RESEARCH ARTICLE

RITUAL, RHYTHM, AND CLOSURE: A VISUAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'THE FINAL SONG' IN 'DRAKENGARD 3'

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Received: 05.06.2026 - Accepted: 12.10.2026

Özkan, E. (2026). Ritual, rhythm, and closure: A visual narrative analysis of 'The Final Song' in 'Drakengard 3'. *Etkileşim*, 18, 194-214.
https://doi.org/10.32739/etkilesim.2026.9.18.XXX

This study complies with research and publication ethics.

Abstract

This article examines 'The Final Song', the final rhythm sequence of *Drakengard 3*'s Branch D (Ending D), as a visual-narrative and audiovisual form of closure. Using qualitative close multimodal visual analysis, it examines a 10-minute screen recording with sound from one successful *PlayStation 3* playthrough and six purposively selected screenshots arranged into five figure units. The findings show that the sequence constructs finality through spatial abstraction, monumental scale, audiovisual cueing, perceptual pressure, and ritualised arrangement. Gameplay completion and narrative closure remain distinct but are connected through coordinated image, sound, interface cueing, timing, and player action. The article demonstrates how video game endings can organise perception and performance as part of visual-narrative communication.

Keywords: visual communication, visual narrative, audiovisual design, video game endings, narrative closure.

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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

RİTÜEL, RİTİM VE ANLATISAL KAPANIŞ: ‘DRAKENGARD 3’TE ‘THE FINAL SONG’ ÜZERİNE GÖRSEL ANLATI ANALİZİ

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Bu çalışma araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Öz

Bu makale, *Drakengard 3*’ün D Rotası’nın (D Sonu) final ritim sekansı ‘The Final Song’u görsel-anlatısal ve işitsel-görsel bir kapanış biçimi olarak incelemektedir. Nitel yakın çok kipli görsel analiz kapsamında, *PlayStation 3* üzerinde gerçekleştirilen tek ve başarılı 10 dakikalık oynanışın ses içeren ekran kaydı ile beş figür birimi hâlinde düzenlenen amaçlı seçilmiş altı ekran görüntüsü incelenmiştir. Bulgular, sekansın anlatısal kapanışı mekânsal soyutlama, anıtsal ölçek, işitsel-görsel yönlendirme, algısal baskı ve ritüelleştirilmiş düzenleme aracılığıyla kurduğunu göstermektedir. Oynanışın tamamlanması ile anlatısal kapanış ayrı kalmakla birlikte imge, ses, arayüz yönlendirmesi, zamanlama ve oyuncu eylemi aracılığıyla biçimsel olarak birbirine bağlanmaktadır. Makale, dijital oyun sonlarının görsel-anlatısal iletişim kapsamında algıyı ve performansı nasıl düzenleyebileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: görsel iletişim, görsel anlatı, işitsel-görsel tasarım, dijital oyun sonları, anlatısal kapanış.

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Introduction

Video game endings are often approached through their narrative outcomes: what happens to the characters, whether the plot is resolved, or how the player's actions are rewarded or punished. Yet some endings communicate their force not primarily through plot resolution. They conclude by reorganising the player's sensory and perceptual relation to the work. 'The Final Song', the final rhythm sequence of *Drakengard 3*'s Branch D (Ending D), is a striking example of this condition. The sequence does not present an ending as a conventional cinematic resolution or as an ordinary combat encounter. Instead, it transforms narrative closure into a rhythm-based audiovisual event in which visual form, sonic cueing, and timed response become inseparably connected.

Drakengard 3 is especially relevant to this discussion because the song is already central to its fictional structure. The game's official premise describes the Intoners as goddess-like sisters whose power is connected to manipulating magic through song. In contrast, Zero's attempt to kill her sisters with the help of Mikhail forms the central conflict (Square Enix, 2013, para. 2). 'The Final Song' intensifies this premise by turning song from a thematic and narrative element into the very structure of the ending. Song does not merely accompany the sequence; it becomes the condition through which the ending is perceived, timed, and completed. This makes 'The Final Song' a useful, focused case for visual communication research: it condenses narrative, audiovisual design, interface cueing, and timed player response into a single ending sequence. The sequence is therefore not selected because it represents all video game endings, but because it makes especially visible how closure can be designed through coordinated sensory and interactive form.

This article examines 'The Final Song' as a visual-narrative and audiovisual form of closure. Its central question is, how does 'The Final Song' in *Drakengard 3* construct narrative closure through visual and audiovisual form? The article argues that the sequence constructs an ending not primarily through exposition or conventional cinematic resolution, but through a ritualised audiovisual structure in which visual scale, symbolic excess, rhythmic repetition, sound-image synchronisation, and player perception together produce the experience of closure.

Within visual communication studies, this case is significant because it shows that digital games do not communicate narrative meaning only through representational images, dialogue, or plot information. Meaning is also produced through audiovisual cueing, spatial hierarchy, rhythmic organisation, interface-like prompts, and directed attention. In this respect, 'The Final Song' can be examined as a new media narrative form in which communication occurs through the coordination of seeing, hearing, timing, and action. This position also resonates with Manovich's treatment of the interface as a defining layer of new media and of database and narrative as distinct organisational forms (Manovich, 2001, pp. 62-76, 225-228).

The study is positioned within visual narrative and visual communication research while drawing selectively from game studies and audiovisual theory. Its primary concern is not to explain the full lore of *Drakengard 3*, to evaluate the difficulty of the sequence as gameplay, or to provide a musicological analysis of the soundtrack. Instead, the article focuses on how meaning is organised through image, sound, rhythm, space, and player action. This position also aligns with Jenkins's account of game designers as narrative architects who construct worlds and spatial stories rather than relying on linear exposition alone (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 121-124). In this respect, 'The Final Song' is examined not as a story outcome alone, but as a designed audiovisual and perceptual event.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative close multimodal visual analysis of a successful recorded playthrough of 'The Final Song' with sound. From this recording, six screenshots were purposively selected and arranged into five figure units. These samples trace the sequence's progression from confrontation and spatial abstraction to monumental scale, audiovisual cueing, intensified attention, and ritualised closure. The figures are treated as analytical samples from a time-stamped audiovisual sequence rather than as decorative illustrations.

The article's contribution is therefore twofold. First, it shows how a video game ending can construct narrative closure through audiovisual and perceptual design rather than through exposition or plot resolution alone. Second, it offers a visual communication model for reading digital game sequences such as multimodal arrangements of image, sound, space, interface cueing, rhythm, and player response. In this respect, 'The Final Song' is not examined only as a video game ending but as a compact case of audiovisual composition and visual communication in which finality is constructed through the coordination of image, sound, space, and action.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section establishes the conceptual framework by discussing visual narrative, audiovisual closure, game endings, and player perception. The third section presents the method and case context. The fourth section analyses the selected figure sequence from 'The Final Song', focusing on ritualised space, monumental scale, sound-image cueing, perceptual pressure, and closure. The fifth section discusses the broader implications of the analysis for visual narrative and visual communication studies. The conclusion returns to the main argument that 'The Final Song' turns into an act of perception: a structure completed through perception, timing, and player participation.

Visual Narrative and Audiovisual Closure

This article approaches 'The Final Song' as a visual-narrative ending whose meaning is produced through the coordination of image, sound, rhythm, spa-

tial arrangement, and player perception. The sequence is not treated as a cinematic cutscene, a conventional boss battle, or a soundtrack-driven spectacle. Instead, it is examined as an audiovisual form of narrative closure in which the ending becomes perceptible through the player's perceptual and timed engagement with the sequence. This requires a framework that can account for visual composition, sound-image relation, gameplay structure, spatial design, and the specific problem of ending in narrative digital games.

Visual narratives are understood here not simply as depictions of story events, but as the organisation of meaning through visual form. Images communicate through choices of scale, composition, framing, salience, spatial relation, and hierarchy. Kress and van Leeuwen's account of visual composition is useful here because it identifies information value, salience, and framing as interrelated resources through which visual elements form a meaningful whole (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 176-177). This perspective is especially relevant for 'The Final Song', where narrative closure is not primarily explained through dialogue or exposition. Instead, the sequence communicates through monumental bodies, abstract space, circular arrangements, visual cues, and repeated formal structures. The ending's images therefore do not merely illustrate the story; they organise how finality, catastrophe, and ritual become visible.

In this article, 'ritualised' describes formal audiovisual organisation rather than ritual in a strictly religious or anthropological sense. The term refers to how patterned repetition, circular spatial arrangement, symbolic scale, rule-bound timing, and performative participation organise the ending as a ceremonial structure. In 'The Final Song', repeated audiovisual cues, monumental bodies, circular forms, and timed player response do not merely decorate the finale; together, they establish a structured process through which the audience perceives and enacts finality. 'Ritualised' is therefore used as an analytical descriptor of formal, spatial, and audiovisual organisation, not as a sociological, religious, or ethnographic classification.

For analytical clarity, this article distinguishes narrative closure, gameplay completion, and audiovisual closure. Narrative closure refers to the production of finality within the represented conflict and narrative world. Gameplay completion refers to the player's successful fulfilment of the sequence's timed and rule-bound demands. Audiovisual closure refers to the formal process through which visual organisation, sound, rhythm, interface cueing, and player action connect these two levels. In 'The Final Song', narrative closure and gameplay completion remain conceptually distinct, but the sequence formally binds them by making narrative finality contingent upon successful audiovisual performance.

At the same time, the sequence should not be reduced to the image alone. Game narrative often operates through designed spaces and experiential structures rather than through linear exposition. Jenkins's notion of narrative

architecture is useful here because game spaces may evoke prior narratives, stage narrative events, embed narrative information, or support emergent stories (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 121-123). 'The Final Song' is not a conventional environment in the exploratory sense, yet its abstract space still functions narratively. The pale city, enlarged figures, rings, platforms, and overhead arrangements create a visual field in which the ending is staged as a spatial and perceptual event. The sequence therefore supports an understanding of visual narrative as arranged, navigated, and performed rather than viewed.

This visual and spatial dimension is inseparable from sound. In audiovisual media, sound does not simply accompany the image; it can transform how we perceive it. Chion's concept of audiovisual 'added value' is useful here because it describes the expressive and informative value through which sound enriches the image and alters its perceived meaning (Chion, 1994, p. 5). In 'The Final Song', vocal rhythm, sonic cueing, and musical repetition do not function as background atmosphere. They structure the player's attention and give temporal force to visual events. A glowing cue, a monumental body, or a circular movement gains narrative force because it is synchronised with rhythm and player response. The image becomes an object of rhythmic perception.

Because 'The Final Song' is a video game sequence, its sound-image relation cannot be understood only through theories developed for cinema. Game sound is shaped by interactivity, response, and player action. Collins's work on game audio is useful because it emphasises that game sound must be considered in relation to interactive systems rather than only linear audiovisual composition (Collins, 2008, p. 125). Medina-Gray's discussion of interactive soundscapes further supports this point by treating video game sound as a combination of music, sound effects, dialogue, and player engagement rather than as a single autonomous musical layer (Medina-Gray, 2021, p. 176). In 'The Final Song', the player does not merely listen to music or watch synchronised images. The player must respond to sonic and visual cues with exact timing. Sound, therefore, becomes part of the sequence's playable structure. It organises perception, but it also demands action.

This is why the ending must be considered a game ending, not just an audiovisual scene. Herte's work on narrative digital game endings is relevant because it treats endings as conclusions of both storytelling and play (Herte, 2021, p. 2). In games, closure is not always delivered as a final scene after the important action has already occurred. It may come through a final challenge, a rule-based demand, a change in audiovisual form, or a performative act required of the player. 'The Final Song' belongs to this problem because its narrative ending is not simply watched after gameplay has concluded. Gameplay completion remains dependent on the player's successful performance of the timed sequence, while narrative closure is delivered through that performance. The sequence therefore connects, without conceptually equating, the completion of play and the production of narrative finality.

This also affects how the player is positioned. The player is neither only a spectator nor an operator of mechanics. Aarseth's distinction between gameplay, game structure, and game world helps clarify how player action, rule-based structure, and fictional-spatial content interact in games (Aarseth, 2004, pp. 2-3). 'The Final Song' depends on precisely this interaction. Its game-world becomes an abstract, ritualised visual field; its game-structure is organised around rhythm and timing; and its gameplay requires listening, anticipation, and response. The ending therefore turns visual narrative into a perceptual task. The sequence requires perception to be organised through coordinated seeing, listening, anticipation, and timing.

Ryan frames immersion and interactivity through a contrast between the text as a world that absorbs the reader and the text as a game that requires participation (Ryan, 2001, pp. 175-176). 'The Final Song' intensifies this tension by combining visual and sonic excess with a demand for timed response. It requires active perceptual alignment, since the visual field must be interpreted through rhythmic cueing and player action. This creates a form of immersion inseparable from discipline, timing, and vulnerability.

The sequence's spatial form also contributes to this perceptual demand. Nitsche's work on video game space is useful because it frames game environments as structures that players perceive, interpret, and act within (Nitsche, 2008, pp. 2-3). In 'The Final Song', the space no longer functions as a conventional navigable environment. It becomes pale, abstract, and stage-like. Bodies, rings, platforms, and visual cues are arranged less like ordinary scenery and more like components of a ritual diagram. This spatial transformation supports the sequence's shift from combat to audiovisual ceremony. Space becomes a medium of closure.

The player's structurally produced vulnerability also drives the sequence's narrative force. Juul's discussion of failure in games is useful because it emphasises that failure is experienced by the player, not only by a fictional character (Juul, 2013, p. 25). While this article does not present an empirical study of player experience, Juul's point helps clarify the design logic of 'The Final Song'. The ending's difficulty is not external to its meaning. The requirement to listen, anticipate, and respond correctly positions the player within a vulnerable perceptual relation to the audiovisual system. Closure is not granted automatically by reaching the final scene; it must be achieved through precise audiovisual participation.

Taken together, these perspectives allow 'The Final Song' to be examined as a visual-narrative ending constructed through audiovisual closure. Together, they provide a combined vocabulary for visual organisation, spatial and environmental logic, interactive sound, game endings, gameplay, immersion, and player vulnerability. The article therefore reads 'The Final Song' as a sequence in which ending is not merely represented as a story outcome but staged as a ritualised audiovisual event completed through coordinated perception and response.

Method and Case Context

This study examines 'The Final Song', the final rhythm sequence of *Drakengard 3*'s Branch D, as a focused case of visual-narrative and audiovisual closure. The method is a qualitative close multimodal visual analysis. This approach is appropriate because the sequence cannot be understood through still images alone, but it also should not be reduced to gameplay mechanics, soundtrack analysis, or plot summary. 'The Final Song' operates across several modes at once: monumental bodies, abstract spatial arrangements, visible timing cues, vocal-rhythmic structures, and player input. The analysis therefore examines how visual, sonic, spatial, and interactive elements work together to construct the ending.

The article's methodological position draws on game-analysis approaches that treat video games as playable, audiovisual, and rule-based objects. Aarseth argues that games should be examined through the relation among gameplay, game structure, and game world: the player's actions and strategies, the rule system, and the game's fictional-spatial content (Aarseth, 2004, pp. 2-3). This distinction is useful for 'The Final Song' because the sequence depends on all three dimensions. The player acts through timed input; the sequence follows rhythm-based rules; and the game world becomes an abstract audiovisual arena. Fernández-Vara's framework also supports this combined perspective by organising game analysis around context, game overview, and formal elements (Fernández-Vara, 2024, pp. 15-18).

The primary corpus consists of the author's complete successful screen recording encompassing 'The Final Song', the final rhythm sequence of *Drakengard 3*'s Branch D, played on *PlayStation 3*. The analysed recording begins with the confrontation immediately preceding the transition into the pale, abstract audiovisual arena and continues through the completion of the final timed input and the transition into the post-sequence ending scene. The recording lasts 10 minutes and preserves the game's complete visual and auditory output from a single successful attempt. From this recording, six screenshots were purposively selected and arranged into five figure units. These moments trace the sequence's visual-narrative progression from confrontation and spatial abstraction to monumental scale, audiovisual cueing, intensified attention, and ritualised closure. The sample is not intended to represent the whole of *Drakengard 3*, the game's broader combat system, or all possible player experiences. It is a focused audiovisual corpus designed to examine how one ending sequence organises visual form, sonic rhythm, and player response into a final narrative event. Accordingly, the study should be understood as an interpretive case analysis rather than an empirical reception study. Its claims concern the audiovisual and visual-narrative organisation of the selected sequence, not measurable player responses, general player experience, or the structure of all video game endings.

The timestamps used throughout the analysis are measured from the

beginning of the 10-minute recorded corpus, not from the full duration of *Drakengard 3*. The recording was reviewed repeatedly with sound to identify moments when visual organisation, sonic rhythm, interface cueing, and player response became analytically observable together. Screenshot selection was guided by four criteria: the moment marked a distinct transformation in visual or spatial organisation; made the relation among sound, visual cueing, and timed response observable; represented a distinct stage in the sequence's progression toward closure; or performed an analytical function not already represented by another selected frame. Visually striking but analytically repetitive frames were excluded. *Figure 1* contains two screenshots because its analytical purpose is comparative: the two frames make visible the transition from character-based confrontation to the pale, abstract audiovisual arena.

The final sample comprises six screenshots arranged into five figure units: the initial confrontation at 00:30; the transition into the pale, abstract city-space at 02:30; the appearance of a monumental Intoner-like body at 03:00; the alignment of the visual cue with the body and platform at 04:00; the overlapping rings, bodily forms, and cue sphere at 06:30; and the overhead ritual array at 08:00. These moments correspond respectively to confrontation, spatial abstraction, monumentality, audiovisual cueing, perceptual pressure, and ritualised closure. The figures are therefore treated as timestamped analytical samples from a continuous audiovisual sequence rather than as isolated aesthetic stills or decorative illustrations. This treatment is consistent with Ledin and Machin's definition of visual communication as materially designed wholes and their emphasis on turning such materials into analysable research data (Ledin & Machin, 2018, pp. 1-3, 8-10).

Each selected moment was entered into a compact audiovisual log and examined across four analytical categories: visual organisation, sound/rhythm function, perceptual-interactive demand, and role in closure. Visual organisation refers to composition, scale, salience, framing, and spatial relation; sound/rhythm function concerns the way sonic and rhythmic structures shape the temporal meaning of the image; perceptual-interactive demand identifies the forms of attention, anticipation, and timed response required from the player; and role in closure describes how the moment contributes to the sequence's progression toward narrative and audiovisual finality. *Table 1* summarises this procedure. It does not constitute a formal musical transcription or an empirical measurement of player experience; rather, it records how visual, sonic, spatial, and interactive elements operate together within the selected sequence.

Table 1. Analytical audiovisual log of selected screenshots from 'The Final Song'

Figure	Visual organisation	Sound/rhythm function	Perceptual-interactive demand	Role in closure
Figure 1	Initial confrontation followed by the transition into a pale, abstract city-space	Establishes the shift from a character-based narrative scene to a song-based audiovisual structure	Reorientation from observation toward timed attentiveness	Marks the transition from character-based encounter to ritualised visual space
Figure 2	Monumental Intoner-like body dominating the city-space	Vocal-rhythmic continuity gives temporal force to the enlarged body	Sustained attention to scale, gesture, and the surrounding cue environment	Communicates catastrophe through monumentality and symbolic excess
Figure 3	Visual cue integrated with the body, platform, and city-space	Sonic and rhythmic cueing makes the visual prompt actionable	Timed response based on sound-image synchronisation	Converts the image into a rhythmic prompt
Figure 4	Overlapping bodies, circular rings, and a cue sphere	Repetition and rhythmic continuity intensify perceptual demand	Maintenance of timing under increased visual density	Produces perceptual pressure and player vulnerability
Figure 5	Overhead arrangement of bodies, platforms, and circular structures	The repeated audiovisual structure becomes spatially legible	Completion through maintained rhythmic alignment	Frames closure as a ritualised audiovisual arrangement

Source: Prepared by the author from the 10-minute recorded gameplay corpus.

The case context requires a brief account of song within *Drakengard 3*. In the game's official premise, the Intoners are described as goddess-like sisters whose power is connected to the manipulation of magic through song, while Zero's attempt to kill her sisters with Mikhail's help structures the central conflict (Square Enix, 2013, para. 2). This context is important because 'The Final Song' does not introduce the song as a late decorative device. Instead, it intensifies a narrative principle the game has already established. The sequence gathers several of the game's central relations—song as power, body as site of catastrophe, Mikhail as the player's point of action, and Zero's conflict with the Intoners—into a final playable form. Song is therefore both thematic and operational: it belongs to the Intoners' fiction, but in the ending it also becomes the condition through which the player perceives, times, and completes closure.

Through this method, the article examines 'The Final Song' as a compact

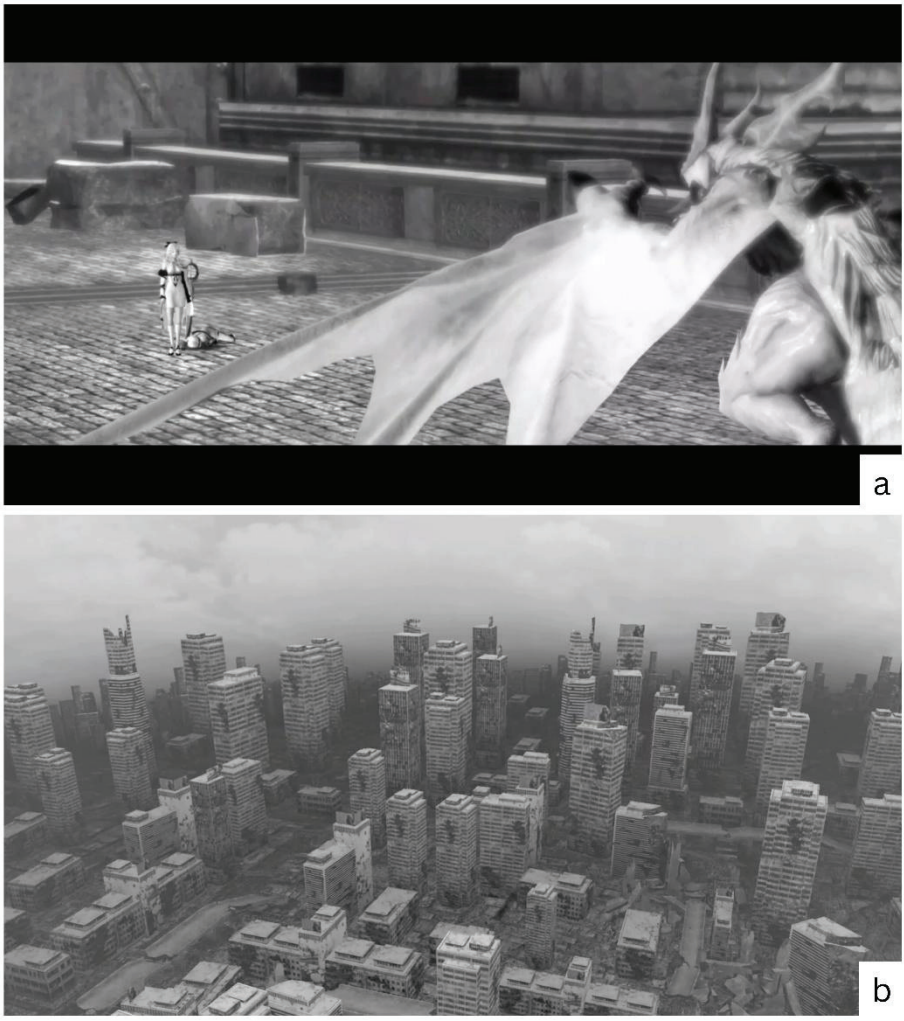
case of audiovisual narrative closure. The selected screenshots make visible the sequence's major visual operations: confrontation, abstraction, monumentality, cueing, overload, and ritual arrangement. The accompanying timestamped sound notes clarify how vocal rhythm, sonic cueing, and musical repetition shape the perception of these images. Together, these materials allow the article to argue that 'The Final Song' constructs the ending not only as a story outcome but also as a ritualised audiovisual event completed through perception, timing, and player response. The following analysis therefore follows the sequence not as a chronological plot summary, but as a progression of visual-communicative operations: abstraction, monumentality, cueing, perceptual pressure, and ritualised closure.

'The Final Song' as Ritualised Audiovisual Narrative

'The Final Song' begins with a recognisable scene of confrontation but gradually transforms it into a ritualised audiovisual structure. Rather than presenting narrative closure through explanation or cinematic resolution, the sequence reorganises the conditions through which the ending is perceived. Visual form, sonic cueing, rhythmic structure, and response are not separate layers in this sequence; they operate together as the means through which the ending becomes intelligible. In this sense, 'The Final Song' does not simply depict finality. It performs it through a sequence of visual and sonic demands.

At the beginning of the sequence, the visual field still carries traces of character-based narrative. Mikhail's position, Zero's body, and the surrounding space establish a relation between witness, body, and consequence. This opening moment anchors the sequence in the game's narrative world before it transforms into a more abstract audiovisual field. As *Figure 1* shows, the shift from the initial confrontation to the pale, reduced city-space marks the beginning of this transformation. What first appears as a narrative scene becomes a staged field of perception, where spatial clarity gives way to ritualised arrangement.

Figure 1. The transition from confrontation to ritualised visual space in 'The Final Song'. The sequence moves from a character-based encounter into a pale, abstract environment, preparing the ending as an audiovisual performance rather than a conventional battle. Screenshots from Drakengard 3 (Access Games, 2014), captured by the author from recorded gameplay at 00:30 (a) and 02:30 (b).



This transition is central to the article's argument because it shows that the sequence changes the mode of narrative communication. The ending is no longer organised primarily through dialogue, exposition, or ordinary combat movement. Instead, it establishes a space where visual form and rhythmic response become the main carriers of meaning. The pale space reduces environmental distraction and turns bodies, rings, and cues into dominant visual elements. In this respect, the game world is no longer treated as a neutral

background but as a perceptual structure through which the player makes sense of the ending (Nitsche, 2008, pp. 2-3). The sequence prepares the player to read the ending as a formal arrangement rather than as a normal gameplay arena.

The appearance of the monumental Intoner-like body intensifies this transformation. The body is enlarged beyond ordinary character scale and becomes a spatially dominant visual structure. This is not simply an increase in size. It changes the figure's function. The body is no longer only a character within a plot; it becomes an image of catastrophic force, voice, and ritual power. Its scale creates salience, and its placement reorganises the field around it. The figure becomes almost architectural, occupying the visual field as both body and environment.

Figure 2. Monumental scale and symbolic excess in 'The Final Song'. The enlarged body transforms the character figure into a visual sign of catastrophe, linking voice, body, and destruction through scale. Screenshot from Drakengard 3 (Access Games, 2014), captured by the author from recorded gameplay at 03:00.



Figure 2 is central to the analysis because it makes the sequence shift from character-based conflict to monumental symbolic form visible. Although the frame does not present a detached full-body view, scale is established through the figure's disproportionate relation to the city-space. The enlarged body occupies the visual field as a dominant form, while the city below functions as a spatial measure that makes the figure's magnitude legible. Catastrophe is therefore made visible not through explicit destruction alone, but through disproportion, dominance, and symbolic excess. In visual-narrative terms, scale becomes a means of communicating the movement from individual confrontation to world-scale catastrophe. The body's enlargement suggests the conflict has exceeded ordinary character relations and become a ritualised,

almost mythic event.

Figure 3 marks the next step in this transformation: the monumental visual field is connected to rhythm and player timing. The visible cue over the body is crucial because it shows how the ending turns image into timed perception. The cue is not only an interface element placed over the scene. It is integrated into the body-space relation and becomes part of the sequence's visual composition. The player must read the cue in relation to sound, rhythm, and bodily movement. This is where the ending's audiovisual logic becomes most explicit: the image is not simply looked at but listened to through.

Figure 3. Visual cueing and sound-image synchronisation in 'The Final Song'. The cue appears over the monumental body, making the image readable as a timed audiovisual prompt rather than a static visual composition. Screenshot from Drakengard 3 (Access Games, 2014), captured by the author from recorded gameplay at 04:00.



Figure 3 is especially important because it shows the visual cue as part of the same field as the body, platform, and city-space. Chion's concept of audiovisual 'added value' helps explain this moment because sound enriches and transforms an image's perceived meaning (Chion, 1994, p. 5). Here, sound does not merely accompany the visual cue. It gives the cue of temporal urgency and turns the image into something that must be acted upon. Perception is distributed across visual recognition, sonic cueing, and timed response. The cue is visual, but its function depends on rhythm. The sound is musical, but its meaning is inseparable from the image and the player's response.

This also distinguishes the sequence from a purely cinematic audiovisual scene. Interactivity and response shape game audio, not only linear synchronisation (Collins, 2008, p. 125). Collins's later account of interacting with sound is especially useful here because it emphasises the difference between simply listening to sound and engaging with sound as part of play (Collins, 2013, p.

4). Medina-Gray's discussion of interactive soundscapes further supports this point, since game sound can involve music, sound effects, dialogue, and player engagement as parts of an integrated audiovisual environment (Medina-Gray, 2021, p. 176). In 'The Final Song', the player does not only receive sound as atmosphere or emotional accompaniment. Sound becomes part of the playable structure. Progress through the sequence depends on responding to the audiovisual system's timing.

As *Figure 4* shows, repetition and visual density become central to the sequence's later phase. Bodies, rings, and circular forms begin to overlap, producing a visual field that is both ordered and difficult to parse. This is where the ending most clearly becomes a sustained perceptual task. The sequence requires continued attention to rhythm and cueing as the image becomes more complex and symbolically saturated. The repeated circular forms suggest rituals, but they also create pressure. The sequence positions the perception between visual spectacle and functional demand.

Figure 4. Repetition, circularity, and perceptual pressure in 'The Final Song'. The overlapping visual forms intensify the ending's ritual structure while increasing the player's dependence on rhythm, timing, and attention. Screenshot from Drakengard 3 (Access Games, 2014), captured by the author from recorded gameplay at 06:30.



This phase matters because it shows that the sequence's difficulty is not separate from its narrative meaning. The sequence produces player vulnerability through the combination of visual density and rhythmic precision. Although this analysis is based on a successful recording, the sequence's structure still depends on the possibility of failure. The sequence requires maintained attention, distinction between cue and spectacle, and timed response. Juul's account of failure in games helps clarify this position: failure is experienced by the player, not only by a fictional character (Juul, 2013, p. 25).

In 'The Final Song', closure is therefore not passively received; it is achieved through perceptual discipline.

This dynamic also shows why the sequence must be examined through the relation between gameplay, game structure, and game world. Aarseth's distinction is useful because it accounts for the player's action, the rule-based structure, and the game's fictional-spatial content together (Aarseth, 2004, pp. 2-3). In this moment, the game-world appears as an abstract ritual space, the game-structure is organised through rhythm and timing, and gameplay consists of precise perceptual response. The sequence cannot be fully understood by isolating any one dimension. Its narrative force emerges from their coordination.

Figure 5 gives the sequence its clearest ritual form. From this perspective, bodies, platforms, and circular structures become visible as a larger spatial composition. The image resembles a ritual diagram more than a conventional battlefield. This shift in viewpoint matters because it lets the sequence be seen as an organised whole. What has been experienced through pressure, timing, and repetition is now visible as a spatial and ceremonial structure.

Figure 5. The ending is a ritual array. The overhead composition organises bodies and platforms into a ceremonial visual structure, reinforcing the article's claim that closure is performed through audiovisual form. Screenshot from Drakengard 3 (Access Games, 2014), captured by the author from recorded gameplay at 08:00.



Figure 5 makes the sequence's ritualised audiovisual organisation most clearly legible. From the overhead viewpoint, bodies, platforms, rings, and spatial relations appear as components of a rule-bound arrangement rather than as elements of a conventional battlefield. The image does not constitute closure by itself; instead, it visualises the formal structure through which closure is produced across the sequence. Repetition, circularity, symbolic scale,

and timed participation converge into a single spatial order.

Herte's account of narrative digital game endings is useful here because game endings may conclude both storytelling and playthrough different formal processes (Herte, 2021, pp. 62-67). In the present analysis, gameplay completion refers to the player's successful fulfilment of the sequence's final timed demands. In contrast, narrative closure refers to the production of finality within the represented conflict and fictional world. These outcomes are conceptually distinct, but 'The Final Song' binds them together by making the continuation of the ending dependent on successful player performance. Audiovisual closure designates the formal mechanism connecting the two: visual arrangement, sonic rhythm, interface cueing, and player action are coordinated so that gameplay completion enables narrative finality.

Figure 5 therefore supports the claim that 'The Final Song' is more than a difficult rhythm-game challenge. Its difficulty becomes narratively significant because rule-bound performance is integrated into visual and audiovisual organisation. The player does not complete the ending through conventional combat mastery; instead, completion requires sustained alignment among sound, cueing, spatial arrangement, and timed response. The sequence consequently turns closure into an audiovisual process in which perception and action are formally coordinated.

Discussion: Visual Narrative as Perceptual Ending

The analysis demonstrates that 'The Final Song' communicates narrative finality by reorganising the player's relation to the game image. The selected moments do not function as autonomous representations of story events. Their meaning depends on temporal position, sonic rhythm, interface cueing, spatial transformation, and the action required from the player. The game image therefore operates as part of an audiovisual and interactive structure: it is not only viewed but also interpreted in relation to sound, anticipated as a timed prompt, and acted upon. This extends visual-narrative analysis beyond the isolated frame by showing how visual meaning may emerge through the coordination of perception and performance.

This finding has three principal implications for visual communication research. First, screenshots from digital games should not automatically be treated as self-contained visual units. A still image may reveal composition, scale, salience, and spatial hierarchy. Still, its communicative role may remain incomplete unless it is situated within the audiovisual sequence from which it was taken. Second, interface-like elements can participate in narrative construction rather than functioning only as operational instructions. In 'The Final Song', the visual cue directs player input, but it also connects the monumental body, rhythmic structure, and progression toward finality. Third, perceptual demand can itself function communicatively. The sequence produces meaning

not only through what it represents but also through how it organises attention, anticipation, instability, and response.

Sound is central to this organisation because it changes the image's temporal and functional status. Chion's concept of audiovisual 'added value' explains how sound may alter the expressive and informative force attributed to a visual event (Chion, 1994, p. 5). In this case, however, interactivity intensifies this relationship. The player must not only perceive the synchronisation of sound and image but respond to it. Collins's account of interactive game audio is therefore especially relevant: sound forms part of a playable system in which listening, anticipation, and action are interconnected (Collins, 2008, p. 125; Collins, 2013, pp. 2-4). The visual cue becomes actionable through rhythm, while the rhythm becomes narratively consequential through the player's response.

This relationship also clarifies the distinction between gameplay completion, narrative closure, and audiovisual closure. Gameplay completion concerns successful fulfilment of the sequence's timed and rule-bound demands. Narrative closure concerns the production of finality within the represented conflict and game world. Herte's account of narrative digital game endings is relevant because games may conclude storytelling and play through related but formally distinct processes (Herte, 2021, pp. 62-67). 'The Final Song' does not collapse these two forms of completion into a single concept; instead, it makes them interdependent. The narrative ending becomes accessible through successful play, while audiovisual closure describes the designed coordination of image, sound, interface, timing, and action through which that relationship is constructed.

The sequence's difficulty is consequently not external to its narrative meaning. Its visual density, rhythmic precision, delayed cues, and changing spatial arrangements place the player in a structurally vulnerable relation to the audiovisual system. Juul's discussion of failure is useful here because players experience failure rather than having it remain confined to the fictional character (Juul, 2013, p. 25). The present study does not claim to measure individual player experience, but the formal organisation of the sequence clearly establishes the possibility of failure as part of its design. Narrative finality is withheld until the player maintains the required perceptual and rhythmic alignment. Difficulty therefore becomes a communicative condition that makes closure contingent, uncertain, and performative.

These findings should be understood as transferable rather than broadly generalisable. 'The Final Song' is an unusually concentrated case, and the study does not claim that all video game endings construct closure through the same ritualised audiovisual structure. Its analytical value instead lies in making a broader design possibility especially visible: digital game endings may communicate finality through sensory coordination, interface organisation, spatial arrangement, and required player action, rather than through

exposition or cinematic resolution alone. This suggests that visual communication research can approach game images not only as representations or aesthetic frames but also as temporally situated components of systems that direct perception, structure action, and produce narrative meaning.

Conclusion

This article examined 'The Final Song', the final rhythm sequence of *Drakengard 3*'s Branch D, to determine how a video game ending may construct narrative closure through visual and audiovisual form. The analysis shows that the sequence produces finality by transforming a character-based confrontation into a rule-bound audiovisual performance. Spatial abstraction, monumental scale, visual cueing, rhythmic repetition, and changing perceptual demands progressively reorganise the player's relation to the game image. Narrative closure is therefore not delivered only through represented events or explanatory resolution; it is constructed through the player's sustained alignment with a coordinated system of image, sound, timing, and action.

The findings also clarify the relationship between narrative closure, gameplay completion, and audiovisual closure. Gameplay completion occurs when the player successfully fulfils the sequence's timed and rule-bound demands, whereas narrative closure concerns the production of finality within the represented conflict and game world. 'The Final Song' keeps these outcomes conceptually distinguishable while making them formally interdependent. Audiovisual closure names the mechanism connecting them: visual organisation, sonic rhythm, interface cueing, and player response are arranged so that successful performance enables the narrative ending to proceed. The sequence thus turns closure from an outcome merely presented to the player into a process that must be perceptually and performatively completed.

For visual communication and visual-narrative research, this case demonstrates that game images cannot always be understood adequately as autonomous frames or illustrations of narrative content. Their communicative function may depend on when they appear, how they are synchronised with sound, how interface elements direct attention, and what action they require from the player. A visual cue, monumental body, or circular spatial arrangement therefore communicates not only through its representational content but also through its temporal and operational position within the playable sequence. This expands the analytical scope of visual communication by treating digital game images as components of systems that can organise perception, regulate response, and participate directly in the production of narrative meaning.

Methodologically, the study shows the value of examining timestamped screenshots together with their audiovisual and interactive contexts. The compact audiovisual log connected each selected moment to its visual organ-

isation, sound/rhythm function, perceptual-interactive demand, and role in closure. This procedure does not replace direct gameplay analysis, nor does it constitute a formal musical transcription or an empirical account of player experience. Instead, it provides a focused means of preventing screenshots from being interpreted as decontextualised still images. In this respect, the procedure may support future visual analyses of playable media in which image, interface, sound, timing, and required action operate as interconnected modes of communication.

The study remains limited to one ending sequence, one successful 10-minute recording, and an interpretive analysis of six screenshots arranged into five figure units. It does not examine failed attempts, compare different routes or video game endings, or measure how individual players have trouble, ritualisation, or closure. Future research could compare endings that coordinate narrative finality and player performance in different ways, examine how failed and successful attempts alter the perception of closure, or combine multimodal visual analysis with player-reception research. Within the scope of the present case, however, 'The Final Song' demonstrates that a video game ending may communicate finality by structuring not only what the player sees but also how the player listens, anticipates, and acts.

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Ethics committee approval: There is no need for ethics committee approval.
Conflict of interest: There are no conflicts of interest to declare.
Financial support: No funding was received for this study.

Etik Kurul Onayı: Etik kurul onayına ihtiyaç bulunmamaktadır.
Çıkar çatışması: Çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
Finansal destek: Finansal destek bulunmamaktadır.