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Imagined History, Fading Memory: Mastering Narrative in  
*Final Fantasy X*

Dennis Washburn

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# Imagined History, Fading Memory: Mastering Narrative in *Final Fantasy X*

The convergence of media over the past two centuries has made access to various forms of representation and information nearly instantaneous and, at least potentially, global in reach. Participatory, interactive technologies that have been developed over the past three decades in particular have accelerated the pace of this convergence and intensified some of its most profound effects, including the compression of the experience of time and space and the disruption of older regimes of knowledge. Henry Jenkins has observed that “the power to participate within knowledge communities” now exists alongside the power of the nation-state and of corporations to control the flow of knowledge, and thus has the potential to act as a corrective to them. Jenkins, however, tempers this optimistic view somewhat by also noting that older regimes are already seeking to co-opt participatory media, and that, in any case,

there are no guarantees that we will use our new power any more responsibly than nation-states or corporations have exercised theirs. We are trying to hammer out the ethical codes and social contracts that will determine how we will relate to one another just as we are trying to determine how this power will insert itself into the entertainment system or into the political process.<sup>1</sup>

The cautionary tone Jenkins adopts concerning the moral and political ramifications of the accelerated pace of media convergence is wise, but it is also of a piece with an ongoing anxiety about the effects of convergence characteristic of the culture of modernity.<sup>2</sup>

David Harvey has argued that this anxiety arises in part because the compression of the experience of space and time and the disruptions of traditional regimes of knowledge have contributed to a sense that modern life is fleeting, ephemeral, and contingent. The consequence is that modernity is seen to have no respect even for its own past. If history has any meaning, it can only be found in the disruptive process of change itself: "Modernity, therefore, not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself."<sup>3</sup> The fragmented, transitory nature of the condition of modernity renders history discontinuous, and thus the collective unity of historical time, the linearity that traditionally bound the present and the future to the past, is no longer accepted as plausible, but has to give way to heterological conceptions of historical narrative.

The disruption of a sense of historical continuity has had an especially profound impact on the hierarchical relationship between memory and history. Pierre Nora has identified this disruption as "the acceleration of history"—a concept he defines in terms that echo Harvey's description of the culture of modernity:

An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear—these indicate a rupture of equilibrium. The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility . . . We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.<sup>4</sup>

The collapse of memory, in Nora's view, has occurred because it operates in fundamental opposition to history. Memory atomizes the sheer data of experience and emphasizes the present as the temporal context in which individual lives may be understood. Because the acceleration of history disrupts the individual's sense of connection with the past, a sense of the collective unity of the past can be recovered only through what Nora calls "sites of memory," places where an imagined collective memory acts as a simulacrum of actual memory to resituate the present within a historical narrative of the past. In Nora's account,

memory is spontaneous and absolute, “a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present,” while history is “a representation of the past,” a critical discourse that can conceive of the relative only.<sup>5</sup>

Nora locates the cause of the breakdown of older regimes of knowledge—whose authority derived from historical consciousness based on actual memory—in the rise of mass media and global culture. Here again his analysis overlaps with Harvey’s and provides a useful starting point for considering the specific impact of interactive technologies, which, as noted above, have helped accelerate the convergence of media. The relatively recent development of videogames in particular, especially those games with complex narratives that create alternative worlds and simulated histories, provide new formats for telling stories through a synthesis of older media, both textual and cinematic, within a framework created by the conventions and practices of gameplay. Such highly narrativized games reflect, and reflect on, the disruptive effects of convergence, and, more important, make use of the rift between history and memory as a central element of narrative, theme, and game design.

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An example of a work that makes the relationship of memory, history, and the struggle for control of knowledge a central element of both its gameplay and its narrative is *Final Fantasy X* (hereafter, *FFX*). The *Final Fantasy* series is Square Enix’s most successful franchise, and *FFX* has been one of the most popular titles in Japan since its initial release in 2001.<sup>6</sup> It was the first game in the series released for the PlayStation2 console and designed to take full advantage of the visual capabilities of that particular platform. *FFX* merges electronic game, written text,<sup>7</sup> soundtrack and music, and digital film consisting of cut scenes of varying length and production quality, to construct a long and complex story.

The unfolding of the story creates a series of intersections between the history of the fantasy world of Spira and the individual memories of the major (i.e. playable) characters. As a fantasy narrative, *FFX* establishes an alternative history—and in doing so creates a fully developed game environment—that does not necessarily have to be plausible in the sense of achieving the reality effects of historical narratives, but that must be at least internally coherent *as narrative* in order for the player to be able to understand or read the game. In narrowly rhetorical terms, then, the genre of fantasy at least strives

to mimic the reality effects, especially the illusion of temporal progression, of historical narratives.

The intersections between imagined history and individual memory are apparent in the lengths to which *FFX* goes to establish the background

THE ABILITY TO COMPLETE THE GAME REQUIRES MASTERING NOT ONLY THE INSTRUMENTAL CONTROLS NEEDED TO ACQUIRE AND PERFECT GAME SKILLS BUT ALSO THE NARRATIVE ITSELF, THE CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE OF SPIRA THAT FACILITATES THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS AND ABILITIES.

story and thereby provide information to help the player negotiate the various tasks that must be performed in order to successfully unfold the entire narrative and complete the game. For example, the player learns that before the present time of the game there was a war between the Spiran cities of Zanarkand and Bevelle. Zanarkand's ruler, Yevon, realized his city was doomed because his *summoners*, beings with a command of special magic powers, were no match for the advanced technology, the *machina*, of Bevelle. With

the physical destruction of Zanarkand assured, Yevon devised a plan to preserve his city in the form of a memory. To accomplish this, he ordered most of the city's surviving citizens to become *fayth*, beings whose souls are sealed inside statues in a kind of living death. Fayth existed before the war between Zanarkand and Bevelle, and were a source of power for the summoners, who would establish a mental and spiritual connection with these living statues in order to gain access to an individual fayth's dreams. Those dreams would then be transformed into physically real and powerful creatures, *Aeons*, that could aid the summoner in battle or in a time of need. Yevon, in order to save some vestige of his lost city, used the individual memories of all the citizens he had ordered to become fayth to conjure a collective dream projection, or memory, of Zanarkand. To protect these dreaming fayth, Yevon enclosed himself in an Aeon-like leviathan known as Sin, a monster that randomly attacked the cities and villages of Spira, and brought the threat posed by Bevelle's *machina* (and all subsequent technological progress) to a halt.

To maintain order and to give the people hope in the face of the cyclical terror of Sin, Yevon left a series of teachings to his daughter, Lady Yunalesca, who used them as the foundation for an institutionalized religion established in the city of Bevelle. The Yevonite religion banned the use of *machina* and taught that Sin was a result of humanity's pride and could be vanquished only when Spirans had attained purity and been cleansed of their past sins. Until purity was achieved, the only recourse for the inhabitants of Spira was

a ritual known as the Final Summoning, in which a powerful creature, the Final Aeon, would be called forth to defeat Sin and provide a temporary respite from its terror. The Final Summoning, however, never ended the spiral of destruction. For Yu Yevon's spirit would always emerge, possess the Final Aeon, and use it to give birth to a new Sin.

The preceding synopsis illustrates how an imagined history unfolds in the course of gameplay. However, it also emphasizes a linear chronology, with its illusion of temporal continuity, whereas the game itself constructs this complex history through the accumulation of fragmentary data taken from what may be described as various sites of memory—ruins, religious and social customs, video spheres that contain recordings of the past, conversations with characters met along the way, and the recurring presence of a wandering scholar named Maechen. Indeed, one of the most intriguing minor features of the game is that it allows you to purchase video spheres that contain all the full-motion cut scenes that the player has managed to open by completing various stages of the game, thus giving players the opportunity to replay, as a stand-alone animated film, their own experience of the unfolding history of the game. In this way the gameplay of *FFX* itself acts as a simulacrum of a site of memory.

Because there are numerous subplots and secondary characters, the synopsis above merely outlines some of the main narrative threads, and provides only the barest sense of how the player experiences the history of Spira. The unfolding of the narrative, and the player's reading of the game, is largely determined by the technical parameters of the console and software. The ability to complete the game requires mastering not only the instrumental controls needed to acquire and perfect game skills (e.g. the battle system or the sphere grid that allows the player to acquire new strength and abilities for the playable characters) but also the narrative itself, the cultural knowledge of Spira that facilitates the acquisition of skills and abilities. For this reason *FFX*, like so many videogames, employs the conventions of a quest narrative as a way to create a task- or goal-oriented interface between the player and the story. In *FFX* the player is both participant and spectator, and the development of a back-story for each of the characters means that the defeat of Sin is not the sole outcome. Instead, the game is also about the growth and self-realization of the characters, who achieve their own (and by implication the player's) total mastery of the fantasy environment, including the history of Spira.

*FFX* may be described as highly narrativized, insofar as it presents a detailed fantasy history that unfolds as a direct consequence of gameplay. However, the shifting, unstable position of the player as both participant (through

an avatar) and spectator calls into question the appropriateness of analyzing a videogame *as* narrative according to the methods commonly employed in film and literary studies. The assumption that games like *FFX* can be read as a cinematic narrative, or even as a literary text, has been challenged forcefully in recent scholarship, which has reframed the subject through an alternative set of questions. Given the disruptive effects of media convergence, are not games, especially role-playing games, so different in structure that they resist analysis by the methods of established disciplines?

One way to address this question is to study games as ethnographic artifacts that reveal larger social and cultural trends. This was the method Sharon Kinsella, for example, took in her study of another popular medium, manga—an approach for which she provided a vigorous justification:

Another way of making an enquiry into manga, other than observing its production, would be to read it . . . But on the whole, this book does not employ that approach. Rather than *taking apart* the constituent elements of manga stories on an abstract level, this book is based on research into how the different elements which make manga are *put together* in the first place. It is an ethnographic study of *cultural production*. The understanding of manga that this approach generates is quite different to the type of understanding achievable from the assessment of manga texts alone. The analysis laid out in this book is in many ways better evidenced, more precise, and more clearly situated within social history. The starting point of this book is not a defense of manga (which is already well defended) but a defense of the modernity, creativity, and complexity of society in Japan in the postwar period.<sup>8</sup>

While this is a productive approach to understanding the industry, it ignores the key function of manga, which is to tell a story, and thus sets aside key evidence such as the conventions and rhetoric of the form—the poetics of manga—for the description and understanding of modernity, creativity, and society. After all, narrative genres, attitudes, and style are also forms of historical and social data, every bit as “hard” as the latest industry sales figures.

In the case of electronic games and media studies, there have been a number of scholars who have sought to establish more rigorous disciplinary frameworks by taking a very different approach from Kinsella, which is to build on established paradigms for both film and literary narrative studies.<sup>9</sup> While recognizing the differences that electronic media platforms create in the process of narration, these approaches both analyze and defend the reading of cybertexts and videogames as narratives in a more traditional sense

by placing them on an already established and recognizable continuum of interpretative conventions.

This strategy in turn has been strongly challenged by ludologists, who want to focus on the unique properties of games and who thereby stake out the disciplinary boundaries of game studies independent from film or literary studies. Markku Eskelinen, for example, has taken a rather hard line on the issue:

It is relatively stress-free to write about computer games, as nothing too much has been said yet and almost anything goes. The situation is pretty much the same in what comes to writing about games and gaming in general. The sad fact is that they are under-theorized . . . So if there already is or soon will be a legitimate field for computer game studies, this field is also very open to intrusions and colonizations from the already organized scholarly tribes. Resisting and beating them is the goal of our first survival game in this paper, as what these emerging studies need is independence, or at least relative independence.<sup>10</sup>

The critical language here is almost self-parodic in that it employs the charged jargon of gameplay as a tool for resisting the perceived dangers of academic poaching.

Espen Aarseth goes even further when he examines what he sees as a controversy raging over the relevance of narratology for game aesthetics:

Underlying the drive to reform games as “interactive narratives” . . . lies a complex web of motives, from economic (“games need narratives to become better products”), elitist and eschatological (“games are a base, low-cultural form; let’s try to escape the humble origins and achieve ‘literary’ qualities”), to academic colonialism (“computer games *are* narratives, we only need to redefine narratives in such a way that these new narrative forms are included”). This latter motive . . . seems to me to spring out of a certain ideology, much practiced by humanists, and also well beyond our ivory towers; an ideology that we might call “narrativism.” This is the notion that everything is a story, and that storytelling is our primary, perhaps only, mode of understanding, our cognitive perspective on the world.<sup>11</sup>

Eskelinen and Aarseth may seem militant, but they raise a point familiar to earlier debates about the relationship of the discipline of film studies to literary studies in their insistence that analysis should be grounded primarily in the



formal characteristics of video games—a position that is quite different from Kinsella’s approach of eschewing an analysis of formal qualities but that also resists the translation of disciplinary assumptions from film and literary studies.

Their criticism of a narrative-centered approach to understanding the poetics of video games is, *prima facie*, based on a number of reasonable observations. First, since not all games are narratives, or even minimally narrativized (e.g., *Tetris*), a broader account of gameplay theory is required. Second, the need to achieve competence or mastery over the game environment disrupts the normal temporal flow of a narrative—a feature of many games, including, as mentioned above, *FFX*. Third, games like *FFX* are often structured so as to include, or even emphasize, localized tasks or puzzles, a structure that can work against the expectations a player might bring to the game from film or literary narratives. Even for highly narrativized videogames of the kind that Square Enix specializes in producing, there can be prominent differences in the ways a narrative unfolds—that is, the degree of interactivity may vary depending on the number and quality of side quests or even on the technical capabilities of a particular game platform.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, role-playing with an avatar provides more intense identification and illusion of choice than is found with other media—though again, this is a matter of degree and of individual reaction, since readers and viewers are capable of intense identification with certain film or novelistic narratives. Finally, in the case of narrativized games, the disjuncture between participation and spectatorship affects the experience of diegetic time and space.

These observations force a reconsideration of the assumptions we may bring to looking at videogames as a medium for storytelling. As a result, a number of scholars of electronic media, including Henry Jenkins, have proposed a middle ground that tries to think of narrative in videogames in ways more appropriate to the developing convergence of media:

Much of the writing in the ludologist tradition is unduly polemical: they are so busy trying to pull game designers out of their “cinema envy” or define a field where no hypertext theorist dares to venture that they are prematurely dismissing the use value of narrative for understanding their desired object of study. For my money, a series of conceptual blind spots prevent them from developing a full understanding of the interplay between narrative and games.<sup>13</sup>

Jenkins blames these blind spots on the call for stricter disciplinary guidelines for ludology, and suggests that reading games in terms of other disciplinary

approaches to narratives may not be so misguided after all. For one thing, critics of “narrativism” assume a narrow model preoccupied with the rules and conventions of classical linear storytelling at the expense of considering other types of narrative that emphasize spatial exploration over causal events as a means to balance the competing demands imposed by the narrative logic of temporal continuity and by the spatiality of spectacle. The critics of narrativism also focus too much on the activities and aspirations of the storyteller and too little on the process of narrative comprehension and readership. Their all-or-nothing attitude leads them to assume either that whole games must tell a story instead of acknowledging that narratives may play a part in the game at specific points, or that narratives are self-contained rather than serving a function within the game environment established by a convergence of various types of media.

Jenkins’s view provides a cogent defense of reading *FFX* as both a cinematic and a textual narrative. Perhaps a more nuanced theory of reading needs to be developed for videogames in general, but in the case of a work like *FFX*, which was designed so that the unfolding of a narrative is a central component of gameplay, the convergence of media, in which older media survive in a transformed environment, suggests that narratological approaches may be useful not just to the critical analysis of a game but also to the aesthetic experience of it.

It takes many hours of gameplay to completely explore the environment and to unfold the entire story of *FFX*. The cut scenes alone, which often contain vital information for play (as opposed to filling in the back-story), make for an extremely long film when strung together.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the experience of *FFX* is not shaped solely by the level of the player’s gaming skills. The long interruptions in the flow of the gameplay created by the cut scenes have been a source of irritation for players who dislike being made passive spectators, while for others it is a welcome relief from the constant and occasionally monotonous task of killing fiends and other enemies. In either case, the disruptive effects produced by the convergence of media are replicated in *FFX* in the interface between the game and the conventions of a fantasy quest narrative.

The complementary regimes of skill and knowledge needed to competently play the game and master the historical narrative of Spira are focused through the main playable character, Tidus. The events of *FFX* take place one thousand years after the war between Zanarkand and Bevelle, beginning with a cut scene at the ruins of Zanarkand, where Tidus begins a flashback narration of “my story.” He is a star blitzball player in the dream-memory

Zanarkand. His father, Jecht, was also a star player who disappeared ten years earlier. Tidus hates his cold, macho father, and his resentment is the key motivating element of his character. The story proper begins when Tidus's Zanarkand is attacked by Sin, and Tidus, along with his longtime mentor, Auron, is sucked into Sin's vortex and emerges alone a millennium later in the ruins of Baaj temple.

Tidus is picked up by a group of *Al Bhed*, members of an ethnic group ostracized by the Yevonites for their continued use of machina. He meets a young woman named Rikku, the daughter of the leader of the Al Bhed (a recurring *Final Fantasy* character named Cid). Rikku is able to speak Tidus's language, and when she informs him that Zanarkand was destroyed long ago Tidus is incredulous. Rikku then tells him that since he was in contact with Sin's toxin, his memory must have been affected. Tidus is brought aboard the Al Bhed ship, but after only a short time is swept out to sea in another attack by Sin.

Tidus is washed up near the small town of Besaid, where he meets Wakka, a blitzball player and captain of the local team. Tidus demonstrates a powerful kick move and Wakka, impressed by his skills, takes Tidus to the village and introduces him to most of the rest of the playable cast, including the second main character Yuna. Yuna, who is originally from Bevelle, is the daughter of the late High Summoner Braska, the last summoner to have defeated Sin. Braska, like all summoners who defeat Sin, was killed in the battle, and Yuna's memory of her father has inspired her to become a summoner as well. The moment Tidus arrives coincides with the completion of her initiation rites, during which she summons her first Aeon at the temple in Besaid. Determined to emulate her father's heroic feat, she sets out her own quest to defeat Sin, accompanied by her guardians Wakka, Lulu (also of Besaid), and Kimahri (a member of the half-beast/half-human Ronso tribe). Eventually, Tidus's guardian Auron joins the party, as does Rikku of the Al Bhed.

To become a high summoner herself, Yuna must travel to all the major Yevonite temples throughout Spira and commune with the fayth sealed in a statue at each place in order to gain control of all the Aeons, which she will need for the final battle with Sin. In the course of their quest, Tidus and Yuna fall in love, and Tidus is determined that she will not meet the fate that befell her father. He gradually learns the history of Spira, seeking information that will help him find a way to save Yuna. As the history of Spira unfolds, the hypocrisy and corruption of the Yevonite religion is exposed, and the system of belief that has sustained the cultures of Spira is radically undermined. In addition, Tidus learns a number of important facts about himself. He discovers

that he is nothing more than a memory and that his Zanarkand is a projected collective dream of the surviving citizens who became fayth. He also learns the truth about his father.

The most recent Calm was achieved ten years ago through the quest of Braska, Auron, and Jecht. It turns out that Jecht, like Tidus, had been transported from the dream-memory Zanarkand to the real world of Spira and had sacrificed himself to bring forth the Final Aeon without knowing that Yu Yevon would possess him and revive the monster Sin. In the final battle of the game, Tidus reconciles with his father before he has to kill him and defeat Sin. Without a sacrificial fayth to create a new Final Aeon, Yu Yevon is destroyed at last. The fayth no longer have to continue their task of projecting a dream vision of Zanarkand out of their memories, and as their dream ends, it bursts into millions of small bubbles, each containing a single memory. One of those memories is Tidus, who fades before Yuna's eyes,<sup>15</sup> leaving her, along with the rest of Spira, to face a future that is uncertain, but without false hope.

As the above synopsis of Tidus's quest makes clear, *FFX* makes heavy use of cultural and narrative conventions—conventions that are, within the context of recent Japanese history, highly charged emotionally—within a game designed literally and figuratively around the goal of achieving competence or mastery. In a narrowly instrumental or pedagogical sense, mastery means acquiring the skills and knowledge dictated by the need to solve tasks or to unveil, or reconstruct, the narrative. The acquisition of competence through simulation and role-play is also equated with self-realization, with becoming an individual fully aware of the expectations of those social and cultural conventions peculiar to the game environment. This is the idea of mastery at the heart of certain narrative forms, such as the *Bildungsroman*, centered on the process of coming of age. The aim of mastery, then, provides a way to think about narrative conventions, technical platforms, and game modes as part of a continuum.

Given the importance of mastering narrative to the structure of role-playing games, one way to discuss games *as* narratives is to use the idea of competence that emerged out of reader-response theory to highlight the fluid relationship between participation and spectacle so crucial in the narrative design of *FFX*. Jonathan Culler has argued for a de-emphasis of the position of both reader and text, and proposed a poetics that focuses on a

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complex system of signs that readers conventionally apply to literature: “To read a text as literature is not to make one’s mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for.”<sup>16</sup> This implicit understanding is what he terms “literary competence”—a notion that locates the organizing principles of interpretation not in the text or reader but in institutions that teach readers to read. This notion of mastery, or competence, provides a way to read videogames on their own terms. It works as both a strategy for play and a key element of the narrative itself, thus placing discussions of the mode of gameplay, the content of the story, and the platform by which reception or consumption takes place on a more or less equal footing.

In the case of *FFX* mastery is only achieved simultaneously with the unfolding of the imaginary history of Spira and the simulated memory of the characters. The destruction of Zanarkand leads to the creation of a collective memory, the dream city, which is always absolute, always in the present, and always in a cyclical, spiraling conflict with the authoritative, relative history established by the Yevonite religion. The unfolding of this history through the various sites of memory in *FFX* evokes a number of culturally vital discourses in Japan that the designers of the game drew on: the modernist aesthetics of evanescence, the loss of faith and belief in a society where technology and religion clash, the desire for a dream realm of memories as the source of an alternative history, and the nostalgic desire for the sublime experience of the annihilation of the past and the completion of history. These discourses, every bit as much as the conventions of gameplay and the technical platform of the game system, are vital to both the structure of the *FFX* narrative itself and to the ways we read and interpret that narrative in order to gain mastery over it.

The most intriguing aspect of the narrative of *FFX* is that it serves as an analogue to Japan’s experience of modernity. A linear perception of history that stressed the concept of progress through the development of technology and the rise of the corporate state led to the intense production of sites of collective memory as a way to simulate the sense of possessing a shared identity, history, and culture. *FFX* ends with a society that has wiped out its past by undermining the belief systems and the institutions that supported older regimes of knowledge, authority, and power. The twist in *Final Fantasy X*, one that mirrors the twisted dialectics of Japan’s culture of modernity, is that mastering the narrative is an utterly self-enclosed historical turn, an end in itself. In disclosing and thus authoring the story, the player creates the illusion

of achieving a historical consciousness that, like its avatar Tidus, is nothing more than an evanescent bubble, a passing memory doomed to fade.

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## Notes

1. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 244. Jenkins draws heavily on Pierre Lévy's *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1997).

2. The compression of our experience of space-time and the breakdown of older hierarchies of knowledge are more commonly seen as characteristics of postmodern culture. However, I am identifying these effects with the culture of modernity to stress the long history of convergence and to suggest that postmodern culture arises as the convergence of media becomes truly global in scale.

3. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 11–12. Although Harvey does not identify a fixed point of origin for the kinds of cultural changes he identifies as characteristic of modernity, he does cite the crisis of capitalism in 1847–48 as the moment when those changes first achieved a kind of critical mass and became widely felt. In terms of media convergence, the mid-nineteenth century, which witnessed the development of both telegraphy and photography, is certainly a crucial moment.

4. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989; special issue, *Memory and Counter-Memory*): 7.

5. *Ibid.*, 8–9. Although I am focusing narrowly on Nora's claim of a rift between memory and history for the purpose of this essay, his view of contemporary modes of historical perception overlaps the work on historiography of Frank Ankersmit and Michel de Certeau. For a clear and sympathetic account of recent trends in historiography, see Jürgen Pieters, "New Historicism: Postmodern Historiography between Narrativism and Heterology" *History and Theory* 39, no. 1 (February 2000): 21–38.

6. For example, in March 2006 the videogame fan magazine *Famitsu* published a poll of its readers' favorite videogames, and *FFX* was listed as the top vote getter.

7. The convention of using subtitles, which is a holdover from earlier games that did not have voice actors, is continued in *FFX*, which means that you read text as the game unfolds. There are other sources of textual information within the game itself, but the "text" of the game also includes peripheral information found in numerous guides, fan blogs, the official Web site, and so on, all of which are in a real sense part of the game platform.

8. Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 14–15.

9. See, for example, Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997) or Marie-Laure Ryan's *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

10. Markku Eskelinen, "Toward Computer Game Studies" in *First Person*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004), 36.

11. Espen Aarseth, "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation," in *First Person*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004), 49.

12. It must be noted that even in a game where the player has a lot of options for input, the basic story is set and doesn't change. Rather, it is uncovered by gameplay. Interactivity means that a player can determine the order or even some nuances of the story. However, even a complex game like *FFX* is not truly open ended. The idea that the player can actually exercise choice is an illusion—though it is an illusion that, as noted earlier, mimics the reality effects of historical narrative through the creation of a fantasy environment, the history of Spira.

13. Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004), 120–21.

14. To insert a personal observation—it took me nearly ninety hours, spread over several months, to complete the game. I mention this because it is important to note that my experience of the game may well be different from more ardent and skilled gamers who are faster "readers" than I. Nonetheless, the time it took me to complete the game is not at all unusual.

15. The image of life as an insubstantial bubble, as froth, has a long history in Japanese literature. It is a striking instance of how the creators of *FFX* situated their game-narrative within a number of culturally charged discourses. The paradox of Tidus's fading is that, even though he was part of a collective dream-memory, he was thrust into the real world of Spira by the fayth, who were exhausted and wanted Yu Yevon to be destroyed so that they might be released from their hellish existence and sleep without dreaming. This paradox that Tidus is both a dream and real, both a memory and in history, was the catalyst for a sequel, in which Yuna searches for her lost love.

16. Jonathan Culler, "Literary Competence," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tomkins (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 102.