

Chapter 3 Reading Response

Rhythm games have fascinated me since I was but a small boy. Ever since elementary school, when I was allowed to accompany my older brother on a playdate (a big honor for a 3rd grader) and play Guitar Hero 3, I have been enamored with the gamification of music. Suddenly, music became something I genuinely wanted to do, not something my parents forced me to do in exchange for video game time. (Though I regret none of the forced practice from when I was young... thank you Mom and Dad!)

Guitar Hero, as I'm sure you're aware, is an incredible abstraction of playing the guitar. It is certainly one of those games that, as Principle 3.3 suggests, feels organic and living because of its imbued personality. Guitar Hero 3, with its blocky, absurdly emotional characters and aggressively edgy rock 'n' roll aesthetic, manages to perfectly capture the zeitgeist of the hard



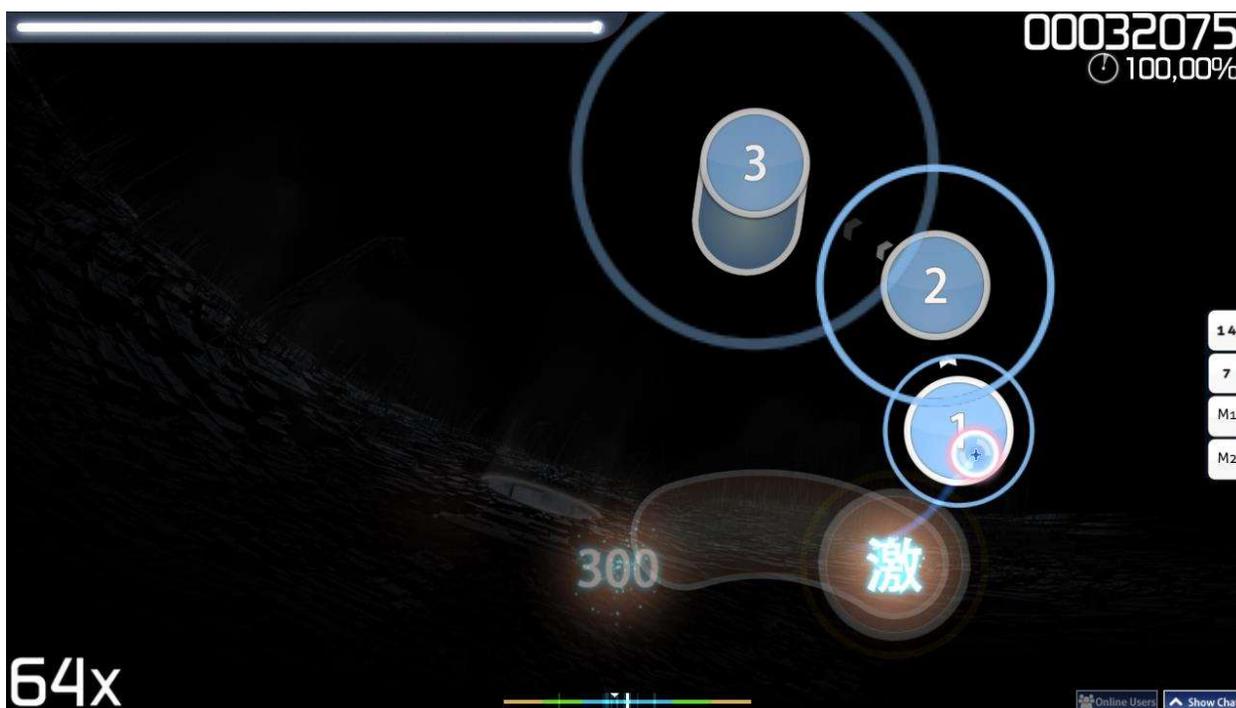
rock era. As someone who never partook in that culture, I still feel transported to the grimy 90s concert atmosphere every time I fire up a song. Speaking of fire, the visuals (as pictured above) are extremely responsive to physical interaction. (Principle 3.6 would be proud!) The user receives feedback from the game in the form of flames when a note is hit and a grating sound if a note is missed. The actual controller is the embodiment of Principle 3.4: a guitar in its most simplistic and reduced form. All the player has to do is press a colored button with one hand and



strum the clicky bar with the other in order to play; all other parameters (such as tuning, changing pickups, different strings, etc.) have been removed except for the completely optional whammy bar. This was a genius design because it not only made the game easier to code, it also made the game easier to learn for an inexperienced user while maintaining the basic idea. As Principle 3.11 states, the developers made it read: it just makes sense that this is how the controller looks, feels, and plays. While the technology of Guitar Hero 3 is dated, it will hold a

special place in my heart forever: like Ocarina, GH3 had many users who took it upon themselves to master the base game and even write custom songs for other people who mastered the base game (myself included). I found an online community growing up in the GH3 custom world, and somehow this all spawned out of infiltrating my older brother's middle school playdate.

As I got older, I went through many phases of rhythm gaming. One particularly salient game for this chapter is Osu!, which, unlike Guitar Hero, isn't really meant to emulate any particular instrument (other than the computer). The control interface consists of mouse position and button press (whether those buttons be on the mouse or keyboard); the player tries to align their cursor with a flared circle (the Ge special) and press any button at the appropriate time.



In some sense, this is a reversal of the guitar hero parameters: any button will do, and the position of the notes remains static while the user is responsible for location (whereas in GH3, the notes move toward you). The response of hitting notes is somewhere in between Ocarina and

Guitar Hero; larger, hollow circles approach the actual note circles (maybe even using a Zeno interpolator) and notes explode gently when hit. Osu!, though somehow a more complex interface than other games, represents a more chill environment than something like Taiko no Tatsujin (my most recent rhythm game interest). Taiko no Tatsujin, based on a Japanese arcade game, is a chaotic and goofy experience that feels almost like a 2-button, caffeine-fueled Guitar Hero. The characters and visuals are overstimulating in the best way (approaching pot-smoking),



and the note response is snappy and aggressive. The interface is incredibly simple: the player merely needs to detect whether a note is red or blue and trigger the appropriate control. However, the aesthetic value is incredible: every component on the screen screams arcade, and the busyness of the graphics feels like it complements the simplistic game atmosphere perfectly. Taiko no Tatsujin, in this sense, perfectly invites the senses described in Principle 3.8. Everything pops. The gaze is led. There is certainly a narrative and a clear purpose to this game experience.

Rhythm games in general have always captivated my attention; there is something special to me about finding a rhythm game with a mechanic that I haven't encountered before. I think I eventually would like to design one (perhaps for my final project). That way, I can at least justify playing video games a bit longer.