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## Meaning and emotion in Squaresoft's Final Fantasy X: Re-theorising realism and identification in video games

Glen R. Spoons  
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**Meaning and Emotion in Squaresoft's Final Fantasy X:  
Re-Theorising "Realism" and "Identification"  
in Video Games**

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BA (Hons) (Curtin)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of  
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Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries  
School of Communications and Multimedia  
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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## Abstract

This thesis takes the position that traditional theories of “realism” and “identification” misrepresent the relationships between players and videogames, and that a cross-disciplinary approach is needed. It uses Ed Tan’s (1997) and Torben Grodal’s (1997) analyses of narrative, cognition, and emotion in film as a basis for interrogating existing research on, and providing a working model of, video gameplay. It develops this model through an extended account of Squaresoft’s adventure role-playing game Final Fantasy X (FFX) (2001), whose hybrid narrative and game macrostructures foreground many of the problems associated with video games. The chapters respectively address: existing research on video games; how perceptual qualities of the interface determine the reality-status of gameplay; how narrative and game codes regulate or retard interest; FFX’s hermeneutic coding of reality; the dual narrative and game coding of video game characters; the uses and limits of the psychoanalytic concept of identification when analysing video games; how gameplay promotes empathetic emotions towards characters; how players develop empathetic emotions towards themselves; and how the disjunctive quality of play may have an existential quality.

## **Declaration**

**I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
Towards Video Game Aesthetics .....	1
Chapter Overview .....	10
<b>Chapter One – Literature Review</b> .....	12
Play and Games .....	12
Cognitive Activity in Art and Games.....	14
The Aesthetics of Video Games.....	17
Video Game Content.....	26
Subjectification and the Play of Meaning .....	27
From “Interactive Narratives” to “Cybertxts” .....	31
Emotion in Video Games: Early Models and Research .....	37
Frijda’s Model of Emotion .....	39
Conclusion.....	42
<b>Chapter Two - The Reality-Status Of The Interface</b> .....	43
Reality-Status and Stages of Audiovisual Processing.....	43
Perceptual Deviation as a Consequence of Digital Articulation .....	46
Introjective and Projective Transactions as a Consequence of Enaction and Enactive Subtraction.....	52
Conclusion.....	62
<b>Chapter Three - The Regulation of Interest</b> .....	64
Hermeneutic Codes in <u>FFX</u> ’s Narrative Macrosequences .....	66
Reinforcement in <u>FFX</u> ’s Game Macrosequences.....	72
Emotion Episodes.....	78
The (Dys)Regulation of Interest Across Narrative and Game Macrosequences.....	81
Conclusion.....	89
<b>Chapter Four – The Unreality of the Narrative</b> .....	90
Vraisemblance .....	90
The Marvellous.....	93
The Uncanny .....	98
The Fantastic .....	103
Conclusion.....	109



<b>Chapter Five – Cognitive Identification and Character Interest.....</b>	<b>111</b>
Narrative Macrostructures .....	112
Actantial Model .....	112
Cognitive Identification: Semic Codes and Types .....	116
Game Macrostructures .....	128
Character Classes and Trait-Dependant Character Types .....	128
Realism in Character Development: Semic Categories.....	133
Semic Relations in Combat Macrostructures .....	135
Conclusion.....	141
<b>Chapter Six – Psychoanalytic Identification.....</b>	<b>142</b>
From Primary to Partial, Multiple and Transitive Identification(s) .....	142
Modes of Identification .....	146
Ideal Ego: The Indestructible Self.....	147
Ego-Ideals: The Desired and Desirable Self.....	150
Super-Egos: Shared Prohibitions.....	156
Conclusion.....	159
<b>Chapter Seven – Character Empathy.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Affective Dimensions of Empathy .....	161
Movement.....	162
Attractiveness/unattractiveness .....	165
Vulnerability.....	167
Facial and other non-verbal expressions .....	169
Cognitive Dimensions of Empathy .....	172
Empathetic Emotions and Situational Contexts .....	175
Happiness and Gratitude .....	179
Anger and Contempt .....	181
Fear and Taboos .....	184
Sadness and Tragedy.....	191
Empathetic Emotions, Investment, and Allegiance.....	197
Conclusion.....	207
<b>Chapter Eight – Player Empathy.....</b>	<b>209</b>
Preoperational Egocentrism and its Blocking at the Interface .....	210
Blocked Egocentrism and its Emotional or Aesthetic Significance.....	215
Shame, and the Compass of Shame.....	220
The Transfer and Dynamics of Emotion in Video Game Aesthetics.....	228

<b>Chapter Nine – Existential and Holistic Gameplay</b> .....	234
The Existential Experience of Play .....	234
Towards Holistic Gameplay .....	241
Conclusion.....	246
<b>References</b> .....	248
<b>Appendix One – Key Events In <u>FFX</u></b> .....	274
<b>Appendix Two – Breakdown of Opening Sequences of <u>FFX</u></b> .....	279
<b>Appendix Three – Hermeneutic Clusters in <u>FFX</u></b> .....	282

## Introduction

### Towards Video Game Aesthetics

Since the 1970s, much research on video games has recapitulated parental and governmental concerns about the effects of print, radio, film and television on youth. Case studies, observational/participant analyses, controlled experiments, questionnaire-based surveys, and correlative analyses have addressed concerns that video games are a “mindless addiction” that promote aggression and sexism, impede social skills, reduce school attendance and performance, undermine family life, and generally take time away from other social activities or responsibilities (Creasey & Myers, 1986; Egli & Meyers, 1984; Funk, 1993; Greenfield, 1984; Kubey & Larson, 1990; Mitchell, 1985; Provenzo, 1991). Indeed, Kevin Durkin’s (1995) review of research on Australian video games was commissioned specifically by the Australian Office of Film and Literature Classification to address “cause and effect issues relating to the behaviour of children and young people” (1995, iii) (also see Durkin & Aisbett, 1999).

However, as Durkin (1995) makes clear, early researchers generally disproved the assumptions that they set out to test. Video games may be distinct from print, film, and other media, but they do not produce the negative psychological and social effects to the extent that critics claim. The recognition that video games are not necessarily antisocial is evident in popular histories of the medium and its culture (Demaria & Wilson, 2004; Herz, 1997; Kent, 2001; King & Bordland, 2003; Kushner, 2003; Sheff, 1999). In fact, research in Cultural Studies has turned to the positive psychological and cultural uses of video games, especially in relation to issues of identity and community (Baym, 1995; Beaubien, 1996; Curtis, 1992; Dibbell, 1993; Holmes, 1997; Ito, 1997; Kollock & Smith, 1999; McLaughlin, Osborne & Smith, 1995; Turkic, 1995; Reid, 1994; Rheingold, 1993; Stone, 1995; Wertheim, 1999). Nonetheless, Cultural Studies is a newcomer to video game theory and in 1995 Ted Friedman observed that while game designers and players had long discussed the aesthetics of video gameplay there was as yet no “software theory” (p. 73). Recently, greater attention has been directed to the aesthetics of video games (Aarseth, 1997; Murray, 1998; Poole, 2001; Wolf, 2001, 2004), and there has been a burgeoning of conferences, and print and online publications. However, researchers are still in the early stages of defining video game aesthetics compared with print and film.

This thesis is partly concerned with applying semiotics and structuralist narratology to a video game—an approach which requires some justification given the shift to poststructuralist and ethnographic methodologies in Cultural Studies (Jenkins, 1992; Morley, 1980, 1992; Morris, 2004; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). As Aarseth (1997) has argued, semiotics and narratology have already been applied to video games, but usually as a form of “theoretical imperialism” (p. 16) in which new media are evaluated in terms of theories developed for print and film. However, this thesis is not concerned with making claims about the exclusive relevance of semiotics or narrative theory; rather it is premised upon the assumption that it is preferable to interrogate the usefulness of older theories, such as semiotics and narratology, before arguing about the radical newness of video games. This will hopefully provide a better perspective when it comes to identifying the distinctiveness of video games as new theoretical objects. In the absence of such qualification, the privileging of “new” theories of “new media” may naturalise the increased turnover of academic capital, paralleling the ideologies of progress, capitalist innovation, and technological determinism which motivate and justify the development of “new media.”

As Frasca (2003) notes:

Certainly, formal approaches are limited . . . but they are probably the easiest way to uncover the structural differences between stories and games. I personally see this structural approach as a first, necessary step in video game studies, which we will definitely outgrow once it helps us to better grasp the characteristics of video games. (p. 222)

This thesis similarly accepts that there is a need for a consideration of structure. The early structuralists, of course, elaborated upon Saussure’s (1915/1966) argument that meaning is produced through differences within a system by analysing the differential structure of texts (Barthes, 1966/1988, 1972, 1975a). Narratology was a dominant field in this approach, and was premised upon a distinction between what Russian formalists, such as Jakobson (1960), called “fabula,” the supposedly objective structure of the story in time and space, and “syuzhet,” the way in which this story was told. Following Barthes (1966/1988, 1975a), narratologists considered how the minimal units of narratives, “events,” were selected and combined in “sequences” according to logical/causal relations. Barthes (1966/1988) distinguished between “nuclei,” the indispensable units in a sequence, and “catalyzers,” units which amplify or fill in a sequence. Indeed, a fairly exhaustive category of terminology was developed, especially in regards to temporal and spatial anachronisms and points of view, or focalisation (Chatman, 1978; Culler, 1975; Genette, 1980; Lanser, 1981; Prince, 1987; Propp,

1968; Scholes & Kellogg, 1966). It was argued that narratology would reveal a universal grammar of narrative organization across all types of media, though narratology was also used to distinguish narrative genres (Todorov, 1973) and media (Metz, 1974) on the basis of how they limited, or facilitated, this grammar.

However, the following makes no claims about the structure of video games in and of itself, accepting Bordwell's (1986) argument that the fabula is not a structure in the text, but is constructed and reconstructed by the audience through ongoing inferences about events represented by the *syuzhet*. This thesis is more concerned with the way "codes" are activated by the *syuzhet* and how they structure (in the verb sense) players' ongoing inferential and interpretative activity. Within Cultural Studies, of course, a code is a system of signs governed by rules agreed upon by members of a culture, and defines conventional ways of making sense of texts (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994, p. 42). Without these codes there is no basis for communication or a common culture, yet at the same time their existence is no guarantee of shared meaning or experience. As Barthes (1975a) argues, each code

is one of the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is the network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven. Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes; in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is "lost" in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing: a stereographic space where the . . . codes . . . intersect. (pp. 20-21)

Codes, then, may have relative autonomy as rules that enable readers to decode a text, but they do not exist apart from the act of reading, they do not inhere in any medium, and they are subject to continual transformation. They also cannot be neatly separated except in an "ideal" text, as texts are constructed by their inter-relationship. Indeed, what this thesis takes from semiotics and structuralism is the attitude that the subtle permutations of signification—the "flickers of meaning" (Barthes, 1975a, p. 19) that result from the inter-play of codes—are *worthy* of consideration. If this thesis passes through a "structuralist moment," then, it is only in the sense of attending to codes which *can* structure a reader's reception.

This thesis makes reference to Barthes' (1975a) distinction between proairetic, symbolic, hermeneutic, semic, reference, and diegetic codes. These are useful in considering how narratives and games organise space, time, characters, plots and settings, and how they employ various narrative strategies to produce *vraisemblance* and suspense. This thesis also

makes reference to technical codes associated with media. Cinema, for example, has codes of focus, framing, angle and editing, which contribute to the meaning of a particular shot. Video games appropriate technical codes from both print and film texts, but also have their own codes which govern players' use of the interface and the aesthetic experience of gameplay. Drawing from Aarseth's (1997) account of cybertexts, codes relating to permissible actions at the interface are referred to as "ergodic."

Codes are usually clustered in genres. In Hollywood cinema, for example, genres are usually distinguished in terms of iconography, structure, theme, character, setting and style (see Neale, 1980, 1990, 2000). Video games often draw from established narrative (print or film) genres, but they also draw from game genres, the most well-known of which are action, simulation, strategy, adventure and role-playing (Herz, 1997). However, video game genres were never defined through a rigorous analysis of formal differences, they were defined ad hoc and reinforced for marketing purposes. While the industry recognises between five or eight genres, with various sub-genres, these genres have always overlapped. Commercial and creative imperatives have also led games to draw from a variety of genres and other media, such that they have become increasingly hybrid (Darley, 2000; Herz, 1997; Wolf, 2001).

Having accounted for some of the common codes which govern gameplay, researchers will be in a better position to analyse how players negotiate with them. Of course, since any "interpretation" depends upon the person engaging in the act of "reading," this thesis is less concerned with "a reading," than with probable and potential relationships between the text and its readers; that is, with preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings or reading formations (Eco, 1981; Hall, 1997; Jenkins, 1992; Morley, 1980; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). In the absence of ethnography, the role of the critic can be loosely identified with the writer of hyper-fiction who creates a text of forking paths, or, rather, several possible texts that are irreducible to a single text or world. Yet the point of such analysis is not to be as exhaustive as Borges' library, but merely to acknowledge the plenitude of meaning-making and, by implication, privilege a politics based upon difference, diversity, creativity, and negotiation. By analysing how codes inter-relate, we become more sensitive to the complexities of gameplay as a context for semiosis. Holding open the possibilities of a "text" in this way militates against simplistic evaluations about the "effects" of video games on players.

However, this thesis is concerned with codes not simply in terms of defining the "meaning" or "values" of games as "texts," but also their role in producing the experience of gameplay. In this respect, the issue is one of aesthetics. There is, of course, no need to turn to idealists, such as Plato, Kant and Hegel, for whom aesthetics refers to supposedly "universal" criteria for value, beauty and taste (see Cothey, 1990; Dickie & Scalfani, 1977; Eagleton, 1990), nor to literary distinctions between "high" and "low" culture or art, such as those derived from Schiller, Arnold and Coleridge (see Bourdieu, 1984; Eagleton, 1983; Turner, 1984). In Cultural Studies all human activity is "artistic" in the broad sense of creative expression, and aesthetic value is seen as socially and historically specific. Within this framework, "aesthetics" can be seen as akin to "poetics" in the sense of analysing how certain codes may operate during one's engagement with a medium to produce aesthetic effects (Todorov, 1977, 1981). By extension, just as shared codes are likely to form the basis of discursive formations, it can be argued that shared aesthetic codes inform the trajectories of aesthetic experience. These may be relative to a medium ('film aesthetics'), narrative genres (the "aesthetics of heroic fantasy"), or game genres (the "aesthetics of first person shooters"). In the following, then, "aesthetics" refers to either: the codes which govern the relationship between formal qualities (of the medium, genres, or individual games); to some quality of aesthetic experience, including uses and gratifications (for example, aesthetics of "mastery" and "kinaesthesia"); or to the discursive representation of an aesthetic (for example, Friedman's (1995) theory of an aesthetic of "demystification").<sup>1</sup>

However, aesthetic codes are more connotative, subjective and polysemic than other types of communication (Fiske, 1982; Melrose, 1994; Turner, 1990), and their articulation is especially subject to the perceptual, cognitive and emotional activity of the individual. The effect of aesthetic codes is usually evident only in some quality of experience, and while Cultural Studies provides a useful theoretical basis for analysing the "textual" reception of aesthetic texts, its account of aesthetic experience tends to fall back on psychoanalytic theory and phenomenology. Cultural Studies tends to display a prejudice against the "natural" or "biological," with the assumption that any reference to either involves a claim to "innateness" or "truth" (Gibbs, 2002; Grodal, 1997; Sedgwick and Frank, 1995). Yet much of a player's experience is only intelligible in terms of perceptual, motor, cognitive and emotional faculties, each of which has its history in the evolution of humans.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is, of course, not a manual on game design, but it provides accounts which parallel, or implicitly explain the significance of, some rules of game design, such as those pertaining to character motivation and emotionally complex situations (see Bates, 2001; Freeman, 2003; Kelly, 1998; Kim, 2000; Lewinski, 2000; Rouse, 2000).

This thesis, then, draws from research on cognition and emotion to account for players' aesthetic experiences. Theories of cognition generally developed out of Jean Piaget's (1929/1973, 1932/1965, 1950/2001, 1951, 1978) analyses of the development of children, and have given way to the dominant Constructivist model that underlies most (non-psychoanalytic) models of psychology. This thesis is therefore in dialogue with the cognitive branch of film theory, characterised by the work of David Bordwell (1986) and Edward Branigan (1992), which examines the cognitive structures that govern film comprehension. While video games also have a sensorimotor component and require strategic thinking, Loftus and Loftus' (1983) account of the cognitive and sensorimotor work of players provides a precedent for the use of a cognitive model.

What needs greater qualification is that, despite the stated value of cognitive science, this thesis makes greater use of structuralist narratology and other methods of textual analysis when accounting for the ways that players represent and organise their experience. There are three main reasons for this. First, as Grodal argues:

Cognitive science is compatible with, or has roots in, different, earlier theoretical models in the humanities, and their special variants within film and media studies. . . . Many aspects of cognitive science are genetically closely related to structural linguistics . . . and freely share terms like 'code' (pp. 13-14)

More specifically, terms like "code," "type" and "genre" are analogous to terms like "schemata," the theoretical structures which govern an individual's cognitive activity. Second, while cognitive science may seem to offer a more dynamic account of the individual's response to a media artefact (Grodal, 1997, p. 14), textual-based accounts, including structuralist narratology, have proven extremely sensitive to the subtle possibilities of signification. If we set aside the problematic argument that the computational structures of video games makes structuralist accounts more relevant, it can be argued that the long-standing methods of textual analysis are (at this early stage of video game research) more useful in suggesting the meaningfulness of video games than cognitive accounts. Third, this thesis employs methods of textual analysis as a way of dramatising the *limitations* of structuralist methodology, in the hope that later research will integrate textual and cognitive accounts in more balanced ways.

Since cognition has increasingly been seen as inseparable from affect (Tomkins, 1963; Nathanson, 1992) and emotions (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991), this thesis is also aligned with



Tan's (1997) and Grodal's (1997) attempts to combine theories of cognition and emotion in their analyses of film. However, some more qualifications need to be made in this regard. First, Carroll (1990) and Grodal (1997) are hostile to the psychoanalytic tradition's emphasis on sexuality, gender, and the unconscious, arguing that many aspects of a viewer's relationship to a film are non-sexual, non-gendered, and conscious. This thesis generally accepts Carroll's and Grodal's claims, but it follows Bordwell's (1986, p. 30) suggestion that psychoanalytic theories are useful when cognitive accounts fail. It argues that psychoanalysis is valuable in conjunction with cognitive accounts, especially when analysing some games and some types of gameplay. Precedents in this regard can be found in Kinder's (1991) and Turkle's (1995) use of both cognitive and psychoanalytic theories in their studies of video gameplay.

Second, while this thesis remains open to other research on emotion it does not perform experimental research. Following Tan (1997) this thesis argues that there are some "homogenous" emotional responses that most viewers (or players) are likely to experience and/or are comparable (p. 154). In this respect, just as textual analysis often concerns itself with dominant codes and preferred readings, this thesis is concerned with dominant ways in which emotions are structured and/or are likely to be experienced. It presumes the existence of, not a "Model Reader," but what, following Tan (1997), can be called a "natural" player, that is, a player who has a preference for the (type of) game under analysis and who freely chooses to enter into the experience of play (p. 10). While all players may dislike and resist aspects of a game, a "natural" player "generally makes no effort to escape the attraction of the fictional world" (p. 10), preferring to progressively invest in the diegesis. At the same time, this thesis regularly indicates potential variations in players' emotional responses, analogous to textual analyses of negotiated or oppositional readings. In so doing, this thesis makes the kinds of qualifications that will hopefully make future quantitative or ethnographic analyses more sensitive to video games and their players.

However, it must be noted that while the following emphasises textual analysis over experimentation, it avoids referring to its human subjects as "readers," as is common in Cultural Studies, or "viewers," as is common in the cognitive tradition of film theory, preferring the term "player." This is not to deny that viewing, or playing, is mediated by textuality, nor to offer a rhetorical statement that "readers" are, and always have, been "players" in a textual game. The role of textuality is too well-known to need foregrounding, and other perceptual, cognitive and emotional processes may be of equal or greater import, so

always calling video game players “readers” is misleading. That said, this study occasionally uses the terms “reader” and “viewer” to indicate the mode of engagement that is of theoretical emphasis, given that a video game player (or a theorist of video gameplay) may focus on reading more than viewing, viewing more than reading, or playing more than reading or viewing.

Lastly, the theoretical conjunction this study offers is developed both *as* an account, and *through* an account, of a single game: Squaresoft’s single-player, graphical adventure role-playing game Final Fantasy X (FFX) (2001). The Final Fantasy series is notable because most early computer role-playing games (CRPGs), including series like Bard’s Tale (1982), Ultima (1980), Might and Magic (1986), and Wizardry (1981), were developed for PCs. Since the CRPG was a relatively minor genre on game consoles, the Final Fantasy series helped to popularise the genre for a broader console market, or at least make it more recognisable. Unfortunately, the Final Fantasy titles IV, V, and VI were not released outside Japan until recently, creating some discrepancies between the titles in Japan and other countries. If we follow the Japanese sequence (recapitulated in the versions recently released for the Playstation), FFI, FFII, FFIII, FFIV, FFV, and FFVI were developed for the Nintendo cartridge market. With FFVII (1997) Square moved to the Sony Playstation, spending three years and US\$30 million to produce detailed backgrounds, animated sequences, and a complex story that took advantage of its three CD-ROMs. FFVIII (1999) and FFIX (2000) utilised the same graphical capabilities, though FFVIII, with its futuristic setting and more complicated magic system, deviated more from the existing formula than fans wanted. FFIX was a more popular return to the medieval flavour and simpler gameplay of the earlier titles.<sup>2</sup>

FFX was created for the Playstation 2 and offers enormous graphical improvements over its predecessors, but similar gameplay. Players navigate panoramic landscapes, collect items, fight monsters, solve puzzles, and develop characters’ physical and magical powers while advancing through a complex narrative. The major difference is that, in addition to the traditional Field Screen, Battle Screen, and various Menu Screens, FFX uses the Grid Sphere to manage skill development. This is comprised of a network of nodes, each representing a particular skill or skill bonus, which characters traverse and activate as they accrue experience points. The story, at its most basic, follows Tidus, Yuna, and Yuna’s Guardians (Wakka, Lulu, Kimohri, Auron and Rikku) on their pilgrimage to defeat Sin, a monstrous being who

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<sup>2</sup> Personally, I have only played FFVI, FFVII, FFVIII, FFIX, FFX, and FFX-2. Both FFVII and FFX were replayed and recorded onto (eight three-hour) video tapes during the course of this study to facilitate analysis.

has ravaged the world of Spira for a thousand years. Familiarity with FFX's ninety or more hours of gaming and narration would certainly give substance to the following arguments, but such familiarity is not presumed.<sup>3</sup> Appendix One lists key settings and events; Appendix Two is a breakdown of codes in the opening sequence; and Appendix Three is a breakdown of dominant clusters of hermeneutic codes. Other relevant aspects of the game are described where necessary.<sup>4</sup>

The choice to apply several different theories to this single game has its analogy in Genette's (1980) analysis of Proust's (1934/1970) Remembrance of Things Past. Like Genette, it would be possible to "put the specific subject at the service of a general aim, and critical analysis at the service of theory," such that FFX would be a "reservoir of examples, and a flow of illustration" (p. 22) for several theories about gameplay. Alternately, one could "turn the concepts, classifications and procedures . . . into so many ad hoc instruments exclusively intended to allow a more precise description" (p. 22) of FFX.

However, the complexity of FFX makes it more useful to take a dual approach: to use several theories to better appreciate the experience of playing a popular game, and to use a popular game as a means to test and refine those theories. Early research was largely directed towards games oriented around, on the one hand, motor skills or strategic thinking (arcade games, first person shooters, war games), or, on the other hand, narrative (adventure and role-playing games). While this is changing, the emotional distinctiveness of video games may be owed to their peculiar convergence of sensorimotor and cognitive activity, and this has not been adequately theorised. While FFX has few of the kinaesthetic sequences that characterise first person shooters (FPSs) like Doom (1994), it nonetheless combines many types of gameplay. Indeed, the Final Fantasy series is significant not just because of its consistent narrative depth or gaming innovation (a few other PC and console games may claim equivalent or superior depth and innovation), but its popular integration of both for an international market.

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<sup>3</sup> All the pictures used in this thesis were taken from the Square Central (<http://www.square-central.com/>) and the Final Fantasy Shrine (<http://www.ffshrine.org/>). Both sites were last checked January 1, 2005, and all pictures taken from them are public domain.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the two guides cited in the references and the Websites noted above, the following sites are useful sources of information about the game and/or gaming culture: Unofficial Final Fantasy Site (<http://www.uff9.net/>), Final Fantasy Insider (<http://www.ffinsider.net/>), Final Fantasy Fusion (<http://www.fffusion.com/>), Fantasy Square (<http://www.fantasysquare.com/>), NeoMidgar (<http://neomidgar.com/>), Final Fantasy Spirit (<http://www.ffspirit.net/>) and Square Nation (<http://www.squarenation.com/>).

## Chapter Overview

While the organization of the following chapters owes something to Tan's (1997) analysis of emotion in the traditional feature film, the distinctiveness of video games, and FFX, requires some modifications of his structure. Chapter One reviews the relevant theories and research on play, cognition, aesthetics, narrative, and emotion. Chapter Two draws from Grodal (1997) to consider the feeling-tones experienced as a consequence of the perceptual construction of reality-status at FFX's interface. Chapter Three adapts Tan's (1997) account of "interest" as the basic emotion in the traditional feature film to video gameplay, but makes greater use of structuralist methodology, and emphasises problems with the regulation and transfer of interest across FFX's narrative and game macrostructures. Chapter Four looks at how FFX's hermeneutic coding of reality regulates interest, or, more specifically, how analysing the game in terms of the marvellous, the uncanny and the fantastic suggests that curiosity, surprise and suspense about (dis-) expected events may give way to wonder, fear, and/or anxiety about events.

Chapter Five reviews structuralist accounts of character before analysing how interest is reinforced through cognitive identification of characters in FFX's narrative and game macrostructures. Chapter Six addresses some of the criticisms against psychoanalytic accounts of identification, then considers the relevance of Cowie's (1997) psychoanalytic account of three modes of identification—with the ideal ego, ego-ideals, and super-egos—to gameplay. Chapter Seven elaborates upon the empathetic emotions players are likely to feel towards characters as a result of innate releasers and cognitive appraisal of situational contexts. On this basis it discusses some of the dimensions of happiness, anger, fear and sadness, but argues that FFX's tragic macrostructures may elicit a dominant mood of sadness. The chapter concludes by arguing that allegiance with a character's moral type reinforces or blocks empathetic emotions towards video game characters.

Chapter Eight argues that the emotional experience of gameplay is often characterised by players' empathy towards themselves in the play-situation. This is addressed in terms of how gameplay promotes and blocks what Piaget (1951) calls "preoperatory" cognition, with its accompanying "egocentrism." Within a psychoanalytic model, the blocking of players' egocentrism might be presumed to give rise to fear or anger. However, a better account of how players experience, and self-regulate, such blocking is offered using Silvan Tomkins' (1963) and Nathanson's (1992) model of shame, defined as an auxiliary affective response to

a sudden, unexpected loss of interest. The chapter concludes that the transfer of empathy players feel for themselves to characters, and vice versa, may distinguish the video game as a medium.

Chapter Nine argues that ambivalent reality-status, the dysregulation of interest, the blocking of empathy, and other aspects of gameplay, produce an experience of "meaninglessness" that is recognised in self-psychology (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Kohut, 1971, 1977), but which finds its analogy in Sartrean (1943/1993) existentialism. However, existential feelings of "meaninglessness" may be interpreted as part of *FFX*'s meaning and aesthetics and/or may be covered over when "affect grouping" (Tomkins, 1991) motivates players' (re-)evaluations of gameplay.

## Chapter One – Literature Review

### Play and Games

While romantics like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schiller idealised play as a state of Nature and innocence, Victorian society tended to oppose play to productive industry, presuming a normal and desirable progression from child's play to adult work (Cohen, 1987). Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961) established the more modern conception of play as an ongoing, positive force in adult life and, more broadly, human civilisation, but their oft-cited definitions nonetheless emphasise the border between play and other types of activity. For Huizinga (1955), play is:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. (p. 13)

Caillois (1961) elaborated upon Huizinga's (1955) arguments to provide a more detailed definition of play as:

1. Free: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
2. Separate: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
3. Uncertain: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative;
4. Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;
5. Governed by rules: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
6. Make-believe: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real-life. (Caillois, 1961, p. 9)

Caillois (1961) also divided games into four categories: "agon," "alea," "mimicry" and "ilinx." Agonistic games involve players pushing their skills through competition. Aleatory games are games of chance in which the player tries to forecast or control chance in some degree. Games of mimicry include all forms of impersonation in which one takes on a pretend role. Ilixa games involve an altered state, such as making oneself dizzy, thrilled, or terrified. For Caillois, there was a 'progression' within each of these types, from the extreme of active

exuberance, spontaneity and turbulence, to control, calculation, effort and subordination to rules; the former he termed "paidia," the latter "ludus."

While Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961) saw play as an end in itself, it is now usually seen in terms of its psychological or social functions (Cohen, 1987; Millar, 1968; Yawkey and Pellegrini, 1984). Within the earlier psychoanalytic tradition, play was seen as an expression of repressed desire that (like dreams) dramatised unconscious content in a way that could be useful in a therapeutic context (Klein, 1932; see also Schaefer & Reid, 1986). More recently, in self psychology, play has come to be seen as central to the development of self, notably in terms of early interaction between the mother and child (Schore, 1994; Stern, 1977, 1865), the use of "transitional objects" (Winnicott, 1971), and "selfobjects" (Kohut, 1971, 1977) (also see Meares, 1992; Mitchell & Black, 1995; Stein, 1991).

Within the Constructivist tradition derived from Jean Piaget (1929/1973, 1932/1965, 1950/2001, 1951, 1978), play is often seen as a form of rehearsal for sensorimotor and cognitive skills. Piaget (1951) distinguished between three types of play. "Practice play" is associated with the repetition of actions as a means of mastering sensorimotor skills. "Symbolic play" is associated with imitation, fantasy and socio-dramatic processes. At this stage play is often egocentric, in the sense that it does not involve true co-operation or the consistent application of rules. Piaget's third category is "constructional games" with prescriptive rules, including hide-and seek, marbles and board games. At this stage, rules are seen as fixed at a point in time through mutual consensus and are changeable through a renewed consensus. Piaget's (1951) model therefore describes a developmental progression from rule-less egocentric play to rule-governed, co-operative games, paralleling Caillois' progression from paidia to ludus.

Taxonomies have been produced which identify the different ways that games structure the relationships between players. Avedon (1971), for example, identifies ten structural elements of games: purpose, procedures, rules, number of players, roles of participants, results or pay off, abilities and skills required, interaction patterns, physical setting and environmental requirements, and required equipment. Redl, Gump and Stratton-Smith (1971) go further, providing a taxonomy of thirty dimensions of games, among them bodily contact, bodily activity, skill requirements, the role of chance and competition, the use of space, time and props, role-taking factors, and role complexity, with subcategories. However, within anthropology games are often seen in relation to rituals as microcosms of

*social* structures and as a site where such structures may be reproduced (Geertz, 1973; Mead, 1934/1972). Certainly, researchers have become increasingly concerned with the relationship between video games and learning. It has been argued that video games improve spatial and cognitive skills (Braun & Giroux, 1989; Greenfield, 1981; Greenfield et al., 1994; Kinder, 1991; McClure & Chaille, 1987; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 1994), and Seymour Papert (1980) has argued that games may function as “microworlds” that facilitate children’s learning. Indeed, the growing awareness of the relationship between cognition and emotion has meant that theories of children’s and adult’s education now tend emphasise the motivating role of the positive emotional states fostered by play (Kafai, 1995, 1996; Malone, 1981). In this respect, play and games are seen as a socialising force as well as an instrument of pedagogy.

Recently, some researchers of video games have suggested the need for a discipline of “ludology,” or the formal study of games (Eskelin, 2004; Frasca, 1999, 2003). This notion of ludology as a discipline is a timely response to the prevalent narratological and dramatic models of gameplay, and seems logical. After all, play is defined as separate from other activities, and may be experienced as separate from non-play activities. However, one must be wary when play’s separateness is over-emphasised. If we do not consider every system of rules a “game,” and almost any activity may be engaged with “playfully,” it can be difficult or misleading to separate play from other processes. As is evident in Bordwell’s (1986) analysis of film, and Godal’s (1998, 2003) analysis of film and video games, the cognitive or affective work engaged in an aesthetic experience are not reserved for that experience, they are mediated versions of everyday cognitive and affective activity.

### **Cognitive Activity in Art and Games**

In accounting for the cognitive skills of video game players a useful departure point is Bordwell’s (1986) and Branigan’s (1992) analyses of film, which focus on inferential perceptual-cognitive activities. For Bordwell (1986):

Perception [is] a process of active hypothesis testing. The organism is tuned to pick up data from the environment. Perception tends to be anticipatory, framing more or less likely expectations about what is out there. . . . The organism interrogates the environment for information which is then checked against the perceptual hypothesis. The hypothesis is thus either confirmed or disconfirmed; in the latter case, a fresh hypothesis tends to appear. (p. 31)



This inferential activity is organised by "schemata," relatively constant hypothetical structures that classify and organise information, providing a basis for expectation, and Bordwell differentiates between "prototype," "template," and "procedural" schemata. Prototype schemata "involve identifying individual members of a class according to some posited norm," and often involve the identification of "agents, actions, goals, and locales" (p. 34), or "identifiable persons, actions, locales" (p. 49). They are, then, readily identifiable as types, or stereotypes. Template schemas are larger structures that "can add information when it is absent and test for proper classification of data" (p. 34). Bordwell argues that the "canonical" story is a template schemata comprised of: "introduction of setting and characters—explanation of a state of affairs—complicating action—ensuing events—outcome—ending" (p. 35). Template schemata may, then, be seen as analogous to the codes and conventions of particular genres. Procedural schemata, by contrast, are those "operational protocols which dynamically acquire and organise information" (p. 36). Bordwell uses the term to refer to higher-level cognitive processing. For example, if material in the *syuzhet* does not conform to canonical schemata the viewer may turn to "compositional," "realistic," or "transtextual" schemata to interpret them, "search[ing] for appropriate motivations and relations of causality, time, and space" (p. 49) which make the material intelligible.

A film, then, "presents cues, patterns, and gaps that shape the viewer's application of schemata and the testing of hypotheses" (p. 33). The viewer proceeds by using a mixture of "bottom-up" processing, making inferences "on the basis of perceptual input," and "top-down" processing, organising perceptions on the basis of expectations drawn from known schemata (p. 31). The viewer thereby organises "chunks" of film into "more or less structurally significant episodes" (p. 35). In this respect, the "artwork is necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and fleshed out by the active participation of the perceiver" (p.32), but the artwork sets limits on the activity of the spectator, encouraging the application of certain schemata. What is significant is that perception when engaging with an artwork differs from other forms of perception:

In ordinary perception . . . perceptual hypotheses tend to be vague and open-ended. In art, however, alternative hypotheses tend to be much more explicitly defined, their set tends to be closed, and they get challenged fairly often . . . Narrative art ruthlessly exploits the tentative, probabilistic nature of mental activity. (p. 39)

Consequently, Bordwell foregrounds the hypothetical activity of the viewers in terms of curiosity and suspense, arguing that: "narratives are composed in order to reward, modify, frustrate, or defeat the perceiver's search for coherence" (p. 38).

Grodal (1997) argues that, compared with cognitive models, structuralist models are too "static," presuming structures within texts, while poststructuralist accounts tend to separate meaning from its adaptive foundations in the individual (p. 14). However, language provides a sequential way of representing the holistic experience of thought, and remains an ongoing determining factor in planning, evaluating, remembering and reasoning (Vygotsky, 1934/1962). In this respect, the accounts of textuality in Cultural Studies offer a sensitive terminology that can be usefully integrated with cognitive models (see Hernadi, 2002; Richardson & Steen, 2002; Spolsky, 2002; Turner, 2002). Indeed, as Stam (2000) argues, cognitivism can be viewed "as a nostalgic move backward" (p. 240) in the sense that "a focus on cognitive commonalities across all cultures exists below the threshold of cultural and social difference, and therefore discourages analysis of tensions rooted in history and culture" (p. 242). Analysing cognition tends to locate meaning within the viewer, making it easy to forget that schemata, like codes, are acquired in a social context and may define an audience's shared culture.

Bordwell's (1986) account is also limited because the cognitive work of video game players is bound up in sensorimotor activity. Indeed, while Bordwell uses the term "procedural schemata" to refer to abstract cognitive work, the term usually refers to the distinction between, on the one hand, an episodic or semantic understanding of an action ("declarative knowledge") and, on the other hand, knowledge which is implicit in performance, including the registering of sensory cues and responding to the present environment ("nondeclarative knowledge") (Squire, 1987). In this respect, procedural schemata are associated less with understanding than behaviour, and are of particular relevance to video gameplay, which has a performative component.

Turkle (1984, 1995) may be seen as accommodating the motor activity of computer users when she differentiates between "abstract" and "concrete" styles of computer use. The abstract style, epitomised by structured program design, may be characterised by a preponderance of top-down processing, in that users have a model of what they want to do at the interface then perform whatever sensorimotor activity is required to carry it out. The concrete style, epitomised by an unstructured, bottom-up approach to program design, may

be characterised by a preponderance of bottom-up cognitive processing and ongoing sensorimotor activity, in that the user learns through experimentation. However, while Turkle acknowledges that these two styles may be mixed, she is more concerned with broad cultural styles and aesthetics than with the real-time dynamics of motor and cognitive activity.

Lofus and Loftus (1983) provide a more useful foundation of the dynamic relationships between cognitive and motor activity in video games. They observe that the mind and body are not unitary systems, but depend upon shared components and processes: sensory memory, short- and long-term memory, attention, reaction time, cognition, and the motor system. Players constantly monitor an original state, a goal state, and the means for achieving the latter, but while several strategies are often available to achieve a goal each strategy has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, a player who relies on their long-term memory of a game environment must continually remember where they are in a given route, will be disoriented when they take a wrong turn, and will have "less processing capability for such things as focusing and switching attention" (p. 71). However, players can choose strategies which work for them. A poor memoriser may choose a strategy that requires little memorisation, while someone who takes too long to retrieve long-term memories may choose strategies that minimise the requirements of such retrieval. In this respect, gameplay may be analysed in terms of the cognitive and sensorimotor strategies that players use to achieve their goals in the game.

### **The Aesthetics of Video Games**

Game aesthetics can be usefully distinguished by accounting for the cognitive and/or sensorimotor demands they make of players and the extent to which these make play more engaging. Malone (1984), building upon Papert's (1980) work, identified four categories of elements which he argued were characteristic of "intrinsically motivating" games: first, the existence, clearness, accessibility and meaningfulness of goals; second, the importance of uncertain outcomes through the use of variable difficulty levels, multiple goal levels, randomness, and hidden information; third, an emotionally appealing fantasy that was intrinsically related to skills learned and provided a useful metaphor; and, fourth, curiosity, both sensory (audio and visual effects, as decoration, as enhancing fantasy, as a reward, and as a representation system) and cognitive (surprises and constructive feedback).

Malone's research has been influential, and is useful from both a design point of view and as a checklist for analysis, but his taxonomy is insensitive to players' aesthetic preferences. Myers (1990c), by contrast, developed Malone's work, using questionnaires (Q-methodology) with a sample of 44 gamers, to identify dominant aesthetics in the subjects' favourite video games. As the basis for his questions, Myers uses four criteria: challenge, curiosity, fantasy and interactivity (and their opposites: ease of play; realism; familiarity; and stability/constancy). He sorts players' responses into five principal "factor arrays": the game as a new challenge (skill building); the game as a pleasant, non-threatening social diversion; the game as meditative withdrawal; the game as an enemy; and the game as a new challenge (skill-proving). He suggests that the three most common aesthetics are: the "game as challenge, subcategorised as (a) game providing a challenging opponent (game as referee) and (b) game being a challenging opponent (game as enemy)"; the "game as meditation"; and the "game as social activity (more common in video than home computer games)" (p.385).

The dominant aesthetic in the above accounts are based on skill mastery, and certainly:

many investigators have concluded that the appeal [of video games] rests in challenges to improve one's skills, to attain a higher level of game complexity, to persist in the face of obstacles and setbacks, to exceed one's own or some other target of excellence. (Durkin, 1995, pp. 16-7)

A sense of development, accumulation and mastery is evident in many elements of game structure: the use of high scores, levels, quests and bonuses; and step-by-step increases in pace, the difficulty of opponents and levels, and the power of characters. These intrinsically motivating aspects of gameplay are amenable to Wallace's (1999) use of "operant conditioning," in that the placement, timing and scale of problems and rewards determine the continued interest of the player.

More generally, Turkle (1984) argues that young children quickly develop concerns with "domination, ranking, testing, proving oneself" (p. 58) whose roots are "aggressive, passionate and eroticized" (p. 59). In this respect, the tendency towards skill development and mastery may be related to the predominantly male demographic of video games (Anderson & Ford, 1987; Cacha, 1983; Chambers & Ascione, 1987; Cooper & Mackie, 1986; Dominick, 1984; Eysenck & Nias, 1978; Graybill, Kirsch & Esselman, 1985; Kaplan, 1983; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1981; McClure & Mears, 1984). Indeed, Skirrow (1990) uses Melanie Klein's (1932)

psychoanalytic theories about the relationship between infants and their mother's bodies to argue that gameplay is a masculine discourse that includes:

a reactivation of infantile feelings triggered by the games, and, partly, perhaps, the attractions of masochism. . . . Continuing to perform in the game . . . is the same as continuing to live. When you stop you die" (p. 331).

For Skirrow, an internalised anxiety about an unreal danger, understood in terms of castration anxiety, is externalised with the embodiment of the "penis-as-magic-wand" (p. 331). Kinder (1991) similarly argues that "the repetitive, segmented, serial nature" (p. 110) of game narratives, during which players are "constantly threatened by short circuiting and premature deaths" (p. 111), "leads to a disavowal of obsolescence, castration and death" (p. 110). For both Skirrow and Kinder, then, the increasing mastery of the typically male protagonist is a pre-emptive attempt to protect the male ego, or phallus, from annihilation or diminution.

Turkle (1984) argues that young players appreciate the consistency of the strictly "rule-governed worlds" (p. 77) of games, and in many respects a game functions as an opponent whose strategies are gradually learnt and mastered. Myers (1990a) and Friedman (1995), following game designer Chris Crawford (1984), argue that video games reveal their constructedness more than other media. Friedman (1995) observes that:

Learning and winning . . . a computer game is a process of demystification: One succeeds by discovering how the software is put together. The player molds his or her strategy through trial-and-error experimentation to see "what works"-which actions are rewarded and punished. (p. 82)

In short, video games, being "simulated, rule-driven worlds" (Turkle, 1984, p. 74), allow players to discover, or demystify, their inner workings, rules, "secrets," and "logic structures" and, ultimately, how they are "put together" (Kirksaether, 1998, p. 82). Indeed, Wertheim (1999) argues that:

[the adventure game] Adventure may be seen as a metaphor for computing itself. During the game, players cracked the code of this virtual world in much the same way that a hacker would crack the code of a computer operating system. (p. 246)

Herz (1997) similarly observes that: "charting out subterranean passages and dead ends is pretty much analogous to mapping out a circuit or debugging a piece of code (p. 11). Unlike print or film texts, then, a game may be replayed until the structure of the software has been

apprehended, and manuals, magazines, and other game accessories help players expose this structure.

Nonetheless, Friedman (1995) overstates the importance of "demystification" when he argues: "the moment [a game] is no longer interesting is the moment when all its secrets have been discovered" (p. 82). He implies one over-riding gaming genre, style or aesthetic of (explorative) mastery, when games are inherently repetitive and allow for replay. Object-event sequences, including enemy activities, are often randomised, and in multi-player games the demystification necessarily extends to the strategies of another player. Unless one is capable of plotting in real-time all factors that determine randomisation in a video game, or another player's strategy is completely understood and predictable, total mastery is impossible. Even Malone (also see Provenzo, 1991 and Wallace, 1999) observes that game appeal is influenced by the degree of randomness, and Chandler (1994) writes:

most good games are not solely a test of skill, but offer an element of chance which can encourage those who less confident of their current level of playing skill. Children, I would suggest, are well aware of this feature, and many prefer games in which they can blame luck for their failures. (¶ 18)

So while some players like "testing their worth" against an unforgiving machine, others dislike the rigidity of strictly rule-governed domains, finding it an "intolerable. . . pressure. . . a taunt, a put-down" (Turkle, 1984, p. 86).

Competition between players may provide a context for challenge and mastery, but the social dimensions of video games may constitute a distinctive aesthetic. Provenzo (1991) argues that arcade gaming constituted a sub-culture that was one of the "great equalizers of youth culture because [they] allow[ed] an eight year-old to approach a fifteen-year-old and discuss something as peers" (p. x). Other research (Lepper, 1985; Mitchell, 1985) has indicated that video games may promote filial interaction when youth play within the family environment and talk about games with their parents. Unfortunately, early arcade culture was lost with the transformation of arcades into sanitised places where parents were encouraged to leave their children in shopping malls (Herz, 1997). However, games still may be played with friends or family; shared knowledge of video games still provides a basis for social interaction; and Local Area Network (LAN) parties and game conventions are contemporary spaces for collective gameplay. The problem is that much of the recent research on computer-mediated communities has tended to focus on specialised PC-users, notably those who use Multi-User Dungeons (or MUDs) (see Baym, 1995; Deaubien, 1996; Chesebro & Bonsall,

1989; Curtis, 1996; Dery, 1994; Foster, 1997; Jones, 1995, 1998a, 1988b; Kim, 2000; Kolko & Reid, 1998; Kollock & Smith, 1999; Porter, 1997; Stone, 1995; Rheingold, 1991; Strate, Jacobson & Gibson, 1996; Wilbur, 1997).

Video games may also serve a social function *without* other players. Selnow (1984) has argued that children may regard the game itself as "a kind of surrogate companion and their interactions with the games as social interactions" to the extent that the game becomes an "electronic friend" (p. 58). Turkle (1984) argues that video games offer a form of useful escape for disabled children, and online interaction especially allows disabled children social interaction otherwise denied them. Wallace (1999) makes a more general argument that it "is hard for any humdrum reality to compete with [the worlds of video games], especially for people whose lives are troubled by low self-esteem, boredom, lack of social support, or unsatisfactory personal relationships" (p. 172). Video games, then, offer a compensatory sense of achievement, autonomy and self-esteem (Greenfield, 1984; Nelson & Carlson, 1986; Turkle, 1984). However, some children may feel "cut off" when they finish a game (Turtle, 1984, p. 66), and it is possible that too much control over a game world may lead children to be impatient with a less obsequious real world (Sheingold, cited in Greenfield, 1984, p. 114).

While mastery and social interaction may play important roles in the aesthetics of gameplay, the experience of identification, immersion and agency is of equal importance. The departure point for early theorists concerned with these experiences was television (Durkin, 1995, 1999; Greenfield, 1984; Turkle, 1984). Greenfield (1984) argued that both TV and video games have a visual appeal, and that their moving images especially appeal to young viewers (p. 88-90). Indeed, for her, familiarity with TV is one reason why children respond so readily to video games. For Stallabras (1996), by contrast, video games are distinguished from other media by their use of interaction: "the passivity of cinema and television is displaced by an environment in which the player's actions have a direct, immediate consequence on the virtual world" (p. 85). However, Greenfield (1984), Turkle (1984), Skirrow (1990), and Kinder (1991) argue that what is truly distinctive about video games is that they *combine* a passive mode of spectatorship associated with cinema and television with more active modes of participation and interaction. For Skirrow (1990), the "'audience' disappears as a distinction between 'doer' and 'viewer'" (p. 330), and the enigmas for the performer are of the order of "Where am I?" rather than "Who am I?"

Durkin argues that, compared with TV and film, video game players “do not feel a strong sense of identification with the characters” (1999, p. 129), and he leaves open the question as to whether there are less behavioural effects in games. Fuller and Jenkins (1995) similarly note that, compared with print and film texts, identification with characters in video games is limited because characters tend not to have psychological depth:

Characters play a minimal role, displaying traits that are largely capacities for action: fighting skills, modes of transportation, preestablished goals. . . . Activity drains away the character’s strength, as measured by an ever shifting graph at the top of the screen, but it cannot build character, since these figures lack even the most minimal interiority. (p. 61)

Skirrow (1990) is even more critical, stating that: “for the performer of a game the first and third person are almost totally identified, so there can be no suspense based on knowing more (having seen more) than the protagonist who represents you” (p. 330). The major objection to such accounts is that the characters in many print and film texts do not necessarily offer more psychological depth than the average video game character. We cannot judge video games solely on the basis of their status as a medium, since a video game with a complex narrative and detailed characterisation may offer more depth than a poorly written novel. In this respect, the above accounts ignore the distinctiveness of video games by evaluating them in terms of other media.

As Turkle notes, in a video game: “you have to do more than identify with a character on the screen. You must act for it. Identification through action has a special kind of hold” (1984, p. 79). The issue, then, is how “identification through action” creates a distinctive hold. Friedman (1995) observes that in earlier simulations, like Civilization (1991), one identified principally with a leader from a particular culture or historical period, such as Genghis Khan, indicating a straightforward identification with the role of a leader. However, in more recent simulations like SimCity (1989) there is a “constant shifting of identificatory positions depending on whether one is buying land, organizing the police force, paving the roads, or whatever” (p. 85). Yet simply “attempting to map ‘roles’ onto the player’s on-screen identification misses the point” (p. 85) since:

overarching these functional shifts . . . is a more general state of identification: with the city as a whole, as a single organism. . . [or] a process. . . . ‘Losing oneself’ in a computer game means, in a sense, identifying with the simulation itself. (pp. 84-85)

Friedman concludes that the player does not simply identify with a role:



the player forms a symbiotic circuit with the computer, a version of the cyborgian consciousness described by Donna Haraway (1985) in her influential "Manifesto for Cyborgs." The computer comes to feel like an organic extension of one's consciousness, and the player may feel like an extension of the computer itself. (1995, p. 83)

The term "cyborg" is, of course, a contraction of "cybernetic organism": a synthesis of the technological and biological. This is usually understood in terms of the physical augmentation of humans with technology, but in practice a cyborg is any being that forms a cybernetic relationship—a dynamic, self-regulating, and homeostatic (information) feedback system—that incorporates both organic and non-organic material (Gray, 1995). This means that a person need not be physically fused with a computer to be a cyborg—any causal relationship with technology, such as the feedback loops that occur during gameplay, suffices for the term to apply. Therefore Friedman (1995) could be read as simply referring to the psychological experience of this relationship.

The problem is that Haraway (1985) sees cyborgs as subverting traditional boundaries between physical/non-physical, self/body, human/machine, and thereby creating post-, proto-, and/or non-human beings. On this basis she sees cyborgs as a polemical metaphor for the subversion of all binary systems, including male/female, which presume a primary term. Theorists of computer-mediated communities, including virtual reality, sometimes seem to conflate the literal and metaphorical meanings of the term, implying that cyborgs are inherently subversive or revolutionary (see Featherstone & Burrows, 1995; Gray, 1995; Haraway, 1985; Helsel & Roth, 1991; Reid, 1994; Stone, 1995; Strate, Jacobson & Gibson, 1996; Wolmark, 1999). However, to claim that the cybernetic relationship is inherently subversive is to fall back on essentialism, when it should be obvious that a cybernetic relationship may be read in different ways. Players may simply see the game as a tool and experience immersion without any sense that their humanity, or any other aspect of their identity, has been altered. It suffices to suggest that, in either its literal or metaphorical form, the term "cyborg" only offers a limited account of the relationships between players and their games.

Turkle (1986) provides a more useful departure point when she argues that what players pursue in their interactions with video games is an "altered state," described less in terms of books and TV than by metaphors taken from "sports, sex or meditation" (p. 60):

Call it 'muscle memory,' call it 'flow,' call it 'trusting your instincts' – the experience of feeling a continuity between mind and body is part of the inner game of any well-played sport. Skilled video game players experience this immediacy of knowing their game with more than their head, and the experience is exhilarating. (p. 81)

An account of such altered states can be found in Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990, 1993) description of "flow." For Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990, 1993), "flow" is "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (p. 4). Csikszentmihalyi (1993) identifies eight dimensions of flow: clear goals and immediate feedback; a balance of challenge and skill; the merging between consciousness and one's activity; a high degree of focus; the loss of self-consciousness; an altered sense of time; and an autotelic quality. The flow state, then, is facilitated when there is sufficient challenge to stimulate the individual beyond their normal level of effort: too much challenge creates anxiety, too little creates boredom, and in this respect flow may be seen in terms of an appropriate schedule of reinforcement (Loftus and Loftus, 1983; Wallace, 1999). It can be argued that play has been increasingly identified with—or is seen at its most optimal when players enter—a state of "flow." In this context, the problem with the term "play" is that it often refers to an activity which may be characterised as an ongoing attempt to (re-)enter the *ideal* of play: a state of flow that is totally absorbing and gratifying to the ego. Furthermore, while it is useful to analyse how games produce flow experiences, the fact that there are different metaphors for "altered" or "flow" states suggests that it may be better to turn away from generalisations about some universal, ineffable state and attempt to distinguish different types, or qualities, of immersion.

As Murray (1997) argues, "immersion" is "a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water" and what people seek from "a psychologically immersive experience" is:

the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. We enjoy the movement out of our familiar world, the feeling of alertness that comes from being in this new place, and the delight that comes from learning to move through it. (pp. 98-99)

Murray traces the distinctive qualities of immersion to the "procedural," "participatory," "spatial" and "encyclopaedic" characteristics of the computer as a medium. She argues that the computer is procedural in the sense that: "it was designed not to carry static information

but to embody complex, contingent behaviors" (p. 72); in short, it is an engine of computation that operates according to programmable rules. The computer is participatory in the sense that it is "responsive to our input" (p. 74), and, for Murray, the notion of "interaction," applied to computers, refers to an environment "that is both procedural and participatory" (p. 74).

The spatial qualities of the computer are also distinctive because, unlike "linear media such as books," the computer does not simply represent space in verbal or pictorial form; it represents "navigable space" that users can "move through" (Murray, 1997, p. 79). Indeed, "the computer's spatial quality is created by the interactive process of navigation" (p. 80), in that computers not only calculate spatial representations from a player's perspective, they do so dynamically, in real-time. Lastly, Murray argues that computers are encyclopaedic, in the sense that they can store so much information, making them more capable of representing a procedural, participatory, and spatial *world*, not just in terms of visual detail, but also scope and dynamics. This encyclopaedic quality provides a basis for "epic-scale narrative" (p. 84), evident in online role-playing games (p. 86) that allow multiple players to create and share occupancy in a developing game world. For Murray, the combination of the spatial and encyclopaedic elements with the procedural and participatory elements is what provides the aesthetic experiences of immersion and the related experience of "agency," that is, the sense of entering a navigable virtual space and seeing the consequences of one's actions in the virtual world.

It must be emphasised that while full sensory immersion is the ideal of Virtual Reality (see Heim, 1993), video games only offer limited physical immersion, ranging from the wrestling, slapping and kicking of the joystick or cabinet with arcade games to the less physically taxing interaction with a PC game's keyboard and mouse controls. Darley (2000) argues that most video games offer a heightened form of "kinaesthesia": "the *illusion of control and agency in real time and in a realistic looking (and behaving) environment [italics added]*" (p. 154). For him: "deliberation is minimal – once the game is under way the player is compelled continually and immediately to respond" (p. 156). Skirrow (1986) has similarly observed that video games often produce a sense of immediacy and danger that leads to "crisis management" (p. 331), and Turkle (1984) has emphasised the importance of survival, in that, in many games, "one false move [and] you're dead" (p. 79). The low tolerance for error in a context of high stakes fosters an increasing level of attention and a more intense or immersive altered state. In this respect, the reflexive and frenzied character of interaction in many video games may compensate for absent sensory channels. However, video games do

not necessarily emulate other media and so cannot be seen as merely compensatory. As Murray (1997) argues, they generate their own aesthetics through creative experimentation with their constraints.

### Video Game Content

It is perhaps understandable that early researchers were concerned about the values, or content, of the video games in which players were immersed, and acted. Provenzo (1991), who reflects these concerns, argues that video games are generally sexist and violent. He argues that females, when they are represented at all, are usually ridiculous stereotypes of femininity and serve as objects to be looked at or rescued (see also Cassel & Jenkins, 1998; Consalvo, 2003; Herz, 1997; Poole, 2000; Turkle 1984). Not only are males the dominant demographic, video games appeal to their aggressive instincts. For Provenzo, the "message communicated by the rules of [video games] is that violence is not only acceptable, it is necessary to win" (p. 124). Stallabras (1996) makes a similar claim, observing that video games do not show the consequences of violence: bodies disappear after a period of time; no matter how they die, the corpses of each type of monster look the same; aggression and murder are seen as merely an expenditure of energy that lowers one's health bar; and injuries are regenerated by eating food or camping for a night's sleep.

What Provenzo (1991) finds especially alarming is that many games draw their scenarios from historical events, such as World War I and II, Vietnam, the Cold War, and the Gulf War. That is, when video games do historicize violent conflict, it is usually to harness or reinforce racial or national stereotypes, such as the notion that Chinese or Japanese are different, might want to fight us, and therefore must be regarded as the enemy. There is, certainly, a strong relationship between video games and the military-industrial complex (Herz, 1997; Stallabras, 1996; Toles, 1985), and many games draw their iconography from warfare: arsenal, field armour, ammunition, health kits, and military-style missions, maps and strategy.

More recently, Fuller and Jenkins (1995) have argued that mastery of the game world gains symbolic value from the New World narratives of Renaissance explorers (1995, p. 58). Players expand their wealth and power, and bring space "under symbolic control" (p. 69) by continually pushing back or establishing such frontiers as the edge of the screen, save points and levels (p. 67). Using Michel de Certeau's (1984) argument that narrative involves the

transformation of space into place, Fuller and Jenkins (1995) suggest that the rhetoric of games as new frontiers or New Worlds is driven by:

the desire to recreate the Renaissance encounter with America without guilt: This time, if there are others present, they really won't be human . . . or, if they are, they will be other players like ourselves, whose bodies are not jeopardized by the virtual weapons we wield (p. 59)

Kinder (1991) and Stallabras (1996) link gameplay to the conservative values of capitalist exchange. Kinder (1991) draws from Piaget (1978) and Lacan (1977/2001) to argue that video games prepare children for consumer culture by fostering interactivity in the context of multi-media merchandising networks. Stallabras (1996), who is more polemical, argues that video games:

obsequiously reflect the operation of consumer capital for they are based on exchange, an incessant trading of money, munitions or energy, a shuttling back and forth of goods and blows. (p. 90)

For Stallabras, video games are a debased "culture industry" that distract the "masses" from larger social issues such as global inequality.

However, there has been a trend in the industry to design games for girls, reflected in Laurel's ill-fated Purple Moon company and the Grrlz Games Movement (see Cassel & Jenkins, 1998). There have also always been a few games, including *Final Fantasy*, that have dealt with social issues such as feminism, economics, ecology, science and religion. More to the point, setting aside critics' evaluation of the moral or political values of games, players' perception and acceptance of a game's values is not a simple issue.

### **Subjectification and the Play of Meaning**

For both conservatives like Provenzo (1991) and polemicists like Stallabras (1996), what distinguishes video games is not merely their undesirable values, but the extent to which players participate in them. Their arguments therefore may be said to rest on the assumption that interaction increases not only identification and immersion, but also subjectification. There is, it must be acknowledged, a rudimentary logic to this. As Andrew Darley (2000) observes, video games are increasingly characterised by "the *impression* of being enabled to act within and upon the world one gazes upon [*italics added*]" (p. 161). That is, while video games are *defined* by their use of interactivity, they offer "a kind of relative or *regulated* agency: the constraints of the game allow the player to choose between a limited number of

options [*italics added*]” (p. 164). This becomes significant when the choices players are forced to make require them to act out certain types of values. As Herz (1997) observes, Will Wright built certain values into SimCity (1989) in the sense that the rules of the game promote certain types of actions, such as the use of public transport. Winning the game is easier when one conforms to those rules, and such conformity could be interpreted as acceptance.

However, despite its seeming common-sense, the assumption that interaction facilitates identification recapitulates an outmoded notion of identification. Within early film theory, which drew from Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the more one identified with a film or a character the more vulnerable one was to the film’s ideological position (see Lewis, 1984; McGree, 1997; Metz, 1975, 1982; Nichols, 1981; Palmer, 1989; Penley, 1989; Staiger, 1992). Cultural Studies no longer accepts this position, but it nonetheless persists. For example, Stallabrass (1996) has claimed that interaction in video games is so routine and mechanical that players subjectify themselves as mindless object-machines beneath the malevolent forces of late capitalism. In a less polemical account, Taylor (2003) draws on psychoanalytic film theory to argue that breaks in point of view fracture identification, thereby recapitulating the notion of the cinematic apparatus as the basis for identification at the very moment she sees the video game as offering a different kind of apparatus.

While the relationship between “interactivity” and “subjectification” is still open to debate, recent research has begun to address the issue in more subtle ways. Frasca (2003) identifies four levels of ideological operation in “simulations,” including computer games. The first level, shared with film and narrative in general, occurs at the level of representation, and involves the signification of the “objects and characters, backgrounds, settings, and cut scenes” (p. 232). The second level relates to “manipulation rules: what the player is able to do within the model” (p. 232). As Consalvo (2003) has observed, the provision for certain types of actions may naturalise or promote an ideology of sexism in FFVII: skills such as “Protect Girl” reinstate traditional gender relations as part of the text. Third, there are “goal rules,” which define actions that are not merely *possible*, but which the player *must* perform if s/he is to win. The fourth level deals with “meta-rules,” when the player is able to change the rules. We might include the use of hints, spoilers, and cheats in this category.

Theorists could distinguish more complex causal conditions across the spectrum of possible and necessary actions, for example in the manner suggested by Esclinson and

Tronstad (2003). However, this thesis takes the position that performance of an action in a video game does not necessarily entail endorsement of that action, and that players have the capacity to play not only in the sense of making physical choices, but also in the sense of playing with the meanings of those choices. This position reflects the changing ways that Cultural Studies has appropriated the terms "play" and "game" to describe the act of reading. Within everyday discourse, as in the phrase "to play a game," "play" is a verb that refers to an activity, or a way of doing something, while "game" is a noun that refers to a system of rules. This usage parallels the distinction between *parole* and *langue*, as is evident in Lapsley and Westlake's (1988) summary of structuralist theory:

The system, known as *langue*, and actual or potential utterances, *parole*, may be compared to the rule system of chess and to the set of moves that may be actually or potentially played. *Langue* defines both what are permissible or impermissible utterances (as do the rules of chess in relation to moves) and what their significance is (again, as in chess). . . . If the meaning of a signifier is analogous to the value of a piece on a chessboard, then it becomes evident that meaning will change according to the context in the same way that the value of, say, a pawn will depend upon what stage of the game has been reached, where it is in relation to other pawns, how many pieces are left on the board, and so on. (p. 33-4)

In a structuralist approach, of course, a text's structure is analysed to identify the possible permutations of meaning, such that the "play" of meaning is seen as an "effect" of the text's structure. This constitutes poetics in the traditional sense in that it emphasises the ways in which the reader *should* read the text (or play the game) and/or the effects that *should be* produced (such as surprise). Hutchinson (1983) provides a valuable example of this tradition, identifying how authors "signal" a game, arouse readers' expectations, and challenge their deductive and reflexive powers by exploiting a game-text as an "enigma," a "parallel," or by utilising such narrative techniques as allegory, allusion and symbolism.

However, in more recent poststructuralist accounts the reader's *parole* (read: play) potentially distorts and/or transforms the *langue* (read: game) in and by which it is expressed (and constrained). While this kind of usage is evident in some of Barthes' work (1975a, 1975b), it is consolidated in reader response theory (Holland, 1975; Iser, 1974, 1978), psychoanalytic accounts of the speaking subject (Kristeva, 1980), and deconstructionism (Derrida, 1970), all of which emphasise the open-endedness of signification. Most recently, the subversive quality of "play" characterises much writing on metafiction, the fantastic, and postmodernism (Hutcheon, 1988; Jackson, 1988; McHale, 1987), with a sense that media-savvy producers and audiences exploit semiosis through the manipulation of conventions (see

also Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1992). Within Cultural Studies' psychoanalytic framework such playfulness is readily seen as indexical of the subject's desire, which is privileged as a liberating force of resistance against imposed meanings and subject positions. That is, since subjectivity is provisional upon the "rules" of language, our "real" identities (as subjects) may be seen as a form of "role-playing," as merely a "game." The term "play" therefore connotes not only the freedom to interpret texts in countless ways, but a changeable state of affairs in which one can "play" a different role in the world *beyond* the text, and, by breaking the rules, come up with new roles.

Unfortunately, such metaphorical, and often rhetorical, usage is problematic. Even if play is read as indexical of desire, desire is not inherently resistant. As Foucault (1979) argues, desire is never simply repressed by social forces, but is produced within discourses. An analogous conclusion has been reached in the psychoanalytic revision of fantasy as the "mise en scene of desire" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 318). Donald (1989) summarises:

What is evident in fantasies is not just the wish, but the setting out of the wish in a way that always also incorporates the prohibitions, censoring, and defences that surrounded the wish. (p. 140)

That is, desire always operates within a social context, and its expression may reinscribe the prohibitions which gave rise to it. By analogy to play and games, sometimes the point of a game is not to win, but simply to prolong the experience of play. Even when one desires to win, and cheats, this may legitimate winning as worthwhile, since cheating is usually an expression of a desire for the ideal subject position offered by a game. In short, the desire expressed when cheating may sometimes be less a violation of the game itself than a violation of the rules which govern one's position in the game.

Nonetheless, the notion of a playful reading usefully foregrounds the freedom players' have in producing negotiated and oppositional readings of whatever actions they choose or are forced to perform in a game. Indeed, Jenkins (1992) has argued that individuals can recuperate their existing values by poaching, and reworking, the resources of cultural artefacts. Ultimately there is no reason why players cannot approach the meaning or experience of gameplay in the same ironic or kitsch way that viewers watch B-grade horror films, in which case submission to the limited rules of a game is little different from submitting to a clichéd plot. The problem is that to understand the "interactive" qualities that distinguish video games from other media, and, by implication, to appreciate their distinctive



aesthetics, it is necessary to interrogate the border between narratives and games in a literal sense.

### From "Interactive Narratives" to "Cybertexts"

Herz (1997) observes that in early video games narrative content functioned as a backdrop for the action or was limited to introductory text and "canned" (pre-filmed) sequences, usually at the start and end of each level (also Juul, 1999; Poole, 2001). These sequences could be seen as "cute or funny but [were] basically irrelevant to their play" (Turkle, 1984, p. 66). However, more recent researchers have begun to identify the tensions, or relationships, between narratives and games in more detail (Buckles, 1985; Juul, 1999; Kirksaether, 1998; Kucklick, 2003; Poole, 2000; Ryan, 2001; Wolf, 2001). Juul (1999), notably, has argued that games and narratives are "two separate phenomena that in many situations are mutually exclusive" (p. 1), concluding that the temporal emphasis on the past conflicts with the emphasis on the present in video games, that the linearity of narrative conflicts with the non-linearity of video games, and that the position of the narrator conflicts with the position of the player.

Nonetheless, Juul (1999) expects that future games will better integrate narratives and games, and Aarseth (1997) has already argued that while there may be differences between the categories of narrative and gaming: "the difference is not clear-cut, and there is significant overlap between the two" (p. 5). This is evident in Darley's (2000) argument that the events of gameplay—opening doors, crossing the screen, picking up objects and so on—can be recounted to construct narratives of "near-epic proportions" (p. 152); or, as Herz contends: "the choreography of an arcade game is its plot" (1997, p. 140). Of course, as Darley (2001) observes, the events which constitute narratives of this sort are impoverished and fragmented when compared with other narrative forms in that they are repetitive, lack closure, have little psychological or narrative depth, and are interrupted by frequent saving, death, and replay (p. 152). In respect to the events of gameplay: "codes that are central to narrative – codes that produce a certain plenitude, a depth of richness and meaning – are largely absent" (p. 153). Darley concludes that "what counts far more [than narrative] is the actual playing, and this involves a certain kind of kinaesthetic performance that becomes almost an end in itself" (p. 151). For him, "narrative in video games is *de-centred* . . . in a subordinate position within the overall formal hierarchy that constitutes the game aesthetic" (2000, p.151).

Yet Darley's (2000) account is true of some games more than others. Some researchers have redeemed adventure and role-playing games in literary or artistic terms, arguing that video games may have the structural or narrative complexity of print and film texts (Buckles, 1985; Kelley, 1993; Randall, 1988; Ziegfeld, 1989). The problem is that, as Aarseth (1997) contends, whether or not adventure games make good novels or not is irrelevant, since adventure games are *not* novels, they are aesthetically distinctive and must be played, and studied, on their own terms (p. 107). Darley (2000) himself acknowledges that "the particular character of interactivity" means that researchers still need to address "what is happening to familiar forms of narrative and [if] other modes and genres [are] involved" (p. 195). In many games, notably interactive narratives, adventure games, and role-playing games, narrative is *not* necessarily de-centred but central to the aesthetic experience (at least during certain sequences), having been incorporated or reworked in varied, complex ways.

In accounting for the complexity of "interactive narratives" some researchers have used hypertext as a model (see Barret, 1989; Delany & Landow, 1991; Kirksaether, 1998; Landow, 1992; Snyder, 1996). As Ted Friedman (1995) summarises, hypertext:

connect[s] the oppositions of "reader" and "text," of "reading" and "writing," together in feedback loops that make it impossible to distinguish precisely where one begins and the other ends . . . calling into question the very categories of author, reader, and text. (p. 73)

That is, whereas a traditional narrative is characterised by a beginning, middle and end, and a predetermined relationship between a writer and reader, those who navigate hypertext and other "interactive" narratives construct their own texts in a non-linear fashion. This has been seen in positive terms as providing a useful metaphor for poststructuralist notions of intertextuality, in that, instead of offering one dominant narrative, voice, or truth, hypertext allows for multiple narratives, voices and truths (Barret, 1989; Delany & Landow, 1991; Jones & Spiro, 1995; Landow, 1992). Indeed, Laurel (1991) has argued that the problem with "interactive narratives" is precisely that players may choose from multiple paths, but that some of these paths may not lead to a dramatically satisfying conclusion. For her, then, the issue is how to program a story that is dramatic in Aristotle's (trans. 1965) sense. However, Aarseth (1997) argues that placing the programmer/computer as a "playwright" simply constructs the user as "both as an agent without a will and as a watcher without a say" (p. 140); that is, Laurel (1991) reduces interactivity to a player's submission to the dramatic decisions of the "playwright." For Aarseth (1997), the user is never simply an author, and, as

Friedman (1995) argues: "the constant feedback between player and computer in computer games is far more complex than [a] simple networking model" (p. 74).

Consequently, after reviewing existing theories of "interactive" media (Anderson, 1990; Anderson, Holmqvist & Jensen, 1993; Eco, 1981; Ziegfeld, 1989), Aarseth (1997) offers his own model. To begin with, he distinguishes between potential sign sequences in a medium, which he calls "textons," and the signs that actually appear at the surface of a medium, which he calls "scriptons." He then argues that media can be distinguished in terms of how scriptons determine the textons. In a book the textons and scriptons are identical (the words on the page), whereas with film the textons (the images on celluloid) highly determine the scriptons (the images projected on a film screen). With computers, the textons (registers that store data) are mediated by the layers of hardware and software as well as by the choices of the user before being represented as scriptons (words and images at the interface).

Aarseth (1997) uses the term "ergodic," derived from the Greek words *ergon* (work) and *hodos* (path), to refer to any text in which the activity of a "reader" (partly) determines which signs appear on the surface of the medium. That is, an ergodic text allows the reader to physically select from, alter, or input text, producing a different text that is read *from*. Aarseth (1997) offers seven variables as a means of classifying the mode of traversal, or ergodic distinctiveness, of texts: dynamics; determinability; transience; perspective; access; linking; and user-functions. Upon this basis, Aarseth differentiates hyperfiction, adventure games, cyborg-authored texts, and MUDs as examples of ergodic literature. However, Aarseth does not see new or digital media as inherently more ergodic than other media, since so-called "linear" media may allow for as much random access as so-called "non-linear" media. The reader of a book may skip sections, read the end first, or consult the index before referring to an earlier section. Certain print texts, such as Choose Your Own Adventure, take advantage of this by making readers choose from multiple narrative sequences, moving back and forth through the physical text. A work of hyperfiction that only allows the user to click forward through a fixed sequence of linked pages is, by contrast, more "linear." Indeed, to speak of a "text" (reading) as a linear sequence of signs forgets that all nonlinearities are subsumed to the supposed "linearity" of the act of reading (or may be mentally reordered after the "text" is read).

Aarseth's (1997) notion of "text" "is closer to the philological (or observable) work than to the poststructural (or metaphysical) galaxy of signifiers" (p. 20). While readers of such

non-ergodic texts as traditional film and print fiction perform the work of reading "in their heads," the user of ergodic texts:

performs in an extranoematic sense. During the cyber textual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of "reading" do not account for. (p. 21)

For Aarseth, early writers on hypertexts confused the playfulness of reading the "text" with the physical playfulness of physically altering the "work," but in correcting this emphasis he necessarily over-emphasises the "work." Consequently, while Aarseth's model of the textual-machine specifies a human operator, it is useful to distinguish this from textual-machines that operate themselves and textual-machines with a human reader (see Figure 1.1).

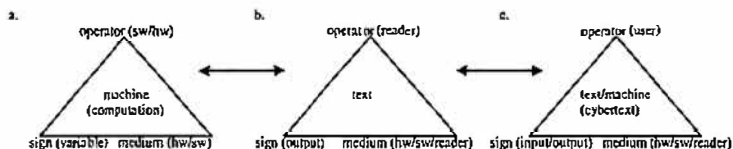


Figure 1.1. Aarseth's (1997, p. 21) model of the textual-machine, adapted to include: (a) computation, (b) reading and (c) interaction. [Note: h/w= "hardware"; s/w="software"]

With textual-machines that operate themselves the "work" stands by itself without any accompanying "text." In the case of textual-machines with a human reader any attempt to understand the internal working of the computer requires that the computational processes ("works") be accompanied by a "text" dynamically (re-) constructed by the operator. This may include not only a textual model of the computational processes, but a text in the more conventional sense of an interpretation of the "meaning" of the text that appears at the interface. In the case of textual-machines with a human user the "work" is accompanied by a "text" of the "work" as well as a "text" of the cybertext's "meaning," and both determine the choices the player makes, and how, as a result, s/he alters the "work."

The relationships between the "work" and the player's model or "text" of this work is implicit in Aarseth's (1997) distinction between "aporia" and "epiphany" in hypertext fiction:

In contrast to the aporias experienced in codex literature, where we are not able to make sense of a particular part even though we have access to the whole text, the hypertext aporia prevents us from making sense of the whole because we may not have access to a particular part. (p. 91)

That is, hypertext readers may have a sense that they cannot make sense of the whole "text" because of absent parts of the "work." With epiphany, by contrast, "sudden revelation . . . replaces the aporia, a seeming detail with an unexpected, salvaging effect: the link out" (p. 91). For Aarseth:

this pair of master tropes constitutes the dynamic of hypertext discourse: the dialectic between searching and finding typical of games in general. The aporia-epiphany pair is thus not a narrative structure but constitutes a fundamental layer of human experience, from which narratives are spun. (pp. 91-2)

So while the "text" constructed from the "work" may be experienced as incomplete because of absent aspects of the "work," closure may be experienced through an "epiphany" which seems to unite the "text."

In fact, relationships between guided speculations (the multiple "texts" cued by the "work") and the actual outcome (the subsequent "text") are central to the dramatic experience of narratives and games in general. The pleasure of reading a detective novel, for example, is dependant upon a disparity between the reader's theory ("text") about what happened and the actual explanation that is finally offered (the completed "work"). This disparity is continually exploited and redressed through the dissemination of clues, red herrings, dead ends, revelations, new events, and so on, which *deliberately* mislead the reader about "what happened" until the entirety of the "work" is complete. In gameplay, of course, players are not usually concerned with the entire "computational work," merely those elements that are functionally relevant to play, and different players utilise different aesthetics to determine what is functionally relevant. The frustration consequent upon disparities between "computational work" and "computational text" is only a problem when it exceeds the frustration deemed acceptable according to the aesthetic by which gameplay is evaluated. That is, players do not demystify the computational or algorithmic entirety of the code, data, or medium, they only produce a "computational text" that is adequate for the task of playing the game according to their chosen aesthetic.

Aarseth's (1997) terms allow for a more subtle and sensitive appreciation of video games, but Aarseth is less concerned with elaborating his taxonomy than he is with discussing existing genres. This provides for some useful insights into the structural differences between commonly accepted genres, but a detailed map of all the ergodic features of a genre or text is less important than the player's model of its sign system, or, rather, the tensions between a

player's expectations about feedback and the feedback they actual receive. Given that this study is largely concerned with players' experiences, it avoids referring to ergonomics in Larseth's sense of the game "work," instead referring to "ergodic codes" that define admissible choices for interaction at the interface. This allows us to separate out conventions of an interface that may characterise a genre, but which are portable between genres. Like all codes, ergodic codes are usually invisible when the user is familiar with the interface, but are visible while being learnt (during in-game tutorials and easier levels), customized (when a player changes game command keys), or blocked (because of unexpected events and/or a player's lack of mastery).

However, it is still necessary to emphasise the distinction between the player's computational text and the player's interpretative text, since these may function either independently or in close conjunction. For example, a reader of a hypertext narrative may have a mental map of the links between each page of text, but this may have no bearing on their interpretation of the text. Conversely, there may be instances when the structure of the links in a hypertext resonate with the text. Murray (1997) addresses this issue when she argues that the structure of games may complement their meaning. For example, navigating complex, closed and/or repetitive environments may give rise to "suspense, fear of abandonment, fear of lurking attackers, and fear of loss of self" (p. 135). A game, then, may produce a type of immersion and agency that complements its intended meanings or aesthetics by manipulating its procedural, participatory, spatial and encyclopaedic qualities. Murray describes the significance of several structures of navigation in this sense: story mazes, the rhizome, the journey story, problem-solving, "losing" and "winning" stories, games as symbolic dramas, the game as contest (agon), and world construction in MUDs.

The corollary of an analysis of "interactive narratives," or, more appropriately, "ergodic texts," is an awareness of not only the collapse between narrative and game, but also the inter-relationship between hypothesis-making about future events (cognitive-oriented interpretation of the "text") and the performance of physical tasks (sensorimotor-oriented interaction with the "work"). In practice, narrative-oriented games require at least minimal sensorimotor action, and sensorimotor-oriented games require strategic cognition. Consequently, despite the theoretical attention it may have received, the terminological distinction between "story" and "game" is less important than the processes of engagement that give rise to the aesthetic experience of gameplay. The issue that emerges from this is how

sensorimotor action and cognition are cued to work in conjunction during gameplay, and how this produces an aesthetic, emotional experience.

### **Emotion in Video Games: Early Models and Research**

The research on emotions in video games has largely been confined to experimental attempts to prove the aggressive effects of gameplay upon players (Anderson & Morrow, 1995; Ballard & Wiest, 1996; Cooper & Mackie, 1986; Dominick, 1984; Fling, Smith, Rodriguez, Thornton, Atkins, & Nixon, 1992; Funk & Buchman, 1996; Griffiths & Dancaster, 1995; Irwin & Gross, 1995; Kubey & Larson, 1990; McClure & Mears, 1984; Nelson & Carlson, 1985; Schutte, Malouf, Post-gorden & Rodasta, 1988; Scott, 1994; Silvern, 1987). The methodology of these experiments may be seen, with some variation (and qualification), as taking the following general form. First, a group of players are measured for an aggressive state. Second, some players are given a so-called "violent" game, while other players are given a so-called "non-violent" game. Third, after a measured period of play, the aggressive states of both groups are re-measured. Fourth, the subsequent difference in the level of aggression is found to be either short-lived, minimal, or non-existent.

There are many problems with this experimental methodology. Aside from Jenkins' (1990) observation that early research tended to abstract "violence" from its context of reception, the experimental conditions of these types of research produce an artificial context for producing and expressing aggressive tendencies, and tend to confuse correlation with causation (Durkin, 1995, 1999). Certainly, there are broad, historically specific correlations between the male demographic and the aesthetics associated with challenge, competition, and aggressive mastery. However, aggressive personality types often choose to engage with media that reflect and reinforce their existing tendencies, making the measurements correlative, not causal.

A more obvious criticism is that such research does not adequately account for the cathartic experience of games, that is, the extent to which emotions are aroused and purged and thereby nullified, reduced, or redirected into a socially acceptable form. Catharsis is an aesthetic evident in Malone's (1981), Myers' (1990c) and Turkle's (1984) analysis of players' preferences, but assumptions about catharsis in gameplay need qualification. First, like aggression, the catharsis players expect from games is less likely to be measurable in an unfamiliar experimental context: the everyday routines one seeks relief from are attenuated or

disrupted by the experimental conditions. Second, it is simplistic to see the reduction of aggression as evidence of beneficial catharsis. To presume that aggression felt in relation to a video game is *necessarily* negative and anti-social, and *therefore* undesirable, is the same as evaluating a person's anger at their football team losing without reference to the psychological, sociological, and ideological functions of fandom. Some players may find it useful to induce manageable anger at a game rather than deal with anger, or other emotion, resulting from some unmanageable social situation.

Third, measuring a purged emotion after its purging ignores or misrepresents the desired aesthetic experience of playing a video game. Determining whether or not some players end up with a (temporary) higher level of stress or aggression after play may be beside the point if what players seek from a game is what they experience *while* playing it, not the state they expect to be in afterwards. In this respect, a "black box" experimental approach draws attention away from the actual processes of gameplay, especially the real-time regulation of emotions. Video games *may* produce stress relief that is measurable by comparing the "before" and "after" levels of physiological arousal. However, not only may this purging be episodic, significant emotional moments of play may occur early on in, or before the end of, a gaming session, and the actual closure may be poorly defined or arbitrary. The underlying problem here is that the catharsis hypothesis was developed for traditional dramatic forms—stage plays, print novels and feature films—which have an aesthetic formula organised around discrete emotion-episodes polarised around central concerns, in which elements are drawn together and resolved in something that subsequently resembles a total, organic text. Video games have been played for the last three decades not as ineffective dramatic forms but as a different *kind* of dramatic form, or, more precisely, as a different kind of emotion-regulator.

Within the bulk of the research addressed in this chapter there has, it should be noted, been a tendency to consider a range of emotional states in video games. However, those emotions tends to be addressed indirectly and/or are seen as debased, compared with print and film. The "altered states" of "meditation," "kinaesthesia," "immersion," "agency," and "flow" may be positive, but they are generalised from certain genres or aesthetics, principally first person shooters, and refer to general states. They therefore provide a limited basis for analysing the dynamic regulation of emotions in any particular game, and it remains necessary to provide a more systematic theoretical account of the regulation of meaning and emotion in gameplay.



## Frijda's Model of Emotion

While Bordwell's (1986) account does not address the emotional experience of film viewing, researchers such as Smith (1995), Tan (1997), and Grodal (1997) see emotional responses as of equal or primary significance. For Tan (1997), while there may be many motives for watching films, "what all natural viewers of the traditional feature film have in common is their desire to experience emotion as intensely and abundantly as possible, within the safe margins of guided fantasy and a closed episode" (1997, p. 39). In an analysis of video games, in which the player's sensorimotor system is engaged and emotional responses are not merely virtual, it becomes even more necessary to appreciate the motivating role of emotion.

Following Tan, we can turn to Frijda's definition (1986, 1988, 1989) of emotions as changes in action readiness through the appraisal of a situation. "Action readiness" refers to how emotions activate the nervous system, giving way to rapid physiological changes, such as heart rate, bronchial dilation, and inhibition of the digestive system. These not only prepare an individual for physical action in a general sense, they are tied to specific "action tendencies" (Frijda, 1986, p. 70): to run, attack, seek intimacy, kiss, and so on. Some theorists, such as Izard (1984), argue that each emotion has its own neurophysiological substrate, such that a basic set of emotions can be identified. Most of these "basic" or "elementary" emotions— notably interest, happiness, surprise, anger, fear, sadness, and disgust—are generally accepted. However, cognitive (Kagan, 1984), structural-developmental (Stroufe, 1996), functionalist (Campos & Barret, 1984; Frijda, 1986), and socio-cultural (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1992) traditions in the study of emotion argue that the quantity and/or quality of emotions is seen as depending upon the stage of development, cognitive appraisal, and/or the cultural context (see Mascolo & Griffin, 1998, pp. 4-14).

The functionalist position is privileged here, following Frijda (1986), Lazarus (1991), and Ortony, Clore and Collins (1988), who see emotion as having a control precedence. That is, "emotion is functional in that it takes control, precluding extended reasoning: a decision to take action—any action—is better than failing to act in time" (Tan, 1997, p. 43). Emotion, then, influences one's attentiveness and motivation towards a particular problem, and, by extension, one's ability to deal with this problem. However, a key difference between theorists is the extent to which emphasis is placed upon associated physiological and cognitive processes. Without minimising the extent to which the different traditions offer

conflicting interpretations, it is possible to take the moderate position that each tradition principally emphasises different aspects of processes that cross the biological and psychosocial.

Upon this basis we can appreciate Tan's (1997) distinction between "primary" and "secondary" appraisal. For Tan, following Frijda (1986), "primary appraisal" is an advanced, automated, and immediate process directly related to the stimulus, premised upon such basic elements as intensity, match-mismatch, hedonic quality, agency and causality. This evaluation is limited to "immediately observable affordances" (Tan, 1997, p. 47), that is, those forms of action which are obviously associated with the object or situation, such as fight or flight (Gibson, 1979; see also Baron, 1980). Indeed, the term "affect" can be usefully reserved for the biological component of arousal consequent upon primary appraisal (Bach, 1976). Tomkins' (1962, 1963, 1991) classic analyses of the complex assemblies of nine innate affects is paradigmatic of this type of usage. While the feeling-states that Grodal (1997) refers to are more general than Tomkins' (1962) affects, they may also be seen as affective in the limited sense that they are premised upon primary appraisal. "Secondary appraisal," by contrast, is a continued cognitive elaboration accompanied by "emotional significance that is not directly evident from the situation itself" (Tan, 1997, p. 47) (see Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1966). In Frijda's (1986) terms it is only when secondary appraisal occurs that we can speak of true emotion, and this study reserves the term "emotion" for this usage. Indeed, for Frijda, each emotion has a distinctive situational meaning structure, or cognitive evaluation. For example, fear is not merely a physiological response, it is a state of arousal *combined with* a cognitive evaluation of an imminent threat.

A central question for the study of emotion in film is if the viewer experiences true emotions. Tan (1997), following Frijda, is aligned with the cognitive branch of film theory (Allen, 1997; Carol, 1990; Grodal, 1998), which critiques the assumption that viewers mistake the screen for reality. Tan (1997) differentiates between an involuntary "illusion of motion," based upon the physiological phenomena of "flicker fusion" and "apparent motion," as well as a series of *voluntary* illusions: the "illusion of the diegetic effect," "the illusion of the controlled witness," and "the illusion of the observational attitude." These "illusions" comprise a sequence which most viewers voluntarily and progressively accept and invest in. The viewer thereby takes up a voluntary observational position as an invisible witness and enters into the diegetic effect. Being in the position of witness the viewer knows that events do not affect his/her welfare directly, but is still able to form an emotional relationship with

the film and its characters. This relationship is not one of habitation or straightforward identification, but of empathetic concern from the position of spectator. This finds its analogue in other situations in which we find ourselves spectators, such as watching sport. Even if the events being watched are not real, our relationship to situations and characters as a spectator is genuine, such that we may feel genuine, albeit inhibited, emotions. As Frijda (1989) argues: "film does not elicit emotions by products known to be imaginary, but allows inhibition of emotions because the products are known to be imaginary" (¶ 4).

Tan (1997) elaborates upon this by distinguishing between "Artifact-emotions," or "A-emotions," which are responses to the film's non-diegetic elements, from "Fiction-emotions," or "F-emotions," which are responses to situations within the film's diegesis. In the classical feature film, A-emotions are minimal (or minimised). Tan consequently focuses on F-emotions, arguing that interest is the key emotion produced while watching a feature film, and that this is oriented around the production and confirmation of expectations about events in the diegesis. These expectations are governed by "thematic structures," such as viewers' expectations about the course of a story about "Revenge," and "character structures," that is, how characters' goals and motives lead viewers to privilege and expect certain outcomes on behalf of those characters (p. 179). The action tendency of interest is a desire to keep watching, but more complex emotions, such as admiration, pity, and sadness, may be reinforced by, and reinforce, interest. These more complex emotional responses are likely to be inhibited because they pertain to a fiction, and the action tendencies associated with them are virtual, or imagined. Someone watching a film may be cued to dislike a particular character on the screen, but s/he is not obliged to act upon that emotion by abandoning their seat and assaulting the screen; s/he merely imagines and fears or hopes for certain outcomes.

Frijda's (1986) model of emotion, and Tan's (1997) application of it to film, provides a basis for some valuable questions and departure points. In video games, the cognitive response to the aesthetic object gives way to some form of sensorimotor-ergodic action, such that video games produce both virtual and actual action tendencies. This being the case, how does the player's position as both invisible witness (to narrative sequences) and active participant affect his/her emotional responses? Should we see participation as giving rise to a different *sort* of interest, and does the confluence of virtual and action tendencies affect the course of this interest? Should we expect video game characters to elicit the same kind of empathy felt towards filmic characters? And does a player's concern with his/her own interests as a player interfere with his/her ability to empathise with characters?

## Conclusion

The above issues will be addressed in the rest of this thesis. Each chapter focuses on a different theoretical concern and/or aspect of gameplay, drawing from various theories of narrative, cognition and emotion. The ongoing concern is to redress vulgar notions of "reality" and "identification" which have characterised popular opinions and early research about gameplay. The general argument in this respect is that the construction of reality may be seen in terms of aesthetics rather than ideology, and that what needs more attention is the reality of players' relationships to the games they play. These relationships cannot be reduced to assumptions about increased identification through interaction; they are better seen as aesthetic, emotional relationships which result from interest in the game and empathetic emotions directed towards characters and players from the *position* of witness or player.

## Chapter Two - The Reality-Status Of The Interface

### Reality-Status and Stages of Audiovisual Processing

Cultural Studies takes the position that, while there is a material reality, knowledge is empirically derived and governed by social convention, such that the "realism" of a fictional text is evaluated with reference not to the object world, but to codes of *vraisemblance* (Barthes, 1975a; Culler, 1975; Neale, 2000). This position is, in a broad sense, in accord with Constructivists like Tan (1997) and Grodal (1997) who argue that "reality" is evaluated through inferences based upon schemata drawn from physics, psychology, magic, and religion.

However, whereas Cultural Studies theorises "realism" in terms of the naturalisation of ideological content (see Chapter Six), Frijda's (1986, 1988, 1989) account of emotion, specifically his Law of Apparent Reality, sees "reality" in functional terms. For Frijda, a concern must be interpreted as "real" if there is to be an emotional response to it. Obviously, if we have evaluated something as *unreal*—in the limited sense of imagined, illusory, or representational—then we have decided that it cannot affect us (except psychologically) and that no physiological arousal or action is needed (except to self-regulate any psychological or psychosomatic effects). For example, being shown an image of a crocodile (which we recognise as such) does not elicit the same motor-activity as discovering one is in proximity to an actual crocodile. This is not to say that we do not have feelings, or an affective response, to something that we decide is "unreal," merely that there is no action tendency, and therefore no emotion, according to Frijda's definition.

Within this framework, the paradox of fiction is that audiences have emotional responses to events they know are unreal. While Sartre (1938/1948) simply denied that film viewers feel genuine emotions, Carrol (1990), Grodal (1997), and Tan (1997) resolve the paradox by arguing that the *thought* of a concern posits a hypothetical or possible reality which produces an anticipatory simulated response with an emotional component. As Tan (1997) observes, this response is inhibited by a viewer's observational attitude. That is, while it is possible that one may share some characters' emotions, any emotional response is governed by one's position as a viewer or player.

What concerns us in this chapter, however, is that the processing of sensory input

usually occurs outside of conscious awareness and only becomes conscious under certain conditions. That is, the appraisal of, and affective response to, a stimulus—including its reality-status—begins at a perceptual level *prior* to conscious and deliberate cognitive activity (Frijda, 1998, p. 281). It might initially be presumed that this early, perceptual evaluation of reality-status is especially bound to the intensity or salience of a particular stimulus, that is, the extent to which it is presented forcefully to one's senses as worthy of attention and response. By implication, it might be presumed that high affect is associated with reality, and low (or the absence of) affect is associated with unreality (Grodal, 1998, p. 34). However, primary appraisal incorporates many dimensions of a stimulus, and Grodal identifies several other fundamental parameters of reality-status: normal perceptual qualities, external (distal) stimulus source, temporal immediacy, concretion (as opposed to abstraction), intentional behaviour, and modality synthesis.

Since there is constant feedback between perceptual, cognitive and affective domains, in practice it is impossible to isolate these lower-level evaluations of reality-status. However, by using Grodal's (1997) four stage-model of the audiovisual processing of fiction (Figure 2.1) it is possible to differentiate key perceptual qualities of the interface which produce impressions of unreality. Grodal's model identifies five modes or types of affect on the basis of what part of audiovisual processing one's mental focus is directed towards, and it can be argued that different parameters of reality-status focus a viewer's, or player's, attention onto particular stages of this processing.

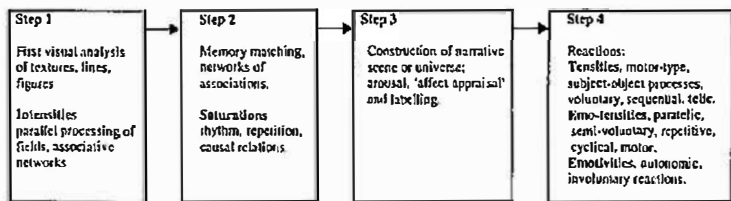


Figure 2.1. Adapted version of Grodal's (1997) model of stages of audiovisual processing (p. 59) with reference to his model of aesthetic fields (p. 57).

Grodal's (1997) four stages may generally be seen in terms of response over time, though neurological processing and feedback mean that the processes involved are not linear. The first stage involves basic sensory perception, such as the stimulation of rods and cones in the retina, and the brain's initial processing of "colours, contrast, and so forth, [to] find figures, ground and spatial dimensions" (p. 59). A "mental focus" on these "non-figurative

perceptual processes" (p. 57), or, more broadly, the experiences located within our sensory systems, produces what Grodal calls "intensities." The second stage involves a general shape identified in the first stage of processing being checked and matched against earlier memories, "aided by feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity," followed by the activation of "networks of association" (p. 60). This includes the attribution of labels and affective values, such that a shape identified as a snake "will surface in consciousness with its visual features and with its affective value" (p. 60). By Frijda's (1986, 1988) definition, the absence of secondary (cognitive) appraisal of reality in these initial stages means that there is no emotion, but intensities and saturations constitute an affective quality of experience.

At the third and fourth stages of processing, Grodal's (1997) account overlaps with Tan's (1997). The third stage is the "cognitive-emotional appraisal and motivation phase," and involves the objects identified in stage two being "put into the framework of a hypothetical narrative scenario" (p. 60). For example, the Chocobo Eater may be labelled as "lethal danger" for Tidus, with whom a player identifies and/or sympathises. This allows for the labelling of the situation and its associated affect (fear), as well as the production of arousal, which motivates "telic-arousal-reduction procedures" (p. 61), or what Frijda (1986) and Tan (1997) call action tendencies. The fourth stage involves the reactive component, that is, the operation of arousal-reduction procedures, or action tendencies, while in a state of arousal (fight or flight). Grodal (1997) identifies three general types of response that can occur at this stage. When the mental focus is on (semi-) voluntary responses to goal-oriented activities or representations, one experiences the "intensities" (p. 57) associated with suspense, but which may take the more extreme forms of distress or terror. This is the case in most linear, plot- or character- driven canonical narratives in which we willingly invest in, and feel concern for, the fate of a protagonist undertaking some activity. Grodal refers to as "emotensities" (p. 61) those experiences when the mental focus is on repetitive or rhythmic semi-voluntary paratelic activity, as when one is lost in the (actual or represented) process of singing or dancing. Lastly, he refers to as "emotivities" (p. 61) those experiences when the mental focus is on involuntary autonomic reactions, as when one cries, laughs, or shivers uncontrollably.

The following, then, argues that deviations from normal perception and shifts between proximal and distal perceptions (Grodal, 1997, pp. 30-31) may be produced by formal qualities of FFX's interface, fracturing modality synthesis. These processes, which can be interpreted as part of the primary appraisal of impression of unreality in FFX, guide players'

mental focus onto intensities and saturations, which constitute a feeling-tone that may occur prior to and/or alongside secondary appraisals of reality-status.

### **Perceptual Deviation as a Consequence of Digital Articulation**

As Grodal (1997) observes, when stimuli imprint upon our senses, one experiences "perceptual intensities [for example, patterns of light in the retina] without any meaning in the ordinary sense of the word" (p. 59). This experience encompasses not just the sensory organs, but the sensory cortexes involved in initial sensory processing. If our mental focus rests upon this element of audiovisual processing we experience intensities associated with aesthetics in the limited sense of defamiliarised sensory experiences. Everyday examples of this include watching the play of light on water, listening to the quality of a singer's voice wash over oneself, and repeatedly running sand through one's fingers to feel its coarseness.

If we limit the present discussion to visual qualities of video game interfaces it can be argued that a similar mental focus on intensities may emerge as a consequence of digital signs. As Grodal notes:

The visual system is preset to transform local intensity-values into a primal sketch (of objects and major features of objects); and, further, to produce a 2½-D sketch; and the directedness of these processes is mentally felt as a search for meaningfulness, for what it looks like. (p. 54)

This process was the focus of Gestalt psychologists such as Max Wertheimer (1958), Kurt Koffka (1963), and Wolfgang Kohler (1975), who argued that visual percepts are grouped on the basis of physical proximity, perceived similarity, and continuity of broken lines, until one perceives a discrete and/or familiar form and thereby experiences closure. What is significant is that forms of representation without obvious structure undermine the capability to render a primal sketch, or perceive a Gestalt impression. This is often elaborated by way of blotchy sketches or trick drawings, which only make sense when a particular focal point is identified. A more dynamic analogy is the experience when one moves closer to an expressionist, impressionist or oil painting, or when an out-of-focus image is focused, and an image emerges from the seeming chaos of perception (or vice versa). This effect is identical to that produced in games which include a player-controlled in-game "zoom" option. Whereas "zooming" in on a photographic image may emphasise hidden details, "zooming" in on a digital image emphasises that image's compound nature. Since each "zoom" maximises the degree of pixelation, it motivates increased attentiveness to the gap between the image and its composite



pixels, until at a certain point the latter possess a perceptual salience that blocks Gestalt impression of the former.

This effect of zooming in on a digital image is exemplary of how digital signs in general may block a Gestalt impression of an image, as is evident when we consider the "articulation" of digital signs (see Eco, 1976). At low levels of resolution the pixel becomes a minimal or fundamental signifying unit which possesses a distinctive triple articulation. The first articulation of the digital sign refers to the way that pixels are combined in a seemingly infinite variety of syntagmatic relationships governed by screen resolution. Using a 1:0.75 ratio, game screen resolutions range from 320x240, 640x480, 800x600, to 1024x678 and higher. The second articulation refers to the way that each pixel is comprised from paradigmatic increments within a predefined range of hue (0-360), saturation (0-100%) and brightness (0-100%).<sup>1</sup> The third articulation refers to the way that at higher levels of resolution pixels, like film images, resolve into "conditions of perception, . . . such as angles, curves, textures, effects of light and shade, and so on" (Eco, 1976, p. 45). At this point the pixel is indistinguishable from a visual continuum. Many monitors now produce a range of values that have no verbal equivalent and/or are unable to be perceived by the human eye in this sense.

In earlier games, of course, low resolution, the use of sprites, and interlaced scanlines meant that the digital articulation of computational objects was obvious in every image. Indeed, despite the stylistic shift towards "cinematic realism" (Darley, 2001; Friedman, 1995; Stallabras, 1996) and the recent use of anti-aliasing to smooth 3D images, the resolution of games is still often low enough that digital articulation. When individual pixels are visible in this way they may function like phonemes that double as morphemes. That is, just as "a" is both a minimal signifying unit and a meaningful word, a pixel may be a minimal signifying unit that also represents a "glint" in a character's eye, a "sparkle" on a metal surface, or a "bullet." However, since pixels may be comprised of multiple percepts of hue, saturation and brightness, a highly saturated, dark red pixel could signify not just a "glint" but "insanity," as distinguished from "spirited enthusiasm." Players may also exploit the double articulation of language when interpreting digital signs. For example, a player may perceive a phonemic correlation between "glint" and "flint" (reinforcing connotations of a character's fiery

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<sup>1</sup> Hue measures the wavelength of reflected light from or transmitted by an object, measured as a location (0-360) on a standard colour wheel. Saturation measures the strength or purity of the colour and is represented as a percentage of hue in relation to grey (0-100%). Brightness measures the relative lightness or darkness, independent of its hue and saturation, represented by a percentage from black to white (0-100%).

disposition), "sparkle" and "buckle" (indexical of powerful armour and/or the power of a character who wears it), or "bullet" and "billet" (in FFX a Text item may be used to heal injured characters). Alternately, a player may perceive a morphemic correlation between "glint" and "sparkle," seeing both as indexical of life (the light in the eye of someone who is in a lively state) and/or wealth (the typical representation of gold as shiny). Indeed, since video game currency is often spent on items (like potions) that increase health, and since the longer characters live the more items and wealth they accumulate, any passing equivalence of life and wealth would have a meaningful resonance.

Of course, in Eco's (1976) terms, such manipulation of the continuum of the expression-plane generally produces "aesthetic overcoding" (pp. 262-270), in that the viewer perceives a surplus of expression that may not be consciously grasped. Indeed, the sheer enormity of combinatory elements at the digital level *cannot* be made meaningful in all its particularity, and perceptual awareness of this surplus may gesture towards an impression of either excessive meaning or meaninglessness. Yet the recognition of these signs as (potentially) meaningful may be evaded precisely because of the "threshold of functional relevance" (Culler, 1975, p. 143), in that the player's mental focus operates at a certain level of functional generality. In other words, digital signs are not meaningful when the player is not observing them.

For example, in FFX the in-game graphics engine of the Navigation and Combat Screens are of a low enough resolution to perceive digital articulation, but not in such detail that they are likely to be perceived as *individually* meaningful. Pixels are most visible at the edges of objects, including character models, and at some level this will be reflected in eye movements which periodically track these edges (see Figure 2.2a). In earlier 3D engines, vector lines which stepped across scan lines were visible as two or more adjacent lines, and when an imprecise calculation of vectors resulted in a dark or white line or area between two filled polygons, such staggered lines were effectively highlighted. While FFX has no problems calculating its polygons, long border lines in the Navigation or Combat screens are still visibly subdivided across scanlines, foregrounding their digital articulation. The edges of narrow objects, such as the branches of trees, have insufficient texture space to provide a well-defined form, and produce this effect of highlighted digital articulation.

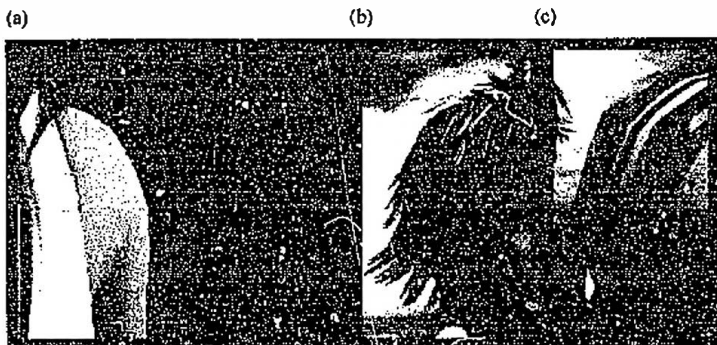


Figure 2.2. (a) Close-up the digital articulation along Yuna's shoulder and blurry texture map in the background. (b) Close-up of the textured polygons that comprise Tidus' hair and (c) a supposedly round blitzball.

While the number of polygons used in creating video game characters and objects is increasing, and their use is disguised by the use of detailed textures, there are instances in FFX where the polygons are obvious (see Figures 2.2b and 2.2c). Generally, graphical textures have also become more detailed, and therefore less visible, whereas in early 3D games, such as in Quake (1996) and Goldeneye (1997), a slightly blurry, semi-realistic face was mapped onto the misshapen head of an angular character model comprising of a small number of polygons. This incongruity is less noticeable in FFX, in that its character and object models have fairly congruent polygons and textures, but textured bitmaps are produced for a certain level of optical perspective and extrapolated onto surfaces and so they only look realistic at certain distance. When an enlarged texture is shown close-up it usually betrays its construction (see Figure 2.2a). While this effect was especially pronounced in the first generation FPSs like Wolfenstein 3-D (1992) and Doom (1994), it can be observed in FFX when Tidus walks close up to the walls during the Trial of the Faith in Besaid. At such moments the textures which comprise the walls take on an artificial, blurry or blocky quality. Similarly, whenever players are presented with a close-up of Tidus and other characters attention is directed to the digital texture of skin, hair, and clothing (see Figure 2.2c). Even if these deviations from normal perception are not always observed during gameplay the FFX manual and game magazines offers close-ups or enlargements of digital images which provide a comparative basis for the eminence of digital articulation in the game.

The disparity between a Gestalt impression of an image and its compound digital composition is also evident in the different degrees of iconic abstraction across FFX. First,

there are the character portraits in the menu screens, which partake of a cartoon style of representation and exploit the rich, opaque colours of the CRT (see Figure 2.3a). Second, there is the in-game engine, which is not much different from that of contemporaneous games, in that characters and environments are visibly angular textured models, and pixels are visible at the borders of game objects as they move (see Figure 2.3b). Third, there are the most detailed, near-cinematic quality cut-scenes. These include skin imperfections, subtle lighting and shadows, detailed textures of clothes and hair, and fluid physics for character movement and the environment (see Figure 2.3c).

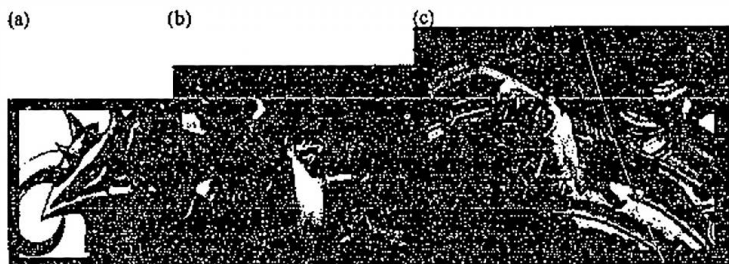


Figure 2.3. Degrees of abstraction in FFX: the Aeon Valefor as represented (a) in the menu screen, (b) in the game engine, and (c) in a cut-scene.

These levels of visual abstraction, or iconism, create a hierarchy of abstraction, in that the pre-rendered cut-scenes and game sequences which conform to objective spatial and temporal logic are seen as having the highest reality-status. This hierarchy is, of course, subordinate to the concreteness of everyday perception in the sense that players will likely attend to the *degree* of realism. That is, during both high-resolution, cinematic cut-scenes and lower-resolution but smoothly animated game sequences players may specifically attend to *how* realistic the images seem. This appraisal is predicated on a perception that the images are merely representations, not real objects, and this may lead to a focus on the degree of abstraction, or, rather, perceptual qualities over and above Gestalt qualities.

Different levels of abstraction are also produced through differences between the representational qualities *within* the game and the representational qualities (packaged as part of the product but) *outside* the game. Most gamers are familiar with the (often comical) disparity between the (semi-)realistic pictures on arcade machines, posters and boxes, and the crude, abstract graphics of the games themselves. FFX's graphics are more detailed than earlier generations of games, but attention may nonetheless turn to the disparity between: on the one hand, the pre-processed, digitally rendered photos or paintings printed on the cover, in

the manual, and in the play guides; and, on the other hand, the real-time, lower-level resolution images generated for the bulk of the game. These differences are reinforced by the distinctive qualities of the respective media. The raster- or vector-based video interface possesses a distinctive "chrome" quality (Stallabras, 1996, p. 8) in which the cold, smooth glass separates the viewer from the untouchable and pristine image. When images appear on glossy paper, as with the FFX CD cover, manual, and the Playstation Solutions (Pattison, 2002) play guide, they minimally resemble the chrome effect. However, when the images are printed from a digital source, as when one prints pictures or maps from a Website, they have a blurry, sketchy quality as a consequence of re-sizing to a different resolution. Words and images printed in paper or cardboard manuals, including printed FAQs, hints and cheats which a player may use while playing FFX, have a coarseness which lends greater salience to tactile qualities, such that the entire in-game hierarchy of abstraction gains a relative quality of abstraction.

It is possible that, like pixels, the use of lines, polygons and differing levels of abstraction may be perceived as meaningful. Just as wooden acting may help to code a character as nervous or awkward, a character whose form is comprised by clear lines or polygons may be perceived as "simple" or "hard-edged." When interactive sequences are represented in a lower resolution than non-interactive sequences, the blocky lower resolution may signify that experiences are unclear (subjective) when one is acting in the midst of things, but come into focus when one steps back to witness them from an external (objective) perspective. Alternately, the "chrome" effect of an iconic image onscreen may connote an idealised fantasy world, compared with the gritty reality connoted by a poor quality printout of a puzzle solution downloaded from the Internet.

However, the demands on a player's attention usually mean that the visibility of digital qualities is not meaningful in the semiotic sense, but primarily serves to create the effect of a digital zoom. We can restate the phenomenon in the following terms. During gameplay, low-resolution sequences, vector miscalculation, in-game close ups, out-of-focus bitmaps, the edges of object models, and inconsistent abstraction may make visible the distinctive digital articulation of the interface. This visibility may give way to perceptual attentiveness, manifested by way of unfocused eye movements and/or the visual tracking of the borders or textured qualities of the objects onscreen. This may defer the Gestalt experience of closure, preventing the image from being processed at a higher stage of cognition, thereby maintaining a player's mental focus on perceptual intensities.

## Introjective and Projective Transactions as a Consequence of Enaction and Enactive Subtraction

Grodal (1997) argues that reality-status is also affected by whether a phenomenon "is experienced as located in exterior space, on the corporeal rim, or in the body-mind interior" (p. 130). He elaborates:

The technical term for a stimulus as a transmission from objects in the exterior world is *distal* stimulus, as opposed to the term *proximal* stimulus, which describes it as a process in the perceptual system. (p. 131)

When digital articulation blocks Gestalt perception it places emphasis on perceptual patterns, or intensities, which are seen as located within the mind-body, such that players will experience introjection, and, by implication, an impression of unreality. It is, of course, impossible to be aware of certain proximal stimuli because organisms have no sensation of many of the processes that occur inside their bodies. For example, humans have no sensation of the process whereby images saturate the retina, they only experience the post-processing of the image. Consequently, the labelling of events as proximal or distal is often retrospective.

For Grodal:

the process by which a phenomenon is relocated from being experienced as an aspect of the body-mind to being experienced as an aspect of the exterior world [is called] a *projection*, the reverse process being an *introjection*. An example of a projection is a situation in which we see something that we first believe to be a dream or a hallucination, but that we then discover to really exist. An example of an introjection would be seeing a *film noir* and feeling that the wet streets are not 'real', but represent mental states. (p. 130)

Introjection is produced not only through a mental focus on perceptual intensities, but also through a mental focus on Grodal's second stage in the processing of audiovisual input. When stimuli pass from the sensory organs to their respective sensory regions in the cortex, memories (or "networks of association") are searched for familiar labels and affective values. When the mental focus falls on this part of processing it gives rise to what Grodal calls "saturations." These:

are the results of emotionally toned and memorized perceptions which have not been transformed into 'motor' tension, and therefore sensation, input-processing, and memory-functions become visible as distinct phenomena. In

memories this saturation is a trace of not enacted excitation that is cut off from its original context of enactment. (p. 56)

This is the characteristic focus of attention during dreaming or daydreaming, and when the mental focus is on this stage of processing it gives rise to a dream-like or "lyrical" style often characterised by "dynamic repetition" (p. 60).

Intensities may, by promoting introjective experience of sensation, promote associational thinking, and therefore a shift to saturations. For example, if a player stares at the image of the burning campfire in the opening sequence of *FX* s/he may initially be focused on the perceptual intensities associated with its rhythmic yet dynamic movement. However, networks of association may be activated: campfire storytelling: reading stories by a hearth: the romance of the book: the romance of Tidus and Yuna: Tidus playing blitzball underwater: the pre-eminence of water in the game: the extinguishing of fire: characters resuming their journey. The mental focus here is displaced onto the sensory, cognitive and affective content and qualities in one's memory, and this displacement will likely be experienced as a displacement of one's attention away from the screen, as an inward turning.

Certainly, in Allen's (1997), Tan's (1997) and Grodal's (1997) accounts, watching a film is in some respects similar to daydreaming, and evokes the experience of a dream. However, while dream content is not yet transformed into a distal, motor attitude, our aesthetic response to films (and, potentially, daydreams) usually is. In daydreams there is a potential for conscious fantasising, whereas during film viewing one's consciousness is directed less towards one's own associational networks than to active inferences about what is disclosed by a linear sequence of *structured* associations, such that viewing is usually focused on telic, distal sequences which produce tensities. That is, viewers feel suspense (tensities) directed at (distal) events that befall characters as they try to achieve their (telic) goals. The focus of both Tan's and Grodal's accounts is that the action tendencies or motor attitudes in film are *inhibited* as a consequence of an observational attitude (Frijda, 1986), in that viewers do not act upon them, and emotions are manifested psychosomatically.

However, Grodal (1997) argues that:

By switching between active and passive modes of representations the different modes and genres of fiction can produce transactions between distal and proximal modes of experience. Subjective experiences and sensations may by the use of active narrative schemata, be projected onto the object world; objective phenomena may, by the use of passive narrative schemata, be

refocused, introjected into being experienced in their subjective form as qualities (intensities, saturations, and emotivities) of the body-mind. (p. 132)

For example, the representation of a sequence without any clear subject-actant, or without any particular goal or narrative schemata, produces passive-introjection (Grodal, 1997, p. 159). Art-house films often emphasise paratelic sequences in this sense, producing a "dreamy" quality because, like dream-states, they involve some subtraction of control (of intention), and emphasise networks of association. Grodal's example of the loss of enactive participation in film is the experience when one views a tape in slow motion. Such a sequence will be perceived as:

'shallow', 'lyrical', 'timeless', 'saturated' . . . We no longer have full enactive identification with the fictive phenomena. The acts and characters become objects controlled by an invisible subject. (p. 47)

This experience of slow motion as transforming the telic-oriented character of most fiction "into a mood of pastness, memory, or abstraction" (p. 47) may be described as physical and cognitive detachment from the event, and it may also be seen as paradigmatic of one's experience of partial (or suspended) enactive capacity in film and during certain sequences in video games. The viewer watches the screen, motivated by the paratelic rhythm of repetition and variation rather than tension (suspense) about the expected achievement of a represented goal. Consequently, within the position of passive witness the most extreme proximal impressions of enactive subtraction are specifically produced during special (dreamy, "artistic") sequences.

Nonetheless, as Grodal (1997) acknowledges:

In a video game, the connection between the screen and the viewer is established both as the visual perception of what is taking place and as a capacity to influence the action by intellectually controlled motor response via the joystick. (p. 48)

The implication is that, in video games, shifts between proximal and distal foci are not confined to active or passive representations of narrative schemata: the player periodically has a sensorimotor relationship with the game itself, and this creates a telic, distal focus on whatever is being controlled. Indeed, since narrative sequences in games define and organise the goals played out in the game schemata they provide a *basis* for enactive projection, or, rather, they provide the telic, distal emphasis that is acted out when the player shifts into an enactive mode.



Newman (2002) has discussed this issue by observing that some sequences have "an ergodic *potential* that demands and fosters a greater degree of player engagement than a standard cutscene or introduction" (p. 6). This is most evident in cut-scenes which explicitly state or demonstrate goals and thereby function as both a period for preparation and a cue for action. In FFX, the cut-scene representations of the appearance of key monsters, the kidnapping of the Summoners, the attack on the Al Bhed home, and Tidus' confrontation with Jecht, provide simple goals like "fight Sinspawn," "find Yuna" or "go to Bevelle" that players can accomplish using previously acquired skills. However, diegetic and non-diegetic planning and preparation are often combined in more explicitly instructional cut-scenes. Such cut-scenes may be seen as having their origin, or parallel, in military, espionage, and heist films, such as Ronin (1998), in which a plan is broken down into its component steps. Perhaps the best example of this is not in FFX but FFVIII, when the characters meet and discuss their plan for kidnapping the Garabadian president from his private train. The leader of the revolutionary movement goes over the plan step-by-step with the characters using a map, indirectly addressing the player (who can choose to hear the plan repeated if s/he did not follow it the first time). However, FFX includes in-game tutorials and instructional text boxes that appear prior to the mini-games, and these perform the same function. These tutorials or instructions are more explicitly denotative and direct in their mode of address, and do not partake of the kinaesthetic and telic qualities of the game-sequences for which they provide instructions. Yet they position the player in the same way as instructional cut-scenes by preparing them for enactive access.

When a goal is understood prior to the end of the cut-scene which demonstrates it, players will likely disregard the implicit position of passive witness to the remaining content through impatient or eager tension about the shift itself. That is, players may watch many of the cut-scenes with a degree of anticipatory arousal whose telos is directed less towards a specific *represented* goal than towards the (anticipated) performance of the shift into a sensorimotor mode. This may be seen as analogous to the nervous anticipation that is felt at the start of a race, which is followed by a momentary excitement as the race begins, and then the tension of the race itself.

However, given that instructional cut-scenes prepare the player for enactive access, it is important not to underestimate the distinctive and unusual quality of *experience* when players enter a state of motor activity. The experience of this shift may be described by analogy to the moment when one wakes from a dream, or moves from being a mere

(day)dreamer or spectator to an acting subject, and has to re-orient oneself to the physical world. This intrusion of the "reality principle" upon the comparative "pleasure principle" of escape into one's associations means that the shift from enactive subtraction to enactive access has a quality of physical exertion or fatigue, a resignation, or energetic leap into, a sensorimotor paradigm (Freud, 1900/1953). It is not merely that players have a shift in *mental* focus: rather, the sensorimotor components of the nervous system are suddenly distally reoriented, so that players experience a shift into greater immediacy, concreteness, salience, and, therefore, reality-status.

At the same time, the shifts into enactive mode in a video game cannot be held as a move from a state of complete enactive subtraction to a state of complete freedom. Interfaces offer a mediated, highly removed and abstract mode of interaction, and enactive limitations are placed on the player for the sake of providing a challenging game. As Poole (2001) argues, players do not want complete reality of immersion, and gameplay edits out the uninteresting aspects of whatever activity the game is simulating:

You don't want to actually be there, performing the dynamically exaggerated and physically perilous moves yourself; it would be exhausting and painful. . . . You don't want it to be too real. The purpose of a videogame . . . is never to simulate real life, but to offer the gift of play. (p.63)

So there is a difference between, on the one hand, the complete subtraction of physical enactive access when players are positioned as a witness during a cut-scene, and, on the other hand, when a game cues an enactive attitude in the sense of a telic-orientation towards the game world, but blocks certain actions.

This blocking of enaction can be addressed in terms of the construction of space, or more appropriately, the blocking of movement through this space. Of course, space has been radically re-theorised in the last few decades, but the audience of a fictional text draws from schemata of objective space as physical, static and linear when constructing the relationship between events and objects in the fabula. Like deviations from normal perception, deviations from these "objective" schemata of space and time are often "perceived as an expression of a subjective factor" (Grodal, 1997, p. 134). That is, the "scaling, size, and isolation of details from a complex-composite totality" (p. 134), as well as the use of unusual camera angles, editing, and lighting effects, is experienced as a subjective distortion "because of an underlying viewer-assumption of a normal, unmediated and objective access to the object-world" (p. 134). As Grodal observes:

If a single picture is constructed by mixing two or several pictures from different points in time or space there is normally no possible external source for the frames and they will therefore be interpreted as expressions of a mental association. Correspondingly, fast sequences of different shots or stills will be interpreted as mental associations. (p. 135)

In this respect, we tend to perceive as mental associations dream or arthouse sequences which abstract and combine spaces or objects in ways which are unusual or impossible in everyday experience. This includes the spatial paradoxes in M. C. Escher's (1992) paintings, the living but separate body parts in Salvador Dali's surrealist paintings (Descharnes, 1984), and fantasy novels and films which represent hybrid or talking animals and miniaturised or gigantic people, as in Lewis Carroll's (1865/1988) Through the Looking Glass.

In FFX there are many such associational qualities in the onscreen representations within the diegesis. Most obvious is the constant mismatch of size and scale between the player-characters, the environment, and opponents. In the Navigation screens, the size of the image of Tidus is often not on the same scale as the landscape. For example, in Besaid the scale seems roughly 1:1, but when Tidus walks or rides a Chocobo across the Calm Lands the scale may be perceived as anything from up to 1:1000, depending upon how the player interprets the depth cues in the expositional cut-scene about the Calm Lands. During encounters with many of the game's monsters, the difference in size between Tidus and Sin, Yunalesca and Braska's Final Aeon beggars rational comprehension. That Tidus opposes such monstrous beings completely suspends real-world logic. Many of the settings in FFX are also spatially associational. The Trial of the Fayth in Bevelle involves conveyer belts and levitating platforms represented by electric signals reminiscent of the non-space inside a computer. The spaces inside Sin are swathed in mists which not only obscure distance but are traditionally coded in film as associated with a dream-state, or the foggy state of drug-addiction, delusion or semi-consciousness. Squaresoft's Final Fantasy X: The Official Strategy Guide (2002) specifically notes: "Your surroundings are rather surreal, with constantly changing perspectives; no wonder you feel disoriented!" (p. 133). When Tidus confronts Braska's Final Aeon the background reinforces the quality of spatial abstraction through the tumbling pagodas, suspended mid-air, and the floating stones of ruined Zanarkand. Inasmuch as these representations violate objective space, they may be perceived as mental abstractions, cueing passive-introjection.

Of course, since video games involve not merely representation, but also navigation of space (Aarseth, 1998; Fuller and Jenkins, 1995; Murray, 1997), it is useful to draw from

Lefebvre's (1991) categories of space: the physical space "perceived" during interaction with the world; the formal, or "conceived," representation of space; and the spatial practice itself. During gameplay the spatial practice emerges from the way the perceived spaces onscreen are navigated by the player and conceived of as a spatial representation (a spatial logic or schemata) that sets up expectations about enactive possibilities.

The physical, non-diegetic spaces of FFX include the space of the hardware (screen, console and game controller) and the space of the environment (the floor, couch and other furniture), and the relational space between them, governed by the length of cables and the proximity required to turn the console on and off or change disks. Given that the interface is not merely observed, but interacted with, its spatial representations are bound up in the spatial practice of gameplay. However, since navigation requires an understanding of the spatial logic governing the game, the interface may be seen primarily as a spatial representation. Compared with film, in which the environment is so dark that it usually falls from context, in video games like FFX there is a greater disjunction between the mundane physical space(s) occupied by the player and the spatial representations perceived onscreen as a consequence of depth cues. This is the distinctive experience, also found with television, in which one seems to look through a window at another physical space.

This general disjunction between physical non-diegetic space and the non-physical space on screen is amplified by the non-physical (represented) non-diegetic space of the interface. As Per Persson (2001) argues of the typical point-and-click, menu-based graphical-user interface (GUI), the layers of menu boxes may be seen as either physically above or below each other, or as insubstantial, in that they appear from, and disappear into, a non-visible space. Persson's argument may be extended to the accessing of menus and submenus, and the use of ergodic symbols and indexes, in FFX, which similarly appear and disappear over the diegetic spaces. However, it may apply in another sense, since menus are not organised by any natural relationship between the content of menus and their spatial arrangement. Rather, menus (and screens) are organised around such functional categories as "weapons," "armour," "use," "sort," "equipment," and "key items." Since these menus utilise conventional categories of objects and functions within adventure games, most players are likely to perceive their congruence between idea and space as fairly normal. By contrast, a list of inventory items organised by such categories as "material," "colour," "shape," or "fashion," which are non-functional in the game as it stands, would be perceived as arbitrary, or relatively associational. It can be argued, then, that the interface may evoke the

associational quality of internal, mental processes through the co-existence of a general perception of the menus as insubstantial (thereby violating normal space) and of the organization of physical space by abstract, functional categories.

These generally non-diegetic constructions of space frame the way players navigate the diegetic space of the game world. Mark Wolf (2001) identifies elementary spatial structures which rework spatial conventions of print and cinema, and his categories are useful in identifying inconsistencies in the diegetic space of FFX. The setting of every attack with the Combat Screen is a contained, single-screen space (p. 55), but such spaces exist in the Field Screen, such as the clearing in the forest in Macalania. Tidus can move through this space to talk to the people, and may exit by leaving the front of the screen, but the perspective remains static.

Of course, the clearing is part of the rest of Macalania Forest, and most spaces in FFX, while finite and bounded, are larger than the screen but only displayed one screen at a time (Wolf, 2001, p. 59). That is, Tidus simply walks to the edge of the screen and the next, adjacent screen appears, with Tidus accordingly repositioned onscreen—an effect analogous to switching between the views of security cameras located in a sequence of rooms as a character passes through them. This is a spatial convention common to many adventure games, like Quest for Glory (1980/2001), and demands the same understanding of spatial convention as cinematic editing, in which continuity is perceived during a cut between two shots. In FFX, when Tidus passes through parts of the forest in Macalania or Thunder Plains, players presume a spatial logic in which travelling upwards, to the top of the screen, leads to a (not necessarily adjacent) northerly space. Players may perceive gaps between such spaces as dilations of space to conserve geographic credibility. After all, while Macalania Forest, the Thunder Plains, and the Calm Lands may take up large portions of Spira they are represented by just a few onscreen spaces.

This jumping between (relatively) adjacent spaces is often combined with scrolling (Wolf, 2001, pp. 57-59). For example, when Tidus moves through the paths that lead to Besaid he moves within the frame until he comes close to the edge of the screen, whereupon the screen scrolls; eventually, he reaches the edge of this continuous space, and the screen jumps to an adjacent continuous space. This scrolling often occurs on two axes, most notably in the vast expanse of the Calm Lands. What is significant is that, in such spaces, players will perceive movement into the z-axis (the depth of field) even if all that is actually occurring is

the scrolling of a fixed background on a vertical axis (p. 63). However, during sequences such as exploring the Submerged Ruins or the Trials of the Fayth, there is actual movement into the z-axis, as a result of the continuous, dynamic reconstruction of the perspective around Tidus' changing co-ordinates; in short, through Tidus' movement in an immersive 3-D space (p. 65).

The importance of these mixed spatial conventions is that the physical surface of the flat screen is inconsistent with the perception of its spatial depth, and the spatial logic across these spaces may not always be properly differentiated. There are several instances across the *Final Fantasy* series during which cuts between adjacent spaces is accompanied by a shift of direction which violates the continuity of movement. When players guide Tidus through the corridors of the Al Bhed home in Sanubia Sands the perspective sometimes changes between screens. If the player pauses to look around, then absently resumes moving the analogue joystick in the same direction. Tidus walks back into the previous screen. There are also inconsistencies between onscreen spaces and mapped spaces (Wolf, 2001, p. 67), such as the minimap in the corner of the Navigation screen and the full-screen map of Spira (see Figure 2.4). These provide global information about the game world which help the player make decisions about where to go and what to do on a local scale. However, even if players simply accept that items are not perceived on the mini-map, the borders of the mini-map do not always map clearly onto the contours of the diegesis, showing spaces that cannot be accessed, or *not* showing spaces that *can* be accessed.

A more general problem is that depth cues provide an ongoing, misleading *perceptual* impression of enactive capacity. *FFX* has few problems representing object overlap, foreshortening, apparent size, and changes in perspective, drawing from such conventions as changing object sizes, altering texture and/or colour gradients, and the use of parallax backgrounds, which were used to compensate for problems producing depth cues in early video games (Wolf, 2001, p. 72). However, its realistic depth cues hold open the promise of potential enactive capacities within the virtual environment. Players constantly see spaces that seem accessible, and objects that look like they can be manipulated, yet any attempt to access those spaces, or to manipulate those objects, is blocked. In Figure 2.4a, for example, Tidus is unable to climb up the ruins, and in Figure 2.4b he is unable to examine, pick up, or use, any of the many objects that surround him.

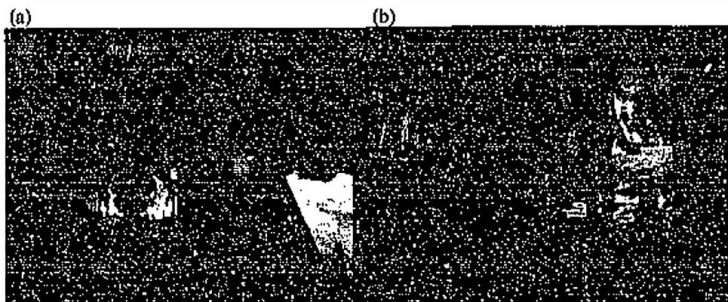


Figure 2.4. (a) Tidus walks under an old Machina. (b) Tidus in a cluttered hut in Besaid.

Players may become adept at spotting, and accepting, such spatial conventions, but as players move between these different representational spaces there may be moments of spatial confusion. This kind of enactive blocking may lead to the same kind of drastic awareness of distal stimulus that occurs when one attempts to walk into a trompe l'oeil or a glass door only to discover that what one thought was distal physical space was merely proximal perceptual or conceptual space. In everyday, public situations, the sudden projective shift to a distal focus as a consequence of misunderstood spatial cues is likely to lead to a proximal experience of embarrassment, readily displaced as anger at the offending architecture. During solitary gameplay, however, there are no witnesses, and selfhood is displaced into a sensorimotor paradigm that is not central to one's sense of personal mastery. Any lack of grace or mastery in gameplay is simply likely to reflect upon one's ability to play that particular game. Consequently, blocked enaction cues a distal transaction: an unwelcome reality principle that is imposed upon the pleasure principle of the play experience. This may be experienced as merely a moment's confusion, anger or frustration directed at the limitations of the game, or a resigned, fatigued, or automatic redirection of one's mental and virtual steps around the obstacle.

Even if a player comes to learn and accept these frequent blockings and suppressions as part of the game's spatial codes they nonetheless represent an enactive capacity which is imagined and desired but not offered. Even a minimal perception of enactive subtraction, such as the realisation that punching the screen will not help Tidus to defeat Brnska's Final Aeon, produces a generalised tension directed at the gap between imagined and actual affordances. It is not merely that enactive capacity is frustrated, since one experiences a disjunction between the proximal abstraction of space and the distal construction of concrete space. Even if the

distal focus on what has blocked one's movement is followed by a proximal focus on one's spatial schemata—as when one discovers that a previously accepted fact is wrong, and pauses to reflect upon it—the disparity between the two may itself produce a temporary impression of unreality.

It is not simply the case, then, that passive modes of representation encourage proximal experiences (saturations), and active modes of representation encourage distal experiences (tensities). In video games, shifts to enactive (game) sequences also usually encourage a distal, telic emphasis, while shifts to enactive subtraction (narrative sequences) encourage a proximal, paratelic emphasis. However, it is also possible for enactive sequences to become paratelic, promoting introjection. For example, many goals in FFX take so long to complete, or are interfered with by other goals, that they lose salience. The goal to achieve the Celestial Weapons requires the achievement of countless intermediate goals, and in many cases these goals can only be achieved when one is lucky enough to wander into the appropriate area and find the next clue. The rhythm of movement, fighting wandering monsters, healing, developing characters, buying and selling acquired items and so on, may mean that the goal loses all relevance. More than this, these sub-goals may lose salience through their habituation. The waning of goals in this way may cause enaction to become increasingly paratelic, oriented around the rhythmic or associational process of combat, navigation, and other recurring game macrostructures.

## Conclusion

In everyday experience, sensory modalities “co-operate to provide a holistic experience” (Grodal, 1997, p. 31), but deviations and other effects may cause these modalities to be split up, as when one perceives:

sound without image, whether motivated by darkness or unmotivated; image without sound; represented acts in which ‘solid’ phenomena lack their tactile qualities (such as ghosts, and mirror-images); lack of synchronization, and so forth. (p. 31)

Incomplete modality synthesis in video games is often a consequence of technical limitations of graphical and sound hardware, in that the delay in processing of one or more sensory modalities in relation to enactive capacity leads to a perceived violation of Gestalt all-in-oneness. However, while the processing power of the PS2 means that FFX has few technical problems synchronising sensory modalities in high-level cut-scenes, a sense of disjunctive



sensory integration results from inconsistencies between parameters of reality-status, such as those discussed above.

We cannot conclude that qualities of the interface produce an impression of low reality-status, leading to a decreased level, deferment, or subtraction of the immediate state of arousal. Rather, deviations from normal perception and from objective representations of space may guide attention to intensities and saturations, and shifts between proximal and distal experience through the affordance of enaction, may reinforce a sense of ambivalence about the game's reality-status. Indeed, even if a player completes secondary appraisal and nominates a sequence as "real" it is possible that there may be a persistent quality or feeling of unreality. Later chapters argue that FFX may recuperate these ambivalent or disjunctive impressions of unreality as aesthetically meaningful through a hermeneutic concern with reality and tragedy. However, before addressing these issues it is necessary to address the foundations of basic emotions in gameplay.

### Chapter Three - The Regulation of Interest

Most theories of emotion accept that interest is a "basic emotion, that is, one that cannot be reduced to one or more other emotions" (Tan, 1997, p. 85). Unlike attention, which is principally a cognitive state without an action tendency (Ortony, Clare & Collins, 1988), interest has an action tendency "to see what happens next, and to formulate active expectations" (Tan, 1997, p. 203). It makes us employ our cognitive faculties "for the elaboration of a stimulus, under the influence of the promises which are inherent in the present situation with respect to expected situations" (p. 86) (see also Frijda, 1986; Izard, 1984; Lazarus, 1969; Schore, 1994; Tomkins, 1962).

This action tendency calls on resources "from a limited capacity" (Tan, 1997, p. 86), such that interest in one thing requires a lowering of perceptual, cognitive or motor attention to other things. In regards to film, the "inclination to devote one's full attention to the stimulus, [comes] at the cost of all other matters, including the completion of motor programs" (p. 90). That is, the viewer's increasing interest produces increasing motionlessness, to the extent that boredom may be measured according to the degree of a viewer's fidgeting, with the exception that when "behavioral activity brings the desired object [of attention] closer, interest, or at any rate anticipatory eagerness, may be accompanied by excitement and excessive movement" (p. 89). This retardation of sensorimotor action reinforces the observational attitude of film, in that the viewer does not vacate his or her seat to enact action tendencies towards the screen, but remains in a virtual mode, merely hoping or wishing for certain outcomes.

For Tan (1997), interest is the fundamental emotion produced while watching the traditional feature film, and its real-time regulation is determined by the prospect of return (p. 101). That is, interest at a particular point in time depends upon a player's "investment" of time and effort in a sequence, relative to the "anticipated return" (AR) on that interest in the future, and, the "actual net return" (NR) on that investment. This return may be cognitive, such as appreciating the artifice of a film, or affective, such as experiencing the triumph of a protagonist (p. 96). Interest is also self-enhancing, at least up until its concern has been elaborated or resolved. As Tan argues:

the action tendency inherent in interest raises the investment [because we have spent more time and energy reflecting upon the concern,] and this increase, in turn, has a positive effect on interest by increasing the contrast between NR already gained and the maximum future return that can be expected. (p. 111)

As a consequence, a viewer may reach a point of no return in regards to the act of watching. Furthermore, by raising the significance of a concern, and promoting inferences and valenced expectations about its outcome, interest provides a basis for other emotions (p. 203). For example, interest may reinforce one's fear or hope for a certain outcome, and this hope and fear may reinforce one's sense that the concern is worthy of our interest.

While some situations in narratives may cue the same expectations directed towards everyday events, most questions operate at the level of generic *vraisemblance* by drawing upon hermeneutic codes of setting, character, iconography and plot from known genres (see Neale, 1980, 1990, 2000). In Barthes' (1975a) terms, hermeneutic codes guide players' anticipation about the expected sequence and outcome of events. While some of these codes may operate in relation to a single event's outcome, they may define an entire sequence, or, in narratological terms, a "macrosequence." At the highest level of organization, the narratological term "macrostructure" can be used to refer to a sequence of events that develops (usually linearly) towards some anticipated (but uncertain) resolution (Cohen & Shires, 1991, p. 60). In Bordwell's (1986) terms, we would say that these generic codes are template schemata activated by a narrative, which guide the individual's construction of an anticipatory *fabula*, but are constantly tested against the unfolding *syuzhet*, leading to periodic reconstruction of the *fabula* through the subversion of expectations.

Given that hermeneutic codes govern how questions and enigmas are posed, delayed and disclosed (Barthes, 1975a, pp. 17, 85) it is useful to distinguish the three hermeneutic strategies of suspense, surprise and mystery/curiosity (see Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1981; Chatman, 1978; Culler, 1975; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Sternberg, 1978; Tan, 1997; Vordcrer, 1996; Zillman, Hay & Bryant, 1975). Each of these general hermeneutic strategies may be produced through the manipulation of any specific hermeneutic code by altering the represented order of events in the *diegesis* (see Figure 3.1). Suspense is a consequence of the deferral of an outcome suggested by a prior initiating event and which is of concern to a character a viewer sympathises with. Surprise is characterised by the sudden representation of an unexpected outcome, though its intelligibility is usually retrospectively linked (if only by inference) to an initiating event. Mystery, or curiosity, is characterised by the representation of an outcome without any, or an adequate, initiating event, giving rise to ongoing hypotheses about causes. The cognitive component of all three strategies may be seen as different forms of what Grodal (1997) calls "intensities" in that they are characterised by

attentiveness towards a distal, telic event, or, in other words, a tense expectation about future events.

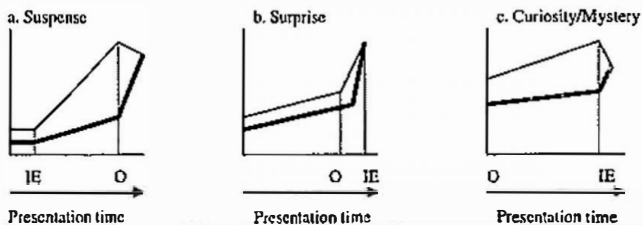


Figure 3.1. Tan's (1997, p. 208) model of the three narrative strategies of interest regulation. IE is the initiating event and O the outcome; the thin and heavy lines refer to the expected net return (ENR) and attained net return (ANR), respectively, and interest ( $i$ ) = ENR - ANR.

To identify some of the hermeneutic codes in FFX's narrative macrosequences and macrostructures the following analysis uses Barthes' (1975a) approach, breaking down the game into key events or event sequences. It focuses on the title and opening sequences of FFX, as detailed in Appendices One, Two and Three to indicate the range of its hermeneutic codes.

### Hermeneutic Codes in FFX's Narrative Macrosequences

After a player of FFX chooses "New Game" from the opening menu, the title sequence appears and begins with a slow zoom towards a sword and other weapons against the background of a wasteland of ruins (1.1.2) (see Figure 3.2a). This may be coded with reference to the use of swords in the fantasy genre, as in the opening sequence of Diablo (1996), thereby defining the genre of the game. Such coding would likely reinforce expectations, also drawn from adventure and role-playing games in general, of a journey through a series of settings, fighting miscellaneous monsters, developing each character's powers, and collecting items, culminating in a final battle (Fine, 1983; Herz, 1977; Mackey, 2000; Schick, 1991). The sword may also activate a more specific code of the sword, or weapon, as a symbol of power, and of triumph by might of arms. In this context it could connote the spoils of conquest, the weapons surrendered to a conqueror, or the courage of a hero who ensures that "goodness" will be victorious. Indeed, the "sword" might connote not just "right" of force, but the force of good. This might be coded with reference to the Arthurian legend of the sword in the stone, to be drawn and wielded, realising one's power and birthright. This might create an expectation that a character will reveal some innate right

to lead or rule, or some innate virtue that distinguishes him/her as heroic, which previously has been hidden.

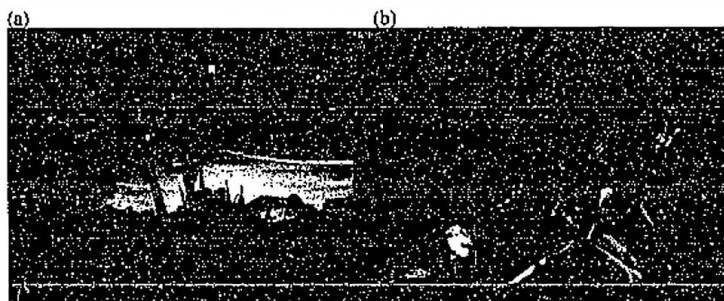


Figure 3.2. (a) The odd assortment of weapons in the opening sequence at Zanarkand. (b) The subdued companions camp by a fire.

However, the weapons include what seem to be a beach ball and a teddy bear. Presuming that the player recognises these as weapons they may be seen as indexical of the personalities of their owners, as marking the qualities of the heroes, creating curiosity about what heroes can be identified with beach balls or teddy bears in a heroic fantasy. This curiosity is partly answered as the camera pans to the group camped by the fire in the ruined city (1.1.2) (see Figure 3.2b). Most players may code this in terms of any fantasy adventure in which there is a "group" of adventurers on a quest, or in terms of the "party" in any role-playing game or video role-playing game, such as Wizardry (1981), The Bard's Tale (1982), Baldur's Gate (1997), or earlier Final Fantasy titles.

Of course, players who have read the manual will know that these characters are on an "epic" "quest to destroy Sin." An epic, in its strictest sense, is a long narrative "on a great and serious subject, told in an elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race" (Abrams, 1988, p. 51). FFX is certainly a lengthy narrative covering the range of human drama, with a predominantly serious tone, centred on magically-gifted characters who commune with "divine" spirits (Aeons), and seek to save not only their own races (the Al Bhed, the Ronso, the Guado) but the life of all those in Spira. However, whereas the classical epics did not differentiate myth from history nor fact from fiction (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966, p. 58), FFX is a fictional narrative written for a secular audience and appropriates mythical content without much of its original symbolic meaning (see Hume, 1984). Without debating the theoretical appropriateness of the term "epic," its use in the game manual may produce the expectation of thematic coherence

across an otherwise picaresque game that incorporates countless, repetitive, randomised battles.

The player may see the fatigued and depressed nature of the party as reinforcing the "great and serious" danger posed by Sin. Yet the player may also recognise that, inasmuch as most epics and heroic fantasies are linear, the game seems to begin *in media res*. If this is the case then there may be curiosity about where in the sequence this respite is, as well as what struggles preceded it and what the characters may have lost to make them so subdued. Indeed, if one remembers that many modern heroic-fantasies, of which J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954/1984) is archetypal, are characterised by the difficulties of keeping a party together, then the odd congregation of characters not only reinforces curiosity about *who* they are and what brought them together, but may also cue uncertainty about the stability of their bonds. This holds open the possibility that one of the party is gone, or dead, and in this respect the weapons may be cross-coded, with reference to the ruins in the background, as marking the grave of a fallen comrade.

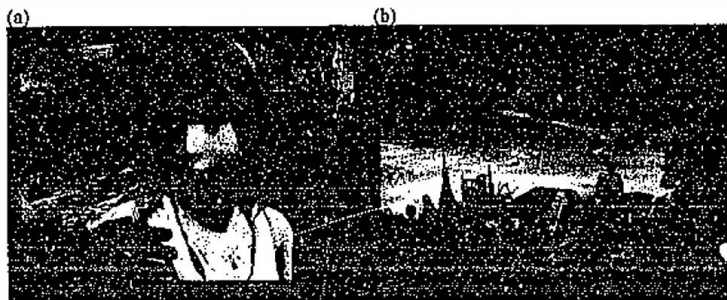


Figure 3.3. (a) Tidus touches Yuna's shoulder. (b) Tidus walks off by himself to look at ruined Zanarkand ("Listen to my story").

Tidus' touching of Yuna's shoulder, and the gaze she turns to him (1.1.3) (see Figure 3.3a), activates an hermeneutic code of romance, specifically the question of their (possible) romantic relationship and at what stage in their romance this scene occurs (prior to, or after, its fulfilment) (see Modleski, 1984; Radway, 1984). More than this, Tidus' black gloves, his wandering away from the party, and Yuna's restrained (or tired) expression, may be coded as a sign of some romantic barrier, and/or unrequited love. The drawn out close-up of Tidus' isolation (1.1.4) reinforces a sense of some unrevealed emotion and the possibilities of romantic separation, which may resonate with the potential separation of group members or the loss of the group entirely (see Figure 3.3b). There might also be curiosity about the

existence of an intervening force that prevents Tidus and Yuna's union. A formulaic assumption might be that there is some social pressure—family, class or religion—with the implication that Tidus and Yuna belong to different social spheres.

As Tidus walks away the motes of light behind him connote atmospheric effects, cosmic events, and/or some supernatural-religious event, such as a leakage or eruption of magical/divine forces. This might be perceived in relation to the ruins, but it may also be read as metonymic of some disaster that needs to be averted. In this respect it might be evaluated in terms of some higher duty or responsibility. Tidus' subsequent voice-over: "Listen to my story. This may be our last chance" (1.1.4) likely confirms some sense of his *responsibility* for the fate of others, of some higher duty to prevent some disaster, and of their sacrifices in this respect. The voluntary suppression of romance might be seen as part of this duty. This may link to earlier curiosity through an expectation that FFX is a retelling of the events that brought the companions, and Tidus and Yuna, together, but what also keeps them apart.

The title "Final Fantasy X," which is then superimposed over the scene, is unlikely to be registered by most players as anything other than a marker of one in a series of Final Fantasy titles. However, it may activate or reinforce hermeneutic codes drawn from earlier titles: the possibility of personal tragedy (Aeris' death in FFVII), of love confirmed (Cloud and Tifa), of unrequited love (Cloud and Aeris), and of some event of cosmic importance (the meteor threatening to destroy the world) on an epic scale (companions forced to traverse all the continents of the planet). The word "fantasy," of course, may connote wishful dreaming and escapism, or the more purposive role-playing of a character in a world where one has the opportunity to experience the extremes of life (love, hate, moral indecision, defeat, victory) and one's actions matter (we change the fate of things) (see Hume, 1984). More specifically, we might identify a link between Tidus' mention of a "last chance" and "Final." The "X" is significant in that, prior to the release of other titles in the series, it could have been read as marking the last single-player Final Fantasy title. For some experienced players, then, the title therefore could have polarised suspense and curiosity through anxiety about the possible end of a much-loved series and excitement about the beginning of FFX: the pinnacle and climactic finale of a tradition. The poignancy of this moment for the player could have resonated with the situation of the characters as on the verge of losing something.

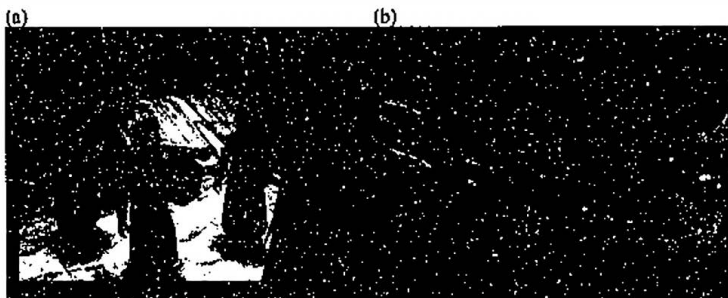


Figure 3.4. (a) Tidus talks to his fans before the blitzball game at Zanarkand (“Teach us how to blitz!”). (b) Tidus walks along the Causeway and looks up at the image of his father.

Through the sequence in Zanarkand, up to the Submerged Ruins (see Appendix Two), we can observe the development of these and other hermeneutic codes. Tidus’ companions are absent, with the implication that this is the true beginning of the narrative, perhaps eliciting curiosity as to when and how Tidus’ company will be formed. More importantly, Tidus’ sporting prowess and celebrity status (1.1.2-1.4.5) prefigures his role as hero (see Figure 3.4a). This may be linked to his suggested importance or destiny, given that Tidus has already spoken as the voice of a collective in the introductory sequence (1.1.5: “this may be our last chance”) and because Auron is waiting for him (1.5.2). Anticipation about the blitzball game’s outcome (1.3.4) parallels Tidus’ adolescent anxieties about the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood/manhood, living in the shadow of his father, holding open the possibility of failure in both the game and as an adult/man, with the necessity for a confrontation with (and taking over of) his father’s authority (see Figure 3.4b).

Tidus’ movement from celebrity to hero (1.5.5) may be seen in relation to the water door/mirror at the blitzball stadium (1.5.1), prefiguring a movement from reality to fantasy, in general terms (entry into the world of the imagination), generic terms (exploration of a surreal fantasy world), and psychological terms (an exploration of Tidus’ latent desires and fears) (see Figure 3.5a). The suspension of time when the ghost-boy appears (1.5.3), as well as the surreal night-sky-floating sequence (1.6), and the whiteout when Tidus is teleported, similarly suggests the relevance of fantasy and dream-states (“I think I had a dream”). Yet despite this emphasis on fantasy the narrative movement from urban-futurist Zanarkand to pastoral-nostalgic Besaid (and the later disclosure of Yevon’s ban on *Machina*) activates hermeneutic codes drawn from science fiction: anxieties about the *hubris* of excessive faith in science and



a loss of contact with nature (see Kuhn, 1990; Sobchack, 1987). Given that the monster is named Sin (1.5.4: "We called it 'Sin'") the attack may be analogous to the attack of Godzilla: a consequence of man's arrogant tampering with the natural order through technology (see Figure 3.5b).

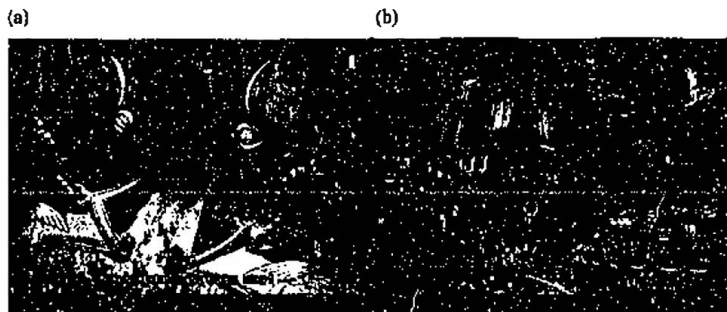


Figure 3.5. (a) Tidus enters the blitzball stadium through the water door/mirror ("Make way, make way!") (b) Futuristic Zanarkand, with Sin approaching in the background.

As Tidus appears in the Submerged Ruins, several new hermeneutic questions emerge: Why has he teleported? Can he get home? What happened to Jecht? How can Sin be defeated? Where are his quest companions? Certainly, the earlier presence of Yuna in the title sequence suggests a search for her, but, more than this, Tidus' absent parents, his isolation as a celebrity (1.3), and his abandonment through teleportation (1.2.1), prefigure the potential importance of an intimate loving relationship with Yuna. Yet the portents, devastation, and isolation (1.1.3; 1.4.4; 1.5) may cue not just epic devastation, but *tragic* loss and emptiness (see Aristotle, trans. 1965; Kaufmann, 1969; Leech, 1969; Lucas, 1966). Given both Tidus' emotional disturbance and the supernatural connotations this may suggest some *cosmic* disturbance in the order of the world. That is, Tidus' adolescent anxiety may be linked to metaphysical or existential concerns about how to make sense of one's place in a world whose order has been disturbed.

It is likely that players progressively or periodically organise the narrative around the macrostructure that seems to have the highest (or simplest) structural significance, cultivating a tonic interest whose action tendency is to continue watching the shared journey of characters and the defeat of Sin. Nonetheless, even these early sequences activate hermeneutic codes drawn from heroic fantasy, adventure/role-playing (video) games, the epic, romance, science fiction, and tragedy, regulating interest through curiosity, surprise and suspense about their

course. Furthermore, the player is likely to welcome the *mixing* of these hermeneutic codes. As Tan (1997) notes:

Surprise is a fixed component of the pragmatic contact between viewer and filmmaker. The viewer acquiesces in the fact that many developments cannot be guessed at in advance, although a really good film will entice the audience into trying to do just that. Each ingenious twist turns the viewer into a good loser, who does not mind admitting that he or she appreciates the ultimate result. (pp. 210-11)

FFX's narrative increasingly complicates, reverses, and connects its hermeneutic codes, progressively diminishing any assurance of the game's generic purity. This is likely to cultivate a growing realisation that FFX is not a formulaic heroic fantasy or romance, but a unique tragic epic which players cannot accurately predict and resolve in their imagination. That is, the *particularity* of the narrative not only personalises the act of investment in viewing the game, it functions as an index of concretion that raises the game's reality status and fosters a desire to watch *this* narrative to its resolution.

#### Reinforcement in FFX's Game Macrosequences

It has been argued above that interest in narrative sequences depends upon an action tendency to keep watching and hypothesising about the (anticipated but uncertain) resolution of hermeneutic codes. By contrast, game sequences have an enactive component that requires physical engagement. We can redress Tan's silence on the matter of physical actions as a source of interest by emphasising his passing reference to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1988, 1992) notion of "flow." For Csikszentmihalyi, flow is not merely cerebral, but occurs in physical activities, such as sports (indeed, he discusses flow in activities *prior* to flow in mental activities). We may take "flow" as the ideal or optimal form of interest, where a balance of challenge and skill staves off anxiety and boredom and leads to total involvement in an activity. Furthermore, we may see the acquisition and performance of procedural schemata as not merely a basis for flow, but a potential source of interest.

Compared with the cognitive interest in narrative events, physical activity facilitates distal impressions that maximise reality-status and constitute a greater investment of physiological expenditure, or labour. This requires a greater net return, or rewards, if interest (and flow) is to be maintained. It is here that Tan's model of "net return" and Csikszentmihalyi's model of "flow" overlap with operant conditioning, in which motivation is intrinsically determined by the magnitude, delay and number of rewards (Skinner, 1971,

1974). Of course, the model of operant conditioning marginalizes both the cognitive activity of individuals and the ability of individuals to self-regulate their emotional states. Nonetheless, Loftus and Loftus (1983) have convincingly argued that schedules of reinforcement are important to player motivation, and in this context a consideration of positive reinforcements, or rewards, provides a way of analysing the regulation of interest.

Table 3.1. The three control modes in FFX, from the game manual (2001, p. 5).

#### BATTLESCREEN

Direction buttons	Move Cursor
← / →	Change pages
Left analogy stick	Move cursor/change pages
O	Cancel
X	Confirm
Δ	Defend (skip turn)
□	Used in Auron's Overdrives
L1	Display switch window/select character to switch
L2	Select character to switch
R1	Scroll CTB window up
R2	Scroll CTB window down
SELECT	Display/hide help window

#### FIELDSCREEN

Directional buttons	Move character (running)
Left analogy stick	Move character (running)
O	Cancel/walk (hold down)
X	Confirm/talk/examine
Δ	Display menu
□	Talk to blitzball player to discover their status
START	Pause *

#### MENU SCREEN

Directional buttons	Move cursor
Left analog stick	Move cursor
O	Cancel
X	Confirm
L1	Switch characters
L2	Scroll menu lists backwards
R1	Switch characters
R2	Scroll menu lists forwards

Press the L1, L2, R1, R2, START and SELECT buttons simultaneously to perform a Soft Rest and return to the start up sequence \*

\* Pause and Soft Reset are disabled during certain scenes.

In FFX, the Field Screen, the Battle Screen, the various Menus, the Sphere Grid, and the Trials of the Fuyth make up the basic game system, though there are three main control modes (Table 3.1). Each of these has its own ergonomic codes that determine both possible actions for the player and related expectations about future game-events and rewards. In a combat sequence, for example, the player is constantly prompted to anticipate: "Will I hit it?"

and "How much damage did I do?" with each turn. At the level of the macrosequence, there may be expectations such as: "Will I win?" or "Will I lose." In this respect, each game interface may function as a relatively autonomous game macrosequence governed by an operation of mixed hermeneutic-ergodic codes, ultimately subsumed to the total game macrostructure of FFX. At this level of organization players might evaluate victory in battle as a failure if they have taken so much damage that they have diminished the chance of surviving subsequent battles.

FFX's Combat Screen offers, first, the aesthetic, audiovisual reinforcement of animated attacks: the kinetic dynamism of the leap and strike, the grunts or cries of effort, the visceral impact (see Figure 3.6a). However, FFX's combat may be distinguished in this regard from most first person shooters (FPSs) in which kinetic reinforcement is bound up in the time-pressured real-time interaction. As noted in Chapter One, secondary appraisal, or cognitive elaboration, is a precondition for true emotion. In action-based games, such as shoot 'em ups or first person shooters, cognitive elaboration may be deferred or blocked by the lack of time available before the next stimulus appears such that primary appraisal and affective arousal may predominate over emotion. FFX, by contrast uses as Conditional Turn-Based (CTB) combat system in which actions are mediated by a menu, those actions are strategic rather than kinetic, and time only passes when players choose an option.

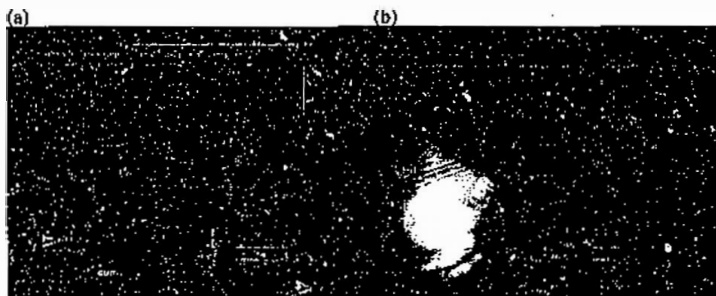


Figure 3.6. (a) The turn-based combat screen during option selection. The menu is in the bottom left hand corner; character statistics are in the bottom right hand corner; the battle queue is in the upper right hand corner. (b) The kinaesthetic representation of the consequences of a selected attack.

Nonetheless, if the procedural schemata required to navigate the combat menu is habituated—such that there is no discernible pause between one's turn, selecting an action, and the animated outcome—there may be an impression of immediate feedback. This is most likely to occur with swift physical attacks using the default menu option, in which case there

is no need to navigate the menu at all: one merely keeps pressing "X" and Tidus keeps attacking. Furthermore, the use of Overdrive attacks provides brief durations of high affect, during which players must press a sequence of buttons within a time limit, with immediate repercussions. These attacks also amplify the normal rewards of success in combat by inflicting more damage, providing greater spectacles of damage, and sometimes including an onscreen congratulation (for example: "Great!").

A second, and greater, degree of reinforcement is the damage inflicted on opponents, represented numerically in the style of arcade games (see Figure 3.6b). As Loftus and Loftus (1983) note, the magnitude of the reward affects the intensity of the reinforcement, but in video games the *perceived* magnitude of the reward is also important. Game designers often choose a magnitude on the basis of a psychological difference between different events. For example, at the beginning of FFX the damage that Tidus inflicts enters into three digits rather than the customary two in some other Final Fantasy titles (including FFX-2). This provides an immediate impression of prowess, even if monsters' statistics are similarly high and therefore victory is no easier. However, at a certain point the psychological value of magnitude is diminished: 10,000 or 20,000 points may both be sufficiently large to impress upon a player the sense of "huge numbers of points" (p. 24). Consequently, the points (and other rewards) awarded to players are usually kept within a range of magnitude with a progression of balanced increments. When damage hits a higher range than anticipated—as when a new weapon or spell increases damage—this provides the new relative basis for magnitude. This is an ongoing case with Overdrive Mode and when we attack using Yuna's Aeons. The intermittent nature of these high magnitude attacks preserves their value, since they remain *relatively* high even later in the game, when the magnitude of Tidus' normal attacks extends to over 3,000 and Auron's extends to over 6,000. However, this effect diminishes when damage reaches 9,999, which marks the absolute magnitude for characters (until they acquire the No Limit Ability).

A third reinforcement is the success which follows from the formulation of a strategy to defeat certain monster types or particular boss monsters (Friedman, 1995; Myers, 1990a). While randomisation determines the appearance, number and type of wandering monsters, and the chance of hitting an opponent and the amount of damage inflicted, the acquisition of strategy involves a clear facility for demystification, in that we can repeatedly confront the same monsters with increasing confidence. The option to "Flee" may constitute a winning strategy, in that one may learn to avoid unnecessary or undesirable conflict, so as to maintain

one's strength for later fights. A fourth reinforcement is the actual defeat of opponents, which is dramatised, and reinforced, by the victory dance. This defeat is reinforced by a fifth reinforcement: the accumulation of Gil, items, and Ability Spheres, and the periodic indication that characters have increased one or more levels (see Reid, 1999; Wallace, 1999). Lastly, sixth, since narrative-related encounters—Evrac, Seymour, Zu, Defender X, Sin, and so on—cannot be retreated from, and are live-or-die affairs, they offer the additional reward of a discrete advancement through the game, usually through the provision of cut-scenes. A strategy, then, functions as a kind of puzzle, or key, which allows players to unlock the rest of the game.

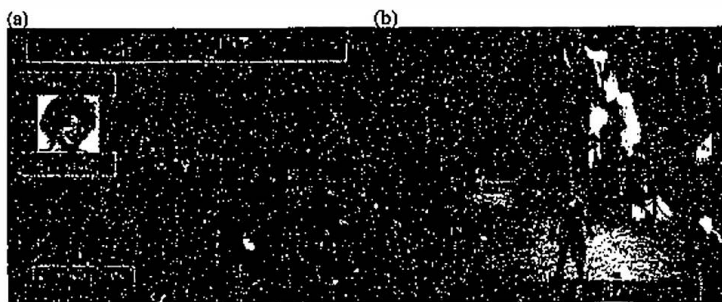


Figure 3.7. (a) Close up of the Grid Sphere. (b) The Field screen.

The menus in FFX include: the Main Menu, the Sphere Grid, and the menus for checking, organising or customising Characters, Items, Abilities, Overdrives, Aeons, and character Formation (see Figure 3.7a). These all offer reinforcements associated with inventories and character development common to most role-playing games (see Fine, 1983; Hertz, 1997; King & Borland, 2003; Mackey, 2000). First, browsing through new items and abilities poses the hypothetical scenario of a character augmented in a particular way and the anticipation of overcoming opponents in the Battle Screen. Second, there is the reward of seeing a numerical increase of stats and the acquisition of new Abilities, and of progressing through the Grid Sphere: a glowing sparkle of lights and metallic clink that are indexical of not merely an economic exchange, but some quasi-mystical imbue ment of power. Third, there is the gradual demystification of the blanks on the list of possible Abilities on each Character screen and the Grid Sphere, with an ideal state of mastery represented by all nodes being activated, or *each* character activating all the nodes. Fourth, there is the pleasure of readiness that comes through the customising and organising of characters, or the party. Indeed, players may spend an inordinate amount of time trying out minor adjustments to maximise their

effectiveness. However, the pleasure of developing characters' abilities and organising their inventories to maximise their effectiveness occurs through feedback between menus and the Battle Screen, since the effect of increasing a character's capabilities is only revealed through a player's improved ability to defeat opponents.

A great deal of the game is also spent in the Field Screen (see Figure 3.7b). The first reinforcement of navigation is the immediate feedback (or agency) consequent upon using the analogue control to move Tidus, accompanied by the forced scrolling of the landscape. This is at its most notable whenever one pauses to simply run Tidus back and forth by rotating the left analogue stick. The second reinforcement of navigation is an ongoing sensory and cognitive curiosity (Malone, 1980) about successive landscapes, with occasional surprise at their panoramic scale, graphical detail, and fantastic invention (Herz, 1997). This navigation is, in itself, a leisurely process, but it may lead to a third reinforcement: the demystification of Spira (Friedman, 1995). One can traverse the entire game world and render its data structure entirely visible. This pleasure is most notable when we gain retrospective access to places that were initially inaccessible, such as the chest beneath the waterfall in Besaid, which can only be accessed after the characters have acquired the Airship. However, unless one has the official guidebook or has downloaded a walkthrough, the task of finding hidden locations on the map by pointing and clicking holds open the possibility that one has missed something, an experience which is analogous to Aarseth's (1997) description of "aporia."

The Trials of the Fayth offer a distinctive system of reinforcement. Each Trial requires the player to guide Tidus through a simple maze, touching glyphs, picking up spheres, and placing each sphere in the appropriate slots in the walls and (moveable) altars (see Figure 3.8). Given that they function as puzzles, the reinforcement might be seen as completing each step, and apprehending the puzzle as a totality. However, there is a gap between a player's abstract reasoning (thinking of a logical possibility or solution) and the process of implementation (the time required to test it by moving the player into position and performing the required activity). That is, one might presume that, being puzzles, the Trials are abstract (cognitive) problems, but in practice they are more reminiscent of platform games and early adventure games in which one picks up every item and tries it out. Here trial and error wins out over strategy, and there is not necessarily a real sense of mastering the puzzle's logic since players may be unable to repeat it. Consequently, reinforcement in the Trials is more likely to extend to: first, moments of insight into possible solutions; second, the gratification when a possible solution is tested and found to work; and, third, the physical relief at having

performed the required (cognitive and sensorimotor) labour, and being able to continue with the game.

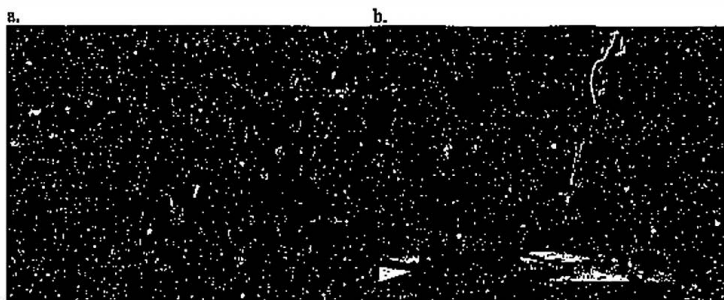


Figure 3.8. (a) Tidus touches a glyph in the Besaid Trial of the Fayth (“A strange glyph glows”). (b) One of the altars in the Besaid Trial of the Fayth.

There are also four mini-games in FFX: Blitzball, Butterfly catching, Lightning Dodging, and Chocobo Racing. While these are part of FFX as a total game, it suffices to say that these games generally offer more immediate kinaesthetic feedback (Darley, 2000). More than this, the player may decide to set aside the main narrative and game macrosequences of FFX and play these games in and of themselves. This may regulate interest in FFX by helping to keep a player in phatic contact with the game, and, by constituting ongoing investment in the game, raising the stakes for pursuing the rest of the game. Conversely, they may be played as a challenge that must be overcome. For example, one must win the fourth Chocobo Race (Catcher Chocobo) with zero time to acquire the Sun Sigil necessary for Tidus to acquire his Celestial Weapon: Caladbolg. Acquiring this may be part of an aesthetic of demystification, or mastery, of the game’s secrets, or as part of a strategy to maximise one’s ability to defeat opponents.

### Emotion Episodes

Hermeneutic codes in narrative sequences and schedules of reinforcement in game sequences are, then, distinctive modes of interest in terms of the degree of investment and reinforcement: mental and virtual versus physical and actual. These two modes parallel the distinction between observation and enaction, and so are affected by the experience of blocked enaction, as addressed in Chapter Two. The implication is that, in a game like FFX, shifts between these different modes may affect the regulation of interest. This can be



addressed in terms of the integrity of the "emotion episodes" which define the course of interest.

Frijda, Mesquia, Sonnemans, and van Goozen (1991) define an "emotion episode" as "a continuous emotion sequence resulting from the more or less continuous impact of one given event or a series of events" (p. 201). Tan (1997) identifies a close correspondence between emotion episodes and the scenes in the traditional feature film, following Frijda's (1986, pp. 204-214) understanding of the course of emotional episodes in film (Tan, 1997, pp. 59-61). From a "situation of balance," our appraisal of some "Complication" in the situational context constitutes a "Disturbance of the Balance": the onset of the emotion. This produces an action tendency which, in Tan's account, remains virtual: a wishing or hoping that a certain outcome will be realised. There may then be a rising and falling of emotional valence through a "Complication phase" in which the film suggests various possible positive and negative outcomes. However, the "Disturbance" is undone through the virtual realisation of the action tendency through the representation of a particular (usually positive) outcome leading to the "Restoration of Balance." This type of account is in accord with Aristotle's (trans. 1965) model of catharsis organised around a beginning, middle and end; with Freytag's (1863/1968) dramatic triangle of *deisis*, *peripeteia*, and *denouement*; with Propp's (1968) model of a hero's quest to redress some lack; with Todorov's (1981) model of equilibrium and disequilibrium; and with other models of narrative disturbance and restoration (Bordwell, 1986; Greimas, 1966, 1987; Heath, 1981; Neale, 1980).

For Tan (1997) there is a close relationship between scenes and emotion episodes within the traditional feature film (p. 62), in that scenes are usually coherent situational meaning structures that elicit and sustain an emotion episode. In feature films, each scene may be said to have its relative autonomy, though there may be divergent narrative threads, each of which pursues a particular hermeneutic code, such that scenes develop in relation to one another. Tan describes the process whereby viewers shift their attention across scenes in terms of "foreground" and "background" interest. Tan defines foreground interest as the anticipated return and net return of a current scene, defined by the past and future that constitute the scope of this scene. He defines background interest as the anticipated return and net return experienced in regards to sequences outside the temporal scope of the present sequence (p. 106). Foreground interest cued by a present scene is relative to the background interest produced (or anticipated) in scenes prior to and after the present scene. However, limits on attention and cognition, as well as the urgency parameter of the situational context (Frijda,

1986, p. 206), ensure that "the foreground return always weighs more heavily than the background return" (p. 106), to the extent that most viewers do not immediately connect foreground to background events, except when specifically cued (Grodal, 1998, pp. 68-70; Tan, 1997, p. 105).

Tan (1997) uses Frijda's (1986) distinction between "phasic emotions," which are "relatively brief responses to a particular event" (Tan, 1997, p. 199), and "tonic emotions," which are "based on prospects and retrospects [and] have a longer life span" (p. 199). For Tan, interest is a permanent, episodic emotion while watching the traditional feature film, in that players experience a phasic interest relative to particular sequences, but this reinforces the tonic interest to keep watching by contributing to the net investment. The willingness to shift attention, such that phasic interest continues to reinforce tonic interest, is influenced by the presumption of anticipated coherence, that is, the expected convergence of divergent narrative sequences. For example, a divergent action and a romance line sometimes converge through a male hero being united with his romantic interest through some final heroic act, such that the respective emotion-episodes find a common resolution (Tan, 1997, p. 58).

Some of the scenes in video games like FFX may be similar to those in films in terms of their duration and pacing. The opening sequence, after the title sequence, may be broken into the relatively discrete scenes summarised in Appendix Two. Each of these has its own coherence: (1.1) introduction to Tidus; (1.2) watching Tidus-as-celebrity; (1.3) bearing witness to Tidus' inner struggle; (1.4) watching Tidus' skilful performance of the kick which lifts him above the stadium and puts him in the privileged perspective of seeing Sin's attack; (1.5) watching the spectacle of Zanarkand's destruction; (1.6) watching Tidus deal with inexplicable events he cannot control. These scenes may be subsumed to a macro-scene: being introduced to Tidus-the-hero and perceiving his heroic qualities as he copes with Sin's arrival. This may constitute an emotion-episode, and is followed by the relative quiet and safety of the Submerged Ruins, and a new scene organised the question: How will Tidus deal with his disorientating isolation?

However, FFX does not simply have scenes, it also has clearly defined settings, sub-settings, and Save Spheres which may regulate the course of players' interest. First of all, FFX is clearly broken into settings such as Zanarkand, Submerged Ruins, Salvage Ship, and Besaid (see Appendix One). Players' movement through these may function like the progression through the chapters in a novel, or the acts in a drama or film, with each setting up a new

interest episode. Yet since these settings are extremely large, they are unlikely to be traversed in a single session of play. Sub-settings, by contrast, are more easily compartmentalised as discrete scenes. For example, players may explore Besaid Village, or Besaid Temple, in one session, but not leave the broader setting of Besaid. Furthermore, sessions are highly delineated by the placement of Save Spheres, which determine the minimal unit of traversal before players can put aside the game without having to re-play a section. Many of these Save points occur after major narrative developments and conflicts, such as after the battle at Mi'ihen crossroads, after fighting Seymour, after traversing Gagazet Mountains, and after acquiring the Airship. These Save points may be more "natural" markers of (ideal) interest episodes, or session, but players may use a Save point as a base of operations for short game sessions. For example, a player may kill monsters for an hour, periodically returning to the same point to save any "progress." In this respect they are free to define a scene in an arbitrary fashion by choosing to pause or quit at any time, with the option to un-pause a game or return to an old save.

Of course, mapping emotion-episodes onto scenes presumes a Model Player and a Model Text/Game, when different players may seek and experience different gratifications, may find different things of interest, and may interpret the situation differently, emphasising different hermeneutic codes ("How will Tidus get home?" instead of: "How will Tidus survive?"). So while it is possible to identify discrete narrative and game structures in FFX that might function as scenes, the activity of the player determines whether or not they are experienced as interest episodes.

#### **The (Dys)Regulation of Interest Across Narrative and Game Macrosequences**

It is not merely that the scenes that regulate emotion episodes are variable; shifts between narrative and game macrosequences may disrupt these episodes. Chapter two argued that there may be a disjunction as players shift from observational to enactive sequences, and that a narrative or game sequences may elicit an enactive attitude in a context of limited enactive possibilities. We might restate this by saying that the hypothetical, and desired, possibilities set up by the game may not be provided for in either subsequent narrative sequences or in the options of ergodic sequences, and this blocking may create an increased attention to non-diegetic factors (such as the game's design) and thereby disrupt interest.

While Chapter Two linked enactive blocking to space, it is productive to see the dysregulation of interest in terms of temporal contraction or dilation. For Juul (1999) the main

problem with "interactive narratives" is that the past of narrated sequences conflicts with the present of player's interaction, and vice versa, creating a radical temporal disjunction when there are shifts between "narrative" and "game sequences." However, Juul conflates the structure of time in the narrative/game with the player's experience of time, and over-states the importance of tense as a distinction between "narratives" and "games." It is more likely that the regulation of interest is affected less by the tense of events than their duration or pace.

In distinguishing the pace of different macrosequences it is useful to turn to Barthes' (1975a) proairetic code, which "provides the basis of events and sequences, proliferating linearly and irreversibly" (Cohen and Shires, 1988, p. 119). At this level of coding, the player simply names actions and their effects (Barthes, 1975a, p. 18), marking signifiers of action and grouping them in a sequence according to the signifieds of their effect (p. 120); for example: "journey," "conversation," or "fight." Since all narratives produce more events than are necessary, the hermeneutic code is applied to the proairetic code to distinguish nuclei from catalyzers. While nuclei are key events that initiate, increase, or conclude a sequence of transformations, catalyzers prolong or retard they nuclei they accompany, and may: create suspense by prolonging an event; direct emphasis, providing grounds for curiosity or surprise; keep phatic contact with the reader; produce an effect of verisimilitude; and/or deepen characterisation (Barthes, 1975a).

Compared with print and film narratives the proairetic code in game macrosequences is hyperactive in its production of catalyzers. As Darley (2000) and Herz (1997) argue, the plot of many video games is the story of player actions, and in FFX these actions are constituted by navigation and combat. These may be broken up into smaller, discrete units: Tidus moves forward; Tidus moves forward a second time; Tidus turns to the left; Tidus turns to the right; Tidus moves forward and to the left; Tidus attacks with his sword; Yuna attacks with her staff; Wakka throws his blitzball; the Bomb dives down to bounce Tidus; Tidus attacks with his sword, and so on. There are, of course, analogous step-by-step or blow-by-blow descriptions of travel or combat in film and print fiction, for example, the fighting sequences in Mortal Kombat (1995) and the Pod Racing scene in Star Wars: The Phantom Menace (2000). However, minimal event-units mapped to player keystrokes and mouse clicks may proliferate ad nauseam (and, potentially, ad infinitum) leading to the extended enchainment of minimal event-units. Upon the completion of a sequence, these events may be retrospectively described as a single event of the generality found in the opening narration (Tidus walks across the room), but by virtue of the process of interacting at key points, video

games continuously produce discrete event units *below* this level of generality (Tidus walks forward; Tidus walks forward; Tidus walks forward).

In this respect, FFX may produce extended sequences of events that continually violate the "threshold of functional relevance, that which divides the narratable below the non-narratable, sequences below which are taken-for-granted" (Heath, cited in Culler, 1975, p. 143). Since this proairetic hyper-activity may produce catalyzers which violate the pace of a dominant hermeneutic structure, they may be seen as potentially diminishing or extinguishing (Frijda, 1986, p. 314) an interest-episode.

Of course, the proliferation of detail below the threshold of functional relevance is relative to the degree of consciousness attributed to each constitutive "event" of the ergodic relationship, and this depends upon the degree of sensorimotor mastery which the player has over the controls of the interface. A player who has internalised the controls of the interface such that its use is a matter of procedural schemata—that is, s/he can perform an ergodic action as a matter of sensorimotor memory with minimal cognitive reflection—may be able to maintain their perception of "event" generality in a manner analogous to the present-tense verbal description. For example, by reducing a sequence to the description: "Tidus is moving across the room," one minimises any sense of proairetic hyper-activity.

However, the pacing of events in FFX is rarely dependant on the speed of player's response or mastery. For example, players cannot speed up the time it takes Tidus to walk across the Field Screen. Generally, the perception of whether or not events disrupt interest depends upon the intended level of generality at which a player is already decoding the events in the game. If player is become bound up in the storyline to the extent that they wish events to be realised at a consistent pace and concretion, the interruptions of battle may be a devastating intrusion, since crossing what seems a mere hundred feet of landscape may lead to half a dozen encounters. The Trials of the Fayth may be seen as especially intrusive, since they prevent both story and character development, to the extent that the term "Trial" may feel warranted. So while film viewing may allow for a simple transfer between foreground and background interest as scenes end and resume, the enactive, spatial, and temporal disjunctions that may result from forced shifts between game and narrative macrosequences may block or complicate such transfer.

Nonetheless, there are several reasons why the experience of these shifts may be attenuated, at least to the extent that they do not reduce one's tonic interest in the game. Just like feature films which utilise divergent narrative threads, hermeneutic clusters in video game narratives may be staggered with game sequences. The most notable hermeneutic clusters in FFX pertain to Tidus' and Yuna's romance, the search for Jeht, the understanding of what Sin is, and the revelations about (Yu) Yevon (see Appendix Three). The onset, deferral, confirmation, reworking, and reversal of these key hermeneutic clusters persists throughout the 90-hour (odd) narrative, both game and narrative. The staggering of these clusters may be seen in terms of Friedman's (1995) argument that when tasks overlap, such that tasks begin before other tasks end, there is no moment of closure, and players find it difficult to extricate themselves from play. As noted above, in FFX, the reinforcements of game macrosequences are governed by a schedule of both narrative progression (navigating areas, defeating boss monsters) and character development (acquiring items, spells, Overdrive modes, Spheres, by advancing through the Grid Sphere) which provide an ongoing intrinsic reinforcement across game macrosequences. If, for Friedman, the staggering of different game activities prevents closure and prolongs play, then the staggering of both narrative and game reinforcements may amplify this effect.

Indeed, narrative and game sequences may function as mutual, partial reinforcement for each other. With partial reinforcement, it should be remembered, people persist in behaviour in the absence of immediate positive reinforcement (Skinner, 1971, 1974). Since the effort expended without immediate reward is added to the net investment, the stakes are raised for a future pay-off, and there is an accompanying rationalisation of the prior investment and of the likelihood of the next pay-off (see Reith, 1999; see also Chapter Eight). The corollary of this is that a player who experiences no interest in the present may retain motivation through the ongoing anticipation of the possibility of a reward in the future which will reconstitute interest, or, more accurately, will provide the reward *of* interest. That is, even if the player has invested far more than the net return, and interest presently has a negative value, a player may persist with the game—or keep returning to it—in the hope that ongoing investment will (eventually) be rewarded.

In video games like FFX, partial reinforcement may be a consequence of the fact that there is a promise for action tendencies to become *more* than virtual: players can enact a formerly hypothetical action tendency, or narrative sections may cue or prepare players for this action tendency. In practice, of course, the actual action tendency is often a *gross*

enactment of the hypothetical action tendency: a desire for a particular hypothetical resolution is reduced to basic actions linked to a (usually) simple type of arousal (fight/flight). In the middle of a narrative sequence, players may desire to see Tidus win a game of blitzball and be celebrated through Spira, but must console themselves with manipulating his inventory, seeing him winning a battle, or finding some new item. It is possible, then, that narrative and game macrosequences provide partial reinforcement for each other.

While narrative rewards may be insufficient to compensate for the high investment of time and effort engaging with game macrosequences, narrative rewards such as the desire to see unfolding character relations may function as catalyzers that prolong players' expectations of such rewards. For example, a player's desire to see Seymour confronted may find vicarious gratification in the hostile victory over a monster in battle, or a player's desire for the power associated with character development and victory over opponents may find vicarious gratification in Tidus' acceptance as one of Yuna's Guardians, an acquisition of *social* rank. Furthermore, even during game sequences, certain kinds of typically "narrative" types of fantasising persist: "I wish he/I would just find that item!"; "I wish those two would just get together!"; "Don't fight that!"; "I hope it misses!"; "Tidus should be stronger!" This may give way to hypothetical strategising ("If I do this, maybe . . ."); "If Tidus had that Celestial Weapon . . ."), but this strategising may hold open new expectations about both game *and* narrative events.

In this respect, there may be a confluence of actual and hypothetical action tendencies: a virtual action tendency which cannot be literally realised by the limited affordances of the interface may be perceived as a denied or aborted fantasy, or it may be experienced as a concrete *compensation* for the hypothetical form. By extension, players may take the concrete affordance as a temporary gratification that maintains their (phatic) contact with the hypothetical wish, with the promise that, even if they cannot immediately act upon it, continuing to play holds open its possible realisation.

However, narrative and game macrosequences are not only staggered, they are aesthetically integrated through cross coding. Perhaps most trivially, the sensorimotor action of the player may function almost continually to reinforce symbolic oppositions. For example, the continued clicking on a keyboard while a player attacks a monster will reinforce a narrative opposition of good/evil, and amplify its emotional significance because each act constitutes a micro-investment in the privileged term of that opposition. More importantly, the

prolonging of the proairetic code through player actions may magnify suspense. For example, a player may deliberately hold off from moving into a dangerous area, thereby providing catalyzers (Tidus waits, Tidus waits, Tidus waits) that defer an expected and feared event. This is especially notable when players are about to confront Seymour for the first time, or when players are about to confront Sin, or Braska's Final Aeon. The danger posed by all these opponents—especially if one has already tried to kill them and have reloaded a save game—may lead players to keep wandering around, developing characters through fighting, or to continually manipulate and/or customise items.

There are some occasions in which the addition or alteration of ergodic capabilities is a consequence of developments in the narrative. For example, when fighting Seymour, Tidus and Wakka have a Talk option; Tidus also has this option when fighting Braska's Final Aeon. When fighting Evrae on the deck of the Airship, Tidus and Rikku both have the option of telling Cid to move the Airship closer to or away from Evrae. This leads a greater impression of coherence between narrative and game macrosequences, at least in terms of the conservation of motivation, goals, and virtual/actual affordances. More importantly, there are some occasions when a significant narrative symbolic code is *decided* within a game macrosequence, as when players must fight and defeat major opponents like Seymour, Yunalesca, Sin, Braska's Final Aeon, and Yu Yevon. In fact, fighting Seymour the first time is likely to be one of most anxious moments of both the game *and* narrative because players have only witnessed the god-like representation of Seymour in the narrative and are suddenly confronted with how that narrative coding will translate into game terms. Players are likely to anticipate an extended emotion-episode marked by the anxiety of failing and having to repeat it. Each subsequent failure may feel like a failure in the flow of narrative, but it may also renew the sense that Seymour is a serious antagonist, not to be trivially dismissed. Seymour's eventual defeat in battle leads to a significant symbolic transformation in the narrative macrosequence: Tidus is superior to the opponent, and Tidus' morality triumphs over the amorality or immorality of the opponent, legitimating his heroism. The subsequent cut-scene functions as denouement for a narrative conflict that has already been resolved.

The integration of narrative and game macrosequences is not, however, merely a matter of the game's aesthetic cross-coding, since players may experience such shifts as part of the total aesthetic of the game. In addressing this issue it is useful to consider Erving Goffman's (1961, 1969, 1974) analysis of "frames." Frames are structures that govern events and participants' experience of events, and are useful in any consideration of the boundaries



of, and within, the play space. Fine (1983) applied Goffman's model to role-playing games (RPGs) and identified three levels of frames, which Mackey (2000) has expanded to five: first, the social frame inhabited by the person; second, the game frame inhabited by the player; third, the narrative frame inhabited by the raconteur, that is, when a player re-tells what has happened to his/her character; fourth, the constative frame inhabited by the addresser, usually the Games Master; and, fifth, the performative frame inhabited by the character. Fine (1983) and Mackey (2000) argue that shifts between these frames is part of the "engrossment" of play and may deepen the play experience.

It might seem reasonable to identify a parallel to this in Tan's (1997) description of immersion in a fictional world as a consequence of a sequence of involuntary perceptual illusions and several voluntary illusions: illusions of apparent motion, the diegetic effect, the illusion of the controlled witness, and the illusion of observational attitude (pp. 236). However, it is not useful to see movement through frames as a linear progression into deeper immersion, since it cannot be stated that any narrative or game frame inherently offers a "deeper" level of immersion than any other. If we take narrative and game macrosequences as frames, it is not the case that narrative macrosequences are diegetic and game macrosequences are non-diegetic. Given that EPX is a role-playing adventure game both types of macrosequence are part of its diegesis. As will be argued in Chapter Eight, there is a greater likelihood of non-diegetic effects (and A-emotions) being experienced in the former because of the frustrating nature of play. The issue here is that the regulation of interest owes more to selection from aesthetic alternatives and the naturalisation of these variations as part of a total aesthetic experience.

This is especially evident in RPGs. Role-players distinguish between frames in a similar way, not as marks of relative engrossment, but as varied aesthetics: hence simulationist, gamist and dramatist playing "styles," or player "stances" as actor, audience, author, immersive, or in-character (see Mack, online). That these frames, styles or stances, are a matter of player aesthetics is evident in distinctions between player types, such as the historian, military enthusiast, specialist, gamer, assassin, and competitor (Dunnigan, 1980). Indeed, the RPG form is exemplary of the way frame switching can be a part of immersion, rather than a disruption of interest. To any external player, the RPG is an absurd mix of activities that seem to have no natural relationship with one another: cartography, drawing, narration, drama/role-playing, gaming, arguments about the rules, and socialising. As Meyers (1986) notes:

one may object that the language of the game is ephemeral, derivative at best, and, most suspicious of all, lacking the traditional literary modes such as dialogue and description. An observer might find the language disjointed, unplanned and unrevised, and frequently interrupted by comments on, questions on, or even arguments over the rules, with each interruption hampering the creation of the fiction. (p. 2485).

However, for any experienced player, the act of playing is a matter of routine and shifts between its component activities are unlikely to attract much attention. The shift between game and narrative macrosequences in FFX may similarly be seen in terms of expected and semi-voluntary "frame-switching." This allows players to, in Eco's (1981) terms, "narcotise" a prior frame, and players may become increasingly adept at this kind of shifting. As Mackey's (2000) argues, "frame switching is considered legitimate as long as it does not overly affect the continuation of the game" (p. 197). If narrative and game macrostructures are seen as frames then the shifts between them may be accommodated as part of the aesthetic experience associated with the genre. That is, players may simply accept the frequent, seemingly disruptive shifts between narrative and game sequences as part of the game.

However, players also voluntarily shift between frames. This may be a matter of aesthetic attitude in that a player bored with interminable wandering or a protracted battle may enter into an aesthetic of visual engrossment by paying more attention to the spectacle of the game's landscapes, architecture, characters, and fashion. But FFX also allows some freedom to choose frames in the more substantial sense of choosing to return to particular game macrosequences. Players may choose to wander in circles until they enter the frame of combat through a random encounter. In some areas there are consoles which offer a Tutorial with the option to practice fighting the monsters unique to the area without any damage to the characters beyond the frame. In the Calm Lands players are also likely to find the Monster Arena, which lets them enter into a combat frame with any of the available monsters. Conversely, Tiedus has a Flee Ability, which allows players to escape the combat frames forced upon them by random encounters, such that they can pursue navigation and the story. Players also eventually acquire a No Encounters Ability, which prevents random encounters, meaning that game-functional senses become narcotised while navigating the game world. Lastly, FFX incorporates the mini-games of Blitzball, Chocobo Racing, Thunder Dodging, and Butterfly Chasing as different frames. All of these allow the player to voluntarily shift frames and renew their interest.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that narrative macrosequences in FFX are periodically interrupted by macrosequences of movement and combat, and that the qualitative distinction between narrative and game sequences may lead to the disruption of phasic interest episodes. However, the dysregulation of interest may be attenuated in several ways. First, the staggering of narrative and game hermeneutic structures, and partial reinforcement between narrative and game macrosequences, may preserve tonic interest in the game. Second, the cross coding of narrative and game macrosequences may preserve interest during shifts between them. Third, frame-shifting means that player's may accept shifts between narrative and game macrosequences as part of the game's aesthetic, and in FFX players can voluntarily renew their interest by switching to a different game macrostructure.

## Chapter Four – The Unreality of the Narrative

If interest is regulated by expectations about events and the reward of their outcome, it can be argued that the narrative construction of “reality” has a central role in regulating interest in *FFX*. After a review of Culler’s (1975) categories of *vraisemblance*, this chapter will address *FFX*’s coding of unreality in terms of the “meta-genres” or “modes” of the “marvellous,” the “uncanny,” and the “fantastic.” It will be argued that *FFX*’s coding of unreality not only regulates players’ curiosity, surprise and suspense, it also extends these emotions into wonder, fear, and/or anxiety. The major implication of this argument is that the disjunctive experiences of reality-status addressed in Chapter Two may be aesthetically recuperated as part of the game’s meaningful experience through the ongoing hermeneutic concern with reality.

### Vraisemblance

The narrative representation of reality is often addressed in terms of *vraisemblance*, the signifying processes whereby something is made to seem sensible and natural by the way it is placed in relation to existing conventions of discourse. *Vraisemblance* may be loosely identified with the operation of Barthes’ (1975a) “reference code,” which provides a basis of extra-textual reality by referring to authorised texts in a culture. However, while Barthes’ reference code provides a *general* link between *vraisemblance* and intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1986; Kristeva, 1980), here we are better served by Culler’s (1975) distinctions between types of *vraisemblance*: “five ways in which a text may be brought into contact with and defined in relation to another text which helps to make it intelligible” (p. 140). This chapter will focus on the first three of Culler’s five categories: the “discourse of the ‘real,’” the “cultural text,” and “generic *vraisemblance*.”<sup>1</sup>

The discourse(s) of the real may be understood as including what Tan (1997) refers to as “naïve physics,” “naïve psychology” and “naïve sociology” (p. 239), which constitute the “common sense” understandings of the world (see also Bruner, 1990; Bordwell, 1989). In regards to naïve physics, we accept that objects exist in time and space and are bound by cause and effect. Much narrative information in *FFX* has the sole function of providing an impression of a real object-world: the waves at Besaid beach, the wind in the trees, smooth

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<sup>1</sup> Culler’s fourth and fifth categories, the “conventionally natural” and “parody/irony,” are not addressed because satisfactory discussion of them would require a lengthy, and unnecessary, account of the status of reality in postmodern theory.

motion-capture for characters, as well as wandering monsters in their ecologically appropriate environments, all denote a world governed by familiar physical laws. In regards to naïve psychology, we accept a version of Bordwell's (1989) "folk psychology," according to which people have minds and bodies, think and feel, and have traits and motives. FFX represents predictable psychological behaviour in this respect: Tidus wants love from his father; he shows romantic interest in Yuna; he defers to Auron as a surrogate father; the Al Bhed are hated and mistrusted because they are unknown; and Seymour's madness stems from his previous persecution.

At the level of naïve sociology, we accept that people are sociable, and that when they come together they form institutions, such as religion and law, which govern their relationships with each other. In FFX, that people naturally seek out groups and community is represented by: the community of Besaid; the bond between the Guardians; and the communal effort to repair the docks after Sin attacks Kilika. That families are important to personal life and social organization is represented by: the family huts in Besaid; the family link between Wakka and Chappu; Tidus' and Yuna's ongoing concerns about their fathers; and the way Wantza carries on his brother O'aka's mercantile trade after the latter is imprisoned. That people form religious institutions through awe or reverence for natural or divine forces is evident in the Temples of the Fayth, the teachings of Yevon, and the authority invested in the Maesters. That people form institutions of work is represented by: the hotels or shops, such as Rin's Travel Agency; young Clasko's indecision to be a Chocobo Trainer or Chocobo Knight; and the ongoing mercantile efforts of O'aka and his brother. Lastly, that humans desire or need release and entertainment is represented by the institution of blitzball. In all these ways, FFX conforms to our "naïve," or "folk," understanding (or discursive construction) of "reality."

Cultural vraisemblance is an extension of the discourse of the real that consists of "cultural stereotypes or accepted knowledge" (Culler, 1975, p. 141), including proverbs and maxims, and authorised "physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical" (Barthes, 1975a, p. 20) discourses. While ideology may permeate a textual transaction, Culler (1975) argues that this category may be explicitly linked to ideology in that it nominates a system of preferred values (p. 144). Texts usually assume that the reader recognises its values or proverbs and "draw[s] upon this fund of human knowledge [to] establish . . . action and motive, behaviour and personality" (p. 143). For example, in FFX players accept the presence of shops and/or merchants at the far reaches of the world, hidden hundreds of miles from

other people, because they are defined as logical and normal by the ideologies of Yevon (the Summoners' require service on their quests), economics (people go where the money is), and tourism (Spira, being so exotic, invites adventurers).

However, texts sometimes provide their own explanation of otherwise inexplicable narrative facts or events, thereby stating their own maxims through a process that Genette (1966/1982) calls "unvraisemblance." For example, Tidus (and perhaps the player) is amazed at how the folk of Spira accept Sin, and must be repeatedly told by Wakka that the people of Spira believe Sin is a punishment they must atone for. Tidus questions whether it is worth sacrificing so many lives to kill Sin for the twenty year peace of the Great Calm, and must be told by Yuna that the (to him) futile actions of the Summoners are necessary for a temporary respite and the maintenance of a hope that one day Sin will *not* return. That those who live in Spira accept this situation is not surprising, since naïve psychology tells us that people can learn to go on with their day-to-day lives despite terrible events (as during the protracted bombing of London in the Second World War). However, Tidus does not truly accept Sin, and this rejection conforms to two other tenets of naïve psychology: that people naturally resist oppression and that people are most happy when liberated. When Tidus learns of Yuna's choice to sacrifice herself for Spira, he (along with the Al Bhed) is unconvinced at the justification, and only continues with the quest after making a promise with Rikku to find a way to save Yuna. What drives the narrative, then, is a conflict between, on the one hand, the beliefs of Spira about Sin (cultural vraisemblance within the diegesis), and, on the other hand, a belief in the rightness of resisting oppression and freedom (naïve psychology in the discourse of the real).

Generic vraisemblance incorporates those codes that define "the range of possible speech acts which a literary text might perform" (Culler, 1975, p. 147); or, more accurately, genres form the basis for the expected *and* unexpected in any communicative act, since a degree of novelty is expected in fictional contracts between texts and readers/players. At the level of game macrostructures, another reason that players are likely to accept the presence of shops and shopkeepers in isolated regions is because they are conventions of computer role-playing games: as characters adventure they find and sell items they find, and buy new, more powerful ones. Shops are needed to perform this service. At the level of narrative macrostructures, players will expect Tidus' rejection of Sin's tyranny because protagonists in epic fantasy narratives always confront a major opponent, and not only is Sin a pre-eminent opponent, the goal to defeat him is stated in the blurb and manual. Generic vraisemblance

(Tidus will fight the monster) reinforces naïve psychology in the discourse of the real (people resist oppressors) against cultural vraisemblance within the diegesis (Sin is part of everyday life).

These aspects of vraisemblance are central to the operation of "mimeticism," which Jackson (1988) and Hume (1984) refer to as a "mode" or "impulse," embodied in classical realist texts. Mimeticism is an effect that may be found in a variety of genres, such as horror, science fiction, romance, tragedy, epic and comedy. However, we can better appreciate the game's construction of the "unreal," and its concomitant ways of regulating player interest, in terms of Todorov's (1973) "genres" of the "marvellous," the "uncanny," and the "fantastic." These may be seen, like the "mimetic," not as historical genres, but as "modes" which cross other genres (see Cornwell, 1994; Jackson, 1988; Todorov, 1973). These modes provide a useful way of differentiating the ways in which FFX recruits codes of vraisemblance for aesthetic effect.

### The Marvellous

For Todorov (1973), the defining principle of the "marvellous" is the acceptance of violations of known physical laws. More accurately, a new discourse of the real is posited that governs the reality of the diegesis and thereby provides a new context that renders the narrative facts intelligible (Culler, 1974, p. 141). As a mode, the marvellous can frequently be found in, and often characterises, mythology, religious texts, magic realism, sword and sorcery, science fiction, and some horror and romance. However, Todorov (1973) identifies four variations of the marvellous—the hyperbolic marvellous, the exotic marvellous, the scientific marvellous, and the instrumental marvellous—all of which may be identified in FFX.

Todorov's (1973) *exotic marvellous* occurs when supernatural elements are represented as normal within the diegesis, usually through the acceptance of magical beings, abilities or events, which violate laws of life, motion and energy in the modified discourse of the real which defines a text's (meta-) physics. In FFX, the precise location and nature of magic varies. Spira itself may be said to be supernatural because its ontology includes magical events (the Grand Summoning and Jecht's transformation into Sin) and magical beings. FFX's magical beings are sometimes magical in themselves by virtue of their fantastic or impossible nature or origin. For example, Yu Yevon has the mysterious, divine origins of

most gods; the Bandersnatch is a folkloric creature drawn from Lewis Carroll's poem Jabberwocky, with the same otherworldly status as unicorns or fairies; and the Defenders are inanimate matter inspired by magic, like golems.

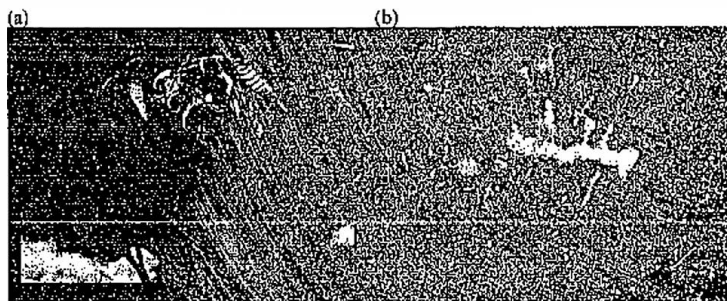


Figure 4.1. (a) The "supernatural" Aeon Valefor. (b) Yuna's "magical" ceremony to "Send" the spirits of those killed at Kilika.

Some beings are magical by virtue of *having* magical abilities: this is as true of monsters, such as Black Elements (with their elemental Strikes), and Behemoth Kings (with their Zombie Touch), as it is of characters, such as Yuna (with her ability to Summon Aeons) and Lulu (who is typed as a sorceress with innate spell casting abilities) (see Figure 4.1). However, most magical abilities are external to the non-magical beings who use them, and are only acquired by: finding items (on monsters, or on the paths of Spira, or as part of a quest); receiving gifts (from non-player characters, or NPCs, such as Belgemine); and through experience (the accumulation of Ability Points which can be used to advance on the Sphere Grid). These magical events, beings and abilities are accepted as part of the laws of the diegesis in that, at the level of generic *vraisemblance*, players expect magic in a fantasy role-playing game, and because the character's cultural *vraisemblance*, and their basic reactions, reflect the discourse of the real in Spira. None of the characters are surprised at their magical abilities, or at the presence of any events simply *because* they are magical.

In Todorov's (1973) next two categories, impossible but accepted magical events and beings blur into science, or scientific explanation. Todorov defines as *scientific marvellous* those narratives in which events or items are represented in rational terms but operate according to physical laws no longer accepted or not yet realised. This is, for Todorov, the realm of much science fiction, and the (forbidden) *Machina* embody this scientific marvellous in that while it may be *possible* to build an entire city over a river like the Moonflow, to contain water in the manner of the globe in the blitzball stadium, or to float an Airship like the



one flown by the Al Bhed, this technology is beyond our current level of understanding (see Figure 4.2). Indeed, the player may be aware of developments in architecture, aerodynamics, or magnetic field theory which legitimate as future possibilities the city that was built over the Moonflow, the Al Bhed's Airship, and the water sphere in the blitzball stadium. However, even the Al Bhed, who are associated with the Machina, have only partial knowledge of the machines they repair. Rikku's brother states this for comic effect as he pilots the Airship on its shaky, virgin take-off from the Al Bhed home. Consequently, the vagueness of explanation of these possibilities allows them to retain the flavour of the exotic marvellous.

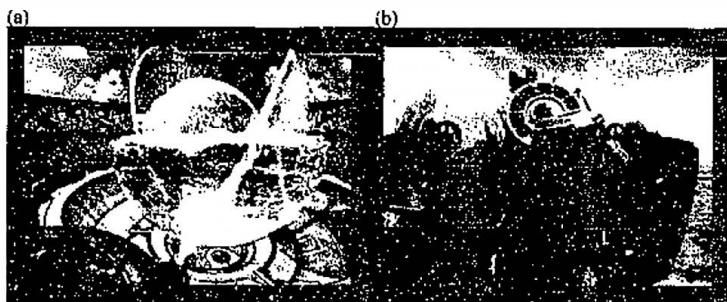


Figure 4.2. (a) The blitzball stadium at Luca filling up with water held in place by a presumably "scientific" force field. (b) The Airship escaping the ruined Al Bhed home.

Todorov (1973) refers to as *instrumental marvellous* those narratives in which can be found devices that were not possible in a certain historical context but whose function has been produced in the present. He offers flying carpets, apples that cure diseases, and pipes which see long distances as examples, whose qualities exist in, respectively, helicopters, antibiotics and binoculars. Many supposedly magical devices in FFX similarly may be interpreted as poetic representations of scientific devices. For example, weapons Tidus that may acquire include: a Taming Sword which captures creatures it kills (like a stun gun); Giftventure, which multiplies the amount of money found on a monster (like interest in venture capitalism); Twilight Steel, which, renders opponents blind (like certain poisons); and Soldier's Sword, which increases strength (like injections of testosterone).

Indeed, magic in *general* may be read as a poetic representation of science and/or physical laws. In many fantasy texts and role-playing games magic is learned at something equivalent to a modern college or university, where magical research takes place, such as the Schools of Magic in J. K. Rowling's (1999) Harry Potter, Bruce Heard's (1987) Dungeons & Dragons Gazetteer: Principalities of Glantri, and Terry Pratchett's (1985) The Colour of

Magic. In other fiction, magic is acquired through personal tutoring or experimentation, as with Pug in Raymond E. Feist's (1983) Magician and Goran in David Edding's (1983) Belgariad series, or as a pseudo-science, as with Jack Vance's (1950/1985) alchemical magicians in The Dying Earth. In FFX, all characters acquire magical skills through experience, and magic itself is structured in a hierarchy of increasingly powerful spells. That is, FFX's magic is as dependent upon laws as strict and predictable as those of the natural world, and its magical effects are as quantifiable as those of non-magical items weapons and armour. Using a water-based spell like Watera against a fire monster is no different from using a hose, and is strategically equivalent to using a Piercing attack against a monster with armour. In this respect, specific magical practices and effects may be accepted as marvellous, but may also be read as poetic representations of existing scientific practices and effects,

Todorov's (1973) last category of the *hyperbolic marvellous* refers to those tales that contain elements that are supernatural "only by virtue of [excessive] dimensions" (p. 54) or through a literalised metaphor. In regards to dimension, physical laws are not subverted so much as exaggerated. FFX contains physically excessive (giant) wasps, piranha and wolves as monster types, which have non-fictional referents. In regards to literalised metaphor, FFX can be read in terms of the metaphor of the "overbearing father." Since exaggeration often functions to represent something in a manner which reproduces its psychological impact, the excessive size of Braska's Final Aeon, the game's visual spectacle, and its narrative drama (death, loss, revenge, and so on), may represent the force of patriarchal authority as experienced by a son (and/or the forcefulness of the son as a liberal individual resisting and overcoming all odds).

By considering these variations of the marvellous it is possible to identify a spectrum from the literally unreal, in which the marvellous exists as an accepted unreality, to the poetically real, in which the marvellous involves the poetic manipulation of a known reality. Across these variations, the marvellous may be generally accepted, but in some circumstances a particular marvellous quality elicits wonder, awe or surprise in characters. Tidus frequently displays amazement or disbelief. When Tidus encounters the Zu in Sanubia Sands, the "camera" moves behind him and he looks up at its unlikely, shaggy mass to exclaim: "Whew!" He is also amazed at the water-travelling, dinosaur-like Shoopuff, whereas the others consider it as no more amazing than a horse-ride, with Yuna reminiscing (and giggling) about a childhood experience in which Kimahri fell in the water. Similarly, while Tidus expresses surprise when he first sees Chocobos, the Chocobo trainer is surprised that Tidus is

surprised, since they are as familiar to her (and to players who have played other Final Fantasy titles) as any other steed. Indeed, when Tidus is confronted by the Aeons, the Temples of the Fayth, and Sin, his status as a visitor to the “future” allows him to express the wonder of a tourist lead through a marvellously exotic foreign culture: alien to him (and players), yet both possible and real within Spira. That is, the marvellous in FFX is reinforced by descriptions of exotic races, cultures and beings with their own cultural vraisemblance. Even the words “Maester” and “Fayth” are deviations from conventional spelling which evoke other-ness. Tidus, of course, comes to accommodate these exotica, and during Chocobo Racing the balloons and prizes connote a carnival or circus-like affair, framing the marvellous elements as part of a tame, sideshow amusement. Yet, despite a player’s ready acceptance of these marvels as natural to Spira, s/he may, along with Tidus, initially be surprised at them.

The game also undermines the bland acceptance of magic, and produces an attitude of awe, through its use of magical spells and events. When Lulu uses elemental spells for the first time she offers such comments as “Need a light?” (for fire) and “Go with the flow” (for water). These comments may be glib, but they prepare the player for the new spell’s spectacle and damage. Inasmuch as new spells open up new powers they may be seen as violations of the previous economy governing gameplay, even if technically they merely confer a higher status (or greater access to resources) within a consistent economy of magic. However, some spectacles of magic seemingly violate the rules of magic in a more radical sense, most notably the cataclysmic arrival of Sin at Zanarkand and the devastating appearance of Anima in Luca Stadium. Both of these spectacles are likely to be seen as a violation of expected magical effects in that they display magical effects so beyond the predicted curve of character development that the player cannot properly conceive of confronting these figures as opponents within the rules of the game, much less effecting an equivalent display of power. Yet, as the player continues the game, characters become exponentially powerful, may acquire Anima as an Aeon whose abilities operate within the rules of the narrative, and eventually confront and defeat Sin. In this sense, the spectacular representation of magic is presented as *exceeding* the development curve experienced as governing the rules of magic in the game macrostructure, but is subsequently normalised as players develop their characters and learn more about Spira. Magic, then, is represented as variously accepted *and* un- or dis-expected through the gradual acclimatisation to the rising scale of magical efficacy.

Players may also experience a sense of the dis-expected through the gradual revelations about Sin, which violate prior disclosures about the discourse of the real in Spira.

Sin is initially accepted as part of Spira's normal existence, and is interpreted by the Laws of Yevon as divine punishment. However, FFX later offers a new explanation: Sin is an Aeon, like the Fiends, and his existence is *not* normal and natural to Spira. He is the undead armour of a god, part of the Grand Summoning which preserves the memory of long-dead Zanarkand, and the key to the Spiral of Death, in which the dead govern the living. Suddenly, what is seen as a physical law (Spira's discourse of the real) is revealed to be a changeable social convention (cultural *vraisemblance*). What is at stake here is not ontology but the *epistemology* of Yu Yevon. Sin is not a symbol of divine punishment, merely a tool of Yu Yevon's unnatural vengeance. Since both epistemologies presume a supernatural ontology, the shift from one to the other stages Sin as marvellous a second time.

The narrative strategy of FFX may, then, be seen in terms of a tension within the marvellous: between the literally unreal versus the poetically real; between acceptance of and surprise at the unreal; and between our initial expectations about the reality of the diegesis and our subsequent revision of this reality. These tensions preserve a tension that is central to the marvellous: the provision of an ongoing sense of wonder and awe that minimises the progressive acceptance and invisibility of the supernatural.

### **The Uncanny**

If the marvellous is characterised by a sense of wonder at spectacles of the unreal, the "uncanny" is characterised by seemingly unreal events that are symptomatic of a hidden, unsafe, fearful, dreadful, or dangerous reality (Freud, 1919/1990; Jackson, 1988; Todorov, 1973). This usage can be traced to the un-negated and negated version of the German term "heimlich":

[*Das Heimlich*] signifies that which is homely, familiar, friendly, cheerful, comfortable, intimate . . . [It] also means that which is concealed from others: all that is hidden, secreted, obscured. Its negation, *das Unheimlich*, then functions to dis-cover, reveal, expose areas normally kept out of sight. . . . It uncovers what is hidden and, by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. (Jackson, 1988, p. 65)

Freud (1919/1990) distinguishes the uncanny as a type of fear directed not towards some known object, but to something that is in the process of being revealed and/or to the process of revelation itself. Armit (1996) summarises:

In order for us to feel something to be uncanny [as distinct from fear], it must derive from a situation, object or incident that ought to feel (and usually has felt) familiar and reassuring, but which has undergone some form of slight shift that results in what I have referred to as a form of dis-ease. (p. 49)

The key mechanism here is projection. In formal terms, projection refers to the process whereby aspects of the self are displaced and relocated in an external position. This may occur in fairly benign ways, such as the routine proximal-distal transactions that Grodal (1997) discusses, or the projection of one's mood, which thereby seems to characterise the environment. However, projection also occurs when a subject cannot tolerate aspects of him or herself and attempts to expel them. It is this latter sense that informs Freud's (1919/1990) account of the uncanny, which is built upon his general theory that neurotic disorders are symptoms of repressed psychological causes. For Freud, a latent trauma is projected onto mundane events which are thereby imbued with the affects associated with that trauma. In addition, just as one may feel unease as the psychic defences of the ego are being dismantled during therapy, the anxieties of a projected trauma may be combined with dread at the gradual process of that trauma's revelation.

What especially characterises the effect of the uncanny for Todorov (1973) is uncertainty about whether seemingly marvellous or unreal events have a psychological or physical cause. On the one hand, a character may confuse the real and the imaginary by thinking that an event happened when it was simply in his/her head, in the manner of a projection, dream, hallucination, or delusion. On the other hand, a character may confuse the real and the illusory, knowing that an event *has* happened but not understanding *how* it happened, as in the case of an inexplicable magic trick. The uncanny results when events are presented in such a way that a character, and usually the reader, is unable to decide either way. This holds open the possibilities that: there is a genuine, hidden reality beyond a character's perception-consciousness; that the character is merely (mis-) perceiving events; and/or that the character is projecting some hidden reality of his or her psyche onto events (also see Cornwell, 1994; Mishra, 1994; Modleski, 1982; Radway, 1984).

Freud (1919/1990) describes four categories of events that can produce this effect: repetition, the perception of doubles, the animation of inanimate objects, and the omnipotence of thoughts. Todorov (1973) extends these tropes, but Jackson (1988) is even more embracing, linking the unsettling effect of the uncanny to violations of linear time, space, cause and effect, as well as motifs of metamorphosis, entropy, and bodily disintegration that

violate the unity of the self. In fiction, then, a character may perceive any of these as a violation of the natural, objective order that constitutes his/her reality. This not only holds open the possibility that events are distorted by the character's perception-consciousness, it cues the reader to expect that some horrible past event about to be disclosed and/or that some horrible event is about to befall the character. For Freud (1919/1990), Todorov (1973), and Jackson (1988), the effect of the uncanny is also linked to the violation of taboos, in that the subversion of a social order elicits anxieties of punishment and expresses a desire for the repressed, unseen, and unspoken. Chapter Seven will discuss this in terms of how FFX generates the empathetic emotion of fear. Here it suffices to emphasise that projective processes are at the core of the uncanny and that they promote a characteristically paranoid outlook characterised by a wary suspicion that what one fears is true (see Swanson, Bohnert, and Smith, 1990, p. 8). That is, uncanny events lead characters to progressively confuse their anxiety about past or possible experiences with the actual threat posed by their environment in the present.

Several aspects of FFX cue such an uncanny, or paranoid, outlook. To begin with, in the opening sequence at Zanarkand, it is revealed that Tidus' father is missing, and no reference is made to his mother. Not long after, retrospective narration reveals Tidus' psychological abuse from Jecht, and his mother's inattention. Here players may realise that Tidus' success as a blitzball player, with thousands of adoring fans, has not made him narcissistic; rather, he lives in the shadow of his father, who was a greater legend in the game, and ultimately he feels abandoned. Tidus' feelings of abandonment, even amidst the enormous crowds at the Zanarkand blitzball stadium, are reflected in his isolation after walking away from his fans, his lonely musings as he walks the Causeway, and his isolation while preparing for the game.

The possibility that Tidus' feelings of abandonment may be physically manifested is foreshadowed by the enormous mirror through which he passes to enter the blitzball stadium. As noted in Chapter Three, hermeneutic codes associated with dreaming suggest a shift from reality into fantasy. Indeed, FFX is preoccupied with dream-states. When the boy appears on the bridge in Zanarkand the world freezes as if preserved in memory. Prior to teleporting, Tidus enters the City of Dreams and swims underwater-in-the-air. Each time Tidus is teleported there is a fade-to-white that may be metonymic of a loss-of-consciousness or the passing from waking to dreaming. The Farplane responds to visitor's thoughts and manifests their memories of lost loved ones. At the end of the game, Tidus returns to the City of Dreams

and confronts his father in a surrealistic parody of Zanarkand. He then confronts Yu Yevon amidst a dream-like abstraction of clouds, standing on the enormous sword that was wielded by Braska's Final Aeon.

Apart from these explicit signs of dream-states, players may also perceive as dream-like the radical oscillation between the ideal and nightmarish in the rapid, and seemingly incoherent, opening sequences. The serene situation at Zanarkand turns into the chaos of Sin's visitation. The disorientation after Tidus' subsequent teleportation gives way to quiet exploration of the Ruins, but this is broken by the attack by the Geosgano, who personifies oral-sadism with his Swallow attack. This is followed by more quiet exploration, this time of the Temple, where Tidus falls asleep. However, another predator wakes Tidus. The Al Bhed arrive to help him, but then they force him onto their boat and force him to help Rikku raise the Airship from under the ocean. Tidus is inexplicably teleported again, this time to the paradise of Besaid, only to realise that the exotic, island peace is false because of the looming threat of Sin. While the pace of the narrative subsequently becomes more coherent, these and later shifts between threat and safety are paralleled by shifts between the spectacular (sweeping views of Zanarkand, Sin, and Geosgano) and the mundane (gathering wood, the contemplative quiet of the ruined temple, and the quiet ocean); between the specular (cut-scenes) and the interactive (navigation and fighting); and between Tidus' role as active protector (as Guardian and lover to Yuna) and passive victim (lonely, confused, lost, and a tragic romantic lead).

Such a rapid succession of incoherent events, with a recurring sense of danger, may not only connote a dream-like quality; combined with Tidus' uncertainty about what is happening, this incoherence may lead him (and the player) to remain vigilant and hesitant about who his "true" friends are, where the "real" danger lies, and what is "really" happening. It can be argued that this promotes a paranoid outlook in the sense that an internal state—suspense or fear about what *is* happening and what *could* happen—is not properly distinguished from the actual threat posed by the environment. Each fearful event proves that fear is justified, and that some "Them" or "It" is, indeed, out to get one. A distrusting vigilance about the "truth" or "reality" behind the appearance of things is certainly justified each time FFX offers disclosures that force players to revise their view of events and they learn that Jeht, Auron, Seymour, Kinoc, Yunalesca, Yu Yevon are manipulating Tidus, the Guardians and Spira in ways that are selfish, potentially dangerous, or downright vengeful.

As the game nears its conclusion, the uncanny in the formal sense of the supernatural explained is evident in that FFX allows players to infer that Tidus' teleportation from Zanarkand to Besaid, a thousand years into the future, was partly an illusion. After all, players are told that Zanarkand and its people, including Tidus, were destroyed a thousand years ago and only exist as Aeons, as part of the Great Summoning. The Grand Summoning therefore preserved Tidus in temporal stasis along with the rest of Zanarkand, and since a thousand years have passed in the narrative, his seeming temporal displacement actually involved the *transportation* of his Aeon-spirit by (or perhaps *in*) Sin while he was "unconscious." So despite the presence of a supernatural *context*, there is another level of reality in the text which is invoked to explain the teleportation, even if this "reality" is also marvellous. It can be argued, then, that one marvellous ontology is unmasked and replaced by another, but that an element of the uncanny persists because the laws of time (and, perhaps, space) are preserved within the diegesis. The obfuscation of illusion and imagination is thereby removed, allowing players to perceive the psychological "reality" of Tidus' experience.

However, because of subsequent disclosures, players will realise that most of Tidus' experiences do literally happen in the exotic marvellous of Spira, and are not *simply* a projection of his emotional state. Most significantly, the uncanny conflation of Jecht as monstrous father and his subsequent role as Sin, tyrant of Spira, is eventually revealed to be merely a coincidence. Yet it remains a curiously uncanny coincidence, and it is not surprising that *Tidus* experiences an uncanny congruence between his own anxieties and the drama unfolding in Spira. Jecht's transformation seems to have a poetic logic: it is hard *not* to read Jecht's transformation into Sin as an elaboration of (or perhaps punishment for) his monstrous parenting of Tidus. Indeed, FFX as a whole makes a lot of *sense* when read in terms of Tidus' psychological state. Tidus' repeated emphasis that "This is my story" logically re-affirms that the story is *his* (final and by implication fatal) fantasy. This preserves the unsettling sense that the story may be not *merely* a marvellous tale of supernatural events, but a reflection of Tidus' mental state, and perhaps an imagined working-through of his abandonment. After all, Tidus' feelings are made conveniently visible to a surrogate love (Yuna), who accepts him, confirms his value, reciprocates his love, and provides a mirror of his own plight. His rescue of her also allows him to perform his desired-for heroism, and his dual union with and defeat of his father allows him to achieve psychological closure. Ultimately, the scale and intimacy of Tidus' suffering—the loss of his father, his mother, his home, his fame, Yuna, and his own life—makes the game's spectacular excess and unreality emotionally intelligible.



## The Fantastic

While Todorov's (1973) experience of the uncanny involves a hesitation that is resolved through subsequent explanations, there is no such resolution in the experience of the "fantastic." For Todorov, the fantastic is characterised by three criteria:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character . . . Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. (p. 33)

In regards to the first criterion, for an event to be fantastic a reader must hesitate between interpreting an event, such as Tidus' teleportation, as either marvellous (supernatural) or as uncanny (an imagined projection and/or an illusion). Since the fantastic persists during the *period* of hesitation many texts that otherwise belong to the marvellous or uncanny may have fantastic aspects or sequences. Indeed, while Todorov sees the fantastic in formal terms as occurring in texts in which there is no closure, Jackson (1988) emphasises that the "fantastic" is simply the most subversive form of fantasy in general and that the experience of hesitation often has the experiential qualities of the uncanny.

Todorov's (1973) second criterion is conditional, in that while hesitation is often represented in the mind of a character it suffices that the *reader* experiences it. It must be emphasised that this hesitation need not be a consequence of the formal qualities of the work: a character may make inferences on the basis of a short-attention span, confusion, or aporia in the plot, and these may give rise to uncertainty. In fact, we can avoid many of Todorov's formal verbal, syntactic and thematic requirements of the fantastic by falling back on Grodal's (1997) account of unreality as the experience that occurs in the absence of closure in and/or between perception, affect and cognition. That is, the effect of the fantastic may be seen in general terms as a consequence of cognitive dissonance in the reader produced through the inconsistent coding (or de-coding) of events. However, even with this qualification we can retain Todorov's (1973) third criterion of the fantastic. As he argues, there can be no hesitation about the status of seemingly supernatural events if they are explained away as "poetic" representations of a familiar reality, or if they are read allegorically as an extended metaphor for something beyond the diegesis, such as the universality of greed, an historical conflict, or a political figure.

There are several events in FFX which are represented in such a way that there may be unresolved uncertainty about their reality-status; indeed, it can be argued that the game's hermeneutic code actively works to code *vraisemblance* in a logically inconsistent fashion. As noted above, an explanation for Tidus' teleportation may be inferred near the end of the game, but the game seems to be more concerned with exploiting its uncertain status. Since visual representation at a cinematic level of detail is taken as objective description, the player is likely to perceive him/herself as a witness to Tidus' perceptions and/or environment. After all, players *see* Tidus teleported, or, rather, they see the *effect* of teleportation, along with him, and so are inclined to accept the teleportation as marvellous at face value. However, the incoherence of the related narrative sequences may be perceived as an excessive representation of the physical disorientation of teleportation within a marvellous text. Given the initial absence of any explanation for the teleportation, players are more likely to receive the impression from the first hour of play that the *story itself* is incoherent, and may feel premonitory doubts about the quality of its telling. Of course, some readers may simply interpret this in relation to the discourse of the real: "this (Spira) is a crazy world!" Yet if Spira is a marvellous world, why is there such an *excessive* representation of the violation of time and space? Why is Tidus *so* confused by events at the beginning of the game? Tidus' expression that "This is my story" here may resonate with a player's awareness that he is not an omniscient narrator, but has a limited perspective, and may be subjectively distorting events. Nonetheless, Given Tidus' surprise and players' shared confusion, there is a possibility that the teleportation may have violated the discourse of the real that governs Spira.

When Tidus talks to Rikku and Wakka, and as the narrative starts to progress in a more linear fashion, players may feel assured that the incoherence of the opening sequences is intentional (or, at least, merely a transitory example of poor storytelling). However, while Rikku and Wakka soon offer players information which helps them to make sense of Tidus' teleportation, they do not resolve its status. On the salvage ship, Rikku tells Tidus that Zanarkand has been gone a thousand years. While honest and seemingly compassionate, Rikku is young and naïve, belongs to a group that seems isolated from the rest of Spira, and, given the Muslim coding of the Al Bhed, perhaps prejudiced, with a distorted, fanatical view of the world. A short time later, Wakka suggests that, having gotten too close to Sin, Tidus' mind is addled by Sin's toxin. Wakka also seems honest, but he is characterised as unintelligent, primitive, and (like Rikku) as living in an isolated region. The unreliability of Rikku's and Wakka's accounts holds open the *possibility* that what has been narrated has

another explanation.

On the S.S. Winno, Yuna provides some early support for Tidus by relating how she met his father, Sir Jecht, ten years ago, and that her quest is taking her to Zanarkand. While Yuna's attraction to Tidus may colour her willingness to remain-open-minded, she places more weight on the *possibility* that Tidus is right: players are free to infer that Zanarkand has been displaced into this future, or that there is some temporal lapse between Zanarkand and the rest of Spira. In any case, having accepted the teleportation, the concern for Tidus becomes how/why he was teleported, where Zanarkand is (past or present), and how, or if, he can get home. This perspective is reinforced by Auron, who, by being present in both Tidus' past and present, is readily perceived as knowing the truth of Tidus' teleportation. Auron eventually confirms Tidus' account and provides the *reason* for the teleportation: he had promised Jecht to bring Tidus to Spira. (The reader may presume that he and Auron "rode" Sin as Sin travelled through time and/or space.) There is, then, a marvellous means to a mundane end: a father's desire to see his son.

Through this, and with the subsequent disclosures about the Grand Summoning, players may come to accept Tidus' teleportation as marvellous and/or uncanny. However, a sense of uncertainty about the status of Tidus' teleportation persists because it is linked to other events that are equally uncertain. The fact of Jecht's transformation into the monstrous Sin, for example, is initially presented to Tidus by Auron. Tidus respects and relies upon Auron, but Auron's appearance at Zanarkand to help Tidus seems overly convenient (and therefore suspicious), and Auron's taciturn qualities may lead players to suspect that he is not telling the whole truth. The statement also is hard to accommodate. Players do not see a visual representation of Jecht's transformation (except analogously, when Seymour changes into his alternate forms), nor do they hear an explanation for how the transformation came about and its extent (does Jecht's mind reside in Sin, or has he completely changed?). There is also no basis for familiarity between Sin and Jecht in terms of shape, intelligence, or motive, except Tidus' perception that Jecht's treatment of him was monstrous.

Later in the game players see that Jecht seems to govern Sin's movements. Sin quietly presents himself to Tidus at the Mushroom Rock battle site, and later at Zanarkand after the confrontation with Yunaesca (Tidus here feels confident enough to refer to him as his "old man") (see Figure 4.3a). When the characters fall under the ice under Guadosalam, players also learn that Sin shares Jecht's love of the Song of the Fayth, likely confirming the fact of

the transformation. However, some players may recognise that the connection between Jecht and Sin is not entirely logical, even within the realm of the exotic marvellous. Auron says that Jecht is Sin, but players learn that Sin is a congregation of Aeons—part of the Summoning of all the Aeons, or dead, in Zanarkand—and Tidus later confronts Jecht *inside* Sin. During the actual confrontation in the City of Dreams, Jecht says that the transformation (into Sin and/or the Final Aeon) is not yet complete, such that he still has some control over his (Sin's) mind. This is the logic governing Tidus' Talk function during his battle with Braska's Final Aeon: by Talking to the Aeon Tidus appeals to the vestiges of Jecht's humanity, reducing his Overdrive Attack. After two attempts to Talk, Jecht's humanity has faded and all that remains are his physical vestiges: muscularity, clothes, tattoos, and the Jecht's Shot Overdrive Attack.

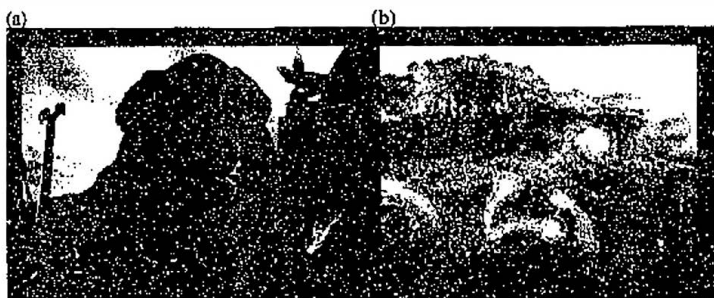


Figure 4.3. (a) Sin-Jecht presents himself to Tidus. (b) The pyreflies which compose the Farplane.

The link between Braska's Final Aeon and Sin is equally ambiguous, unless players think of Jecht as the sacrifice that links the divine to the human, such that the Final Aeon is a kind of spiritual battery (an assertion that is never explicitly made). Indeed, there remains an unresolved slippage between the Grand Summoning of the Aeons of Zanarkand, the Aeons of Auron, Tidus and Jecht, Sin, and Braska's Final Aeon. *All* partake of the Grand Summoning, such that it is not merely Jecht that has "become" Sin: Tidus and all the others from Zanarkand are a part of the Grand Summoning which preserves Sin, and this in turn is merely part of the Spiral of Death, in which the dead (Masters) rule the living.

Even if the Grand Summoning and the Spiral of Death are accepted as marvellous, death and the dead are inconsistently represented. Mika can voluntarily reveal his spirit-state, and Seymour is able to see that Auron is a spirit (players may retrospectively realise the significance of Seymour's comment of: "What are you still doing here?" to Auron in Guadosalam as an indication of this). However, Tidus is not even *aware* of being dead: he has

mass, he can injure and be injured, he can move and be moved, and he can touch and kiss Yuna. Players might generalise from the convention that ghosts persist because of unresolved commitments or excessive attachment to the world, and that some ghosts do not know that they are ghosts, as was recently dramatised in *The Sixth Sense* (1999). Having acknowledged this, an Aeon who knows s/he is an Aeon might *choose* to disappear, as does Mika when he learns that Yunalesca has been killed. However, as long as one remains ignorant of one's situation and/or uses one's will to persist, one remains (like Tidus) in the world.

Here players might explain away Tidus' and other Aeon's solidity as part of the game's (meta-) physics. It is significant that Tidus is not undead in the classic sense of a putrefying corpse. Indeed, the absence of zombies, vampires, mummies, and other literary and cinematic icons of the undead is significant for reasons other than censorship. Excluding Anima, who embodies bondage and torture with her Pain attack, *FFX* visualises death not in terms of putrefaction, but *dissipation*. It is as if material existence is merely a solid state of a substance that can turn liquid or gaseous. This is perhaps evident in elemental beings such as the Larva (Fire), Imps (Lightning), Ice Flans (Ice), and Remora (Water), which may be seen as a distillation of compound materiality into its fundamental particles. Players may also distinguish an even more fundamental particle: the atoms of spirit, or mind, positively embodied by Aeons, and negatively embodied by monsters such as Ghosts, who are susceptible to the White Magic spell, Holy. That is, the spirit world may be seen not as some "other" realm, but as the inspiriting force behind all matter: an animistic conception in which all things have a spirit, and are spirit.

However, if players make this inference, another distinction needs to be accommodated. During combat, we bear witness to the way in which Fiends killed during battle dissipate in a spectral blur marked by motes of multi-coloured lights. Given that Fiends are the spirits of the dead, we may presume that these motes represent the atomic particles of the spirit-hood dispersing into the world. However, when we see similar lights at the Moonflow and at the Farplane they are called pyre flies. Pyre flies, we are told, resonate with the memories of the living, and in the Farplane they may manifest as the spirits of the dead (see Figure 4.3b, above). Since Tidus crosses the barrier into the Farplane, it would seem that Auron could enter but chooses not to because he knows he will see nothing of value. However, as they leave, Seymour's father, Lord Jyscal, appears at the edge of the Farplane and physically passes on a recording sphere speaking of Seymour's treachery. We are, then, less likely to see him as *merely* a projection. The problem is, do we read Lord Jyscal's

handing over of the sphere as a supernatural occurrence within an already otherwise supernatural diegesis, in the manner of a new level of the marvellous? Jyscal's desire to pass on the truth makes his manifestation equivalent to that of Aeons like Tidus and Auron, who are able to remain in the world because of their attachment to it. We have no basis for perceiving Tidus, Auron or Seymour as a mass of pyre flies, but Lord Jyscal's manifestation effectively blurs the boundary between Aeons and pyre flies.

This indeterminacy about the metaphysics of death culminates in the patent surrealism of the final battle with Yuna's Aeons and Yu Yevon. Characters have an Auto-Life status, so that when they die during combat with the Aeons or Yu Yevon they are immediately resurrected. Even though they are resurrected with minimal health points, so that characters may die quickly after being brought back to life, the *absolute* worry of dying and having to replay the game sequence is suspended. In this respect, the end sequence is strangely abstracted from other combat sequences. Furthermore, while Yu Yevon is not physically imposing he is likely to kill the player's characters several times, and his healing abilities mean that he keeps returning to his initial condition, undermining any sense of progression. The easiest way to kill him is by the logical reversal of attack types. If we cast Reflect on the characters, Yu Yevon's spells rebound back onto him. By casting Zombie status on Yu Yevon, his own healing spells injure him; and if we subsequently cast Full-Life on him he is subject to the reverse: full death. The whole end sequence is, then, governed by a kind of dream-logic.

While this last conflict may seem anticlimactic, it retains a certain retrospective force because of its inexplicability. With Jecht dead, the confrontation is a weird witnessing and participation in the known resolution of a tragedy, a form of estrangement from the player's previous engagement with the game. At the same time, the end sequence may produce a kind of exhilarating sense of freedom, of joyous reversal: we fight amidst the abstraction of orange clouds, aware of a moment of finality, destroying Aeon after Aeon as a permanent extinction (as opposed to the temporary defeat from which they can later be re-summoned). The whole sequence allows not merely an anticlimactic resolution to a ninety-hour-long gaming experience, but a kind of suspension of the telos that governed this play, governed by a euphoric recognition that one has actually performed the labour of the entire game: one has finally *made* it. If no single reward can adequately suffice to provide closure for such a sprawling narrative, then the surrealism of the closing experience connotes the transcendence of the laws of the diegesis prior to re-entering the laws of the "real."

It is possible to argue that the subsequent narrative resolution expurgates some of these inconsistencies. By dispelling the Spiral of Death, the order of Life is re-instated, or, rather, Spira recovers its "natural" balance of life and death, matter and spirit, reality and unreality. Prior inconsistencies can therefore be dismissed as an index of the prior imbalance. However, players may still have cause to hesitate between different interpretations of the game. As has been noted, despite knowing that events are marvellous, there is a logical reason for perceiving FFX as an uncanny projection of Tidus' mental state. Similarly, while Yu Yevon may be read as a supernatural being, he is figured as an elemental ball of anger or hatred just prior to being unveiled as a small, ugly, and pathetic figure. This may incline some players to read him as a kind of psychic residue, a distillation of the hate and rage born from fear of those in Spira. That is, players may see him as literally a projection of Spira's emotional life just as some ghosts are seen as psychic residue of the emotions experienced during their death.

Players might also read Yu Yevon as an *allegorical* projection, whereby FFX becomes a story about how giving into fear and hate can give rise to escalating, pointless suffering. Such an allegorical reading might be reinforced by the parallel between Seymour's pathological way of dealing with the prejudice he was subject to as a child, and Yu Yevon as over-reacting to his fear of humanity's potential technological powers (especially given Seymour's desire to appropriate Yu Yevon's power). That is, these coincidences or parallels are readily interpreted in thematic terms, allowing players to read FFX as a parable about not only an adolescent's rite-of-passage, but intolerance, fear, or, even more generally, the human condition. Indeed, even those players who do not observe any inconsistency in the logic of FFX's events, such that it is not experienced as fantastic, may still hesitate over whether to read the game as supernatural, uncanny, or an *allegory*, preserving a hovering sense of its indeterminate reality-status. This uncertainty may promote a global anxiety about what is happening that may complement any paranoid, projective tendencies that the player experiences about events in the game.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that FFX may be seen as placing emphasis on reality by not only revising hermeneutic expectations about *what* is happening, but by also revising players' understanding of what *has* happened and *if* or *how* it happened. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the ambivalent perceptual impressions of reality addressed in Chapter Two are

recuperated in thematic terms and integrated as part of the game's aesthetic effect. That is, the experience of intensities and saturations produced by disjunctive proximal-distal transactions may work together with the inconsistent cognitive construction of reality to reinforce players' confusion, and suspense, about Tidus' experiences. As will be argued in later chapters, disjunctive affects may resonate with other aspects of FFX, but before making such arguments it is necessary to address a different kind of reality: the reality of players' relationships to characters.



## Chapter Five – Cognitive Identification and Character Interest

It is generally accepted that the marketing of Lara Croft, Sonic the Hedgehog, and Mario was a large factor in the popularity of Sony, Sega and Nintendo respectively (Berger, 2002; Poole, 2000). More than that, the marketing of games in general has frequently emphasised known and likeable characters drawn from print or film texts. It may therefore seem logical to start with the assumption that if one likes a character one is likely to be interested in any game in which that character appears. However, characters are not usually seen as having a role in *regulating* interest, in that, as Skirrow (1980) has observed, there is "no [psychological] development of character as [a video] game progresses" (p. 331). Fuller and Jenkins (1995) similarly argue that characters:

play a minimal role, displaying traits that are largely capacities for action: fighting skills, modes of transportation, preestablished goals. The game's dependence on characters . . . borrowed from other media allows them to simply evoke those characters rather than fully develop them. The character is little more than a cursor that mediates the player's relationship to the story world. Activity drains away the character's strength as measured by an ever-shifting graph at the top of the screen, but it cannot build character, since these figures lack even the most minimal interiority. (p. 61)

This position reaches its extreme in Stallabras' (1996) analogy to commodification, according to which "digital objects encountered in the game [are] types . . . ranked on a common arithmetical scale in which every quality is tradeable" (p. 90). Here characters are figured merely as the player's gaming assets, and any psychological drama lies solely in the player's experience of the rise and fall of his/her fortunes.

While video game characters do sometimes function as simply a familiar face or a tool of the player (see Chapter Eight), early researchers tended to generalise from kinaesthetic or puzzle games in which the use of narrative was limited to cut-scenes which represented character goals. By contrast, adventure and role-playing games like *FFX* have made ongoing use of narratives in which characters have a complexity equal to characters in film and undergo psychological development. This chapter is concerned with the way players produce a model of such complexity, drawing upon Tan's (1997) argument that, if interest is governed by dynamics of anticipation and outcomes, another source of investment and return lies "in the expectations and anticipations that are rooted in the viewer's knowledge of, and feelings toward, the characters of a film" (p. 154). Whereas later chapters address the "feelings" towards characters in *FFX*, this chapter addresses players' "knowledge of" them, or what Grodal calls "cognitive identification" of character traits, and the consequent expectations that

regulate interest. After considering the limitations of early models of character, it analyses players' cognitive processing of what Barthes (1975a) calls semic codes across narrative and game macrostructures.

## Narrative Macrostructures

### *Actantial Model*

Aristotle (trans. 1965), in his analysis of Greek tragedy, began from the premise that "Artists imitate men in action," and went on to distinguish between "agents" (pratton), referring to figures who function merely to perform actions required by the narrative, and "characters" (ethos), referring to figures traited in such a way that they have personhood. In practice, many narratives have characters that do little more than perform a function that advances the narrative, and early narratological theory paid much attention to these functions. Since some critics regard video game characters as functional, without any psychological complexity or depth, it becomes necessary to address the implication, which Berger (2002, pp. 45-47, 78-79) makes explicit, that early structuralist models of narrative (Barthes, 1966/1988, 1975a; Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980; Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1977, 1981) have renewed relevance to video games.

Vladimir Propp (1968) identified seven roles that characters in folktales may take up—villain, helper, donor, sought-for-person, dispatcher, hero and false hero—and which were distributed across a fixed sequence of thirty-one functions (supposedly) common to all fairy tales. The problem with this model is that non-fairy tale narratives (novels, films, video games) rarely conform to Propp's structure, either in terms of the sequence or number of functions at the level of *fabula* or *syuzhet*. In video games, Propp's functions *may* be manifested in some form, but video games have a repetitive (non-linear) structure, and draw upon various genres, from fantasy, through horror, to film noir, each with its own structural distinctiveness. Consequently, systematically applying his functions would be to subsume video games to one genre in another medium (the print fairy-tale). Propp's model also is, needless to say, insensitive to historical context, reader competence, and the poststructuralist recognition that meaning is read *into*, or *from*, the text.

If any use is to be made of Propp (1968), then, the appropriate departure point would be Anton Greimas' (1987) "fertile and inaugural rewriting of Propp" (Jameson, in Greimas,

1987, p. xi). This extrapolates from sentence grammar by way of the semiotic square to identify six categories of "actants," which are only intelligible when grasped as a total structure:

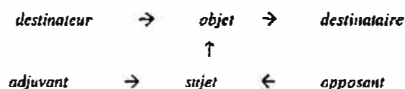


Figure 5.1. Greimas (1987) actantial grammar.

This structure is understood as a form of exchange between the subject (*sujet*) who desires the object (*objet*), and its terms may be translated as follows (with the analogous Proppian terms in brackets):

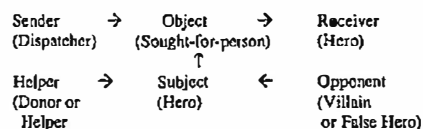


Figure 5.2. Greimas (1987) actantial grammar mapped onto Propp's morphology.

While this model of actantial relations describes a basic grammar which governs the logic of narrative transformations, it does not (like Propp's) rely on a fixed sequence of narrative functions. Rather, a sequence of narrative functions may be seen as an "effect" of these actantial relations through a particular act of reading.

If we apply this actantial model to FFX's narrative macrostructure, Tidus would seem to be the subject (hero) because he is the first figure represented in the manual, the first and last figure players control, and other characters under the player's control are absorbed into him during many navigation sequences (Tidus also states "This is my story" on several occasions). Jecht, having given Auron his mission to retrieve Tidus to defeat him, would seem to be the sender. The object of the quest, not realised until near the end, is the defeat of Yu Yevon, who resides in Sin. Since the quest to defeat Yu Yevon relieves Spira of Sin's oppression, Spira is the receiver (of liberation). The Guardians are the helpers, in that they accompany Tidus through the entire quest. On this basis, it is possible to nominate the following general actantial system:

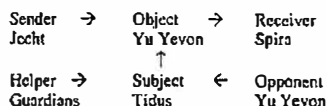


Figure 5.3. Greimas (1987) actantial grammar applied to FFX's narrative macrostructure.

If this is accepted as the actantial system that dominates the narrative macrostructure then the sequence of the fabula and the meaning of the narrative may be seen as organised around the actions of characters. That is, Jecht sends for Tidus (who is helped by Yuna and the other Guardians) to destroy Yu Yevon (who is helped by Sin and Seymour) and, thereby, free Spira. A strict structuralist may conclude that a player's narrative competence would be reflected in his/her ability to generate a summary (no doubt with variations or differing degrees of emphasis) using this basic actantial grammar.

A more diligent structuralist enquiry might elaborate upon which characters function as supplements or intermediaries of these actantial roles. Auron could be seen as an intermediate sender between Jecht and Tidus, given that Jecht gives him the mission to send for Tidus. Sin and Jecht (or at least Braska's Final Aeon, his alter ego) are indexical of Yu Yevon, and for much of the narrative function as supplement objects. The initial receiver seems to be Tidus, then Zanarkand or Yuna, but later in the narrative Spira becomes the pre-eminent receiver, as is evident in Yuna's address to the stadium in Luca. While the other Guardians may be seen as Tidus' primary helpers, Spira may collectively function as the helper given that its citizens provide knowledge or resources and unite to sing the Hymn of the Fayth that calms Sin. While Yu Yevon is the primary opponent, *all* the monsters encountered are opponents, but since most monsters are random encounters the "boss" monsters may be seen as supplementary opponents, with Seymour the pre-eminent supplement given his intention to usurp Sin's power.

The most obvious problem with such an account is that it is only relative to a generalised epic or quest macrostructure, when, as Chapter Three indicated, FFX shifts between film and print fantasy, science-fiction, romance, adventure/role-playing game, and tragedy. In the romantic macrostructure, Tidus may still be the subject, but Yu Yevon becomes an obstacle to the higher-order object of love with Yuna, and Tidus' subsequent dispersal as an Aeon makes this a tragic romance: Yuna receives love from Tidus, but not a loving union. Alternately, since Yuna is the survivor and authorised voice who speaks at the

end of the game as the living leader or figurehead of Spira, players may see her less as taking over the narrative from Tidus and more as having focalised his narrative from the beginning, with Tidus the (tragically lost) love object. (Indeed, in a final scene allegedly edited out of the game, Yuna makes this reversal explicit, saying: "I know it's selfish but this is my story").<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of the tragic nature of the romance, the reader may take the moment when Yuna intends to sacrifice love (for Tidus) by marrying Seymour to unite Bevelle and Guado as the key dramatic point, with public duty the higher-order object. Since defeating Sin permanently means that Tidus will disappear, Sin and Yu Yevon function less as obstacles in the way of romantic love than as necessary actants in a plot that dramatises Yuna as performing the public duty of sacrificing one's hope for love (which she was prepared to make with Seymour but could not because he was a "false hero"). In this reading, Tidus may be seen as the helper and Spira is at once the sender and receiver.

A detailed structuralist analysis of the dominant actantial relations of the various macrostructures, and the superimposition of these actantial systems, would provide some useful departure points in correlating the readings provided by players. For example, one player may emphasise the fantasy, romance and epic macrostructures and ignore the tragic macrostructure, suggesting a preference for narratives that articulate a faith in the transcendental unity of the self and its integration with society: a happy ending. Another player may emphasise tragic macrostructures, suggesting a preference for narratives that express the fragmentation and alienation of the self: ambivalent or sad endings. Such a player may perceive the subject as being excluded from the actantial role of receiver, revealing at once a liberal faith in the capacity of the individual to change the world, but a tragic perception that an individual's suffering is in direct proportion to the benefit of others. The same player may consistently verbalise macrostructures around Tidus, even those in which he is not the character being controlled, such that using Yuna in combat is still just "helping" Tidus. The narrative's attention to Yuna rescuing Spira may therefore function to make a hero of the tragic self. These interpretations might be correlated with a player's personality (low self-esteem), social position (the absence of filial affection), and/or gaming history (a tendency towards solitary gameplay).

However, if the structure of actantial relations extrapolates from the sentence, the above accounts do not do justice to the grammatical variation and flexibility of sentences and

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<sup>1</sup> This document can be found under the title "Final Fantasy X: The Eternal Calm" at the [Final Fantasy Shrine](http://www.ffshrine.org/ffx2/ffx2_cc.php), last accessed January, 1, 2005 ([http://www.ffshrine.org/ffx2/ffx2\\_cc.php](http://www.ffshrine.org/ffx2/ffx2_cc.php)).

sequences of sentences. The actantial roles of successive sentences may be performed by different subjects and vary from scene to scene. Not only are other characters often the subjects, each game and narrative sequence has its own object (rescuing Tidus, escaping Geosgaeno, rescuing Yuna, and so on). Barthes' (1966/1988) summarises:

every character (even secondary) can be the agent of sequences, of actions which belong to him . . . when a single sequence involves two characters (as is usual), it comprises two perspectives, two names [for example, the "opponent" of one may be the "helper" of the other]; in short, every character (even secondary) is the hero of his own sequence (p. 119).

It is, then, not sufficient to simply identify an end-state. Just as real-time interest cannot be understood retrospectively, comprehension and emotional response to characters in any *particular* sequence will depend upon dynamic changes in and across various macrostructures, including the complexities of focalisation and related mediations of spatial and attitudinal perspective. Indeed, the final structural arrangement may be highly unrepresentative of the meaning taken away from it and the experience of watching it, as is evident when we consider the process of character typing.

#### *Cognitive Identification: Semic Codes and Types*

Psychoanalysis tends to emphasise the ways in which individuals identify (or do not identify) *with* something (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 205). However, it is only possible to identify with something, or to resist such identification, after identification *of* it, that is, after it has been *identified*. In this sense, psychoanalytic accounts of identification marginalize the issue of how viewers construct the identity of the subject-actants with whom they identify. The narratological model of actantial relations is inadequate in providing a model of identification since it focuses on narrative structures, not the dynamic perceptual, cognitive and emotional activity of players. Here we can turn to Tan (1997) and Grodal (1997). For Tan (1997), impression formation directed towards fictional characters follows the same patterns as with real people, and research suggests that cognitive evaluation of people is initially top-down (pp. 163-164) (see also Brewer, 1988; Wyer and Gordon, 1984). That is, upon observing a person's traits, one will attempt to categorise him/her according to well-known types: "hierarchical combinations of roles, features and behavioural characteristics" (Tan, 1997, p. 164). Grodal (1997) refers to this process as "cognitive identification" and argues that:

the most basic levels are the most general. They only presuppose abilities such as the ability to perceive remote objects, to experience tactile and interoceptive sensation, to feel simple motives, affects, and emotions, and to understand uncomplicated plans, goals and acts. (p. 92)

Indeed, Bordwell (1989) identifies a generic "person schemata" (p. 152) characterised by:

1. a human body, presumed to be singular and unified;
2. perceptual activity, including self-awareness;
3. thoughts, including beliefs;
4. feelings or emotions;
5. traits, or persisting dispositional qualities;
6. the capacity for self-impelled actions, such as communication, goal-formation and -achievement, and so on.

According to this model, all these features are attributed the moment we identify a person or subject-actant. That is, the moment we see a character we automatically accept a range of potential capabilities that will affect our evaluation of previous, present and future narrative/game events. Consequently, narratives can be sparse in their description of characters: there is no need to specify the existence of limbs, the ability to perceive and be self-aware, the capacity for reflection and emotional responses, or that characters are motivated in particular ways.

As Eco (1979, p. 23) notes, a text may make some of these "properties" more textually relevant and/or may narcotise others. In FFX, the existence of Tidus' "body" presumes the existence of the full complement of organs, including the facility for ingestion, respiration, defecation and sexual intercourse. However, not all of these organs have equal significance in terms of their effect on the unfolding of narrative or game macrostructures. The relevance of ingestion is only manifested during both navigation and combat sequences when players access the party's items and "use" poisons, and the only representation offered is the stylised action of a character bringing a potion into the vicinity of his/her face. The ability to respire is not only narcotised but abolished, since characters in FFX seem incapable of drowning: at the start of the game, Tidus plays blitzball underwater without artificial aids; later on other characters swim underwater for indefinite periods. Defecation is narcotised in that it is not represented and has no narrative import, unless one sees some monsters' attacks (such as the Marlboro's squirted excretions) as a form of defecation. The potential relevance of primary sexual functions (the possibility of sexual intercourse between characters) is partially narcotised by the game's rating and its platonic emphasis on romantic love and friendship. However, the narrative does promote an adolescent voyeurism based on secondary

sexual characteristics, such that players may be cued towards sexual fantasy, even if they do not expect the game to fulfil them.

Once a player has identified a general "person type," more complex typing may occur which allows for more complex expectations about a character's future behaviour or fate. Tan (1997) draws from Andersen and Klatsky (1987) to differentiate between simple and generic "trait types"—such as "outgoing, socially skilled, friendly, nutty, power-loving, self-confident, knowledgeable, and intelligent" (p. 165)—and more detailed "social stereotypes"—such as "mafioso, clown/comedian, politician/diplomat, bully/gang member, brain/genius, depressed/suicidal, wise man/guru" (p. 165), including specific person stereotypes, such as "Ronald Reagan, Woody Allen, and Ghandi" (p. 165). An actantial type may function as the basis for organising these trait-, social- and person- types. For example, Belgemine consistently performs the function of "helper," and this type is reinforced by specific traiting of her as female, beautiful, more experienced (older) and more powerful (a guardian). Even when she functions as an opponent by pitting her Aeons against Yuna's, she is testing players, helping them to better understand the difficulties of their quest.

However, structuralist accounts of characterisation tend to recognise that characters are *not* types: "they are simply subjects of a group of predicates which the reader adds up as he goes along" (Culler, 1975, p. 235). This is clearly articulated in Barthes' (1975a) account of the "semic code," which refers to the provision "of the basis of character traits" (p. 19). For Barthes, reading involves a constant process of naming, but, as Culler (1975) summarises:

naming is always approximate and uncertain. One slides from name to name as the texts throw up more semantic features and invite one to group and compose them. . . . When one succeeds in naming a series of semes a pattern is established and a character formed. (pp. 236-237)

Tan (1997) similarly argues that much mental modelling in feature films is a matter of trying out different schemata and discarding them as the narrative offers new or contradictory information about characters (p. 164). In cognitive terms, the top-down assignment of types is repeatedly revised through ongoing bottom-up processing of new information that is inconsistent with the existing type(s). At the same time, viewers tend not to hypothesise connections beyond an immediate scene, and that when they have arrived at a particular view of a character they only reappraise it when new (inconsistent) information arrives (Tan, 1997, p. 105). Consequently, the necessity of reappraisal—such as discovering that Jeht is Sin, that



Yuna is tragically aware that she is about to die, and that Tidus and Auron are Aeons—is often cued through surprise.

The literary and cognitive accounts may be seen as emphasising different aspects of this process. In semiotic terms, senses may be grouped into “types,” but these are unstable, not only because of new disclosures, but also because of polysemy. Consequently, the emphasis is on variations within or between types and/or the formation of new types. In cognitive terms, a type is synonymous with a schemata, either a “prototype” schemata (an established set of contents) or a “template” schemata (an established form which readily assimilates new content). While accommodating new information is a dynamic activity, the cognitive model may be seen as emphasising *prior* types through its concern with the stability of schemata. While the cognitive account distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up processing, the semiotic account better accounts for the dynamic exchange between the two. So, as FFX develops, characters accrue senses, and the player attempts to “group and compose them” according to some perceived association (explicit or connoted) and/or a well-known type. This typing may be relatively automatic, providing a quick and coarse way of defining and anticipating character behaviour, but new information will cue players to re-type characters or to provide new semic groupings, and, by implication, new types.

The process of re-typing means that relationships between actantial roles and more particular types become increasingly complex. In the beginning of FFX, Tidus is the focaliser, so players are likely to type him according to his dominant actantial role as the subject (“hero” or “protagonist”). This generic type will be reinforced as players type his thoughts, feelings, traits and goals in more detail. When Tidus receives adulation from fans prior to a blitzball game, players may type him as an “exceptional person”; when he obligingly signs his name we might type him as “modest celebrity.” This provides some expectation that his object, as subject (hero), will involve him using his skills as a blitzball player. This is confirmed when he takes the sword from Auron and his prowess as a (modern-style) celebrity translates into (old-fashioned) heroic prowess. This holds open the threat that he will *lose* his celebrity status, as he does when the Master brands him and Yuna’s other Guardians as traitors. When players see Tidus think reflectively about his father they may type him as a “troubled young man,” with the possibility that his goal will involve finding or confronting his father. When players later hear him speak in an upbeat manner in his oddly high-pitched voice they may type him as, at heart, “plucky and high-spirited,” who must attempt to maintain this upbeat nature and/or “youthful innocence” in the face of what the world has in store for him.

As was discussed in Chapter Four, FFX plays with the possibility that events are an uncanny projection of Tidus' anxieties of abandonment. However, after his early typing Tidus is a relatively consistent character until it is revealed that he is an Aeon and will disappear upon the completion of the quest. This forces players to re-type him as a "tragic hero" and re-categorise his moody introspection, less as a sign of immaturity and more as a response to his loss. Players also are likely to re-type his upbeat attitude not as just naive, immature or youthfully excessive, but as a poignant attempt to make the most of the time he has left. This may resonate with the earlier recognition that Yuna seeks Tidus' light-hearted company to distract her from the knowledge of her impending death. When Tidus and Yuna talk after entering the Temple at Luca and deal with their fears by voluntarily laughing, Tidus' high-spirits may be read as a human response to the certainty of death. However, what is particularly important is that this may lead the player to recognise a disjunction between Tidus' general actantial type and his specific type: he becomes less a tragic hero than a martyr and, being a martyr, others must take up the cause. In short, he becomes a helper to Yuna and the other Guardians, who survive as the primary (retrospective, end-state) subjects.

A more complex example of the ongoing revision of type-attribution that is central to the dramatic articulation of FFX, is the characterisation of Maester Seymour Guado. Tidus' companions describe him as the new Maester: the authorised voice of Yevon and "spiritual leader" of Spira. Players might anticipate from the gravity of his reception at Luca that he will be a key character who may use his authority to help Tidus, or that he may become an opponent who will entangle Tidus in some spiritual or political macrosequence. When he first descends from his boat and shares a meaningful glance with Yuna the specific type of "romantic competitor" cues players' expectations that, later in the narrative, he will try to seduce or kidnap her. However, his appearance is not so easy to type. His robes may suggest a "wizard" and his seeming grace and gentleness suggest more a "monk," yet the casual and stylish exposure of his toned (muscular) chest is contrary to both types. His ridiculous coiffure, soft voice, and display of flesh mark him as fashionable or effeminate, but his obvious confidence and control, the acclaim and respect he has from others, and his self-knowing manner and political savvy, suggest masculine authority (see Figure 5.1a). This showy mix of masculinity and femininity may lead players to type him as "unconventional," "homosexual," and/or a kind of "transvestite."

a.

b.



Figure 5.1. (a) Seymour and Yuna. (b) Seymour and his Aeon Anima.

When Fiends interrupt the blitzball game at Luca, Seymour summons his Aeon Anima: a seemingly male (but actually female) cross between a corpse, sea-creature and bat, imprisoned by an anchored chain. That the word “anima” is the passive, female principle in Jung’s (1978) terms may confuse players’ typing, unless they see the inner-feminine (or unbalanced Jack thereof) as the source of Anima’s power (perhaps in the fashion of a “terrible mother” or “raging goddess”). The term also might be mistaken, as by a layperson, for the active, male principle, or simply be interpreted as connoting psychic or spiritual power. In any case, players may read Anima as an external representation of Seymour’s inner state (see Figure 5.1b). This may mean seeing him as evil, with the anticipation that he will turn upon the player’s characters. It may also mean seeing Seymour as good precisely because he has confronted and tamed the forces that threaten Spira (albeit with the possibility that he will lose control of those forces).

This reading of Seymour’s power and mystery as a sign of potential danger governed by potentially malevolent motives will be reinforced by players of *Final Fantasy*, who may observe that Seymour resembles Sephiroth in *FFVII* and Seifer Ansley in *FFVIII*. Both Sephiroth and Seifer are powerful role models for the younger main characters, Cloud and Squall, but eventually betray them and embark upon crusades of power. In either case, players are likely to type Seymour’s civilised exterior as a figurative chain over his (repressed or suppressed) true nature, but do not yet have a signifier for this nature in the same way that they have signifiers for Anima’s power: dazzling explosions and damage whose ridiculous magnitude is quantified by numbers onscreen. Consequently, Seymour’s ambiguity is reinforced and players can only hesitantly attribute types to him.

When the characters next meet Seymour on the Mi'ihen Highroad he uses his authority to allow the characters to pass a guard post, and reveals a casual defiance of the musty traditions of Yevon by supporting the blasphemous use of Machina against Sin. Here players are cued to type Seymour as a "young leader" who will bring a new era and revitalise Spira, and so players are likely to type him as a helper. However, when the characters meet Seymour again he asks Yuna to marry him for political reasons (to unite Bevelle with Guado), and so players are inclined to abandon any romanticism attributed to him. He is more likely to become typed as a "politician," caught up in the petty, effeminate machinations of diplomatic intrigue. At the same time, his justification for wanting to marry Yuna does have a practical and moral basis and initiates the major narrative conflict between public duty and romantic love. This may incline players to re-evaluate not only his character, but the narrative macrostructure itself: perhaps the game is not a romance but a tragedy about self-sacrifice? If players evaluate the macrostructure in terms of public duty, then Seymour may still be a helper, but relative to the romantic macrostructure he is an opponent. In either case, he still seems to be a helper in the epic macrostructure, the quest to kill Sin.

In Macalania it is disclosed that Seymour killed his father and that his ambitions are self-interested; the characters also must confront him in battle. Here the specific type-attributions are stabilised around the actantial type of opponent as well as the more specific-type of "treacherous tyrant," in the sense of someone who misrepresents himself when it furthers his own end of dominating others. This type persists when he kidnaps Yuna in order to marry her and, in rescuing her, characters fight his second incarnation as Seymour Natus (with Mortibody). However, when Seymour catches up with the characters on Mount Gagazet in the form of Seymour Flux (with Multiorchis), and, later, in his final form of Seymour Omnis, players learn that he has personally exterminated the Ronso race and wishes to become and control Sin to dominate Spira. Here players are cued to trait him not just as a self-interested tyrant, but as downright evil. At the same time, the *extremity* of his evil seems deranged, and during the short narrative sequences in Macalania and Zanarkand it is revealed that Seymour, like Tidus, was tormented for being a Guado half-breed and suffered the absence of his mother, suggesting that his evil is pathological. Consequently, players may type Seymour as "psychologically disturbed," a trait ratified when Seymour, with his final words, recognises his defeat and death, and perhaps implicitly acknowledges his misguided grandiosity (mirroring Tidus' renunciation of Yuna and life).

This constant re-typing of Seymour is central to FFX's hermeneutics. Initially players are likely to be curious as to his motives (compassionate rule or tyranny?) Players are likely to be surprised when new information about him or his actions is disclosed, which cues re-typing him ("romantic competitor," "young leader," "politician," "teacherous tyrant," "patricide," "genocidal lunatic"). Lastly, players are also likely to experience suspense when they realise Seymour's intentions to destroy Spira and await the outcome. However, since Seymour's characterisation requires so *much* re-typing, players may begin to get the sense that their current, or anticipatory, typing cannot be relied upon to provide adequate expectations about him.

Indeed, the revision of types attributed to Rikku and her race, the Al Bhed, dramatises the *limitations* of (stereo-) typing. Rikku and several other Al Bhed are first encountered after Tidus is teleported by Sin and pulled from the sea onto their salvage boat. Because of their clothing (goggles, robes and veils), their aggressive actions (seeming slavers) and harsh, alien language (which characters learn by picking up Al Bhed language spheres), the most obvious type from which a player will draw is that of a radical/military "Muslim terrorist": as "violent," "inflexible" and/or "ruthless" (see Figure 5.2a) This type is undermined by Rikku's friendliness (see Figure 5.2b), but seems to be confirmed when the Al Bhed attack the Guardians on the Shoopuff and kidnap Yuna in Macalania. The player's evaluation of the Al Bhed as characters also is played out through Wakka, who keeps espousing his hatred and distrust of them, to the extent that Tidus does not reveal that Rikku is an Al Bhed. When Wakka does finally learn the truth, he snubs Rikku.

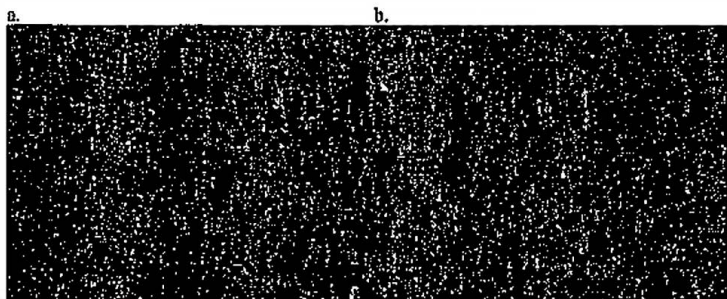


Figure 5.2. (a) Tidus' first encounter with the Al Bhed. (b) Tidus' gets to know Rikku ("You . . . You understand me?")

Later, when the party goes to the Al Bhed home in Sanubia Sands, it is revealed that the Al Bhed were victims of racism. The people of Spira hate the Al Bhed because of their

association with Machina and all but drove them from the continent. The Al Bhed therefore were forced to find sanctuary in the desert. Their earlier attempt to enslave Tidus on their boat therefore may be re-read in terms of survival under harsh conditions: those who do not contribute to the group must expect nothing from the group. Furthermore, players soon learn that the Al Bhed's motive for kidnapping the Summoners was that they did not want them to be killed trying to defeat Sin, who always reappears after twenty years. They are, then, more morally informed than Tidus, who had not known that Yuna expected to die fighting Sin and that, consequently, as Guardian, he had been guiding her to her death. Worse, after visiting the Temple at Kilika, he had spoken flippantly about the quest and its end. Consequently, players are likely to not only reclassify the Al Bhed in general terms (as helpers rather than opponents) and specific terms (as "hardy and desperate" rather than "aggressive and cruel"), but also to transfer some of their traits (as "outcasts," "revolutionaries," and "terrorists") to Tidus and the other Guardians, who similarly come to act against the teachings of Yu Yevon and the authority of Bevelle. Indeed, players may perceive that, up until this point, Tidus was not the subject or hero at all: the motivating subjects were the Al Bhed, whose quest Tidus appropriates.

Wakka's response to Rikku is of special note. Tidus, without prior knowledge of the Al Bhed, types her according to her actions as "helper" and "young, friendly, reliable companion"; when he realises that she is an Al Bhed he still merely types her as a "Guardian." However, since Wakka hates the Al Bhed his initial acceptance of Rikku involves, from the player's perspective, a denial of the obvious, since Rikku's race is evident from her clothing, accent, and eyes (pure Al Bhed have spiral irises). In this respect, it seems that Wakka's inability to reconcile Rikku as person and her racial type leads to a refusal to confront the disparity. When *forced* to confront the disparity between person and type, he creates unnecessary tension amongst the Guardians.

Wakka's prejudice derives from his faith in Yevon, according to whose teachings Sin is punishment for the arrogance of the humans in the past who used Machina. Consequently, he sees the Al Bhed's use of Machina and the attempt to defeat Sin at the Mi'ihen Highroad as blasphemous, a view made particularly salient because his brother, Chappu, died trying to kill Sin with such Machina. Wakka is, then, shocked to learn that Seymour, who is supposed to represent Yevon's authority, does not object to Operation Mi'ihen. However, it is only when the characters reach Macalania and fight Seymour that Wakka realises his faith was misplaced. If Wakka comes to (eventually) revise his perception of the Al Bhed, this is in part

because he is also forced to revise his perception of Yevon, against whom he presumes the Al Bhed are blaspheming. Wakka's revision parallels, and is a prescription for, the player's revision of types, and dramatises the player's difficulties in typing certain characters. That is, if players become aware that their typing has, or may, lead to false expectations about characters and events, they may become more cautious or flexible in their attribution of types.





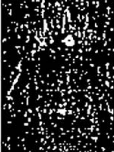


It might be presumed that this constant revision of semic structures through the bottom-up processing of new information leads to more detailed and precise typing of characters and facilitates more precise expectations about character's behaviour and fate. However, while ongoing traiking may affect players' interpretation of, and investment in, certain characters, its absence would not much alter actantial relations or narrative functions at the highest levels of FFX's macrostructures. If players, like viewers, do not read far beyond the present scene (Tan, 1997; Vorderer, 1996), then detailed traits may function less to help players anticipate what *will* happen and more to allow players to *retrospectively* recognise the intelligibility and coherence of revealed behaviour. In this respect, the *general* significance of detailed traiking is the evocation of "roundedness" (Foster, 1927/1949), of complex motives and the inner life of an individual responding to events within the diegesis. As Tan (1997) argues:

The more depth there is to the individuation of a character, that is, the sharper the differentiation in terms of subtypes [and, we might add], the more real the character is and the higher the reality parameter of the situational meaning structure. (p. 171)

Character believability and psychological coherence are also governed by a *readerly practice* governed by the ideological tenet of individualism: the unity of the subject. As Barthes (1966/1988) argues, the proper name of a character provides a kind of assurance that, as the reader selects and organises semes scattered throughout the text, they *will* cohere, and this may be the case even if the representation is not in itself realistic, in that (as is evident in much modernist fiction) realistic representation is not necessarily consistent with psychological verisimilitude. In this respect, as Culler (1975) argues:

The process of selecting and organizing semes is governed by an ideology of character, implicit models of psychological coherence which indicate what sorts of things are possible as character traits, how these traits can coexist and form wholes, or at least which traits coexist without difficulty and which are necessarily opposed in ways that produce tension and ambiguity. (pp. 236-237)

Figure 5.4. Character summaries from FFX Game Manual (2001, p. 7). The pictures of Tidus, Yuna, Lulu and Auron are not identical to those in the manual.

	<p><b>TIDUS:</b> Tidus is a cheerful, rising blitzball star playing for the Zanarkand Abes. He has long resented his father, who was a renowned player himself before his untimely death. Tidus's quick moves allow him to attack even the swiftest foes with ease.</p>
	<p><b>YUNA:</b> Daughter of High Summoner Braska. Honest and determined, Yuna embarks on a pilgrimage to obtain the Final Aeon and defeat Sin. Yuna is learning the mystical art of summoning aeons – spirits of yore.</p>
	<p><b>WAKKA:</b> Coach and captain of the local blitzball team, the Besaid Aurochs. Wakka plans to retire from the sport after this year's tournament, so that he can dedicate himself fully to serving as Yuna's guardian. His deadly blitzball is especially useful for shooting down aerial enemies.</p>
	<p><b>LULU:</b> One of Yuna's guardians. She and Wakka think of Yuna as a younger sister. Lulu's stoic and self-possessed nature makes her appear insensitive at times. She specialises in the art of black magic.</p>
	<p><b>KIMAHRI RONSO:</b> A young warrior of the Ronso tribe, Kimahri has watched over Yuna from her youngest days. He speaks little, but is deeply devoted to Yuna and serves her loyally as a guardian. Kimahri can learn enemy skills with his Lance ability.</p>
	<p><b>AURON:</b> The legendary guardian who, together with High Summoner Braska, defeated Sin ten years before. A man of few words, he guides Yuna and Tidus on their mission to vanquish Sin once more. He swings his gigantic sword with such power that even the toughest fiends are cut asunder.</p>
	<p><b>RIKKU:</b> A young Al Bhed girl. Her personality is upbeat, and she is not afraid to speak her mind. She works hard to restore her outcast people to their former glory. Rikku handles mechanical devices with ease, and can steal items from enemies too.</p>



Barthes (1966/1988) uses the term "indices" (p. 106) to refer to narrative information whose function is principally the signification of "being," or, more broadly, "reality." Where these indices are associated with a character, they function less to guide functional transformations of the narrative macrostructure than to construct a sense that the characters *have* a psychology and to evoke the sense of a habitable diegesis. This kind of information is evident in the summaries that FFX's manual provides for the main characters (see Figure 5.4).

Tidus' "cheerful"-ness may be retrospectively significant if players realise that it is a way of staving off his fear and abandonment. This is made explicit in his discussion with Yuna at Luca, when they agree to laugh in the face of their unhappiness, partly for the sake of others. Yuna's beauty and innocence make it unlikely that the player will expect that Yuna is *knowingly* going towards her death. However, when this fact is revealed, the earlier waiting of her as "honest and determined," as well as compassionate and committed to public duty, make this surprise intelligible and logical.

That Wakka "plans to retire" will gain significance if the player realises that Wakka is, in effect, giving up because his team has never won a game and wants revenge against Sin for the death of his brother. That Lulu's "stoic and self-possessed nature makes her appear insensitive" facilitates players' impression of Tidus' surprise when he overhears her talking with Wakka on the bridge of the S. S. Kilika. Here Lulu betrays the feelings beneath her sharp cynicism. Later, in the Calm Lands, Tidus learns that another Summoner died while Lulu was acting as her Guardian, which provides an explanation for her attitude. That Kimahri "watched over Yuna from her youngest days" and is "deeply devoted" is later linked to him having found Yuna just after her father, Braska, died defeating Sin. That Kimahri "speaks little" is later given additional meaning because he was exiled from his own race and is in turn protective of new family: Yuna and the other Guardians. It takes Kimahri time to trust, and talk to, Tidus.

Auron's summary functions primarily to reinforce a sense of his distance and mystery, with the implication that, being older and having been on the quest before (a "legend"), he knows more than he is saying. This gains retrospective significance with each of his disclosures: that Jeht is alive; that Jeht is Sin; and that both Auron and Tidus are dead. Finally, that Rikku is "upbeat . . . not afraid to speak her mind [and] . . . works hard to restore her outcast people to their former glory" becomes significant when players discover how greatly her people, the Al Bhed, have suffered. As with Tidus and Yuna, her "upbeat" attitude

is not merely a consequence of her youth or immaturity, but is, like Tidus' "cheerfulness," a way of dealing with deeper sadness, and both she and Tidus form a seemingly over-optimistic pact to find a way to save Yuna.

FFX places much emphasis on the gradual revelation of the history behind, and the implications of, this indicial detail. In this respect, it cannot be charged with Skirrow's (1980) accusation that, because of the constant, first person perspective, "there can be no suspense based on knowing more (having seen more) than the protagonist" (p. 331). FFX functions as a character-centred, or "psychological" narrative, focused on "the protagonist's motives for what he or she does, and on how the protagonist will turn out" (Abrams, 1988, p. 119), and the next few chapters elaborate upon of players' relationships to characters in more detail.

## Game Macrostructures

### *Character Classes and Trait-Dependant Character Types*

a.

b.



Figure 5.3. (a) Tidus fights Kimahri in Besaid ("Attack an enemy with equipped weapon"). (b) Tidus fights Sin's fin en route to Kilika ("Attack with magic and Wakka's ball").

While the narrative macrostructure of FFX may be seen as having the complexity expected of some print and film texts, the game macrostructures would seem more amenable to the criticisms levelled against video game characters. Unlike narrative possibilities, which may be of near-infinite range, anticipation in combat is limited to a character or monster's attacks and defences (Figure 5.3). Having weighed the strategic value of an action, a player's concern is whether it has improved the probability of winning the battle ("Has my character hit? How much damage was inflicted?"). In this respect, many action-based video games may be seen as analogous to the plot-driven "novel of incident," which is focused not on characters in themselves but on "what the protagonist will do next and on how the story will turn out"

(Abrams, 1988, p. 119). In a combat macrostructure, the "characters" are mere agents of a strategy: to win the battle. More detailed characterisation therefore might be seen as impeding the flow of game-events.

If anticipation about character types finds its crudest organization in actantial roles or types, then it can be argued that strategies in combat often find their crudest organization in the typing of a character according to "class" types. The use of "character classes" to define generic ergodic strategies within game macrostructures can be traced back to table-top role-playing games (RPGs), of which Gary Gygax's AD&D (1978) is the archetype. In the first edition of AD&D, the classes and subclasses were: "fighter," with subclasses of "paladin" and "ranger"; "magic-user," with the subclass of "illusionist"; "cleric," with the subclass of "druid"; "thief," with the subclass of "assassin"; and "monk" (Gygax, 1978, p. 13). Other RPGs and computer role-playing games (CRPGs) offered additional classes; the classes in earlier Final Fantasy included: "knight," "monk," "thief," "dragoon," "ninja," "samurai," "archer," "berserker," "mystic knight," "white mage," "black mage," "time mage," "blue mage," "red mage," "chemist," "elemental," "bard" and "dancer." However, most subclasses or variations may be seen as variations or combinations of the main classes of cleric, fighter, magic-user and thief. Furthermore, while FFX does not specify classes, and has no option for initial character creation, players familiar with (C)RPGs, early Final Fantasy titles, or even fantasy literature, will be predisposed to see characters in terms of these class types on the basis of generic classes of action.

Character classes are primarily determined on the basis of statistics which perform a particular game-function. In AD&D there are six traits: strength (STR), dexterity (DEX), constitution (CON), intelligence (INT), wisdom (WIS) and charisma (CHA). As Myers (1992) argues, these statistics determine the (internal) relationship within a character and the (external) relationship between a character and the game world, and are modelled on a rudimentary conception of physics. Characters' defensive capabilities are expressed "as some combination of density (con) and volume (size)" while offensive capabilities "are calculated by (mass x linear velocity), which equals momentum (str), and/or by acceleration, which would add a time factor (dex) to velocity" (p. 423). This reductive "physics" extends to magical and spiritual attacks based on INT and WIS, at least to the extent that intelligence and wisdom function quantitatively as mental density, volume, momentum and speed in the calculation of attack, defence and damage. STR, then, modifies attack, CON modifies hit points, and DEX modifies defence. INT and WIS modifies spell-casting abilities, while CHA

modifies interaction with NPCs. For Myers, these statistics provide a consistent representation of "character" in gaming terms across a range of gaming styles: a universal model of ergodic capabilities analogous to Bordwell's (1989) general model of a "folk-psychology" of character traits (pp. 151).

In AD&D particular traits were seen as "prime requisites" (PR) for a class, that is, certain traits associated with that class were expected to be particularly high. The PR for fighters was STR, but they also tended to have high CON and low INT and WIS. The PR of magic-users was INT (WIS for a cleric), though a high DEX gave them a chance of casting spells before physical characters could attack them. However, magic-users usually had a very low STR and CON. Since thieves avoided combat like magic-users they also had a low STR and CON; their PR was DEX, which was used to calculate such special actions as lock-picking, moving silently, and firing long-range weapons.

Table 5.1. Character statistics for FFX.

	<b>Yuna</b>	<b>Tidus</b>	<b>Wakka</b>	
Age	17	17	Age: 21	
Height	5'3"	5'9"	Height: 6'2"	
Weapon	Staff	Sword	Blitzball	
Armour	Magical Ring	Small Shield	Heavy Armguard	
Attack	Low attack power	Medium attack power	Medium attack power	
Magic	High magic power	Weak magic power	Weak magic power	
Hit Points	Medium hit points	Medium hit points	High hit points	
Best Against	Any enemy with high HP	Ground-based enemies	Flying monsters	
Ovenhive (OD)	Grand Summon	Swordplay	Slots	
OD Attacks	Depends on summoned Aeon (Valefor, Ifrit, Titan, Shiva, Bahamut, Yajinba, Anima, Magus Sisters)	<i>Spiral Cut</i> - Hits a single enemy <i>Slire &amp; Dice</i> - Hits enemies six Times <i>Energy Rain</i> - Hits every opponent on screen <i>Blitz Ace</i> - Hits a single opponent, delivering a massive amount of damage	<i>Element Reels</i> - Attacks will have Elemental abilities <i>Attack Reels</i> - Attacks will do Extra damage <i>Status Reels</i> - Status effects will be added to attacks <i>Aurachs Reels</i> - A combination Elemental and status effects will be added to attacks	
	<b>Rikku</b>	<b>Auron</b>	<b>Rikku</b>	<b>Kimahri</b>
Age	22	35	15	25
Height	5'6"	6'0"	5'2"	6'9"
Weapon	Dolls	Sword	Claws	Spear
Armour	Light Bangle	Heavy Bracer	Targets	Heavy Armlets
Attack	Very low attack power	Very high attack power	Low attack power	High attack power
Magic	High magic power	Medium magic power	Low magic power	Medium magic power
Hit Points	Low hit points	High hit points	Low hit points	High hit points
Best Against	Elemental monsters	Heavily armoured foes	Machines	Ground-based enemies
Ovenhive (OD)	Fury	Bustle	Mix	Ro,so Rage
OD Attacks	<i>Fire, Water, Thunder, Blizzard, Fira, Watera, Thundara, Blizzara, Firaga, Waterga, Thundaga, Blizzaga, Bio, Demi, Death, Drain, Osmose, Flare, Ultima</i>	<i>Dragon Fang</i> - Hits all opponents. <i>Shooting Star</i> - Hits one opponent. <i>Banishing Blade</i> - Hits one opponent with Power Break, Mental Break, Magic Break and Armour Break. <i>Tornado</i> - Hits all opponents.	Depends upon the items mixed	Depends upon attacks learned using Lance skill, which include: <i>Jump, Fire Breath, Seed Cannon, Self- Destruct, Aqua Breath, Thrust Kick, Doom, White Wind, Stone Breath, Nova, Bad Breath, Mighty Guard.</i>

While FFX uses different statistics (table 5.1), some of its statistics perform the same (or component) function(s), and/or statistics which in AD&D were *modified* by principle statistics, *are* principle statistics. For example, characters have Strength, which modifies attack damage, but instead of CON (which modified hit points), Hit Points (HP) is a principle statistic, as is Defence (DEF), which reduces the amount of damage taken. CON can only be inferred on the basis of HP and DEF. In place of DEX, characters have Agility (which determines the frequency of attack in the queue of turn-based combat), Evade (which increases the chance of completely evading an attack), and Accuracy (which affects their chances of striking opponents). In many RPGs, these functions are all determined by DEX. Indeed, the role of DEF in the reduction of damage is modified by DEX in some RPGs, owing to the dextrous use of weapon and armour. Instead of INT and WIS as generic modifiers for, respectively, magical and clerical actions, characters in FFX have Magic Attack, Magic Defence, and Mana, which serve for both.

CHA is a significant exception because it is visible through FFX's visual, dramatic representation. In RPG terms, Yuna would have a high CHA because of her manifest physical attractiveness, the loyalty of her Guardians, and the adoration of the folk of Spira. Wakka, while relatively handsome, is fairly colloquial (his use of "Yah" is, like a Cockney accent, an index of poor education and/or lower-class sensibilities) and inadvertently bullying (putting Tidus in a headlock to convince him to join the Besaid Aurochs). He is also poor at expressing himself (speaking hesitantly with one hand behind his head), and his inflexible faith sometimes makes him antisocial (he is confrontational when the Law of Yevon is challenged). In RPG terms, Wakka would have a low CHA, though in RPGs which make the distinction he might be said to have a high Appearance (APP).

Upon the basis of these statistics and abilities, each character in FFX may be seen as a weighted distribution of the standard character classes. Auron conforms to the fighter type because of his high Strength; Lulu conforms to the magic-user type because of her high Magic Attack; Yuna conforms to the cleric type because of her healing spells (though her Aeons are a cross between the fighter and magic-user type); and Rikku conforms to the thief type because of her high Speed, and Steal and Mix abilities. Wakka may be seen as a "long-range attack" subclass of the fighter type (like an archer), because of his use of blitzballs, and Tidus, while primarily identified with the fighter type, has spells like a magic-user, and a high DEX (as well as a Flee Ability and Haste spells), like a thief. Kimahri, with a smaller personal section on the Grid Sphere, and the capability to learn enemy attacks through his Lancet

ability, is the most malleable character, and because of his size and strength might be seen as a fighter multi-class.

Squaresoft's Final Fantasy X: The Official Strategy Guide (2002), like most RPG manuals, includes a bestiary listing each monster's generic statistics. Inasmuch as monsters operate using the same game mechanics and statistics as characters, players may, at a coarse level, type monsters as a variation or combination of character class types. In this respect, an Adamantoise, with great Strength (38), Defence (90) and high Hit Points (54400), may be typed as a fighter. A Dark Element, with its low Strength (1) and Hit Points (1800) but high Magic Points (280) and various magic attacks (Reflect, Bio, Osmose, Drain), may be typed a magic-user. A Chimera, with its high Strength (25), middling Magic Points (130), and various magic attacks (Thundara, Aqua Breath, Megiddo Flame, Assault) is a fighter/magic-user multi-class. The Sanctuary Keeper, with its high Strength (37) and Defence (100), its high Hit Points (40000), magical attacks, and Healing ability, might be seen as a fighter/magic-user/cleric multi-class.

Since high-level clerical spells defend against undead but also include spells such as *Zombie* and *Doom* associated with and/or used by undead, Yunalesca might be seen as an "evil cleric." Thief monster types, identified with the possession of high Speed and Steal ability, are relatively rare in FFX, though in FFVII there are duck-billed Bandits that steal items and then disappear in a puff of smoke. We may see the Basilisks disguised as treasure chests in the Omega Ruins as an "anti-thief"-type since they only transform and attack when a character attempts to steal from them. Lastly, whereas Lulu, as magic-user, has access to all elemental spells, many monsters are typed according to a particular element—Fire, Blizzard, Water or Thunder—which affects their attack and defence values. A Grenade, for example, always uses a Fire-based attack. Of course, there are also many multi-elemental-types: the Chimera, for example, is capable of Fire, Water and Thunder elemental attacks.

In this respect, primary attributes guide a rudimentary top-down classification of characters and monsters for the purposes of ergodic capability in combat macrostructures. Once players identify Tidus, Kimahri and Auron as Warriors, they know that their position should always be at the front and that they will do the majority of the fighting. When players encounter an opponent that is immune to, or has protection against, physical attacks, they know that they should use Lulu's mental attacks. When they encounter an opponent that is immune to, or has protection against, a certain element, they know that they should use other,

or opposing, elemental attacks. When characters are near death, players know to use Yuna to heal them (though, as a slight deviation from type, Yuna's Aeons are used to weaken or finish off major opponents). When players wish to do damage to a distant opponent, they know to use Wakka, and when they wish to steal or mix items they know to use Rikku. This basic strategy is sufficient to allow the player to defeat most of the game's opponents.

However, even if players learn monster statistics through FAQs and spoilers, the average and Model Player will acquire knowledge about many monster types through experimentation. Indeed, many FAQs, including the relevant Playstation Solutions (Pattison, 2002) magazine, only offer hints, not complete details. Furthermore, the permutations of combat are enormous—Playstation Solutions (pp. 16-27) lists 182 enemies to be found in FFX, which may be combined in combinations of up to three monster types, against three characters (chosen from seven) on a turn-by-turn basis. In any case, many "boss" monsters are the sole instance (token) of their type, and players must construct a new model of their type during the encounter (albeit guided by other types).

#### *Realism in Character Development: Semic Categories*

While character classes and monster types may define a *general* strategy or guide to anticipating future events, in practice the semic attribution of each character is not static. Indeed, players might begin by distinguishing between static and dynamic semes. "Static semes" could refer to traits possessed by a character as a linguistic term or quality ("health"), equivalent to the persistent type traits identified above. As stated, each character in FFX has a fixed series of semes, including Hit Points, Mana, Attack, Magic Attack, Defence, and Magic Defence. "Dynamic semes" could refer to quantitative representations of a static trait, where a trait is assigned a different numerical value. In FFX, each character's numerical trait for HP or MP is represented as a ratio against a (current) maximum. For example, Tidus' HP might be 70/100, and his MP is 80/80, but during a battle, his current HP may drop to 50/100. Yuna then may heal him to 100/100, only for him to be attacked again and for his HP to drop to 20/100. Such numerical variations might be equated with adverbial qualifications, in that, instead of having a series of semes ("seriously injured," "badly injured," "slightly injured," "not injured") a single seme may be marked by a more precise measure of degree (25, 50, 75 or 100 out of a 100).

However, character traits are not dynamic solely because they fluctuate within a predefined range. As characters go up levels, the range of traits may alter (as when maximum health points are increased) and/or characters may gain additional traits, or Abilities (such as Heal, Echo Screen and Zombie). Furthermore, if psychological coherence is a sign of realism in narrative macrostructures, experience-related character development is a sign of realism in game macrostructures. For example, in early text- and graphical-CRPGs, like Rogue (1980) and The Bard's Tale (1982), players chose a class for a character during character creation, and this determined the weapons and armour that character could use and a fixed line of development. For example, the experience required to advance a level, and the spells gained with these level, was particular to each class. Later CRPGs, such as Baldur's Gate (1997), allowed for the kind of multi-class characters (such as fighter-druid) found in the AD&D rule system, and some, such as Daggerfall: The Elder Scrolls (1994), have taken up action- or option- based skill development systems. In Daggerfall: The Elder Scrolls (1994) and Everquest (2000), the more frequently a skill (say, 1H Attack or Sense Heading) is used, the more quickly it develops, such that skill development is a crude simulation of real-life experience: practice leads to improvement. In most contemporary CRPGs, the player has some freedom to select which statistics or skills he/she wants to develop. This not only provides for some nominal realism, it offers functional diversity: an individual character can incorporate the characteristics of more than one character class. This is extremely important in long single-character games because options which otherwise would have been regrettably excluded on the basis of the initial character choice remain open to players.

The system of character development in FFX partially reflects this trend. At a certain point, players may choose for their characters to develop skills more "natural" to another type, such that Tidus may learn Lulu's higher-level magical spells. However, each character has a separate paradigm of weapons available to him/her, and each character begins at a certain point on the Grid Sphere, which partially determines the sequence of skill acquisition. The phrase "static semic paradigm (diegetic)" can be used to refer to the set of semes that a character can acquire within the game's diegesis. For example, there are a range of items any character can collect—such as Potions, Elixirs, Phoenix Downs and Grenades—as well as character-specific weapons and armour. All characters can potentially acquire all the Abilities on the Grid Sphere, including new Abilities, but each character's ease or order in acquiring these varies. Other abilities, such as Overdrives and Overdrive Modes, are character-specific. The phrase "dynamic semic range (diegetic)" could be used to refer to the quantitative limits—current and/or absolute (static) minimum and maximum—that are placed on



characters' dynamic semes within the diegesis. In FFX, there is a universal 9999 Damage Limit. This prevents characters from becoming too powerful and upsetting the game's balance—though FFX eventually offers players a Limit Break, which allows characters to inflict more than 9999 damage.

Despite the freedom for unique character development on the Grid Sphere, the initial principle statistics mean that characters' functional capabilities do not greatly depart from their class type, at least, not relative to one another. For example, Lulu's physical attacks are never as high as Auron's, just as Auron's mental attacks are never as high as Lulu's. Consequently, "non-natural" skills may only be used in a supplementary fashion when primary attacks are unavailable. When Lulu is suffering from a Silence status and cannot cast spells, players fall back on her minimal physical attacks, and when Auron is suffering from a Darkness status, and keeps missing, players are better served by using one of his spells (if he has any). Lastly, whereas combat in early (C)RPGs yielded generic experience points, FFX has character-specific quests which lead to the acquisition of particular skills, such as finding Jecht's spheres (which allow Auron to learn his Overdrives), and the side quests required to find the Celestial (Ultimate) Weapons of each character. Here narrative development overlaps with character development, offering the minimal realism of experience-based development.

It should be foregrounded that the attribution of static and dynamic semes extends to each item possessed by a character. While some items have a fixed use (especially quest items like the Spheres used in the Trials of the Fayth) most weapons and armour can be "customised" by using up certain items. For example, Tidus' Vigilante sword has two blank slots, and two Ability Spheres can be "spent" to give his Vigilante the Sensor ability. This leads to a cybernetic conjunction of both the item and character: the weapon itself changes the character's statistics, but the character's attack and defence determine the effectiveness of the weapon. Even if the only use of an item is to sell it, this will alter the semic attribution of Gil in the party's and merchant's inventory, which affects the potential items purchased in the future.

#### *Semic Relations in Combat Macrostructures*

In RPGs, quantitative semes apply to a wide range of activities, such as forcing open doors, jumping long distances, lifting heavy objects, swimming underwater, picking locks, and so on. In FFX, character semes primarily serve a function in combat. While a suspenseful

(blow-by-blow) battle sequence in a film or print narrative may lead to dynamic changes in the level of danger posed to characters, in video games these semes fluctuate in a more quantifiable sense. The related consequence of this semic complexity and dynamism is that any attempt to complete each fight solely on the basis of basic class types would fail in certain battles, or would at least not provide the optimum strategy, since often a *specific* skill or spell is required to damage an opponent, and it may be necessary to use characters who possess the skill but are not typed by it.

For example, while Tidus is the character whose developmental path leads directly to the spells Haste and Hastega, Rikku might be a better choice to acquire and use those spells, since, being the faster character, she might be able to cast them before a monster has a chance to attack. Similarly, when a character is near death players do not care that Yuna is the prized healer; the only concern is that at least one character has a healing spell or potion. In this respect, despite the generic class-types in FFX, characters are in some respects *not* just types or classes, since at a certain point of development they may deviate so much from a type that their *character* becomes their class. More than this, players cannot base their entire strategy upon class types since more specific semic attributions inform player's ergodic choices, such as to which character to rotate into the battle, which attack to use, when to heal, when to cast defensive spells, and so on.

Mapping semic oppositions in combat macrostructures by way of Greimasian squares is useful where it reflects the minimal grammars of game logic coded by the game, and, by implication, the ergodic, semic, and/or symbolic codes that players use to make decisions in combat. That is, while players may sometimes utilise class or character types to make decisions during combat, combat strategy is often based upon a series of significant oppositions that define the effectiveness of a particular attack. For example, certain mental defences block physical attacks, certain monsters are only susceptible to physical attacks, and characters with mental attacks have low physical attacks and defence. Using a physical attack or defence in place of a mental attack or defence, then, is often not a matter of strategy, but necessity.

Care must be taken in using a Greimasian semiotic square to map the confluence of ergodic choices and player schemata since, as Jameson argues, the term which is taken as primary will affect the results (Greimas, 1987, p. xv-xvi). The fighter class, with his physical attributes, is the most logical primary term. The fighter class (or its variation) offers the

easiest introduction to most CRPG systems, since fighters do not usually use many spells or class-specific skills, and players can fall back on the basic game mechanics of movement and swinging a blade. Furthermore, as Myers (1992) observes, the statistics in RPGs may often be grouped according to a distinction between "physical" and "mental" characteristics: strength, constitution and dexterity versus intelligence, wisdom and charisma (p. 423). That is, "physical" can be taken as the primary term, S1, identifiable with the attacks of the fighter and thief classes, or, more specifically, with Auron, Kimahri, Tidus, Wakka and Rikku. The second term, S2, "mental," may be identified with the magician and cleric's magical attacks, or, more specifically, with Yuna and Lulu. The third term, -S1, or not-physical, might be referred to as "immaterial," where one attacks but misses because of a low attack "roll" (one literally strikes empty air). The fourth or paradoxical term, -S2, or not-mental, might be referred to as "imaginary," where, because of paralysis or unconsciousness, the attack turn could not be taken in the first place. The utopian term, S, could be identified with "combo" attacks, as when one performs a physical attack with a weapon that also has a mental component (Tidus' Liquid Steel has a Waterstrike ability), or a mental attack that does non-mental damage (Gravity magic does non-elemental damage). The neutral term, -S, could be identified with avoidance of battle.

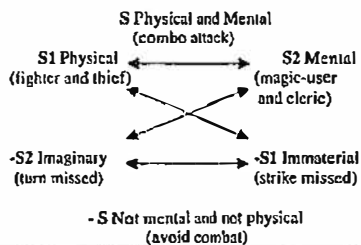


Figure 5.5. Greimas' (1987) semiotic square premised upon an opposition between mental and physical statistics.

Second, a distinction between direct and indirect attacks is important in that a long-range attack cannot (usually) be used at close quarters (Wakka's blitzball is an exception), and a hand-to-hand attack cannot be used except at close quarters (as when there are two ranks of opponents, which is frequent with robot opponents). Furthermore, physically weak characters may be held in the second row so that they are protected from direct, physical attack. If "direct" is taken as the primary term, S1, may refer to action in close proximity, associated with the fighter-type. Auron's, Tidus', and Kimahri's physical attacks may be included here, though in practice Wakka's blitzball, and all spells, also operate at close proximity. The

second term, S2, "indirect action," may refer to action-at-a-distance, which is only possible using the long-range attacks of the magic-user, cleric and thief types, including Wakka's blitzball attacks, Lulu's spells, and Rikku's Mix Ability, or throwing an item. The third term, -S1, not-direct action, might be labelled a "circumspect" strategy, referring to when one tries to cycle a character in and out of combat so as to avoid retribution. The fourth term, -S2, not-indirect-action, might be labelled "avoidance" and could refer to when one does not cycle a character into combat. The utopian term, S, might be identified with certain attacks that may be either direct or indirect, including Wakka's blitzball attacks and many of Lulu's spells. The neutral term, -S, could refer to complete inaction: again, completely avoiding battle.

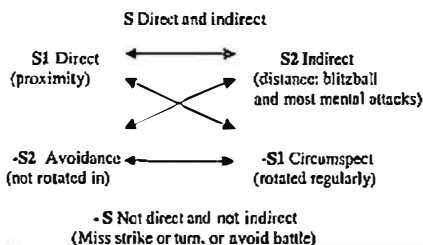


Figure 5.6. Greimas' (1987) semiotic square premised upon an opposition between direct and indirect effects, seen in terms of physical proximity.

There is also a clear distinction between attacks that inflict damage to an opponent and actions which heal the character being controlled. If "damage other" is taken as the primary term, S1, including the physical and mental attacks of the fighter, magic-user and thief, the second term, S2, "heal self," could be identified with healing spells of the clerical type. The third term, -S1, not-damage other, could be called "damage self," and could refer to when one inflicts damage on another friendly character to remove one or both of the status ailments Sleep and Confusion. The fourth or paradoxical term, -S2, not-heal self, or "heal other" could refer to status changes or defence spells, such as Haste, cast upon oneself or a friendly character, or to status changes, such as Curse or Slow, inflicted upon an opponent. The utopian term, S, might be identified with such situations as when characters cast Heal on an opponent with Zombie status and thereby inflict damage by healing their negative health status (being undead), or when a monster tries to Heal itself but characters have inflicted it with a Reflect status such that the healing effect is deflected onto the characters. The neutral term, -S, could be identified with passing, missing, or avoiding an attack.

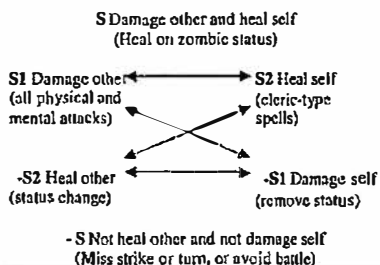


Figure 5.7. Greimas' (1987) semiotic square premise upon an opposition between inflicting damage and healing injury.

Players also must pay attention to the elemental attributes of the attacker and defender, which operate as a simplified pair of oppositions: Fire opposes Blizzard, and Thunder opposes Water. A monster is immune to its own element, but takes double damage from its opposing element, such that a strategy often simply requires typing the enemy according to an element. For example, since a Grenade (monster) absorbs Fire magic, players are cued to use characters with Blizzard-based attacks (or, if they are not available, Thunder- or Water-based attacks). However, in some instances the elemental attributes cannot be generalised and depend upon the specific combat turn. The Spherimorph in the woods of Macalonia seems nothing more than a shapeless, watery blob, so players are tempted to use Thunder-based elemental attacks, but these are as likely to heal the monster. Scanning it leads to a Counterattack against all party members, punishing players for not working out its "nature" through experimentation, but trial and error allows players to realise that, while its appearance does not change, the creature periodically transforms into a different elemental form. It is healed by attacks and spells of its current state, and only suffers adequate damage from attacks and spells of the opposing type. Similarly, when players first fight Seymour they learn that he casts his elemental attacks in a particular sequence, and by anticipating this sequence players can cast a series of elemental defence spells in the appropriate order. When players encounter Seymour the last time, his elemental attack type cycles according to rotating coloured spheres that surround him, and players need to adapt their elemental attacks to this sequence.

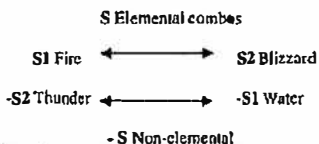


Figure 5.8. The oppositions between elemental effects, presented as a reworked Greimasian (1987) semiotic square in which oppositions operate horizontally but not transversely.

It must be emphasised that the theoretical categories nominated above do not represent actual structures in the game. The game's computation is more complex than this. However, many of the oppositions nominated above are significant in that they represent the game's ergodic codes and constitute a grammar of combat strategy. If we accept that the S and -S positions tend towards abstraction, and that even the -S1 and -S2 positions may only be applicable in certain situations, then players may tend to base their decisions on the basic oppositions nominated by S1 and S2. Nonetheless, even if a general strategy is based upon basic types, each decision is determined through the basis of bottom-up processing of individual semes in relation to the total set of active semes.

Indeed, many battles require not just a cycling through of recurring attack types by particular characters but a step-by-step, goal-driven cognitive strategy. While there are sometimes several successful strategies in killing boss monsters like Sin, Yunalesca and Braska's Final Aeon, these strategies sometimes require up to an hour to complete, and finding them through experimentation can require many more hours of trial runs. There are, it should be noted, Save Spheres and wandering monsters next to "boss" monsters so that players can pause to develop their characters if they are not strong enough, in the hope that the next Ability acquired may unlock a new strategy. Yet players may not know how long to keep developing their characters, leading to protracted sessions in which they alternate between minor battles and trying to defeat the "boss."

When players *cannot* find an appropriate strategy, or do not wish to waste time doing so, they are likely to search out a FAQ document. The [Playstation Solutions](#) (2002) guide, for example, offers the following extended strategy for fighting Yunalesca, who has three forms, each with their respective statistics:

Rather than using up your Overdrives on the first form, it's more effective to save them all for the third form. After casting Protect, Shell and Haste, have Yuna back up the attackers by healing everyone is the best way to go. For the first form just keep chipping away at her with the heavy hitters, pausing to cure any status effects Yunalesca tosses your way. During the second form Yunalesca will inflict Zombie status on all the characters. Normally this spell should be countered immediately but the boss also follows this up with Mega Death. While Mega Death usually kills instantly, it has no effect on Zombie characters, so it's a better idea to stay in Zombie status during this battle. When the third form is triggered the boss will hit you with Mega Death and continue to soften you up with Hell Biter. Use your Aeons' Overdrives now. Shiva is the most effective. Attack with Shiva's Diamond Dust first, then follow that up with its Heavenly Strike. The Heavenly Strike can freeze Yunalesca, allowing

you to score many hits. After bringing out other heavy hitting Acons, like Bahamut, Yunaesca should be pretty close to death. (p. 66)

This strategy is governed by class types ("heavy hitters"), spell types (healing), specific spells (anyone with Protect, Shell and Haste), specific characters (Yuna), and specific attacks (Yuna's Acons), as well as by dynamic senses (health and status). However, while it constitutes a relatively linear sequence it is only a generalised and simplified form of the specific sequence of actions that the player will produce when fighting Yunaesca. That is, as a strategy it consists of a series of interventions during a more aleatory series of strategic choices, and depends less upon *what happened* than whether or not the present state of the game allows for a present or future action. While a diachronic sense of "what happened" is registered as the vaguely remembered history of inter-related micro-game events that define a strategic trajectory, a player will be more attentive to the synchronic register of game-variables which define current possibilities. A player is less likely to attend to which spell was cast at what exact time earlier in the battle, than they are to be focused on the problem that they have no more Magic Points and cannot (now, or for the remainder of the battle) cast any more spells.

## Conclusion

A mixture of structural analysis, ethnography, and/or other empirical research, could produce a more detailed account of the step-by-step process whereby players make decisions, relative to an end-goal, during longer battles (see Loftus & Loftus, 1983). The mathematical tradition of game theory here would be useful in suggesting some of the decision-making processes in terms of risks and pay-offs (see Colman, 1982; Myerson, 1991; Thomas, 1984). However, the above account suffices to redress some of the criticisms made against the role of characters in video games. The player of FFX is likely to be engaged in a top-down attribution of character types in the narrative macrostructure that is equal or superior to many print and film narratives in its complexity, and the game demands constant and complex bottom-up processes of type-revision and semic attribution across both narrative- and ergodic-macrostructures. Both types of coding reinforce interest, either through suspense, surprise or curiosity at the history, motives and fate of characters, or through the development of a strategy in combat through experimenting with ergodic affordances. However, before appreciating the significance of the dual narrative and game coding of characters in any more detail, it is necessary to elaborate upon players' "feelings towards" characters (Tan, 1997, p. 154).

## Chapter Six – Psychoanalytic Identification

The previous chapters have addressed some of the codes that structure players' interest in terms of expectations about, and the outcome of, narrative and game events. However, while the confirmation of a hermeneutic code may afford pleasure in and of itself, the interest players have in a sequence depends upon the relationships they have been formed with the subject-actants, or characters, in that sequence. In accounting for these relationships, recent researchers have drawn from the psychoanalytic model of identification initially used in film theory in the late 1960s. However, this account sits uneasily alongside recent cognitive work on film. While Bordwell (1986, p. 30) argues that the psychoanalytic model, with its emphasis on sexuality, gender, and the unconscious, does have a limited, or specialised, role in film theory, Carrol (1990) and Grodal (1997) argue that psychoanalysis is a flawed basis for film theory, since many of the basic processes of film reception are non-sexual, transgendered and conscious. It suffices to say that the pre-eminence of psychoanalytic theory in Cultural Studies means that it cannot be easily dismissed, and this chapter draws from Cowie's (1997) account to suggest what the psychoanalytic model of identification offers a theory of video gameplay in general and an analysis of FFX in particular.

### From Primary to Partial, Multiple and Transitive Identification(s)

During the late 1960s, film theory began to draw upon Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue that the film screen operated much like ideology itself. For Baudry:

the spectator in the cinema 'identifies with the camera' and perceives the events that are depicted in the image in the manner of a transcendental subject. That is, the spectator is not simply positioned by the image but assimilates her own vision to that of a camera-eye with limitless powers of vision and sees the world viewed through this eye in a way that appears unmediated. (1974, p. 20)

Mez (1975) referred to this as "the thesis of primary cinematic identification" (p. 20), arguing that the viewer was ideologically positioned at the centre of the visual field. The screen was here seen as an "imaginary signifier," in the sense that no matter how realistic the images onscreen might have seemed, they were not produced from light reflected from an actual object but from a projector: that is, the light reflected off the screen was phenomenologically "real" but signified what was not present. As Tan (1997) summarises, this postulated a "tragic viewer" assuming:



the reflection of an imaginary, absent object, based on a lack of some kind, a shortcoming that is at once compensated for and constantly recalled. Film technique denies the existence of this lack, creating the illusion of presence; in this sense it is a fetish, a surrogate. (p. 155)

The cinematic viewer, then, uses a voyeuristic gaze, seeking wholeness in an image that is a fetish for its own absence, misrecognising his/her ideological position in relation to the images onscreen (Dayan, 1974; Heath, 1981; Oudart, 1977). The "cinematic apparatus" was therefore defined in terms of the way primary identification naturalised a false and unconscious ideological position for a subject, and Metz (1975) dismissed all other forms of identification, especially those with characters, as intermittent, referring to them collectively as "secondary identifications" (p. 58).

Oudart (1977) referred to the positioning of the subject as "suturing," and Dayan (1974) argued that the shot/reverse shot sequence provided a space for the absent viewer relative to the multiple point of view onscreen shots. However, Rothman (1975) argued that Dayan (1974) too readily identified the operations of the cinematic apparatus with bourgeois ideology, and that what Dayan was referring to was a shot/reverse shot/shot sequence, which occurred less frequently than was asserted. Theorists such as Heath (1981) subsequently went on to argue that (the viewer's) space was governed by such cinematic codes and conventions as framing, cutting on action, eyeline match and the 180° and 30° rules. These are, of course, the dominant codes of the traditional realist feature film (Bordwell, 1986), and it was generally accepted that realism was the dominant mode that naturalised the interpellative process of the cinematic apparatus. Indeed, what Donald (1989) calls the "Screen project" involved exposing or breaking primary identification through social criticism, or privileging Brechtian conventions of "alienation" or "distanciation" which made the viewer aware of how cinematic conventions positioned them.

This model has serious problems. Feminists criticized the Freudian/Lacanian model for presuming a male subject, though they corrected for this by analysing how female viewers identify with characters (Cowie, 1997; Mulvey, 1975/1992). More importantly, the cognitive account suggests that gendered and sexualised modes of gazing and identification must be taken as special cases of general perceptual, cognitive and affective processes. In terms of the previous chapter, identification may occur on the most minimal basis with any subject-actant which fulfils Bordwell's (1986) "person" schemata. This recognition is at the basis of Cowie's (1997) and Allen's (1997) position that viewers are often *indifferent* to the gender of

characters: viewers identify with characters as humans with goals and motives that are being frustrated or fulfilled. So while gender may frequently be a significant factor in how viewers relate to characters it is not necessarily the *basis* for identification. Grodal (1997) acknowledges that some films employ "voyeurism in the trivial sense" (p. 105) of visual inspection, and that some films may explore issues of castration, but he argues vision has a broader ecological function of gaining information. For Grodal, reducing the cinematic gaze to voyeurism and fetishism gives an undue and over-generalised precedence to the sexual drive and castration anxieties.

Cowie (1997) offers a further qualification in her revision of the psychoanalytic position. Cowie cites Laplanche & Pontalis (1988) definition of identification as a:

psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. (p. 205)

The important qualification here is "partially," since identification is never total or timeless.<sup>1</sup> As Cowie (1997) emphasises, there is a distinction between identification *of* something, as in: "I identify that figure as Tidus," and identification *with* or *as* something, as in: "I identify with Tidus." Cowie argues that "these two processes involve a common element" (p. 72), which, in the above example, would take the form: "I am not Tidus":

In order to identify, to make the same, an acknowledgement of difference is required, implying a separation prior to any assimilation with the object of identification. As a result, and in this gap, a psychological process comes into play. (p. 72)

Within the Lacanian (1977/2001) model, of course, what is born in this gap is desire itself, that is, a sense of lack born from the insufficiency one feels when faced with an image.

Upon this basis Cowie (1997) critiques Metz' (1975) distinction between primary and secondary identifications. Cowie (1997) argues that we *may* occasionally identify with the camera's perspective, but there is also a sense in which we do *not* identify with the camera. Whenever we are aware of the camera, or digital equivalent, panning, but are also aware that

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<sup>1</sup> Identification is distinct from incorporation, introjection, internalisation, and projection. Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) suggest that incorporation and introjection are "prototypes" of identification in which "the mental process is symbolised as a bodily one (ingesting, devouring, keepings something inside oneself, etc)" (p. 207). They argue that the term internalisation opens up the problematic issue of "what it is that the subject assimilates himself to" (p. 208), suggesting that whereas one identifies with objects one internalises relations. However, they conclude that these terminological distinctions are still not well decided. Projection has already been discussed in chapters three and four.

our head has *not* turned, there is a sense that a gaze has been provided for us. For Cowie, cinema constantly shifts between a mode in which it seems we are seeing things for the first time and a mode in which we are aware that what we are about to see has already been produced and therefore has already happened (p. 101). Indeed, suspense is often *predicated* upon the fact of an audience's awareness that certain events will (or *have*) happened (pp. 101-102).

Identification with characters, which Metz' dismisses as "secondary," similarly is variable. There is always a *general* spatial and temporal gap, or distance, between the viewer/player and character. This idea finds its most complex elaboration in Lacan's (1977) "graphe complet" (p. 348), according to which what we identify with is always somewhere else ("I am Tidus, but Tidus is there, and I am here") and the act of representing it displaces it into the past ("Tidus is *there*, but the 'is' I just referred to is prior to the moment I referred to it") and the abstract play of language ("the word 'Tidus' and the image of Tidus are not the Tidus I spoke of"). There are also *particular* physical and psychological differences between players and the characters with whom they identify. In *EFFX*, Tidus is 17, but the player may be 30; Tidus is blonde, but the player may have brown hair; Tidus is high spirited, but the player may be withdrawn; Tidus' motivation includes the desire for intimacy with Yuna, but the player may be homosexual and desire Tidus. These physical and psychological differences extend to players' and characters' sensory modalities. If we emphasise that Tidus' sensory modalities are not realistically represented, and that players can therefore only *imagine* the "reality" of his experience, then we can acknowledge that: players do not taste or smell Tidus' blood, sweat and dirt; players' hearing is displaced by the television's speakers; the natural relationship between saccades and head movements is mediated by the way the program, or player, changes the "camera" perspective; and players do not physically move, walk, swing a sword, or dodge blows in the way that Tidus would experience.

Cowie (1997) concludes that Metz' distinction between primary and secondary identifications is a false distinction, because transitory identifications "signify the incompleteness and insufficiency of the constitutive identifications" (p. 76), and in this respect it offers an artificial hierarchy of identification (p. 102). It is now accepted that viewers may identify with multiple positions in a dynamic progression, and that no one type of identification can be seen as pre-eminent in and of itself. One basis for this is Freud's (1919) "A Child is Being Beaten," which: "demonstrates the possibilities for the subject of fantasy to participate in a variety of roles – sliding, exchanging and doubling in the

interchangeable positions of the subject, object and observer" (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, p. 154). For example, players of *FFX* may, at one time, or over time, speak of, or perceive, Tidus as an external figure ("He is attractive"), as oneself in the present ("I am attractive"), as a future-self ("I will be attractive"), as a threat to oneself ("He is *more* attractive than me"), and so on. In this respect, what Metz (1975) dismissed as "secondary identifications" cannot be dismissed as posterior or inferior to "primary identification."

Even with the qualification that identification is partial and transitory, Bordwell (1986) and Branigan (1991) argue that the psychoanalytic tradition makes undue presumptions about the relationship between point of view as optical perspective and point of view as a symbolic structure or set of values (a subject position). For Bordwell and Branigan, space is a device of narration, part of the total form of the filmic text, and affects the dissemination of information by concealing, revealing or framing certain objects and events. If narrative comprehension occurs by way of cognitive processes of deduction and inference about the causal logic of events, then focalisation has less to do with constituting subjectivity than regulating curiosity, suspense, and surprise. Grodal (1997) makes clear that focalisation does not *in itself* determine identification: that is, changing the optical (perceptual) point of view from one character to that of another does not *necessarily* mean that viewers shift their (conceptual) identification from one to the other. If the "camera" in *FFX* aligned itself with Seymour's *optical* perspective, that would hardly be sufficient for players to abandon their allegiance to Tidus in favour of Seymour's *conceptual* perspective: identification is conserved in ways that optical variations may jar, but do not usually sever.

### Modes of Identification

The qualifications above undermine the possibility of analysing processes of identification and subjectification without closer analysis of a wide range of filmic and cognitive processes. What remains particularly useful in the psychoanalytic account, however, is its distinction between the "ideal ego," "ego-ideals," and the "super-ego" (Cowie, 1977; Freud, 1921/1985; Lacan, 1977/2001).<sup>2</sup> These three types of identification do not occur in a fixed order or hierarchy: they are all transitory and dynamic. While particular texts or media may motivate certain types more than others, no type can be exclusively identified with a text or medium, since they may operate simultaneously, in co-operation, or in conflict with one

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<sup>2</sup> As Schore (1994) argues there seems to be some neurobiological basis for these types of identification (p. 349).

another. Indeed, it is precisely the inter-relationships between these identifications that is revealing, in that they foreground the dynamics of desire. As is argued below, these categories are useful in suggesting some of the ways players engage with video games in general, and FFX in particular.

### *Ideal Ego: The Indestructible Self*

The first mode of identification with the ideal ego in the register of the real relates to "an image which restores to the subject its original narcissism, of being without flaw, omnipotent" (Cowie, 1997, p. 103). This is referred to as "primary narcissism," even though the putative restoration of the subject is partial and nostalgic, since the desired state—of completeness and unity, of solipsism prior to the recognition of the Other—is already lost. As Cowie argues, the ideal ego "is not a set of ideal contents so much as a position, the place in which the subject is beyond reproach and, therefore, in a sense super-human" (p. 103). Consequently, identification with the ideal ego emerges not simply because of a character's traiking but because a character (or player) functions as omnipotent and/or invincible.

In FFX, certain characters offer fairly pronounced representations of the ideal ego in this sense. Auron's age, wisdom, mystery, legendary status, and power (and the fact that he has previously completed the quest to defeat Sin with Yuna's father) may be taken as a guarantee of his invulnerability and inevitable triumph over adversity (see Figure 6.1a). While FFX's narrative tends to align the player with Tidus, as apart from and inferior to Auron, players regularly gain control of Auron during combat. However, Tidus himself performs some seemingly impossible tasks that position him as indestructible, such as sliding down the Airship's anchor cables over Bevelle while trying to rescue Yuna (see Figure 6.1b). The victory sequences at the end of each battle, which offer swinging camera views and close-ups of the victors to the accompaniment of triumphant music, may also be seen as offering phatic contact with the ideal ego. Furthermore, since the game's major opponents, such as Seymour, Sin, and Jecht, have powers on a scale beyond normal comprehension and constitute an aggressive challenge to the player's ego, their defeat may be seen as offering a sudden regression to the ideal position of primary narcissism.

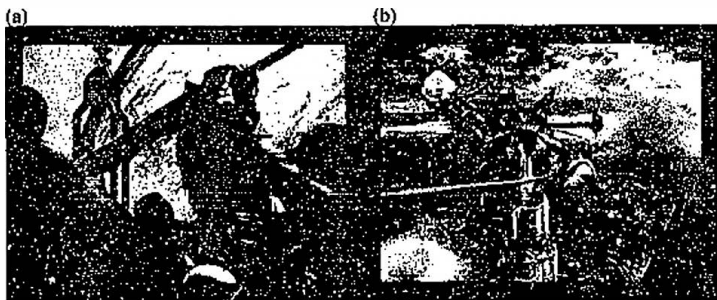


Figure 6.1. (a) Auron as ideal ego, calmly walking through the hysterical crowd to confront the Fiends that disrupt the blitzball game at Luca. (b) Tidus about to rescue Yuna from Bevelle, performing the seemingly impossible feat of sliding down the Airship's anchor cables high over the city.

However, Yuna's Acons (Valefor, Ifrit, Ixion, Shiva, Bahamut, Yohimbo, the Magus Sisters and Anima) offer an especially pronounced and routine form of the ideal ego. The constantly repeated sequences in which they are summoned function much like the transformation sequences found in superhero and anime television shows and films, such as Batman (1989) and Sailor Moon (2000), by staging an energetic anticipation of the indestructible force of the ideal ego. This anticipation is (usually) justified in that the Aeons do more damage than most characters and monsters, and, in their Overdrive mode, inflict 1000s of points of damage, devastating opponents with spectacles of elemental abandon (for example, the graphical sequences for Sonic Wings, Energy Ray, Meteor Strike, Hellfire, Heavenly Strike and Oblivion). Despite being Summoned, and therefore being positioned as subservient, the player directly controls Aeons, and is thereby given *access* to their power, which is beyond that of any human or mortal. After all, up until the final battle with Yu Yevon when all the Aeons are banished, it does not matter how often they are killed, they may be re-Summoned, offering the position of a metaphysical ego, beyond life and death, indestructible.

Since FFX is not just a narrative, but a game, the ideal ego is produced not simply through representations of characters with whom player are encouraged to identify, and/or control, but through the player entering into a confident state of mastery, either in terms of the performance of procedural schemata (the easy grace of the expert player navigating a game environment or mastering the game controls) or the abstract mastery associated with strategic cognitive operations (the player who has "demystified" a game so that s/he knows which

strategies guarantee triumph). This confident mastery and identification with the ideal ego would initially seem to emerge from a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). However, identification with the ideal ego is accompanied by self-grandeur and motivated by an anxiety about separation from a prior solipsistic sense of selfhood. By contrast, in a state of flow one is engaged in the present without any sense of self. Consequently, it could be said that identification with the ideal ego may emerge from a state of flow, but its emergence may mark the *border* of a state of flow: a conscious recognition of one's alienation from the process in which one was previously immersed.

Indeed, the principal relevance of the ideal ego to gameplay is the consequence of its *loss* whenever the limits of the player undermine identification with the ideal. The limits in question may relate to the player's sensorimotor coordination, his/her mastery of the interface/game, or his/her recognition of other characters and the game as separate entities (minds, narrative agents, narrators) that withhold information. That is, identification with ideal ego is lost every time the player is unable to advance in the game, for example, when s/he cannot work out where to go or how to advance in the Trials; it is lost every time the player loses in battle, leaving Tidus and the other characters dead; and it is lost every time the player becomes aware that the characters know more than s/he, for example, when players sense, but are not quite conscious of, Wakka's relationship to Lulu, Yuna's feelings for Tidus, and Auron's knowledge about the fate of Jecht. Indeed, the ideal ego is lost every time a player becomes conscious of salient physical or mental limits to his/her activities *vis-a-vis* the narrative/game world.

The significance of this loss is that identification with the ideal ego presumes a state of complete mastery, and any threat to it may be seen as cueing an action tendency to (re-) gain mastery. When this action tendency is frustrated, the player may fall into an aggressive pattern of trying to reassert his/her will, and each subsequent frustration may lead to a more pronounced and aggressive denial, leading to a cycle of affective amplification which may quickly pass from anger to rage. Indeed, it is such frustration of the ideal ego that is the basis of narcissistic rage in general (Lacan, 1977/2001), and an inability to reconcile with the reality of one's limitations is, developmentally and clinically speaking, the basis of a narcissistic pathology (Schorr, 1994). Of course, the issue here is not pathology, but how sustained aggression towards a perceived source of frustration may lead to sadism as an active coping strategy. In other words, the repeated frustration of the ideal ego may be seen as a motivation

for sadistic play, a point that will be elaborated in Chapter Eight in terms of the empathy players feel for themselves.

### *Ego-Ideals: The Desired and Desirable Self*

The second form of identification pertains to ego-ideals in the register of the imaginary. It involves the subject identifying with an external image arising from the demands of others so that it can be lovable by the Other. This happens when "we identify with an image for the gaze of the Other, as the space from which we are desired by the other" (Cowie, 1997, p. 93). This is referred to as "secondary narcissism," and Cowie suggests that it is invoked by cinematic close-ups, which (like mirrors or photographic images) promote that fundamental mode of identification in which "I am what I see." However, identification with an ego-ideal is produced whenever an image is offered to a subject who interprets it as desirable (and seeks such desirability), and this may occur across the range of cinematic perspectives.

This is evident when we consider the two main psychoanalytic types of desirability. The first, the "narcissistic type," includes love of what one *is*, love of what one *was*, love of what one would *like to be*, and love of what was once a part of oneself (Cowie, 1997, p. 80). It is generally concerned with relations to the self. The second, the "anaclitic type," is directed towards the primary caregivers, usually the mother and father who feed, care and protect the self, and those who subsequently take on this role (p. 81). It is, then, generally concerned with one's relations with others. Laplanche (1976) sees the narcissistic-type as metaphoric, in that the narcissistic object-choice is made on the basis of similarity (p. 80). We may love our perceived *imago*, those that resemble that *imago*, or those that resemble others we would like to be. Since the perceived similarities may appear in a spatially, temporally, and causally separate image, this involves a *transportation* of desire. The anaclitic type, by contrast, is metonymic, in that it follows from a series of slippages, from breast, to milk, to nurturer, such that there is a greater spatial and causal connection between its objects. This involves a *displacement* of desire onto that which we perceive to be part of, or complementary to, us. However, in practice, identification with an ego-ideal may involve complex combinations or operations of both these types, the simplest case being that we often love what resembles our caregivers and we often love our caregivers as lost parts of ourselves. In terms of visual (photographic or cinematic) representation, the operation of metaphor and metonymy mean



that not only close ups, but also partial, displaced or figurative images of body parts and objects may be taken as desirable if they are perceived as similar or related to an ego-ideal.

To take an extended example, Tidus' and Yuna's similar age (17), attractiveness, adolescent uncertainty, and role as public figures (blitzball star and Summoner) make the two mirrors of what the other is and desires to be. If a well-defined Other motivates narcissistic rage, then Yuna's familiarity marks her as not-Other, as part of Tidus (see Figure 6.2a). Certainly, because of Tidus' abandonment by his primary caregivers, Yuna, the hope and potential saviour of Spira, presents as a pre-eminent surrogate caregiver, in the sense of making Tidus feel loved and important. Of course, within a traditionally gendered social context Yuna's vulnerable femininity also implies the need for Tidus to take on the masculine role of Guardian. The image of a positive likeness is thereby complemented by traditional gender roles and an equation of mutual desirability in which the differences between Tidus and Yuna are part of a larger unity. Tidus' gaze in Figure 6.2b therefore may be read as betraying a mixture of admiration, a desire for intimacy, and protectiveness.



Figure 6.2. (a) Tidus and Yuna Sin together. (b) Tidus steals a glance at Yuna.

However, as is evident from their conversation at Kilika, what Yuna especially desires from Tidus is his cheerfulness, his ability to make her laugh in the face of impending death. This morale-boosting role is metonymic of the moral support provided by many of the citizens of Spira, through which the party pass on their journey, and which finds its most utopian moment when the population of Spira all start singing "The Hymn of the Fayth" to help calm Sin. Indeed, while Tidus' role as an ego-ideal may depend upon his role of protecting and supporting Yuna, *she* is Spira's protector and saviour. It is her unique power as a Summoner that is capable of defeating Sin and bringing the Great Calm. Furthermore, the people of Spira offer support for both Yuna and Tidus. Besides overt compliments and encouragement,

passers-by offer free items, such as healing potions. The protection of Yuna and saving of Spira therefore may be seen as a means of achieving a deferred state in which one is protected and provided for by Spira, a form of desirability-in-perpetuity. Yuna is metonymic of Spira and her gaze stands in for that of Spira's in defining what one would like to be. In this case, one's desire to be desired by Yuna, and one's subsequent identification with an ego-ideal associated with the trait of cheerfulness, involves providing for and protecting Yuna whilst being protected by her in the hope that Spira will provide for and protect oneself in the future.

These transitive identifications are, of course, ruptured whenever the partiality of identification (the disparity between ego-ideal and self) becomes evident, or when Tidus conducts himself in a way that affects his desirability (when he does something shameful or embarrassing). For example, in *Sanubia Sands*, after Yuna is kidnapped by the *Al Bhed*, Tidus learns that Yuna must die if she is to be successful in her quest to kill Sin, and that the *Al Bhed* kidnapped her precisely to protect her from such a fate. He also learns that everyone but he knew this, and is ashamed that his upbeat talk about the end of the quest hurt her. At this moment, Tidus role as ego-ideal is undermined. However, transitive identification is resumed when the desire of the Other is reconstituted. When the other characters finally rescue Yuna in *Bevelle*, and Tidus takes her to one side to apologise for his inconsiderate comments, her acceptance of him suggests that their relationship has in fact deepened, and Tidus is recuperated as an ego-ideal.

We also can argue that, if the ideal ego may be constituted by a position rather than a set of contents, then similarly a character onscreen may become a desirable ego-ideal because of the way the game positions it and the player. As in many video games, Tidus is a desirable ego-ideal simply on the basis that he, in particular, is requested and *needed* by the Other, constituted by a relay of signifiers ranging from individual characters, such as Auron, Wakka and Yuna, through to the collective of Spira, or all humanity. That is, the game indirectly recruits the player as the displaced ego of Tidus to rescue the helpless (the people of Spira), kill monsters (wandering monsters, the Chocobo Eater, key opponents such as Seymour), and free the land (Spira). In doing so, Tidus is loved and rewarded with gratitude from the Other (the population of Spira, Yuna, and the other Guardians) and a love-object (wealth, power, Yuna, the extended family of the Guardians). That is, the entire world of Spira is under threat from Sin, and the fate of Spira depends upon the actions of the player as Tidus' displaced ego, or, conversely, Tidus as the player's principal alter ego.

It is precisely because the *entire* game world is under threat and *no one else* can (or is available to) perform the task that we can thoroughly accept our role. The Other's demand for the hero's performance is itself a last hope, and may be read in two ways. First, we may see the individual as the *last* choice: no one else is available, which may be taken as an affront or as an opportunity to prove oneself a hero that has been previously unrecognised. Second, we may see the hero as the *first and only* choice: no one else is important or special enough, in which case the hero will perform and confirm an already-acknowledged heroism. The latter impression may be seen as facilitating identification with the ideal ego in the register of the real, but within the register of the imaginary the special status of the hero is significant as a basis for desirability, in that it points to a *particular* ego-ideal that is desired by the other. Lastly, while the hoped-for love from the other is at its most pronounced when the call is made (each time a character *states* how much the hero is needed) the player may see this desirability reinforced by the simple act of survival and may feel that even in failure one is loved, at least temporarily or partially, because *no one else* got so far. One may remain a hero, relative to other failures.

The distinctiveness of identification with ego-ideals, compared with identification with the ideal ego, is particularly revealing when we consider the dual coding of characters across narrative- and game macrostructures, as addressed in Chapter Five. We might restate this dual coding in terms of, on the one hand, the *representational* coding of characters for observation (primarily in narrative sequences), and, on the other hand, the *functional* coding of characters for ergodic purposes (primarily determining a character's effectiveness in combat). This can lead to two opposing attitudes towards the same character. For example, a player might find Wakka desirable because his physical appearance connotes physical strength, health and exoticism. However, Wakka's low hit points and un-masculine attack of throwing a blitzball may cue the player to reappraise him, or to experience a dual or ambivalent identification with him as an ideal ego and/or ego-ideal.

This problem is most clear when a player deliberately equips his/her character(s) with functionally inferior weapons because of an aesthetic preference, or abandons an aesthetic preference for the sake of functionality. In FFX, a player may choose to give Tidus a different name and/or may choose one weapon over another. For example, a player may choose Tidus' Liquid Steel blade over his Vigilante blade because the former *appears* more powerful. It is also conceivable that a player may prefer Tidus' Deathbringer blade to his Heartbreaker blade solely on the basis of the connotations of their respective names. Alternately, a player may

begrudgingly sacrifice Tidus' Liquid Steel blade for the sake of a better weapon, but may make the point of retaining the item in the inventory such that it retains its indexical relationship to Tidus. This problem is more pronounced in CRPGs which offer greater freedom to customise characters' clothing and weapons. In Daggerfall: The Elder Scrolls (1994), for example, a player may attire his/her character in black skin tights, leather armour and daggers because they conform to a particular ego-ideal: romantic connotations of night-time, thieves, assassins, the underworld and sneaky voyeurism. However, these items have lower statistics than other available items, such as banded armour and double-bladed weapons, in regards to their effect in the game. Players in video games, then, may approach or evaluate their characters in representational and/or functional terms, such that a character may be aesthetically desirable as an ego-ideal (attracting the desire of others) but functionally undesirable and therefore less effective as an ideal ego (it does not have the quantitative power to perform well in the game), or vice versa.

Ideally, and sometimes in practice, these two codes may (come to) coincide. Auron, as a legendary character in the narrative and a powerful character in the game initially offers players an ideal ego and ego-ideal, but as the game progresses he increasingly *lives up to* these ideals: he ends up with over 4000 hit points and inflicts 9999 or more damage with every hit. Indeed, the character's visual image and cognitive type may be seen not just as the *player's* ego-ideal, but also as the ideal of the game *character*, inasmuch as the character is developing towards the maximum statistics of its type. In practice, there may be no such "maximum" since the equipping and development of characters is usually a matter of balancing different choices: one cannot equip *all* the weapons or forms of armour at once, and even the most powerful weapons are incapable of *all* the possible effects of that character's weapons. Tidus' Celestial Weapon, the Caladbolg, when completely "unlocked," has Break Damage Limit, Triple Overdrive, Evade & Counter, and Magic Counter auto-abilities, and does damage relative to Tidus' hit points, but it will not confer every bonus nor allow *every* magic/status attack. Players may take the functional increase or maximum of damage as a basis for increased identification with the character as an ideal ego, as a relatively super-human figure. Also, players may revisit areas in the game world to better appreciate the enormous (relative) power of their characters. For example, the monsters in Besaid may be killed with a single stroke by characters who have travelled all the way to Zanarkand, developing their statistics all the way.

The disjunction between representational and functional coding may be minimised when players accept the aesthetic distinctiveness of game and narrative macrostructures. As was argued in Chapter Three, one way that players can regulate interest is by voluntarily changing frames when their interest is exhausted, and FFX has various means of allowing the player to shift between game and narrative macrostructures. Inasmuch as voluntarily frame-switching involves a level of meta-gaming, there may simply be a pragmatic “narcotising” (Eco, 1973, p. 23) of the semic codes relating to the previous macrostructure. That is, since the activity of a game macrostructure is usually unaffected by narrative traits and the player is positioned as the strategic agency, players may take for granted that psychological coherence does not extend to game macrostructures. While there may always be a sense of lack in the gap between ideal ego and ego-ideal, any frustration may be attenuated when frame-switching has been adequately achieved.

The disjunction between representational and functional coding may also be actively reconciled by a forced naturalisation of the unity of the ego-ideal through the player’s preservation of their investment and positive affect. For example, investment in Tidus may motivate players to narcotise schemata that logically contradict any positive valence towards him. So, as the narrative macrostructure of FFX unfolds, players may overlook Tidus’ emotional insecurity—most obviously his tendency to cry, which his father Jecht pokes fun at—as an unnecessary and unwanted addition to the schemata of “exceptional person,” which reinforces Tidus’ desirability as an ego-ideal. Furthermore, while players may see Tidus as functionally weak compared to Auron, who at the beginning of the game inflicts about ten times as much damage, they may perceive that: first, Tidus’ exceptional status as blitzball player makes him more capable of *becoming* a Guardian (like Auron) than “others”; and, second, being young, and the functional subject of the narrative, the whole point of the game is to enjoy Tidus *becoming* a Guardian. In short, he remains an ego-ideal by way of his potential desirability. This expectation is naturalised by hermeneutic codes of rite of passage, bildungsroman, the quest of the unexpected hero (discovering strength inside himself), and character development. However, such a favourable, ongoing investment is also eminently *practical*, given that the player must interact with and (partially) identify with Tidus for the duration of the game (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

### *Super-Egos: Shared Prohibitions*

The third form of identification with the *super-ego* occurs in the register of what Lacan calls the Symbolic and involves identification with not only the *demand* of the Other, but an acceptance of prohibition (and lack) as such. This occurs whenever we internalise “not only [a] prohibition but, more importantly, the point of address, the subject of enunciation of [that] prohibition” (Cowie, 1997, p. 96). That is, we internalise the voice and perspective of an authority that prohibits us. The acceptance of a prohibition is predicated upon the recognition that the prohibition is not imposed just upon ourselves but also upon the Other: it is not just a personal but a *social* prohibition in that we identify “one’s own lack, with the lack in the other” (Cowie, 1997, p. 97). The psychoanalytic model has traditionally elaborated upon this in terms of the Oedipal complex, in which the surrendering of the mother as love-object, and acceptance of the normality of this, marks one’s accession to the Law-of-the-Father.

There *etc.* of course, as many problems with the theory of the Oedipal complex as there are with the notion of gendered identification. Freud’s Oedipal complex reveals a Victorian sensibility by presuming that the individual grows up in a (petit-) bourgeois family; it naturalises the sexual division of the mother as nurturer and father as protector/competitor; it normalises the *phallus* and heterosexuality; it can be staged and resolved without direct confrontation with the father (just as the mirror stage need not require an actual mirror); and the Oedipal complex is now used less as a description of a psychological stage than as a metaphor for patriarchy’s symbolic division of gender.

Nonetheless, the Oedipal complex is so well known as a stereotype that even those without any salient experience of it may employ a hermeneutic macrostructure focused around parental conflict, the desire for love, and personal identity. In this respect, **FFX** offers an “Oedipal hermeneutic.” Jecht, the bullying father, continually criticises Tidus for his “crying,” which may be seen as a demand for his mother’s attention (see Figure 6.3). Jecht also competes with Tidus for his mother’s love and attention, most importantly in the sense that, when Jecht disappears, Tidus’ mother becomes even more remote. Consequently, Tidus hates his father, and struggles to surpass him in their shared sport of blitzball. While the bulk of the narrative follows Tidus’ tragic love for a new love-object, Yuna, and the replacement/extended family of the other Guardians, the narrative concludes with Tidus confronting and killing his father and dissipating. This not only reminds the player that both actually lived (and died) a millennium ago and are merely spirits (Aeons), it may suggest that

Tidus' desire for a new love-object was always-already a belated attempt to acknowledge and resolve a deeper feeling of rejection.

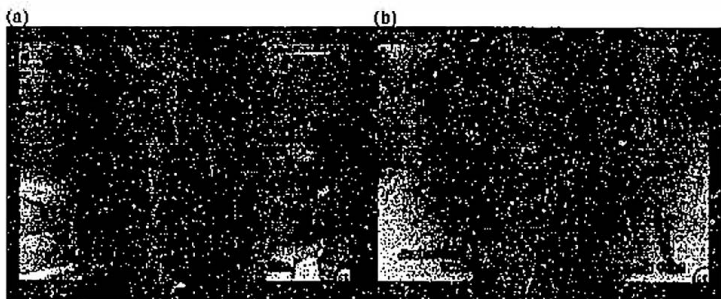


Figure 6.3. (a) Flashback to Tidus' with his mother ("If he dies, you'll never be able to tell him how much you hate him"). (b) Tidus' dream of Jecht at Besaid ("Gonna cry again? Cry, cry. That's the only thing you're good for!").

Tidus' Oedipal narrative is paralleled, and given additional significance, by Seymour's. Since Seymour not only possesses his mother in the form of the Aeon, Anima, but also killed his father, players may read his criminal actions in the narrative as stemming from his refusal of the Oedipal prohibition. Given Tidus' anger at his own father, and his bitterness at his own mother, Seymour becomes what Tidus *could* have been if he had not restrained his anger at his father and developed surrogate attachments to Yuna, the "family" of Guardians, and Spira. In fact, it is *because* Tidus accepts Spira as the highest order super-ego—a prohibition of his own desire for the sake of the "State"—that he is *allowed* to confront and murder his father. Jecht, having taken the form of Braska's Final Aeon, has become opposed to Spira, legitimating his murder. Tidus' patricide opens the door to defeating Yu Yevon, and thereby the banishment of all Aeons, including not only Sin, but the ghost of Zanarkand, Auron, and himself.

Players need not, of course, read FFX in terms of the Oedipal complex, since they are free to emphasise other hermeneutic codes, but the game makes a lot of sense when interpreted in such terms. Even if the player adopts a populist or critical rejection of Freud's pan-sexuality, familiarity with the Oedipal complex cues an expectation that Tidus will confront his (feelings about his) father, re-unite with his mother, and find a surrogate love-object, and that Seymour will pay for his patricide. It also provides a basis of surprise as the Oedipal drama unfolds in an unexpected manner.

In any case, identification with a superego operates in far more general terms than Oedipal prohibition. In practice, one can accept *any* prohibition out of fear, as a means for taking masochistic pleasure in being prohibited, or as a licence to prohibit others sadistically. The point is that we are more likely to *voluntarily* accede to the voice of authority if a respected person who embodies that authority has him/herself suffered and accepted the force of its prohibition. We might restate this by saying that positive figures of authority tend to act according to the authority they embody, whereas negative figures of authority tend to impose authority on others that they do not accept themselves.

Cowie (1997) illustrates this by recuperating Oedipal connotations, arguing that many figures of authority in cinema are represented as "castrated," as physically weak or crippled. The best example of this in FFX is Auron, who takes on the role of father-figure, dispenser of wisdom, and guide. Auron has legendary powers and is distinguished from the other characters as "old," at least in that (at 35), he is twice as old as other characters, has grey-streaks in his hair, and is blind in one eye (a classic psychoanalytic symbol of "castration"). He not only risks his life to go on the quest a second time, it is later revealed that he is an Aeon and will share Tidus' fate of dissipation. Moreover, he knew this all along, and so his voluntary aid is a surrendering of his own freedom (and pseudo-life) in the service of others, reinforcing his authority as the voice of a super-ego. Of course, when players learn that Auron fetched Tidus on Jecht's behalf they may feel that Auron mediates Jecht's voice and therefore stands-in for the father's prohibition. However, Jecht himself is cursed with the inhuman body of Sin, and Tidus eventually realises that Jecht risked his life on the previous quest to defeat Sin, and that the journey made him recognise his love for Tidus. (Auron relates this in Macalania Woods, though it is also revealed in the Spheres that Jecht used to record moments of his journey and which characters collect during the game).

Nonetheless, the operation of the superego in FFX principally may be seen in terms of the moral prohibition against surrendering to one's own desires in the face of doing one's public duty. We can see this in the figure of Belgemine, the Summoner who offers to help Yuna. Like Auron, players are likely to respect Belgemine for having been on the quest before, especially given her statement that someone who cannot defeat her "is not ready" to defeat Sin. She and all her Aeons must be defeated on three (or more) occasions before she gives up her Moon Sigil, required for Yuna to acquire her Celestial Weapon: Nirvana. It is only when this has occurred that she offers her full approval and sanction, and this may affect all three modes of identification. At the level of the ideal ego, players are offered the



narcissism of defeating a master and occupying her position. At the level of the ego-ideal, players may desire to please or impress her as deserving of the status of saviour of Spira, such that she confirms the player's desirability. At the level of the super-ego, players may see themselves as similarly risking (sacrificing) their own (virtual) lives for the common good of Spira. This may resonate with Yuna's selflessness in having already chosen to confront Sin, despite knowing that it will lead to her death.

The authority of public duty, as opposed to the Law-of-the-Father, is more explicit when Seymour asks Yuna to marry him for the sake of Spira's political stability and morale. At this point, Seymour and Yuna function as the authorised figures of the prohibitive force of public duty (others' needs before one's own), but this conflicts with Tidus' (and later Yuna's) private inner voice of romantic love (do what your heart tells you). When Seymour is revealed as a *false* image of authority (having, in true Oedipal style, murdered his own father), his image is separated from the voice of duty. However, the hope that the authority of romantic love may win out is undermined by the recognition that Tidus is an Aeon, fated to disappear when Sin is destroyed. Here the discourse of the real encodes the authority of the prohibition: since it is not (meta-) physically *possible* for Tidus and Yuna to stay together, the prohibition of one's desires in service of the state seems to be a part of the tragic reality of the story, or the tragic nature of life.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided support for Bordwell's (1986, pp. 30-31) argument that psychoanalysis may complement cognitive accounts. In video games with extended narrative macrostructures like *HFX*, many familiar psychoanalytic processes may be analysed, and psychoanalytic models of identification suggest some interesting dynamics between players and characters in video games in general. Chapter Seven will extend the discussion of the super-ego by analysing how taboos function as a basis for anxiety and fear in *EFX* and how the representations of a character's self-imposed restraint may function as a basis for sadness. Chapter Eight will consider the appropriateness of psychoanalytic models in accounting for players' aesthetic responses to the play situation. Here it suffices to make the broader assertion that the multiplicity of identifications evident in the psychoanalytic model undermines simplistic assumptions that identification in video games *in general* is more or less effective or complex than that of other media. The modes of identification discussed above regulate players' varying levels of investment in characters.

However, the psychoanalytic tradition is not a viable *basis* for an account of gameplay. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, viewing is a non-gendered process that has the broad, non-sexual function of acquiring information that viewers use to make conscious inferences about what they are watching. In addition, the cognitive identification of characters, addressed in the last chapter, often occurs prior to identification *with* them; and that a character has identified with a character as an ideal ego, ego-ideal, or super-ego only explains part of a player's relationship to that character. It may sometimes be useful to emphasise these types of identification, and/or to see some situations as activating, or resonating with, a character's unconscious fears. However, the normal range of emotional responses in Frijda's (1986) model owes to homeostatic responses to situations that cannot be reduced to psychoanalytic terms. Just as not every long, hard object is phallic, not all fear is fear of castration. Generally, fear is an action tendency to avoid the threat of harm. The psychoanalytic model's emphasis on repressed trauma and/or desire in a broad sense therefore is insensitive to the rich affective life of individuals in everyday life and to the emotional dynamics of gameplay. The next chapter pays closer attention to the dynamics of players' emotional responses, arguing that players' emotions result, not from identity between the player and a character, or the desire for such an identity; rather, players' emotional responses are premised upon their distance and difference from characters.

## Chapter Seven – Character Empathy

"Empathy" is often understood as the projection of oneself into another's emotional and conceptual perspective. The modern term can be traced to Johann Gottfried Herder's German term "*Einfühlen*," which was later developed by R. H. Lotze, and roughly translates as "to feel into" or "to feel within." It is supposed that Herder's concept entered Anglo-American psychology in the work of Dilthey and Lipps, and E. B. Titchener (Meares, 1992), but other theorists like Kohut (1971, 1977) elaborated upon the concept, which now occupies an important theoretical and practical role in the clinical process. Two aspects of the present understanding of empathy are of particular pertinence. First, empathy is not a simple or single process, but an aggregate one with separable affective and cognitive dimensions (Berger, 1982; Davis, 1980; Richendoller & Weaver, 1994; Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim, & Sleight, 1988). Second, we are capable of empathising with people with whom we have little or no sense of identity; indeed, even when identification exists, the motives and emotional state of an empathiser are often different from that of the person being empathised with (Basch, 1983; Kohut, 1977).

This understanding is reflected in Grodal's (1997) and Tan's (1997) analyses of viewer's empathy towards characters in feature films, which this chapter uses as a basis for addressing empathetic emotions directed towards characters in *FFX*. It begins by addressing empathy's affective dimensions in terms of unlearned stimulus and nonverbal expressions. It then addresses empathy's cognitive dimensions in terms of situational contexts, emphasising the disparity between the emotions of players and characters. It argues that while *FFX* may elicit a range of emotions, such as happiness, anger and fear, the game may be characterised by a mood of sadness linked to a dominant hermeneutic code of tragedy. The chapter concludes by considering how empathy is reinforced by players' investment in, and moral allegiance with, characters, but may be blocked by impressions of inhumanity and personal distress.

### Affective Dimensions of Empathy

The affective dimension of empathy is usually seen in negative terms, in the sense that we feel "sensitivity to the misfortune of others and feelings of compassion for their plight at seeing their pain, ill-treatment, loneliness, crying and helplessness" (Tamborini, 1996, p. 111). This sensitivity to affects of fear and distress has been referred to as "sympathy" (Bennet,

1979) or "sympathetic arousal" (Hoffman, 1977). For Grodal (1997), "empathy has a genetic basis caused by the clear survival-value of social bonding resulting from emotional ties" (p. 94), in that it motivates the defense of another and the subsequent formation, preservation, and consolidation of sociality (Izard, 1991, p. 395).

However, stimuli related to mating- or rearing-behaviour, which similarly serve a social purpose, may produce positive arousal that motivates or reinforces action tendencies of seeking intimacy, care and protection. In acknowledging both negative and positive sympathetic arousal, it is useful to turn to what Frijda (1986) calls "unlearned emotional stimuli" (p. 162), which Tan (1997) discusses in terms of "innate releasers" (p. 160). These are unlearned types that have an adaptive or survival value for the species by causing the automatic attribution of intentions to another, and an action tendency towards them. Movement, attractiveness, and vulnerability are three dominant groups of innate releasers cued by visual representations of fictional characters, including those in FFX.

### *Movement*

Grodal (1998, p. 87) points to research (Perret, Harries, Mistlin & Chitty, 1990) which suggests that there is a neurological sensitivity to the perception of living beings, cued principally in terms of their moving forwards, or moving their arms away from, their body (as opposed to moving backwards and moving their arms towards the body, which cues a less marked cognitive and affective response). Consequently, if a fictional character in a film or video game begins moving, players automatically perceive this movement as more important than other movement in one's immediate field of vision, in that the movement may be *intentional*, and the player (or character) may be the (threatened) object of this intention. The animation of most figures in FFX, especially in cut-scenes, may be seen as especially fascinating because of the smooth precision of the movement, derived from vectors on actors in body suits. The reality-status of this movement conflicts with the lower reality-status of crude graphical textures and cartoon-like faces, which may give it additional salience.

Innate releasers of movement may be seen as having the general function of reinforcing the readerly practice whereby the activity of a narrative is seen as a consequence of the actions of individual characters (Bordwell, 1986; Tan, 1997). However, they apply in a more obvious way to kinesthetic game macrostructures, especially first person shooters (FPSs) of the Doom (1994) mould, in which reflexive attention to movement is part of the

aesthetic. In FPSs, play is polarised around rapid-fire evaluation of the sudden movement of fictional characters (or monsters) according to basic affordances of fight/flight, the prior state of arousal being especially determined by the player's current level of health and amount of ammunition. Indeed, a state of high arousal cued by the game (and this arousal in many cases being central to the game's aesthetic) usually means that *any* movement (be it non-human or non-living in origin) will be perceived as the motivated (threatening) movement of an opponent. In games based on horror movies, such as Aliens vs Predator (1999), any sudden movement (such as the sudden hissing of gas escaping a broken pipe) may be sufficient stimulus for players to automatically presume it to be the intentional movement of a goal-directed being and move or fire, revealing their character's position and wasting ammunition. The same holds for games with tactical or hostage-rescue scenarios, such as Counterstrike (2000), in that players must inhibit this innate response to the sudden appearance of a living being so that they do not act counter to their goal of protecting civilians.

Since the combat game macrostructures in FFX operate on a turn-based system, in which the player can enter non-diegetic time while selecting a menu option, player responses are rarely time-pressured in this way. Nonetheless, the Chocobo Eater encountered on the Mi'ihen Highroad, is notable not just because of its oversized mouth but its enormous arms, wide-open and held apart from the body in a pose of threat. This threat is made manifest during its Charge attack, which push the player's characters back until, after three successive charges, they are pushed off a cliff. However, since the player can only control his/her characters when their turn arrives, and the Chocobo Eater's charge is only an occasional attack, the innate releaser functions less to cue an immediate response than as a background of arousal: during the delays between the charge attacks, and when the player chooses an option, the potential danger is manifested as suspense in the game macrostructure.

The animation of the slowly grasping hands of Iron Giants and the jerky movements of Ochu tentacles similarly cue an affective alertness: a sense of dangerous proximity, intention and/or capability. However, the perceived danger in these cases has a less pronounced relationship to the danger actually posed to characters during battle, since these monsters are less powerful and/or characters develop their powers until these monsters pose (almost) no threat. When characters come to kill such monsters easily and routinely, such that they become a reliable source of experience and items, this animation may function like the non-threatening tentacles of a sea-anemone, cuing a kind of hypnotic interest in ceaseless movement without (apparent) purpose or danger. That is, on the one hand, there is a recurring

and highly-valenced innate releaser of ceaseless movement, cuing interest and anxiety about intention. On the other hand, players have a cognitive evaluation that the movement is automatic or non-intentional and that they are safe. This tension between cognitive and emotional evaluations may incite a self-amplifying cycle that may cue excessive excitement: a kind of suspense without structure or closure in which players feel a creepy awareness of danger until the movement is withdrawn.

The perception of movement is significantly affected by the *size* of the moving being, both because the mass of the movement itself is a more prominent stimulus and because the correlation of size and intention poses greater potential danger. Relatively large beings, then, are likely to cue avoidance or hesitation. The initial appearance of such enormous opponents as Geogeano, the Chocobo Eater, Sinspawn Gui, the Omega Weapon, Sin and Braska's Final Aeon requires a moment's pause and cognitive evaluation to overcome the initial uncertainty and anxiety about the threat posed. Indeed, given that many of the larger opponents central to the narrative macrostructure are inescapable, one is precisely forced to act against the action tendency to flee.

It might be presumed, then, that small subjects simply cue less arousal. However, in the context of a game-macrostructure, the secondary appraisal of small monsters, like Bite Bugs, Funguar and Killer Bees, involves a cognitive evaluation of a low reward for the expense of time and effort: an unproductive interruption of either the narrative macrostructure or rewarding game encounters. This sudden (cognitive) anticipation of wasted energy may elicit anger, and likely will be aggravated by the helplessness of the player to over-ride the minimal time required to deal with it. This recognition may become so routine that the player is primed for small size as a cue for an anticipated, and anticipatory, negative arousal, the degree of which is relative to the interest invested in the macrostructure that is interrupted.

Innate releasers of movement may also operate in another way, in that empathy may be traced back to genetic cues for co-ordinated group fight/flight activity, or "motor empathy" (Michotte, 1948/1991), in which one imitates the movements of another. This can be seen in animals, in which aggression, retreat, or a change of direction in a group cues other individuals in that group to respond similarly. It is also obvious in a minimal sense in video games when there are parallel movements between characters and players. As Poole (2002) observes, part of the pleasure of interaction comes "through a joyously exaggerated sense of control, or amplification of input" (p. 148) focused around movement, as when one

accelerates or turns a corner in a virtual car. However, while the Chocobo races in FFX offer something of this amplification, the characters of the game offer no dynamic and responsive amplification of player movement. Direct control is limited to a single-speed navigation of Tidus across a 3D landscape, or menu-options, such as when one pauses to consider and select an attack type, and Tidus subsequently leaps into a sword attack.

### ***Attractiveness/unattractiveness***

Physical attractiveness is a dominant innate releaser which gives rise to an action tendency to seek and/or maintain proximity/intimacy. To a large extent, beauty is equated with average or similar facial and body forms within a population (Langlois & Roggman, 1990; Light, Hollander & Kayra-Stuart, 1981) and its appearance may involve the release of opioids which promote a positive state and motivate mating behaviour. Of course, since what one finds attractive is also determined by the imprinting of primary caregivers (Schoer, 1994), and innate releasers for beauty are often stimuli learned from personal experience and cultural types (Carello, Grosotsky, Shaw, Pittenger & Mark, 1989), referring to them as "innate" does not mean that they are genetic, merely archaic and/or habituated.

In many anime-style television shows and movies, Japanese people are represented as wide-eyed and white-skinned, such that some Europeans mistake them as European (Herz, 1997). It is here significant that FFX is the first Final Fantasy title with such resolution and realism that Tidus' and the other characters' epicanthic folds are signs of racial difference for European players. However, these racial markers are only evident in the highest-quality FMV sequences, and since the realism of the clean-skinned physical beauty and health of the characters is coupled with (epicanthic folds notwithstanding) wide-eyed, youthful vulnerability, it can generally be expected a minimally positive primary appraisal, and action tendencies of protectiveness and seeking intimacy, in players of both European and Oriental race/ethnicity.

Innate releasers of physical attractiveness include genetic sensitivity to secondary sexual characteristics. Many video games deliberately over-emphasise these characteristics to the point of physical impossibility: Lara Croft's thin, pinch-waisted and top-heavy deformity is the classic example of the hyper-female; muscle-bound mesomorphs like Rastan, Hercules, and Duke Nukem are representative of the hyper-male. In FFX, the emphasis does not reach the point of unrealistic deformity, but Yuna and Lulu have pronounced breasts and hips, and Tidus, Wakka and Kimahri have broad shoulders, deep chests (especially Kimahri) and high-

muscle tone. These characteristics are often emphasised by optical perspective, in the sense of breast, chest and hip shots, and clothes which either reveal more than everyday clothing (Lulu's cleavage and dress and Yuna's upper arms) or hide it in such a way that imitates the smoothness of skin (Yuna's near-skin-white tunic and Rikku's tight leather top). For Occidental players, the main characters' innate releasers of physical attractiveness and sexual characteristics are likely to exceed racial traits.

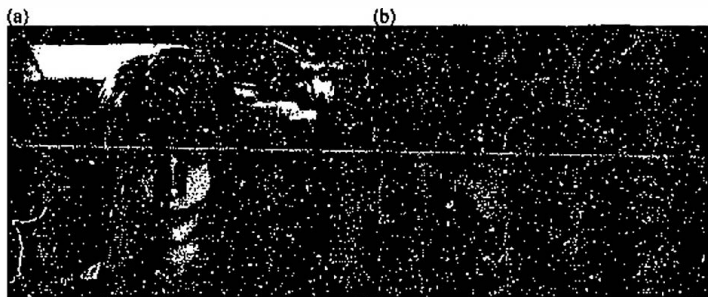


Figure 7.1. (a) Yuna's epicanthic folds are clearly visible within the high-resolution cut-scenes. (b) Lulu's customarily exposed cleavage.

If epicanthic folds give pause to some Occidental players in their evaluation of a character's likeness and desirability, this is because *abnormal, unattractive* forms often produce negative arousal, and in extreme cases lead to action tendencies of avoidance, sometimes reinforced by affects of disgust (see Carroll, 1990). As Tan (1997) notes:

Antagonists . . . [are often] characterized by means of innate releasers of aversion and fear. These include such things as a slight deformity, a rasping voice, a perpetual expression of anger, or—less commonly perhaps—a remote physical resemblance to animals that generally call up a reaction of fear, such as rats, snakes, and scorpions. (p. 162)

In other words, innate releasers of extreme (sudden or massive) movement and unattractiveness inherent in the enormous, insectile, deformed and other qualities of most monsters cue action tendencies of fight/flight or avoidance which oppose empathy and sympathy. Notably, players may have some reserve towards Seymour because of the blue veins on his face, and his indeterminate character traiting. This cues uncertainty as to whether he expresses casual, youthful irreverence combined with duty, or devious, arrogant design.

When strong enough, these cues may give rise to a reflexive and energetic attempt to remove the offending object. However, while many of the monsters in FFX are abnormal,



they are also unrealistic, drawing from stereotypical types in European and Japanese mythology, fantasy, science fiction and horror. Consequently, the insectile qualities of a Varuna, the gastropod form of a Marlboro, the deformity of an Ochu, or the hybridity of a Chimera Brain, primarily cue an interest in monstrosity as a marvellous spectacle. Nonetheless, a genuinely abnormal form with sufficient reality-status may coincide with a prior state of high arousal and sense of threat. This might include the appearance of Anima (see Figure 7.2a), the oddly deformed Sin (see Figure 7.2b), or Yunalesca's hideous, giant head, with its lolling red tongue and Hellbite attacks. No doubt innate releasers which do not have a corresponding effect in the game macrostructure may be suppressed as irrelevant, but these releasers may produce or reinforce a global, generalised (virtual) fight/flight response ("I don't want to fight this thing! Flee!"), or even a minimal pause (sensorimotor paralysis) if the player is unable to find immediate cognitive closure in its attempt to accommodate the form ("What *is* this thing?"). However, this last instance may be no more significant than the pause of reflection when we wonder if Disney's Goofy is a horse or a dog.

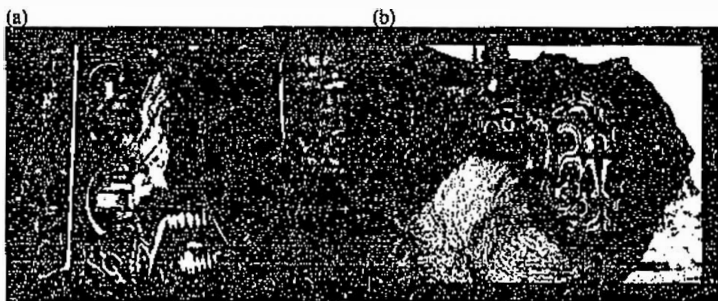


Figure 7.2. (a) Anima and (b) Sin.

### *Vulnerability*

Vulnerability, perceived in terms of megaloccephaly, overlarge/widened eyes and sensorimotor clumsiness, is another dominant innate releaser, and cues action tendencies of sympathy and protection which may be seen in evolutionary terms as linked to parental and mating behaviour (Alley, 1983, 1986; Brooks & Hochberg, 1960). Many video game characters are "cute" as a consequence of their overlarge eyes and heads, small, child-like bodies (see Poole, 2000, pp. 139-142; 151-152), and movement characterised by a seeming clumsy, sensorimotor retardation. Poole (2000, p. 140) notes that the small bodies and big heads in earlier games was a consequence of the technological limit on the available number of pixels onscreen, in that by reducing the size of the body, programmer's maximised screen

space. Yet megaloccephaly persists despite technological advances. In many respects, the Final Fantasy series has always conformed to the cute Japanese anime style, as is most evident in the cartoon exaggeration of the female form in Sailor Moon (2000) and of the male form in Dragonball Z (2001). In FFX, these innate releasers are evident in the cartoon portraits of the characters in the character screens, in Lulu's "Moggie"—which is, after all, a toy bear—as well as the youthfulness and wide-eyed naïveté of Tidus, Yuna, Rikku, and the villagers of Spira (see Figure 7.3a). The coding of such characters as cute or vulnerable means that they may function as “safe” transitional objects (Winnicott, 1971), that is, a familiar, non-threatening point of identification for children. Indeed, since, as Poole (2002) suggests, “large heads and limitless curiosity remind us of children” (p. 150), in marketing terms they may provide an idea of what is safe and suitable for children for parents as consumers. Given the popular anxiety about the influence of video games, it may be presumed that parents who know nothing of a game's content are more likely to purchase a cartoon-style game over a realistic one.

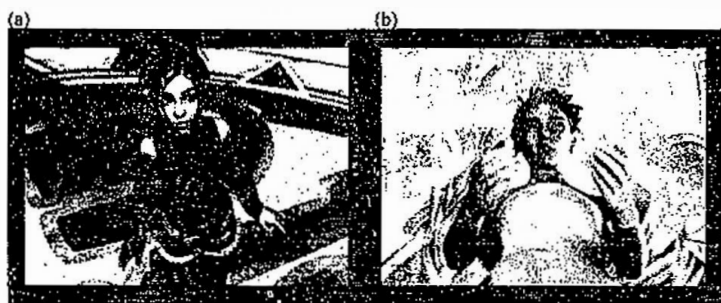


Figure 7.3. Innate releasers of vulnerability: (a) Rikku as startled child and (b) Yuna's entreaty as she falls from the tower at Bevelle.

Innate releasers of infantile or child-like vulnerability—large eyes, clear skin, innocence, and naïveté—are often seen as feminine. That is, if we bypass the issue of the genetic origins of the correlation between them, feminine features are coded in terms of these innate releasers. Furthermore, in video games, irrespective of their physical representation (as children, princesses, and/or virgins), female characters are often represented as victims in situations which require the performance of actions of sympathy/protection associated with vulnerability, irrespective of whether this is experienced as an (emotionally motivated) action tendency. This was more pronounced in early, rudimentary video games in which the princess or maiden was kidnapped and needed to be rescued, such as Donkey Kong (1981). However, it persists in games like FFX, in which Yuna (despite being the “saviour” of Spira) requires an

entire complement of Guardians, some (Auron and Kimahri) dutifully parental, others (Wakka and Lulu) like protective elder siblings, and still others (Tidus and Seymour) potential mates. Despite this protection, she is kidnapped, and must be rescued (see Figure 7.3b). Of course, Yuna's role as saviour is related to her holy purity—her sacred quest requires that she *remain* holy—and this holiness is coded in terms of child-like or feminine innocence and asexuality. She becomes more like the figure of Tripitaka in *Monkey* (1978): her sexual innocence becomes the virtue that must be protected, whereby one's own desire is an internal warning of a potential external threat, and its repression a sign of one's purity relative to those who threaten her.

Traits of vulnerability are also evident in Tidus, whose prettiness, high-pitched voice, slight physique (compared with the other males), and tendency to cry, trait him as both child-like and feminine. Tidus' bravado—evident in his desire to become a Guardian and such plucky but nervous comments as: "See you next time!" when he retreats from battle—may be seen as either/both a manifestation of his childish high-spirits and naïveté, and/or as the bluff of a tiger cub baring its claws. The player, then, may be cued to take on a protective relationship to Tidus, even if this relationship will be undermined as his character develops and he functions more effectively in combat.

### *Facial and other non-verbal expressions*

Facial expressions may be seen at a basic level as more specific forms of innate-releasers, in that humans not only possess a universal set of facial expressions—Frijda (1986) includes happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, anger, disgust/contempt, and attention—the face is the primary site in which affect is experienced and communicated (Darwin, 1900/1965; Ekman, 1973; Ekman, Friesen & Ellsworth, 1972; Ekman & Rosenberg, 1997; Frijda, 1986; Tomkins, 1976). Facial expressions are a primary way in which visual texts make the emotional states of characters accessible, and may be seen as a significant basis for "emotional contagion" (Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim & Sleight, 1988), which refers to the process whereby individuals involuntarily imitate or adopt the emotions of someone being observed.

Digital technologies are, of course, opening up channels of access to interior states found in other forms of communication, and PS2's so-called "emotion engine" allows for quite clear facial expressions during narrative sequences (see Figure 7.4a). However,

historically speaking, video games have been too limited to provide detailed facial expressions readily mapped onto basic affective states. In *FFX*, the facial expressions we often see are as poorly timed as the lip-synch in a badly dubbed Martial Arts film, and in the low-resolution cut-scenes and in-game cut-scenes and sequences, expressions are static and pixelated. Even in the high-resolution cut-scenes there is a blankness which underlies the facial expressions, given the limited ability to perceive minimal eye and muscle movements. It might be presumed, then, that video game characters are incapable of activating some affective dimensions of empathetic behaviour through the display of character emotion.

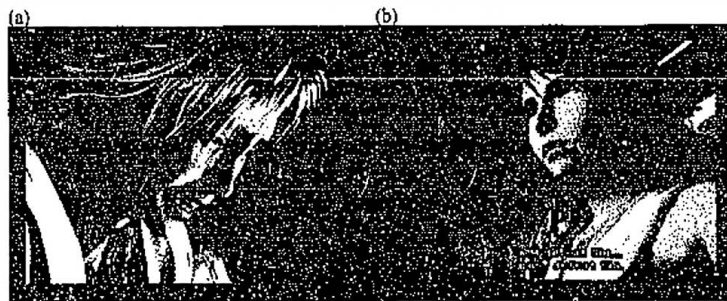


Figure 7.4. (a) Tidus' anguish when confronting his father near the end of the game. (b) Yuna's blank expression in the game engine ("I will defeat Sin . . . I must defeat Sin").

Several arguments can be made against this presumption. While players may sometimes read the blank, jerky, or rigid expressions of characters as non-diegetic signs of *FFX*'s limited graphical engine, such expressions can be interpreted in diegetic terms. Players might perceive blankness as disinterest, which may be true enough in the case of Auron, who, having previously completed the quest to defeat Sin with Braska, may be relatively bored (he usually limits himself to occasional grunts of effort when fighting unexpectedly powerful monsters). Players might also interpret blankness as unhappiness or depression. This would seem to describe Yuna, who Tidus occasionally watches stare inscrutably into space, eventually realising that she expects to die and is saying goodbye to each place. Consequently, her blankness may also be read as sadness and depression. In other instances, however, her blankness may sometimes be read as a form of quiet determination (see Figure 7.4b). Indeed, players may *generally* read jerky or rigid expressiveness as a sign of anxiety or repressed emotion. For example, players might see Tidus' blankness in relation to his high-pitched voice and infer nervous tension (as when he offers a scratchy "Hi!" upon reuniting with his father). However, sometimes the jerky animation of all expressions from a state of underlying blankness has a creepy quality, as if a ghost were using its fingers to move a dead person's

face into a smile or frown, creating an impression of inhumanity or pathological instability. This kind of impression is likely to be appropriate in the case of Seymour, who progressively reveals his deranged nature.

It also is obvious that video games have developed conventions for expressing emotional states in the absence of facial expressions. Within computer-mediated communication, it has been argued that "emoticons" such as :) and :( within the ASCII character set compensate for absent channels and allow for the formation of genuine emotional relationships and community (Baym, 1995; Beaubien, 1996; Danet, 1998; Kolko, 1998; McRae, 1997; Reid, 1994; Stone, 1995). The same can be said of the symbolic signs derived from cartoons, for example, the use of a light bulb to express an idea, an exclamation mark to express surprise, and wavy lines to represent anger (McCloud, 1990). In FFX, this kind of convention exists through the use of an exclamation mark to signal when something has been stolen from a character within the Battle Screen.

Such expressiveness is more clearly compensated for by emphasised and/or stylised nonverbal gestures. In FF7, gestures are clearly over-emphasised: when Cloud is depressed, frustrated or ashamed his entire upper body flops forward and his arms hang free; when Barret is embarrassed he drags and kicks his feet; when Cait Sith is happy he jumps up and down with flapping feet; and when Tifa is embarrassed at having been seen with Cloud, she runs into a corner and covers her face with her hands. When signs and nonverbal over-emphasis become familiar enough, they may activate networks of association associated with affect, much like un-mediated expressions, and may therefore be sufficient to produce emotional contagion. Of course, when seen out of context, the above kinds of expressions are readily perceived as not only excessive, but absurd or comical. This is exploited in FF9, when the exaggerated gestures of Captain Albeit Steiner complement his bumbling antics, running back and forth through Lindblum castle, punctuated by his clanking armour, creating the caricature of a frustrated egotist.

In any case, compared with earlier games in which the face is a fixed sprite or has no movement, FFX presents more realistic expressions, and its relatively pronounced graphical expressiveness defines a change in the experience of empathy. As Bela Belasz (1952/1999) has argued in relation to film, the tiniest facial movement reveal internal drama, and the microcosmic details of facial movement seen in close-up provides for an emotional intensity that is not dependant upon the rest of the body or any context. An entire emotional exchange

can be conveyed simply by cutting between different faces, devoid of body gesture or an informing narrative frame. FFX's capacity to create extremely minor facial movements provides for explicit revelations of inner life, a real-time, suspensive fascination with how the character's emotional state will be expressed and resolved.

However, facial expressions are easily (and routinely) misperceived without knowledge of the context (Ekman, 1977). Consequently, expression must be linked to the cognitive evaluation of the context in which it occurs. Indeed, the face does not usually simply *communicate* basic affects, nor is it necessarily an object of fascination in itself. A face may function as a marker or index, pointing to an object, or, like focalisation, may simply define relationships within a dramatic situation, in the sense of partaking of a network of signification or causation (see Deleuze, 1986, 1988). In considering the actual emotional response of the viewer, then, it is not possible to rely upon the innate releasers, and facial or other nonverbal expressions, which constitute primary appraisal. Since true emotions in Frijda's (1986) model require secondary appraisal, it is necessary to address the cognitive dimensions of empathy.

### **Cognitive Dimensions of Empathy**

Empathetic emotions, as opposed to "sympathetic arousal," require secondary appraisal, or cognitive evaluation, of another's mental, physical and emotional state (Coke, Batson & McDavis, 1978; Feshbach, 1975; Grodal, 1998; Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim & Sleight, 1988; Tan, 1997). However, it is useful to distinguish between empathy and empathetic emotions. Tan (1997) defines "empathy" as "all the *cognitive operations* on the part of the viewer that lead to a more complete understanding of the situational meaning for the character [*italics added*]" (p. 172). This includes processes of cognitive identification and may be linked to accounts of the ability to "imaginatively" inhabit the minds or perspectives of others, otherwise known as "perspective taking" (Coke, Batson, McDavis, 1978; Davis, 1980, 1983; Deutsch & Madle, 1975; Dymond, 1949; Feshbach, 1975; Krebs, 1975; Mead, 1934/1972).

By contrast, "empathetic emotions" are "characterized by the fact that the situational meaning structure of the situation for the character *is part of the meaning for the viewer* [*italics added*]" (Tan, 1997, p. 174). That is, both character and viewer *share*, and have an emotional response to, some of the *same* concerns (though, again, the character's and viewer's

understanding of, and emotional response to, these may differ). This may be linked to "fictional involvement," in which one emotionally projects oneself into the feelings and actions of others (Stotland, Mathews, Chernman, Hansson, & Richardson, 1978).

There is a general reason why the cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy may act in concert with one another. As Grodal (1997) argues:

The mental apparatus is primarily developed as a tool for implementing the preferences of the subject. The senses safeguard us against danger and register possible objectives, such as food or mating, which are then transformed into plans and goals and carried out by the motor system. There will therefore be a very strong relationship between motivation and cognitive activities. If a given preference finds its way into the consciousness, the consciousness will immediately begin to seek scripts for implementing that preference. Conversely, cognitive scripts will activate the corresponding emotions and preferences if these are previously known by the subject. (p. 93)

According to this model, the most minimal or general cognitive identification of a character as a protagonist with a goal may be sufficient to define preferences that a viewer may take up. This creates a figure-ground relation in the sense that the world and its objects only become significant in terms of their significance for the fictional being. However, the migration of a character's preference into the player's own preference-seeking system "will very often be the consequence of a prolonged cognitive identification" (p. 93), because of the close relationship between cognition, emotion and motivation. In *FFX*, characters offer persistent points of identification for the ninety or more hours of play, and have complex and developing backstories. This, and the corresponding effort of typing of characters discussed in Chapter Four, constitutes not only the cognitive component of empathy, but also an investment which provides the basis for a tonic attitude of interest in, and sympathy for, characters.

However, the distinction between empathy and empathetic emotions remains important because the cognitive work of empathy may sometimes be devoid of the feeling which laypersons might associate with the word. As Kohut (1977) and Basch (1983) have argued, while there is a clear survival or adaptive value in being able to evaluate another's intentions and emotional state (or "perspective") as a basis for determining our interaction with them, the cognitive component of empathy is value-free. Basch (1983) observes:

Much of the time we are empathically attuned to the affective states of others primarily to fulfill our own needs and to spare ourselves pain . . . some of the world's greatest scoundrels have been exquisitely and unerringly attuned to grasping the significance of the unconscious and unspoken affective

communications of others and have used that knowledge to achieve base aims.  
(pp. 119-120)

In short, we may empathise with another without sympathising with them; or, rather, we may have cognitive empathy (understanding) of another's mental/physical state while remaining sympathetic to our own needs. In fact, the understanding of another, and a manipulative attitude, may give rise to negative empathetic emotions of superiority and contempt.

Even when we *are* sympathetic to the plight of the other, and understand the key determinants which govern a character's internal state and behaviour, empathy is premised upon *limited* identification of another character's internal state. Most of the empathetic emotions experienced in fiction depend upon the difference in situation between the person empathising and the person with whom they are empathising. As is evident from Tan's (1997) and Grodal's (1997) accounts, the viewer takes an observational attitude such that instead of feeling the same emotion as a character, such as fear, we may feel a witness emotion, such as suspense. In video games, we may also feel witness emotions, but the player's emotional response will also be affected by their position as player.

Since the player's position as a player is addressed in Chapter Eight, the following focuses on witness emotions in *FEFX*. However, even witness emotions may be experienced from the perspective of the self ("imagine-self" empathy) or from the perspective of another ("imagine-other" empathy) (Davis, Hull, Young & Warren, 1987; Hoffman, 1982; Stotland, Mathews, Sherman, Hansson & Richardson, 1978). McCloud (1993) argues that a simple visual representation provides more space to project one's self. That is, unlike a realistic face, a blank face does not present us with differences which mark an Other and so provides fewer blocks for projection. By way of parallel it can be argued that the more generic a *situation* the greater the opportunity there is for the individual to draw upon his/her own experiences and traits in defining the significance of that situation, and in hypothesising possible affordances and outcomes. As Tan (1997) argues, the mere *mention* of a character type, such as "racist dictator," may elicit an emotional response; the same may be said of typed *situation*, such as Tan's "thematic structures." As is evident in Carroll's (1990) account of the emotions experienced by film viewers, one may feel anger at the very *idea* of something, for example, a "selfish person about to realise the consequences of selfishness," or of a "villain getting away with villainy." That is, the more general a situation the more we may simulate it from our own perspective, recruiting concrete content from our own experience, promoting imagine-self empathy.



Of course, situations may be described with concrete detail, such as "a child putting up poster of lost dog (who is dead)," or "a wife about to discover her husband has left her (on her birthday)." These situations may, by virtue of their specificity, add salience to the type, increasing its reality status, and thereby its poignancy. Indeed, the more particular the situational type, and the more particular the traiting of characters in the type, the more one is inclined to evaluate the situation on behalf of one of the characters, and the greater the likelihood of imagine-other empathy. That is, the increasing particularity of a situation may complement psychological verisimilitude and facilitate increased interest in both what happens to characters and in how characters evaluate and experience what happens to them.

Tan (1997), it should be noted, makes the competing argument that the complex, individuated appraisal of a character encourages an imagine-self attitude. For him, this is because the self "displays a similarly complex and flexible organisation" (p. 187) and in such cases "there are so few schemas available that support the elaboration and organization of the information provided by the film" (p. 188). That is, the complexity of the character suggests that the actions in the narrative world will be as complex as those in real life, and will not conform to any simple narrative schemata; consequently, the viewer is encouraged or required use his/her own inferential capacity on behalf of the character to entertain future possibilities. In the absence of empirical confirmation of Tan's (1997) account it suffices to suggest that a concrete situation may have salience *either* because we identify with the particularity of the situation from the perspective of a character (imagine-other empathy), or because the complexity of the situation resonates with the complexity of *our* reality, and thereby cues our (simulated) responsiveness to the situation (imagine-self empathy).

### *Empathetic Emotions and Situational Contexts*

Just as interest is the basic emotion that operates during film viewing and video gameplay, Tan (1997) argues that "sympathy" may be the basic empathetic emotion, polarising viewer interest in favour of a protagonist overcoming a complication. Sympathy is characterised by a sense of equality and reciprocity, and its action tendency "may be an inclination to seek proximity and intimacy, a sharing of thoughts and feelings, and a sense of cherishing and being cherished" (p. 178). This usually involves a character being weaker than an opponent but relatively equal to a player, and its action tendency is seeking intimacy, giving and receiving, and sharing.

Tan (1997) places sympathy between "admiration" and "compassion." For him, admiration usually involves the admired character being perceived as superior, at least in regards to the particular quality being admired. This superiority may elicit action tendencies involving the seeking of proximity, receiving and giving (p. 180), but it is premised upon a certain distance between oneself and the desired character. The implicit distance involved in admiration makes difficult the giving and receiving which characterises sympathy; indeed, it may involve us seeking to prolong complications so that characters can continue to perform their admirable qualities for our benefit. With compassion, the character becomes inferior to the player, if only in terms of their relative vulnerability, and the action tendency is one of protection, helping and/or consolation: "a form of giving, a willingness to go more deeply into the unpleasant significance of the situation, to seek hope and grounds for defence or resignation" (p. 180).

Innate releasers of attractiveness and vulnerability predispose one to sympathy, admiration and compassion in that they elicit reflexive action tendencies of seeking proximity/intimacy, seeking sexual engagement, and protectiveness. This not only creates a desire for continued (phatic) contact, either in the form of witnessing them onscreen or controlling them through the interface, it reinforces partial identification with them as ego ideals. However, what especially promotes empathy is our expectation that a narrative will reward the protagonist. The misfortunes of the protagonists are unwelcome (and the misfortunes of the antagonists are welcome) precisely because they do not reward our prior investment in their wellbeing. It is, in short, in our interest to sympathise with the protagonist's interests.

In defining the key components of a situation, and how it guides empathetic emotions, Tan (1997) argues that:

To [the three major empathetic emotions: sympathy, admiration and compassion] may be added others, such as gratitude, anger, envy, contempt, and embarrassment. These often complement the first three, forming a response to attendant features of the situation that evoke sympathy, compassion, or admiration. The fate of the protagonist is, as we know, bound up with the actions of the other characters. When the protagonist reaches his goal, this delights the viewers; when that goal is attained thanks to someone else, they feel gratitude as well. (p. 181)

This constitutes the extent of Tan's discussion of more complex empathetic emotions; Grodal (1997) similarly avoids the diversity of empathetic emotions in favour of how different genres elicit particular types of arousal or emotions. However, Tan's (1997) mention of "attendant features of the situation" (p. 181) suggests that his account may be translated into Greimas' (1987) actantial model. That is, it might seem useful to map empathetic emotions onto actantial transactions:

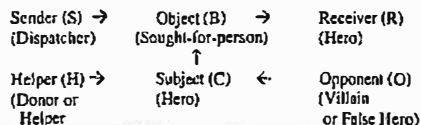


Figure 7.5. Greimas (1987) actantial grammar mapped onto Propp's morphology, labelled (S, B, R, H, C, O) for translation into formulaic situational context.

If we follow the terms in Figure 7.5 the following provisional notation could be used to denote the relationships between Greimas' (1987) terms: "+" could indicate a transaction, "=" could indicate the result of the transaction, "-" could indicate the loss of the subsequent term. Furthermore, "°" could indicate a weakened or blocked relationship with the subsequent term, "^" could indicate a strengthened relationship to the subsequent term, and "∧" could separate possible, exchangeable, and cumulative terms. On this basis it is possible to derive a formula for each situational context. Sympathy, and compassion, could be seen as the consequence of a transaction in which the subject-actant's access to the object is delayed, weakened, or blocked (S°B). Anger could be seen as the consequence of transactions in which a subject-actant loses (access to) an object because of an opponent ((S+O)°=B). Happiness could be the consequence when a subject-actant acquires its object, or is helped (C+H+∧B), and admiration could be the response when a subject-actant acts as his/her own helper ((C=H)^O). Gratitude could be seen as occurring when a subject-actant is strengthened by the sender, object, receiver, or helper ((C+S+O+R+H)=^O), or when transactions between helpers and subjects block or reduce the power of the opponent ((S+H)°=O). Fear could be seen as the consequence of transactions in which a subject-actant is in a position to be diminished or defeated by an opponent ((C+O)°=B), and sadness could be seen as a result of a transaction in which a subject-actant loses an object or helper (S/B-H).

Of course, a more elaborate notation could be developed, but the one above suffices to demonstrate the problem with such notation: not every transaction of this type produces an emotional response. Not only is the actantial structure dependant upon the players interpretation of the situational context, the mere labelling of, say, "anger" on the basis of a

transaction in which a subject-actant is blocked by an opponent is hardly a guarantee that the player experiences arousal and that this arousal may be described as anger. This discrepancy is evident in Tan's (1997) distinction between the "situational meaning context," which may simply be a cognitive construction of the "text base," and an "emotional situational context," which refers to that aspect of the situational meaning context that provides the basis for an emotional response (p. 197). Many transactions may form part of the situational context, but are of little or no emotional relevance.

An emotional response to a situation also is affected by the progress and outcome of a sequence, since situational contexts change during the course of a transaction. Sympathy frequently gives way to compassion and admiration as a character navigates the obstacles of a plot, alternating between moments of defeat and triumph; envy may give way to anger; gratitude may give way to resentment at any obligation. If Tidus is evaluated as a victim player are likely to offer virtual support and wish for his triumph. If Tidus then triumphs players are likely to re-evaluate the situation and feel triumph on his behalf. However, if Tidus is subsequently defeated the resulting sense of defeat may be worse, relative to the former sense of triumph.

Indeed, emotions often work in a complementary fashion to define what we can call an "emotional dynamic." As Tan observes:

A situation that arouses compassion for the hero may at the same time evoke anger directed towards the villain or envy at his success. But it is also possible to experience a combination of compassion and anger, for instance, when the protagonist suffers a reversal that is in some way his own fault. Admiration for the hero can go hand in hand with contempt for the antagonist. Empathetic embarrassment often accompanies failures of the protagonist whereby he loses face (Miller, 1987). In short, empathetic emotions occur in regular configurations that reflect the mutual relationships – and in particular the conflict – between various characters. (p. 181)

Given that the same type of arousal may be labelled in different ways (Grodal, 1997, p. 96), and it is possible to evaluate a situation in different ways (Fridja, 1997, p. 375), it can be said that an "emotional dynamic" describes the basis for a variety of emotional responses to different subject-actants within a situational context. That is, just as each character may be the hero of his own sequence (Barthes, 1966/1988, p. 119), so too may players interpret each situation from a different perspective. For example, a character's situation may prompt the player to oscillate between anger towards the antagonist and joy for the protagonist, depending upon the player's cognitive position and/or the game's cues. Together, the two (or

more) emotions that the player experiences may be said to constitute the emotional dynamic for that situation.

Yet, even with these qualifications, the actantial model's concern with textual structures is less sensitive to the physiological and psychological bases of emotion than Frijda's (1986) model of situational contexts. Frijda differentiates between ten "core components" of a situation: objectivity, relevance, reality level, difficulty, urgency, seriousness, valence, demand character, clarity, and multiplicity (p. 204).<sup>1</sup> In the absence of experimentation there is no need not elaborate upon, or apply, all of these parameters. It suffices to emphasise that, for Frijda:

Each emotion corresponds to a different appraisal – a different situational meaning structure – and is characterized by it. . . . Different situational meaning structures map onto different modes of action readiness. (p. 195)

Frijda subsequently provides a "profile" for each emotion, and, drawing from his account, it is possible to define a basic situational structure in terms of particular cognitive appraisal and an accompanying action tendency. The rest of this chapter indicates some pertinent aspects of the dominant emotions as they pertain to *FFX*, arguing that while the game offers situations likely to elicit happiness, fear, and anger, it may be characterised by a dominant mood of sadness.

### *Happiness*

Gameplay is often seen as intrinsically motivating, or as producing Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990, 1993) happy state of flow, but little attention is usually paid to narrative situations that elicit happiness. The situational profile of happiness (or joy) may be described as the positive (labelling of) arousal, involving the attainment, possession or engagement with a desired object, person, quality or state. Its action tendency may be seen as either a passive desire to enjoy one's happiness, or a particular object of happiness, or it may be a kind of global vitality which reinforces interest-excitement directed to anything within our immediate experience. From the perspective of a viewer, the action tendency is to enjoy and prolong the present state of the character, albeit with the expectation that the narrative will threaten it. In

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<sup>1</sup> Frijda also identifies ten "context" or "action-relevant components" (p. 208): presence/absence, (un)certainty, change, open-ness/closed-ness, intentionality, controllability, modifiability, object versus event evaluation, focality-globality, strangeness-familiarity. He also identifies four "object components" (p. 214): ego as constituent, ego as object, object versus subject fate, and value relevance versus contingency.

FFX happiness within the narrative macrostructure might be seen as a likely response to those situations in which Tidus meets, befriends, socialises, and bonds with the other Guardians. Tidus' happiness at the security of this surrogate family is especially pronounced given that Yuna offers the happy prospect of love. Here players experience not only the ideal-ego of Tidus' lovability confirmed and self-esteem gratified, but also the contagion of Tidus' concomitant joy.

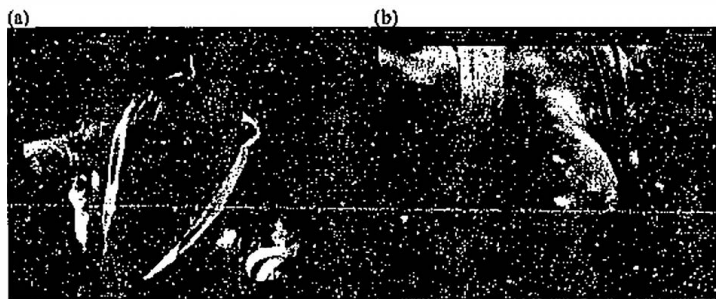


Figure 7.6. Tidus' (a) and Yuna's (b) complementary happiness during their romantic dalliance in Macalania Woods.

However, for Tomkins (1962), the underlying affect of happiness, or what he calls the "smiling response," is the sudden relief from a prior state of high arousal—or the smile of triumph that follows from a reduction of anger (p. 371). As Frijda (1986) says, "it is achievement of positive outcomes rather than having them that generates positive emotion" (p. 187). In other words, the situations of greatest happiness are those which occur after, or are won from, some struggle with an *unhappy* situation. Of course, the player may be primarily happy for him or herself upon completing the Trials, sub-quests, and/or traversing a territory like the Calm Lands (see Chapter Eight). However, players are inclined to feel happy when Tidus re-encounters Rikku at the Moonflow; when Tidus rescues Yuna at Bevelle and realises that she will not willingly marry Seymour; and during the ensuing moment when Yuna forgives Tidus for having spoken glibly about what they could do after the quest (not knowing that she was destined to die). Tidus' and Yuna's expression of love in Macalania Woods is joyous precisely because it is amplified by relief from their prior uncertainty and restraint (see Figure 7.6). Indeed, FFX spends a great deal of time cultivating the bonds between the main players, principally through intimate exchanges (Wakka and Lulu on the S.S. Winno), gradual disclosures of background (Lulu speaking of the death of Chappu), growing loyalties (Kimahri finally talking to Tidus) and mutual dependence (Yuna's need for protection, Spira's

need for Yuna). This happiness, or its promise, is particularly significant because it provides a basis for negative emotional responses.

### *Anger and Contempt*

Anger's situational meaning structure may be seen as negative arousal that occurs when desire, or telos, is blocked by a voluntary external agent (Frijda, 1986; Griffin and Mascolo, 1998; Tomkins, 1991). It is generally argued that an intentional and voluntary slight or hurt maximises anger. As Tan (1997) says, paraphrasing Spinoza (trans. 1994): "The more the other is free, the more we hate him: he is a cause of our pain" (p. 198). Such intentional and voluntary obstruction by someone allows for a sense of anger, or, indeed, righteous outrage ("How dare you! You should know better!"). When Seymour repeatedly attacks the characters, kidnaps Yuna, sets the Guado and the authority of Spira against them, and destroys the Ronso race, players are likely to see this as not merely immoral and inhuman, but as a wilful attempt to destroy another's happiness. This is especially evident when, while forcing Yuna to marry and kiss him, Seymour acknowledges Tidus (see Figure 7.7). The action tendency when we empathise with a character's anger is clear enough: we hope for, hypothesise the means of, and fantasise about, revenge on the character's behalf. At the same time, we may remain alert to the character's admirable qualities, since these diminish the relative success of the opponent. Consequently, we are likely to experience angry fantasising in response to the Maester's participation in the lie about Sin and the Summoning, as well as Kinoc's and Seymour's callous disregard for those they supposedly protect.



Figure 7.7. (a) Seymour's confident acknowledgement of Tidus while forcing Yuna to marry him. (b) Tidus' initial dismay at Yuna's false marriage turns into anger at Seymour's willfulness.

Conversely, when blocking is seen as semi-voluntary, or involuntary, anger may blur into frustration or impatience, in that a certain inevitability is accepted that we cannot control

and the anger becomes more global in its appraisal. This may extend to the amoral animals, plant-animals, robots and so on mentioned above, in that their automatic and routine nature means they are not always experienced as wilful (though players may become genuinely angry at the constant interruptions posed by amoral beings, or may see them as an extension of a wilful agency that has sent or placed them). A telling example is when Wakka shows angry contempt at Rikku for being Al-Bhed, creating tension between the Guardians. Wakka's prejudice results from his belief that the Al-Bhed Machina were responsible for his brother's death, which he cannot accept. Consequently, the player's action tendency is less likely to involve fantasising revenge and more a hope that Wakka will come to some realisation and become *capable* of choosing to act differently. A similar frustration may exist towards Mika, who participates in the lie of the Masters and the Spiral of Death because he believes that it is in the interests of those in Spira, and that there is no alternative. For both Wakka and Mika, it is not their wilfulness but their narrow-mindedness that is the salient aspect of the situation.

Frustration is also likely when others refuse to believe Tidus when he claims to come from Zanarkand. For much of the game both Wakka and Lulu do not believe him, and while Rikku and Yuna are open-minded they advise Tidus not to tell anyone what he thinks because they know many would not believe him. Tidus' position may be seen in terms of Carrol's (1990) argument that horror films often utilise a macrostructure in which children or teenagers try to convince credulous adults about the impending danger posed by ghosts, monsters or other supernatural beings. Of course, everyone in Spira knows that Sin exists, and is dangerous, but players may see other characters' refusal to believe Tidus as a basis for suspense in that it generates the prospect of what will happen if others do not believe him (for example, the Guardians may ignore clues that could help them to defeat Sin). However, even if this is not the case, Wakka's and Lulu's refusal to accept Tidus' "reality" may activate the same anger and pity as is experienced when someone is blamed, shamed and/or punished for a crime they did not commit. That is, their denial reinforces players' sympathy with Tidus.

Even though we may understand Wakka's and Lulu's denial, the player may feel sadistic pleasure at the anticipated moment of their comeuppance, that is, the moment when both characters are forced to confront the "reality" that the player has already accepted. Certainly, Wakka's initial rough treatment of Tidus (putting Tidus' in a headlock, like a condescending big brother), and Lulu's detachment, cynicism and pragmatic criticism, may both invite such petty retribution. More importantly, when players realise that Tidus can never return home their sympathy may motivate resentment or anger towards those who do not



believe him (because in refusing to believe him they deny the validity of his pain). The longer the denial is drawn out the more the player can relish the possibility of a comeuppance, through either/both the possibility of withholding forgiveness and/or the possibility of the other's subsequent pity and guilt.

It is notable, then, that Lulu's belief in Tidus is revealed by casual comment on the sled over Lake Macalania. Tidus is able to say: "So you believe me now?" but there is no drama about it. By retaining her aloofness, and confronting the truth on her own, she effectively robs Tidus (and the player) of the pleasure of seeing her arrogance challenged; this may reinforce players' sense of distance from, and/or dislike for, her. Wakka, on the other hand, is made to look idiotic for not believing Tidus, for his prejudices against Rikku, and for his slow recognition of the corruption of the Masters he has always respected. He subsequently apologises, contritely, offering players the satisfaction of another's unjust attitude being reprimanded, and reversing the position of Wakka as older brother and Tidus as the ignorant newcomer.

Anger often may accompany contempt, or disgust, which results from the presence of negative attributes in another. Contempt's situational profile may be described as negative arousal produced by another's misconduct, especially when the other does not feel shame for him/herself (Frijda, 1986, p. 73). Its action tendency may be to make the other aware of, and feel, our contempt, usually by hoping that another character will express it, or through fantasising about ill-fortune which will force them to re-evaluate themselves. For example, players may feel contempt for Wakka when he is ineffective in battle, or when he expresses prejudice against Rikku, undermining the harmony of the Guardians. However, once Wakka shows contriteness for his prejudice against Rikku, players no longer need to communicate their contempt since he is embarrassed for himself. At this point, his prejudice seems less wilful and more a matter of a character flaw, allowing players to feel compassion for him. Nonetheless, since the blocking of a protagonist's actions is often the result of contemptible qualities in an antagonist, such as Seymour's arrogance, angry fantasising is likely to accompany contempt.

### *Fear and Taboos*

When one is angry, the danger faced is not usually part of one's evaluation of the situation. By contrast, fear involves a heightened awareness of danger perceived in proximity to the self, often accompanied by uncertainty as to one's ability to cope. When fear operates as an empathetic emotion that a player feels on behalf of a character, its action tendency is likely to be to direct that character to safety (Frijda, 1986, p. 197). In *FFX*, the most obvious assertion might be that players experience fear when characters enter into new and unknown environments, which holds the promise of new threats, necessitating some degree of caution.

Of course, if there is anything to be afraid of during navigation of Spira's wilderness it is encounters with fierce opponents. However, while the random and therefore unexpected entry into combat may be startling, combat is usually routine and not really a cause for threat. It is more likely, then, that most new environments give rise to suspense rather than fear. Where a pronounced suspense or fear is likely to occur is during encounters with new, oversized and/or unknown monsters, and/or when characters are weak and low on healing potions or magic points. This suspense or fear may be reinforced by countdowns, as when Sin, Anima and Jecht gradually charge their devastating Overdrives, or when opponents like Seymour alternate between different attacks for which players may not have been able to prepare. Any suspense or fear may also be reinforced whenever the Flee option is disabled and there is no affordance for escape, as is the case with most Boss monsters, including Seymour and Sin. In these situations, players may see no way for the characters to survive, and can only fantasise about some impossible escape or protective force.

However, as the next chapter argues, emotions within game macrostructures are more likely to be experienced from the perspective of the player, not a character. The implication is that empathetic fear, in the sense discussed here, is less likely to occur in the Field or Battle screens, and more likely to occur as a witness emotion felt towards characters during narrative sequences, including cut-scenes. Indeed, the inability to act during such sequences may be a significant parameter of empathetic fear. As Grodal (1997) argues, when there is no affordance for voluntary action all that is left is an involuntary autonomic response of fear, pity and/or horror. Perhaps the clearest example of this is during Sin's attack on Kilika, which brings forth an enormous, advancing wave. The close-up on the faces of the village folk, especially the mother and child, elicits compassion and protectiveness, but, more than this, the immobility of the viewer as witness reinforces the sense of helplessness (see Figure 7.8).

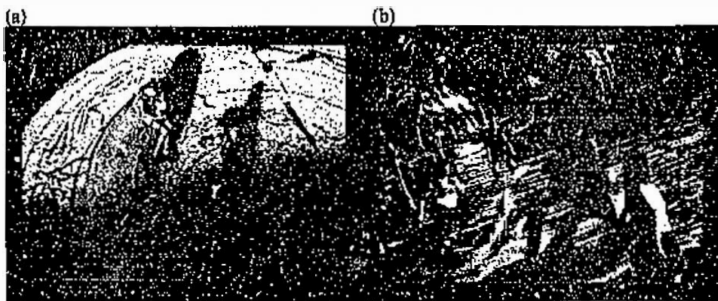


Figure 7.8. (a) A mother and child in the shadow of Sin in Kilika. (b) The folk of Kilika helpless before the advance of Sin.

It also can be argued that FFX makes systematic use of taboos, and their violation, as a way of evoking a sense of dread and danger. Here it is relevant that Besaid, Tidus' departure point in Spira, connotes the kind of tribal life often associated with taboos: a primitive world stripped of civilising masks, naked in its sex, death, and ritual. Certainly, Besaid is an *idealised* village, and the tribal connotations may derive less from FFX than from stereotyped representations of "primitives" in colonialist-styled texts, such as Rider Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (1885/1956), or Indiana Jones: Rider's of the Lost Ark (1981). Nonetheless, FFX's representations of "primitive" rituals (the "blitzball" prayer, the Summoning, and Sendings) and taboos (not entering the Trials of the Fayth, praying at the standing stone before leaving Besaid island, and not using Machina) suggests the potential relevance of taboos to player's hermeneutic expectations (see Figure 7.9).

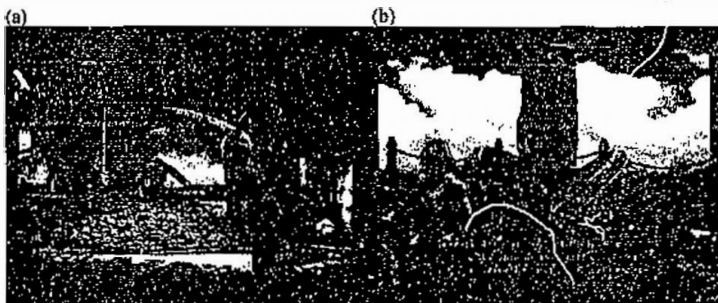


Figure 7.9. (a) Yune shows respect to the imposing Temple in Besaid. (b) Wakka prays to the standing stone before leaving Besaid ("It's an ancient custom. People leaving the island pray here for a safe trip").

Freud (1913/1950) defined taboos as social prohibitions that have their origin in group survival, and anthropologists have elaborated upon the formation and function of the major taboos, such as incest or marriage within families, eating one's totem animal, speaking of the dead, and observance of caste (Evans-Pritchard, 1937/1985; Frazer, 1912/1993; Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1966/1976; Malinowski, 1926, 1927, 1954, 1963). The issue here is that, following Jackson (1988), it can be argued that fear, or at least suspense, may be elicited when characters in FFX violate social prohibitions.

Jackson (1988), like Freud (1919/1990) and Todorov (1973), sees taboos as contributing to a sense of the uncanny, which is a specialised form of fear. She argues that representations of the unspeakable, the nameless, and the taboo, express resistance to the dominant cultural order, "truth" or "reality." We may see this as significant both because it troubles the epistemological certainties of a narrative, suggesting some "other" reality, and because the violation of a cultural order invites fear of punitive consequences, promoting a vigilant search for hidden threats. Of course, just as the experience of trauma cannot be generalised, the experience of the uncanny depends upon the taboo in question. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that any anxiety or fear exists largely in relation to the prohibition itself. That is, one may be horrified at a taboo act, such as murder, putrefaction, or rape, but this horror may overlap with fear of the prohibitive force that prevents its expression. If the taboo exists through our prior acceptance of the prohibition at the level of the super-ego, then its violation may resonate through our moral being. Our pursuant anxiety about the consequences of transgression may be globally projected as a vague, but overwhelming, fear of wrongness, deviance, and punishment. There is no need to fall back on the Freudian equation of punishment with castration; it suffices to say that what one fears is the punishment itself and/or the emotions associated with the punishment (such as fear and shame). The uncanny therefore may be regarded less in terms of repressed trauma and more in terms of a learned anxiety about a prohibitive/punitive force. In regards to fictional texts, the sense of dread about some hidden trauma or violation in a character's past, and/or some unspeakable taboo in the present, creates a sense that there is an anterior "reality" beneath the appearance of reality. With this qualification, it is possible to focus on which taboos are represented in FFX, the extent to which the narrative preserves the force of prohibition, and therefore the extent to which they may elicit anxiety and fear.

While many psychologists have rejected or reworked Freud's (1920) dual-instinct theory (Mitchell & Black, 1995; Stein, 1991; Tomkins, 1962), the terms Thanatos (death-

drive) and Eros (sex-drive), as used by Todorov (1973) and Jackson (1988), usefully point to two clusters of taboos in FFX. In regards to the taboos associated with death (Thanatos), taboos of patricide, suicide and matricide can be observed in the game. Patricide, as mentioned in Chapter Six, may be the most prominent taboo in FFX, in that both Tidus and Seymour slay their own fathers. However, while Seymour's blasé acknowledgement of patricide shocks the other Maesters, there is no Oedipal moment of crisis during which Tidus states: "I can't kill my own father" or "I have just killed my father!" Despite Tidus' growing recognition that he must defeat his father he never verbalises the problem as one of patricide, nor is patricide the explicit basis of narrative suspense (except perhaps before the fight with Braska's Final Aeon, when Tidus says "let's get this over with").

Nonetheless, there is a definite sense in which Tidus wishes to escape or conquer the influence of his father. In one notable sequence, the player is asked to try and perform Jecht's trademark kick while "bad memories," in the form of Jecht's discouraging voice, keep appearing on the screen: the player must strike the appropriate keys quickly enough to "banish" them. If the player does not "banish" the bad memories, Tidus does not make the kick and keeps living in Jecht's shadow. Furthermore, the silence in regards to patricide may be seen as analogous to Yuna's silent awareness of her impending death through self-sacrifice. Yuna's fate is not spoken of because, as Lulu says, "some things are too painful." Similarly, Tidus may be unable to speak of the impending murder because he is repressing the pain of it, such that his silence bespeaks the force of the taboo.

However, given the Japanese concern with filial piety, it is more likely that the taboo in question is a *verbal* one against speaking ill of one's father or family. Tidus' anger at his father is largely represented while he is narrating to himself, or alone. Yuna is shocked when Tidus expresses hate for Jecht, especially given her positive memories of Jecht and the enormous public respect accorded to both Jecht and her father, Braska, for defeating Sin. Indeed, Tidus' disrespect for Jecht is an indirect disrespect for the pilgrimage itself, and is therefore sacrilegious. When, in Macalania Woods, Auron tells Tidus that Jecht loved him, observing that "it had to be said," Tidus' suppression of his anger may be read as reflecting his own (need for) love. In light of this, Tidus' real confrontation with Jecht may be seen, not as any act of violence, but the verbalisation of "I hate you" to his father's face. This verbal acknowledgement, within the context of mutual understanding of their love (evident in Jecht's gently laughed "I know"), is the true moment of resolution between child and primary caregiver: the moment in which Tidus acknowledges not only his mixed love and hate for his

father, but his father's love for him.

It is significant that, even though Tidus subsequently fights Jecht's form in Braska's Final Aeon, Jecht is being transformed into something *other* than a father (Braska's Final Aeon) and he *organised* for Tidus to kill him. Indeed, Tidus *rescues* his father from being confined to the cursed form of the monster he no longer represents. The murder, then, is an act of love. Indeed, part of the tragedy of the game is that at the moment he realises that Jecht is not the monster that Tidus thought he was, Jecht turns into a monster in the literal sense, and Tidus must kill him. There is a kind of dreadful wish-fulfilment in this, a parody of the id's drama being realised to punish the ego that has exorcised it. This diffuses the sense that Tidus (intentionally) commits patricide, yet retains a sense of the horror, or tragedy, of the act.

Suicide as a taboo is implicit in the Summoners' (including Yuna's) quest to kill Sin, despite knowing it will lead to their death. Within the religious discourse of Yevon, spoken by Yuna, this is *self-sacrifice* for the sake of those in Spira: the highest act of altruism, supported and respected by the majority of those in Spira. However, that this self-sacrifice violates the sanctity of human life is represented by the Ai Bhed, who kidnap the Summoners to prevent them going to their deaths. For them, the Summoner's deaths is not a case of self-sacrifice but of *being sacrificed* to preserve a god (Sin, Yu Yevon) or a system (rule by the dead Masters) which is itself unjust. Volunteering to be a sacrifice to Sin crosses the taboo of suicide because such an act perpetuates the Spiral of Death. The dramatic refusal of the Guardians to sacrifice one of themselves to Yunalesca to become a Final Aeon is the definitive moment when suicide is preserved as a taboo, when the liberal rights of the individual are held above Spira's tradition of sacrifice. Suicide also is made explicit in the cut-scene in which Seymour's mother gives her life to become an Aeon, the horror of which is represented by Seymour as a crying child, dramatising a prohibition against mothers abandoning their children. This suicide is supposedly a compassionate act of motherly self-sacrifice, in that Anima hoped the power she could give Seymour might help him overcome his difficulties as a taunted, half-breed Guado. However, when the characters reach Baaj Temple and talk to Anima in her human form, she acknowledges that her sacrifice was a mistake because it denied Seymour a mother's love and facilitated his compensatory greed for power.

A subtext of matricide may be perceived in the way Seymour embraces the power of his dead mother. While Seymour did not kill her and suffered her loss as a child, players may infer that he has come to see her death as necessary, and, were he given a choice between

keeping her alive and killing her to receive Anima's power, he would choose to kill her (as he killed his father). Her death precipitates his goal to release *everyone* from suffering by murder: a murder of all life (vitalis-cide?) which subsumes all variations of murder; or, perhaps, gyno-cide, in the sense of killing the womb, that which gives life. Players might perceive deeper motives in Seymour's character. By killing everyone, his mother's death may be rendered meaningless and in some sense nullified, leading to a kind of reunion with her. Nonetheless, Seymour's disregard for, and illicit exploitation of, his mother's death connotes matricide, or at least the taboo against hating or disrespecting one's family.

If we consider the taboos associated with sex (Eros), it is possible to observe taboos of voyeurism, incest, necrophilia, homosexuality and miscegenation in FFX. Most trivially, FFX's emphasis on visual spectacle gives way to focalisation on (especially) Yuna's and Lulu's secondary sexual characteristics, promoting the paradoxically safe and legitimate taboo of voyeurism. At the same time, the G-rated FFX lacks direct or explicit representations of sexual intercourse, and the romance between Yuna and Tidus is represented in the manner of coy romanticism. FFX's gameplay, being a private act before a television, may be negatively structured as a private, guilty act of voyeurism, but no other aspect of the game structures this voyeurism as prohibited: the player may wait for and relish the exhibitionism. Nonetheless, the sexualization of Yuna may be seen as structured as a taboo for several reasons: her virginal purity as a Summoner; her role as a Guardian of social virtue (and therefore as prohibitive in herself); and Tidus' status as Aeon (in that any suggestion of sex with Tidus might connote a sexualization of death).

Tidus's love for Yuna may also be interpreted as symbolically prevented by an incest taboo, through her sisterly qualities as wiser, sibling guide, and the subtext of the Guardians as an extended/surrogate family, with Tidus and Yuna as brother and sister, or cousins (especially given that their fathers both knew one another, literalising the metaphor "brothers by the sword"). This taboo may also be seen as occurring between Wakka and Lulu, given that Lulu was initially attached to Wakka's brother, Chappu, or at least their relationship may be seen as connoting the possible violation of the biblical prohibition against coveting another's wife. Through the majority of the game, Lulu's waspishness and criticism of Wakka place their relationship in negative terms. However, when Tidus overhears them talk through a tent flap in Besaid, and then, later, while sitting on a staircase on the S. S. Winno, his voyeuristic eavesdropping may re-position the two characters' relationship in terms of not just some hidden secret, but forbidden desire, and some after-hours romantic tryst.

Necrophilia might be seen as a weak, flickering subtext of Tidus' and Yuna's romance given Tidus' status as an Aeon, a spirit of the dead. Of course, Tidus is not represented (like Anima) as a decayed corpse, but as a normal, young male, and his ultimate dissipation into spirit dust on the deck of the Airship is more akin to transcendence. Ultimately, his and Yuna's romance is represented not as necrophilia, but as love that—foreshadowed by Seymour's proposal—is doomed. Thematically, it is tragic, not taboo, and the taboos derive from the qualities indicated above. However, necrophilia may be read as a stronger subtext of Seymour's union with his dead mother's Aeon. The figure of Anima, as a grotesque image of Seymour's mother chained and tortured in bondage, is sexually unattractive, yet Seymour is sexualised by the casual display of his chest and his proposal to Yuna, with the unstated but inferred promise of connubial obligations. If Seymour is sexualised, this sexualises his drive for power, and the player may characterise him in terms of some transfer of desire between Seymour and Anima.

A minor taboo of miscegenation may be observed in FFX in that Seymour is half human and half Guado. While players eventually discover that Yuna is half Al Bhed, the Al Bhed seem to be a different *race* of humans, whereas the Guado, with their larger size, bestial manes, and long claws, seem to be a different *species*. The blurring of categories associated with miscegenation might be linked to a minor taboo of homosexuality, given Seymour's sexually ambiguous self-presentation. That is, Seymour's trans-gendered appearance, which violates the expectations of clearly gendered roles set up by the clearly heterosexual protagonists, marks the absence of simplicity or wholeness. He is marked by complexity, some tension (or pathology) under the surface of his image, which can later be interpreted as a sign of his subterfuge, treachery and patricide.

Despite the weakness of some of the taboos noted above, *collectively* all the taboos represented in FFX connote a trespass upon the forbidden, and all of these taboos may be seen as embodied in the prohibitive force of Sin. Sin is initially perceived as collective guilt, humanity's punishment for its arrogance. He may be profaned (defeated), yet only within the ritual defined by the Maesters as acceptable (the pilgrimage), and he always returns: an eternal fetish of veneration, of fear and awe, unwanted yet accepted. When the Guardians defeat Seymour and attack Yunalesca in the hope of defeating Sin once and for all, they commit an act of blasphemy against the Law of Yevon that preserves Sin. When Maester Mika hears of Yunalesca's death he is so dismayed at the sacrilege and its potential



consequences that he chooses to end his undead existence and dissipate. Even though he serves the Spiral of Death, which the Guardian's have chosen to attack, Mika's dismay expresses the *Guardians'* fears about the consequences of their actions. As traitors they are scapegoats, inheriting all the fear and guilt of taboo, fostering not only sympathy for them as victims of injustice, but an uncanny feeling that anything and anyone could be an agent of their punishment.

However, players later learn that Sin is not, literally, the embodiment of human sin. Rather, Sin is the armour of a god, Yu Yevon, who witnessed Bevelle's destruction of Zanarkand a thousand years earlier and wished to defend himself against the threat of technologically-empowered humans. While the people of Bevelle were arrogant and justly punished, the punishment of Spira a thousand years afterwards is a consequence not of the stain of that Sin, but the fear and vengeance of Yu Yevon. It is only when Sin's sacred nature *itself* is bravely defiled—when Sin is revealed to be neither natural, moral, nor divine, but merely the armour of a fearful supernatural being—that he becomes truly profane, something to be hated, cursed and purged in the name of sacred life. Indeed, the ritual of the Summoner's quest retrospectively may be seen as a neurotic script which ultimately preserves the affect (fear) it tries to repress, and which the Guardians must banish. Certainly, the defeat of Sin not only reprieves Yuna and her Guardians, it also allows for the inauguration of a new order, of the son (Tidus) over the father (Jecht), and the daughter (Yuna) over the mother (Yunalesca). This retrospectively legitimates the Guardians' taboo-breaking. To kill the already-dead is not a crime against life. A situation in which the dead rule the living is the trauma, the taboo, which must be brought to consciousness and undone.

### *Sadness and Tragedy*

Despite the prevalence of cues for fear in *FFX* it can be argued that the emotion that especially characterises the game is sadness. Sadness may be characterised as negative arousal resulting from the overwhelming loss of desired object or state without prospect of recovery, or at least of likely or easy recovery (Frijda, 1986, p. 199). Its action tendency is a withdrawal which provides the space to work through one's sadness and accept the loss in the present, leading either to a renewed hope for (eventual) recovery of the object, or to a more complete acceptance of the irrevocable nature of the loss. *FFX* represents many profound losses experienced by characters: Tidus' father dies; his mother dies; his home is destroyed. He meets Yuna, whose parents are dead, and Wakka, whose brother, Chappu, is dead. Tidus later learns

that his father is still alive, but must be killed. Worse, Tidus learns that he is already dead and that his desire for a loving union with Yuna is an impossible dream.

Many of these losses, and the losses experienced by other characters in FFX, are disclosed retrospectively, such that the player is forced to recognise the previously unperceived sadness of characters. Rikku is initially represented as exuberantly happy, but we later are told that she and her race have suffered prejudice and violence, including exile from Spira. Her new home in Sanubia Sands is subsequently destroyed. Players learn that Kimahri was exiled from the Ronso home in Mount Gagazet, and that his broken horn is a sign of his lost honour. Although Kimahri returns home and reclaims his honour by beating Biran and Yenke in a fight, Seymour subsequently exterminates the entire Ronso race. Lulu, while initially represented as coldly indifferent, suffers from the death of her lover Chappu. She is also revealed to have failed an earlier Summoner, who died before the completion of her pilgrimage. Worse, Tidus learns that everyone but him was aware that Yuna was expected to die if her pilgrimage was successful. This means that he had not shown sympathy where it was due, and the player may also sense a lost opportunity for consolation, here and whenever a formerly hidden loss is represented. This progression of retrospective disclosures of loss culminates near the end of the game when it is revealed that Auron is not only dead but knew the entire tragic story of the Spiral of Death all along, and was prevented from his final rest because he had promised Jecht that he would bring Tidus to Spira. His formerly mysterious and distant manner therefore may be re-read as a sign of the burden he has carried: the secret of the suffering that his companions had already experienced or had yet to endure.

Indeed, part of the tragedy in FFX is that characters' emotions, honest expressions of sadness as well as happiness, are repressed. From the character's perspective we might say that this repression compounds any loss by taking away the promise of emotional release and consolation. Perhaps the clearest instance of this is the drawn out silence between Yuna and her Uncle Cid after she is rescued from Bevelle. When Cid turns away and the external focalisation closes in to reveal his suddenly stricken face, the combination of surprise at the ability of a video game character to present such an expression is combined with surprise at the extremity of Cid's grief/relief. The visibility of this expression is likely to be perceived as a form of inhibition because the object of the expression, Yuna, does not see it. Consequently, players may see this expression not simply as a sign of Cid's inner life or of the intimacy of Cid's and Yuna's relationship, but as a sign of the repression, or inhibition, of feelings in general. Cid's expression may make players more aware of the feeling-world beneath the

digital representations of the characters and beneath the surface of characters' casual transactions.

This restraint or helplessness is evident elsewhere in *FFX*. Tidus must restrain his love for Yuna because he does not believe she reciprocates; later they both must restrain their mutual love because of their duties to Spira; then their love is denied through Tidus' death. Tidus must restrain his anger towards his father because Jecht is respected in Spira and liked by Yuna, who he does not wish to alienate. Yuna must restrain her anger when Seymour forces her to marry him, as is evident in her clenched, but impotent, fist (see Figure 7.10). Kimahri, being hyper-masculine, also constantly restrains his emotions; Lulu represses her feelings at Chappu's death (only truly showing her weakness at Mushroom Rock); and all the Guardians restrain their emotion about Yuna's impending death ("some things are too painful to talk about"). This restraint is evident even in Tidus and Wakka's frequent qualifying use of "well," "then," "you know?" and "ya," which may sometimes be read as indexical of an idea or emotion that is simply too overwhelming to express. Lastly, Tidus' forced smile and laughter is likely to be perceived more as a way of dealing with an underlying fear than as a sign of happiness.

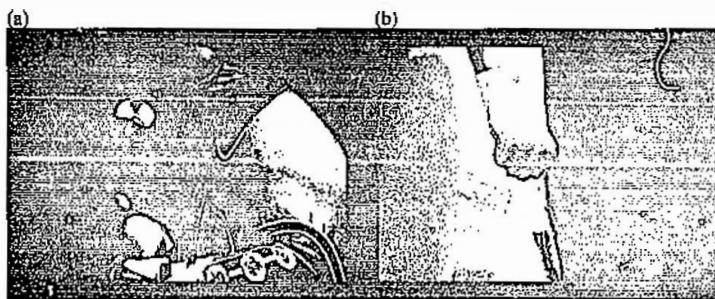


Figure 7.10. (a) Seymour forces Yuna to kiss him. (b) Yuna, having been warned that resistance will lead to her friends' execution, clenches her fist in her effort to restrain herself.

This restraint could, given Squaresoft's Japanese heritage, be explained in terms of stereotypical representations of the Chinese and Japanese (Occidentals are liable to conflate them) as restrained and inscrutable. However, it is more likely that restraint is interpreted in terms of characters being afraid to lose affection or the possibility of affection. If Tidus takes on the role of Yuna's Guardian as a means of indirectly expressing his love, this is because he fears she does not feel the same. When Wakka punches Tidus' shoulder and gets him in a headlock, this is meaningful because both of them have both lost loved ones: the aggression is

an indirect expression of affection that holds at bay the possibility of rejection or further loss. Players may also see restraint in terms of characters' super-egos. For example, Cid's and Wekka' masculinity makes any expression of emotion a sign of weakness. The issue here, then, is not that players identify with the prohibitive force of a super-ego accepted by a character, but that a player may perceive a prohibition as a regrettable force which holds a character back, and which the character is helpless to overcome. That is, players may feel compassion towards characters who are prevented by their own fear or other traits from realising their happiness, and the loss of this potential happiness has a tragic quality.

Of course, restraint may also be seen as a sign of external forces in that, for the Al Bhed, who are constantly persecuted and must struggle against adversity to survive, their masculine super-egos have an adaptive function. Indeed, it is likely that the various exhibitions of restraint in FFX generally may be coded in terms of the characters as helpless victims of the events in which they find themselves. Tidus' love of Yuna is threatened by Seymour's proposal, his kidnapping of Yuna, and his threat to her life, and their romance is doomed by Tidus' knowledge of his death. Tidus may spend one evening with Yuna in Macalania Forest during which they express their love for each other, but only in the awareness that Yuna may die. When Tidus runs after Jecht following their conversation in the City of the Dead, he betrays his true goal, his desire to be re-united with his father. The final moment of Tidus' departure is one of desire frustrated. He and Yuna reach towards one another from opposed realms: the living, material and present world of Yuna versus the dead, immaterial, past world of Tidus. Consequently, as Tidus attempts to embrace Yuna he simply passes right through her (see Figure 7.11).

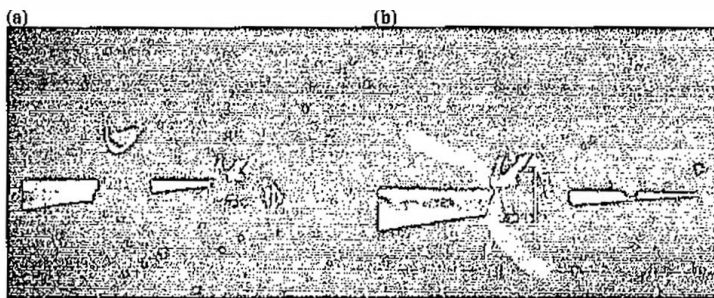


Figure 7.11. (a) Tidus attempts to embrace Yuna but (b) passes right through her.

The tragic quality of FFX especially lies in characters' *helplessness* at the possibility, or *inevitability*, of loss. If we define tragedy in the limited sense of characters caught up in an

unfavourable chain of events they cannot control, and which arouse in viewers fear (*phobos*) and pity (*eleos*), then many of the macrostructures discussed above are tragic (see Abrams, 1988; Aristotle, trans. 1965; Kaufmann, 1969; Leech, 1969; Lucas, 1966). Notably, Tidus appears in Besaid only to be caught up in conflicts whose momentum is beyond his ability to (initially) alter, much less understand, and all his hopes and loves are tragic because he is already dead and they can never be realised.

Indeed it can be argued that, by occasionally or eventually making most characters' motives accessible, and/or making them seem inevitable as a consequence each character's *hamartia*, empathetic fear and sadness is distributed across many characters. This is not simply because multiple characters suffer their respective losses, but because characters share the same loss and/or are helpless victims of the same circumstances. For example, the moment when Tidus interrupts Yuna with the recording sphere at Rin's Travel Agency at the Mi'ihen Highroad is narrated a second time later in the game, with internal focalisation that allows the player to appreciate Yuna's feelings for Tidus, which she had hidden at the time. This is likely to reinforce the player's empathy towards *both* Tidus and Yuna as victims of a situation that keeps them apart.

More generally, all the characters in FFX are caught up in the wake of Bevelle's sins, the follies of human nature, and the chaos and violence at loose in the world. It is significant that Yu Yevon is such a weird and inhuman being, for as a visual representation he cannot support all the villainy that players have witnessed throughout the game. Yu Yevon resembles nothing more than a ball of elemental fear and/or rage. His violent conduct is an ongoing reaction to the threat posed by the Machina wielded by Bevelle a 1000 years ago when it destroyed Zanarkand, and *because* this attack is represented *so far* in the past, almost as timeless as legend, Yu Yevon may be read as a projection of universal negative attributes of human nature: selfishness, intolerance, fear, and the hunger for power. Since these attributes are evident in the actions of the Seymour, the Maesters, and even Wakka, it is possible that players may see Yu Yevon as the face of human nature and may see susceptibility to this nature as the *hamartia* of humans in general. This means that players may pity not only individual characters, but many, or all of, the game's characters.

These arguments can be linked to the shifts between observational and enactive attitudes discussed in Chapter Three. When viewing a canonical narrative we usually identify and empathise with a voluntary, self-impelled protagonist acting towards a particular goal,

and, as a result, experience motor-oriented tensions in the form of suspense. This requires, of course, a sense that the character (or, in the case of game, the player), has a choice to act, or *not* to act, or to *choose* from one of several actions, suggesting a decision-making process embedded in a living individual (pp. 116-122). When a character's "capacity for voluntary acts and thinking is *blocked* it usually leads to a feeling of alienation, strangeness, and unreality in the viewer" (p. 120), a kind of impenetrable detachment. The consequence of subject-actants being controlled or manipulated by forces of nature, superhuman agents, social institutions, or "phenomena representing metaphysical agents, like Destiny or God" (p. 170), is "passive-introjection" (p. 160), in the sense that a viewer can only identify with the passive position of the subject-actant as object.

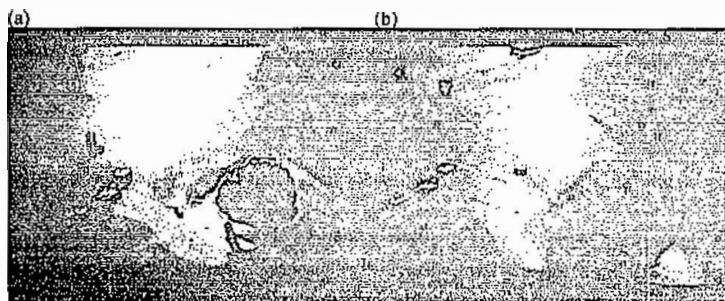


Figure 7.12. (a) A blitzball floats through the debris of Kilika and then (b) floats out of the frame.

Since, in Grodal's (1997) account, "reality" is usually characterised by the capacity for agency, the passive position may create connotations of unreality. It may also create more disturbing sensations in that the subtraction of a future in which choices and possibilities are held open produces an impression of pastness, inevitability, and deadness. As Grodal argues of *Terminator II* (1997), viewers witness an horrific future in which a nuclear war destroys much of the planet and leaving the rest of humanity to be hunted by mercenary robots:

The viewer is put into a state of high arousal, labelled fear and grief. But voluntary reactions seem to be totally blocked, because we are told that this is a precise recording of a future event in the history of mankind. . . . Logically there can be no teleological and voluntary acts, no guesses of outcomes. Everything is preprogrammed and causal. We can only shiver, cry, or react with various types of involuntary reactions of the nervous system. (p. 122)

Similarly, in *FFX* the player is repeatedly placed in a position of helpless witness to tragedy. Perhaps the most effective example of this occurs after Sin's destruction of the village of

Kilika. Here the "camera" focuses in on the water and a blitzball bobs into view, only to pass out of the frame (see Figure 7.12). This blitzball is, given the devastation, likely to be read as metonymic of the dead at Kilika. The resulting transfer of significance and affect may mean that it is anthropomorphised and given a vulnerable, pathetic quality. This places the player in the passive position in a quite literal sense, because the player empathises with an object manipulated by natural forces: its movement across the debris-strewn water both restages, and makes more poignant, the player's helplessness. Furthermore, the metonymic operation itself constitutes a form of inhibition by making the dead bodies invisible. This is not merely a polite censorship that allows the dead to preserve their dignity, it signifies the inexpressible horror of their pointless and unpreventable death. It is also significant that the ball floats away and refuses the more obvious and contrived representation of the ball sinking below the surface. The ball is *not* merely a signifier of loss or grief, it testifies to the reality that *it* survives while *people* have not.

While gameplay is frequently disrupted and each player will have distinctive emotional responses, it is possible that these recurring situational meaning structures may give way to a "mood." Moods are of more enduring quality than emotions, and characterised by "the absence of an object" and an appraisal that is of a "highly global nature" (Tan, 1997, p. 204). If this is the case, then the tragic elements of *FFX* may, in conjunction with the ambivalent reality-status, lead to a tonic tone of sadness or melancholy characterised by a passive position. Indeed, when players witness characters caught up in a tragic sequence of events beyond their control, this may resonate with the inability of the player to alter events in the context of enactment. The player's limited interactions in a linear narrative only serve to *advance* the tragedy, producing a seemingly paradoxical emphasis on involuntary autonomic responses (sadness and pity) from a passive position.

### *Empathetic Emotions, Investment, and Allegiance*

Expressions and situational contexts may, in general, be seen as operating along a synchronic axis and as largely regulating phasic emotions. Conversely, investment in, and allegiance to, characters may be seen as operating along a diachronic axis and as regulating tonic emotion towards characters. The usefulness of this distinction is that it emphasizes how, on the one hand, a situational context may have precedence in defining a player's empathetic responses. Even when the antagonist Seymour is killed it is possible to experience empathy with him by identifying with the generic situation of a *person* experiencing their death. On the other hand, sometimes the tonic sympathy generated through investment in, and allegiance

with, a character may be what especially determines the emotional response of the player to a situation, or at least the degree of that response.

As Grodal (1997) notes, interest in, and sympathy with, a character usually results from prolonged cognitive identification; more precisely, investment provides a basis for a tonic attitude of sympathy which functions as an antecedent of other, phasic empathetic emotions. However, this investment may be reinforced by "allegiance," which Murray Smith (1994) defines as the extent to which one cognitively or affectively adheres to a character's values or moral perspective. In identifying the potential allegiance between players' and characters' values it is useful to look at how types of moral agency and values operate, and their relationships with one another. Smith distinguishes between "Manichean moral structures," in which there is a clear "binary opposition of values," and "graduated moral structures," in which characters "occupy a range of positions between the two poles" (p. 207). FFX may be seen as possessing a graduated moral structure, and in elaborating upon it we can turn to Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) model of moral development. This model is a reworking of Piaget's (1932) model, and attends to the changing relationships between individuals and rules. Without debating the validity of a stage-dependant model or processes of moral reasoning (see Kohlberg, 1976, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine & Hewer, 1983), Kohlberg's (1981) six stage model suggests six broad categories which frame players' differentiation of value systems: amorality, self-serving (or sadistic) immorality, egocentric morality, rigid morality, equal (liberal) morality, and selfless morality. We may see these categories as moral "types" along a spectrum of negative allegiance to total allegiance that define a basis for evaluating and positioning oneself in relationship to conflicts between or within characters, and which frame more subtle distinctions between the values and goals of characters.

First, a type of "amorality" may be identified in the limited sense associated with natural forces, inanimate matter, or beings devoid of conscious awareness or any capacity for empathy. While they may be organised and act strategically as opponents, the activity of amoral beings is akin to the biologically motivated, non-voluntary responses of animals or the programmed agency of machines. As noted above, the significance of this may be to reinforce a sense of frustration, rather than anger, in that any blocking produced by such beings is involuntary. More generally, amorality provides a negative position against which to define a suitable subject of identification and allegiance: in the absence of consciousness there is no basis for allegiance. As is elaborated in the next two chapters, amoral beings, such as robots,



may cue a sense of automatic and indifferent assault: a fear of loss or death made poignant by the lack of acknowledgement of our meaningfulness or humanity.

This type may be distinguished from a second type of “self-serving” or “sadistic” “immorality.” Unlike the “amoral” type, the “immoral” type is predicated on a being’s awareness of the perspectives and interest of others, but is qualified by that being’s willingness to violate others’ interests for his/her own ends, or for its own sake. As noted above, anger towards another is greater when that person acts voluntarily, and this is the category in which we position most of the humanoid monsters in *FFX*: they are attributed with sufficient intention that we can readily perceive them as having made an anti-social *choice* against us. Seymour embodies this category in that he freely manipulates others for his own ends. Generally, the expectation that villainous or inhuman characters will be punished makes it unproductive, or impractical, to empathise with them in anything other than a transitory way. Once a player knows that a character is an antagonist, or “immoral” or “inhuman,” there is not usually any need for further cognitive identification, except to hypothesise (or, in the case of gameplay, experiment with) the means for their defeat and punishment. Inhumanity, then, allows players to recognise antagonists, provides a target for negative empathetic emotions, and maximises sympathy, compassion, and (potentially) admiration for characters who oppose it.

Both the “amoral” and “immoral” types, which are in some respect “inhuman,” may be reinforced by the distinctive qualities of video game characters. This is evident if we turn to Grodal’s (1997) argument that the impression of humanity usually requires an impression of organic unity, a Gestalt of “human-ness,” which is clearly embodied by Bordwell’s (1989) “folk-schemata” of “the putatively sane, mentally active and uncoerced human adult,” or generic “person schemata” (p. 152). In narratives, the most minimal description—often merely a name—is sufficient for us to provide a basis for identification with a character, inasmuch as players will infer other basic attributes (Grodal, 1997, p. 92). So long as these traits are projected onto them, even patently inhuman characters—animals, plants, animated objects, and so on—may be identified as human, in that one can empathise with their struggle to attain goals within a diegesis. By implication, human-ness is “often described negatively, as something lacking, in non-human figures of fiction such as robots and monsters” (Grodal, 1997, p. 106). If the subtraction of notably “human” traits is a basis for perceiving deviations from human-ness, then it is likely that the limited coding and ergodic affordances of video games may read as a subtraction of these traits and may contribute to a sense of inhumanity.

Humans are presumed to have a "singular and unified" (Grodal, 1997, p. 152) body, which provides a basis for us to evaluate the *intention* of a being ("it has teeth and claws, it can injure me if it gets close enough to bite or scratch"). In FFX, a player will usually react to "monsters" onscreen with some sense that their onscreen bodies define the proximity of their actions. Certainly, many robots, notably Defenders, Gemini, and YKT, embody mechanised masculinity, whereby their physical presence has a direct correlation with physical danger. Many monsters also have physical characteristics which correspond with an attack type, as in the YKT's "Kick," Behemoth's "Heave," the Sand Worm's "Swallow," or the Bomb's "Explode." However, with some opponents the entire form and capabilities may not be immediately apparent from their body, or they may inflict damage beyond the normal range of that body. Yunalesca, for example, sends an enormous tongue out at the characters, and her Hellspite attack involves tentacles burrowing under the ground and up at the characters. Furthermore, several opponents have more than one incarnation. Seymour reappears three times after his initial defeat, taking a different form each time: Seymour Flux, Seymour Natus, and Seymour Omnis. Yunalesca takes three forms during the single battle with her: she is initially a goddess-like figure; she then summons tentacles to her; and then takes the form of an enormous, black, medusa-like head. This body-hopping inclines players to see the perceived body as but part of a larger presence, perhaps suggesting an immaterial body behind the physical one.

Humans are also presumed to have "the ability to perceive remote objects" (Grodal, 1997, p. 92), which allows us to identify another's line of perception ("it has poor vision, I'll be safe if I don't move"). In FFX, it can be said that "monsters" have perceptual activity, but that it is often limited to a (heightened) awareness of characters. In many 3D games, like Doom (1994) or Vampire: The Masquerade (1999), players can see monsters approaching, and are free to attack and run in real-time. In FFX, the only real instance of this real-time action is the escape from Guadosalam where players must guide Tidus to run from the pursuing Guado in the Field Screen. However, each time a Guado comes too close the game jumps to the Combat Screen. During most of FFX players do not even get this much warning; there is a jump from seeing Tidus travelling alone in the Field Screen to seeing Tidus and the other characters fighting a wandering monster in the Combat Screen. Within the Combat Screen characters cannot hide or outmanoeuvre, they can only (try to) flee from the fixed site of battle. Yet trying to flee involves characters running on the spot until they succeed, and escape. This holds for not only seemingly immobile monsters, like Funguar, but fast-moving

insects that players might imagine would chase characters across the landscape. In this respect, being perceived by a monster may be experienced as a kind of immobilising force. Characters struggle not so much to escape a monster's proximity, but to escape the irresistible force of its perception and will. Indeed, in some video games, opponents respond before characters move into their line of sight, *Gauntlet* (1985) being perhaps the most discomforting example. Such opponents respond as if their perception and consciousness are not confined by a physical body, but extend through the software and/hardware with access to the game database.

In addition to a physical body and basic faculties for perception, humans are presumed to have the ability "to experience tactile and interoceptive sensation" (Grodal, 1997, p. 92), and, by extension, "to feel simple motives, affects, and emotions" (p. 92), including self-awareness and empathy for others (p. 109). At this level, we can infer another's state of arousal ("is it hungry?"). As Grodal observes, an impression of inhumanity is often produced through the absence of emotions, or when emotion is not holistically integrated. For example, we might perceive as inhuman: the absence of another's emotional response to an event which we would presume to produce an "emotional" event (such as a violent death); an incongruent emotional response (such as a character's surprise that s/he forgot his/her umbrella while witnessing a violent death); or "odd" emotional responses, such as "weird, psychotic, cold" (p. 31). In *FFX* there are specific instances of this. When it is revealed that Seymour killed his father and he offers an indifferent: "Didn't you know?" Similarly, Kinoc and Yunalesca express a shocking indifference to the suffering of the people of Spira, given the regard in which both of them are held. In these cases, the absent or inappropriate emotional response is perceived as inhuman, as monstrous. More generally, players may experience the emotions of most monsters as fixed and organised by a pathology of hate and/or fear. While players may accept that robot opponents like the Oblitzerator are simply unemotional, robots may be seen as extensions of human agents, and the distribution of probabilities in a robot's programming may be seen as affective amplifiers, in that a robot may be predisposed towards certain kinds of responses. Alternately, since robot opponents function no differently from other opponents, their perceived absence of emotion may be projected onto other monsters creating a general impression of the un-emotionality of all opponents.

Humans are also presumed to have the ability "to understand uncomplicated plans, goals and acts" (Grodal, 1997, p. 92), including the capacity for flexibility, and "teleological, intentional and voluntary behaviour" (p. 108). This allows us to infer future conduct ("Is it

aggressive? Does it see me as food?"). For Grodal, an impression of non-human-ness may be produced through the absence of such intention or mental representations of the goals of others (p. 108). This extends to obviously non-human, amoral opponents who are devoid of conscious awareness or a capacity for empathy, and act according to reflex or programming. In FFX this includes: animals (Achelous, Adamantise, Bandersnatch, Bite Bug, Cave Iguion and so on), plant-animals (Funguar, Exoray), robots (Mech Guards, Gunners, Hunters and Leaders, Oblitzerator, Yat-99, YKT-63), magically-animated creatures (Defenders), and (arguably) elemental forces (Black, Blue, Dark, Gold, Red, White, Yellow Elements, and the Spherimorph). However, this impression is especially pronounced when one perceives automatism, exemplified by mechanical-like behaviour and/or a lack of characteristically human feedback and adaptability. This includes the tendency to walk rigidly, to gaze implacably, to speak formulaic statements, to possess a generic voice without emotional modulation. It also includes acting according to a mechanised or fixed form of behaviour, in the sense of a narrow motivation or "one-track-mind," being driven by some program or script, or being impelled by some external force.

Of course, most video game monsters have no, or limited, capacity for self-impelled actions, such as communication, goal-formation, and goal-achievement, other than those associated with its narrative function or its traits for combat. It is only recently that Artificial Intelligence has been sufficiently developed so that enemy characters may, for example, investigate sounds and run to get reinforcements. The only responsiveness of opponents to player strategy in FFX is linked to their current status: some monsters may flee, heal themselves, or use a different attack, after a certain amount of damage is taken. For example, once Seymour Flux's HP drops below 35,000, his Multiorchis will use Total Annihilation within two attack rounds. Most encounters in FFX are random or fixed to a certain location, and there is no "seeking," merely a reflexive (reactive) attempt to attack and destroy under the generic semic attribution of "guard," drawing from programmed strategies of defence and (in rare cases) retreat. If players perceive any motive at all it is likely to be: pathological; blind obedience to the commands of a "boss"; or a biological imperative to survive.

It can be argued, then, that the distinctive or limited qualities of video game characters may be interpreted as a subtraction of human qualities and produce an impression of what can be called a "pathological, physically over-reactive and coerced human" or "an inflexible, non-intelligent, programmed machine" (or "robot schemata"). At the level of gross typing, to be confronted by that which is "inhuman"—especially if it is coded as monstrous, psychopathic

or mechanical—implies a greater expectation of threat. This is not to suggest that every character in a video game who has the above characteristics is perceived as inhuman. Many opponents simply repeat a cycle of action, such as the sharks in Hercules (1997), or pass through programmed or random sequences of fixed functions, such as the bricks in Tetris (1984). It can be presumed that players often regard these not so much as actual opponents, but as agents of a greater opponent: the game itself (see Chapter Eight).

An impression of "inhumanity" therefore may reinforce, and characterise, the typing of video game characters as "amoral" or "immoral." Of course, many humans may have limited perception, or be reflexive, inflexible, narrow-minded, obsessive, and so on. The issue is that whenever they act in excessively selfish or immoral ways we are likely to perceive them as *less* human, or even monstrous, having lost the tolerance and altruism that marks the best of humanity. Indeed, Seymour is perhaps the most monstrous figure in FFX precisely because he is (part) human, and therefore has the *capacity* to be tolerant and altruistic. His conduct is a sociopathic negation of humanity's highest defining virtues: tolerance, empathy, compassion, altruism, and selflessness. Indeed, while Seymour's ambiguous traiting and miscegenation may foreshadow his madness and treachery, Yuna's parallel miscegenation means that his actions are more likely to be read as a warning of the psychological and social consequences of egocentrism, intolerance, and the inability to forgive: that is, as a warning for humans who *act* inhuman.

While all video game characters may have qualities of "inhumanity," games like FFX mark protagonists by more "moral" types, and/or discourses, as a means of fostering allegiance. Aside from the "amoral" and "immoral" type, it is possible to identify a type of "egocentric morality," whose basis is self-interested, but more in the liberal sense that people in *general* are "out for themselves," and this self-interest is legitimated by an ideology of individualism. It can be argued that allegiance in video games is often based upon this morality in its form as the seemingly "natural" morality or right for individuals to do what is necessary to survive. This extends to Tidus in FFX. At the beginning of the game, Tidus finds himself an orphan, teleported alone into a strange ocean, attacked by Geosgaeno; he explores the deserted ruins, makes a fire so as not to freeze, then falls asleep, only to be attacked by a giant lizard. Tidus's practical concerns with survival, safety and comfort define an agenda with which to define his other goals in the game (as well as the player's attitude towards gameplay, see Chapter Eight). Tidus' character is forced into a situation which promotes a reflexive individuation, a self-interested one-to-one relationship between self and

environment. In this sense, once he has been defined him as the protagonist, a player is likely to persist empathizing with him on the basis of his survival (ironically or tragically, given that Tidus is already dead).

A player's concern for the survival of another may be exploited by games in which characters are self-interested and expiatory to the point of vengeful carnage. Players are unlikely to question Tidus' right to defend himself against the many monsters that attack him; his encounters with wandering monsters are likely to be seen in Darwinian terms as survival of the fittest. (Player's investment in Tidus also is likely to mean that players become concerned with the morality of fair play, in the sense of their right to enjoy a game they paid for; again, see Chapter Eight). Both investment in Tidus' survival and the conservation of gameplay incline players to cultivate a sense of Tidus' moral right to victory; that might makes right (or should). Given the continuity of game mechanics and the fact that Tidus' quest *requires* him to cross many landscapes and confront countless monsters players also are unlikely to register as morally significant their choice to *chase* wandering monsters simply for the sake of increasing Tidus' experience (if only because this is part of the game, rather than the story). However, it needs to be emphasised that FFX does not exploit survival in its narrative frame in the same way as FPSs like Doom (1994), which involve a lone protagonist violently destroying hundreds or thousands of foes.

It is possible to distinguish this "egocentric morality" from a type of "rigid morality," in which a character believes in absolute truth and/or authority and inflexibly follows a particular set of rules as embodiments of this truth and/or authority. In FFX this is most evident in characters who follow the faith of Yevon. In Besaid, Tidus meets characters who profess obedience and devotion to the Law of Yevon and its priesthood. He also learns that the whole of Spira accepts the Law that states that Sin reappears every thirty years, that Summoners should die on the quest to defeat him, and that one of the Summoner's companions must sacrifice himself to become the next Final Aeon (Sin). Yevon's rigid morality, which is a belief in an absolute truth or authority and whose rules are meant to be followed as a categorical imperative, is most clearly represented by Wakka, for whom actions are (initially) defined as right or wrong according to their adherence to these Laws. For example, the use of Machina to defeat Sin at Mushroom Rock is wrong because it is against Yevon's Law, and Maester Seymour's treachery is incomprehensible because Maester's embody the Law. This leads to a judgemental attitude. While Wakka humbly accepts that all

people must "pay" for the sins which gave birth to Sin, he blames those of old Bevelle and those who use Machina.

This type can be distinguished from a fifth type, of "equal morality," predicated on some degree of understanding and the tolerance of others' moral values. For example, when Tidus is abandoned at the beginning of the narrative, his lonely return to the basics of survival functions as a context in which to define the value of sociality. By being helped by the Al Bhed ("You're friends!"), Tidus learns that it is *easier* to survive in the company of others, with the possible implication that humans are naturally gregarious. This provides a pragmatic basis for empathetic activity: irrespective of racial or cultural difference, those who help us survive are friends, if not our moral kin.

FFX also dramatises a morality based on the fair and tolerant negotiation of different people's values through its representation of inter-racial and inter-cultural interaction. Early on in a bar at Luca, Tidus witnesses a conflict between Kimahri and two other Ronso. Tidus is told that this is none of his business and, while he has reservations that non-interference is cowardice or a lack of loyalty, he holds back in the awareness that he does not fully understand the situation. Later, when Kimahri has to confront his Ronso brothers, Biran and Yenke, at Mount Gagazet, the other characters respect the honour-bound traditions he lives by, and stand back to let him fight alone. More generally, Yuna, as Summoner, embodies the virtues of harmony, and accepts men, women, human, Al Bhed, and Ronso as her Guardians. Yuna is also willing to marry Seymour, who is half-Guado, for the sake of harmony in Spira. The Al-Bhed are rejected by most of Spira, but Tidus initially accepts Rikku (as does Yuna when she meets her) and eventually all the other characters overcome their prejudice. Indeed, because of Yuna's attractiveness, the love that Tidus, the Guardians, and the people of Spira, feel for her, and her increasing role as a protagonist in whom players have invested, her miscegenation as half-human and half-Al-Bhed forces the characters, and inclines players, to overcome their prejudice against the Al Bhed.

While a type of "equal morality" may be predicated on self-interest, in that acting altruistically holds open the likelihood that others will act altruistically in our interest, it blurs into a sixth type of "selfless morality" that is predicated on not only empathy with the other, but a sense that selfless altruism is its own end. This is expressed in the actions of the Guardians, in that, as the heroes of the land, they precisely endanger themselves for the benefit of others. Tidus transfers the skills which make him a celebrity to the task of helping

Yuna, the Guardians, and the community of Spira. Of course, altruism may be seen in cynical terms as a pragmatic way of ensuring one's safety in the sense that we wish well those who wish us well. After all, Tidus is alone in a strange land and *needs* help to get home. In this respect, "Guardian" is his occupation, and the help he receives from Yuna and the others is his wage. Yuna's quest conveniently leads towards his own destination, Zanarkand, and also allows him to stay close to her.

Nonetheless, FFX occasionally dramatises a selfless morality predicated on the belief that the effacement of one's own interests is its own end. Yuna not only offers a single act of selflessness, of giving up her love for Tidus by promising to marry Seymour, she accepts the ultimate act of self-sacrifice: surrendering her life to Sin for the sake of her people. This self-sacrifice is significant because the empathetic realisation that another is altruistic makes it safer and more productive for one to maintain proximity and allegiance with them. This might be explained in psychoanalytic terms in that the voluntary restraint exhibited by moral characters not only facilitates the player's allegiance with them, it facilitates the player's acceptance of them as a super-ego. More generally, any admiration for another's compassion and sacrifice produces a growing gratitude and obligation, manifested as loyalty and friendship, because most narratives reward virtue, and the more moral the protagonist the more likely one is to expect a reward from investing in them. Certainly, since Yuna is the character with the most effective ability to heal characters and cure status ailments, FFX literally and continually rewards a player's allegiance to her.

The conflict between different moral types is a useful basis for nominating dynamics of empathetic emotions. Generally, characters of equal or selfless morality are seen as justifiably opposing amoral, immoral and rigidly moral characters. However, this tension is not only between obvious opponents, but within or between protagonists. Much of the narrative tension in FFX results from Tidus and Yuna, who are already flexible in their moral attitude, being confronted by those who are closed-minded and oppressive. Indeed, if survival provides a seemingly universal basis for allegiance to characters, then the resistance against the imposition of another's rigid morality is naturalized as an extension of the human right to live in, and fight for, freedom. Throughout the entire Final Fantasy series there is a celebratory disobedience and revolutionary quality against a tyrannical ruler or rulers. In FF7, Cloud is a member of Avalanche, who commits terrorism against the polluting Shinra Corporation. In FF8, Squall joins a resistance movement to overthrow the Garabadian government and then challenge a Sorceress bent on world domination. In FFIX, Daggerrebel



against her mother, the Queen, who is later seen as a puppet of another Sorcerer. In FFX, Tidus and the Guardians defy the Law of Yevon, and violate a host of taboos, as noted above.

Much of this revolutionary activity finds its subtext in the adolescent drive to find and assert oneself: Final Fantasy's characters tend to be young (Tidus and Yuna are 17), and the games often narrate a rite-of-passage. If adolescence is about finding one's place in the world, then across the Final Fantasy series there is a subtext of "adults" having not run the world properly and as needing to be overthrown by the "natural" vitality and morality of the protagonists. It is only once a "natural" moral order—in which everyone is freed from (some tyrant's) oppression—that the young can find their place. So, in coming-to-age through service to the state, characters realize that their values are not those of the state, and that they can only realize their selfhood by confronting the corrupt(ed) world of adult power and politics. Here it is significant that the AI Bhed, who are the first to reject Yevon's law in FFX, are initially coded as barbaric, childish, or terroristic (violence and kidnapping), but are later seen as more morally informed. The necessity of acknowledging one's own misjudgement may not only elicit shame, but also allow us to feel that we have both matured and renewed our contact to a more natural morality. Players may not only feel intellectually and morally superior to other characters because of this, they may feel moral outrage when others persist in reversing *their* initial judgement.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that FFX positions players to sympathise with Tidus' and Yuna's vulnerability and attractiveness, which may elicit compassion and foster their desirability as ego-ideals. This is likely to be reinforced by players' allegiance with the equal and/or selfless morality of the Guardians, which fosters identification with them as super-egos. Sympathy also will be reinforced through negative arousal towards unattractiveness, threatening and abnormal opponents, which is likely to be reinforced by negative allegiance resulting from their immoral, amoral, or rigidly moral typing. However, FFX also promotes a global sympathy for the population of Spira, including most opponents, as having experienced suffering or loss through the hermeneutic coding of tragedy. The helplessness of the player is partly dependant upon his/her position as a passive witness, but it may also resonate with his/her position as a player whose limited affordance merely serves to advance the tragic hermeneutic, producing not only the withdrawn tonality that Grodal (1997) associates with passive-introjection, but sadness as a dominant empathetic emotion or mood.

Nonetheless, we must make one final qualification. It is possible that Tidus' and Yuna's *excessive* vulnerability and sadness in the face of such an enormous and hopeless quest may produce "empathic distress" (Frijda, 1986), in the sense of discomfort around, and *aversion* to, the suffering of others. For example, a player's pleasure at being able to watch Yuna (for mules) and/or share in her situation may occasionally be outweighed by the player's frustration at the lack of access to her, the labour of the game (notably rescuing her when she is kidnapped by Seymour), and her ongoing sadness (as a consequence of her self-sacrifice). That is, Yuna is hardly a *fun* girl. Her tragic air may be alluring, but its poignancy may become *excessively* painful, especially given that she may die. This anxiety will be greater if players suspect that her function in the story will be like that of Aeris in FFVII: a tragic female who sacrifices her life for others. If this is the case, players may expect that any positive investment in her (as a character in the narrative and as a character in the game) will be wasted. Players similarly may feel personal distress in reaction to Tidus' ongoing lament about his father's mistreatment of him, and, later, from the realisation that he is dead and will not be united with Yuna.

Any such personal distress might manifest itself in a path of minimal investment: players may not let themselves feel too much towards a character, and/or may not spend too much Gil and/or time developing them. It may also manifest as momentary wishes and fantasising. For example, players may wish that Yuna disappear or die sooner rather than later, or that Tidus abandon his interest in her. Players might hold open the possibility of a positive resolution, such as Yuna and Tidus uniting as spirits, or that Tidus will come back from the dead (the premise, it turns out, of FFX-2). Alternately, players may displace interest onto other aspects of the character, or *other* characters entirely, perhaps by attending to Auron's prowess, the bond between Tidus and the Guardians, or the potential romance of Wakka and Lulu. Indeed, personal distress may increase the attractiveness of Seymour, whose easy composure in a position of authority offers an ideal of both autonomy and freedom, reinforcing players' experience of the game as a tragedy in which weak "virtues" are doomed. However, personal distress is significant in a broader sense, since it is metonymic of the general process whereby the player's empathy with characters is affected by, or gives way to, the player's own self-concern.

## Chapter Eight – Player Empathy

The previous chapter has argued that players are not in the same position as characters. When a character feels an egotistic self-concern, such as fear at a monster, a viewer may mentally simulate an (inhibited) version of that emotional state, but the viewer primarily experiences an altruistic concern for them. Here what concerns us is Carroll's (1984) additional observation that film viewers may feel an egocentric concern for their own position as a viewer and that this self-concern may conflict with their altruistic attitude towards characters. It similarly can be argued that players sometimes care less about the interests of their characters than they do about their own interests as a player. For example, when players engage in combat in *FFX* a character may function as a tool in the player's attempt to win the battle, and failure may be registered as sorrow in and for the player.

We cannot simply refer to this self-concern as imagine-self empathy and oppose it to imagine-other empathy directed to characters because there is no need to "imagine" another's situation: the player responds to his/her immediate position of oneself as a player in a game macrostructure (Tan, 1997, p. 185; see also Davis, Hull, Young & Warren, 1987; Hoffman, 1982; Stotland, Mathews, Chennan, Hansson & Richardson, 1978). Grodal (2003) and Frasca (2003) have offered similar arguments that some video games function as simulations, in that, rather than treating the game as representing anything, the player acts as if s/he occupied that space. Unlike the empathy and virtual wishing on behalf of characters which occurs while watching a film or cut-scene, ergodic sequences utilise the *player's* sensorimotor, cognitive and emotional scripts as if s/he were in that situation, albeit within a context of (partial) enactive mediation and/or subrivation.

It might seem inappropriate to use the term empathy to refer to the player's experience of his/her own situation, but to say that the player actually *believes* s/he occupies the simulated space, and acts on that basis, is to presume that the player is either gullible or deluded. Even in the most convincing simulation one can maintain cognitive awareness of the simulation, and most video games, including *FFX*, offer something very far from a convincing simulation. By implication, the situational context of play is defined by rules that are absent, or differently codified, outside of the play-space. Players may empathise with their prospects of winning or losing a game in a way that is uncommon during their daily activity. The term "player-empathy" can be used to distinguish the empathy that players feel towards themselves from the empathy that players feel towards characters. This player empathy may be seen as

separable from, but usually overlapping with, the ways in which players empathise with themselves beyond the play-situation. When a player feels that what has transpired in the game is significant beyond the game, as when a character's death in the game reinforces a player's general sense that s/he is a failure, or mortal, then "player-empathy" may be said to have blurred into the player's everyday experience of selfhood.

This chapter addresses players' emotional experience of play by arguing that gameplay promotes "pre-operatory" cognition (Piaget, 1951, 1978), characterised by egocentrism, by extending the agency of players, but that this egocentrism is regularly blocked. It is argued that while blocked egocentrism may be explained in psychoanalytic terms of narcissistic rage and anxieties about the (male) ego, Tomkins' (1962) and Nathanson's (1992) model of shame provides a more useful account of the emotional experience of gameplay.

### **Preoperational Egocentrism and its Blocking at the Interface**

For Piaget (1951, 1978), intelligence emerges from sensorimotor experience, in that as children grow they not only become capable of mentally representing sensorimotor actions, they become more systematic and logical in their organization of schemata, and increasingly adept at mentally manipulating them. Piaget refers to such cognitive work as "operations," which he defines as "internalised actions." At the concrete-operational stage, these operations can be mentally reversed, but they cannot be applied to complex or hypothetical problems. At the formal-operational stage, operations can be applied to all types of problems, including complex verbal and hypothetical ones.

While gameplay frequently engages the sensorimotor system, the performance of procedural schemata during ergodic sequences usually requires higher-level strategic cognition. Certainly, Loftus and Loftus (1983) discussion of player's strategies presumes that players have these cognitive capabilities, and the bottom-up and top-down cognitive processes discussed throughout this thesis require concrete- and formal-operational thought. Indeed, Turkle's (1984) distinction between two dominant styles of computer mastery parallel Piaget's categories. The "concrete" style is akin to Levi-Strauss' (1966/1976) notion of "bricolage" in that it is an approach to problem-solving which "involves entering into a relationship with [one's] work materials" (Turkle, 1984, p. 51). The individual experiments, makes mistakes, goes back, and reconsiders different approaches, until a workable/working

model is found. By contrast, the "abstract" style of mastery is characterised by a top-down approach, that is, an attempt to progressively break down tasks into components. Turkle's "concrete" and "abstract" styles may be seen as modes characterised by the *predominance* of concrete- and formal-operational operations, respectively, in that both styles would involve the use of both concrete- and formal-operations.

Turkle's emphasis on "abstract" and "concrete" styles is valid at a high level of generality, but it ignores what Piaget (1929/1973, 1950/2001, 1951, 1978) called "pre-concepts," or "preoperatory thought," now commonly referred to as "preoperational" (Wadsworth, 1989). For Piaget, cognition is preoperational prior to the acquisition of operational thinking. *Preoperations* have prelogical qualities, and are characterised by: an inability to follow certain transformations; an inability to mentally reverse operations; a tendency to focus on only one, or a few, of a stimulus' variables ("centration"); and the privileging of perception over cognition.

In characterising preoperational cognition it is useful to emphasise its close relationship with magico-religious modes of thought. Early anthropologists' were particularly concerned with the presence or absence of "rationality" in particular cultures and made a clear distinction between prelogical and logical thought (Horton & Finnegan, 1973, p. 17). Freud's (1913/1950) early account of magico-religious thinking, for example, followed Frazer's (1912/1993) view that ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis. An individual's psychological stages of narcissism/auto-eroticism, attachment to love objects, and abandonment to the reality principle were seen as respective parallels to the evolution of totemism, monotheism, and science. Consequently, early anthropologists tended to dismiss the primitive thinking—of "primitives", women and children—as developmentally inferior.

This position is no longer accepted because so-called "primitives" are as capable of scientific modes of thought as "civilised" scientists, who may in turn utilise non-scientific modes to legitimate their supposed "objectivity" (see Evans-Pritchard, 1937/1985; Levy-Bruhl, 1935/1983; Malinowski, 1954). Indeed, Turkle (1995) argues that the increased tendency towards a "concrete" style of computer use results from a cultural revaluation of concrete modes of thought that were formerly dismissed as "primitive," child-like, and feminine. The present position is that both pragmatic (proto-scientific) and magico-religious modes of thought may be found across the diversity of human cultures and that this reflects

the "psychic unity of [hu]mankind" (Tambiah, 1989, p. 84); yet at the same time, different "modes" of rationality coexist within cultures and individuals.

Magico-religious thought is not reducible to preoperations, nor do players of FFX simply regress to a preoperational stage, since they remain *capable* of formal-operations. However, formal-operational thinking is domain-specific, and unless an adult's environment demands accommodation there is not usually any need to utilise formal-operations. This being the case, it is possible to argue that there is a "preoperational mode" characterised by a preponderance of preoperational reasoning, but which presumes the use of other operations. More specifically, it can be argued that certain aspects of gameplay promote characteristics of preoperational thought—phenomenalistic causality, naïve realism, and physiognomic perception—often associated with magical thinking.

Phenomenalistic causality describes the process whereby the conjunction of events is mistaken as a causal relation, and is associated with children's (and "primitive") beliefs in magic, as when opening a curtain is seen as creating light or jumping up and down is seen as causing crops to grow higher. In video games this may result from players misperceiving the causal, or cybernetic, relationships which bind them to the game. For example, the conjunction of pressing the "O" button may be immediately followed by the appearance of a wandering monster, and may thereby be seen (or experienced) as causally related, even if the effect was random, or was triggered by some other event. This is partly a consequence of "intuitive" and well-known interfaces: the less troublesome the process of interaction, the less likely it is that a player will attend to signs at the interface as representations of computational processes. While this is likely to be a fairly transitory phenomenon, it overlaps with naïve realism, the belief that signs have an indexical relationship with the objects to which they refer. This is evident in children's beliefs in the power of words and language in which the quality of the object is seen as residing in the word and vice versa. Here there is no active perception of signs standing for, or motivating, processes within the computer. That is, digital signs—the character, the game world, and opponents—become treated as the objects of one's actions, not as representing something else. For example, players may perceive "powerups," including potions, as powerful *in and of* themselves, not as indexical of the power a character gains from them, and which is observed in subsequent actions.

This process is perhaps most obvious when one imbues the buttons and game controller with a quasi-mystical power, a tendency that has been exploited in Sony's

Playstation advertising campaign, which mystifies the game controller's symbols. Certainly, the Playstation controller's symbols are the point of contact between the diegetic and non-diegetic, the liminal entry point between the unreal and real, between the extended agency of the player's will and the limited agency of the character in his/her mundane existence. These are the symbols on the gates of the "Third Space" referred to in some of the advertisements for the Playstation 2. It is therefore not surprising that, stripped of any specific context of (inter)action in/with the game, they may represent the magical act of immersion or imagination itself, or the magical enforcement of the player's will, and are imbued with power (see Tambiah, 1996).

What is significant is that it is easy to mistake *oneself* as the cause of an event. This may occur whenever a player experiences a fortuitous congruence between his/her desire and game feedback: a character is injured, but finds a healing potion; a character is close to dying, but the opponent misses him/her; an opponent seems to be winning, but then the character defeats it with a critical attack. In such instances, it may seem as if the player has *caused* something to happen. Since the transparency of the interface brackets out the technicalities of mediation, a particular act, such as clicking on a menu item, seems to translate thought into deed (see Dibbell, 1993; Stefik, 1996). This blurs the boundaries between mind and body, such that the interface may be experienced as a place where one's thoughts or desires are magically manifested.

A player's felt interpenetration between will and world may lead to physiognomic perception, the tendency to project emotional states onto inanimate objects, or, more accurately, the inability to distinguish inner states of being from an external situation. We have already discussed this in terms of projection and the uncanny, and similarly Scott Bukatman (1993) has argued that virtual reality environments, and computers in general, are a "place for the return" of Freud's notion of the "omnipotence of thought" (1993, p. 209), in that the interface not only masks the body, it seemingly translates thought into deed. It can be argued that this experience occurs when players project or perceive events in terms of their own anxieties. For example, players of FFX may worry that they will not find enough potions to get them to the next save point, or that they will not find a save point before they have to stop playing to perform some social obligation, and one of these fears *comes true*. Players may feel anxious about being attacked by a particular monster, and find themselves suddenly confronted by a wandering monster of *that* type. In such situations, players' anxiety about their fate readily leads to an assumption that there are aggressive and malevolent external

forces acting against them, and players may constantly search for proof of this in game events. Here the player does not so much feel that s/he has caused something to happen so much as feel that his or her fears were (and are) justified.

While Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990, 1993) flow state is characterised by a narrowing of attention it is, of course, not necessarily accompanied by the kind of illogical cognition that Piaget associates with preoperational thought. Nonetheless, increased immersion into the logic of the game world and a state of flow does promote an egocentric tendency to bracket out mediating (computational, biological and social) processes. If, for Tan (1997), film viewers voluntarily enter into the illusions bound up in the diegetic effect, then it is likely that players may voluntarily enter into the experience of the machine as a proximal extension of the self, cultivating a preoperational egocentrism which serves their pleasurable experience of mastery. In other words, if gameplay is a space for ego-gratification, then players may seek a high degree of attunement between their thoughts and feedback at the interface, and this may produce characteristics of preoperational thought, including egocentrism.

While both psychoanalysis and cognitive psychology may have terminology for this process, the Freudian account (1919/1990) is less productive. A return of the repressed may occur during gameplay, producing some paranoid projection, but a modified version of Piaget's (1929/1973) model of preoperational egocentrism offers a more general account of the adaptive function of players' cognitive and affective work. Emotion, in its uninhibited extremes, overrides cognition and forces us to act; in its less extreme or inhibited forms it motivates and narrows attentiveness. It may be useful, then, to see the motivated and narrowed attentiveness that occurs during an emotional event as a form of "centration," in that certain aspects of a situation are not processed: one focuses upon the most salient threat and the concomitant affordances. This involves an increasing emphasis on nervous processes that are phylogenetically archaic, and it may activate preoperational thinking which is global or stereotypical in its appraisal ("The Al Bhed are Arabic! Don't trust them! Fight/Run!").

Stereotypes are a potential problem in any communicative context, in that they tend to produce a generalised negative/positive affect for a group, minimise the perception of variation, nominate and marginalise "others," constrain perception and behaviour, and are often self-confirming (Guirdham, 1999, p. 163). However, stereotyping, which may be seen as an adult manifestation of preoperational thought, is not simply prelogical, outmoded, or



incorrect. Stereotypes are an economic (albeit lazy) way of appraising one's environment. They provide ready-to-hand, general appraisals which are sometimes valid at a broad level of generality, short circuiting the need for convoluted reflection, thereby freeing one to act quickly (see Mackie & Hamilton, 1993). Because much gameplay *demands* quick action, and deliberately fosters a gratifying immersion, flow, and egocentrism, preoperational thought is a functionally useful way of accommodating information at the interface. Egocentrism therefore may be seen as the defining aspect of those preoperations that occur at the interface.

### **Blocked Egocentrism and Its Emotional or Aesthetic Significance**

While egocentrism may frequently occur, then, gameplay may be characterised through its repeated blocking, and earlier chapters have indirectly discussed aspects of video gameplay that may cause this. Chapter Two argued that digital articulation may block Gestalt impression of an image, and that shifts between observational or ergodic attitudes produce disjunctive proximal-distal transactions, especially when players are promised the freedom to act in a virtual world but can only choose from some basic, repetitious commands. We can extend this account by arguing that because preoperational experience is characterised by ignorance of mediation, video games may block egocentrism by drawing attention to their semiotic qualities. For example, the sense of the video game as an expression of one's mind is effectively blocked when one learns, or is confronted by, a new assignment of sign-functions. This occurs at the beginning of *FFX*, when characters acquire a new Overdrive, and when the player first plays blitzball. Such blocking is obvious when the player has to consciously check the controls and (re-)read the manual.

Increasing mastery will minimise an awareness of sign-functions, but the forced and hurried use of habituated procedural schemata may lead to make mistakes that create the same effect. Errors, for example, are obvious during those actions, such as Overdrive charging, which require complex and/or time-pressured button combinations during periods of high-affect: Auron's Shooting Star Overdrive requires players to press: "Δ," "O," "↓," "X," "Left," "Right," and "X" during a rapid countdown. More routine "errors" occur during combat when one scrolls down a small menu to find an item but scrolls past it because the inventory has not been properly sorted. Similar problems also occur because of unexpected or complex options during menu navigation. For example, a player may have fallen into a pattern of choosing various menu options for three selected characters in combat which is effective against most monsters (Attack: [Selected Monster]), but then may come across a monster which requires a

different sequence. If the player accidentally falls into the habituated sequence at some point, the player may be frustrated at the computer's inability to differentiate the selected assignment of sign-expression to a sign-vehicle (the routine: Attack: [Selected Monster]) from the *intended* assignment of a sign-expression to a sign-vehicle (such as: Summon: Ixion) in the Combat Menu.

Chapter Three argued that shifts in and between narrative and game interest structures may defer or block access to the objects of one's interest, and we may extend this by arguing that the game interface may block one's agency by limiting access to information that is important to the maintenance of flow. Poole (2000) addresses this by distinguishing the use of the "camera" in video games from its use in film. For him, the analogy to "camera" in describing the point of view in video games is limited in that, "cinematic camerawork of the kind that is immediately noticeable or stylish . . . often depends for its effect on *hiding* something from the viewer, *not* letting you see everything" (p. 81). We might accept Poole's point, then, that: "there can be no dramatic irony in videogames, because dramatic irony depends on a knowledge differential between spectator and protagonist – yet in a videogame the player is both spectator and protagonist at once" (p. 81). When games attempt to "replicate this kind of stylised shot choice," by (say) hiding an item or monster where players cannot see it, it "becomes a fraudulent and frustrating method of inducing tension; the player can get killed by zombies, not because the environment is cleverly designed, but because s/he was deliberately hindered from seeing them coming until it was too late"; consequently, "a purely filmic notion of camerawork cannot work in a videogame context. Film manipulates the viewer, but a game depends on being manipulable" (p. 81).

Against this it can be argued that level design in many games (most especially FPSs) involves the *deliberate* placement of monsters and objects to surprise, startle or frustrate the player (see Kushner, 2003, p. 143) and/or to exploit the graphical technology (Poole, 2000, p. 130). Some players accept that levels have to be replayed until they are known and mastered—after all, this is Friedman's (1995) aesthetic of "demystification," Turkle's (1995) "tinkering," and Myers (1990b) "experimentation." While FFX's game macrostructures are not governed by an aesthetic of surprise and shock, they do reward with items players who explore hidden areas. Consequently, the blocking of items, like the chests hidden behind crates on the Luca docks, is a challenge that is part of the game's aesthetic of mastery and demystification, coded in both ergodic and narrative in terms of the exploration and colonisation of space (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995). Certainly, it is frustrating to search an area and

realise there was nothing to be found, but players are not required or expected to find every item hidden on the side of paths, behind boxes, or in distant or secret locations, since players can pass the game without them. Whether players search systematically, continuously, or occasionally depends upon their selected strategy and style of play.

Nonetheless, earlier chapters addressed other processes that may block a player's egocentrism. Chapter Five discussed the dual narrative and game coding of characters, which Chapter Six argued could lead to a tension between characters as ideal egos and ego-ideals; and Chapter Seven argued that players' empathetic emotions depend upon their separateness from characters. These arguments hold open the possibility that characters may act against a player's virtual wishes, guidance, or commands. While empathy may result from seeing characters as independent, unique and unpredictable personalities, a character's ignorance of one's virtual guidance in observational sequences, and the absence of desired affordances during ergodic sequences, may be experienced as defiance. Consequently, characters who engage in actions that are not in accord with a player's motives or goals may effectively deny or undermine that player's free interaction, mastery and desired omnipotence over the game world.

It is evident, then, that gameplay both encourages and blocks egocentrism; the issue that follows this recognition is the emotional or aesthetic significance of such blocking. Within psychoanalytic discourse, the blocking of egocentrism may be seen primarily as a cause for fear or anger. In Freud's or Klein's terms (see respectively Kinder, 1991, and Skirrow, 1980) blocked egocentrism may be seen in terms of fear, in that the constant threat of failure or being overwhelmed by opponents during gameplay may be premised upon an aggressive defence against the regression of the male ego to an earlier state of vulnerability. First person shooters (FPS) may be seen as exploiting this quality. For example, Carr (2003) argues that *Silent Hill* (1999), being a horror game, "aims for intensity, tension and fright" (p. 3), and to this end is "tense, sparse and linear" (p. 2). Its incessant fighting and tight first-person perspective hold open the possibility of sudden death, and its horror-genre premise of supernatural incursion creates a sense of the monstrous violation of the real. The fighting, maze-like space, limited save points, keys and puzzles, all drive the player inevitably forward in a "tidal pull" (p. 3), allowing the game to "instigate and maintain pace and tension, [fuelling] its unnerving visions of death and possession" (p. 2). This constitutes a characteristically male aesthetic or pathology that constantly places the ego under threat while providing affordances for reactive and pre-emptive destruction. Creed's (1993) account of the

monstrous-feminine would seem applicable here, in that the presence of monstrous and dangerous females, such as the alien in Aliens vs Predator (1999), explicitly links a threat to the player's ego to male anxieties about female sexual power.

However, such accounts are not particularly relevant to role-playing games (RPGs). Carr (2003) observes that, compared with Silent Hill (1999), the RPG Planescape: Torment (1999) is more concerned with immersion, and is consequently dilatory, encyclopaedic, open-ended and cyclical, encouraging detours and the (re-)examination of detail. Players can save almost anywhere, minimising fear of re-play, and there is a more accommodating top-down perspective which provides for visual mastery and a strategic orientation. Its goals also "remain dispersed or vague," and in place of an ongoing anxious rush it prefers "to be savoured, wandered through, in the company of armed companions" (p. 8)—in short, in relative *safety*. Carr implies that it would be misleading to place undue emphasis on psychoanalytic accounts of negative affects—on a constant re-staging of primal fear about death or ego-loss—in RPGs, which promote an aesthetic that is atmospheric and strategic.

These comments apply almost wholesale to FFX, which allows replay, offers a third person perspective, is open-ended, and encourages mastery through combat strategy and exploration. Most of the game's images of bodily disintegration and death are so typical to fantasy fiction, RPGs, and previous instalments of the Final Fantasy series, that they may be seen less as expressing latent anxieties about separation anxiety, (s)mothering, castration or death than as conserving the genre. For example, while stereotypical images of the monstrous-feminine (Creed, 1993) may be found in many CRPGs, the only real horrifying female figure in FFX is Yunaesca; the main opponents are male. A player may interpret this absence in terms of a male destructive force that must be destroyed to re-instate the role of the nurturing mother (absent from Tidus' life) in the (re-) productive (social) life of Spira (whose positive aspects are figured by Yuna). Yet such an interpretation is more intelligible at a hermeneutic level in relation to broad cultural anxieties, and hardly describes the player's likely interpretation of the game or motivation.

In a Lacanian (1977/2001) account, the forced shift from a narcissistic experience when one's agency is blocked may be seen as posing the presence of an Other that challenges the Self at the level of the imaginary, inciting narcissistic rage. This might be seen as a useful and broadly applicable model. After all, while play may be ideally satisfying to the ego, games *require* challenge and *necessarily* frustrate the ego. Difficulty settings not only

accommodate flow by adapting play to a player's increasing mastery of the system, they indicate that challenge is an aesthetic of gameplay, and anger is an emotion that may help us face challenges. Furthermore, the labour of play may be seen as analogous to the labour of shoring up the ego. Indeed, it cannot be over-emphasised how much of the player's affective activity is bound up in the simple issue of labour, of the expenditure of time and effort. FFX requires up to 90 hours of gameplay and complex cognitive strategies which, if they fail, require players to repeat extended sequences. Characters, including the history of their development, may function as an *index* of the player's investment in the game as a whole, with death of a character less a figuration of the player's castration than an index of the player's loss of labour. The point is that the greater the loss of labour, the greater the offense to the ego, and the greater the narcissistic rage.

This angry response to a challenge to the self response may be reinforced because, as was argued in Chapter Seven, the absence of moral, human qualities minimises empathy and maximises negative empathetic emotions. That is, the computer may be attributed with super-human qualities that promote an angry sense of unfair opposition which opposes any sense of egocentrism. If a computer wins it can be accused of cheating because, not being human, it does not *think*, it merely calculates to an inhuman degree. This promotes the kind of injustice one might feel if two people were given the same mathematical problem to solve, but one of the people had a calculator. In this sense the computer is an instrumentality to which the player has no access. Such an awareness of the computer as a computer may lead players to recognise that there is not an equal playing field, which takes away any sense of play as a just experience. The computer's lack of reciprocity may lead to an expiatory type of anger in which players punish the game, smashing and cursing it, for a felt injustice. It is not just that: "You cheated" or "You broke the rules"; there is a more profound sense that: "You betrayed me! This was meant to be fun!" It is precisely because players are encouraged to promote egocentrism at the interface (an overextension of the self into the machine) that the rage they feel towards the machine may be so potent: there is a sense of having been betrayed during an (invited) intimate moment.

However, seeing gameplay in terms of male ego anxiety and aggression readily suggests a phallogocentric stance or a polemical feminist agenda. We should not forget that story- and character-based games such as Final Fantasy attract more of the female market (Cassel & Jenkins, 1998), and psychoanalytic accounts tend to draw attention away from why some games appeal to *both* genders. As Grodal (1997) argues of film, most of the perceptual,

cognitive and affective aspects of gameplay already addressed—*affective tone*, the regulation of interest, and the production of empathetic emotions—are not gender specific. Therefore, reducing analysis to issues of gender misrepresents the emotional experience of gameplay. This is not to argue that gender should not be addressed, that gender is never central to the experience of gameplay, or that the above psychoanalytic accounts are without value; it is more to state that more fundamental processes need to be accommodated. Indeed, we can correct some of the gender bias in psychoanalytic accounts by simply observing that male players do not usually fear the loss of their penis so much as the loss of the phallus, and that castration may be read as trans-gender metaphor for the diminution of a player's ego through the loss of (symbols of) power. Similarly, while aggression may be associated with males, we can observe that narcissistic rage is not always gendered and often will depend upon the consolidation of an individual player's ego.

Nonetheless, while play *may* be experienced in psychoanalytic terms as the labour of shoring up the ego, with fear resulting from one's loss of power and anger resulting from a challenge to one's agency, it can be argued that players may sometimes feel quite differently about the *work* of gameplay: slowly guiding a character across an entire level, fighting recurring wandering monsters, re-loading sections and replaying them, for the possibility of some future reward of interest or fun. The following argues that if gameplay is experienced, not as a constant state of egocentrism and flow, but as a recurring sense of blocking with an ongoing threat of the loss of labour, then shame may be central to gameplay.

### Shame, and the Compass of Shame

In Tomkins' (1963) account, the familiar emotions of shame, defeat, shyness, inferiority, guilt, humiliation, and frustration are built upon an underlying *affect* of shame. In this model, which accords with Izard's (1984) model of the physiological substrates of the major emotions, shame is an auxiliary affect whose activator is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. More broadly, shame is a physiological response to sudden and unexpected separation from positive affect, and it is associated with the inhibitive activity of the parasympathetic nervous system. The immediate form of shame as a "slump, blush, averted gaze, and loss of attention" reflects an attenuation of interest, in the sense that "nobody can think clearly in the moment of shame . . . [It] turns off interest-based consciousness and turns on shame-based consciousness and shameful attention" (Nathanson, 1992, p. 133). Schorc's

(1994) neurophysiological account describes shame more precisely in terms of an "attachment deactivator" component, which:

[is] mediated by activation of the lateral tegmental limbic circuit, [and] acutely brakes hyperaroused and hyperstimulated states, diminishes positive narcissistic coloring of self-representations, contracts the self, lowers expectations, decreases self-esteem, active coping, interest and curiosity, interferes with cognition and increases overt consciously experienced shame, parasympathetic supported passive coping, blushing, gaze aversion, and depressive affect-toned mood. (p. 363)

Defined this way, shame is the least damaging of the negative affects. It forces us to re-appraise a recent situation, and potentially re-engage with that situation with greater attention to those aspects of it which we perceive to have caused the shame response.

As we develop, this affect is socialised and begins to take on the emotional character usually associated with shame. For example, when we have been cut short mid-sentence, we may initially experience the underlying *affect* of shame, but we will also search our memory for similar situations. These may refer to social conventions, such as speaking out of turn or too loudly, and layered associations to one's physical ability, sense of helplessness, a lack of success, sense of self, attractiveness, visibility, and anxieties about intimacy, and so on (Nathanson, 1992, p. 317; see below). This awareness of shame is a significant characteristic of its socialised form as an emotion, especially given that the visible signs of shame, such as blushing, usually amplify the affect (Tomkins, 1963, p. 36).

Of course, gameplay is often a solitary situation with a non-human opponent, and players do not usually accord the machine the authority to shame them in the everyday sense. However, the ongoing blocking, frustration, failure and loss of positive affect may be seen as an experience of this innate *affect* of shame, and it can be argued that there are some instances in which the *emotion* of shame may emerge. If this is the case, then it may be possible to see some player's strategies of self-regulation in terms of Nathanson's (1992) model of "the compass of shame" (table 8.1), developed in co-operation with Tomkins to find therapeutic applications of his theory. This model identifies four general tendencies—"withdrawal," "attack other," "avoidance," and "attack self"—which suggest four categories of the ways players may attempt to self-regulate the play experience.

Table 8.1 Nathanson's (1992) compass of shame adapted to scripted patterns of shame-regulation in video gameplay.

Point of Compass	Style of Operation	Sexuality	Auxiliary Affects	Range of Action
Withdrawal	Shame affect as such	Impotence; frigidity	Distress; fear	Sulk in presence of game → resign/hide from game
Attack Self	Avoid helplessness	Masochism	Distress; self-disgust; self-dissmell	Defer to game/situational logic → belittle own ability
Avoidance	Prevent the affect	Maclismo	Excitement; anger	Deny or cover-up failure by reinforcing one's pride (self-esteem), or by adjusting one's attitude to the game (preparation, seeking help, cheating)
Attack other	Avoid inferiority	Sadism	Anger, dissmell; disgust	Put-down sequence, game, genre, medium, context of play and/or game producers → sadistic behaviour against game and/or game world

In the context of play, which is often characterised by an energetic and pleasurable immersion in the play space, a minimal form of the affect of shame may occur whenever a player's engagement has been suddenly cut short. Where this is seen as simply unexpected, or as reflecting upon one's own failure, this may manifest as a momentary lack of responsiveness, or exhalation, characteristic of resignation. That is, the player may take a second to recognise the separation before making the effort to re-enter the play space. However, it is also possible that gameplay may elicit more extreme forms of shame, especially when the player has a personality prone to shame, or if there is an antecedent condition that makes the player vulnerable to shame, for example a pronounced depressive state. A player in this state may take longer to pick themselves up from their ejection from pleasurable engrossment in the play space, in the depressive sense of learned helplessness. This might be manifested as sitting and staring at the game controller or floor, looking away from the screen, or (at its most extreme) the player quietly getting up or turning off the game. The cognitive expression of this shame might be intelligible in terms of the game as an (anthropomorphised) witness to one's failure and, consequently, a desire not to be "seen" by, or not to be near, the machine.

However, this sense of shame may become even more pronounced, since the status of the computer as a partner in, or context for, play holds open the possibility that the player may recognise or experience the entire process of gameplay as wasted labour, as an empty kind of play. The issue is that, while the computer may have some super-human qualities, it especially may be characterised by the *absence* of human qualities. The computer does not experience fun, nor can it witness or acknowledge one's fun or ego: it is a cold, rational, unfeeling



device, and one's victory may occasionally or retrospectively change from excitement into an uncanny moment of realising that one's intimacy with the game and its characters was experienced with such an impersonal artificial intelligence. Even if one *does* win, the victory may be seen as a hollow, partial or alien victory against something incapable of recognising or understanding that victory and/or the strategies which led to it.

Shame in the more common sense, as an emotion, may occur whenever one makes a personal link between oneself and negative stereotypes of people who play games, as when a player recognises oneself as having spent too much time on a game, as lazy, failing to confront the real world, or as excessively escapist. However, it is perhaps more likely that players feel shame as a consequence of evaluating gameplay from someone else's perspective. That is, a player may experience the game not in terms of his or her own gratification, but *someone else's* gratifications, as when the player is engaged in such tedious tasks as navigating the landscape, looking behind bushes, trees, and crates, re-checking areas in case anything was missed, and becomes conscious that this activity is not gratifying to a co-player, viewer or commentator (say, a competitor or researcher). Such an empathetic emotion requires only a minimal form of cognitive empathy: for example, the presumption that the observer prefers kinaesthetic spectacle or some dazzling demonstration of spatial or strategic skill. The player may feel that s/he has failed whenever there is no such spectacle or demonstration, and may oscillate between shame, guilt or embarrassment towards oneself, anxiety about the protracted nature of a dull sequence, or anger towards all the perceived causes for this experience of failure. This can be extended to players who participate with observer-participant research and become self-conscious that play is being evaluated according to some "intellectual" aesthetic. If nothing else, such shamefulness may be sustained by the ongoing presence of the observer, attenuating flow and its pleasurable egocentrism.

The *avoidance* pole of shame refers to the ways we "reduce, minimize, shake off or limit" (Nathanson, 1992, p. 313), either through drugs, sex, or other stimulation, or by calling attention to whatever brings us pride. That is, avoidance is achieved, not through the physical withdrawal which characterises shame as such, but through diversionary stimulation and/or positive evaluation of one's self-esteem, for example the activation of narcissistic scripts, sometimes to the extent of denial. For Tomkins (1962), Nathanson (1992), and Schore (1994), pride is complementary to shame in regulating self-esteem, or, more precisely, self-esteem is governed by "two dissociable psychobiological components" (Schore, 1994, p. 363). The

"attachment deactivator," which is part of shame, constitutes one of these components; the other component, the "attachment regulator":

[is] mediated by activation of the mesocortical central tegmental limbic circuit, [and it] reduces consciously experienced shame, negative affective self-representations, low-keyed depressive states and passive coping, and initiates self-comforting functions which enable recovery of sympathetic supported positive hedonic-toned mood and narcissistic affect, expansion of the self, and active stress coping capacities. (p. 363)

The cognitive component of the "shame modulator" that Schore identifies as a "pride" response may include benign responses such as "I'll get it, if I keep trying." This may give way to attempts to re-define one's aesthetic relationship to the machine. For example, players may accept that the game is harder than they desire and may subsequently change the difficulty settings, or may check to see if there is any preparation that can be accomplished, such as double-checking the manual, playing tutorial sequences, and searching out hints, cheats or walkthroughs. In *FFX*, certainly, a great deal of time is spent preparing characters by buying and selling items, rearranging items in the inventory, checking cheat notes, and so on, to maximise the chances of surviving a dangerous opponent or section of the game. This allows one to literally avoid moments of mis-attunement or failure and/or overcome whatever initiated shame, and thereupon re-engage with the game without damage to one's self-esteem.

However, pride may also lead to such over-optimistic responses, such as "I'm worth it, I'll give me/it another chance!" or "There must have been a mistake, let's try that again!" This may lead to preoperational thoughts that conserve the player's egocentrism in spite of contradictory feedback (Reith, 1999). That is, when the conscious exertion of will does not seem magically realised, phenomenalist causality may be preserved through the use of the kind of magical thinking that gamblers use to justify continued play in spite of losing. In this model failure does not necessarily disprove (the efficacy of) our (desired) omnipotence, it merely proves one's failure to fully enter into the potency of that state. For example, sequences which contradict our expectations of influence may be dismissed in terms of: intention ("I was not thinking about it so I shouldn't have expected it to happen"); intervention ("something was influencing my attempt to realise my intention"); flawed method ("I did something wrong so it didn't happen"); or weighted probability ("If I keep at it it *will* happen").

Since preoperational reasoning may function to preserve the state of play, the above kind of thinking is not necessarily symptomatic of some problem in the player's personality or

in the experience of play. The broader significance of the pride response is that it functions to renew and augment interest by creating a positive net return, which may provide sufficient stimulus to provide closure and comfortably terminate gameplay. If the affective (and aesthetic) character of play is oriented around self-esteem, pride may signal adequate self-esteem *vis a vis* the act of play: a sense of accomplishment, of a *resolved* action tendency. The cognitive form of this might be: "I played to win, and I won: so the game is over." This closure may make it easier for the player to compartmentalise a gaming session, in spite of the absence of a discrete emotion-episode, and achieve something closer to the kind of cathartic or aesthetic pleasure found after viewing a classical drama or feature film. Nonetheless, some players may turn to pathological evaluations, such as: "I'm great, no matter what this #\$%^ thing says!" and may play and fail repeatedly as a means to prove the game's inability to recognise their perceived worth ("What do *you* know, you're just a dumb machine!"). This kind of pride is so excessive that the experience of gameplay primarily enables aggressive scripts that deal with negative self-esteem.

In the case of the *attack self pole* of shame, anxiety about the helplessness and isolation characteristic of shame leads one to attempt to take control of the experience, that is, by voluntarily putting oneself down in the presence of another. We thereby accept a reduced sense of self but avoid feelings of helplessness and isolation by maintaining a social dialogue (Nathanson, 1992, p. 313). In place of another, of course, we may simply internalise the voice of the other as a conscience or super-ego and regard the intensity of this voice as surrogate proximity to the other. The most benign response to this might have the cognitive form of: "that was more unexpected or difficult than I could have expected; maybe I'll learn," such that the player defers to the game as a pupil to a tutor. However, the player may respond in terms of far more damaging layers of association, such as the player cognitions listed in Table 8.2, adapted from Nathanson's (1992) schemata of negative self-evaluation.

Table 8.2. Schemata of self-evaluation, adapted from Nathanson (1992, p. 317).

Schemata category	Sample schemata
(A) physiological limitations	"I am slow, clumsy, incompetent."
(B) dependence/independence	"I cannot design games; I am totally helpless before this game; there's nothing I can do but cheat by consulting someone else who can do this properly."
(C) competition	"I am a loser, I have been beaten by a machine."
(D) sense of self	"I must be the only person who can't get this; it must be obvious to everyone else who plays this."

(E) personal attractiveness	"How attractive can I be, sitting here alone playing this game?"
(F) sexuality	"I am so sexually inadequate I am failing at fighting imaginary opponents, autoerotically twitching the controls while watching Yuna and Lulu."
(F) visibility	"Thank God this is not an arcade game. I can't let anyone see me like this."
(H) wishes/fears about closeness	"I am completely alone with a machine and even it is unresponsive: I could never be loved or deal with a real person."

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The emotional tone of play may not always involve such conscious cognitive responses, and will certainly vary with the player's personality and scripts. However, a frequent, significant response to such negative self-evaluations may be the resumption of play *not* to prove that the game is faulty, as in the avoidance pole, but to prove that the *self* is insufficient. This ongoing demonstration may function as a limited form of phatic contact, maintaining the relationship that staves off a feared sense of isolation.

It is common, of course, for players to have emotional responses to the game which are fundamentally aggressive, premised upon narcissistic rage, or upon more complex appraisals of the situational context. However, sometimes aggression may be a secondary, defensive response, as in Nathanson's (1992) fourth pole of shame: *attack other*. In this case, the shame response "is associated with a feeling of lowered self-worth that is simply unbearable" such that "we are likely to reduce another person so that we can at least be better than someone else" (p. 136). The obvious cognitive form of this kind of response is a verbal reduction, humiliation or abuse of a *section* of the game ("This section is boring, when do I get back to the fun!"), the *game* as a whole ("I hate FFX!"), the *genre* ("I hate Final Fantasy games" or "I hate adventure role-playing games!"), the *medium* ("I hate video games!" or "I hate computers!"), or a physical (sadistic) attack on the video game itself (striking the console, keyboard or joystick). It might be observed here that when players think: "You cheat!" they are not necessarily engaging in physiognomic perception, that is, projecting of human qualities onto to the game. The expression "you" may be a linguistic convenience, since the designer of the hardware or software may be accused *in absentia*, or the player may simply be giving voice to an experience in which s/he *feels* "cheated."

However, the attack other pole of gameplay may also be seen when the player takes a prolonged and (mediated) sadistic attitude to play. For example, instead of physically attacking the machine, the player may play in spite of their resentment and deliberately go out

of their way to violate the rules of the game. This is evident when players take their time during a timed sequence, deliberately go the wrong way when given a predetermined path, avoid goals or quests the game provides for them, or deliberately crash/kill their vehicle/character. In video games, of course, this rejection of the rules may sometimes be seen as producing a kind of humorous mayhem through comic mis-use. This may, in turn, be taken as setting up an opposition between the inert, stupid inhumanity of the computer (with its grim conformity to rules and its formulaic guide for play) and the creative/destructive activity of the human player (capable of illogical behaviour and absurdity).

Nathanson's (1992) model of the shame therefore suggests some of the ways that players may experience shame and self-regulate it, but it is particularly useful because it suggests that what video games really offer is a *context* for self-regulation. After all, while self-regulation may be a necessary consequence of gameplay, it is possible that the provision of a context for self-regulation may constitute the aesthetic appeal for some players. This is not the same as saying that players wish to enter a state of "flow," since a game may offer a series of challenges, frustrations and failures which threaten to sever the player from a state of "flow," *forcing* the player to recover from it. The desired "zone" of self-regulation is premised upon a level of difficulty that is not only sufficient to maintain interest but is also capable of producing shame responses. The player, then, may have a sense not so much of seamless "flow" as of a staggered series of interruptions, after which the player must re-appraise the situation, pick themselves up, and re-enter the "flow" state; or, alternately, they enter a state of "flow" whose tonality is negatively charged relative to the perceived proximity of a shame response and the labour required to process it.

It is obvious, of course, that players may feel happiness in the sense of relief at the unexpected end of a long sequence, or gratitude at suddenly finding or being given some desired item or aid. However, happiness, especially as it is associated with flow, may be seen as a reward for self-regulation; mastery comes through practice, through constantly overcoming an opposing force, through defying the external agency of the game and subordinating to our own will, assimilating it as procedural schemata. It is not merely that players win or complete a game, and that their happiness is thereby over and done; happiness *itself* is won from the game, and this victory allows the player to retrospectively value gameplay. For example, an entire, frustrating and dehumanising session, or history of play, may be emotionally and aesthetically recuperated when an ongoing process of self-regulation finally culminates in success.

## The Transfer and Dynamics of Emotion in Video Game Aesthetics

Earlier chapters have identified a number of processes and factors that govern the relationships between players, characters, and games. Notably, it has been argued that focusing upon the identity between characters and players is misleading because a player's position is mediated by an observational attitude and ergodic conventions. That is, players' empathetic emotions are, even when sympathetic, usually different from those of characters, and the empathy that players may feel for themselves as players may interfere with empathy with characters.

Of course, as was noted in the introduction, this thesis has largely focused on "homogeneous" emotional experiences, when in practice each player's emotional experience depends upon antecedent factors. For example, a player's psychobiography and learned patterns of expectation may lead to distinctive emotion-episodes (see Tan, 1997, p. 154). An individual player may have a learned affective response of distaste to a particular class of people, and may, upon becoming aware of this habituated response, feel guilt which self-amplifies until the individual feels distress, whereupon the individual becomes angry at their susceptibility to this distress, and directs this anger at the class of people in question. If this assembly of affect is triggered by an event in a film, then its points of articulation are unlikely to find realisation in the narrative. Consequently, a viewer's emotion episodes may cross scenes and give rise to expectations and action tendencies that are not accommodated by the narrative.

More generally, existing affects or emotions will affect a player's sensitivity to concerns presented in the game, to the extent that players may respond to unexpected aspects of a situational context. A player who is in an angry state may seek objects for that anger, whereas another player may seek attunement with objects that mirror his/her own self-pity. For example, one player may experience anger at Wakka when he abuses Rikku because of her race, while another player may experience embarrassment, awkwardness or anxiety on Rikku's behalf. Yet another player may experience anger at Sin, who caused Wakka's prejudice by killing his brother Chappu (while using an AI Bhed weapon). Consequently, for some players Wakka's chiding by Tidus may constitute adequate resolution, while for other players the only adequate resolution of defeating Yu Yevon comes later at the resolution of the game.

Nonetheless, it is possible to define antecedents that players are likely to share because of the emotions likely to be cued during prior sequences, and if interest may be preserved or transferred between narrative and game macrostructures, then we may presume that the empathy players feel for characters and the empathy they feel for themselves may operate as antecedents for one another. Anger which finds its expression as global empathy with oneself against the machine ("I hate this game") may be redirected as local empathy with oneself posed against a particular opponent ("I hate this Funguar!"). Similarly, a global or local empathy with oneself ("I'm useless at this game!") may be redirected as local empathy with a character ("I pity Tidus!"). This local empathy with Tidus may be redirected as global empathy with all the characters in Spira, or all humans ("We are trapped by our greed and hate!"). Indeed, any local empathy felt towards Tidus when he is attacked by Machina may resonate with a players' sense of being the victim of a frustrating machine.

Multiple, mixed, and dynamic emotional cues may also lead to conflicting or ambivalent emotional states. We may have motor empathy with a character that affords us the pleasure of kinaesthesia, but we may dislike the character's appearance or persona. Innate releasers may present a character as unattractive, yet vulnerable, such that we feel both repulsion and sympathy. We may feel a tonic sympathy for a character as a hero or helper, yet a situational context may promote a phasic contempt for them during a sequence. We may disagree with the reasoning and motives of a character, yet we may respect their courage as they pursue their goals. We may feel that the constraints at the interface resonate with the constraints experienced by a character, yet may also feel that a character's goals are imposed upon or own (we want to do *this*, but Tidus wants to do *this*). We may find that we are so concerned with our labour that a character becomes an index of our own agency, a vehicle of our own gameplay, and we evaluate it solely in terms of aesthetic appeal or functional usefulness. At the same time, some aspect of the character may continually draw us back into a position of sympathy, compassion or admiration.

Some of these dynamics may occur in any medium. For example, poor television reception, a book that is falling apart, or a noisy person in a cinema, may occasionally produce a context of irritation that may be transferred as the desire for an antagonist's punishment; and a book or film character may be both admirable and contemptible. However, the necessary blocking of egocentrism which is a part of any rule-governed game may routinely produce emotions directed towards the medium, or what Tan (1997) calls "artefact

emotions" ("A-emotions"). These A-emotions may constantly come into conflict with emotions directed towards the diegesis of narrative and game macrostructures, or what Tan calls "fiction emotions" ("F-emotions"). The tensions resulting from the conflict between A-emotions and F-emotions, which may often result from the dual role of the player as participant and witness, may mean that video games may be characterised by disjunctive or ambivalent emotional states.

Earlier chapters have argued that *FFX* aesthetically recuperates some of its disjunctive qualities; here we can elaborate that video games in general may accommodate the disjunctive experience of dual character and player coding as part of their aesthetics. Tim Schafer (cited by Pearce, 2003), for example, has observed that when a character is required to perform a particular action, game designers often offer the player a reward so that their own actions coincide with that of the character. For Schafer: "you can't just rely on the story empathy, you have to put in little gameplay bribes, to make them like [a] character and want to pursue [them]" (§ 6). In *FFX*, for example, the character's and player's motives for rescuing Yuna are different. While both Tidus and the player may desire to see Seymour get his comeuppance, Tidus has the opportunity to "win" Yuna by saving her, whereas the player is motivated by investment in the act of viewing the progression and/or culmination of a romantic macrostructure, the pleasure of being able to renew a voyeuristic relationship with Yuna, and the practical reward of being able to fight with Yuna's Aeons.

For Schafer, such moments of divergence between character and player motive may be "kind of interesting to the player" (p. 9), and he argues that the player can be thought of as the "intuition" of the character:

The character is . . . hearing this voice in their head that's saying "walk to the right." And they're like, "okay, I think I want to walk to the right." And the character always exhibits this cognitive dissonance. They act like they wanted to. "Yeah, I think I want to go over here. I think I want to open this door." But it's really you, you're kind of like this voice in their head, this Tourette's-syndrome compulsion – "Open the door. Open it!" And they're like, yeah, uh, I want to open the door. . . . Because you're not the actual thought of the character, you're sort of the hunch. . . . It's like in real life, we're getting these weird impulses that we don't really understand sometimes. (§ 90-92)

This certainly suggests some possibilities about the psychoanalytic relationship between player and character. For example, the player may be not only a character's "intuition," but also his/her super-ego or unconscious. In the first case, characters may perform such virtues as courage, bravery and self-sacrifice which players have no scope to perform in their mundane



lives. The player therefore may function like the character's super-ego, making noble choices, or the character may externalise the player's super-ego such that the play space becomes a realm of honourable heroism. More than this, where the player sees more than the character, helps him to choose wisely, and/or corrects mistakes through replaying a sequence, the player may enact a position of benevolent guidance. That is, acting to ensure a character's survival may be experienced as committing to a reassurance in a higher self or higher forces, a kind of secular faith.

In the second case, characters may perform anti-social acts that express a player's unconscious or repressed impulses. That is, the play space may be seen as criminal playground in which the prohibited desires and villainy that enters players' minds during their everyday life can find remorseless exercise. However, since players' desires are constrained by not only by the social order, but also the limited scope of ergodic action, aggressive actions may be a response to the formulaic rules of the interface and game. Indeed the player's expiatory agency may be targeted at characters, who may be placed in precarious situations less to tempt death than to tempt relief from the stress of the challenge that prohibits the player. Having lost the game a player may renew his/her non-virtual life, simulating an oddly fatalistic immortality. The player thereby becomes part of the forces that drive characters into danger, and is liberated by his/her capacity for chaos and destruction.

While it is possible to view characters as a psychic extension of the player, or vice versa, it is more useful to see divergences between characters and players as inclining players to recognise, understand, and/or act in accordance with, another's (conceptual) point of view. That is, differences between characters and players may help players to become aware that they are engaged in an act of empathy, that they are, after all, role-playing, and may wonder: "What would the character do? How does it differ from what I would do? What are the repercussions of this choice? Given those repercussions, why *did* I choose to do that? What does that say about me?" Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar (1985) was memorable and significant precisely because of the moral dilemmas it posed for players, who found that their actions as a player had repercussions for their characters (Herz, 1997, pp. 155-159; King & Borland, 2003, pp. 74-75). In one section, for example, the player could choose to pay a blind woman a single coin for her help, ignoring not just her disparaging comments, but also the moral implications of such exploitation. Later in the game, the characters learn that they need her help, and if they have been miserly it is too late to apologise: she remains resentful, and the game is harder to complete. Not only is the player forced to realise the consequences of

his/her act in the game world, the morality of this act unexpectedly traits the characters under his/her control.

Unfortunately, FFX does not much exploit these possibilities. While the game has narrative depth and complexity, its ergodic freedom is navigational or strategic in that its linear narrative macrostructure is unaffected by player choices, and it has no alternative endings (if failure to reach the end is excluded). In short, it offers no major moral dilemmas premised upon divergences between character and player choices. However, we might make two observations. First, the Final Fantasy series does allow players the freedom to decide to kill or run from certain monsters. While most opponents are Fiends, or Aeons who have not found rest, such that battle is encouraged as part of the quest to free Spira, the player may act out a moral attitude by avoiding unnecessary battles and retreating from animals or supposedly neutral humanoids.

Second, FFX allows players to select from different dialogue options, and, as Smith (2003) argues, choosing one dialogue response over another allows players to take moral ownership of the character's attitudes. For example, in FFVII, players can refuse to buy Aeris' flowers, or can buy them as an act of charity and subsequently give them to Marlene. However, FFX has less options for such moral manoeuvring than FFVII. Perhaps the most notable choice is whether players offer Clasko their honest opinion that he is more suited to work a Chocobo Trainer, or whether they encourage his seemingly hopeless dream to become a Chocobo Knight. In the first case, the attempt to be genuinely helpful risks offending Clasko; in the latter case, the attempt to spare his feelings, or to make him learn the lesson himself, may lead him to waste his time and effort, and may be a cowardly avoidance of confrontation on the player's part. Across the Final Fantasy series, dialogue options like this have no effect on character or narrative development, and tend to provide predictable choices of self-presenting as honest or dishonest, as private or open, as aggressive (rude) or peaceful (polite), as mean or nice, as self-interested or selfless (and so on).

Video games, then, may exploit the disparity between characters and players, even if FFX is not particularly innovative in this respect. However, even when video games do not actively exploit their disjunctive qualities, players may justify and personalise their investment in video games by perceiving disjunctive qualities as personable quirkiness. As Aarseth (1997) argues, some video games may be seen as "autistic" in that they do not properly respond to relevant contextual cues and are governed by their own (often

inexplicable) logic. We might equally say that video game characters may sometimes be coded in terms of the cute imprecision of the developing child, in the sense of clumsy sensorimotor co-ordination, and pre-logical cognition. For example, the absurd contradiction between a desirable ideal-ego and its functional weakness—its evident undesirability as a game-agent—may be dealt with through a human resignation, a kind of tolerant and humorous acceptance. This “human” response to the video game character, or, more specifically, the attributes which mark it as a product of a computer program, humanises one’s relationship with that character. That is, the human ability to project affection onto inanimate objects, which so characterises children’s play, may code the intense relationship between player and character as itself “cute” or “human.” Indeed, because of the defenceless and vulnerability of video game characters as they passively await our informing agency, a protective stance towards them flatters one’s own sense of humanity (Tan, 1997, p. 192).

More than this, the computer itself may be coded as child-like. This was more obvious with older PC computers, such as the System-80, or even later models like the Commodore 64. The crude simplicity of the low resolution pixels on older machines may (now) be seen as something like an innate releaser for cuteness. Older users may also remember waiting while their clunky machines took half an hour to load from tape or disk. Beyond the periodic frustration and technical confusion there was sometimes the anticipation of some simple, child-like accomplishment which could be performed *without* the computer, such as a digital version of a game that might be played better with paper cards or a board. At such moments the computer’s execution of its task could create something akin to parental pride, and also perhaps a sense that one can remain in contact with one’s own childish qualities from a position of technical mastery. However, just as a child’s selfishness and an inability to consider consequences may frustrate us, the “autism” of a computer, coupled with its inscrutable computation, may be distressing. The next chapter takes up this issue by addressing the existential implications of the computer as a partner in play.

### The Existential Experience of Play

If we do not belabour its problems as a philosophy, existentialism offers a useful analogy that helps us to draw together some of the arguments in the preceding chapters (Camus, 1955/1991; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Sartre, 1943/1993, 1959/1964).<sup>1</sup> By Sartre's (1943/1993) account, existentialism refers to the belief that we are trapped in existence, forced to live in a meaningless world without recourse to absolute values or any essence of human nature that might organise our experience. The only facts we can take for granted are that we exist, that we will die, and that our interpretations of this existence and death are arbitrary. The human condition consequently involves the absurd necessity of making meaning in a meaningless world, and the awareness of this may be experienced as anguish, shame or nausea.

It can be argued that some of the processes described in previous chapters produce in players the shame, anguish and nausea that Sartre (1943/1993) associates with existential experience. Sartre describes shame in his account of Being-for-others (*etre-pour-autrui*) where a being becomes (shamefully) conscious of his/her being as defined by others, as when one is caught peeping through a key-hole (p. 259). He emphasises how, through shame, we exist in a different way: "Shame is by nature recognition. I recognise that I am as the Other sees me" (p. 221). This is a radical moment of disruption, of separation from a prior state of knowing one's self and of Being-for-itself (*etre-pour-soi*). Here Sartre describes shame as what, in Frijda's (1986) terms, we would call an emotion in that it incorporates a cognitive appraisal of the "Other." The existential character of this emotion lies in the way it alienates an individual from a valued and meaningful experience of selfhood.

As noted in the last chapter, while some players may feel shame by perceiving themselves as associated with negative stereotypes of gamers, to *presume* an emotion of

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre's (1943/1993) existentialism betrays its class status by ignoring the important ways that people are beholden to social forces. Many people are so disadvantaged by poverty, war, repression that their experience is characterised by terror or starvation, and Sartre's nausea is not only the least of their concerns, it would be a luxury. It is an insult, or naiveté, to suggest that such people be "authentic" to themselves.

Furthermore, while anyone may have an existential moment such a moment hardly defines that person's constant attitude to life unless they have a personality disorder. Even the most atheistic person may have, or act automatically according to, a (vague) faith in particular beliefs, such as "good is its own reward," and even the most religious person may have "existential" moments.

shame on behalf of players is to reproduce assumptions that gameplay is a shameful activity. Nonetheless, the frequent disruption of a player's interest or flow may be seen in terms of Tomkins' (1963) account of shame as an auxiliary affect. Schore (1994) not only cites Sartre in his account of shame, he situates Tomkins in relation to more recent theories, notably theories of "mis-attunement" (Kohut, 1974; Mearns, 1992). "Mis-attunement" refers to when one experiences (the possibility of) a certain type of attentiveness or feedback, but finds it continually frustrated. This does not require identity in terms of what the two seek from the exchange: if one person likes to talk and the other likes to listen we have an instance of attunement; if both people like to talk and neither likes to listen we have an instance of mis-attunement (see Tomkins, 1962, p. 411). In its mild form, the reduction of a (potentially) positive affect state elicits Tomkins' (1963) definition of shame, with archaic resonances in early experiences of mis-attunement with primary caregivers. However, as Mearns (1992) argues within the tradition of self psychology, mis-attunement and its related processes may, at their most systematic and extreme, lead to dissociative disorders, including borderline personality disorder, in which the individual has not had the opportunity to develop an authentic sense of self (see Erikson, 1950, 1968; Kohut, 1971, 1977).

The dysregulation of interest and flow discussed in early chapters may be referred to as mis-attunement with the machine. Of course, players may self-regulate the resulting affects of shame well enough, but shame may nonetheless constitute a significant aspect of the aesthetic experience. Indeed it is possible that the disjunctive qualities of gameplay may resonate with an awareness of the status of the computer as a medium and partner in play. While play is meant to be satisfying to the ego, the player may experience a gap, an emptiness, between him/herself and the computer as a fellow agent in a game. Computation, and computers in general, are coded as not merely mathematical, but logical, as rationality deprived of emotion and morality, as cold, impersonal, and inhuman. If, for existentialists, the world is disenchanted, its facticity is analogous to scientific language: even if there is structure in the world, even if there is order in it, it is not *meaningful* in that it holds no dignifying place for the human. The player's position *vis-a-vis* the computer is, then, analogous to the existential individual's position *vis-a-vis* a universe whose grim facticity, its impersonal order, has no empathy for us. The computer is egoistically self-concerned, stubbornly disinterested in the wants of the player. Mis-attunement therefore may be experienced as a loss of meaning because the computer as an inhuman, dysfunctional opponent blocks empathy and creates a context in which our sense of self, or self-esteem, is diminished. In short, a sense of meaninglessness is linked to not merely the lowering of self-

esteem, but to the absence of empathy; a context in which one's ego is not even recognised. The player experiences the emptiness of this disavowal as shame in its most profound sense as a separation from a positive experience of selfhood.

Even when players do not experience any such sense of the emptiness of play, some effort is required to reinvest in a state of interest, flow or joy from which one has been cut off. Indeed, it is difficult to emphasise how important this labour is to the experience of play, and in elaborating upon it we can find an analogy in what Sartre (1943/1993) calls "anguish." For Sartre, anguish refers to the (presumably) familiar moment when we experience the salience of our choices, where our future hinges upon an action in a present separate from the past (pp. 30-33). Anguish is

the recognition of a possibility as my possibility; that is, [anguish] is constituted when consciousness sees itself cut from its essence by nothingness or separated from the future by its very freedom. (p. 35)

If anguish for Sartre is a sense that the future is contingent upon our agency, this may be seen as analogous to the situation when a video game hangs in temporal suspension while awaiting player input, as occurs in most of the menus and navigation screens of *FFX*. It is at that moment that one may feel isolated from the temporal flow of play and forced into labour. A player may become *overwhelmed* by the one's awareness of the enormous scope of the game world and the necessity of traversing this scope to satisfy an aesthetic of mastery or demystification. If, as the cover of the *Playstation Solutions* issue dedicated to *FFX* suggests, players wish to: "Finish every Quest/Win every battle/Master every character/Learn every secret," they may feel a sense of incompleteness every time they miss a path they cannot return to, or have missed an item, or have failed and aborted a game. It is possible to speak of as an existential moment whenever the labour of play reverberates upon oneself as a *player*, when we become aware of the Sisyphean task of wresting joy from a machine. This is the moment when an attempt to involve the motor system in some supposedly meaningful or pleasurable activity in a play space gives way to demanding, pointless labour.

This experience of shame and anguish may be linked to the experience of nausea. For Sartre (1943/1993), nausea is a consequence of a horrible realisation of the facticity and contingency of experience, its grim reality and emptiness. His claim that this is fundamental to other specific types of nausea, for example to spoiled meat, ignores physiological explanations for nausea, but these physiological explanations may be adapted to account for an existential experience of gameplay, given the physiological link between shame and

nausea. As Schore (1994) observes, shame is linked to not only the parasympathetic nervous system, which arrests arousal and triggers partial paralysis of motor function, it is also linked to the onset of the vagus nerve, or vagal restraint, which reduces the motility of the gastrointestinal tract, and produces the characteristic nausea associated with shame.

Nausea may also be seen as an independent affect, as is evident in the case of motion sickness, a category of vertigo in which a mismatch between visual stimuli and motion in the vestibular canals of the middle ear interrupts our sense of balance and creates nausea. This:

begins with epigastric discomfort, often described as "stomach awareness," which is usually accompanied by increased salivation, eructation, and a feeling of bodily warmth. With sustained exposure to the triggering stimulus, gastric emptying is inhibited and symptoms progress to nausea, pallor, sweating and, eventually, vomiting or retching. (Gahlinger, 1999, ¶ 2)

What is important here is that:

actual movement of the body is not necessary to produce symptoms. Purely visual stimuli, such as those from flight simulators, video games, panoramic movies, or even the movement of slides under a microscope, can produce symptoms more effectively than does actual physical motion. (¶ 3)

The latter phenomenon has long been known in military simulators, where it is known as "simulator sickness." Its cause is held to be either the mismatch of visual and vestibular cues, or too much strain being placed on the vestibular-ocular reflex, which governs synchronisation between eye and head movements. A distinct cause may be the stroboscopic effect of the interface which occurs when, for example, the monitor's refresh rate is too low. Postings to websites, which include amateur experimentation, are one anecdotal source of nauseous responses to video games (see Solomon, 1998, 2000). Working from player accounts, the nausea in video games seems to have become prominent with the rise of the FPS Wolfenstein 3D. This experience was exacerbated by virtual reality goggles, in which case it sometimes elicited vomiting (Kushner, 2003, p. 114), though a staff member at id Software, which designed the game, was known for routinely lying on the floor to recover from motion sickness from the PC interface (p. 150).

In games like FFX, the absence of both first person perspective and accelerated motion minimises the chance of "simulator sickness." Nonetheless, disparity in and between the perceptual, affective and cognitive dimensions of experience may be felt as uncertainty about, for example, an event's or object's proximal or distal qualities, or, more broadly, its

"meaning" or significance. This ambiguous reality-status may be experienced as a kind of disorientation in the literal sense that we cannot properly orient ourselves towards the event or object. Even if we commit to an action tendency there may be a persistent feeling of unease that we are acting blindly, or wrongly, without fully understanding what is going on. That is, the disparity between visual and spatial cues for reality-status may produce an occasional disorientation, analogous (and arguably related) to the nauseous disequilibrium that results from disparities between visual and vestibular cues. Unless the perceptual qualities of the interface addressed in Chapter Two are entirely attenuated through habituation, it is possible that a minimal sense of "un-reality" or disorientation persists as a background tone during gameplay. It can more confidently be stated that a more pronounced disorientation occurs during shifts between the diegetic and non-diegetic, when we pass from a state of immersion and re-orient ourselves to the world beyond. The moment when we become aware of having sat in the same spot for hours, of the demands of our forgotten body, and experience our re-orientation to non-diegetic space and time, clearly marks the passage from one state to another.

Whether shame, simulator sickness, or the stroboscopic effect of flickering interfaces are causally distinct in the elicitation of nausea is beside the point. Here we can suggest a way of linking together an emphasis on pre-meaning intensities, the dysregulation of interest and flow, the absence of empathy, and the coding of computation as meaningless. All these processes may be experientially linked as fractures in the Gestalt of play. If for Gestalt psychologists the absence of closure fractures the Gestalt impression of wholeness, and our search for closure is experienced as a search for meaning, then the sustained dysfunction of Gestalt of play may be felt as the suspension, frustration, or absence of meaning. The human, creative activity of the player is alienated and disavowed by the inhuman, logical machine. This is not merely some anxiety about the death or the loss of self, it is a sense of the self fully present to itself as a possibility, yet denied through the absence of another's (the computer's) empathy. This sense of non-being is, of course, not without meaning, since a player might say that the "meaning" is that the game was unsatisfying; the point is that it is *experienced* as a loss of (personal) meaning and value.

It is possible that, in FFX, any disorientation and/or loss of meaning will resonate with one's cognitive engagement with the narrative. Chapter Four observed several aporia which result from the uncertain reality-status of certain events and which are characteristic of the fantastic. In her account of the fantastic, Jackson (1988) argues that figurations of physical



and psychic fragmentation parallel (or are an effect of) social fragmentation in secular, post-Romantic, capitalist culture. These figurations are subversive because they mark the margins of a dominant (ideological) reality or discourse, that which is unseen or unsaid, pointing towards the realm of non-signification. What is notable is that Jackson cites Sartre's categories of the "thetic" and "non-thetic" to emphasise the tension between meaning and non-meaning that characterises the fantastic (p. 75). In short, for Jackson, the uncanny and the fantastic have an existential character. If we set aside Jackson's ideological assertions about the subversive quality of the fantastic, it can be argued that the disparity of some narrative information in *FEF* may produce a sense of hesitating uncertainty or cognitive disorientation which complements both shameful ejection from a state of interest and nauseous disorientation produced by mixed perceptions of movement. Collectively, these processes may give rise to a pronounced existential quality of experience.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, if perceptual experiences of unreality may be aesthetically recuperated through *FEF*'s hermeneutic concern with (un)reality, then similarly an existential drama in *FEF*'s narrative may aesthetically recuperate any felt sense of meaninglessness. After all, Tidus is teleported—perhaps, in Heidegger's (1962) terms, "thrown"—into a chaotic world in which the (un)dead rule the living, who are threatened by the random destructiveness of Sin. Tidus finds it difficult to believe Spira's acceptance of Sin's domination, but in guiding Yuna to defeat Sin he learns that he is leading her to her death and must confront his own responsibility for her impending death. While Tidus helps to find a way to save Yuna, Tidus discovers that he was already dead. In repeating: "This is my story" several times, Tidus may be read as marking *FEF* as a bildungsroman: Tidus is a suffering individual, striving to assert his voice and his destiny, to find his place, in a hostile world. Yet upon Tidus' death, Yuna takes up the phrase: "This is my story," such that his attempt to make sense of the world with himself at the centre of things is lost in the story of the freedom of Spira.

Of course, a key aspect of Sartre's (1943/1993) account is that it is only by accepting our existential state and entering that mode of being he labels anguish that we open ourselves

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<sup>2</sup> We might reposition Sartre (1943/1993) by saying that an "existential" experience may refer to a variety of disjunctive states that may result from, or be linked to, a range of perceptual, cognitive, emotional or socio-historical factors. For example, we might distinguish between: an intellectual response to events which suggest a cruelly indifferent humanity and/or universe, such as the bombing of Nagasaki; the emotional response of those who endure trauma (van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996); the alienation which results from our psychological separateness from others; the culturally specific "alienation" experienced in capitalist society; and pathological experiences which find their extreme form in borderline personality disorder (BPD), in which a person does not feel like s/he owns or experiences an authentic sense of self (Mearns, 1992).

to the dreadful freedom of choosing our world view, our way of life, and taking responsibility for the consequences (p. 553). Similarly, in FFX, Tidus is forced to re-experience the basis for his engagement with a seemingly chaotic world and relearns the reasons for co-operation, trust and loyalty which provide the foundation of morality. Even if we read Tidus' upbeat personality as a kind of desperate happiness, or as a nervous manifestation of unhappiness, he does *try* to find courage and optimism in the face of what seems hopeless. Similarly, while Yuna is more introspective and maudlin, owing to her awareness of her impending death, she sees it as her *duty* to put on a brave and happy face for those of Spira, to offer them hope. The conversation between Tidus and Yuna outside Kilika presents the reader with their united choice to laugh and find joy in the company of others. Both ultimately define their humanity by way of humour and moral action in the face of loss, death, tragedy and evil (compared with Seymour, who uses his dreadful freedom to end the freedom of others). That is, Tidus' and Yuna's commitment to laughter and happiness is *premised upon* loss, hopelessness, and impending death, and therefore has a kind of absurd or hysterical quality to it. The other Guardians certainly point this out to both of them, wondering if they have both not gone insane.

Even if players do not interpret the game precisely in these existential terms, they may experience the game as a tragic romance that dramatises emotional states of hopelessness, resignation, uncertainty, loss, and sadness. In such a reading, the player's experience of shame, anguish and nausea/disorientation, may be experienced as a basis for empathy with Tidus' psychological state. Indeed, just as Tidus and Yuna use humour as a means of dealing with a harsh and indifferent world, the player may confront the meaningless, programmed machine—or any disjunctive affect experienced during play—through the use of courage and humour. That is, the player may define his/her humanity as an attitude of courage and humour in the face of the computer as meaningless data and agency, which holds power over them, in the context of a supposedly ego-validating experience. As was noted in Chapter Eight, Aarseth (1997) has observed that the potential for absurd theatre in computer-generated narratives through "the possibility of unintentional sign behavior" (p. 124) has not gained much academic attention or been systematically exploited by the gaming industry. However, players have long regarded the happy, but accidental, convergence of output as a distinct aesthetic of gameplay, and there is a tradition of designers making in-game jokes about the limitations of the interface. While FFX does not go out of its way to exploit self-reflexivity in this way, the use of humour by designers and players is one way in which players may

maintain the sense of interaction with the machine, or computer-mediated communication, as an expressive, human act.

### **Towards Holistic Gameplay**

For critics of video games, of course, the problem with video games is precisely that they *are* meaningful, but that their meanings are ideological, in that they perpetuate violent, sexist, and capitalist values. Following Stallabrass' (1996) polemic, the most pervasive ideological contradiction in FFX may be its emphasis on the moral agency and responsibility of the individual. Underneath its supposed values of community, of sociality, of morality, of empathy, the individual player avoids social obligations by spending money on a video game console and game, spending ninety or more hours playing it alone, and dignifies this activity as a demonstration of empathy and a virtual proof of one's own moral disposition. The political activity of the public sphere is reduced to the individual's relationship with the gaming interface as a simulation of interpersonal communication. The narrative therefore legitimates and heroises the self in an ideological context in which the self is a mere consumer in a capitalist system premised upon inequality.

While this is true enough at a certain level of description, it restages anxieties and assumptions about the influence of ideology inherited from the Althusserian-Marxist tradition: that realism naturalises ideological content, and that interaction reinforces identification with characters. This thesis has complemented recent reader-response based research (Consaivo, 1993; Herz, 1997; Frasca, 2003; Jenkins, 1987) by extending the critique of traditional notions of realism and identification. It has argued that reality-status is affected by various perceptual, cognitive and emotional processes, and may have a largely aesthetic function. It has also argued that identification must be seen more in terms of the player's cognitive work, and in relation to empathetic emotions, including those directed towards the player.

Even if we accept that players of video games have the same freedom that they have with other media to produce meaning (see Frasca, 2003), it remains necessary to avoid the fallacy of meaning, especially given that adventure and role-playing games are valued in literary or artistic terms (Aarseth, 1997; Buckles, 1985, 1987; Kelley, 1993; Randall, 1988; Ziegfeld, 1989). Players certainly make sense of FFX, but this "making sense" is not the same as the text's "meaning." To presume that players "find meaning" in the sense of a clear

interpretation may misrepresent the experience of play because meaning sometimes may be subordinate to strategic activity and/or emotional experience. In Morley's (1980) terms the "meaning" of many texts may be *irrelevant* to an audience (or players) (see also Jenkins, 1992; Morley, 1992; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). Play is often an end in itself, not merely a conveyor of meanings, or a cause for a secondary experience. This is not to argue that the practice of play cannot, or should not, be seen in semiotic, narratological, ideological or discursive terms. The issue is that some players may not bother to construct much or any meaning at all, except as a retrospective reading formation, and their aesthetic evaluation may be in terms of enjoyment or boredom. Any ideological cognition therefore may be dependant upon whether or not the game successfully met their preferred uses and/or gratifications. In more precise terms, the player's defence of his or her labour will likely affect any evaluation of the game.

The importance of a player's emotional experience to his/her evaluation or meaning of a game may be addressed by way of terms of Tomkins' notion of "affect grouping." For Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1991) and Nathanson (1992), recurring stimulus-affect-response sequences are called "scenes," and become grouped in terms of similarity of source, affect, and response (Nathanson, 1992, p. 246). Stern (1985) refers to these groups of scenes as "Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized," or RIGs, (p. 97). These scenes, or RIGs, are not memories of particular experiences, but "the summation and integration of a host of experiences" (Nathanson, 1992, p. 246), which allow the individual to select an appropriate script for action. However, what is important is that:

Whenever the organism is able to form such groupings, the group itself becomes an entity that is now capable of triggering affect. . . . [T]his affect *magnifies* everything within the group. (p. 246)

Affect grouping can be seen as a theory of emotional stereotyping whose dynamics depends upon narcissistic and analitic transfer. This model may be applied to either people, characters, games or genres to account for not only the tendency to evaluate complex impressions in general terms ("I liked it" or "I hated it") but also more subtle relationships between emotion and meaning.

If we apply the concept of affect grouping to real or fictional people it is evident that a positive high valance towards a loved person will lead to a generalised positive valance being extended to *all* that person's characteristics, including those that are non-average or unattractive, such as a dark mole, a protruding stomach, wide-eyes, and wide-teeth. This

generalised assignment of emotion may require, or be facilitated by, a conscious resolution, the cognitive form of which might be: "you have *that*, which I don't like, but, after all, I love you, and so in fact I really love *this*, and therefore, *all* of you." Since this labour, or investment, is undergone in relation to another person, a *relationship* is formed which our homeostatic drive will try to preserve: "Through my acceptance of your imperfections I've invested in you and shared something special (my act of love), so how can I give up on you now?" This may be governed by some anxiety that the act of investment (of love, of the equal acceptance of one's own flaws) will not be rewarded (with reciprocal love).

Rejected love, of course, involves an undesirable shame, and the denial of the *possibility* of such shame may give rise to a frantic effort to preserve one's charitable investment, to maximise the significance of one's act of love as *deserving* reward. Previously non-ideal characteristics may, subsequently, become *signs* of the act of investment, of the love as acceptance, as a charitable act which (being compassionate), seems to make oneself lovable. We might subsequently think: "how could you not love me, after I've made the effort of overlooking your imperfections?" Indeed, by taking on the role of defender of the other's imperfections, one has *acted out* an action tendency of protectiveness ("just imagine how *others* might criticise you for those imperfections"). The imperfect characteristics may come to function anaclitically, through a metonymic transfer of desire, not just as individual desirable qualities ("you are *this particular thing*, not that general type") but to a plenitude of them that exceeds the unity of any *imago*: ("I desire *this*, and *that*, and *that—all* these things about you!"). At the same time, magnification of the entire constellation of signs, the "grouping" of the person's characteristics as part of a total "character," may make them cohere emotionally.

These processes are particularly relevant to narrative macrostructures in which characters are developed in complex ways. Chapter Seven argued that prolonged cognitive identification of characters constitutes an investment that raises the stakes for empathetic emotions. This is especially significant when one is cued to judge characters a certain way only to be later offered disclosures that render such judgments inappropriate, as is the case with the Al Bhed and Jecht. If players develop negative arousal towards a character, any shame, guilt or other emotional response to the initial misjudgment becomes part of the history of their relationship to the character, increasing the arousal that is redirected to, or re-grouped around, the character. Conversely, the process of affect grouping in response to *typing* may occur with negative emotions, as is the case with Seymour. While players may

never completely trust Seymour, they may admire him as an ideal ego or ego-ideal, and perhaps even as a super-ego, given that his proposed union with Yuna for the sake of Spira may connote a shared commitment towards civic duty. Given the ambivalence of his traifing, the positive investment in Seymour likely will be accompanied by cognitive dissonance, which will make him a more emotionally interesting character. However, when he betrays Tidus he also betrays the player's greater emotional investment in him, and the excess of emotion will strengthen the player's tendency to polarise negative cognitive and emotional closure around him. In this respect an opponent who initially self-presents as good but then betrays the player's trust may elicit more anger than a character who is evil from the outset.

Complex characters, then, require greater cognitive and emotional investment, and are more emotionally engaging. The implication is that the disjunction between narrative and game macrostructures, and the tension between the dual narrative and game coding of characters, may make *gameplay* more emotionally engaging. As Chapter Eight argued, the disjunctive qualities of video game characters may be exploited for aesthetic reasons, and may even be perceived as personable. Here we can add that affect grouping may mean that *gameplay* is given a Gestalt impression of coherence, during play and/or retrospectively. For example, players may determine whether a particular game or gaming experience is aesthetically akin to other games in the genre by simply identifying a match-mismatch between immediate experience and an existing script. For example, if a player likes CRPGs but dislikes FFX, one may not only feel that FFX is a failed CRPG, one may feel a kind of amplified emotional betrayal of one's history of investment in the genre. In broader terms, it is through the operation of scripts that players retrospectively assign a general valance to a game irrespective of the actual conflicted emotions or ambivalence experienced during play. A game that was experienced as enormously frustrating may be re-evaluated in positive terms to maintain one's positive attitude towards the genre to which it belongs, and players may generalise from one or more (idealised) sessions or elements of the game to the rest of their gaming experience, or the rest of their valuation of a genre.

This may be seen in terms of some generalised cases. For example, a player may believe that: "I play CRPGs; I enjoy CRPGs; therefore CRPGs are good." This belief raises the stakes for a negative valuation of FFX. For example, if: "CRPGs are good, and FFX is an CRPG . . . but FFX is awful," then one has a problem. If another gamer says: "I played a CRPG, I hated it, and CRPGs are awful," the player may feel the need to reconcile his view with the other person's. Closure may be achieved by means of the fallacy of *petito principii*,

or circular logic, once used to justify the inclusion of "literary" texts into the canon of "literature": "CRPGs are good because they facilitate 'imagination'; this is evident in that, by playing them, my 'imagination' is stimulated; anyone who does not like the game is 'unimaginative,' and therefore my intellectual or artistic inferior." However, some players may respond to the claims of dissatisfied players using more benign reasoning, such as: "they did not understand the game because they have not spent enough time investing in it to recognise its value: that is why they did not enjoy it and why they are not in a position to judge the genre." An even more benign defense would simply be to acknowledge one's own experience or subjective preference as the source of justification: "I've played the game for years and have fond memories of it; that is why it is good (for me)."

The importance of a history of investment or labour in the production of a reading formation may be linked to the formation of community through a final analogy to existentialism. The experience of online communities in massively multiplayer online role-playing games, such as Ultima Online (1997), EverQuest (2000), and Dark Age of Camelot (2001), is premised upon, or reinforced by, a realisation of shared vulnerability to the whims of the network. During play one experiences many frustrations: hours spent (or wasted) installing, patching and re-patching the game (or patching the patches, in some cases); hours spent purchasing and installing the appropriate new hardware; being subjected to inexplicable lag, or being kicked off a network in the middle of a game; and, in EverQuest, dying, running across half the continent to fetch one's corpse and inventory items, only to die again. Until one has experienced and dealt with this labour—until one has factored in suffering as part of the aesthetic experience—until one has learned to self-regulate oneself during gameplay—until one has found a way to wrestle joy from such an indifferent machine/network—one has not truly entered the game community. That is, confronting the existential experience of the machine in isolation is the rite of passage which facilitates one's sense of connection to others online: we empathise with a shared condition of dealing with the inhuman context of human play, and use this sense of connection as our basis for evaluating the game as a whole. The same may be said in regards to most video games, including FFX, in that the shared investment in the labour of play not only guides our evaluation of play, it also constitutes a basis for a recognition of another player's suffering. Indeed, the fan community of video games may sometimes have less to do with shared pleasure than with shared attempts to cope with its absence.

Within this framework, naturalisation need not always be seen in ideological terms of normalising or recuperating potentially subversive impulses and placing them within a socially conservative form. The preferences of players may be motivated by a personal desire to defend one's investment in a form of leisure, albeit a defence that may often appropriate ideological associations. The ideological function of naturalisation therefore may be seen as a secondary effect, or a special instance, of the equilibration of the individual to his/her environment. In such a framework it is possible to engage in ethnographic work that relates players' experiences to not only broader social formations such as class, gender and race, but also to personality types and scripts.

## Conclusion

While game designers like Freeman (2003) eschew "theory," an understanding of the psychological principles that determine how fictions and games are experienced opens up new possibilities in the creative use of video games as an expressive medium. Throughout this thesis it has been argued that, while gameplay may be a hybrid process, its elements gain coherence and interweave through the cognitive and emotional activity for the player. The regulation of meaning and emotion has been seen as something that occurs not before and after gameplay, but *during* it, and the supposed limitations of the medium may become part of the aesthetic practice as elements of a holistic medium, genre, game, or experience. These processes are not reducible to vulgar accounts of "realism," "identification," or "immersion." If, as Murray (1997) has argued, certain types of game structures may complement the characteristics of the computer as a medium, in FFX narrative and game macrostructures exploit the characteristics of the medium. Notably, an hermeneutic emphasis on reality and tragedy may aesthetically recuperate the disjunctive experience of gameplay.

Lastly, while there is a definite need for ethnographic and other empirical research to counter decontextualised claims about the "effects" of video games, there is still a need for analyses of the structure of the texts themselves. The twenty-five-year head start of the industry means that, in reacting back through the history of the medium, we also have an opportunity to reach back through the history of theory. While theories such as semiotics and structuralism have limitations, they promote attentiveness to textual formations that may sensitise us to the potential subtlety of meaning in general as well as distinctions in and between player discourses produced during ethnographic research. At the same time, cognitive psychology and recent theories of emotion are highly sensitive to non-textual



processes, and self psychology and other therapeutic traditions offer a means of better understanding the experience of play. Individually, and in conjunction, these theories can only enrich our understanding of the dynamics of video gameplay. Indeed, if gameplay is about making choices, so too is cultural analysis. By taking advantage of seemingly disparate disciplines we may be in a better position to appreciate the complex choices that determine the meaning of human experience.

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## Appendix One – Key Events in FFX

The following is a list of the key settings and events in FFX. Setting numbers match those in Squaresoft's Final Fantasy X: The Official Strategy Guide (2002), but the events (or scenes) identified are not exhaustive. The sheer length and breadth of the game means that only key events and characters are referred to, in addition to particular events mentioned in the body of the thesis. However, the setting numbers match those listed in Chapter Three and Appendix Two.

Setting	Event
1. Zanarkand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Title sequence.</li> <li>2. A mysterious ghost boy appears and disappears as Tidus meets his young fans.</li> <li>3. Tidus walks the Causeway to the blitzball game, passing the image of his father.</li> <li>4. Sin attacks the blitzball game.</li> <li>5. Tidus meets Auron, who leads him through a series of running battles to Sin. On the way Tidus talks to the ghost boy and fights BOSS: Sinspawn Ammes</li> <li>6. Tidus is teleported by Sin.</li> </ol>
2. Submerged Ruins	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus explores the ruins.</li> <li>2. BOSS: Geosgaeno.</li> <li>3. Tidus makes a fire and rests.</li> <li>4. Tidus dreams.</li> <li>5. BOSS: Click.</li> <li>6. Tidus is helped, and then taken, by a mysterious girl and other strangers.</li> </ol>
3. Salvage Ship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus is taken aboard a salvage ship and talks to the girl.</li> <li>2. Salvage operation for the Airship.</li> <li>3. BOSS: Tros.</li> <li>4. Back on the ship Tidus' talks to Rikku and learns that he has been teleported 1000 years into the future.</li> <li>5. Sin appears and Tidus is teleported again.</li> </ol>
4. Besaid	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus appears in the water by Besaid beach. He meets Wakka, a member of the local blitzball team: the Besaid Aurochs.</li> <li>2. Tidus follows Wakka to Besaid Village. He talks to the Crusaders then some of the monks at Besaid Temple.</li> <li>3. Tidus sleeps and dreams.</li> <li>4. Tidus awakens, goes to Besaid Temple, and enters the Hall of Trials.</li> <li>5. First Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>6. Tidus catches up with Wakka and learns more about the Summoning.</li> <li>7. Tidus watches Yuna summon the Aeon Valefor, and then flirts with her.</li> <li>8. Tidus sleeps and dreams.</li> <li>9. Tidus awakens, talks to Wakka, and receives Chappu's (Wakka's brother's) Brotherhood Sword.</li> <li>10. Tidus and the others depart the village, fighting a Plan.</li> <li>11. Kimahri Ronso attacks Tidus, but Yuna intervenes.</li> <li>12. Tidus and the others reach the boat on the beach.</li> </ol>
5. S.S.Liki.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus talks to Wakka and learns the reason for Yuna's voyage.</li> <li>2. Tidus meets the trader O'aka.</li> <li>3. Sin heads towards Kilika, and the crew of the S. S. Liki try to distract him.</li> <li>4. BOSS: Sin.</li> <li>5. BOSS: Sinspawn Echuilles.</li> <li>6. Sin destroys Kilika.</li> </ol>

6. Kilika	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yuna performs a Sending ceremony for the dead.</li> <li>2. The Guardians head for the Temple, through the woods.</li> <li>3. BOSS: Lord Ochu.</li> <li>4. BOSS: Sinspawn Geneaux.</li> <li>5. The Guardians reach the Kilika Temple and meet the Summoner Dona.</li> <li>6. Second Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>7. Tidus talks to Lulu and Wakka.</li> <li>8. Yuna appears, now able to summon the Aeon Ifrit.</li> </ol>
7. S.S. Winno	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus talks to O'aka.</li> <li>2. Tidus listens in on Lulu and Wakka's conversation.</li> <li>3. Tidus sees the blitzball and tries to perform the Jecht Shot, blocking out Tidus' 'bad memories' of Jecht.</li> <li>4. Tidus talks to Yuna.</li> </ol>
8. Luca	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Arrival at Luca.</li> <li>2. Seymour disembarks.</li> <li>3. Tidus visits the locker rooms of the Besaid Aurochs.</li> <li>4. Blitzball tutorial.</li> <li>5. Tidus explores the city, looking for Auron and the others.</li> <li>6. Tidus sees Kinahri's confrontation with his Ronso kin, Biran and Kenke.</li> <li>7. Tidus learns that the Al Bhed Sikes have kidnapped Yuna and are demanding that the Besaid Aurochs lose the game.</li> <li>8. Wakka plays in the blitzball game while Tidus and the others try to save Yuna.</li> <li>9. BOSS: Oblitzerator.</li> <li>10. After rescuing Yuna, Tidus returns to the locker room.</li> <li>11. The first player-controlled blitzball game.</li> <li>12. Tidus meets up with Auron. Fiends attack the Luca Stadium and the Guardian's attack them.</li> <li>13. Seymour's Aeon Anima appears and defeats the remaining Fiends.</li> <li>14. Auron offers to become a Guardian for Yuna.</li> <li>15. Tidus talks to Yuna and they promise to keep their spirits up for the sake of the others.</li> </ol>
9. Mi'then Highroad	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians start across the Mi'then highroad.</li> <li>2. Belgemine challenges Yuna to duel with her Acons.</li> <li>3. The Guardians reach and sleep at Rin's Travel Agency.</li> <li>4. Tidus interrupts Yuna's reflection and they talk.</li> <li>5. BOSS: Chocobo Eater.</li> </ol>
10. Mushroom Rock Road	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians continue till they reach the gate to Mushroom Rock Road, but it is blocked.</li> <li>2. Seymour arrives and lets the Guardians through.</li> <li>3. The Guardians learn of 'Operation Mi'then', an attempt to defeat Sin using Machina forbidden by the Laws of Yevon.</li> <li>4. The Guardians enter the Headquarters and prepare for battle.</li> <li>5. BOSS: Sinspawn Gui.</li> <li>6. Yuna helps defeat another Sinspawn Gui.</li> <li>7. Sin attacks.</li> <li>8. Tidus wakes up and sees the devastation. Sin presents himself to Tidus, who acknowledges him as his father. Jecht.</li> <li>9. Tidus talks to Auron and Kinoc.</li> </ol>
11. Djose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians travel the Djose Highroad and eventually reach the Djose Temple, where they meet the Summoner Issaru.</li> <li>2. Third Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>3. Tidus talks to Auron, then Yuna arrives, now able to cast the Aeon Ixion.</li> <li>4. The party rests at the hotel outside the Temple.</li> <li>5. Tidus has to wake Yuna, then the party leaves.</li> </ol>

12. Moonflow	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians meet Shelinda.</li> <li>2. Biran and Kelke make fun of Kimahri.</li> <li>3. Belgemine challenges Yuna again.</li> <li>4. The characters take the Shoopuff across the Moonflow River, underneath which is a ruined city.</li> <li>5. The Al Bhed try to kidnap Yuna again.</li> <li>6. BOSS: Extractor.</li> <li>7. The Guardians reach the other side of the Moonflow and see the pyre fires.</li> <li>8. Rikku appears and is asked to join the group.</li> </ol>
13. Guadosalam	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians enter Guadosalam.</li> <li>2. The Guardians enter Seymour's mansion, and Seymour meets with Yuna.</li> <li>3. Tidus and the others (except Auron) enter the Farplane.</li> <li>4. The Farplane-Aeon of Lord Jyscal throws a recording Sphere to Yuna.</li> <li>5. Tidus talks to Yuna and learns of Seymour's proposal.</li> <li>6. Tidus talks to Shelinda, then enters the Thunder Plains.</li> </ol>
14. Thunder Plains	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lightning Bolt Dodging mini-game.</li> <li>2. The characters meet Shelinda again.</li> <li>3. Rikku becomes terrified of the lightning storm.</li> <li>4. The Guardians stay at Rin's Travel Agency.</li> <li>5. Yuna acts detached and depressed.</li> </ol>
15. Lake Macalania	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The characters walk through Macalania Woods.</li> <li>2. Butterfly Catching mini-game.</li> <li>3. The characters meet O'aka again.</li> <li>4. Auron wants to show the group a magical spring.</li> <li>5. BOSS: Spherimorph.</li> <li>6. The Guardians reach another hotel.</li> <li>7. The Al Bhed kidnap Yuna.</li> <li>8. BOSS: Crawler, Negator.</li> <li>9. Characters must continue on to Macalania Temple.</li> <li>10. Before entering the Temple, Yuna must talk to Seymour.</li> <li>11. Tidus sees the message on Lord Jyscal's Sphere and learns that Seymour killed his father.</li> <li>12. BOSS: Seymour, Seymour Guardians.</li> <li>13. Fourth Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>14. Trommel, Seymour's aide, accuses the Guardians of treachery for killing Seymour.</li> <li>15. Seymour's guards chase the Guardians from the Temple.</li> <li>16. The Guardians escape across Lake Macalania.</li> <li>17. BOSS: Wendigo/Guado Guardian.</li> <li>18. Sia appears, and the Guardians fall beneath the ice of Lake Macalania.</li> <li>19. The Guardians are teleported by Sin.</li> </ol>
16. Sanubia Desert	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus finds himself alone in the desert. A Zu attacks him, whereupon Lulu and Auron appear and help him.</li> <li>2. The Guardians explore the desert and find Wakka, Kimahri, and Rikku.</li> <li>3. Rikku leads the characters to the Al Bhed home.</li> </ol>
17. Al Bhed Home	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Al Bhed home is attacked.</li> <li>2. The Guardians look for Yuna. They find Dona, and learn that the Al Bhed simply wanted to protect the Summoners. However, Seymour has reappeared and kidnapped Yuna.</li> <li>3. The characters climb onto the now restored Airship that was salvaged earlier. The Airship carries them to safety as the Al Bhed home is destroyed.</li> </ol>
18. Airship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus talks to Cid, the leader of the Al Bhed (and Yuna's father), and explores the Airship.</li> <li>2. The airship heads towards Bevelle, where Yuna is being held.</li> <li>3. BOSS: Evrae.</li> <li>4. The Guardians jump from the Airship to save Yuna, who is about to be forcibly married to Seymour.</li> </ol>

19. Bevelle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple encounters with warrior monks and robots.</li> <li>Yuna escapes Seymour.</li> <li>Tidus enters the fifth Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>Tidus meets up with the others. Yuna now is able to summon the Aeon Bahamut.</li> <li>The Guardians are arrested and taken before all the Maesters: Seymour, Kinoc, Mika, and Kelk Ronso.</li> <li>While imprisoned, Auron tells Tidus of the Spiral of Death, in which the undead Maesters rule the living and preserve the power of Sin.</li> <li>The Guardians are sentenced to the Via Purifico, a labyrinthine dungeon.</li> <li>Yuna looks for, and finds, her Guardians in the Via Purifico.</li> <li>The Guardians are confronted by Isaaru, who obeys the Maesters and tries to prevent them escaping.</li> <li>BOSS: Isaaru's Aeons.</li> <li>BOSS: Evrae Altana.</li> <li>BOSS: Seymour Natus, Mortibody.</li> <li>The Guardians escape.</li> </ol>
20. Macalania Woods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Guardians continue their journey through Macalania Woods.</li> <li>Tidus leaves the campsite to look for Yuna. The two express their love for each other.</li> </ol>
21. Calm Lands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Guardians enter the broad, grassy expanse of the Calm Lands.</li> <li>Maechen and Rin can be reached in different areas of the Calm Lands.</li> <li>Chocobo Racing mini-games: Wobbly Chocobo, Dodger Chocobo, Hyper Dodger Chocobo, and Catcher Chocobo.</li> <li>The Guardians can now access the Monster Arena.</li> <li>Belgemine, who waits in her Temple, offers a final challenge to Yuna.</li> <li>The Guardians enter the Temple of the Lost Fayth. Here Lulu lost her previous Summoner, Lady Ginnem.</li> <li>BOSS: Lady Ginnem.</li> <li>After defeating Lady Ginnem, Yuna is able to acquire the Aeon Yojimbo.</li> <li>As the Guardians leave the Calm Lands they come across one of Seymour's guards.</li> <li>BOSS: Defender X.</li> </ol>
22. Mt. Gagazet	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Guardians meet the Ronso and talk to the High Priest Kelk Ronso.</li> <li>Biran and Yenke challenge Kimahri, who must defeat them alone.</li> <li>BOSS: Biran Ronso, Yenke Ronso</li> <li>The Guardians then must make the long journey along the snowy paths of Mt. Gagazet.</li> <li>At the summit, Seymour confronts the party and reveals that he has killed all the Ronso.</li> <li>BOSS: Seymour Flux, with Mortiorchis.</li> <li>Upon entering the next area, Tidus has a waking-dream in which he learns that he is merely an Aeon, part of the Great Summoning that preserves the memory of long-dead Zanarkand, and all its citizens.</li> <li>The Guardians must pass through the caves of Mt. Gagazet and pass the Trials within.</li> <li>BOSS: Sanctuary Keeper.</li> </ol>

23. Zanarkand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians camp on the outskirts of Zanarkand (this is where the title sequence began).</li> <li>2. The Guardians enter Zanarkand city, walking along the old Highway.</li> <li>3. Sin presents himself to Tidus.</li> <li>4. The Guardians enter the Yevon Dome. Aeons fill the air, like ghosts.</li> <li>5. The Guardians past a ghost-scene from Seymour's youth.</li> <li>6. Tidus must complete the last Trial of the Fayth.</li> <li>7. BOSS: Spectral Keeper.</li> <li>8. The characters meet Yunalesca, Yuna's mother, and must choose which one of them will be sacrificed to become the next Final Aeon. Tidus realises that his father made the last sacrifice and has become the Final Aeon that must be killed if Sin is to be permanently vanquished. The characters challenge Yunalesca.</li> <li>9. BOSS: Yunalesca.</li> </ol>
24. Airship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Guardians are picked up by the Airship.</li> <li>2. Tidus talks to Yuna and learns that they have to try to talk to Maester Mika to discover how to defeat Sin. However, Mike disperses into nothingness upon learning of Yunalesca's defeat.</li> <li>3. The player may choose to revisit and explore the earlier sections of the game, and may try to acquire the other Aeons, Anima and the Magus Sisters.</li> </ol>
25. Sin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sin is approached via the airship and fought in several stages:</li> <li>2. BOSS: Sin's Fins.</li> <li>3. BOSS: Sinspawn Genesis.</li> <li>4. BOSS: Sin.</li> <li>5. Once Sin is crippled the Guardians must fly inside him to battle Yu Yevon. They walk through the mist-like Sea of Sorrow, where Seymour confronts them again.</li> <li>6. BOSS: Seymour Omnis.</li> <li>7. After defeating Seymour, the Guardians enter the City of Dying Dreams. At a tower in the middle of the city they are teleported into a surreal landscape where Tidus must dodge icicles and collect ten items. Having collected these, the Guardians are teleported into the Ruins of the old Zanarkand blitzball stadium.</li> <li>8. After making final preparations, Tidus is free to walk over and talk to his father. After the conversation, Jecht is drawn back until he falls over the edge of the stadium. He then reappears as Braska's Final Aeon.</li> <li>9. BOSS: Braska's Final Aeon.</li> <li>10. After defeating Braska's Final Aeon the characters are teleported onto the sword that Braska's Final Aeon wielded, which floats in a sky of elemental abandon. Yu Yevon flies back and forth in the form of a fireball as Yuna summons her Aeons, which must be defeated. Having done this, Yu Yevon appears in his true form.</li> <li>11. BOSS: Yu Yevon.</li> <li>12. After Yu Yevon's defeat, Auron and Tidus both disappear, along with all the other Aeons that were part of the Great Summoning.</li> <li>13. There is a final cut-scene in which Yuna addresses the citizens of Spira in the blitzball stadium at Luca.</li> </ol>



## Appendix Two – Breakdown of Opening Sequences of FFX

The following is a breakdown of the title sequence and the opening sequences at Zanarkand and the Underwater Ruins. Setting and scene letters and numbers match those in Appendix One, with additional numbers to nominate lexies that are referred to in Chapter Three (hence 1.1.1 for Zanarkand, opening sequence, opening shot).

### SETTING 1 – ZANARKAND

#### Scene 1 – Title sequence

- 1 Close up of bladed swords and other weapons planted in a group against a ruined background.
- 2 Pan across the characters (Tidus, Rikku, Auron, Lulu, Kimahri and Yuna) camped around a fire, seemingly exhausted or sad.
- 3 Tidus places a gloved (black) hand on Yuna, who seems to respond sympathetically.
- 4 Tidus walks off alone, flashes of light in the background like some cosmic battle.
- 5 Tidus' voice over: "Listen to my story. This may be our last chance"
- 6 Title: "Final Fantasy X."
- 7 Fade to black.

#### Scene 2 – Meeting the Fans

- 1 Party scene and music by neon pillar. People run off screen. A boy appears from nowhere, like a ghost, and follows them.
- 2 Tidus' (yellow) boots approach; he greets his fans. (The player briefly, and intermittently, takes over control of him, guiding him to particular fans.)
- 3 Tidus signs a few blitzballs.
- 4 Young boy: "Good luck tonight."  
Tidus: "Nothing to worry about."
- 5 Tidus speaks casually to his fans ("No prob!" "All right!"). He promises to make a sign when he scores to show the kids "it's for you."
- 6 The children ask Tidus to teach them blitzball. He promises to do so but the ghost boy warns: "Not tonight," and Tidus acquiesces: "You're right. Tomorrow. I promise."
- 7 The children offer a solemn, blitzball bow, which Tidus returns, then departs.

#### Scene 3 – The Lonely Road of the Celebrity/Hero

- 1 Panoramic shot of Zanarkand: a futuristic city.
- 2 Image of Jecht on the side of one of the larger buildings, looking down.
- 3 Tidus walks down the road.
- 4 A voice over reminisces about Jecht, who disappeared, then mentions the up-coming game and "Jecht's blood."
- 5 The player guides Tidus along the Causeway. If he is directed to talk to passers-by they variously say that they support him or that he better win. Tidus is guided over a rise in the road towards a spectacular background of Zanarkand

#### Scene 4 – The Game/The Coming of Sin

- 1 High shot of Tidus walking through the crowd towards what appears to be an enormous mirror, force field, or wall of water.
- 2 Tidus lies in wait before the game in a bath, with water-reflected light playing over him.
- 3 He enters into the spectacle of the stadium (high, panning view). A rock and roll song plays over the top: "Don't give up . . . If you want it! (etc)"

- 4 We see Auron standing atop a high beam. A dome of water rises from the sea. Auron approaches.
- 5 Two blitzball players slap hands. Tidus leaps out of the top of the blitzball dome, kicks a ball, then (upside down) sees the approaching dome of water. Fireballs approach, then strike and create devastation. Tidus grabs an overhanging strut, looks at the chaos below, then falls.
- 6 Flash to white.

#### Scene 5 – Battle on the Ruined Road

- 1 Shot of the “broken mirror.”
- 2 Tidus approaches Auron, who waits to one side.  
Tidus: “What are you doing here?”  
Auron: “I was waiting for you.”
- 3 We see the road in chaos; the city floods and burns in the background, overwhelmed by the elements. Suddenly Tidus sees the ghost-boy. Tidus looks around and sees that time is frozen.  
Boy: “It begins.”  
Tidus: “What?”  
Boy: “Don’t cry.”  
Time returns to normal, the boy is gone.
- 4 Tidus reaches Auron and sees the globe of Sin suspended in the air.  
Auron: “We called it ‘Sin’.”  
Sinscales strike the buildings; smaller ones land on the road in shells and then open up to reveal insect-like monsters.
- 5 Auron: [gives Tidus a sword] “Take it. A gift from Jecht. I hope you know how to use it.”
- 6 Running battles with the Sinscales which only require selection of the “Attack” menu option.
- 7 Sinspawn Ammes stands in the way like a giant crustacean with glowing lights on its tentacles. During the battle, text information for the player about Overdrives appears. The player’s first use of Overdrive occurs in this battle. The player is likely to need to use a healing potion by accessing the “Item” menu option. Sinspawn Ammes explodes when killed. Tidus then passes the first Save Point.
- 8 Tidus passes the image of Jecht again. (“What are you laughing at old man?”)
- 9 A forest of Sinscales lands around them. During the battle Auron says that they should attack a nearby machine. When it is destroyed there is an explosion, and the bridge collapses in flames, freeing them.
- 10 Tidus jumps into space and just catches on. As Tidus hangs there, Auron looks down, with his greying hair, dark glasses, monkish robes, scared eye.  
Auron: “This is it. This is your story. It all begins here.”
- 11 Tidus is sucked inside of Sin.

#### Scene 6 – The Dream City

- 1 Whiteness. A voice: “Hey!”
- 2 Tidus floats in the night sky over Zanarkand. When the player moves the controls Tidus swim as if through water. The city is brightly lit but deserted.
- 3 Tidus can only swim down towards a platform on which stands a figure. It turns out to be a young boy.
- 4 Tidus: “I felt light-headed, then sleepy. I think I had a dream. A dream of being alone.”

## SETTING 2 – THE UNDERWATER RUINS

### Scene 7 – “Lost in the Ocean Ruins: Geosgaeno”

- 1 Tidus is alone in the ruins, except for a bird. He calls out and the bird flies away.
- 2 The player guides Tidus through the underwater ruins.
- 3 Tidus passes a pillar upon which is writing that he cannot read.
- 4 The player guides Tidus along a long, narrow walkway over the water. To one side is a walkway that leads to a chest containing a Hi-Potion.
- 5 Tidus spots something moving underwater. The bridge collapses. Three weird, oversized fish attack Tidus.
- 6 After killing two of these fish, Geosgaeno appears. Tidus gets in two strikes before Geosgaeno tries to swallow him, and then he escapes to the ruins.
- 7 Tidus walks into the ruins. (“I thought I was going to die in this place.”)
- 8 Light flashes, like lightning, revealing a statue of what seems a monster or god. The scene pans to reveal an enormous cavern.
- 9 Tidus: “Cold. Need fire.”
- 10 The player must control Tidus and find a way to make a fire.

### Appendix Three – Hermeneutic Clusters in FFX

The following identifies dominant hermeneutic clusters that span the length of the FFX's narrative.

<p>I. Tidus, the hero?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tidus speaks to us as a narrator. (Likely hero).</li> <li>2. Tidus shares a look with an attractive female. (What relationship do they have? The convention of the hero as romantic lead reinforces Tidus' role as the hero).</li> <li>3. Tidus is a showy but accommodating sports celebrity. (The hero displays his skill).</li> <li>4. Auron was "waiting" for him. (Why? What does Tidus not know about his own value?)</li> <li>5. He wields the sword. (Parallelism of celebrity and hero, and movement from urban celebrity to heroic fantasy figure)</li> <li>6. He is "chosen" by Sin. (Why?)</li> <li>7. He helps the Al Bhed, accepts the role of "slave" (unpretentious, willing to make-do) and befriends one of his captors (non-judgemental).</li> <li>8. At Besaid, his blitzball skill earns him respect. (His status as hero is recognised).</li> <li>9. He breaks law by entering (and completing) the Trial of the Fayth, in case anyone needs help. (He is willing to break some laws for the sake of a higher morality).</li> <li>10. He is chosen as Yuna's Guardian. (Why? He takes on a typical heroic role as her protector.)</li> <li>11. Tidus hates his father, but Tidus' father is respected in Spira, and Yuna liked him. (Was Jecht that bad? Has he changed? Is Tidus a "cry baby"?)</li> <li>12. Tidus remains optimistic in the face of hopelessness: Yuna likes him for this. (Laughter as bravery).</li> <li>13. Tidus rescues Yuna from Al Bhed. (Masculine role of protector)</li> <li>14. Tidus witnesses the political machinations of the Maesters and the attack on Sin. (The hero witnesses the unheroic activity of politics, and is heroic for not taking the wrong action).</li> <li>15. Tidus learns that the Masters are corrupt, and that Seymour killed his father. He works with Yuna to violate sacred tradition by trying to kill Sin permanently (reconfirming his willingness to break unjust laws for a higher purpose).</li> <li>16. Tidus discovers that he is an Aeon (a ghost), and that destroying Sin (and the Grand Summoning) will lead to the disappearance of Zanarkand and himself.</li> <li>17. Tidus discovers that he must kill his own father. (The hero confronts his potential un-heroic side, embodied by Seymour).</li> <li>18. Tidus confronts and kills his father, Sin, and Yu Yevon, then disappears (Tidus as hero through forgiving his father and sacrificing his love for Yuna, and existence, for the good of others).</li> </ol>
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<p>II. Romance?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In the title sequence, Tidus shares a glance with Yuna. (Friendship? Love? Unrequited love?)</li> <li>2. In Zanarkand we see that the title sequence was in media res. (When will they meet?)</li> <li>3. Yuna shares a glance with Tidus when first meet. (Is she interested?)</li> <li>4. She selects Tidus as Guardian. (Does Yuna trust him, need him, or love him?)</li> <li>5. Yuna is loved by all in Spira. (Love as public versus love as private)</li> <li>6. Yuna and Tidus share a private laugh. (Coping with the quest as masking real intimacy and love?)</li> <li>7. Tidus rescues Yuna from the Al Bhed. (Tidus' role as male saviour confirmed, but distributed amongst other Guardians)</li> <li>8. Tidus interrupts Yuna while alone. (Was she thinking about him?)</li> <li>9. Tidus objects strenuously to the proposed marriage between Yuna and Seymour. (The choice of duty over romance? Is Tidus betraying a conviction about the importance of love in general or his own desire to be with Yuna?)</li> <li>10. Tidus saves Yuna from Seymour at Bevelle. (Aborted marriage, romance deferred by quest.)</li> <li>11. Yuna as focal point in Via Purifico. (She is capable of being independent.)</li> <li>12. Tidus and Yuna embrace in Macalania woods. (Romance confirmed.)</li> <li>13. Yuna realises Tidus is an Aeon and will disappear. (Tragic romance?)</li> <li>14. Tidus disappears on the Airship. (Tragic romance confirmed.)</li> </ol>
<p>III. Jecht?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We presume that Jecht died at sea; his face looks down from a building. (Absent father, absent leader/god?)</li> <li>2. Auron suggests that Jecht still may be alive. (Reversal of expectation.)</li> <li>3. Jecht came to Spira before Tidus. (Curiosity.)</li> <li>4. Jecht is Sin, having become the monster Tidus thought he was. (Surprise, and curiosity at how this has occurred.)</li> <li>5. Jecht sent Auron to summon Tidus to free him. (Jecht's character revised: did not abandon Tidus, but was forced to leave.)</li> <li>6. Jecht sacrificed himself to become the Final Aeon so that the Great Calm could come. (Reversal of Jecht's character.)</li> <li>7. Jecht greets Tidus, and requests he be killed, so that Yu Yevon can be challenged. (Jecht has chosen the common social good over filial good, but acknowledges regret.)</li> <li>9. Tidus kills his father. (Tragic reversal of expected reunion.)</li> </ol>
<p>IV. Sin?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sin is a monster that destroys Zanarkand. (Where did he come from and what is he?)</li> <li>2. Wakka states that Sin is a supernatural punishment for humanity's misdeeds. (Curiosity temporarily resolved.)</li> <li>3. Sin is Jecht. (Expectation subverted with surprise: curiosity rekindled.)</li> <li>4. Sin is Yu Yevon's armour. (Curiosity resolved with surprise.)</li> <li>5. Sin is the focus of the Final Summoning: defeating Sin ends the Final Summoning, and dispels the Aeons of Zanarkand (including Tidus). (Curiosity resolved with surprise. Curiosity and suspense regarding the confrontation with the so far invisible agency of Yu Yevon.)</li> <li>6. Jecht is inside Sin. (Expectation subverted with surprise: curiosity rekindled.)</li> <li>7. Bevelle, not Sin, destroyed Zanarkand. (Reversal of initial expectation through final surprise.)</li> </ol>

V. Yevon?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yevon is the prophet of Spira's teachings. (Surprise and curiosity as to why the blitzball gesture is now a religious gesture.)</li> <li>2. Yevon's tradition is subverted by Seymour's youth and casualness. (The tradition is unnecessarily repressive.)</li> <li>3. Yevon's authority is questioned through Seymour's and Kinoc's blasphemous use of Machina to attack Sin. (The sacred laws are no longer held sacred.)</li> <li>4. Yevon's validity is undermined by the corruption of Seyour and the other Maesters. (Suspicion confirmed. Suspense at how Yevon's authority will be resisted by the Guardians.)</li> <li>5. Yu Yevon was the basis for Yevon's teachings. (Curiosity rekindled through return to the origin of a previously established fact.)</li> <li>6. Yu Yevon is inside Sin: his fear at what Bevelle did to Zanarkand has made him preserve himself by using Sin to keep those in Spira afraid of him. (Expectation subverted through surprise reversal. Suspense at confronting the original authority/power of Spira).</li> <li>7. Yu Yevon is an elemental force/god. (Surprise that the prophet of the god is the god, and that both the god and the gospel are the original cause of Spira's suffering).</li> </ol>
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