Figure 38. Sound and music turn characters into the "extension of the self" for players

Collins' argument revealed one crucial fact—that is, **the overlap of human's physical body schema and the imaginary world of game is achieved through sounds and music**. She summarised how the audio extends the player's sensations into the fictional world : In games, sound extends our sense of self beyond our physical body and into the intermediary space between ourselves and the virtual world. Sounds that we make— including in the virtual world—become a sensory extension of our self into that virtual world. The auditory realm of games thus becomes <u>an extension of the self, a technological body through which we sense the game-world</u>.[316] As Figure 38 illustrates, the pink circles show the player's body schema from personal space to peripersonal space (light pink). Meanwhile, the yellow circles represent the virtual world of game which is composed of the characters' actions, emotions, game events and the corresponding audio, including music and sound effects (light yellow). The imaginary world of computer game is situated in the external space of the players. More precisely, it is located at the <u>mediated external space</u> which requires players to undertake actions to enter the fictional world. As the action and sound is inextricable in games, the kinaesonic congruity makes the auditory realm the crucial pivot to bringing players into the imaginary kingdom. When players are aware that their wills could be embodied by

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[316] Collins, *op. cit.,* p.4 *The emphasis is added by this study.

characters' bodies and actions, the immediate sonic response strengthens their confidence on battle performances, and enhances their own thoughts and feelings toward characters. That is, through sounds, the players not just enter the fictional world but proactively immerse themselves into the narrative, making decisions for characters and empathising with what they have gone through. Further, these embodied relations with the virtual world would also 'spill into our conduct in the real world', as evidences by the studies of *Second Life* (Linden Labs, 2003). 'Bailenson has shown that after only 90 seconds, the **interactions that take place virtually can elicit real behavioural changes** in our physical self', noted Collins.[317] This is supported by Slater's study on the sign of *presence* in an immersive system. He identified that 'when you are present, your perceptual, vestibular, proprioceptive, and autonomic nervous systems are activated in a way similar to that of real life in similar situations'.[318] That's why we laugh at comical scenes in simulative spaces and burst into tears when there is no chance to make our beloved characters survive.

Since the game audio is vital for the embodied cognitive connection between players and characters, Collins explicitly encouraged the usage of surround sound system. She believed it would amplify the gaming experiences and player's identification with characters when the spatial audio is provided, 'since we are then even more immersed in the sound, our own body in the middle of the peripersonal auditory space'.[319] Given that a game character is an extension of player's self in games, voice acting becomes an essential tool for involving players into the character's heart. However, setting a standard to evaluate the voicing acting is a controversial matter, because the perception of voice acting depends on each individual's taste. 'The voice is so intimately personal, that the "wrong" voice can destroy our illusion of the character,' argued Young.[320] Even though the voice acting is excluded from the scope of this study, 《NieR: Automata》's approach of **not using voice acting** at certain moments is worth to mention here. One example is

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[317] Collins, *op. cit.,* p.7 *The emphasis is added by this study.

[318] Slater, *op. cit.,* p.2

[319] *Loc. cit.*

[320] As cited in Collins, *op. cit.,* p.6

Do these clothes make me look cute?
Would he like it if I walked like this?

I still don't understand what it means to love someone.
But I've made up my mind.

I will do whatever it takes to capture his affection.

the campaign story of Beauvoir at gameplay 11 (9:10–14:11). Compared to the "theatre-like" styles of machine campaigns and Pods' data-exchange, Beauvoir's campaign is the first one that tells the story without any concrete character or image, but via typing text, as Figure 39 exhibits.

All the campaign stories are silent, her story explaining why she is eager to become beautiful only has the soundscape to accompany till the end. One possible reason is that it is a **rather long** campaign lasting 5 minutes and the sparse soundscape can help the typing sound more soothing. It's unnecessary for Beauvoir to say one word, because 'the player has already read the words on-screen, and thus already "heard" (and re-enacted) the voice in their heads', indicated Young.[321] The second reason to have soundscape here is for **inducing a certain mood** toward the character, therefore some related **issues are emphasised**. Actually, the soundscape doesn't appear when the campaign starts, but gradually fades in when the line 'I still don't understand what it means to love someone' is typed. By doing so, the topics of "loving someone" or "how to be loved by someone" and her solution—becoming beautiful—not only fulfils the campaign's function of telling character's history, but also successfully arouses the players' attentions, doubts, even reflections.

The other prominent example is in gameplay 21, 9S' monologue at **Ending D** (5:08–8:30). It's also shown via typing text on the white screen, without 9S' voice or image. Actually at this moment, after the extremely radical battle between A2 and 9S, presenting any image would be redundant. As the fatal system has been destroyed and

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[321] Young, K. (2010, May 16). Voice in Bioware's 'Dragon Age: Origins'. [Web log post] GameSound.org Blog. Retrieved from https://gamesound.org/2010/voice-in-biowares-dragon-age-origins/

9S is dying, using the fading text in white screen to visually represents his fragmented memories is a pretty adequate choice. Meanwhile, the intention of using sounds to induce player's empathy is more obvious here because this time, the text-typing sound is not accompanied by soundscape but by the soundtrack〈**14.** *Vague Hope—Cold Rain*〉with the gradually faded-in vocal until the end of 9S' last words. The biggest merit of eliminating the voice of the character is that it enables the players to embed themselves into the character through imagination. As highlighted by Young, 'If we are to become our character, shouldn't they sound like us, or at least how we imagine they should sound? […] by not hearing a prescribed character voice which takes them out of the experience, <u>the player is empowered to fully inhabit their character</u>'.[322] These two examples demonstrate well the power of imagination—even though there is no voice acting, the sound and music gently guide the players into character's mind, resonating with their real-world experiences deeply.

7.2 Setting

"*Everyone is fragile, not that strong. And NieR:Automata is about the world how these frail characters' stories interweave together.*"— *YOKO TARO*

According to the investigation by Huiberts, sounds can effectively enhance the believability of the world setting of games. He distinguished between the visual and the audio, pointing out that there are 'specific qualities that audio has over graphics in the realm of imagination and credibility'.[323] Following our previous discussion, the penetrative feature of game audio plays a pivotal role in bridging the players' imagination and body schema via their control on characters within the fictional world. 'Especially pit music, can function like the <u>spatiotemporal equivalent of a railroad switch</u>,' discovered Chion.[324] From Chion's point of view, compared to other sound and visual elements which are 'obliged to remain clearly defined in their relation to the diegetic space and to a linear and chronological notion of time', music enjoys the status of being

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[322] *Loc. cit.* *The emphasis is added by this study.

[323] Huiberts, *op. cit.,* p.83

[324] Chion, *op. cit.,* p.81 *The emphasis is added by this study.