

II. Magical circle

The term “magical circle” coined by Johan Huizinga refers to the boundaries that the play activities take place within. Within the boundaries, the magical circle results in momentary worlds that reside inside our ordinary world.³⁸¹ These activities could happen in mediated environments and non-mediated environments, such as playing computer games, or playing tennis at a sports arena. Salen & Zimmerman adopted the concept of magic circle on games studies and noted that by circumscribing 'a special place in time and space created by a game', the magical circle encloses and separates it from the real world.³⁸² From the auditory aspect, Huiberts proposed a similar term, “**imaginary contract**” to delineate how sounds ideally work within the frame of game world. He described that by participating, the player agrees with the contract that is offered and consequently, has specific expectations concerning how things sound in that game. The presence of a sound asset that fundamentally goes against the contract is liable to disrupting immersion.³⁸³

With regard to immersion, I'd like to discuss two examples that exhibit opposite ways of applying the imaginary contract within the magical circle. **Firstly**, the usage of *<21. Wretched Weaponry : Medium/Dynamic>* and *<21-1. Wretched Weaponry : Quiet>* . The Dynamic version **<21.>** usually accompanies the battles that take place within the area of Abandoned Factory (gameplay 2, 7, 14), the tunnel fights of flying units (gameplay 9) and the Boss fight with Operator 210, who is crying for family (gameplay 19). Following the development of narrative, it is also used for depicting the brutal massacre happening at the Machine Village (gameplay 18). Then, the Quiet version **<21-1.>** appears when 9S meets Pascal, whose memory has been erased already, at the ruined Machine Village (gameplay 19). The musical choice is interesting. Since the original location music is no longer appropriate to represent the peaceful

³⁸¹ Leino, O. (2007). Feeling So Real – a phenomenological exploration into the realities of emotions in play. *Academia.edu*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/484166/feeling_so_real_phenomenological_exploration_into_the_realities_of_emotions_in_play

³⁸² Leino, *op. cit.*, p.5

³⁸³ Huiberts, *op. cit.*, p.95 *The emphasis is added by this study.

Machine Village, instead of creating a new tune to illustrate the massacre and Pascal's amnesia, using the tune we've been familiar with can re-trigger players' curiosity within the context and without the expense of breaking immersion—especially during the last stage of the game.

The **second** example is the **Jukebox** design at Resistance Camp. Players can change the background music when they stay at the Resistance Camp. Each title has three or four versions to choose from : ambient version, the track with a little rhythm version, full percussion with full instrumentation version and the 8-bit version.³⁸⁴ After choosing one title, players can decide whether it plays with or without vocal. This innovative idea is great and supports the composer's hope of appreciating the soundtracks within the game. As Okabe once mentioned, 'Many fans told me they've bought the album and like Nier music very much, but they've never played the game before. Of course, I was still happy when people expressed their admiration to my music. However, as a game composer, I believe our duty is to enrich the game world further, by helping it establish the unique worldview through music. So, if possible, I would be much happier if fans can listen to it within the game'.³⁸⁵

However, this design is strictly limited to listen to the chosen music in front of the Jukebox, so it does not even apply to other spaces within the Resistance Camp. Whenever the player leaves a certain area, for instance, to visit weapon trader's stand which is still at the Camp, the chosen music is automatically replaced by the location music **⟨3. Peaceful Sleep⟩** , immediately breaking the "imaginary contract", resulting in confusion, annoyance and the collapse of immersion (see Appendix #8). I believe this issue can be improved by better implementation of the transition between music. Nonetheless, it is disputable whether the idea of letting the player intervene with the game setting is good or whether it will result in not achieving immersion. On the one hand, it can lift the players' spirits by giving them freedom to make their own choices. On the other hand, it withdraws players from their role in games, consciously being

³⁸⁴ Iwamoto, *op. cit.*, p.5-7

³⁸⁵ Nagayoshi, *op. cit.*, p. 28-29

detached from the fictional character. More discussions on this **paradoxical situation** are necessary if the production team wishes to keep this design for the next games.

7.3 Story

According to Huiberts, audio can be used to enhance the story—a fundamental part of game design—and players recognise this as positively influencing immersion.³⁸⁶ With respect to immersion, he examined the functionality of game audio through four perspectives : Overcoming barriers, Supporting primary and secondary emotions, Creating empathy with avatar, and Music as evaluation.

I. Overcoming the barriers of immersion by sounds

Huiberts identified that ‘to keep the player in the mood and to help concentration during game play, some of the barriers of immersion concerning the disruption of the flow of the game (for instance due to loading screens), can be overcome with sound’.³⁸⁷ An apparent example is the initiation page that starts the game. The players hear **〈1. Significance–Nothing〉** when they initiate the game for the first time and after Ending A while the **〈1-1. Significance〉** plays in the background if the players wish to play again after Ending B and Ending C. Both tunes eloquently show the Nier-like atmosphere—the loose soundscape that is full of reverberations and ambience, randomly accompanied by the soft chants with no clues as to where it comes from. By repeating these tunes to restart the game, it effectively helps players stay in the same mood and re-enter the atmosphere of game world more smoothly, even though they might be defeated many times. Another good example is the preview of route C and D which is shown after Ending B. As Huiberts discovered, ‘the audio storytelling during the loading screens keep tension, presents short flashbacks or create atmosphere, while keeping the player focused on the story, while preventing the real world or real world thoughts from interrupting’.³⁸⁸ To some degree, it is essential to have such a preview to arouse players’

³⁸⁶ Huiberts, *op. cit.*, p.96

³⁸⁷ Huiberts, *op. cit.*, p.101

³⁸⁸ *Loc. cit.*