



Proteus

- Genre: Open World / Exploration
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 - Publisher: Curve Studios (PlayStation)
 - Developer: Ed Key
 - Sound: David Kanaga
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Game Description

Development

Proteus is an open-world game developed by Ed Key and David Kanaga for Microsoft Windows, Mac OS and Linux as well as PlayStation 3 and PlayStation Vita. The game was released in 2013. In Proteus, you explore a procedurally generated 3d pixel art island in first person point-of-view and wander through meadows, hills and forests, also meeting animals along the way. The game has no goal. The only thing you can do is walk and sit down. The core of this game lies in music and sounds. Every object of the world has a distinct musical signature and will react to your position and movements on the island. This way, the player has an impact on the musical elements of the game. The timeline of Proteus is defined by day/night cycles and four seasons. The world and music also change depending on the season and the hour of the day.

Sound Analysis

What purpose does the sound have?

Proteus is a game without a specific goal in that it is a pure exploration game in which atmosphere, mainly created by sound, plays the crucial role. As the visuals are held in simple pixel art, sound attains all the more emphasis. It is the main factor that keeps the player motivated. Firstly, there are different background sounds which create the basic atmosphere. These background sounds change in relation to time and location of the player.

Secondly, there are sounds which occur as soon as the player gets near to a certain object. Sound can also be triggered as a certain object comes into the camera's perspective.

Further, it depends on the player's movement. The basic atmosphere of the game is given by the current background music but the player can enhance this particular mood by navigating through the game world and thereby activating plenty of unique and atmospheric sounds. It could be described that the world of Proteus is a piece of music and the player's movement through it is a live mixing system.

Relationship between actions and sound

Background Sound

Each of the four seasons has its own background sound which can further be divided into day and night sound. Thus, there are altogether eight different background songs for the time of the day. Additionally, there are also short pieces for sunrises and sunsets. There's also a water background sound that occurs when the player is in the sea where any background music is muted. The background music further depends on the altitude of the player's position: if he is up on a hill or down in a valley, for example, the music will change. The player can therefore interact with the background sound and influence it.

Objects

There are plenty of interactive objects which trigger sound. Some animals are activated as the player gets near. However, they run away and the player may pursue them, if he likes, and trigger further sounds. Others are static and activated each time the player navigates close to them. Further there's the sun which activates a sound each time it comes within view.

Movement

The player can affect the sound also by changing his speed sliding down a hill. As the player moves faster, a sound emerges to emphasize his speed of motion.

Conclusion

Objects and movement allow the player to interfere and interact with the music and atmosphere given. It motivates the player to keep exploring the environment in search for new sounds and sound combinations. It brings about a continuous variation.

Narration & Dramaturgy

Narrative Metatopics

The concept of Proteus is the experience between player and environment. Therefore, narrative metatopics are severely featured in the game. As the player wanders in the island, he'll often come to face with changes in the background music and environmental sounds. These changes may be relative to his position or due to an object that he observes. For example, watching the Sun in the Summer will play out a cheery tune. Time of the day, weather and season also have respective sounds and music which help set the mood. Whenever the Sun sets and the Moon rises, background

music changes accordingly, from more energetic to slow and melancholic.

Dramatising

Proteus' total gameplay boils down to exploration of the environment however certain emotional cues are reached at given points. For example, when a player swims his way to the island or climbs a mountain to the top, the music changes accordingly in reaction to his achievement.

Time perception

Proteus has a day/night cycle system in which the sun rises every morning and sets every evening. Music and environmental sounds differ substantially between night and day, with daytime featuring several environmental sounds and night-time becoming much calmer. This helps distinguish the passing of time.

The player can travel forwards in time by positioning himself accordingly in relation to a circle of stones and open up a portal. This ritual will not only drastically change the landscape of the island but background music and environmental sounds will change accordingly. The sounds in the warmer seasons of Spring and Summer are playful and loud whereas in the colder seasons of Autumn and Winter they become eerie and melancholic.

Character and Personality

Whereas the player plays an invisible and soundless character, NPC animals in Proteus have distinguishably different visuals and sounds from each other. Animal sounds will often correspond to their locomotion style. For example, chickens are small and quick-footed and therefore their respective sounds are high-pitched and nervous whereas fireflies in the night sound like small echoing bells.

Suggestion, Metaphor, Subtext

A recurrent theme in Proteus is spirituality and ascension. This mood is set during certain locations and events in the game through a single instrument or choir playing in the absence of any other environmental sound. Approaching totems will result in said thematic mood. It is also perceivable by climbing or „ascending“ hills though the collaboration between sound and action is contextually more comprehensible at the end of the game.

Room

Navigation, Orientation

Music will sound while the player is on land whereas he'll hear only water when swimming in the

ocean. This may aid the player in understanding the progress in game is found on the island itself.

Setting, Scenography

Proteus' background music will change depending on several factors. The most dramatic is the change between day, night and seasons, each providing a different mood for the island.

Composition / Mix / Aesthetic

The visual as well as the auditive style of Proteus is inspired by 8-bit and pixel art.

Game Comparison: Flower

Purpose of sounds

As flower does have a specific goal and stunning visuals, the role that sound plays isn't as big as in Proteus but nevertheless crucial for a thrilling game experience. While in Proteus, sound is the main motivation for the player to keep playing, in Flower, it adds to the atmosphere and the gameplay.

Objects

Object sounds are less prominent than in Proteus and rather subtle in comparison to Flower.

Movement

The player in Proteus is less prominent than in Flower, as he is neither visually nor audibly present.

Conclusion

Although the sound in Flower depends a lot on the player's location, his progress and his speed of movement, it is much more predefined than in Proteus. In Proteus, the player's main motivation is to experiment and experience sound, whereas in Flower mostly underline the general atmosphere of the current environment and contributes to a thrilling gameplay.

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