Epic Spatialities: The Production of Space in *Final Fantasy* Games

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When first asked to write about "vast narratives" for this book, I was inclined to discuss the Final Fantasy *games as* Gesamtkunstwerk: *the epic themes, the exhaustive dramatis personae, and the fantastic cosmological preoccupations of the game franchise that seem so rich for such interpretive study. I have taken something of a "spatial turn," however, that brings me through the question of the epic narrative to the modifier "vast," which is at the very least a spatial metaphor (mapping time as space, and duration as expanse). Rather than dwell on surface narrative epic aspects that are consistent with other, noncomputational representational practices (particularly anime and manga in the case of Japanese games), I was drawn to the elements of these objects that produced the experience of the vast in a distinctive fashion.*

Video games have been described as "play spaces" (Jenkins 1998), partially to distinguish them from other screen-based representational practices by emphasizing that their spaces are not simply represented but also experienced, understood, and navigated. Yet there has been little to suggest a critical inquiry into the production of space in the authoring and playing of video games in general, much less within genre- and title-specific terms. Space is not a straightforward category in the physical world. The design and authorship of video game space is no less a complex practice.

A relationship between spatiality and narrative is alluded to by Henry Jenkins (2004) in his essay "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." The essay is a general defense of attention to narrative aspects within video games, rather than a theory of spatiality itself. It might be more productive to see both play and story elements as temporal orderings, and then to understand the relationship between those temporal orderings along with the spatialities created by game design and game experience.

An undifferentiated hermeneutics of video game space cannot manage an analysis of these spatialities with adequate granularity. It is within genres, franchises, and titles that we can unwind strategies and methods by which space is produced, represented, and engaged (outside the categorical observation that video game space is, materially, software-generated space). The *Final Fantasy* franchise is one such framework for conceiving the practices of spatiality within the authorship and play of video games, particularly insofar as it utilizes techniques of telescoping scale and acceleration through space in the service of the creation of what is still an expansive, epic *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Space and spatiality are fraught, elusive categories. An excellent conceptual model for the production of space is proffered by David Harvey (2006) in his chapter "Space as a Keyword." He intersects a tripartite model of space with another tripartite model, described by Henri Lefebvre (1991), to produce a matrix of concepts for understanding space and spatiotemporality.

The first of these concepts is that of absolute space, typically characterized as Newtonian or Cartesian space. This is space as a fixed system of coordinates that exists without reference to the objects that are then conceived as populating or traversing it. This exists in a dialectical tension with relative space, most powerfully expressed as Einsteinian space. It is in temporal terms that the most basic distinction between absolute and relative space is drawn; as Harvey (2006) writes, "The idea of simultaneity in the physical universe, [Einstein] taught us, has to be abandoned." Relative space might be seen as the spatiality that relies on spatial framings that can be brought into some friction with other spatial framings—for example, the internal space of a train coach, which is both a static frame of spatial reference for the inhabitants of the coach even as it is traversing the space on land.

The third of Harvey's concepts is that of relational space, which he associates with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's critique of Sir Isaac Newton. Harvey (2006) observes that "there is no such thing as space or time outside of the

32.1 Airships in *Final Fantasy IV*: Relative "material" (experienced) space.

32.2 Airship deck, *Final Fantasy IV*: A relational material space. The "moving" space of the airship becomes a containing space of interaction between characters, until an encounter with a hostile creature moves the player . . .

32.3 . . . into battle space. The emergent conventions of the console (particularly Japanese) role-playing game during this period (roughly 1987 to the mid-1990s) used shifts of perspective to visually cue the transformation of space, from isometric to top-down to stylized side view.
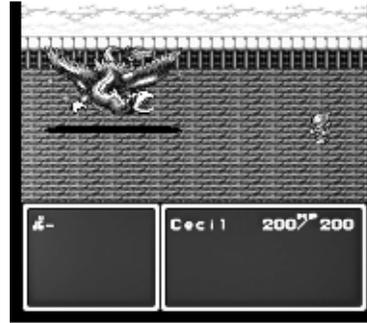
32.4 *Final Fantasy X*: Saved games loading menu. Place marks play, and flags an instant in a temporal progression, creating an intersection between fictional space/time and playtime.

32.5 Combat *in Final Fantasy X*. The overlays convey operational information. The visual display of space is unchanged: the transformation of space once performed by shifts in angle is now served by the heads-up display and the cues of the sound track. Operational spatial deixis remains stylized in keeping with the traditions of the genre, a practice that would only change with *Final Fantasy XI* and *XII*.

32.6 A relational space of representation, from *Final Fantasy X-2*: The sphere theater allows players to play back movies and music from earlier in the game. To be added to the player's library, each "memory" (media file) must be purchased using the game's currency.

32.7 Relational spaces of representation: The ruins of Zanarkand in *Final Fantasy X*. In the preapocalyptic milieu of the game, Zanarkand is a desolate place of spiritual portent and traumatic memory. The place is revisited early in the play of the sequel, *Final Fantasy X-2* . . .

32.8 . . . where it becomes a space of public memory, and (as one of the player's characters notes) "a tourist attraction." The episteme of the sequel is that of postwar levity: the often melancholic piano trills of the first game are replaced with jazz funk and pop songs, and even the game mechanics reflect the emergence of a euphoric commodity culture. This shift in the character of place is reinforced by dialogue between player and non-player characters, before the place is again recast . . .

32.9 . . . as an operational space. The interface then foregrounds the omnipresent representation of space (the map on the heads-up display), and the player stance shifts from reflection to active and instrumental navigation.

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32.10 The "Youth League Headquarters" represented in material space in the game, and . . .

32.11 . . . within a space of representation within the options menu.

32.12 <!AU to add caption for this figure?!>

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processes that define them," which, for Leibniz, connotes the freedom of a creator to produce any one or another spatiotemporality. "Processes do not occur *in* space," adds Harvey, "but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process." While Harvey, as a geographer of urban spaces and differential global development, understands "process" mostly in historical, economic, and sociopolitical terms, we can exploit a different idea of process in this regard to foreground the authorial

and programmatic aspects of the production of video game space.) Among the operations that embed relational spaces within it are those of collective memory: the idea of Hiroshima, the "Orient" and the "West," Ground Zero, Nanking, and Abu Ghraib.

Harvey is interested not in determining whether space is absolute, relative, or relational but seeing how all these conceptualizations are implicit in human social practice. In his recent work, he extends his three conceptions of space by transecting them with one that foregrounds experiential (rather than conceptual) categories, drawn from a phenomenological (rather than analytic) reflective tradition. According to Lefebvre, space can be analyzed as a phenomenon produced in three different modes of human activity. Harvey describes material (or experienced) space as "the world of tactile and sensual interaction with matter," as produced and traversed by the immediate actions of bodies and objects. This mode of spatial phenomena includes a range of practices, from our immediate, bodily interactions with stairs, bridges, walking surfaces, and so forth, to environmental and microscopic experiences of space.

There exist also what Lefebvre (1991) calls "representations of space" and "spaces of representation." The first of these are spaces produced by human representational practices, including cartography (especially administrative and

cadastral), narratives of landscape, simulated space, scientific models of space, spatial metaphors, painterly spaces, and (according to Harvey) cyberspace. Aesthetic practice generally produces representations of space, often in readings of the experience of material space (and I will be able to trouble Harvey's assignation of cyberspace to this mode accordingly).

Spaces of representation are the various affective, interior, and situational conditions under which humans represent space, including memory, imagination, anxiety, fantasy, loss, shame, nostalgia, trauma, and desire. The practice of representing space is drawn as much from these internal states as from the experience of material space. While at first this seems like the most elusive of the phenomenological categories, one can recall what it is like to revisit, after a long absence, the place of one's childhood, or a place of personal or collective trauma, to capture how distinct this mode of spatial production is from those that are either material or simply representational, and how it determines much of the perceptual and navigational experience of these spaces.

Harvey (2006) creates a three-by-three matrix, transposing his original conceptual modes of space with Lefebvre's phenomenological ones. The resulting grid allows us to speak, for example, of "absolute material (or experienced) space," such as that created by walls, bridges, and other physical, body-navigable features; "relative spaces of representation," such as that produced by the frustrations and anxieties of a commute through dense traffic; and "relational spaces of representation," which includes, in his words, "surrealism; existentialism; psychogeographies; cyberspace," and the spatial modes characterized by Leibniz and Gilles Deleuze. It is through this matrix of spatial categories that I will parse the spatial elements of the Japanese console role-playing game, *Final Fantasy X*, with reference to previous and subsequent games in the series.

The *Final Fantasy* series of games spans four primary platforms in its mainline history (with other platforms targeted for ports, adaptations, and the like.) Within these games, platform differences account for the broadest divergences in the material experience of space. The series began

with a title released in Japan in 1987 by a then-struggling Square, Inc., which had already released a handful of unsuccessful titles for the Nintendo Famicom. The title reflected the belief of the game's director and original creator, Hironobu Sakaguchi, that it would be the company's last release before being forced to close; hence "Final." While the game has become the representative title for the Japanese role-playing game genre, its predecessor, Enix's *Dragon Quest* (1986), was released a year earlier (Berardini 2006). The genre produced by these two titles was both a continuation of and a response to the Western computer-based role-playing genre, and particularly the *Ultima* series, first produced in the early 1980s for desktop personal computers (especially the Apple II). In particular, the third title of the series, *Ultima III: Exodus*, had a strong influence on the developer of *Dragon Quest* (Barton 2007).

Garriott's *Ultima* games, and other Western computer-based role-playing games, were adaptations of the nondigital practice of pen-and-paper role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, which had become popular in the late 1970s. Pen-and-paper role-playing games emerged from miniature wargaming hobbyists, who grafted a narrative and fantastic sensibility on to a medieval-themed, one-to-one scale military simulation.[1] Within this relatively brief history—though military simulation as both a hobby and an element in military practice has a history dating at least as far back as the late eighteenth century, the passage through *Dungeons & Dragons* to *Final Fantasy* encompasses less than fifteen years—the migrations of the space of practice accompany a transformation in the practice of space. Pen-and-paper games often relied on grid paper to generate adventure maps. The grid space is then used in conjunction with game rules that dictate rates of traversal, effective ranges for weapons, line of sight, and the like. The representation of space mandated by these games is motivated by the need to create a material object on which to perform the calculations that constitute the simulation. When these calculations are performed on a computer, players no longer directly perform this representational practice.[2] Instead, the representation of space is constrained by technological considerations, and the perception of space

becomes a matter worked out through the computer interface.

The Japanese reception of role-playing games includes a discontinuity: there is little sign of a culture of tabletop fantasy role-playing games in Japan before the production of computer-based games. *Dungeons & Dragons* was translated into Japanese in 1985, the same year that *Dragon Quest* was released. The *Ultima* and *Wizardry* games were already in widespread Japanese distribution by this time. While the acronym RPG signifies pen-and-paper role-playing games in the United States and other Anglophone regions, it signifies computer-based games in Japan, and the pen-and-paper games are referred to as TRPG, (テーブルトーク) (a transliteration of "Table-Talk RPG") (TRPG.net 2003). Thus, the temporal framework for the role-playing game in Japan has been primarily computer based from the outset; the evolution of role-playing game mechanics as a practice performed by a collaborating group of players does not exist in Japan. The "roles" of role-playing are categories of character function, and the player-driven theatrical aspects of pen-and-paper role-playing are instead replaced by story practices that owe as much to cinema and television as they do to military simulation. This is the historical context for the creation of the *Final Fantasy* games.

Using Harvey's and Lefebvre's categories for the production of space, the platform produces, first, absolute and relative material space. It also contributes considerably to the structuring of material relational space; genre and story conventions and patterns, however, also contribute to this conceptual mode. That it does so with a symbolic, representational system (programming as well as digital and digitized artwork) is an inversion of the typical characteristics of spatial relationships, but this is the nature of the production of spatial phenomenon authored by computer software.

Material Space and the Production of Bodies

Video games create space by first materially representing it within specific material constraints created by the hardware and software platforms on which the games run. The initial

Final Fantasy games produced material space within the constraints and affordances determined by their target platforms (broadly speaking, of course, this could be said to be true of any game). The Nintendo Famicom was an eight-bit video game console system, developed by Nintendo Japan and released in 1985. It was capable of producing a video display of 256 pixels by 240, and displaying fifty-three colors (Diskin 2004). The Nintendo platforms lacked true 3-D display capabilities (except by isometric projection).

Final Fantasy X was the first of the franchise's titles to be produced for the Sony Playstation 2. The platform afforded the designers increases in storage capacity (Playstation titles were shipped on compact discs; a single title required as many as four compact discs), processing power, and most important, video resolution, particularly for 3-D models. The Playstation 2's computational architecture revolves around the "Emotion Engine," described as "a combination CPU and DSP Processor, whose main function is simulating 3D worlds" (Stokes 2000).

These platforms, and to a lesser extent the regimes of controllers and inputs associated with them, created broad limits on the relationships between body and space. The Nintendo games had three primary spatial displays: city/dungeon-scaled space, in which the display screen bounded a scaled region analogous to one or two city blocks; battle space, in which the characters would be depicted individually; and countryside/landscape space. The transitions between them were well marked. The player would move their avatar on to an icon marking either a town or, often, a cave entrance. Some event would usually presage the transition to the battle space, such as dramatic music. Within any given scale, the navigation of spaces on Nintendo platforms is generally continuous.

The world spaces of the Playstation 2 (and to a somewhat lesser extent, Playstation) games are implemented as a series of zones, characteristic spaces that frequently also have an architectural, aesthetic unity. The focus on display technologies and the use of read-only discs, rather than cartridges, as delivery media would make it impossible to have extensive spatial continuity within a given scale on the Sony platforms. Instead, as a spatial transition occurs, the

required data is loaded into the working memory of the Playstation. As these transition load times could be noticeable, the disks would spin), it was more effective to turn these transitions into temporal and narratological ones as well as to turn places into "chapters" of sorts.

While zone transitions became less continuous, transitions from travel to battle would become more continuous, as the representations of characters in the navigational screens increased in resolution and scale. Beginning with *Final Fantasy XII* (2006), the transition from navigation interface to conflict interface was effaced (except for the drawing of lines of hostile force, indicating that a combatant was targeting a character).[3] We can characterize two trends in the history of the game: the convergence of relative spaces (active/battle space and travel space), and the division of space along geographic (zones as aesthetic and landscape ideas) and temporal (zones as chapters) lines.

Representations of Space (and Place): Producing Worlds

At least four of the worlds of the *Final Fantasy* games are named, and in the naming of the worlds, subfranchises have been created. The world of Ivalice, for example, was introduced in the game *Final Fantasy Tactics* (1997). The world would be revised and reused for a number of other games, culminating in the recent *Final Fantasy XII* (2006) and a series of related products, called the *Ivalice Alliance*, for handheld platforms.

The authorship of the fictional world included a process of aesthetic sampling of our own world. *Final Fantasy XI* (2002), a massively multiplayer role-playing game, is set in a world called Vana'diel, divided into loosely Western-styled nations.[4] In re-creating Ivalice for *Final Fantasy XII*, teams of world designers traveled through Turkey and India (IGN staff 2003). The fictional setting of *Final Fantasy X* was a departure from the preceding titles. *Final Fantasy VI* (1994), *VII* (1997), and *VIII* (1999) in particular, and to a lesser extent *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), featured worlds of fantastic technology and "steampunk," retro-futurist aesthetics. They were also identified as having architectures that evoked a European sensibility. The designers of *Final Fantasy X*—

especially producer Yoshinori Kitase and character designer Tetua Nomura (Squaresoft 2001)—wedded a move to a more traditional fantasy ambience to an aesthetic turn away from Western tropes of place.[5]

Final Fantasy X is set in a world called Spira, which is dominated by a religious institution called Yevon. Spira endured a cyclical cataclysm: the destruction of any center of population greater than a village by Sin, a huge, armored monstrosity that came from the ocean. The doctrines of Yevon taught that Sin was punishment for technological ambitions. It would later be revealed that this was not the case, and that the religious institution itself was complicit with the destruction wrought by Sin.

Final Fantasy X begins in the city of Zanarkand, a fantastic, technological metropolis. The avatar controlled by the player is soon identified as Tidus, an up-and-coming sports superstar, on his way to a professional Blitzball match. The spatial representations are on a local, urban scale (although somewhat constrained: there are few open urban spaces in *Final Fantasy* games, and instead, there are interconnected zones of passage, resembling the Situationist topographies of Paris as a system of nodes).

This scale of player-space relationships persists—that is, a broader geographic representation of space is not yet presented—when the initial apocalyptic event, the destruction of the city of Zanarkand, destroys this space before it can be explored or understood. Transported to another time-place, the player is left with an unsatisfied curiosity about the space of initial play. From this new place, the player begins a process of narrative and spatial traversal that resembles and reflects that of the genre within the franchise: "forward" progression through space (that is, from the known and "cleared" region to the unknown; to another place directed by the conditions of the game), which is slow and fraught with challenges.[6]

The game is divided into zones, the initial entry into which is experienced as a chapter; the temporal dimension is managed by the navigation of space. On entering a new zone for the first time, the name of the zone ("Besaid," "Kilika," or "Zanarkand Ruins") is flashed across the screen, along with a panning shot of the zone's typical landscape.

These markers serve to indicate to the player that they are, indeed, making progress through the story line.

Players need not make this progress immediately. Most *Final Fantasy* games adhere to role-playing game conventions originating in *Dungeons & Dragons*.[7] Characters are a bundle of statistics that simulate traits and abilities, and these statistics are modified by the experience of the character. In practice, every battle that a character fights provides the character with "experience points." By earning experience points, a character will "level up," becoming stronger, more difficult to destroy, and capable of various previously inaccessible feats of combat, magic, and the like. The result is a kind of statistical bildungsroman. It is possible, although time-consuming, to repetitively kill weaker opponents in the game to increase one's level in such a way as to make the traversal of zones trivial. The "experience points/level" mechanic is nearly ubiquitous to this genre of games, and exceptions to this mechanic are often notable for just this reason.[8]

Also, *Final Fantasy* games are known for their inclusion of minigames: mise en abymes that occur in fictional spaces of their own. *Final Fantasy XI* features "Tetra Master," a collectible card game (with a separate in-game interface) popular on the continent throughout which the characters travel.[9] In-game tournament-level play occurs in a specialized arena. The minigame in *Final Fantasy X* plays a central role in the plot: the lead character is a professional athlete (as was his father, whose fate is connected to that of Sin). It is possible to play Blitzball as a stand-alone sports game, along with league management mechanics that involve recruiting players throughout the world of Spira. The practice of building, managing, and playing a Blitzball team becomes a possibility during the indefinitely extensible period before the game's denouement.

The tactic of "leveling up," of seeking out story-irrelevant combat in order to improve the statistics of the players' avatars is, ironically, outside the fictional temporality of the game, which is generally only driven forward by the passage into new zones.[10] Inverting the customary relationship between time and space, it is the passage through geographic space that creates the tempo for the passage of fictional/historical time.

Final Fantasy X's lead character, Tidus, finds himself displaced several times before being given agency over his own navigation.[11] After the first cataclysmic displacement, he finds himself swimming and wandering through half-submerged ruins. He is later picked up by a ship over which he has no control, and is eventually again thrown ashore. In time, he meets the other members of what will become his band of friends and companions for the rest of the game. His primary love interest, Yuna, is a summoner, a figure of destiny with the power to call on powerful, primordial beings, and who has the ability and responsibility to bring about a twenty-year period of calm from the destructive power of Sin, through an event called the Final Summoning.[12] Before this can take place, she—escorted by Tidus and other companions—must make a pilgrimage to a series of temples throughout Spira. Each temple visit requires the party to solve puzzles and battle opponents, and this pilgrimage provides the dominant (though by no means only) fiction that orders the temporal progression through the zones of the game. As the party progresses, epiphanies and expositions disclose more of the nature of the world of Spira—including the discovery that the Final Summoning involves the martyrdom of the summoner, and the phantasmal nature of Tidus's own existence (DigiCube Company 2001).

As play and story progress, the player develops multiple and layered perceptions of the spatialities of the game. Common to many of the games are modes of transportation that become available to the player at critical junctures. These modes of transportation have become brand icons of their own. One is the chocobo, a large, flightless yellow bird that is ridden as a mount, which appears in most *Final Fantasy* games since *Final Fantasy II*. In most games, players who have access to a chocobo are able to navigate spaces more quickly. Riding a chocobo also avoids the random combat that otherwise besets players moving on foot through the games' terrain. Another of these iconic modes of transportation is the airship, which constructs space as a network of disparate, connected nodes (just as real air travel does).

Each mode of transportation presents certain landscapes as navigable and impassable. In *Final Fantasy III*, the player

will get access to different airships that may allow access undersea, yet be unable to cross over a mountain. Toward the end of the game, the player has access to a flotilla of airships that account for every possible terrain. These modes of transportation occur with the relative modes of the representation of space. Velocity compresses the experience of place and creates the passing landscape, or spaces of transition. There can be affective shifts associated with moving through a space quickly through which one once moved slowly—even without conflict, a kind of mastery is produced, and the satisfaction of this telescoping mobility is a significant element in the aesthetics of the play of these games.

Final Fantasy X culminates in a series of epic battles against primordial forces and figures within Sin. Before taking the steps that trigger this series of battles, the player enjoys almost complete freedom over the world of Spira. This is when the Blitzball tournament minigame becomes available. It is also during this time that the ancillary quests, which unlock valuable items and resolve side narratives, can be undertaken. A completionist approach to the game is possible at this point, collecting sets of various types of items, weapons, and the like. When the final narrative sequence is launched, however, the world is "closed," unless the player opens a saved game, participating again in this penultimate moment of maximal liberty.

Spaces of Representation: Spira Revisited

As frequently occurs in successful franchises and entertainment commodities, the popularity and lingering narrative tension of *Final Fantasy X* motivated the production of a sequel, *Final Fantasy X-2*. Much of the software and many of the resources of the original game were repurposed for the sequel. The world in which the game occurs remains the same, and the protagonists of the sequel are three young women, two of whom were lead characters (though neither the lead protagonist) of the original game.

A short film, created as bonus content for one of the later editions of the game, acts as a narrative bridge between the two titles and provides the internal impetus for producing the sequel (Dunham 2003).[13] The two titles are set in the same world, and largely feature the same charac-

ters, yet are starkly distinct in the experience of play. Whereas *Final Fantasy X* begins with a mysterious world that is slowly, painstakingly uncovered through pilgrimage, the sequel, set two years after the end of the events of the first game, immediately places the protagonists in control of an airship, with full access to a world that is, for the most part, completely familiar to players of the first game. The space of representation has changed from one created by foreboding, expectation, and cataclysm to one dominated, mostly, by a lighter sense of play. The lead character, Yuna, has survived what was meant to be her moment of world-saving self-sacrifice, and now is faced with a kind of existential crisis: what to do with the rest of her life, after her world-historical moment.

The music of the sequel, too, dramatizes the shift in mood. Whereas the first title favored orchestral program music, the sequel tends toward popular, jazz, and even funk-inflected sounds. In light of the conscious "turn to Asia" that motivated the directorial team of these titles, it is easy to see allegorical references to the experience of Japan during and after the Pacific War.[14] If the turns of complicity, ironies of memory, and slow construction of spaces through travel in *Final Fantasy X* evoke the national memory up to and through the war period, the sequel suggests the giddy consumerism and conflicted identities of the postwar period. Two of the playable characters of the first game, Wakka and Lulu, are now expecting their first child (and are thus removed from the cast of playable characters for the sequel).

The three female protagonists begin the game as neither sports heroes (as Tidus was in the first game) nor as traditional epic heroes, but as pop stars. Their efficacy within the game mechanics is managed by a system of costume changes, accompanied by animations that resemble music videos. Whereas the first game portrays a traumatized world suffering disastrous paroxysms, the sequel suggests a postmillennial world of giddy consumerism and optimism.

While there are differences in mechanics between the first game and the sequel, it is in the mood and the framing of space that the sequel diverges most clearly from the original. What occurs as discovery and epiphany in the first game becomes nostalgia, revision, and a struggle to frame

Table 32.1

	Material space (experienced space)	Representation of space (conceptualized space)	Space of representation (lived/played space)
Absolute space	Rendered 3-D space; physics; buildings, trees, grass, road; barriers, walls, and rivers that effect navigation	Map displays; intertitles; landscape features; textured spaces; city layouts; reference to spaces in FAQs, walk-throughs, and guides	The game world and its fiction as an object of contemplation; literacy of game space and ability to interact with it confidently—the space created by mastery; the learned map, becoming traversable with minimal attention
Relative space	Modes of transportation and acceleration: chocobo space, airship space; scaled space (from overhead map to walking space to battle space)	Airship destination menus; nodes and linkages; zone transitions; hidden and revealed spaces (secret doors, corridors); minigame (Blitzball) spaces	Affective play spaces: melancholy, anxiety/tension—sense of threat/excitement in high-risk zones and boss fights; shifts of attention motivated by changes in level of threat and comfort; cutscene spaces[1]
Relational space	"Battle space" versus "traversing space"; transitions in scale; blockages and transitions between zones and modes	Narrated space;[2] the fictional accounting of fictional space; aestheticized space, rendered architectures, and landscapes	Collective and personal memory; pre- and postcataclysmic spaces; zones of return; sublime spaces

Notes:
1. This kind of space is thematized within *Final Fantasy* X through various tropes: the "dreaming" of Zanarkand by the disembodied spirits of its former residents, the space of the massive "Sin," and so on. Since much of this is revealed through expository—some of it extragame—it remains otherwise outside the scope of this work.
2. Within *Final Fantasy* X and *X-2*, one of the nonplayer characters, a wandering scholar named Maechen, periodically meets the party, and reveals various historical and "scientific" aspects of Spira. Several *Final Fantasy* games have characters who generate authoritative, expository knowledge.

the events and places of the original title: in the wake of the institutional discrediting of the religion Yevon through the events of the first game, a cultural civil war brews between two major factions, embroiling places and characters familiar to players of the first game.

When a space of experience becomes represented through interiority, through memory or desire, it becomes a space of representation. Players return to a known world—a world that is much like that which they remember, as an experienced (material) space. The fictional historical change in these materially unchanged spaces produces experiences such as nostalgia, mourning, and expectation, through a fictive collective memory, abetted by the player.

The Matrix of Spatialities Revisited

It is now possible to locate these various spatial modes in Harvey's grid. This matrix works at a specific scale. For example, it does not include the living room or desktop of

the player, or the environmental context of play. Such a scale of inquiry would dilute our analysis by becoming a general theory of video game spaces, obscuring the ways in which the game as an authored system produces these spatial effects. We see character/avatar/player relations as a deictic displacement across multiple modes (that is, as the way in which the "as if" of the game fictions can recruit the player into space–production rather than just a representational strategy. Attention to only the fictive space of the game would diminish the materiality of the spaces produced.

Rethinking Space and Game Narrative

A more exhaustive conceptual approach to space affords us a better way to discuss the aesthetic and textual aspects of games. While it may seem somewhat arbitrary to adapt a theory of spatialities originally developed by geographers and urban studies theorists, such an environmental and ar-

chitectural approach to game spaces overcomes an approach that omits the spatial, navigation, and deictic elements that are part of the mode of attention that screen-based video games demand, especially those that feature 3-D graphics and spatialized player-avatar relations. Japanese role-playing games have generally been treated simply as linear stories driven by various role-playing mechanics. Such a criticism implicitly eclipses spatiality by its emphasis on temporal organization. If we attend to these spatial aspects, particularly to the production of spaces of representation, we can identify the relationship between game structures and affective experiences of space in these games—a relationship driven by play in which narrative performs a distinctive supporting role. Some impasses in critical approaches to video games might be resolved by taking a spatial turn.

Notes

1. In terms of "one-on-one," one game unit represented one simulated combatant, rather than a group or organized unit of combatants.

2. There are interstitial practices, by which computer systems are used to perform calculations within the context of pen-and-paper games, or—particularly for text-based role-playing games such as the early *Zork* games—in which players produce their own hand-drawn cartographies of the game spaces as mnemonic and tactical aids.

3. The temporalities of battle in the games would go through various changes as well, and would act as a differentiator between titles. Nevertheless, these design differences were less dependent on platform considerations.

4. An expansion, *Final Fantasy XI Online: Treasures of Aht Urghan* (2006), added a Near Eastern "Orient" as a newly discovered continent.

5. Tensions between magical/religious and technological ideologies are common themes of *Final Fantasy* narratives. Other common tropes are memory and trauma, friendship and isolation, and complicity. Addressing these issues exhaustively is far beyond the scope of this piece; one monograph in Italian (Calamosca 2003) has attempted to deal with them at greater length. Many of these tropes are well-represented in other forms of Japanese cultural production, including literature, film, television, and manga.

6. The fiction of the game makes the relative status of these new spaces rather elusive. Far later in the game, it is revealed that while the initial space did exist in the historical past, the instance of it that the player, as the character, Tidus, experienced, was a phantasmal space generated by the collective memory of those destroyed in the original cataclysm.

7. An exception is *Final Fantasy* II (1988).

8. The *Legend of Zelda* series of games published by Nintendo, among others, does not use this mechanic, relying instead

on changes in player inventory to differentiate abilities and constraints.

9. As is now often the case with fantasy franchises, an actual (paper) version of Tetra Master was produced and marketed in Europe; it was not particularly successful. An online version of the game is now part of Square Enix's PlayOnline service, which primarily delivers *Final Fantasy XI Online* (2002).

10. Many Japanese role-playing games differ from most Western role-playing games by representing a group, rather than an individual, as the unit of play. This could be interpreted broadly as a cultural difference—the well-worn and, in my view, overstated observation of the importance of the group over the individual in Japanese culture (the observation leaves too many questions about the construction of the self and subjectivity unanswered)—but it is also an adaptation of the dynamics of the tabletop role-playing game, which foregrounds group tactics and coordination, to the computer/console. Representing a party of characters, rather than a single character, as the unit of play is truer to the origins of the role-playing game, also creating tactical play options that do not arise in an action/adventure game with a one-to-one-to-one player/avatar/character relationship.

11. The names of the male and female leads, Tidus and Yuna, are the Okinawan terms for "Sun" and "Night," respectively, reflecting the association of Spira with the Asia-Pacific region (Khosla 2003).

12. *Final Fantasy* games have an extensive secondary literature in Japanese, published by Square Enix, that includes strategic, tactical, and fictional data unavailable in English. While most of this work is redundant of information available in game, the *Ultimania* series of books, published by DigiCube (and later Square Enix Publishing), includes interviews with directors, developers, and designers describing their processes and extending the fictions of the world.

13. Interestingly, one narrative motivation for the sequel was to offer the possibility of overcoming the tragic overtones of the conclusion of the first game with the possibility of a nontragic ending; the use of the sequel to overcome the tragic would be repeated by the producers of the *Final Fantasy* series when they released a number of products that continued the story of *Final Fantasy VII*.

14. The naming of this conflict is not a straightforward task: referring to it simply as "World War II" places it on the periphery of the European conflict, even though the hostilities in the Pacific began earlier. In Japan, it is usually referred to as the Pacific War (太平洋戦争), or sometimes (often by defenders of Japan's actions during this period) as the Greater East Asian War (大東亜戦争). I choose to use the more neutral Japanese nomenclature when discussing a Japanese cultural production.

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