Nostalgic transmediation: A not-so-final fantasy? Ichigo's sheet music online platform as an object network of creative practice

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ABSTRACT

Using the music of the *Final Fantasy* game series as our case study, we follow the music through processes of transmediation in two very different contexts: the Netflix series *Dad of Light* and music transcription forum *Ichigo's Sheet Music*. We argue that these examples reveal transmediation acting as a process of 'emptying', allowing the music to carry its nostalgic cargo of affect into new relationships and contexts. This study's theoretical combination of transmediation with Bainbridge's object networks of social practice frame challenges normative definitions of nostalgia. The phenomenon of 'emptying' we identify reveals a function of popular culture nostalgia that differs from the dominant understanding as a triggering of generalized emotional longing for (or the desire to return to) the past. Instead, this article uncovers a nostalgia that is defined by personal and communal creative engagement and highlights the active and social nature of transmediated popular culture nostalgia.

KEYWORDS

nostalgia

This article explores the intersections between memory, nostalgia, community and popular culture in official and user generated transmediations of music from the *Final Fantasy* game series. Our analysis of the anime and video game music online community *Ichigo's Sheet Music* (hereafter *Ichigo's*) draws attention to a social and communal aspect of popular culture nostalgia. Users of this platform listen to video game music, transcribe it (write it down in musical notation), share these transcriptions (transmediations) on the website, and receive feedback from other users. We use Jason Bainbridge's (2014: 74) concept of 'object networks of cultural practice' to unpack this phenomenon. Following Bainbridge's model, we understand a media object like a video game to be part of a network, connected to other media, people, memories and social structures. We use this idea to expand our understanding of nostalgia. We argue that nostalgia is more than just a feeling or something that happens inside an individual's mind. Nostalgia is also something that is experienced, transmitted and curated actively and communally inside these networks. We identify this process by examining the transmediation, or the process of moving a work from one medium to another, of *Final Fantasy* game music by users of *Ichigo's*. Transcribing the music turns the musical sounds in the game into a PDF with notation. This sheet music can then be played on the piano or other instrument at home. The music is turned back into sound, but it is now experienced differently. Engaging with

video game music creatively allows users to own it in a new way and sharing the resulting creations in an online community evokes the communal element of the video game experience. Nostalgic experiences of playing the game and hearing the music are, in a sense, *emptied* when they are turned into different media. This means that the nostalgia associated with experience of playing the game can be refilled with new contexts, experiences and relationships. This process of emptying and refilling is a way of curating a specific emotional quality or affective experience separated from the original context. In other words, this is not a simple recollection of an old memory but a re-enactment, and re-enactment always entails knowledge of the distance from the original experience.

Definitions of nostalgia often include references to the fundamental impossibility of resolving the desire nostalgia expresses. We long for something which we can never (re)experience. Svetlana Boym (2001: 3) describes nostalgia as 'a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return', while Katharina Niemeyer (2014: 1) sees it as a longing for the inaccessible, whether that be 'former times and places', lost youth, or a desire to rewrite the past. Popular culture expressions of nostalgia are often object-oriented; vinyl record collections (Roy 2016), 1980s movie remakes and mid-century pin-up fashion (Hackett 2020). Descriptions of nostalgia in this vein can become depictions of an entirely internal process. For instance, when an old piece of music plays the listener is transported into an interior world of nostalgia and memory disconnected from the time and space their body inhabits. Imagined in this way, nostalgia occurs entirely in the individual's psychological interior. This study's theoretical combination of transmediation with Bainbridge's networks concept challenges the interiority of

normative definitions of nostalgia. The case studies we will examine highlight a nostalgia that goes beyond the internal world of the individual to include embodied and relational experiences. We seek to move beyond this understanding of nostalgia as a generalized emotional longing for (or the desire to return to) the past. Instead, the transmediation of video game music here mobilizes nostalgia to recharge the music with new connections to an object network of creative practice.

We begin with a brief discussion of the Netflix series *Final Fantasy XIV: Dad of Light* (2017)*,* hereafter *Dad of Light*, which illustrates the ideas explored later: nostalgia, affect, relationships and the music of *Final Fantasy*. We then examine the case study of *Ichigo's Sheet Music*, exploring how video game music is recontextualized in online transcription communities. Nostalgia in these contexts becomes both creative and social, bringing remembered feelings into connection with current circumstances. We observe video game music becoming a nostalgia-bearing vehicle emptied of its in-game specificity. Finally, we turn our attention to the use of video game music naming conventions in original compositions shared in our online community case study. These compositions evoke a nostalgic affect that becomes more decoupled from the game the further away the media travels from its original form as the game soundtrack. The examples examined in this article uncover a nostalgia that is defined by personal and communal creative engagement and highlight the active and social nature of transmediated nostalgia. In the case of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), interpersonal relationships are a central feature of the game experience. We begin our analysis, therefore, with an example of an MMORPG that has been transmediated by being turned into a nostalgic TV sit-com/drama. The 2017 Japanese

mini-series *Final Fantasy XIV: Dad of Light,* streamed internationally by Netflix, is a recent example of how video game nostalgia can be refracted through different times, relationships and media.

Dad of Light and the impossibility of going back

At first glance Noguchi and Yamamoto's (Dir.) *Dad of Light* (2017) appears to be a formulaic narrative of nostalgia as Boym and Niemeyer understand it: it expresses a longing to re-enact childhood experiences of playing a video game and to return to the father-son relationship forged through that game. Based on a true story, the series is about a father and his adult son who communicate through *Final Fantasy* and its online game community. On closer examination, however, the programme constantly questions this narrative. It shows how attempts to return to a past relationship instead direct their relationship in the present in new configurations. The protagonist Akio had only been able to bond with his uncommunicative father Hakutaro after he suddenly bought then 8-year-old Akio a copy of *Final Fantasy*. The two enjoyed playing the game together before a promotion refocused Hakutaro on work. Jumping to the present day, Akio is shocked when his workaholic father suddenly takes an early retirement, refusing to give any explanation to his bemused family. After consulting with his in-game friends, Akio decides that this can be a chance to rekindle their relationship through the MMORPG version of *Final Fantasy, Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn*. In an episode with the self-consciously referential title *A Relationship Reborn* Akio gives Hakutaro a copy of *Final Fantasy XIV*. However, instead of sitting beside him and guiding his play, like he had as a child, Akio this time plans to befriend his father in-game without revealing his offline identity. Unlike Hakutaro, Akio is not very successful in his corporate career. As

he coaches his father through the basics of playing MMORPGs, he begins to get tips in return about teamwork and problem solving which he applies in his job. The two worlds begin to merge; Hakutaro's years of corporate experience provide a boost to Akio's party in their quests, enabling them to defeat a major enemy to whom they have consistently been losing. Back in the real world, when Akio is given a difficult assignment by his boss, the *Final Fantasy* 'quest accepted' music plays, and when he solves the problem the victory fanfare sounds.

The role that *Final Fantasy* plays in this series reflects many of the common narratives of nostalgia. It recalls childhood pleasures, the joy, excitement and sense of connection felt while playing. The game represents a time and place to which the protagonist wishes to return. These impulses are typified in Akio's initial daydream of exploring the world of *Final Fantasy* with his father. He imagines exploring the game-scape on the back of a chocobo. Riding this bird-like creature, he imagines enjoying the same sense of comradery which he experienced playing the game with his father as a child. The chocobo has its own musical theme and is a potent symbol for the nostalgia which the franchise has consciously curated. Writing about an even earlier instalment in the *Final Fantasy* franchise, for example, Jessica Kizzire notes that the 'nostalgic rhetoric that pervades the visual, interactive and narrative aspects of *Final Fantasy IX* extends quite clearly to the music soundtrack' (2014: 187). The use of the figure of the chocobo in the series demonstrates an awareness of the most quintessential expression of nostalgia: the desire to recall a childhood experience. This is not where the exploration of nostalgia stops, however.

Although it is steeped in nostalgia, *Dad of Light* systematically undermines the main character's initial nostalgic desire which is based on 'going back' or even 'recreating' a specific set of circumstances. There is an element of ironic self-reflection to the programme that challenges the idea that video games and their music are unchanging data enabling an exact return to a past experience of them expressed in popular media (cf. Knorr 2019). Instead, nostalgia is used in *Dad of Light* to transfer certain feelings from one situation to another. Nostalgia connected to the game shifts from an evocation of the past towards a coping mechanism for the challenges of the present. The sense of achievement Akio felt when defeating an in-game boss as a child is now translated into how he feels after solving a difficult problem at work, as symbolized by the use of the game's victory fanfare. The music and feeling are constants, but the situational specificity has been emptied, allowing the same feeling to be shared in a different context. Rather than recollecting a past instance of successfully clearing a difficult section of the game, the music symbolizes a re-enactment of the same sense of triumph in a new situation. *Dad of Light*'s story and premise are based on a player's blog, which is in turn based on his real-life experience. The refraction here through one media form after another makes it an interesting example of transmediation (particularly in the context of interactions between fan produced and official media; *Dad of Light* is sponsored by Square Enix, *Final Fantasy*'s developer and distributor). The use of game footage and music evokes the viewer's own past experiences but directs these emotions towards a new narrative, taking nostalgic elements and weaving them into a new context and new media form.

The point we are illustrating with *Dad of Light* is that video game music may be understood not so much as being the object of nostalgia, but as a vehicle carrying the

nostalgic affect. The nostalgic emotions that the music carries do not have to be attached to a past experience of playing the game or specific memory. Our observations here align with the research of psychologists Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Sara Robertson who argue that nostalgia plays an important role in maintaining a sense of connectedness between one's present and past (self-continuity) and therefore is observed to occur most strongly when undergoing life transitions such as leaving home for the first time rather than increasing steadily with age (2018: 1030–31). *Dad of Light* is an excellent example of nostalgia not as a feature of old age, but rather as a feature of updating one's selfhood in the face of change. We turn our attention now to an examination of fan created transmediations of music from *Final Fantasy*, allowing us to observe the process of nostalgic transmediation as a creative and communal practice, rather than a solitary, diffuse sense of nostalgia for a game or a time-of-gaming in general.

Ichigo's: Video game music transmediated

Ichigo's is a file-sharing platform and online community (founded in 2001) that heavily features the music of *Final Fantasy*. Users request songs from video game or anime soundtracks they want to access as musical notation so that they can play the music themselves. Other users will transcribe the requested tracks and upload the transcriptions, in some variation of the following process:

> User A plays *Final Fantasy* and identifies a particular section of music as significant to
> > them
>
> User A posts a transcription request on the *Ichigo's* forum.
>
> User B sees the request.
>
> User B listens to the soundtrack hosted on YouTube.

User B uses an instrument, perhaps in combination with a MIDI interface, to create a

transcription.

User B uploads the new transcription files to *Ichigo's*.

User A downloads the transcription from *Ichigo's* and plays it on their own instrument.

It is possible to see how the music undergoes a process of transmediation from this example: it goes from in-game sound to PDF notation to sounds produced in the homes of users. In simple terms, transmediation describes a process by which media is transformed. The original object is taken from one source and transferred to a new medium. Transmediation happens when a book is made into a movie, or in this case, when a video game soundtrack becomes keyboard notation. The technical medium is changed but the same 'sensory configurations' (Elleström 2014: 14–15) are provided by a different medium. With these 'sensory configurations' comes an emotional trigger which lies at the core of a nostalgic relationship to video game music. Within *Ichigo's* each step of the transmediation process is a creative practice shared and discussed communally. The forum offers space for discussion about the creative decisions made, technical issues of musicianship, and the game or anime itself.

While an entire website devoted to the music of video games and anime long past is surely a nostalgic enterprise, what makes it of particular interest is that this nostalgia is expressed through an ever-increasing distance from the original media (the sounds in the game) and through a personal creative process shared in a communal space. *Ichigo's* is more than a pragmatic solution to a historical lack of distribution of desired music scores outside of Japan. Even now that companies such as *Amazon* have made it easier to access the scores, *Ichigo's* continues to exist and does not support scanned copies of the published sheet music now commercially available. Instead, the site continues to

facilitate the transcription and arrangement of music by hand. The resulting transmediated objects are then shared with notes about the process of their creation. In addition, there is a section where members upload their original compositions which reflect the style and naming conventions of video game and anime music. There are even competition events in the categories of transcription and original composition. This shows that helping people return to the music in the dictionary definition sense of nostalgia is not the goal. Instead it supports different ways for users to engage with the music and with each other. These relationships reflect an interest in the creative process of nostalgic transmediation, not only the resulting object.

The idea of *replay* is important in discussions of video game and music nostalgia (cf. Gibbons 2018). Video games and music are both media which are re-playable, meaning that a nostalgic return of sorts is possible. Hitting replay may then be attributed to a desire to return to the past. However, it also sets in motion a process of meaning-making and transformation. We believe that these transformative processes are key to understanding the nostalgia which drives sites like *Ichigo's*. This is different from a nostalgia which 'necessarily idealizes the past', as Kizzire (2014: 183, Drawing on Aaron Santesso) defines it. As Bogost (2011: 36) notes, both music and games are *playable*. Importantly, the same process also applies to the acts of transcribing, sharing and playing video game music. Games and music allow for different experiences within a fixed frame. They are not, as Knorr (2019: n.pag) claims, an 'ever-present time capsule that we can re-enter at will'. Sandbox type games will always be somewhat different when replayed, and MMORPGs can never be replayed to gain the same experience twice. As Gibbons (2018: 2) notes, each time we play a piece of music or a game, we bring our

previous experiences with us. Just as musicians practice a piece repeatedly, game players may replay sections of a video game repeatedly before progressing, but each experience will differ as skill increases and the memories of previous sessions influences future ones. Our experience of video game music is multi-layered and this impacts how we interpret the music. Especially when a piece of music from a video game is transformed into musical notation, it can be experienced in different contexts that each add their own layer of meaning to the music and its emotional encoding.

Posts on *Ichigo's*' forums show a clear reverence for the music of *Final Fantasy* as an object independent of its embedding in the game, reflecting Summers' (2016: 159) assessment of how important it is to fans on a personal level. Summers cites the many reports from gamers of the music 'being the accompaniment to, and guide through, existential crises and adolescent fears' (159). We see this emotional engagement reflected on *Ichigo's*:

> I am restless – this song, however pretty little song, seems amazingly simple yet there appears to be no existing midi file of it. My heart and soul, all my likes and shares to who manages to bring it into life. (jannetfenix 2017)

From this comment, we can see that the music has been decontextualized. The user refers to the music as a 'pretty little song' rather than to the part of the game in which it appears. Just as in *Dad of Light* the music has become an object in its own right, independent of any interaction with the game, user jannetfenix's need to 'bring it into life' refers to bringing the music into a new context. The emotive language here is typical of how fans describe their relationship to the music. They create an emotional interaction with the transformed media object independently of gameplay.

Creative interaction with video game music allows it to become part of different social networks. The sheet music uploaded to *Ichigo's* is not normally a one-to-one copy of the music from the game in musical notation. Instead, the music is adapted, usually for piano. This means that the music has not only changed media, but that this transmediation has involved an adaptation from orchestral music to pieces which can be played by individual users. Summers warns against fan-based transcriptions, noting that they 'are usually second-degree derivatives from the soundtrack records of the game music, rather than from the primary source of the game' (2016: 48–49). However, it is precisely these processes of derivation and adaptation that interest us here. There is a sense on *Ichigo's* that members belong to a community of amateur music-making and learning. Members show a sense of responsibility for helping others' learning goals by making the sheet music available. A primary function of the arrangements is to allow access to the music for other instruments and skill levels. The transmediation allows for the continued evolution of nostalgia in relation to the object, and this transmediation occurs within a network. The following thread provides a detailed example of what we are describing:

> Chrissyannecia: I would like to request: Serah's theme or A wish from Final Fantasy XIII for violin Blinded by light from Final Fantasy XIII for violin Lightnings theme from Final Fantsy XII for violin thank you it would mean the world if i could have the sheet music for these beautiful songs' […] (and also could i ask if you could possibly make it easy as for 2nd violin sorry I really like anime and I am taking classes but not the best yet) [...]
>
> MeloettaMusic00: 'Hey there! Sorry it took so long, I had to make tough arranging decisions because you said that you are still a student violinist lol.
>
> [...]

> Chrissyannecia: I am having trouble with the piece and my teacher said its [sic] a little
> advanced for me
>
> MeloettaMusic00: I'm sorry to hear that:(How can I help? And if it's a LITTLE advance,
> couldn't hurt but to keep on learning and trying until you're able to play it. At
> least that is how I understood that sentence, lol.
>
> Chrissyannecia: I can't get the hang of it and it's not sounding like the original piece
> maybe if it wasn't in the key of c maybe sharps would be easier for me I'm sorry
> I wish I could play this piece too
>
> MeloettaMusic00: When I arranged it, I have to change a few things here and there to
> accommodate to your playing level. […] This is very common when writing an
> existing song or piece of music for new musicians and presenting it as teaching
> materials. […] Please know that I'm only human and not Mewtwo where I have
> psychic powers to change things easily;) [...].
>
> (Chrissyannecia 2015)

It is one of the longest threads to be 100 per cent upvoted, indicating that the content is of

high value to the community. The interactions in the thread demonstrate that transcription

is a process of transmediation and, furthermore, that this process is embedded in a

creative and social network.

Each time an aspect of the original media, like the music, is transmediated, the

distance from the original context in the game increases. At the same time, the

possibilities for it entering a tangential network increase. Chrissyannecia's violin teacher,

for instance, becomes involved when Chrissyannecia writes that her teacher thinks the

music is too hard for her. The way that video game music becomes part of a music

teaching and learning network can also be seen in MeloettaMusic00's expertise in

simplifying video game music so that is can be used for teaching. They write that

simplifying the melody is 'common when writing an existing song or piece of music for

new musicians'. MeloettaMusic00's ability to judge where the student is in their curriculum also indicates that they experience video game music from within an environment of music teaching and learning.

The example of Chrissyannecia and MeloettaMusic00's interaction demonstrates that the transmediation of video game music is a phenomenon which is both creative and social. Further interactions with the music can embed the new media objects in other networks. In the case of transcriptions of video game music on *Ichigo's*, there is a strong connection to communities of amateur music-makers and teachers. The newly transcribed piece forms a point of interaction between musician and teacher, or even musician and audience if performed. The interesting thing about these connections is that someone may enter the network at any point and even connect at several different points. In the example above, MeloettaMusic00 virtually takes on the role of both transcriber and music coach. Transmediation of the object (the music) allows it to be a connection point linking together different objects and even different networks, such as those of classical musicians, YouTubers and Twitch streamers.

The relationship between game, music, transmediated objects using the music, and interpersonal interactions based on them, can be best understood as existing in an 'object network of cultural practice' (Bainbridge 2014: 74). Bainbridge's concept provides an excellent framework to analyse individual media objects in the context of the interactions between the media, individual people, communities, markets and even legal frameworks. Bainbridge developed the idea of *Pokémon* as an object network of cultural practice from Buckingham and Sefton-Green's characterization of *Pokémon* as pedagogy. They argue that *Pokémon* is 'not merely a set of objects that can be isolated for critical

analysis, in the characteristic mode of academic media studies. It might more appropriately be described, in anthropological terms, as a "cultural practice"' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003: 379). The mapping of the wider network can be achieved through analysis of several of its elements. Mapping the different elements in the network shows how the different parts of the network interact with each other (Bainbridge 2014). The network we are examining here is made up of objects like the *Final Fantasy* games, soundtracks, people who enjoy the soundtracks, online conversations, sheet music, musical instruments and so on.

The creative practice of transcribing video game music takes place within multiple social contexts. Anna Reading and Colin Harvey (2008: 167) argue that by separating text from players, some video game analyses concentrate on one moment and ignore the player's experience of the world. Although transcription and editing may be solo practices, the act of uploading the resulting creations is a fundamentally social one: it invites interaction. Sharing these transcriptions resonates with other objects in networks of cultural practice as they are consumed, transformed, experienced, shared and discussed. *Ichigo's* community, for example, exists somewhere between the site itself, the reddit forum we have quoted above, the now defunct previous forum which included role-playing elements, YouTube, sheet music PDFs, a sense of community of classical music lovers and learners, and of course the games originally featuring the music. MeloettaMusic00's empathic communication with Chrissyannecia as 'a student violinist' implies a nostalgia for MeloettaMusic00's own experiences of past music learning. Furthermore, MeloettaMusic00's evocation of the *Pokémon* character Mewtwo is a playful way of appealing to an assumed common interest to soften their explanation for

why the requested piece of music cannot easily be transcribed into a version accessible for a student violinist without some distancing from the original sound. MeloettaMusic00 assumes, based on their other shared points of interest, that Chrissyannecia will recognize the name Mewtwo and understand what is implied by its use. In this context, nostalgia is a longing for an affective state rather than for a time or place.

Video game music undergoes various forms of media transformation and becomes embedded in an object network of cultural practice which goes beyond a unidirectional relationship to the game. The network intersects with other media-based communities, such as online forums. At the end of this process, however, the relationship to the video game music ends up in a similar structure. It is as though through the process of transmediation the music is emptied of the original associations stemming from its embedding in the game and is free to connect to other networks with no other connection to the game (such as violin teachers). What remains is a nostalgic emotion that the music evokes and a way to relate to it: an underlying structure to the relationship expressed in a different form. We can compare this to the function of sliding signifiers in language: words like 'you' or 'there' whose meanings change completely depending on context and that gain their value through transformation (Kinder 1991: 3). The victory fanfare from *Final Fantasy* playing when Akio solves an office problem in *Dad of Light* is an example of this. The meaning of 'success over adversity' is retained by the music, but completely decoupled from the physical action of game playing or the story worlds of *Final Fantasy.*

Video games are things you 'do' rather than 'consume'. Patricia Greenfield's (2014: 74) classic 1980s study highlights this as the core appeal of gaming, as her child interview subjects all preferred games to TV because games have 'active control'. These

children may have grown up wanting to continue to exercise control and 'do things' with and to their beloved games. Moving video game music from one media to another is exactly this. It is 'doing things' with an element of the game. Video game music, when isolated from the original context in game, could certainly be viewed as a simple object of consumption. However, in our examples of the transmediation of video game music the 'doing' is absolutely essential. Furthermore, the 'doing' is focused on the communal engagement with the resulting media object. If we see Chrissyannecia and MeloettaMusic00 as objects interacting with one another within a network of cultural practice, we can see how the contexts of music learning and video game fandom intersect to create the possibility of this kind of interaction. Many of the music related objects in the *Final Fantasy* network, such as the official soundtracks, transcriptions of the music both official and fan produced, and live orchestral performances such as *Final Symphony: Music from FINAL FANTASY®*, have been creatively transmediated and fed back into the network. The object network of cultural practice we have identified in *Ichigo's*, for example, is entirely centred around the transmediation of music. We will now begin to unpack the significance of the transmediation process for our claim that nostalgia in this context relates to affective states rather than a specific time in the past.

Transmediation as a process of emptying

Playing transcriptions of game music changes the structures of emotional involvement. The physical interaction with the media adapts because the person is now not only listening, but also physically playing the music. In contrast to listening, playing the music involves personal interpretation and a greater degree of emotional input. The music is experienced not only via the ears, but through the physical act of playing it. Harvey

(2015: 161) identifies a recurrent equation 'between emotional connection and tactility' that 'is suggestive of our embodied and affective relationship with the physical world, in which touch plays a central role in determining how we think and feel'. The music, when played on an instrument, is experienced differently in the body and also differently on a more abstract level as a creative process. This creative process, in turn, changes how it is experienced communally, as we saw in the exchange between Chrissyannecia and MeloettaMusic00 in the previous section. The music becomes an entry point allowing individuals to participate in a social network of creativity, learning and exchange.

We have already noted that the transmediation of video game music involves an increasing distance from its original role in-game, what we have termed 'emptying'. This distance entails, at each stage, emptying the media object (the music) of what it originally signified in the game context and allowing it to take on new functions and meanings in the new context. Our next case study takes this idea to the extreme. *Ichigo's* plays host to original compositions, as well as composition and transcription competitions. When the case of original compositions on *Ichigo's* is brought into focus, it becomes clear that this music functions both as a media product (the music itself), and as qualified media. Qualified media are objects which represent entire categories. As any gamer will recognize, images of scrolls, for instance, represent the idea of medieval or archaic writing. Each original piece on *Ichigo's* can be seen to represent the naming conventions of the genre at large. These naming conventions reflect a very specific way of evoking abstract emotion which video game music, like that from *Final Fantasy*, shares with the broader genre of anime music also hosted on the site.

Naming conventions around video game and anime music create a virtual geography with emotive cues recognizable to members of the community. These cues include insider knowledge (Japanese language, classical music terminology), evocations of seasons, emotions and actions (to do battle for instance). It is possible to experience nostalgic longing for these places without any correspondence to a specific experience of playing a video game. Song titles on *Ichigo's* can be divided into the following categories: place names/descriptions; a combination of emotion and season; titles which follow European classical music naming conventions; and Japanese or mixed language titles. Examination of the titles from *Final Fantasy* on *Ichigo's* reveals that this music follows the same pattern, with the significant addition of the category of gameplay and characters. Thus pieces, such as *The Fierce Battle* and *Cid's Theme* or *Door Crawl* are added to place names (*Matouya's Cave*, *Ruins of the Madain Sari*); classical titles (*Prelude*); and season/emotion/mood (*Eternal Wind, Theme of Love, Melodies of Life*). The original compositions on *Ichigo's* reflect the general naming conventions of anime music with added categories from video gameplay. Character titles are replaced with the composer's own name (*Purry's Prelude*) and the replacement of gameplay with titles which indicate a certain action (*Grope in the Dark*).

At first glance, these naming conventions appear to stem from the nature of gaming music itself. As Summers (2016) notes,

> *Final Fantasy VII's* music, composed by Uematsu Nobuo, is formed of discrete cues, typically between one and two and a half minutes in length, most of which are set to loop until a game parameter changes. The cues fall into several categories: location themes, characters themes, music for particular emotional moods and music for the battle sequences. (159)

In-game music follows this pattern because it has to react dynamically to play. Summers, however, goes on to explain how the music creates a 'virtual geography in a game' (2016: 162). The influence of Hollywood on the function of music in *Final Fantasy* identified by Summers (2016: 163) explains why these naming practices are not only found in relation to video game music but reflect naming practices found in anime music as well: 'Locations are characterized beyond mere backdrops, they are expressed in terms of their narrative significance and emotive affect'. This 'emotive affect' is the carrier of nostalgia which remains whatever form the music takes when it is transmediated from soundtrack to notation to being played at home. The emotion cueing which the music serves in video games reflects both in-game narrative and more diffuse and generalized emotional states. As Summers observes, '[g]ame music is apparently able (even more than film music) to move from fictional context to personal significance' (168). What we observe in both the transcription of video game music and the naming conventions discussed here is that nostalgia is an adaptive emotional state rather than an object-oriented desire.

In the naming conventions represented on *Ichigo's*, naming practices reflect nostalgic processes in that they often evoke the emotional experience of a virtual and/or imagined place/season. The emblematic nature of many of these titles is particularly relevant to nostalgia. The individual elements of the title work in tandem to evoke the music's emotional landscape in the same way that the individual symbols in a heraldic emblem evoke the history and character of the family. The effect of combining imagined places, seasons and emotions in one emblematic title is that a virtual space takes on the emotional hallmarks of lived memory. This is more than the description of a character's

experience of this place; it is made personal by the very vagueness of the genre. It requires the reader to fill and connect the images in the title with their own emotional content. The title of an original composition *2:32 was when I saw her and the moon* hosted on *Ichigo's* for instance, is particularly interesting in the context of our study, because it not only employs the emblem convention, but implies the experience of watching anime or playing by mentioning the running time: '2:32'. In this way, the title implies nostalgia for the gaming experience. At the same time however, it also follows naming conventions which are both emblematic and vague. This allows the listener/player to fill the music with their own emotions and experiences. This is a nostalgia uprooted, folded-in on itself, and directed not at the past, but at the 'presence experience' of the moment of play, not at the console but this time at the piano.

The kind of self-conscious reference to the medial nature of the musical experience we find in *2:32 was when I saw her and the moon* is similar to the way*Dad of Light* uses the image of the chocobo. Using figures like the chocobo in new versions of the game invites the player to recall a past experience, for instance, the first time they played an older version of the game. The title of this piece likewise recalls a past moment: the moment when 'I saw her'. It brings that moment into the present in a nostalgic gesture. Yet this gesture is also an ironic one. It reflects on its own mediality – one could even say banality – through the addition of the time marker '2:32' so easily visible in digital media. Although the time marker is oddly specific, the absolute lack of context and combination with the moon create a title which reflects the emblematic naming practices of the genre and which is simultaneously generic enough to allow the sense of nostalgia it evokes to be personalized by the person playing the piece. Lorna

Martens (2011: 65) writes that as both objects and subjects change over time, 'new encounters with old objects overwrite the original memory and undermine its integrity'. In this case, the transcriptions of music from *Final Fantasy* and the original compositions it inspires are not merely 'encounters with old objects' but are transformations of old objects in new contexts. If we were to characterize nostalgia as a simple longing for the past (which cannot, by definition, be changed) then the desire to adapt and transmediate an object of nostalgia does not make a lot of sense. After all, if it is changed too much, it will surely lose its nostalgic power. Our examples have shown, however, that the emotional significance of these nostalgic objects is what matters, not the specific media configuration or scenario. By transforming video game music into notation which can be played by the amateur musician, transmediation places this music in different social contexts (networks); the music is experienced physically and can take on different meanings. In this context, nostalgia remains, but it is no longer necessarily a desire to return to the first time a fan played the game. It is a nostalgia which finds expression in creative transformations of the media in a network of different subcultures and media products.

Conclusion

There is great delight in the shivering moment of recognition when the cell phone ring tone of a character in the movie *Final Fantasy Advent Children* is the victory fanfare which has remained the same through every iteration of the game, or the laugh-out-loud absurdity of the quest accepted music playing as Akio takes on a work problem in *Dad of Light.* The emotional significance of these snippets of sound clearly relies on them having a nostalgic resonance. However, experiencing them in transmediated form and updated

contexts is playful and fun in a way that hearing them when replaying an older game edition, for example, would not be. This article has explored the link between nostalgia and transmediation using the music of *Final Fantasy* as our reference point and online video game and anime music sharing community *Ichigo's Sheet Music* as a case study. In examining how the video game music is transmediated in this communal setting we have observed that it is the transformation of video game music into different media formats (specifically, from soundtrack to sheet music) that facilitates the curation of nostalgia with this music outside of the gaming experience. We argue therefore that it is the act of transmediation itself which allows the music to carry its nostalgic cargo of affect into new relationships and contexts. The naming conventions of original compositions posted on *Ichigo's* are examples of a nostalgia that has become distanced from its original object to the point of abstraction. This requires the reader to fill and connect the mind-images with their own emotional content. The transformation of video game music into different media creates a nostalgia that lives across multiple moments and forums of creative social experiences. By focusing on communal and transformative engagements with nostalgic popular culture objects we aim to complicate the commonplace assumption that nostalgia is a longing for the past and argue that popular culture nostalgia is, at its core, an ongoing curation of an emotion-experience connection.

Using the idea of 'sensory configurations' (Elleström 2014: 14) in transmediation, we have traced the adaption of video game music into different formats as it goes from soundtrack to sheet music, is adjusted for different instruments and skill levels, and finally becomes sound again as it is played on an instrument at home. It is these processes of transmediation which allow video game music to become part of different social

experiences and to connect different life stages through the evocation of familiar emotions in unfamiliar circumstance. The concept of 'object networks of cultural practice' we have adapted from Bainbridge offers a conceptual framework for examining these interactions. We argue that the process of transforming video game music in this way is a creative practice. This social and creative practice allows video game music nostalgia to become more than a simple desire to return to the past. Unmoored, this music does express nostalgia for 'The Place I'll Return to Someday', but that place just might hold the soft curve of couch and console remembered so well; it might be a place created in the spaces between keystrokes, allowing for that nostalgia to transport not just to the past, but also to the future. Nostalgia is not only an individually experienced, internal process of fantasy about a finite past. Transmediations of popular culture texts carry nostalgic associations into new networks and future contexts. In this sense we consider nostalgia to be a not-so-final fantasy.

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