Gameplay and Narrative in *Transistor*

Introduction

Regarding the analysis of video games, an argument exists on the role gameplay has regarding narrative, as described by Daniel J. Dunne, who writes, "Although videogames are arguably a conflation of media, there has been limited analysis of the ways in which they combine textual, visual, aural and performative elements. For the most part, scholars have relied on one or two methods of analysis to explain how videogames work, traditionally focusing on narrative or gameplay.…Videogames predominantly rely on the notion of a divide between the two elements" (182-183). Released in 2014, Supergiant Games' *Transistor* uses elements of gameplay to reinforce its narrative. Gameplay is also used as a tool to reveal elements of characterization and to create a complicated relationship between the player and the game's protagonist; both characterization and gameplay, in turn, reinforce elements of the plot. Understanding the protagonist, Red, as her own character, as well as understanding the city's recent cultural past, is key to understanding a sudden loss of player control at the end of the game. *Transistor* presents a theme of the importance of expressing one's unique voice through the protagonist's desire and struggle for art and free self-expression and for that expression to reach others; gameplay, other multimodal elements, and the relationship between the player and the protagonist, built also through the use of gameplay and other multimodal elements, reinforce this theme.

Plot Overview

The game opens in media res with the protagonist, the popular singer Red, pulling a talking, electronic sword from the body of a man. The sword, called the Transistor, is revealed to

have the power to absorb people's Traces, or souls, and through the course of the game, it is revealed that the man in the Transistor, the man who was impaled by the Transistor and who provides narration, is Red's unnamed lover. He saved her from the blow by taking it himself, but the Transistor came in close enough contact with her to steal part of her being, and Red is left voiceless.

The player controls Red as she traverses the digital city of Cloudbank on a quest to meet the Camerata in person, the secret organization that attacked her with the Transistor. Along the way, she and the narrator discover that the city, and the people within it, is being erased, or Processed, by a collective of robots known as the Process, which is revealed to be the force behind the digital city's ever-changing nature. Upon encountering members of the Camerata, Red learns that the organization, which has been behind the disappearances of a number of important people, was attempting to use her voice to influence the city to their own ends, but when they lost the Transistor after their attempt on her life, the Process went haywire, destroying the city and the people within it.

Red attempts to stop the Process with the help of the last remaining Camerata member and succeeds in stopping further destruction, but the city is left in a blank, lifeless state. Though Red has the ability to restore the city's buildings with the reality-altering Transistor, she chooses instead to take her life, and she is seen in the world inside the Transistor reuniting with her lover.

Establishing the Theme of Voice

The gameplay of *Transistor* consists of traversing across the city of Cloudbank, defending Red from the mechanical Process along the way. Red's exact goal is unclear, as she cannot voice her plans, but what can be inferred is that she has plans for her assailants, given that

she refuses to leave town when presented with the suggestion, instead delving further into the city's heart. The game's maps are linear, with little room for exploration, and thus the player has little option but to follow the path set before Red. Along the way, the player has the opportunity to discover information about the world and the characters in it through experimenting with different combinations of combat abilities, called Traces, which fleshes out character profiles which can be read in Access Points scattered across the city.

Cloudbank is a highly digitized city which citizens can alter at whim based on popular demand. Polls are held regularly which determine aspects from who will perform on a given day to deciding the day's weather and even altering the city's infrastructure. The character profile on the engineer Royce Bracket states that "The city changed quickly and often, reconfiguring to best suit the contemporary sensibility. Thus the engineer's work was ephemeral. He loved his craft, but could not let himself become attached to the product of his effort."

It comes to be evident that the ever-changing physicality of the city reflects a constantly changing popular voice which has little regard for the minority opinion or individuality. Through the process of everything being determined by a popular vote, through everyone's individuality being lumped together to determine a uniform outcome, individuality is erased. Expressive arts, for example, have had little presence in Cloudbank until recently, and the arts that have existed have been commercial or subject to the populace's whims. Designer Maximilias Darzi, for example, is a creative individual, but his popularity is tied to his clothing, commercial pieces for consumption. There is also an element of controlling individual expression, as can be observed in the character profile for Farrah Yon-Dale, who was given authority to turn the changing sky into an art, but was limited by administrative restrictions:

She was Cloudbank's first-ever skypainter, someone who took the everyday occasion of the ever-changing sky and made an art of it…. She was drawn to the district of Goldwalk, where her suitor lived, and there she would change the horizon to shimmering sapphire for the solstice, and for their and everyone's sake. This was when her art became a liability.

Administrative restrictions over the northwestern part of Goldwalk conflicted with the breadth of the sky that needed painting.…Ms. Yon-Dale disregarded the restrictions and painted away….because Ms. Yon-Dale wantonly ignored a front page directive from administration, she was banned from skypainting for a term 2.5 times longer than she found acceptable.

Individualism in entertainment has been swept aside in favor of use or commodity until Red influences the society and rises in popularity. Reading her profile reveals that she has had a strong impact on arts in Cloudbank:

Ranked in the top percentile of Cloudbank's contemporary performing artists for five years, Red demonstrated early interest in music despite studying at Traverson Hall. Traverson groomed many of the city's most ambitious civic planners, though Red spent the majority of her time developing the academy's nascent arts program, and was the first on record to select two nontraditional disciplines.

This reveals Red's influence on the city, working to inject creativity into a sterile world, as well as the fact that she strongly values the ability for all to freely express oneself through creativity. She fought to establish the arts program, providing an opportunity not only for herself, but for all students at the academy.

Though Red climbs in popularity and manages to make a name for herself using her art, the city resists, and some reject the rampant individuality expressed in her music, as seen in another section of her profile.

> To appreciate the impact of Red's music, consider first the current state of Cloudbank's social climate and how it evolved over the past two decades. When an altercation finally erupted in the crowd during one of her performances, it was the first such incident in four years….As one of the suspects was banned from the premises, he accused Red of being an instigator and provocateur.

Another example of this pushback can be observed in the character profile for Niola Chein, a politician who fights to establish the location called the Goldwalk Channel, which states that, "The Channel was to be a gallery space of sorts designed to showcase eclectic works from those pursuing nonstandard vocations that traditionally held little share. Instead, Ms. Chein found herself accused of stirring unrest by calling attention to meritless perspectives undeserving of notice." Still, despite the resistance, these perspectives seem to be gaining a foothold in Cloudbank, as seen with Red's rising popularity and in the fact that Niola's movement for the Channel "edged out a competing vote for a metro station," meaning that there were in fact individuals who voted to create a space for artwork.

This growing discontent with the popularity-based decision-making system in Cloudbank extends to an individual in the city's upper echelons. In his character profile, it is revealed that Administrator Grant Kendrell is dissatisfied with the popular opinion being the only opinion that matters:

Administrator Kendrell was one of the longest-tenured public servants in the

administration's recorded history….By now he had realized he had fought for virtually

every social position at one time or another, always pleasing the majority. Over time this

left a hollow feeling in his heart. He had his own position on many matters, his own

dreams and desires. But he had learned to keep those thoughts in check.

Thus, disillusioned with the political structure, disdainful of the lack of power behind the

individual voice, Grant establishes the Camerata with the goal of reforming the city in a more

static image, adopting the creed, "When everything changes, nothing changes." In time, several

others join the secret organization, and they develop a plan to change the city by borrowing the

voices of local influential figures with the help of the Transistor.

The Transistor, the titular weapon wielded by Red after the failed attack on her with it, is

a powerful, reality-altering device. One of its abilities is the absorption of an individual's Trace,

an essence much like a soul. These Traces become abilities which have an impact on reality

which mirrors the impact of the individual they are derived from: Red's Trace, Crash(), for

example, is a powerful blow which stuns enemies, just as Red boldly disrupted the sterile society

and shocked those within it. Further, the consciousness of individuals absorbed into the

Transistor seems to remain within it, as seen with the game's nameless narrator remaining

conscious within it and being able to communicate with Traces not yet integrated into the device.

The Camerata is revealed to have hunted down several others before making an attempt

on Red's life. In Camerata member Sybil Reisz's profile, it states "As one of the Camerata, Ms.

Reisz was responsible for gathering information about potential high-value targets, people who

could contribute to their cause….One night Ms. Reisz nominated Red as a target…citing Red's

surging popularity…Red could substantially advance the Camerata's agenda." Other individuals

targeted include sky painter Farrah, designer Maximilias, a radio personality, a professional athlete, and the like. Asher, a member of the Camerata, reveals to Red directly that the Camerata's goal is to use these people's voices, as well as hers, to further their ideology. As he explains, "You were valuable, hand-picked. Unique. But one of many. All we needed was your point of view. To give the people what they didn't know they wanted…What good could four individuals ever hope to accomplish in this city with only their own four voices?" In other words, the Camerata hopes to manipulate the words of popular individuals, using these individuals like puppets to repeat ideas that are not their own, but the Camerata's. Thus, the Camerata is another force which quashes individuality in its quest to reshape the city, calling to mind governments seeking to use art as propaganda to sway the public. Rather than attempting to magnify their own voices themselves, they plot to force individuals' voices to suit their ends.

The game begins in media res with Red having just been silenced by the Camerata; though unsuccessful in their attempt to take her voice for their own, they succeeded in muting her. After the riot at one of her performances, Red was shaken and "She decided to take certain precautions from that point, receding from the spotlight to compose new material in relative privacy," quieted by the negative reaction; now she is again silenced by an outside force, this time physically.

Thus, the game presents a setting in which the primary conflict is not only Red versus the Camerata, but freedom of creative expression and individuality versus forces which would silence that individuality. Red's silencing serves as a physical manifestation of the forces which have quashed individuality in Cloudbank, making a statement on the muzzling of artists and individuals and framing such action in a consistently negative light. Additionally, it is after she is attacked and silenced that the city of Cloudbank begins to fall apart physically. As the Process

wreak havoc on the city, pieces of Cloudbank begin to disappear or otherwise turn into nothingness. One building is erased from the skyline completely, while other features of the city are turned into bland white blocks with no distinguishing features. The city also becomes devoid of life as people fall prey to the Process This erasure of detail and life after Red's silencing is symbolic of the bleakness of a world which does not allow for personal expression, further reinforcing the game's theme of the importance of expression.

*Transistor***'s Songs as Extensions of Red**

In Red's profile, it states that she "would often say her work spoke for itself." Players of *Transistor* get to experience her music for themselves, as the songs in the soundtrack are attributed to her and are written to be interpreted as her original work. For instance, she is shown in a flashback performing one of the songs, showing that it is to be considered hers, and all other songs with lyrics are sung in her voice. Thus, a multimodal element of the game can be used to understand its silent main character, as in the words of Dunne, who writes, "Videogame scholarship…can also make use of the methodology of multimodality to create a framework in which analysis can identify a multitude of modes (linguistics, audio, visual, gestural, spatial and multimodal design modes) to give a more comprehensive analysis of videogames" (191). There are plenty of multimodal elements which work together to produce a greater understanding of *Transistor*; for example, turning on subtitles allows the player to understand the distorted speech of the partially-Processed Sybil when she is encountered. The songs and their lyrics, however, provide a direct avenue for characterizing Red, whom the player controls but cannot receive verbal responses from, and thus provide an avenue for understanding the actions Red takes without player input.

A common theme that runs throughout Red's music discontent with the state of the world along with a fear of conformity. "The Spine," the first song with vocals to be played in the game, illustrates a feeling of isolation with the lyrics, "It's just skin and bones / Nothing inside / Sleeping alone / Fingers tied themselves / In knots around the heart / It beats in time" but also a desire for companionship in a bleak world: "So come with me / We'll fly right over / Right over / Watch it break / If we get closer / Much closer".

This theme continues with the song "We All Become," the song Red is seen performing before she is attacked by the Camerata. It opens with the lines, "When you speak, I hear silence / Every word a defiance", expressing contempt for the system which favors the popular voice and silences the individual. The rest of the song expresses fear of assimilation throughout, but also a desire to bring others to a state where the individual is heard, with the lines "Think I'll go where it suits me / Moving out to the country / With everyone, oh, everyone / Before we all become one". The song "Signals," unlocked through playing optional challenges, conveys similar feelings: "Step out beyond the edge and start the motion / Look out below, I know there's no decision / Just collision / It's all arranged…Take up the call and follow everybody / I won't become a number in the system / Zeroes and ones / Not me / Not me".

As noted, these songs share a common theme: disdain for assimilation. What should also be noted is the focus Red places on others in her lyrics. Other people—not specific individuals, but just the presence of others—are mentioned in her songs, implying her need for an audience and that self-expression is meaningless if others are not around to hear.

Though these songs are important for providing characterization, it can be difficult for a player to take in the songs' lyrics while playing. It may be difficult to split attention between listening to the lyrics while fighting enemies, the soundtrack is altered when Red stops time in

combat, and a song may be stopped early by ending a fight. However, songs can be unlocked for the player to listen to at leisure in the secret beach area with entrances scattered across Cloudbank; in fact, completing the challenges and unlocking songs is the only way to hear "Signals" within the game, as it is not played during the plot itself.
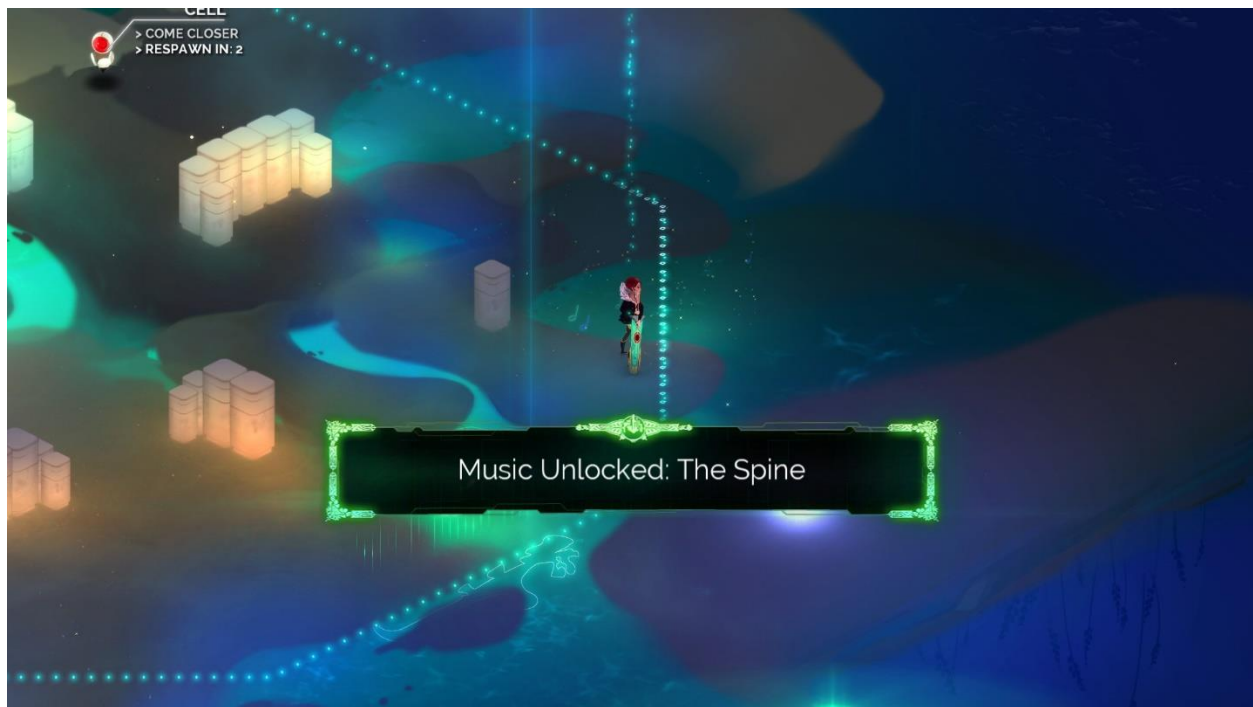

Figure 1: Unlocking a song after completing an optional challenge

The Role of Gameplay

Along with completing optional challenges to unlock songs, the act of playing the game supplements *Transistor*'s narrative in other ways. Dunne argues that gameplay itself should be considered a multimodal element of games, writing that his goal in his work is to "establish multimodality as a positive tool for narrative and gameplay analysis, as it has been in graphic novels, with text and image" (190), also writing that, "Although both narrative and gameplay can

be discussed within videogame scholarship, one element is usually highlighted above others"
(182), showing his belief that gameplay is an element to be considered in analysis along with
narrative. He compares the multimodality of games to the multimodality of graphic novels,
writing:

> Within graphic novels the use of multimodality allows for the combination of both image
> and text to be analysed effectively as individual components, as well as general
> components that make up the entire meaning of the graphic novel. Graphic novels present
> a robust model for our understanding of multimodality in videogames. If these two
> elements can be analysed together in graphic novels, narrative and gameplay can be
> thought of in the same way in videogames" (183).

Bjarke Alexander Larsen and Henrik Schoenau-Fog also argue for the collaboration of gameplay
and narrative in that "game mechanics inherently convey a narrative through the possibilities and
valorization of actions given to the player" (70). In *Transistor*'s case, gameplay allows the player
to learn more about Cloudbank and the characters that inhabit it. Traversing Cloudbank
progresses the plot, which also exposes the player to Red's songs, and as previously stated, said
songs can be listened to without distraction after unlocking them with gameplay challenges. Also
as noted, combining Traces in different ways allows the player to learn more about the characters
attached to their respective Traces, from main character Red, to the nameless narrator, to side
characters who are never actually seen.

Figure 2: An empty character profile

Gameplay also encourages finishing the narrative. Playing is, in itself, fun and enjoyable, but an attached narrative further encourages continued play. Ewan Kirkland, describing the end of the game *Silent Hill 2*, in which the player must make the protagonist, James, kill a reincarnation of his wife, writes, "Of course, just as a spectator may quit the cinema, a player may refuse to play the game, choosing instead to switch off the console and to leave James's fate unresolved. But, if done so, many hours of often grueling game playing will be rendered meaningless. That degree of investment, if nothing else, tends to compel participants—however aware, however uncomfortable—to complete the game's narrative circle" (163). If a player who can see the obvious repercussions of his or her imminent actions is impelled to continue, a player who sees no obvious disaster will certainly desire to continue. Thus, gameplay itself pushes a

game's narrative forward; and, further, the act of playing can reinforce themes present in the narrative.

On the impact of gameplay on narrative, Larsen and Schoenau-Fog write that "The choice of game mechanics is similar to the choice of framing in movies: By allowing the player to do certain things and value others, we imply a message, inherently through the mechanics themselves." (64) In other words, gameplay itself, with its limits and allowances, convey a message to the player. Óliver Pérez Latorre provides a specific example of how gameplay itself can reinforce a game's themes through examining the game *Grand Theft Auto IV*:

> GTA IV is characterized by a pattern of action regarding final objectives that links violence and criminal activity with obtaining large sums of money. In Liberty City, to become rich you need to intimidate shop owners, face gangs of drug traffickers, commit murders, rob banks, and so on. However, below the surface there is a discourse on mobility versus immobility of social class: the missions for the Mafia are linked to a possible substantial improvement in living conditions, which can be associated with social mobility; in contrast, the alternative game play units are associated with no movement in social class and remaining poor….The social discourse of GTA IV is structured by the tensions between a character/ player branded by his disadvantaged status (an immigrant newly arrived to Liberty City in conditions of near poverty) and a virtual environment of New York City characterized by the combination of seemingly great freedom of interaction and a tremendously constraining game rule design: the need to resort to violence/crime in order to obtain substantial sums of money. (430-432)

So, in other words, a player can choose to guide the game's protagonist to gain money through illicit activities or remain poor through abstaining from crime, and this act presents a theme that social mobility is near impossible.

This method of gameplay creating and reinforcing a theme can be extended to *Transistor*. Unlike *GTA IV*, Transistor is not a game which provides choice within the narrative—which in itself reinforces the idea of having one's voice taken away. Of course, as with Kirkland's writing on *Silent Hill 2* (163), the player could leave Red to her own devices, but doing so does not allow the narrative to progress. *Transistor*'s plot is set, linear, but the act of playing itself reinforces the theme of voice—of having voice taken away and also fighting to assert one's voice—through the player's controlling Red. The player guides Red through the game, but limits her actions in that, in most cases, Red can only do what the player tells her to do. However, Red at times asserts her freedom by periodically breaking free from this control.

The Relationship Between Red and the Player

Red is a specific type of protagonist seen often in games known as a silent player character, or SPC, in that she cannot speak (Mears and Zhu, Introduction). Through gameplay, the player connects with the silent Red, creating a sort of symbiotic relationship with her. On the protagonist of the game *Half-Life*, Jonne Arjoranta writes:

> Because Freeman stays completely silent during the game, his implied agency is based
> solely on his actions. But the actions are almost completely controlled by the
> player…This first-person external focalization is usually done for a specific
> meaningmaking effect: the player is supposed to identify with the tabula rasa-like

character (the anonymous you) through viewing the actions of that character as their own. (7)

Emma Westecott provides further perspective on the merging of player and character, writing:

> The player binds to the lived experience of gameplay through engagement with the sign systems at play in a specific gaming experience. This is a live and improvised dramatic performance in which the player consists both puppet-master through her input control as well as audience through her screen gaze. The player character is a particular type of virtual puppet, one that moves within a specific game world, directed to a particular game objective, achieved through our skillful progression over time. (5)

Thus, through controlling Red, the player comes to feel a connection with her, especially because she cannot verbalize. The player guides Red through her narrative and makes a number of very small choices which have no narrative impact along the way: deciding what toppings to order on a pizza, voting on the color of the solstice sky, etcetera. This relationship mirrors that of Red and her audience within the game's story: her audience may have felt a connection to her, but some members of it have controlled her and led to silencing her. In the hands of the player, Red's actions are not fully her own. As Bria Mears and Jichen Zhu write "SPCs can also be used…to represent a theme or to tell a particular story. For example, *Transistor*'s…protagonist losing her voice to a corrupt system" (3 Silent Player Characters).

However, Red does, in fact, have a number of qualities which separate her from the player, but may not be obvious to the player, including the few opportunities she has to converse through text, her characterization known by the player only through paying attention to her art, the few chances she has to act independent of the player, and the relationship between herself

and the game's narrator. Mears and Zhu propose a model for silent player characters, ranging from projective to expressive, explaining that, in their model, "The projective character is a SPC with little to no characteristics, personality, or known history.…In comparison, an expressive character is a pre-defined SPC with a personality, history, and characteristics that must be communicated to the player"; Mears and Zhu define Red as an expressive silent player character: "SPCs placed in position 10, for example Red in Transistor…are expressive characters that have the highest level of characterization throughout the course of the game—essentially the only thing missing from these characters is their voice" (4 Expressive and Projective SPCs). We learn about Red through her music and through information available in her character profile—elements Mears and Zhu describe as "Personal Cues" (5 Expressive SPC Design Patterns). Red has strong characterization, but many aspects of this characterization can be easily overlooked, as it is up to the player to seek out and read information in her profile and to listen to her music. Less easily overlooked, however, are Red's moments of autonomy and her relationship with the narrator, who acts as a "Narrative Assistant" through characterizing Red by positioning her in the narrative and feeding her information (Mears and Zhu, 5 Expressive SPC Design Patterns).

Regarding *Transistor*'s narrator, it becomes evident over the course of the narrative that he and Red are in an intimate relationship, with the narrator proclaiming his love for her a number of times; this provides what Mears and Zhu term a "Personal Relationship Cue," which creates a set relationship and therefore set life circumstance and characterization for a character (5 Expressive SPC Design Patterns), driving a wedge between Red and the player. Further, the narrator speaks directly to Red throughout the game, never to the player as with some other games' narrators; the narrator can be contrasted with the narrator of another of Supergiant Games' works, *Bastion*. As with *Transistor*'s narrator, regarding the narrator of *Bastion*,

"'pieces' of verbal narration…are triggered by a variety of player actions… the sheer presence of the narrator, who comments not only on predetermined 'narrative' but also on simulated 'ludic' events, doubtlessly 'makes a difference' in how the gameplay is experienced." (Thon 44). As seen in Figure 10 provided by Jan-Noël Thon, however, the narrator speaks in third-person, describing to the player what actions the player character is taking (44). This is opposed to *Transistor*'s narrator, who speaks directly to Red throughout the game, leaving the player almost as if he or she were an eavesdropper. Further developing Red and the narrator's relationship are instances in which Red, given the opportunity, uses text to communicate with him. When the player guides Red to certain terminals in Cloudbank and allows her to leave a comment, she inputs comments without player guidance on the comments' content; at times, she uses these opportunities to communicate with the narrator, further characterizing herself and driving a wedge between the merging of herself and the player.

Figure 3: Red using a terminal to communicate with the narrator

On silent characters, Arjoranta states that in some instances, "the player has control over a character's actions while not having access to the character's mental landscape… Video games may also describe a character's internal state by suddenly removing player control and having the character act regardless of the player's wishes" (8-9). On two major occasions, Red acts separately of player control: first, in setting the story in motion by ignoring her companion's suggestion to leave town; second, in eliminating the player's control over herself by committing suicide at the game's end. In the first instance, Red is told which way not to turn; if a player had control over her at this point, the player may have been inclined to obey the instructions given, but Red does not give the player this option, deciding to dive deep into the city's heart. In the second instance, the player is given the impression that the game's next course of action will be to guide Red to rebuild the destroyed Cloudbank, only to have Red make a different decision.

It should be noted that, though Red has elements of characterization which establish her as having a set identity and make her an expressive player character (Mears and Zhu, 4 Expressive and Projective SPCs), the elements of silent player characters acting as a "virtual puppet" (Westecott 5) and creating the effect of a player "viewing the actions of that character as their own" (Arjoranta 7) still exist, creating a complicated relationship between Red and the player, in which Red is controlled by the player and has the player's will imposed upon her, but still retains her identity and acts independently of the player when given the opportunity, reinforcing the theme of the individual fighting for self-expression.

The Ending

As noted earlier, player characters can have their internal states made known through breaking free of player control (Arjoranta 8-9). In *Transistor*'s ending, Red does exactly this, breaking away from the player's control and asserting her own voice over her fate when faced

with the prospect of continuing in a world that has nothing left for her and engaging in actions antithetical to her desires.

As the end draws near, Red is left one of only two living people in Cloudbank, and thusly, the terminals she operates give her full access to the city's workings: she can override polls, for example. In the end, after the final battle against the last Camerata member, the city is still in the blank state the Process left it in, reduced to sterile white blocks, and the player is prompted by in-game interface and the narrator to guide Red to begin rebuilding the city. With the player's input, she rebuilds the bridge leading back to the game's starting area, and then, again with player input, rebuilds the narrator's body—with no option for the player to go or do anything else. Then, without any input from the player, she uses the Transistor to commit suicide, taking away the player's control over her.
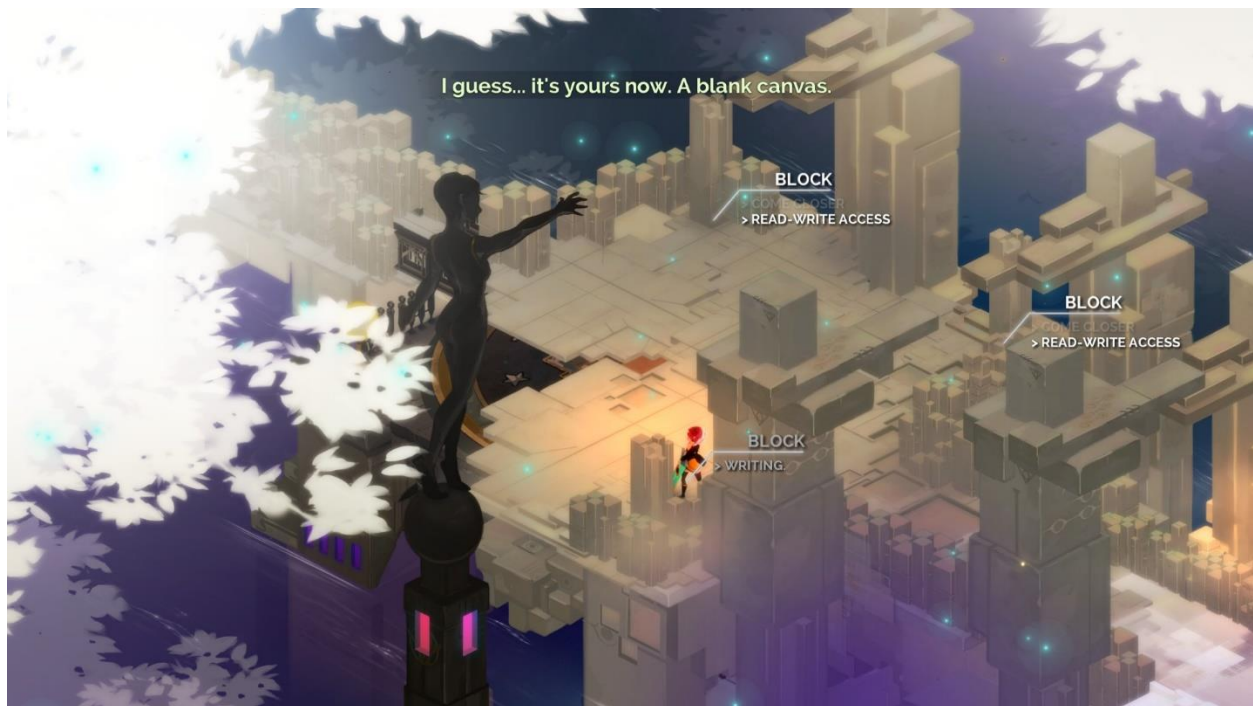

Figure 4: Red rebuilding a bridge upon the player's input

A player who has not paid attention to Red's characterization will be left wondering why Red has done this as well as feeling frustrated in having the narrative suddenly halted—as noted earlier, players want to continue a narrative (Kirkland 163), and in committing suicide, Red abruptly halts the story where a player expected it to continue. Paying attention to the various multimodal elements of the game and the themes and characterization they reinforce, however, reveals that Red's action here is the culmination of the game's themes and is the result of her values.

When Red is given complete access and authority over the city, this puts her in a role similar to that of the Camerata: she now asserts the power of her voice over the city, with no one to contest and no one to hear. In the words of her companion, the narrator, "This isn't a vote. It's a choice." Further, there is no one present: she can express her voice, but there is no one to speak to beside the narrator, and even then, she is separated from him by a physical border, the fact that she remains living while he is in a state of afterlife inside the Transistor. Further still, the game and the player task her with an objective antithetical to her values in asking her to rebuild the city, a city which would be built in her image. She, again, never wanted control over the city: not over its people, and not over its physicality. Red values creative expression among a populace that is willing to listen. When there is no one present, there is no reason for her to create. Further still, her removing control from the player asserts her voice, reinforcing the theme of the struggle for self-expression. She is seen after the credits existing within the Transistor with the narrator, free of control and free to express herself to those around her, and she has fully regained her ability to speak, as she greets the narrator verbally.

Conclusion

Transistor is a game which establishes as a conflict the struggle of the individual to assert one's own voice and individuality in a world which does not value self-expression and attempts to silence individuality. This theme is seen not only in the game's narration itself, but is reinforced by gameplay through the player's control over the silenced main character (Mears and Zhu, 3 Silent Player Characters) and in the instances in which the main character breaks free of the player's control, culminating in the game's ending, which abruptly stops the narrative at the Red's behest; examining Red's characterization give insight to her past and her actions, explaining the sudden loss of player control, further reinforcing the game's theme. Red, as a character, reinforces the theme of an individual's desire to express her voice, of art as expression, and desire not only to speak but to be heard. The player must listen to her to understand her, as well as examine other characters' circumstances as revealed through gameplay to understand them, and, in turn, understand the game. The control the player has over Red reinforces the theme of a voice being silenced (Mears and Zhu, 3 Silent Player Characters), and Red's moments of breaking player control reinforce the importance of expressing said voice and breaking free of constraints at all costs to do so. Thus, *Transistor* uses gameplay and other multimodal elements to create and reinforce characterization and, in turn, create and reinforce the theme of expressing individuality amongst forces which would silence it.

Works Cited

Arjoranta, Jonne. "Narrative Tools for Games: Focalization, Granularity, and the Mode of

    Narration in Games." *Games and Culture*, 2015, pp. 1–22.,

    doi:10.1177/1555412015596271.

Dunne, Daniel J. "The Scholar's Ludo-Narrative Game and Multimodal Graphic

    Novel." *Creative Technologies for Multidisciplinary Applications*, 2016, pp. 182–207.,

    doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-0016-2.ch008.

Kirkland, Ewan. "Masculinity in Video Games: The Gendered Gameplay of Silent

    Hill." *Camera Obscura*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 161–183., doi:10.1215/02705346-2009-

    006.

Larsen Bjarke A., and Henrik Schoenau-Fog. "The Narrative Quality of Game Mechanics."

    Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol. 10045, 2016., doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-

    319-48279-8_6.

Latorre, Óliver Pérez. "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study:

    GTA IV." *Games and Culture*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2015, pp. 415–437.,

    doi:10.1177/1555412014565639.

Mears, Bria, and Jichen Zhu. "Motherhood: Designing Player Characters for Storytelling".

    FDG17 Proceedings, The International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games.

    2017, http://fdg2017.org/#proceedings,

    http://fdg2017.org/papers/FDG2017_game_Motherhood.pdf.

Thon, Jan-Noël. "Toward a Transmedial Narratology: On Narrators in Contemporary Graphic

    Novels, Feature Films, and Computer Games." *Beyond Classical Narration: Transmedial*

    and Unnatural Challenges, edited by Jan Alber and Per Krogh Hansen, Walter De

    Gruyter, 2014, pp. 25–56. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

    ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uindy-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1642699.

Transistor. Supergiant Games. 2014. Video game.

Westecott, Emma. "The Player Character as Performing Object." *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009,*

    Digital Games Research Association, 2009, http://www.digra.org/digital-

    library/forums/5-breaking-new-ground/