

interest. Apart from the changed viewpoint of protagonist and character campaigns, route B (gameplay 9-15) has almost the same structure and missions as route A. Thus, motivating players to explore other routes makes the loading/menu pages something to be reckoned with. The good thing is the ambience-like tune **〈23. Broken Heart〉** appears to accompany the preview right after the theme song **〈15-1. Weight of the World〉** has finished, which successfully bridges the gap between different routes and continues the game mood seamlessly.

In fact, compared to the music suturing approach at *INSIDE*, which runs the musical loops non-stop even when the players die and restart, **the flexibility in using silence and music** cues in 《NieR: Automata》 presents another valuable means to enhance immersion. For instance, when 9S realised the top secret of the blackbox at gameplay 19 (45:43-48:53), his psychological state deteriorated seriously. When the player follows 9S to hack into his memory space, we can clearly see his memories of 2B being invaded by logical virus which makes 9S totally collapse, he starts insanely stabbing the intruder and yelling to it, 'Stay the hell out...of my GOD DAMN MEMORIES! These belong to me and me alone!'<sup>389</sup> Then, the screen shows that the intruder had already transformed into 2B's body while 9S continues stabbing, crying, then laughing. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most heartrending scenes in 《NieR: Automata》 which encompasses very intense and complex emotions. Then, the black loading screen comes in with complete silence for around 10 seconds. In my opinion, leaving no sound at the loading screen is a very wise choice, because intense emotions takes time to digest, and the player who has been playing the role of 9S needs room to take a breath. Any extra emotion brought by music or ambience would make this scene too weighty and melodramatic. It won't be possible to inhabit character's emotions in the player's heart until such emptiness is provided.

Further, it is worth mentioning that the setting of **loading screen** in 《NieR: Automata》 is actually not a stumbling block but the stepping stone to achieving immersion. Chen's study on Dynamic Difficulty Adjustment (DDA) showed that the gamer's flow experience can be accomplished and customised by offering a wide spectrum of activities and

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<sup>389</sup> The capital words are the original text.

difficulties to choose from. However, he also reminded us the frequent DDA choices might become potential interruptions which break the player's Flow. 'The only solution is to embed choices into the gameplay, let the player treat choices as part of the play and eventually ignore them. Thus, their choices will become intuitive and reflect their actual desires'.<sup>390</sup> In the case of 《NieR: Automata》, whenever the players want to visit specific locations, check map, or receive mails from the Bunker, they go to the nearest **Access Point**—a machine that enables players to transport themselves in the game world of their free will (see Appendix #9). After the players make their decision, the Teleportation screen is the same as the Loading screen, which is programmed to appear at the transitions between different narrative plots. That is to say, by combining players' free choices into the core gameplay mechanics, players won't take the Loading screen as an interruption instead, it's just part of the game, and they still stay with 2B, 9S and A2 within the world of YoRHa project.

## ***II. Supporting Primary & Secondary emotions – Ending A & B***

Huiberts identified that game audio should help players recognise the current state of game by supporting two types of emotional response : The primary emotions concern the character, the secondary the player, who experiences the primary emotions but is able to feel differently from the reflected emotions of the game character.<sup>391</sup> To serve this purpose, game audio should be used for creating empathy with the avatar in the context of narrative, and emphasising the emotions felt by players as well. Especially for imaginary immersion, 'the aim is to couple the primary and secondary emotions (story has ended and the player is happy)', suggested Huiberts.<sup>392</sup> In 《NieR: Automata》, both route A and route B have the same sad ending at first place—2B has to strangle 9S with her own hands even though it causes her (and the players) so much pain. This scene is accompanied by the melancholy tune **14. Vague Hope–Cold Rain** whose lyrical melody in B minor expresses well the avatar's mental suffering and how helpless the

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<sup>390</sup> Chen, *op. cit.* p.13-14

<sup>391</sup> Huiberts, *op. cit.*, p.96

<sup>392</sup> Huiberts, *op. cit.*, p.97