

Semiotics in Video Game Sound Design:

Contrasting the 'Evil' from the 'Good' in sound design within video games.

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Introduction

Sound design plays a pivotal role in storytelling across all forms of media. In the world of entertainment, video games are the youngest sibling of the media family, yet they wield an increasingly influential voice. Throughout their development, video games undergo a sound process similar to their linear counterparts. From initial concept to final release, sound design follows a structured flow that evolves alongside the game's development stages. This rigorous process ensures that audio elements harmonise seamlessly with gameplay mechanics, enhancing immersion and narrative depth for players. Therefore in the realm of interactive entertainment, sound design is not merely a complement but a vital contributor to the overall gaming experience.

In the book *Leading with Sound: Proactice Sound Practices in Video Game Development,* Rob Bridgett breaks down the big four major "food groups" of video game sound design. These are voice, sound, music, and mix, with mix being especially important for video games. This is mainly due to their complexity coupled with an interactive implementation process encompassing everything the player hears in game. Since the majority of modern video games are an interactive medium and not on a linear timeline, each audio environment can be changed depending on the time and place that the player is experiencing and depending on the choices that he/she/they makes in that moment.

Let us examine each of Bridgett's food groups individually, starting with Mix. Mix enables the game developer to consider what sound needs to be prioritised during gameplay. Bridgett states, "It helps if you think about game mixing as the 'dynamic priority of what the player needs to hear', rather than 'mixing' in any traditional film sound sense, because the mix of a game is about so much more than the relative volume of the sounds, or categories of sounds – it includes the dynamic relationships between those categories" (Bridgett, 2021). These categories are passive automated mixing systems and active override mixing systems. These active and passive systems work together in tandem in order to give the player their own unique experience of playing the game.

With the focus on voice being an ever increasing element of video game soundscapes, voices and voice landscapes are implemented through various different ways. These ways include

- Narration or voice over.
- Onscreen character dialogue (diegetic, spoken with lip-sync).
- Offscreen character voice-over (radio, telephone and other choices).
- Barks.
- Walla.
- Grunts/Efforts.

Depending on the video game, the voice categories can be implemented from none of these, some of these, or even all of them. Voice is oftentimes the easiest delivery method for giving important information to the player by having a character provide the player the exposition through spoken dialogue. For example, tutorials and gameplay direction can be given to the player through a non-playable character directly telling them what they need to do.

Moving on to Music, Music is mostly consistent with the linear mediums. Its purpose is to provide emotional context to the player, often through leitmotifs, musical themes, and elements through each gamestate. These include,

- Score.
- Licensed music.
- Source music.
- UI stingers.

Finally, these elements of sound design are the core of the gameplay loop and what is mostly heard by the player:

- Ambiences/backgrounds.
- Foley.
- Sound effects.
- Weapons and gear.
- UI (User Interface)/HUD (Heads Up Display)/loading.

With sound design being the focus of this essay, I will be explaining the different methods and challenges I faced when working on my experiment. In the book *Game Audio Fundamentals: An Introduction to the Theory, Planning, and Practice of Soundscape Creation for Games,* Zizza states that, "Specific sounds can be heard at any time, repeat themselves, get cut short or played at different speeds, layered upon each other, or even played backward. And because sound design normally plays a larger part of the game mix, it must provide a generous amount of feedback, engagement, and enjoyment, all in real time" (Zizza, 2023 p.142). This makes the sound design have a significant weight on the player's experience of a game.

What I am looking to explore is the effect that sound design has on the gameplay experience by changing the emotional environment that the player is traversing. I have redesigned the first six minutes of gameplay of the game, *Darkest Dungeon* (2016). Here is the description of the game for context, "*Darkest Dungeon* is a challenging gothic roguelike turn-based RPG about the psychological stresses of adventuring. Recruit, train, and lead a team of flawed heroes against unimaginable horrors, stress, disease, and the ever-encroaching dark. Can you keep your heroes together when all hope is lost?" (Steam, 2016).

The initial segment of the gameplay experience delves deeply into the realm of 'Evil' sound design, skillfully harnessing elements of Lovecraftian horror, visceral depictions of blood and gore, and immersive soundscapes to accentuate and reinforce the overarching themes and narrative of the game. This approach is meticulously crafted to resonate with players on a primal level, evoking feelings of dread, suspense, and unease that align with the game's dark and foreboding atmosphere. Through strategic use of sound effects and unsettling ambient noises, the 'evil' sound design serves to intensify the psychological impact of the game's visual and narrative elements, effectively immersing players in a haunting and unsettling world.

In stark contrast, the subsequent segment of gameplay shifts gears to explore the realm of 'good' sound design. This phase deliberately alters the player's perspective by presenting a diametrically opposed auditory experience while retaining the same foundational gameplay elements and narrative content. By reframing the sound design to emphasise themes of hope, courage, and triumph, the 'good' sound design aims to uplift and inspire players, fostering a sense of optimism and empowerment within the game's universe. This transformation is achieved through uplifting melodies, heroic sound effects, and ambient sounds that convey a sense of serenity and renewal.

Despite the contrasting tonalities between 'evil' and 'good' sound designs, both segments remain consistent in delivering essential gameplay information and narrative cues. This strategic juxtaposition not only highlights the versatility and impact of sound design in shaping player perception and emotional engagement but also underscores its pivotal role in reinforcing the overarching thematic motifs of the game. By placing these auditory perspectives side by side, the gameplay experience becomes enriched with layers of emotional depth and narrative complexity. This invites players to explore and contemplate the dynamic interplay between light and darkness within the game's narrative.

In refining this gameplay approach, my focus shifted towards crafting a curated, linear representation of the game rather than implementing and playing through the same six-minute segment. The decision stems from the inherent unpredictability introduced by *Darkest Dungeon's* procedural generation mechanics, which could potentially yield drastically different outcomes with each iteration. Such disparity would undermine the reliability of the experiment in assessing the impact of varied sound design.

Central to this experiment is a meticulous exploration of the nuances in sound design, where elements such as voice dialogue and music remain consistent across all iterations. By maintaining this uniformity, I aimed to isolate and emphasise the exclusive influence of sound design on the player's experience. Each variation introduced in sound effects, ambient sounds, and combat cues becomes a critical variable, serving to shape and redefine the atmosphere, tension, and emotional engagement within the game. Through this deliberate approach, I sought to demonstrate how subtle alterations in sound design can profoundly impact player perception and immersion, transcending the confines of traditional gameplay metrics. By meticulously documenting and comparing these nuanced differences, I aim to unveil the transformative potential of sound in enhancing narrative depth, gameplay dynamics, and overall player experience. This experimental framework not only underscores the artistry and technical skill required in sound design, but it also highlights its pivotal role in shaping memorable and evocative gaming experiences.

Listening Modes

In Michael Chion's book *In Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (2019), he characterises the three listening modes, causal, codal, and reduced. Causal listening is listening to a sound to find out the source of the sound. An example of this within the game is when the enemy locks onto the player character, the game plays a notification sound in which the player can determine that the enemy is targeting that character in their team.

Chion further breaks down causal listening into causal-figurative, discovering the source of the sound in the diegetic reality, and causal-detective, which questions the creation of the sound itself. *Darkest Dungeon* gameplay feeds mostly into the causal-figurative category of causal sound, as everything that happens to the player is a direct result of a decision they have made within the game.

Causal listening ranges depending on their breadth of scope, from broad to specific. On a general level, sound can be sorted into categories from specific sources to more broad sources. A broad source may be a mechanical machine, animal sound, or human sound. A more specific source may be a parent speaking to a child, and the child knowing who the parent is and what they sound like.

The second listening mode is codal listening. This mode "aims to decode the signal to get the message" (Chion 2019, p.25). The example used in his research is the coded audio signal of spoken language; humans can interpret what is being said and understand its meaning, breaking down the message that is being said and understanding it.

The final listening mode is reduced listening. This aims to isolate the intrinsic qualities of the sound and emphasise its inherent characteristics. The sound itself conveys complete information autonomously, regardless of its origin, significance, or consequence.

As humans we mainly understand sound effects through the first listening mode (causal). What happens on the screen is what we see and perceive. But how do these listening modes play into a player's interaction within video games?

Within the realm of video games, this principle is pervasive across much of sound design. It highlights the importance of emphasising the source of each sound, enabling players to interpret and react accordingly to the auditory cues provided. In gameplay, these cues often serve as critical indicators, guiding players in making strategic decisions or prompting immediate responses to in-game events. By effectively utilising sound to convey information about the game environment, objects, or characters, designers enhance immersion and facilitate intuitive gameplay experiences.

Thus, sound design not only enriches the audio-visual landscape of games but also plays a crucial role in enhancing player engagement and interaction within virtual worlds. In the real world, the player has their own built in audio engine which determines the importance of certain sounds depending on their immediate urgency. For example, when talking to someone while in a crowded room, our brains will internalise the current conversation and focus our attention onto what we need to hear. If the circumstances were to change and more people flooded into the room, making it difficult to hear, we would be immediately taken into a new state where we must make a decision to leave or stay in order to continue the conversation.

Semiotics

Dictionary.com (2021) refers to semiotics as "the study of signs and symbols, esp the relations between written or spoken signs and their referents in the physical world or the world of ideas". Ferdinand de Saussure first defined semiotics as the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the thing that does the standing in for something else and the signified is the thing and concept.

Charles Pierce builds on top of this foundation by introducing the universal categories. Pierce further breaks down semiotics into firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Leo Murray describes the categories in the fundamental level as follows:

"1st-ness: Raw feeling about something, unanalysed impression.2nd-ness: apprehension, or recognition of a cause or relation.3rd-ness: bringing together, mediation, or synthesis" (Murray, 2019 p.64).

This is then further explained as each step is categorised within semiotics. "1st-ness being Icon: when the link is a quality or property 2nd-ness being Index: when the link is existential 3rd-ness being Symbol: when the link is conventional, from habit or rule" (Murray, 2019 p. 67).

With sound design within video games, the repetitive nature allows for thirdness to form rapidly upon playing a game. For example, within the production portfolio clip of *Darkest Dungeon*, the player interacts with a tent which is revealed to have valuable loot inside. According to the universal category, this 'first' interaction is the fresh and new information of there being a tent (icon) to interact with. Once the player interacts with the tent, they are then given valuable loot. This enforces that tents equate to loot (index). If the player was to stumble upon another tent in the future, that interaction accompanying the same result enforces the idea that forms the rule that tents mean loot. This also happens with sound design.

Sound designer Shaun Farley in his personal blog states that "signification is a function of exposure, a collective agreement by a culture or society that connects signifiers and signified through repetition over time" (Farley, 2012). This made it difficult to design some of the sounds that have been seen through culture. Personally, I don't see this as a problem, but it allows for creative expression on certain sounds to be unique while still providing cultural acceptance for the player to understand. This is especially when introducing someone to something new. It makes it easier to process the information if there is something tangible to grab onto instead of being overwhelmed with information.

'Evil' focus:

The 'evil' sound design was a lot of fun to delve into. Being able to make every sound hit with increased ferocity and weight was so satisfying to explore and discover. The inspiration for these sounds come from a variety of video games, with each of these games having a critical element of an 'evil' character.

For the 'evil' sound design, I meticulously deconstructed each element into distinct categories, enabling me to focus on refining each component and seamlessly integrating them into the final product. Beginning with ambient sounds, my objective was to transform the forest setting through auditory cues that instil a sense of peril and constant surveillance, effectively preying on the player's subconscious.

By layering ominous whispers, rustling leaves that mimic sinister whispers, and distant, unnerving sounds, I established a foundational atmosphere that evokes a haunting and foreboding environment. This ambient backdrop not only sets the tone, but also heightens the immersive experience, ensuring players feel a pervasive sense of danger lurking within the shadows. Transitioning to the game's user interface (UI), I divided this aspect into two distinct categories: interactable UI and status effects. Interactable UI elements encompassed everything players engage with, from selecting weapons to manoeuvring their character through the perilous landscape.

In crafting the sound design for these interactions, my aim was to evoke a sense of antiquity and decay, reflecting the mansion's long-forgotten history and the relics left behind. Sound here is being used to reflect the visual landscape and enhance the player's immersion into the game. Utilising sounds reminiscent of creaking mechanisms, aged parchment, and weathered paper, I imbued each action with a tactile sensation of handling ancient artefacts. This approach not only enriched the gameplay mechanics but also reinforced the narrative thread of exploring an ancestral estate to uncover its secrets. Central to the game's storyline is the player's inheritance of the mansion, setting the stage for a journey to reclaim lost treasures and truths. Leveraging this narrative backdrop, I integrated sound elements such as the turning of aged pages and the scratch of quill on parchment to convey the weight of history and the significance of the player's discoveries.

Each tutorial prompt, designed as scattered pages found amidst the mansion's abandoned corridors, served not only as a guide but also as a testament to the mansion's forgotten past. By meticulously crafting these elements of 'evil' sound design, I aimed to immerse players in a narrative-driven experience where every sound serves to deepen the atmosphere, enrich the gameplay, and enhance the emotional resonance of their journey through the haunted forest and enigmatic mansion. This approach underscores the transformative power of sound in shaping player perception and engagement, elevating the game from a mere interactive experience to an evocative storytelling medium where auditory details play a pivotal role in unravelling mysteries and evoking chilling suspense.

As the player enters battle and the turns begin, a deliberate atmosphere of impending doom and fear envelops the scene. Central to evoking this emotion is the haunting pulse of a war drum, its ominous echoes reverberating with each passing turn. This technique draws inspiration from cinematic moments like in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), particularly during the fellowship's perilous journey through The Mines of Moria. Here, the character Gandalf reads out a journal recounting the dwarves' clash with orcs, punctuated by a chilling revelation, "The ground shakes... Drums... Drums in the deep" 'The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring' (2001). This iconic line underscores the drums' power, signalling the approach of relentless foes.

In my sound design, a similar effect is crafted as each moment unfolds. For instance, when the player steps into the scene where combat begins, much like the character Pippin's inadvertent disturbance in the Mines, it triggers a chain reaction. A skeleton and bucket clatter into a well, the sound echoing ominously through the battleground. The fellowship strain to discern any reaction from the enemy, their senses sharpened in tense anticipation. Much like how the player needs to engage with the combat to survive their encounter. In this crucial moment, the illusion of safety fractures irreparably, replaced by a palpable sense of dread that cascades through the player's experience.

This sense of impending doom isn't merely atmospheric; it's a strategic element intertwined with gameplay. The war drum's cadence grows more urgent with each passing turn, a subtle yet unmistakable reminder of escalating danger. It serves as a foreboding signal to the player. The longer the battle persists, the deeper the peril becomes. Every decision carries weight, heightening the stakes and urging players to consider their tactics carefully. This immersive design not only enhances the narrative tension but also deepens the player's engagement by making them keenly aware of the rising threat level.

Ultimately, by integrating such narrative and auditory cues into gameplay, this aims to evoke a visceral emotional response akin to the dread and urgency experienced by the fellowship in their darkest hours. It's about creating a dynamic and immersive experience where strategic choices are informed not only by immediate tactical considerations but also by a deeper narrative thread of impending danger, echoing the resonance of those iconic orc drums from Moria's depths.

In the realm of weaponry, encompassing both the player's arsenal and that of their adversaries, the options are segmented into two primary categories: melee and ranged. The assortment features a diverse array of implements, ranging from firearms among the ranged weapons to close-quarter choices such as knives, swords, and even whips, all of which were vividly depicted in the production portfolio. Drawing inspiration from the iconic *Bioshock* (2007) series, my approach to sound design gravitates towards the visceral impact conveyed by melee weapons prevalent throughout the game.

In the initial stages of gameplay, players are introduced to the wrench, a tool renowned for its substantial weight and palpable heft. Each swing of this implement carries a sense of physicality and force, immersing the player in a world where every strike resonates with power. To complement this impactful gameplay experience, my sound design revolves around imbuing each attack with a distinct sense of potency and consequence. The soundscapes accompanying edged weapons are crafted to evoke sharpness and aggression, heightening the intensity of each blade's bite against its target. Meanwhile, for the blunt yet menacing whip, known as the "Rain of Whips," the auditory representation mirrors its namesake with thunderous cracks that reverberate through the air, ensuring its presence is felt as a formidable force on the battlefield.

Beyond merely enhancing gameplay mechanics, this meticulous attention to sound design aims to enrich the player's immersion by reinforcing the tactile feedback of combat. Each auditory cue serves not only to underscore the weight and impact of every action but also to deepen the narrative engagement, forging a visceral connection between the player and their avatar's struggles within the game world. By aligning with the evocative sound design principles observed in seminal works like *Bioshock* (2007), where every swing of a weapon resonates with significance, we compell players to wield their chosen implements with strategic intent and immersive fervour. When it comes to ranged weaponry, both for the highwayman and the bandits, their arsenal boasts a variety of firearms ranging from nimble flintlock pistols to imposing blunderbusses.

A fitting point of reference for this armament can be found in the exploits of pirates, epitomised in games like *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013). Here, players step into the shoes of Edward Kenway, a swashbuckling pirate captain navigating the vast Caribbean seas. In his quest for plunder and glory, Edward employs an assortment of weapons, prominently featuring his frigate cannons and personal flintlock pistols during naval skirmishes and raids. While his crew fire from muskets. In translating this piratical inspiration into my sound design approach, I aim to imbue each ranged weapon discharge with a sense of impact and weight akin to their melee counterparts. For instance, when players engage in a naval assault in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013), the thunderous roar of cannon

fire punctuates the intensity of each broadside, reverberating through the enemy hull with devastating effect.

This same principle is applied to the firearms wielded by characters in my 'evil' sound design; every shot fired is designed to resonate with power, emphasising the consequences of each projectile striking its target. Specifically, when the knight is struck by the large enemy's firearm, the sound design combines elements reminiscent of a swift flintlock pistol shot with the deep resonance of a naval cannon blast. The result is a dynamic auditory experience that not only underscores the impact of ranged combat but also enhances the player's immersion in the chaotic skirmishes unfolding within the game. By meticulously crafting these soundscapes to mirror the visceral nature of both historical naval battles and swashbuckling adventures, I aimed to create a cohesive and compelling audiovisual narrative that enriches the gameplay experience for players, ensuring that every shot fired echoes with significance and contributes to the immersive world I seek to evoke.

Finally, the status effects in the game encompass a range of conditions that significantly impact gameplay, including debuffs, stuns, bleeds, and the ominous state known as Death's Door. It was imperative to imbue each status effect with a distinct sense of importance, ensuring players understand the stakes of each action. Drawing inspiration from *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (2017), where the player character fights against dangerous robots in the wilds, wielding various weapons capable of inflicting diverse status effects like frost, roped, burning, and corruption, I integrated a similar approach into my own project. In *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (2017), each effect is accompanied by unique auditory cues, providing immediate feedback to the player to confirm the enemy's condition.

This design not only enhances gameplay fluidity but also deepens immersion by seamlessly integrating sound into strategic decision-making. In my project, I adopted this concept to ensure status effects play a pivotal role in both gameplay mechanics and narrative immersion. Each effect is designed with a distinctive sound signature that clearly communicates its impact to the player. For example, when an enemy becomes stunned or resists being poisoned, the corresponding sounds audibly convey these conditions. This auditory feedback informs players of vulnerabilities and enriches tactical decision-making, encouraging adaptation and strategic planning in real-time.

By leveraging lessons from *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (2017), I aimed to create a gameplay experience where sound design serves as a seamless and intuitive communication tool. The incorporation of distinct status effect sounds not only enhances gameplay clarity but also underscores immersive storytelling, ensuring every encounter is as engaging as it is strategic. This approach not only pays homage to innovative game design but also enhances the overall cohesion and depth of my project, elevating player interaction with its dynamic and evolving world.

Beginning with debuffs, which hinder a character's performance, I employed subtle yet discernible sound embellishments that conveyed a sense of weakening or suppression. Stun effects were characterised by the resonant chime of a bell, reminiscent of the signalling bell in a boxing match, indicating temporary incapacitation.

For bleeds, a visceral sound of dripping blood was introduced, underscoring the ongoing damage inflicted upon the affected character. The most critical status, Death's Door, was marked by the solemn toll of a church bell, a stark reminder to the player that the character teeters on the brink of mortality. These auditory cues not only served as informative signals but also contributed to the immersive storytelling experience, enhancing the player's emotional connection to their characters' plight.

By integrating these distinct sound designs, I aimed to foster a deeper engagement with gameplay mechanics, encouraging strategic decision-making and heightened awareness of the evolving battlefield conditions. Ultimately, the audible representation of status effects became integral to the game's narrative depth and gameplay dynamics, enriching the player's journey through its compelling and perilous world.

'Good' focus:

In comparison to the 'evil' sound design, the main focus of the 'good' sound design was to create a lighter touch and immerse the player within the same gameplay by utilising the same elements of sound design but shifting the perspective to bring hope, courage, and triumph. The 'good' sound design aims to uplift and inspire players, with more of an adventure feel rather than survival, by fostering a sense of optimism and empowerment within the game's broody and dark universe.

This transformation is achieved through removing the weight of battle, and adding heroic sound effects and ambient sounds that convey a sense of serenity and renewal. Using the 'evil' sound design as my foundation allowed me to explore contrasting choices and invert my creative decisions to provide a contrast to the dark narrative. I systematically deconstructed each element into distinct categories, similar to how I approached the 'evil' sound design, enabling me to refine and integrate them cohesively to deliver a complete experience. Beginning with ambient sounds, my goal was to transform the forest environment by alleviating the sense of peril and constant surveillance.

I achieved this by introducing melodic ambience beds and layering them harmoniously. To deepen my understanding of this approach, I drew inspiration from Nintendo games, particularly *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017), where the open-world adventure of Link is accompanied by atmospheres that evoke calm and tranquillity through almost musical sound design. This technique was adapted into the good version of *Darkest Dungeon* to enhance its ambience. As gameplay begins and battles unfold, each turn is accompanied by a more playful and percussive sound design, fostering a lighthearted atmosphere in combat. This contrasts with the stress-inducing and ominous tone of the 'evil' version, creating a more enjoyable and engaging gameplay experience. Throughout the rest of the gameplay, I aimed to diminish the brooding atmosphere and murky sound design characteristic of the evil path. This involved reducing the weight and intensity of certain sounds, particularly during combat sequences, creating a more optimistic environment.

While actions like melee strikes and ranged attacks still register audibly, I dialled back on elements like blood and gore sound effects. This adjustment maintains gameplay clarity and feedback while offering a more pleasant overall experience for the player. By tempering the severity of consequences conveyed through sound, the gameplay becomes more approachable and less intimidating without compromising on strategic depth or narrative impact.

Conclusion

Reflection

Listening to the different sound designs, one of the main distinctions between the evil and good soundscapes lies in the choice of melodic higher pitched sounds versus dissonant lower pitched tones. In the evil playthrough, the majority of sound elements clash and collide, contributing to a murky and unsettling atmosphere that resonates deeply with players on a primal level. This cacophony of sounds heightens emotions of dread, suspense, and unease, effectively enhancing the game's dark and foreboding ambiance.

Conversely, in the good playthrough, the sound design emphasises harmony and coherence, with melodic choices that complement each other without discord. This approach aims to evoke feelings of heroism and hope, aligning with the narrative's themes of triumph and optimism. I believe that employing more melodic and harmonious sound design choices contributes significantly to shaping the player's emotional response and immersion within the game world. By carefully selecting sounds that resonate with the thematic elements of each playthrough, I aimed to enrich the storytelling experience and reinforce the player's connection to the narrative journey.

However, conducting this experiment posed challenges, particularly due to Charles Pierce's universal categories. Upon experiencing the first version of either playthrough, players may develop preconceived expectations about the game's audio landscape. Subsequently, when they encounter the second version, they tend to compare and contrast it against their initial experience rather than forming an unbiased opinion. Despite these challenges, I view this experiment as a valuable exploration into the deeper nuances of sound design and its impact on player perception and engagement.

Moving forward, I believe this experiment represents a significant step towards advancing our understanding of these concepts. By refining methodologies and exploring innovative approaches, we can continue to unravel the intricate relationship between sound, emotion, and gameplay experience, ultimately pushing the boundaries of interactive storytelling and immersive gaming environments.

Critique

"Although it is relatively easy to specify different interactive structures used in new media objects, it is much more difficult to deal theoretically with users' experiences of these structures. This aspect of interactivity remains one of the most difficult theoretical questions raised by new media." (Manovich, 2001 p. 56) Through thorough examination and introspection of the game's sound design, I have discerned a distinct emotional contrast between the 'Evil' and 'Good' auditory landscapes. The soundscape crafted for the 'Evil' path evokes a visceral response of fear, tension, and unease, deeply immersing players in the game's dark and foreboding atmosphere. In contrast, the 'Good' path utilises melodic and harmonious elements to instil a sense of heroism, hope, and optimism, aligning with the narrative themes of triumph and resilience. However, I am convinced that this experiment can be expanded significantly.

By integrating these distinct sound designs into the gameplay experience and observing how players respond, we can gauge the profound impact of sound on player choices and emotional engagement. Implementing such an experiment would provide empirical evidence of whether and how sound design influences player decisions and perceptions within the game environment. Moving forward, I am keen to explore this avenue of research further. Conducting gameplay experiments that manipulate sound design variables will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of its role in shaping player experiences and influencing narrative interpretation.

This research endeavour holds the potential to uncover valuable insights into the intersection of sound, emotion, and gameplay dynamics, paving the way for innovative approaches to enhancing interactive storytelling and immersive gaming experiences.

Summary

Overall, after extensive evaluation, I firmly conclude that both 'Evil' and 'Good' sound designs exert a profound impact on the player's overall experience. Each sound design approach contributes uniquely to shaping the player's emotional engagement and immersion within the game world. The 'Evil' sound design, characterised by dissonant tones, unsettling ambience, and tense auditory cues, effectively cultivates an atmosphere of dread, suspense, and foreboding, aligning seamlessly with darker narrative themes. In contrast, the 'Good' sound design employs melodic compositions, harmonious rhythms, and uplifting auditory elements to evoke feelings of hope, heroism, and optimism, resonating with themes of triumph and resilience.

Through this exploration, I recognize the potential for game sound design to be leveraged in innovative ways. By meticulously aligning soundscapes with the narrative intentions of the game, designers can amplify thematic elements and immerse players more deeply in the intended emotional experience. Moreover, the strategic subversion of expected sound design norms can dramatically alter player perceptions and narrative interpretations, offering avenues for creative storytelling and gameplay innovation. In conclusion, there is much to be gained from reevaluating game sound design methodologies and approaches.

By comprehensively understanding the narrative and emotional objectives of a game, designers can wield sound as a powerful tool to enhance player engagement and enrich the overall gaming experience. This nuanced approach not only underscores the importance of sound in interactive media but also underscores its potential to redefine how stories are told and experienced in the digital age.

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