Analyzing Walking Simulators

Video game scores are often interactive and almost always dynamic. Composers typically write in loops and modules to permit the player any timing they require during their play session. Some games do not employ such sensitivity to the player's choices and prefer a static score instead. One genre rests in the gray area between dynamic and static. Walking simulators, also termed "visual narration" or "interactive narration," are games without winning or losing or much in the way of mechanics. Without goals, danger, actions, or the need to react to anything, there is widespread discussion whether or not they qualify as "video games" at all. Indeed, they resemble virtual sound walks. Regardless of their name, they pose a problem to video game music theorists: how does one analyze a fixed score without fixed gameplay? In this paper, I will draw from soundscape and sound walk theories from Steven Feld, R. Murray Schafer, and Hildegarde Westerkamp to build a foundation of analytical techniques that apply to soundwalks. Next, I will draw from video game music conventions and theories to account for walking simulators' characteristics that they share with video games rather than traditional soundwalks. I apply this new approach to *Leaving Lyndow* to synthesize a method of analysis appropriate for walking simulators ranging from *Dear Esther* to *Lifeless Planet* to the *Drizzlepath* series.