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Abstract	<p>The popularization of virtual reality meeting points has become a form of socialization among teenagers and young adults, offering platforms for communication, exchange of opinions and personal experience exchange. Popular video games with open-world environments, such as <i>Minecraft</i> and <i>Fortnite</i>, have provided interactive and immersive contexts that move beyond gaming, and which serve as “prosthetic extensions” to explore reality. Among these virtual interactions, music continues acting as a socializing and community creation agent, complementing live music events. The creation of virtual shows in virtual setting, which provide free mass access, affords the appearance of new stages for popular music and artists, achieving unprecedented mediatic impact.</p> <p>In this chapter, I explore the interventions of Marshmello, Travis Scott and Ariana Grande in <i>Fortnite</i>, along some in-game events offered by the game’s developers. These events create “hyperreal environments” where fans can transmediatically approach their idols. The scenarios designed by Epic Games redefine traditional performative contexts referring to ritual processes, individual and group identity formation. Thus, in line with Frith’s perspective, according to which music ends up transcending the experience of sonic events through technology, I argue that digital stages define new practices for the everyday life of their participants, taking and turning current socializing dynamics into new possibilities.</p>
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Immersive Environments in Video Games as a New Stage for Popular Music Performance

Eulalia Febrer-Coll 

INTRODUCTION

The popularization of video games with open worlds such as *Fortnite* or *Roblox*, which are massively accessible and prepared for the inclusion of events that go beyond play, have made them common meeting points for many teenagers and young adults, who find in them a channel not only for communication, but also for opinion and experience exchange. Since the first decade of the current century, technology has made the concerts and participative events in such environments increasingly attractive and immersive, thus building new contexts for music production and consumption that have come to coexist with—or complement—traditional formats. Furthermore, they have built an opportunity for the convergence of the music and video game industries that, as will be explored, find significant benefits in their mutual collaboration.

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L. López Gómez (ed.), *Music, Sound and Identity in Video Games*,
Palgrave Games in Context,

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19 This chapter aims at establishing how video games create new opportu-
20 nities for popular music to be staged, in a continuous dialogue with tradi-
21 tional concerts, and how they help shape the identities of attendees. For
22 this purpose, I open with a brief literature review that addresses the cur-
23 rent state of the art, and the definition of some concepts that will be neces-
24 sary for a thorough understanding of the case studies later discussed. I
25 specifically tackle *Fortnite* for a scoped contextualized review, including a
26 theoretical approach to its specific music uses and its proposal for in-game
27 performances. This is lastly illustrated through three concerts that have
28 taken place in the game, featuring DJ Marshmello, rapper Travis Scott,
29 and pop singer Ariana Grande. These artists, through their eco on social
30 and traditional media, open a discussion around the increased relevance of
31 new diffusion formats for popular culture, which are yet to fully permeate
32 academic literature.

33 In the following headings, I consider the unfolding of these events and
34 their constitutive elements, as well as their reception, including the opin-
35 ions of video game users. The subsequent analysis was drawn from qualita-
36 tive digital ethnography (Hine 2017),¹ encompassing in-depth interviews
37 with music industry professionals, the review of fan and company-created
38 websites, analysis and participant observation on *Fortnite*-specific Reddit
39 forums, and an overview of the music videos uploaded to YouTube with
40 their respective comment section. These, along with the available litera-
41 ture, afford an analysis that considers all agents involved in the dissemina-
42 tion and mediatic success of the concerts in the game, from developers
43 to fans.

44 A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

45 Virtuality, the main concept at the basis of the following discussion, has
46 been extensively discussed by scholars in popular music through collabora-
47 tive works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*,² offering
48 a standpoint for further research and discussion on online music
49 performance and dissemination. In this volume, each author is offered the

¹Christine Hine, "Ethnography and the Internet: Taking Account of Emerging Technological Landscapes." *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2017): 315–329.

²Sheila Whiteley y Shara Rambarran, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

opportunity to establish their own take on the term, which Whiteley 50
describes “in relation to its very opposite: the, as it were, un-virtual (i.e., 51
the real, the actual).”³ In the same vein, Rambarran points at how “the 52
representation of the simulation blurs the boundaries between reality and 53
fantasy, and is usually digitally produced”—an affirmation that will apply 54
to the cases that will be further discussed.⁴ 55

More pertinently for the topic at hand, we may refer to the work 56
addressing virtual popular music concerts in video game environments. 57
These exclude networked music performances,⁵ which are usually medi- 58
ated by collaborative platforms such as Jamkazam or Jamstud.io, or unidi- 59
rectional streaming platforms like Twitch or YouTube. Green adds to the 60
discussion on liveness and virtuality through his analysis of online music 61
festivals,⁶ highlighting the impact of the COVID pandemic on the dis- 62
semination of the format from 2020 onwards, which we may argue applies 63
to the popularity of in-game events.⁷ Nevertheless, the discussion on 64
music performance in virtual contexts is not new, as it has evolved since 65
the beginning of the century, hand in hand with the technology that 66
makes it possible. 67

It is worth noting the existing literature referring to live concerts in 68
Second Life,⁸ as well as the growing attention that *Minecraft*, *Roblox* or 69
Fortnite have been raising in their interchange with the pop music indus- 70
try.⁹ The in-game performance format was first introduced in 2006 in 71

³Whiteley and Rambarran, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, 1.

⁴Whiteley and Rambarran, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, 149.

⁵Ben Loveridge, “Networked Music Performance in Virtual Reality: Current Perspectives,” *Journal of Network Music and Arts* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1–19.

⁶Ben Green, “Splendour XR: Place, Experience and Liveness at a Virtual Music Festival,” *Leisure Sciences* (2023): 1–18.

⁷Dave Thier, “A Staggering Number of People Saw Fortnite’s Travis Scott ‘Astronomical’ Event,” *Forbes*, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2020/04/28/a-staggering-number-of-people-saw-fornites-travis-scott-astronomical-event/?sh=626ad2497b41>, accessed September 24, 2024.

⁸Trevor S. Harvey, “Avatar Rockstars: Constructing Musical Personae in Virtual Worlds,” en *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, ed. Sheila Whiteley y Shara Rambarran (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 171–190.

Felipe G rtrudix-Barrio and Manuel G rtrudix-Barrio, “Music in Virtual Worlds: Study on the Representation Spaces,” *Comunicar* 19, no. 38 (2012): 175–181.

⁹Karina Moritzen, “Abrindo Moshpits Virtuais: Cenas Musicais e Shows ao Vivo em Fortnite e Minecraft,” in *XXX Encontro Anual da Comp s*, 1–24, 2021.

Jennifer L. Breese, Mark A. Fox, and Ganesh Vaidyanathan, “Live Music Performances and the Internet of Things,” *Issues in Information Systems* 21, no. 3 (2020): 179–188.

72 *Second Life*, with the collaboration singer Susanne Vega and the band
 73 Duran Duran,¹⁰ and escalated towards events such as *Coachella* (2018) in
 74 *Minecraft*, or David Guetta’s performance in *Roblox* (2022).

75 Nowadays, music events in video games usually include collaborations
 76 between platforms and artists, such as The Fat Rat in *Minecraft* or Travis
 77 Scott in *Fortnite*. However, the examples as the first did not offer its users
 78 the opportunity to participate live in the music experience, as it was pre-
 79 sented as a music video. Villén Higuera and Corral Rey refer to this as a
 80 form of *machinima*, an “appropriation and reconfiguration of video games
 81 to generate novel content” aimed not only at gamers who may want to
 82 enhance their gaming experience, but also at artists and professionals that
 83 perceive creative and commercial opportunities in these events.¹¹

84 Breese et al. describe how the collaboration between streamer Ninja
 85 and rappers Drake and Travis Scott in *Fortnite*, streamed on Twitch,
 86 resulted in the *Astronomical* event within the same game, which gathered
 87 the attention of millions and created “a ripple of publicity and accolades
 88 from gamers and non-gamers alike.”¹² Furthermore, they underline how
 89 the influence of fans is crucial in shaping the business models that emerge
 90 around such events.

91 Participants of in-game virtual concerts benefit from the possibility of
 92 “free movement” in the virtual spaces that they attend, which aids in
 93 building the illusion of non-mediation. In these contexts, sound and space
 94 consciousness are key to providing attendees with a sense of orientation
 95 and immersion. However, virtual presence may be seen as holding some
 96 impediments to experiencing real-life-like events, as they “seem to pose
 97 direct challenges to the understandings of place and experience that are
 98 central to music festivals.”¹³ In the discussion around the *pros* and *cons* of
 99 the in-game or avatar format, the work around liveness and concert

¹⁰Lies Bouckaert, “Virtual Reality as New Concert Space: The Experience of VR Concerts Illuminated from the Perspective of Audience and Developers,” master’s dissertation, Universiteit Gent, 2021.

¹¹Sergio Jesús Villén Higuera and María Nieves Corral Rey, “Análisis de las Relaciones Intermediales Entre la Música y los Videojuegos: Una Perspectiva Desde los Videos Musicales,” in *Narrativas Emergentes para la Comunicación Digital*, edited by Nadia Alonso López, Raúl Terol Bolinches, José María Herranz de la Casa, and Pavel Sidorenko Bautista, (Madrid: Dykinson, 202), 142–163.

¹²Breese, Fox and Vaidyanathan, “Live Music Performances and the Internet of Things,” 181.

¹³Green, “Splendour XR”, 7.

attendance must also be taken into consideration, as it is linked to the mediation of technology and its affordance of audiovisual experiences.¹⁴

To take on this matter, concepts such as *immersion* or *presence* are unavoidable. Although there is a lack of consensus on a definition regarding the implication of such terms in online concerts, they can be seen as the two main conceptual standpoints in the field, along with Calleja's "incorporation."¹⁵ This term is described as unfolding at two simultaneous levels: in the player's mind as part of their surroundings, and in the virtual environment that they explore. However, the author elaborates on it as a disambiguation of the term *immersion*, which he deems too vague due to its different use in diverse contexts and disciplines.

Immersion is specifically approached by authors such as Loveridge¹⁶ and Onderdijk et al. The authors define it as a quality of technology with "the technical capability to generate experiences in a realistic manner,"¹⁷ despite its necessary link to embodied music cognition and other areas that are a step removed from the discussion at hand. It may serve, nevertheless, both to refer more broadly to the individual state of focus and loss of real-life perception, similarly to what was described by Csikszentmihalyi as "flow,"¹⁸ and to encompass the terms diversely defined by different authors.

The experience of concert attendees is, in any case, nondependent exclusively on immersion, but also on other factors such as socialization, community building, or interactions with musicians.¹⁹ The online means used to "achieve status" and to obtain the "respect and admiration of others" work similarly in live and virtual contexts.²⁰ Although technological mediation can interfere with some of the opportunities offered by live shows, its rapid actualization may work in favour of procuring new approaches to socialization channels, coexisting with traditional formats.

¹⁴ See Jean Philippe Charron, "Music Audiences 3.0: Concert-Goers' Psychological Motivations at the Dawn of Virtual Reality," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): Article 800, and Kelsey E. Onderdijk, Lies Bouckaert, Edith Van Dyck, and Pieter Jan Maes, "Concert Experiences in Virtual Reality Environments," *Virtual Reality* (2023), 1–18.

¹⁵ Gordon Calleja, "Immersion in Virtual Worlds," en *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw-Agaard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 222–236.

¹⁶ Loveridge, "Networked Music Performance in Virtual Reality."

¹⁷ Onderdijk et al., "Concert Experiences in Virtual Reality Environments."

¹⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins Publ, 2008).

¹⁹ Breese, Fox and Vaidyanathan, "Live Music Performances and the Internet of Things," Charron, "Music Audiences 3.0."

²⁰ Charron, "Music Audiences 3.0."

127 Taking this experiential level into account, Onderdijk et al. studied the
 128 uses of music in the metaverse to renew business models and innovate in
 129 the music industry. They concluded that “experiences were positively
 130 influenced by headset usage, general accessibility, and the possibility to
 131 experience visuals and environments that are unattainable in more conven-
 132 tional settings.”²¹ This statement corroborates the overlapping of two par-
 133 allel needs: that of the music and video game industries to continue
 134 expanding and adapting their markets; and that of the pivotal relevance of
 135 users to shape the present and future of their contents and formats.

136 As already stated, this progressive mutation of the music industry
 137 towards a two-way built market that transforms passive listeners into active
 138 participants, benefits from the elimination of reality barriers in imagined
 139 worlds with no physical norm—“flying, floating, changing costumes and
 140 shape-shifting, directing their song selections, accompanying and dancing
 141 songs by interacting directly with singer avatars”—and the building of
 142 new bridges—including same venue access for geographically distant
 143 attendants.²² It is no surprise that such ideas have been present in further
 144 discussion regarding the differences in experience between virtual and live
 145 concerts.²³ However, when seen not as two competing event modalities
 146 but as complementary, bound by the constant evolution of cultural goods
 147 through technology, they appear as the two sides of the same (market-
 148 ing) coin.

149 In sum, virtual concerts have grown to occupy a significant place among
 150 popular music studies, specifically in ludomusicology, through the interest
 151 of video game-centric events. The collaboration between game developers
 152 and the music industry is ubiquitous among open-world games with mas-
 153 sive multiplayer capacity—or *metaverses*—, and it is precisely this massive
 154 attendance that makes the role of users central in defining what works best.

155 This tendency needs the support of continuously evolving technologies
 156 that scaffold the immersive experiences of their participants. However, the
 157 experience of attendees is not exclusively dependent on a loss of sense of
 158 self or reality, nor on the fidelity of the games to reality: it is strongly reli-
 159 ant on the social opportunities that the concerts afford, as well as the

²¹ Onderdijk et al., “Concert Experiences in Virtual Reality Environments.”

²² Gizem Çelik, “A New Field in Music Production: Metaverse Concerts,” *Ege Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Medya ve İletişim Araştırmaları Hakemli E-Dergisi* 12 (2023): 4.

²³ Charron, “Music Audiences 3.0.”

intersubjective agreement regarding the metaphorically plausible worlds in which they occur. 160
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MUSIC IN *FORTNITE* 162

Fortnite is well known as a cross-platform Battle Royale game,²⁴ in which a hundred players land on an island and must fight each other to be the last character standing. Despite it counting with cooperative and creative modes such as *Save the World* or *Fortnite Creative* respectively, the Battle Royale mode is its insignia, and the default map on which it unfolds its token. *Fortnite* was first released in 2017 by Epic Games as a free-to-play game that is sustained through in-game purchases, merchandising, and live events such as World Cup championships. Its popularity is moreover evidenced by its users, which in 2023 reached more than 230 million active monthly players.²⁵ 163
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Although video games within the shooter²⁶ genre do not spike a straight relation with music as they do not usually count with an in-game soundtrack, titles such as this are especially known for the audiovisual events that they regularly hold within their reality—besides the presence of lobby music, radio stations or in-game dances, which also have a significant function in building the sonic identity of the game. 173
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Fortnite largely benefits from its continuous intersection with popular culture icons, brands, and trends that are noticeably present in both live and online social (media) streams. These events were listed and analysed by Fernández Rincón et al. in 2021,²⁷ including collaborations with the film industry (e.g. Star Wars); tournaments (e.g. Celebration Cup); the sports industry (e.g. Air Jordan); brands (e.g. Fortnite X Havaianas); and a long miscellanea (e.g. Día de Muertos in Mexico). These have since 179
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²⁴ Battle Royale is a genre that pits numerous players against each other, whose objective is being the “last one standing.” They are survival games in which each participant must use the available resources to eliminate other opponents and protect themselves.

²⁵ Activeplayer.io. *Fortnite: Fortnite Live Player Count and Statistics*. 2023. <https://activeplayer.io/fortnite/#:~:text=Right%20now%2C%20there%20are%201%2C153%2C546,played%20Fortnite%20this%20September%202023>. Last accessed September 22, 2024.

²⁶ *Shooter* games are those whose main mechanics consist of eliminating enemies using different weapons, usually firearms and other long-range arms.

²⁷ Antonio Raúl Fernández Rincón, Pedro Antonio Hellín Ortuño, y Antonio Castillo Esparcia, “Eventos en la Industria de los Videojuegos. Estudio del Caso Fortnite,” *ZER: Revista de Estudios de Comunicación = Komunikazio Ikasketen Aldizkaria* 26, no. 51 (2021).

186 continued growing, including game-story developing events such as *The*
 187 *Convergence* or *Collision*.²⁸ As Soto de la Cruz, Cortés and Lacasa describe,
 188 *Fortnite*, “more than a leisure artifact ... has become a metaverse or virtual
 189 universe that enables interaction, integration, collaborative work and the
 190 development of players’ social skills.”²⁹

191 Concerts have also been largely present among in-game events although
 192 they have not always been linked to the game’s story—like in Marshmello’s
 193 case, which was conceived as an exploration of the possibilities of the virtual
 194 world and the response of fans.³⁰ All these have been complemented
 195 with limited-time episodes, which are themed around specific occasions
 196 and serve as opportunities for players to obtain in-game rewards, including
 197 specific music built for the bidirectional promotion of artists and
 198 the game.

199 It is worth noting the difference between *endemic* and *partnered* events,
 200 as the first usually take place in the Battle Royale arena, while partnered
 201 content is usually placed on *Fortnite Creative*. This mode allows both
 202 individual users and brands to create their own personalized islands, which
 203 can be later accessed by other players. This has served music events such as
 204 Coachella,³¹ which has become a recurrent collaborator on Epic Game’s
 205 servers and facilitated new marketing opportunities and income.³²

206 These concerts are available for users visiting the islands at different
 207 times, and as such do not necessarily require the live and synchronous
 208 presence of participants on shows. On the other hand, concerts on the
 209 Battle Royale map and main events are one-time occurrences, which gives
 210 them an increased sense of liveness. These are mostly embedded in
 211 *Fortnite’s* storyline and serve the introduction of major technical updates
 212 in the game.

²⁸ Fortnite Wiki. “Live Events.” 2023a. https://fortnite.fandom.com/wiki/Live_Events. Last accessed September 18, 2024.

²⁹ Jenniffer Soto de la Cruz, Sara Cortés Gómez, y Pilar Lacasa, “The Reinvention of Video Games and New Forms of Consumption in Times of Lockdown: The Case of Fortnite,” *Comunicación y Sociedad* (2023): e8455.

³⁰ Fortnite Wiki, “Showtime.” 2023b. <https://fortnite.fandom.com/wiki/Showtime>, last accessed September 18, 2024.

³¹ Coachella, *Coachella Island in Fortnite*, n.d., <https://www.coachella.com/coachella-island>, last accessed September 21, 2024.

³² Mat Ombler, “What Fortnite Creative Mode’s Payout Model Means for Music,” *Water&Music* (2023), <https://www.waterandmusic.com/what-fortnite-creative-modes-payout-model-means-for-music/>, last accessed September 3, 2024.

Epic Games acquisition of the platform Bandcamp in 2022—along with its integration of artists into the game radio station—gives us a glimpse of the relevance of music for the developing company, not only at an aesthetic or socializing level, but also in terms of licensing. According to Mat Ombler, this incorporation adds to the company’s music strategy for three groups: artists, developers, and gamers. Artists get exposure and their licensing opportunities increase; developers can have easier access to licensed music to use in game, as tracks can be directly published in *Fortnite*; and gamers, “aside from facilitating more virtual concerts and live music events from popular artists” can count with music safe to stream on other platforms.³³

This may not directly apply to events that require specifically developed soundtracks or synch placements, such as those in the movie industry or the shows here discussed. For instance, some events present symphonic soundtracks, as can be seen in *The End* or *Fracture*, in which the music is specifically designed to accompany cinematics, interactive and adaptive elements, following an action-film approach.

APPROACHING THE DELOCALIZED STAGE 230

Concerts in *Fortnite* can take different forms, as they can be presented through avatars or in-game screens, as a pre-set show or live. Each approach implies a different experience for users, since the interactivity and perceived proximity to the artists varies between options. For instance, the in-game screened Fall Out Boy concert in *Fortnite Creative* that took place in 2023 on iHeartLand—the virtual island owned by iHeart Media—, allowed users to follow the show as broadcasted on the screen placed on the virtual venue. Although this formula can serve as a meeting and socialization point, is limited by the position of the in-game audiovisual source and its statism.

Otherwise, concerts such as Marshmello’s (2019), which are staged through avatars, have been accessible only at a specific point in time. Differently from the previous case, on this occasion attendees could move around the performance stage freely, and approach or move away from it. This also applies to Travis Scott or Ariana Grande’s concerts, although these two added a participative music-video presentation to the experience

³³Mat Ombler, “What Fortnite Creative Mode’s Payout Model Means for Music.”

247 that included interactive activities, erasing the stage centrality of a tradi-
248 tional venue.

249 In each case, the context is that of an interactive open world, but the
250 level of immersion on each occasion is lowered in proportion to the
251 increased mediation. When inquired on this matter, Reddit users on
252 *FortniteBR* forum noted:

253 “I’ve been to the Marshmello and Ariana concerts in game and I prefer
254 them over the creative map concerts because they are made with the same
255 level of quality as Fortnite events, and give off the same vibe though. Those
256 events turned the concerts into an experience.”³⁴

257 “I agree that the in game concerts are better, but one big downside was that
258 if you weren’t there live you missed it. Putting concerts in an ltm allows
259 more players to experience it.”³⁵[Reply] This is my sentiment. Live event
260 and something weird happens and you can’t get in? You’re SOL now. I
261 don’t like that. I want everyone to have the same opportunity as others.³⁶

262 These statements show how different virtual configurations afford differ-
263 ent experiences for users and reinforce the essential role of technology in
264 the communicative process. It is worth underlining that the *experiential*
265 element described by the user TheBroomSweeper underscores the signifi-
266 cance of the resources dedicated to main-map concerts, designed to be
267 visually spectacular, interactive, as well as ephemeral one-time occasions,
268 thereby adding social value to them. The status achieved by participants in
269 being part of live events can be thus seen as similar to the inconvenience
270 of missing a real-life show.³⁷ However, as inferred by users Camcrusha and
271 Barbecuestu, the illusion of permanence in a digital environment may
272 remove some of the valued ephemerality of in-time presence. Given that
273 the democratization standpoint expressed by these users may not differ
274 from accessing an online platform such as YouTube to search for a show,
275 Epic Games has set live or one-time concerts to enhance the experience of
276 intangibility.

³⁴ [TheBroomSweeper], comment on “In-game concerts” *Reddit*, September 23, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/FortNiteBR/comments/16q7duv/ingame_concerts/.

³⁵ [Camcrusha], comment on “In-game concerts” *Reddit*, September 23, 2023.

³⁶ [Barbecuestu], comment on “In-game concerts” *Reddit*, September 23, 2023.

³⁷ Charron, “Music Audiences 3.0.”

These scenarios outline new approaches to traditional performative contexts, as they include specific elements that make them relatable for traditional concert assistants—presumably considered by game developers to foster a sense of “incorporation.”³⁸ Furthermore, these involve elements described by Löbert when discussing ritual processes in popular music concerts, as well as discussions around hyperreality as explored by Richardson and Rambarran.³⁹

In what regards the ritual aspect of concerts, Löbert points to them as an “interruption of the continuity of ordinary life,”⁴⁰ which in this case would coincide with the day-to-day life of the game. The author enters a discussion around the existence of such concerts as extra-ordinary events:

The adored performer – as a sacred being – appears as the object of the ritual, since he fulfils all the conditions required to do justice to the belief system of his fans. ... The concert must be perceived as an important interaction ritual—and as shown above, the fans see it as such—precisely because it is the only occasion at which the star himself is present and engages in face-to-face interaction with his supporters.⁴¹

Following this line of thought, not only are main-map concerts ephemeral as one-time events, but they make it possible for fans to transmedially approach their pop idols through their avatars, which work as a prosthetic extension to explore reality.⁴² The behaviour of participants is also frequently paralleled to face-to-face concerts, attending the current limitations of user-accessible technology. The specific forms of expression and communication in metaverse contexts show the resilience of attendees to

³⁸ Calleja, “Immersion in Virtual Worlds.”

³⁹ Anja Löbert, “Fandom as a Religious Form: On the Reception of Pop Music by Cliff Richard Fans in Liverpool,” *Popular Music* 3, no. 1 (2012): 125–141, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143011000493>.

John Richardson, *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Shara Rambarran, “‘Feel Good’ with Gorillaz and ‘Reject False Icons’: The Fantasy Worlds of the Virtual Group and Their Creators,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 148–166.

⁴⁰ Löbert, “Fandom as a Religious Form”, 130.

⁴¹ Löbert, “Fandom as a Religious Form”, 130.

⁴² Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

301 maintain sociality, such as coordinated in-game movement or the use of
302 game items to show involvement in the event.

303 These points are scaffolded by a context of hyperreality, as “used in
304 reference to the intensified experiences afforded by cinema and computer-
305 generated virtual reality.”⁴³ This is procured by the immersiveness of the
306 game, which presents a plausible environment for the user not only at a
307 visual level (e.g. movements of avatars or surroundings) but also at a sonic
308 level (e.g. source of sound and reception according to position in space),
309 bringing an enhanced experience that could not be attended in real life.

310 These elements make it possible to talk about new stages for popular
311 music performance in video games, which add to the life experiences of
312 users through immersive virtual environments. These delocalized and
313 widely accessible stages serve as a continuation or complement to what is
314 experienced at live music events and can be of a similar social value for
315 attendees. Furthermore, they are not only a complimentary resource for
316 users or fans: they also create new opportunities for artists to perform and
317 new strategies to create what has been unprecedented mediatic impact.⁴⁴
318 We must take into account that Marshmello, Travis Scott and Ariana
319 Grande’s participations meant more than an online music show, as they
320 were the basis for wider marketing plans.

321 A GLIMPSE INTO THE CONCERTS

322 To put the previous theoretical frame into specifics, we may approach
323 three of the concerts that have taken place in *Fortnite*: Marshmello, Travis
324 Scott, and Ariana Grande’s. While the first was a live intervention and the
325 latter were pre-set performances, all three shared interactive elements that
326 contribute to their social and aesthetic value.

327 Marshmello’s event was the first live concert to take place in *Fortnite*,
328 in 2019, reaching 10.7 million viewers, according to Epic Games (Webster
329 2019).⁴⁵ The event consisted of 10 minutes of audiovisual performance on
330 the Battle Royale island, where the DJ participated live engaging with the

⁴³ Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, 47.

⁴⁴ Webster, “Fortnite’s Marshmello Concert Was the Game’s Biggest Event Ever,” *The Verge*, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/21/18234980/fortnite-marshmello-concert-viewer-numbers>, last accessed September 21, 2024.

⁴⁵ Webster, “More Than 12 Million People Attended Travis Scott’s Fortnite Concert.” *The Verge*, 2020. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/23/21233946/travis-scott-fortnite-concert-astronomical-record-breaking-player-count>, last accessed September 21, 2024.

audience.⁴⁶ Besides attending the event, each assistant could take on different challenges to obtain rewards such as emotes or weapons to use later in the game. The event had been teased previously to its premiere in the game, showing “Marshmello’s real-life tour schedule and, eventually, advertised via posters within *Fortnite* itself.”⁴⁷ This is an example of the integration—and not the substitution—of the artist’s virtual performance into his live schedule, including a brief show for the Fortnite World Cup in the same year.⁴⁸

The concert included seven tracks by the DJ and other featured artists, which were accompanied by visual effects and projections on the in-game screens of the virtual stage. Furthermore, some of the tracks included modifications in the environment where the concert was taking place, such as altered gravity and the appearance of giant bouncing balls. The success of the performance later unfolded in a concert-remake on a Fortnite Creative island by the user TheBoyDilly, for those who wanted to relive the occasion.⁴⁹

The feedback left by users on the artist’s YouTube channel allows a deeper understanding of the meaning of the concert at a social level. The comments point to different aspects of the event, such as the opportunity to share the experience with peers.⁵⁰

I remember going to this concert with my friends and actually getting chills!! This wasn’t even that long ago but it feels like it’s been forever. (@ghosteda8241, 2022)

I attended the concert with my 6 year old. He told me about and thought, “that sounds stu[p]id” but still went since he wanted to go. I was 100%

⁴⁶Nick Statt, “Fortnite’s Marshmello Concert Was a Bizarre and Exciting Glimpse of the Future,” *The Verge*, February 2, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/2/18208223/fortnite-epic-games-marshmello-concert-exciting-bizarre-future-music>, last accessed September 21, 2024.

⁴⁷Statt, “Fortnite’s Marshmello Concert.”

⁴⁸Marshmello, *Marshmello’s 2019 Fortnite World Cup Highlights ft. Ninja, CouRage, Tfue, Ewok, NAV & More*, YouTube video, 2019, <https://youtu.be/N9dx4QUigNI>, last accessed September 12, 2024.

⁴⁹FCQH, *Marshmello Live Event*. n.d. <https://www.fortnitecreativehq.com/marshmello-live-concert-remake/>. Accessed September 21, 2024.

⁵⁰All the citations are comments from the video: [Marshmello] “Marshmello celebra el primer concierto de Fortnite en vivo en Pleasant Park”, *YouTube Video*, February 2, 2019, <https://youtu.be/NBsCzN-jfVA>. The date and user for each are specified in the citation.

356 wrong. It was pretty awesome seeing all the visual effects. Pretty cool and
357 good job by Epic games. (@donaldthompson7705, 2019)

358 Likewise, some interventions point to the characteristics of the concerts
359 and compare them to face-to-face events:

AU3 360 This was the best and awesome concert just ever happended on Fortnite,
361 more like a real concert (except that scene was everyone was floating, but
362 anyways). This will be my best and awesome experience that I've ever felt in
363 game on Fortnite. (@kiyoshi13, 2022)

364 This was the best live event because Marshmallow was actually interacting
365 with the people. (@retanafam577, 2022)

366 The immersive experience was arguably highlighted by the effects used by
367 the developers and the real-time interaction procured by the artist.
368 Furthermore, some users expressed a similar interest in the concert despite
369 not being active *Fortnite* players, which attest to the relevance of the
370 remarked intersection of the gaming and music industries:

371 Don't play Fortnite or any video games for that matter but my brother
372 showed me this when it was actually happening and I'll never forget the feel-
373 ing it gave me like I've been to concerts for sure but this one was a bit dif-
374 ferent knowing your connecting all around this beautiful planet all at once
375 was the coolest shit ever tbh thanks lod!!! (@skiddrowe7365, 2022)

376 I'm a 30 year old woman who mostly loves country music but this shit is
377 legit. I never played fortnite but this is cool. I love Marshmallow. (@breana-
378 valles9717, 2022)

379 Marshmello's contribution to the dissemination of the event and engage-
380 ment with fans through other social media platforms such as Twitter (now,
381 [X.com](#)) afforded an opportunity for attendees to feel closer to the artist.
382 Likewise, the marketing strategy that served to promote in-game pur-
383 chases was incentivized through these means.

384 Following the success of this proposal, Travis Scott's performance
385 *Astronomical* was announced and showcased in the game in April 2020.
386 Epic Games announced the collaboration stating that it would be "one of
387 a kind musical journey" and that would feature the world premiere of a
388 new track, *The Scotts*. The company also took the opportunity to list the

exclusive *merchandising* or items available for players, including outfits and emotes to use in-game. 389 390

Scott's 10-minute-long intervention has been one of the most massively visited concert in *Fortnite* to date, with more than 27.7 million unique players attending live.⁵¹ The artist himself streamed his own performance live on Instagram, as did other streamers and influencers across different social platforms. The global event provided an occasion for a shared experience and a distinction opportunity among peers for those who attended—and although the intervention was a pre-set interactive music-show, the interactivity was carried out live. 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398

Tatiana Cirisano compiled some of Travis Scott's impressions in an interview for *Billboard*, where the artist stressed his interest in exploring metaverse concerts and their hyperrealistic environments: 399 400 401

I could go from being myself to underwater, the stage could go underwater without anybody getting hurt—all of the things I would want to do in real life," Scott tells *Billboard*. "We can fly; we can do all of these things. That's what gets me amped, you know what I'm saying? The fantasies I would think of, to see it all come alive, so people can see and experience it, too."⁵² 402 403 404 405 406

The performance included five songs, some of them in collaboration with other musicians such as Kid Cudi, along different challenges for players to address. Users on Scott's YouTube channel provided feedback that complements observation on Marshmello's case regarding peer attendance and concert production.⁵³ 407 408 409 410 411

This was hands down the best live event that ever happened in Fortnite. Still gives me goosebumps watching it again 4 years later. I remember that everyone was expecting a similar show to Marshmello, everything happening in the music stage that was being built for the occasion in the island. Instead they baited us all, nothing happened in the stage, it was all around the island, under the water and flying across the universe. I had no words after 412 413 414 415 416 417

⁵¹[@FortniteGame] "Thank you to everyone who attended", *Twitter*, April 27, 2020, <https://x.com/FortniteGame/status/1254817584676929537>.

⁵²Tatiana Cirisano, "Game On: What Travis Scott Is Teaching Music Stars About the World's Biggest New (Virtual) Stage," *Billboard* (2020), <https://www.billboard.com/pro/travis-scott-fortnite-billboard-cover-story-interview-2020/>.

⁵³All the citations are comments from the video: [Travis Scott] "Travis Scott and Fortnite Present: Astronomical (Full Event Video)," *YouTube Video*, April 26, 2020. <https://youtu.be/wYeFAIVC8qU> The date and user for each are specified in the citation.

418 it ended. I was speechless. Completely unexpected level of production.
419 Congratulations Epic, this was awesome. (@TheJaviJB, 2023)

420 Some users reinforced the intersection of the music and gaming industries,
421 underlining how the partnership between the artist and the game effectively
422 contributed to their knowledge—and later consumption—of the
423 least familiar end:

424 Bro I've watched this 4 times over 2 years and keep getting reminded of the
425 hype and how Travis' music entered my life. (@kierfernandez9273, 2023)

426 I didn't really know Travis Scott before this event but maaan I loved the
427 whole event and I loved all of these songs. I'm glad my buddy convinced me
428 to go to this event because I got to experience it live and a lot of people
429 didn't get to. I know my friends were bummed when I said this literally
430 wasn't happening again. Good shit fort and Travis Scott for killing it. (@
431 lightningshadow4609)

432 This was reinforced by the earlier mentioned “adored performer”,⁵⁴ made
433 explicit by the introduction of a giant avatar of the artist while attendees
434 remained usual avatar-size. We may argue that the metaphorically plausible
435 environment that was created, along the interactive music-clip aesthetic,
436 contributed to a sense of “incorporation” for the participants. This
437 strategy was paralleled in Ariana Grande’s concert, who was depicted as
438 part of the game’s storyline. Grande’s intervention was part of 2021
439 *Fortnite’s Rift Tour*, “a journey to new realities where Fortnite and super-
440 star Ariana Grande collided,” that included similar marketing strategies to
441 the prior concerts such as special rewards and collectable items to be later
442 used in the game. The concert was once again massively attended, adding
443 up to 27 million live users.⁵⁵ Differently from the previous cases, this event
444 was broadcasted five times over three days on different time zones for
445 wider access. It also referred to the narration of the game and offered a
446 brief review of past occurrences, instead of being presented as an isolated
447 episode:

⁵⁴Löbert, “Fandom as a Religious Form,” 130.

⁵⁵Max Power Gaming. “The 10 Most Popular Metaverse Concerts.” *Max Power Gaming*, Nov 18, 2022 <https://web.archive.org/web/20241221170632/https://www.maxpower-gaming.co/post/top-10-most-popular-metaverse-concerts>.

- Other than this absolute masterpiece, doesnt this make Ariana an actual Goddess in the Fortnite world? The style for her skin is literally called “Rift Goddess” (@keitaro6190, 2022) 448
449
450
- [Reply] Think it does. Travis was still chilling in fortnite during the galactus event so I’m assuming Ariana is just a God in fortnite universe now which is cool. (@QariMurKalot, 2022) 451
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- [Reply to @QariMurKalot] alright, basically, Ariana grande in the Fortnite universe is apparently a monster hunter that travels in space. She got hired by the last reality (the alien race to be as a bait during the event while the aliens were scanning the characters’ memory to find important information about the island. (@itsmattzed, 2022) 454
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- The concert was approximately six minutes long, and featured five well-known songs by the artist, including *7 Rings*, *Be Alright*, and *The Way*, originally composed in collaboration with her deceased ex-partner Mac Miller. This intervention was specially noticed by fans as shown through feedback left on the artist’s YouTube channel: 459
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- I think we can all agree that hearing her feature *The Way*, the first song she did with Mac, as she walked up the stairway to heaven, was absolutely heart-string tugging and hit home for a lot of us. definitely makes a mf cry in the club. (@lilsushiroll4452, 2021) 464
465
466
467
- She’s letting us know she’s ok, by preforming “the way” again. (@olivia-mi9hs) 468
469
- Proximity to the artist can be underlined, although the concert was the least interactive out of the analysed. The fantasy environment set for the event, which included a succession of different scenarios, included briefly interactive moments that prioritized the artist-centric live-broadcasted music video. In this vein, the sense of a *stage* as found in Marhsmello’s concert was blurred, which raised doubt among attendees in what regards the event’s possible parallelisms to real-life shows: 470
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- I don’t think many people my age realise that a whole generation are literally living inside a video game & seem to have no concept of the difference between this and a real live concert (@fenlandwildlifeclips, 2022) 477
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480 This points towards the specific target audience of the events, but also
481 serves as a standpoint to continue the discussion around metaverse perfor-
482 mance and its limitations in the future. Regardless, the interconnection
483 between the music and gaming industries, as well as the effectiveness of
484 the coordinated marketing strategy, was once again emphasized by
485 attendees:

486 My first event and Ariana was the reason I started playing Fortnite I didn't
487 have to buy any skins because I used hers. Fast forward to now I have nearly
488 300 skins but still use her as my main." (@OliviaHaruno, 2022)

489 The exploration of the reception of the shows thus allows a deeper under-
490 standing of the implications of the new concert formats as they afford new
491 opportunities for both gaming brands and artists to present their prod-
492 ucts, and for fans to participate in their exchanges. Furthermore, these
493 contexts, as they develop to coexist with real-life staging and socializing
494 environments, suggest an increased presence of new communication chan-
495 nels that complement traditional structures, and which are closely entan-
496 gled with the overall mediatic ecosystem that articulates our day-to-day life.

497 CONCLUSION

498 Although the performative stages discussed in this chapter are strongly
499 influenced by the collaborative strategies of the gaming and music indus-
500 tries to adapt to an increasingly technology-mediated reality and expand
501 their products, the role of users in the equation has become especially
502 significant. The democratizing environment enabled by social media—
503 allowing users to contribute specific input on preferences and tastes both
504 in music and other entertainment formats—plays a crucial role in shaping
505 the new environments in which popular culture is inserted.

506 The cases examined here contribute both to preexisting virtual models
507 of performativity, such as those developed in *Second Life*, and traditional
508 face-to-face concerts, creating new opportunities for staging popular
509 music furthering its expansion, and adapting the music market to contem-
510 porary realities. The main performances produced in *Fortnite*, in collabo-
511 ration with Marshmello, Travis Scott and Ariana Grande, present formats
512 in-between previous models, which range from live recreations of tradi-
513 tional stages to interactive forms of *machinima*. These may primarily
514 understood as a form of exploration of the intersection between different

industries, while also offering new perspectives about performance and music participation. 515
516

The illusion of non-mediation afforded by the rapidly evolving technologies and the free movement allowed in open virtual worlds, create experiential opportunities that afford new socializing spaces. These spaces—as in other non-virtual contexts—are continuously shaped and articulated through music and its participatory cultures. However, as with real-life contexts, the sustainability of the virtual concert format will depend not solely on the affordances of technology, but on the extent of user integration, and the ways in which they engage with these technologies. 517
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Uncorrected Proof

Author Queries

Chapter No.: 7 0006021052

Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU1	Please check the city name is okay in the affiliation.	
AU2	Please check the author name "Eulalia Febrer-Coll" is okay.	
AU3	Please check if 'just ever happended on Fortnite' should be 'just ever happened on Fortnite'	

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