OUTLAST

Genre:	Survival Horror
Release:	2013
Platforms:	MS Windows, PS4, Xbox One, Linux, OS X, Nintendo Switch
Developer:	Red Barrels
Publisher:	Red Barrels
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1. Gameplay

Outlast is the story of a journalist who gets a tip by an anonymous informant that something peculiar is going on at a remote psychiatric hospital located in the mountains. The journalist goes there to investigate and see it for himself, but when he arrives, he realizes that hell has broken loose already. He decides to leave but he realizes that it is too late. He is already trapped inside. Hence, he has to find a way out and while doing so, he investigates and finds out what's happening inside the asylum, what's been going on with the patients and who's behind those experiments.

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKA-IA4locM

2. Sound

Outlast is a game of horror and so are its soundtracks. Its sounds play a major role in the game. They conduct a huge load of emotions that go along with the game narrative. The sounds are delivered in a realistic, honest, and unique manner, which convey horror, pain, and helplessness. Background sound and noises are mostly combined together. Noises however are only played depending on the location and/or the player's input. Sound progressions are present in the game that accompany the character's development, location evolvement, and the ambient actions.

2.1 Soundtrack

Environment

The environment's soundtracks build up uneasy atmosphere and tension throughout the game, a slow-paced soundtrack faded in. This is accompanied with blurry, unclear, and grainy noises like that from dry leaves, radio, car engine welcome the player into the game, an outdoor scene. Howling of wolves, calls of owls, and chirping of insects from afar expand the environment's size. These combined together gives overall an ominous sound, which builds up a deep atmosphere of fear.

Game Introduction	soundtrack-environment_outside.wav
Howling of wolves	sountrack_wolfehoule.wav

The background sound changes and/or gradually builds up the tension when the character comes up closer to specific areas. For example, when entering the asylum building. Several sounds overlap with each other. The sound changes and tends to play with the emotions of the player and tends to tease the player into thinking that something unknown could happen in blink of an eye. Creaking of floors, static noises from television, fuzzy voices of people murmuring in distant rooms deliver the message to the player that the place he is in, is more likely like a huge maze.

Entering the garden (00:06) Entering the asylum building (00:41)	soundtrack_enter-the-asylum.wav

Spontaneous Happening

Whenever an unexpected happening in the environment happens (example: closing of door in front of the character), an ominous sound is played that overlaps to the current background sound.

Example:

2.2 Noise/Tone

Dialogue/Voice Over

Voice overs are not present for the player character but is present for the nonplayable characters (NPCs). When delivering scripted dialogues, the NPCs deliver it with great voice acting depending on what they want to convey to the player. Mysterious hums, suffering murmurs, slow deliverance of statements and angry commands are some examples of it.

There are two types of character and NPC encounters:

- Interaction with NPC (The character's actions/player's input aren't limited.)
- In-Game cutscene (The character's actions/player's input are limited.)

Whenever an interaction with an NPC occurs, the NPCs deliver the script/voice overs, the background sound stays the same where the character is to be found.

Example:

Whenever an in-game cutscene occurs, the background sound changes into a louder and cinematic background sound.

Example:

Player Character

The main character's actions go along with their corresponding sound effects. They evolve depending on what situation the player is in. For example, footstep sounds change depending on the material of the ground being stepped on by the character. Panting sounds differ and evolve according to the situation of the player. For example, jumping, squeezing into narrow places and climbing up. Whenever the player is hurting or at the peak of a situation, the panting is more evident and louder. The evolvement of the character's sound feedback gives the player the same feeling of what the character is currently experiencing.

Example:

Nonplayable Character

Beside voice overs, NPCs actions like the character's actions, are accompanied by their corresponding sound effects. They change depending on the situation the NPC is in. For example, their footstep sounds change depending on the material of the ground. If they are holding an object, its sound equates to the material of that specific object. For example, metal or wood.

Example:

Objects/Assets

The sounds of objects in the game are heard very clearly in contrary to the background. Ringing of phones, flickering of lights, zooming in of camera, etc. are delivered very distinctly, in such a way that the player knows whether that object is far or near him/her. The sounds also give the player an excellent feedback when doing actions with specific objects. First encounters with a specific object like dead bodies are accompanied with a jump scare sound, a very loud scream combined with orchestral sound.

Example:

Barks

Sound barks are very present in the game. Out of nowhere, sounds pop out either near or far. They give the player the feeling of uneasiness and anxiety that something is going to come up, either in a short or long distance. The barks in the game evolves from popping out one at a time to coming more and more either overlapping or simultaneously.

Example:

2.3 User Interface

In the game, there are three major UI elements:

- Showing the game objective
- Reading storytelling items when picked up
- Writing on the character's journal

When an objective is shown, the background sound doesn't change but it is accompanied by a sound

bark, a hitting-metal sound, to get the player's attention to see what his/her next goal is.

Objective	ui_objective.wav

When picking up a storytelling item, the background sound changes into a slow-paced one, muting all the noises in the current environment, where the player is. This allows the player to focus on the storytelling item. The UI transition is always accompanied by a sound of the specific item. For example, grabbing a paper. Going out of the UI is also accompanied by a loud scary sound, reminding the player that he/she is back into the game.

Storytelling Item	ui_letter.wav

When the character is writing on his journal, the background sound doesn't change but the writing is accompanied with a scribbling sound on paper.

Journal	ui_diarynotes.wav

3. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the soundtracks of Outlast play an enormous role to achieve what the game wants to convey to their players, horror.

Overall, we find its soundtracks very complex. The gameplay together with its soundtracks play with the player's emotions and state of mentality. The combination of the background sound and noises, especially the barks, is a great result of attaining fluctuating emotions: from being in an environment completely in silence (being at ease) to hearing spontaneous noises from somewhere (being alert) to the point that it gets really loud (being anxious).

In our opinion, the sound designers achieved to build up a fearful ambiance in the game. The implementation of jump scares adds to their playfulness. They achieved players to suffer because of fear and by playing with the player's overflowing senses.

All things considered, we think that analysing the sound design of Outlast broadens our perspective on how we can better our future games, on how to build the right game ambiance and combine it with the gameplay and on how to give our players a full user game experience.

4. Comparison with Five Nights at Freddy's

4.1 General Comparison

4.2 Sound Comparison

Soundtrack Noise/Tone Voice Over User Interface

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Last update: **2022/06/09 16:31**