summary of creatures encountered

Music: Rhythmical, ritual beat with percussion and gongs/bells with cello and strings playing melodies.

7. The Mountain

(The Crossing / Reclamation / Nadir)

A struggle against the wind, and against additional stone-serpents. The climb, interspersed with moments of stillness, becomes more and more taxing, finally wiling away the scarf and the ability to sing, until the character collapses in the snow.

8. The Summit

(Apotheosis)

The character is revitalised by the mysterious beings in white encountered earlier, and filled with energy soars towards the summit. Once there, it lands on a patch of snow, and starts to slowly walk through the fissure into an eternity of white.

9. End Credits

(I was born for this)

A shooting star is emitted from the mountain, travelling through all of the locales traversed by the traveller, journeying backwards through the player's experience, until ending up at the same spot as the beginning.

Gameplay: Cold, wind and snow alter the traveller's mobility, gradually breaking down abilities before stripping them completely.

Visuals: White, grey, bleak, stormy, tumultuous.

Music: Increasingly agitated string orchestra, with brief moments of respite, before being torn apart by wind into silence.

Gameplay: Total freedom for the player, whose abilities are all magnified.

Visuals: Colourful, uplifting, triumphant, and serene. The first truly blue sky.

Music: Energetic, perpetually ascending 4/4 with orchestra and soloists, reiterating variations of the theme, ending with solo cello.

Gameplay: No player input, pure cinematic sequence. Ends with names of co-players.

Visuals: Complete palette, viewing locations in new light as the day passes into night. Ending with a sunrise over the first hill.

Music: An aria sung by solo soprano in six languages, accompanied by orchestra.

Terminology

Adventure game	Games focusing on puzzle solving within a narrative framework
Avatar	A graphical representation of the player within the gameworld
Controller	Hardware through which the player sends their input to the game
Gameplay	Ambiguous term for the player's holistic experience of the game
Glitch	Software error in the code of a program, can be utilised by players
Playthrough	One instance of playing a game from start to finish
Third-person view	A normative graphical perspective, with the camera situated a fixed distance behind and above the player's avatar
Virtual world	Simulated system presented as having large-scale geography

The Monomyth

The structure of the monomyth, or Hero's Journey, as put forth by Joseph Campbell (1949), can be summarised as follows:

Departure:					
The Call to Adventure	Refusal of the Call	Supernatural Aid	The Crossing of the First Threshold	The Belly of the Whale	
Initiation:					
The Road of Trials	The Meeting with the Goddess	Woman as the Temptress	Atonement with the Father	Apotheosis	The Ultimate Boon
Return:					
Refusal of the Return	The Magic Flight	Rescue from Without	The Crossing of the Return Threshold	Master of the Two Worlds	Freedom to Live

For reference, I here present a comparative chart of Hollywood three act structure, the monomyth, Confucius' stages of life, and the progression in *Journey* through scenes and the soundtrack (this chart is based on a similar chart presented by thatgamecompany's creative director Jenova Chen at a public address at 2013's D.I.C.E. summit):

Three Act Structure	Act I: Setup		Plot Point 1	
Monomyth	The Call to Adventure	Supernatural Aid	Crossing of the First Threshold	
Stages of Life	Birth	Exploring (15)		
Emotional Intensity	-1	0	1	
Journey	Title Screen	(Scarf)	Bridge	
Soundtrack	<i>The Call Nascence</i>	<i>First Confluence</i>	<i>Second Confluence</i>	
Act II: Confrontation				
Road of Trials	(Meeting w/t Goddess)	(Woman as Temptress)	Atonement w/t Father	
Focusing and Working 30		Excelling 40		
0	2	-2	4	
Desert / Canyon / Cave	(Final Congruence?)		Tower	The Mountain
<i>Threshold / Third Confluence</i>	<i>The Road of Trials / Fourth Confluence</i>	<i>Temptations Descent / Fifth Confluence</i>	<i>Atonement Final Confluence</i>	<i>The Crossing Reclamation Nadir</i>
	Plot Point 2	Act III: Resolution		
Apotheosis	The Ultimate Boon	The Magic Flight	Freedom to Live	
Mastering 60	Transcending 70	Life Calling	Re-Genesis	
-4	6	4	2	
The Summit	The End	Credits	Replay	
<i>Apotheosis</i>		<i>I was born for this</i>	<i>Nascence</i>	

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