

Art and narrative:

music and colours in the video game 'Gris'

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ABSTRACT

Creating a specific methodology to analyse the music in video games remains a challenge to this day. Concepts taken from cinema or other linear media are insufficient as both the characteristics of the medium (interactivity and non-linearity) and the huge variety of genres and formats prevent the creation of a universal method for all video games. In this sense, the most viable option may be to create a methodology that can be adapted according to the genre or mechanics of the game in question. To contribute to this field of study, this article presents the analysis of a relatively linear video game using methodological tools traditionally applied to linear audiovisual resources, at the same time as terminology used in the study of interactive audiovisuals. The video game chosen is *Gris* (2018), produced by the Barcelona studio Nómada. It follows in the wake of other video games generally considered to be artistic, such as *Journey* or *Limbo*, in which the narration and the visual and musical aesthetics are all essential elements. The visual style of *Gris* was determined by illustrator Conrad Roset and its music composed by the group Berlinist. Both create synergies between music and image, highlighting the use of colour above all. This article therefore seeks to delve into the relationship established between music and colour and to contemplate to what extent the game can be considered a work of art.

Introduction

A few years have now passed since music studies in audiovisual media laid the foundations for a methodological analysis applicable to productions in this field. Authors have proposed various methodologies, and it is certainly true that nowadays the issue of analysing the relationship between soundtrack and audiovisuals is no longer a challenge. This progress has allowed many academics to consider going further and to question what should happen in the case of new media, such as video games. Despite being a gradually expanding field, the huge variety of genres and formats make it fairly challenging to provide a unified and valid methodology for all typologies of video game. Should we consider a method of analysis based on whether it is a racing, adventure or fighting game? Or should the variable be the degree of interaction or linearity of the game? These are some of the questions researchers face when entering this rich and immense world and it is highly unlikely that these questions will be answered in a single article. Nonetheless, it may be possible to go some way towards unravelling this spider web, and this is the aim of the present article: to propose a way of analysing a video game. For this reason, the game chosen as a case study is not too far from what would be considered a traditional audiovisual product. *Gris* is an adventure game with a platform format that has been qualified by many critics as an “artistic video game” (Harmon, 2018). The creators do not hide the fact that they were inspired by other video games considered to be artistic, such as *Ori and the Blind Forest* (2015) and *Journey* (2012) (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). In these games, the story and the visual and musical aesthetics are all essential elements. In the case of *Gris*, the aesthetic is determined by Conrad Roset’s illustrations, while the music by the band Berlinist is characterized by the dream-pop style mixing acoustic and electronic instruments.

Why is this video game a good starting point for proposing an analysis methodology in this format? The answer is straightforward; it presents a linear story, in which there are no remarkable variations between the experiences of different players. All players hear the same music combined with the same images, with only slight variations, making it closer to a traditional linear audiovisual. It also presents an experience that is difficult to transfer to film or television, this being the artistic component. We are unlikely to come across a film in which viewers spend hours looking at an image, delighting at the illustrations and the music that accompanies them; or at a narrative level, a storyline that does not conform to the Aristotelian model of setup-conflict-resolution – even less so one structured in five stages, each represented with a different colour. This article specifically emphasizes these two points – the artistic component and the relationship between narration and colours – as well as establishing the synergies between music and image. The article is divided into three main sections: a state of the art regarding music in video games, which includes a brief overview of the bibliography on this topic. Representative terminology used for traditional audiovisual resources is also called upon, to which ter-

minology from interactive audiovisuals is added. Subsequently, the video game *Gris* is introduced and its creators, the video game production process, and its background considered. The second section presents an analysis of the video game, underlining the storyline and its relationship with the five-stage process of overcoming pain. This analysis combines chronological description of the video game's development and the role played by music. Finally, the article ends with the discussion and conclusions, which highlight *Gris*'s contributions in terms of video game music and to what extent the game can be considered an artistic experience.

State of the art. Music in video games

Since the publication of *Game Sound* by Karen Collins in 2008, a relatively small number of articles and books have appeared related to music in video games. This is probably due to several factors, the main one being the difficulty of analysing their music. It is certainly difficult to take notes while playing or to consider all the different options a video game may offer. Moreover, as mentioned, the video game sector includes a wide variety of formats and genres, making it difficult to systematize a study method in such a vast field. Although not an easy task, new articles and books are regularly published, such as the compilation by Kamp, Summer and Sweeney (2016), and articles in journals focusing on the subject, such as this one. Numerous books have also been written as manuals for composers, clarifying some key aspects and terms used in the sector. Examples include *A Composer's Guide to Game Music* (2014) by Winifred Phillips and *Writing Interactive Music for Video Games: A Composer's Guide* (2014) by Michael Sweet. Beyond these publications, Summers' *Understanding Video Game Music* (2016) lays a foundation and shows the wide variety of possible analytic perspectives for video games. The author proposes a theoretical framework for research in the field of video game music, combining traditional musical analysis methods with new approaches suitable for the digital medium.

Since a relatively linear video game was chosen for the present study, the analysis can be rooted in a much more developed field of study: film. From here, a comparison has been drawn to differentiate one format from the other.

Common audiovisual vocabulary

To begin with, the article uses specific terms taken from film which are perfectly applicable in this context. Among them, the acronym MS (musical soundtrack) will be used to refer to the music heard in the context of the video game, and FM (film music), to refer to the recorded edition of the music created for an audiovisual product, as suggested by Lluís i Falcó (1995)¹. Other musical terms used for linear audiovisual products that can also be

¹ During conferences, the author has acknowledged that this terminology needs to be revisited, among other things, because it does not make sense to talk exclusively about film music given that music is created for more audiovisual formats. However, in the absence of a more up-to-date reference, this terminology will be used for the present paper.

applied to video games are the concepts of diegetic and extradiegetic music (Fraile Prieto, 2008, p. 34). The *leitmotif*, that is, a musical motif associated with a character, plot or a particular aspect of a work of fiction is a widely accepted compositional formula also used in video games. Finally, it is worth mentioning a concept deeply rooted in the field of animation and, therefore, in video games, that of *mickeymousing*, which refers to the musical accentuation of movements or gestures that can be seen on screen.

Differences between interactive and non-interactive audiovisuals

The first thing to keep in mind when comparing film and video games is the importance of technological development. Early videogames could only afford minimal sound, so composers had to work with what little they had (Collins, 2008, p. 9). This was the fundamental reason they opted for simple and repetitive melodies that were easy to remember. Nowadays, with this hurdle behind us, there is a certain absence of melodies (Game Score Fanfare, 2019). Even though most of the initial limitations have disappeared, composer Olivier Deriviere² says the mechanics of the game and technological development remain of central importance. For example, in the fighting scenes of the game *Remember Me* (2013)³, the composer had the idea of creating a series of back to back musical fragments to indicate the fight status (whether the player is winning or losing). This was feasible because the technology allowed such adaptability and because the composer himself decided to implement it, as Deriviere confirms. This constantly changing music makes sense in an action game, in which the music must adapt to its development. In contrast, in graphic adventure games such as *Myst* (1993)⁴, the music takes place in a space regardless of the actions of the player. In this way, the player has the necessary peace (or a certain amount of tension, depending on the case) to solve the puzzles in the game.

Another element that distances video games from film is the response of the recipient. When watching a film, the spectator is a passive subject, while a video game player is an active subject. This implies that each player's experience will be personal, different and unique. In the case of film, on the other hand, all the spectators will see the same story told in the identical way. The implications of this fundamental difference in the music are innumerable. This is precisely the central point made by Collins' (2008), who distributes the types of music according to their level of interaction in the following way:

- *Interactive audio* sounds that appear as a reaction to the player's action.
- *Adaptative audio* sounds adapted to the development of the game (the sounds are activated after a certain time or when passing through specific spaces).

2 All the statements attributed to Deriviere are taken from a personal videocall recorded on May 18, 2020.

3 *Remember Me* is an action-adventure video game with music by Olivier Deriviere.

4 In *Myst*, the player can move the character by clicking the mouse wherever they want. They can also interact with specific objects just by clicking on them. There are no enemies in this type of game, instead there is a set of puzzles that must be solved.

- *Dynamic audio* combines interactive and adaptive sound.
- *Nondynamic audio* sounds that exist in a specific space but that are not influenced by the actions of the player.

Although this is an interesting theory, it presents certain ambiguities that make it difficult to use. In fact, when video game composer Deriviere was asked about this terminology, he admitted he was not familiar with it (Deriviere, 2020). This contrasts with composers' use of the terms *leitmotif* or *mickeymousing*. This lack of communication between academia and the professional world prevents such terminology from becoming established and raises the question of how useful it really is if composers are not aware of it. In this sense, Deriviere suggests, for example, differentiating between illustrative music and reactive music (Deriviere, 2020). In a video game, illustrative music would be limited to illustrating what is happening, whether it is an action or a love scene. On the contrary, reactive music would respond to the player's actions. A simple example of this idea can be found in the game *Life is Strange* (2015), in which the player has the option of playing a specific album or song while they look around.

For Berlinist, the band behind the MS for *Gris*, the difference between film and video games lies in the role of the player and how music often serves as a guide:

Musically speaking, in addition to the different technical process and mechanics that a video-game OST requires, the role of the player is also essential for us as we must guide them, make them feel as a part of the experience, and know when to stress and minimise the musical component (Madarasi, 2019).

Other terminology used by composers is also relevant, such as the term *loops*. In order to avoid repetition becoming tedious for the player, the composer adds layers or produces variations, which dilute the feeling of reiteration. This action of adding layers is called *additive* music according to composer Christian Henson (Spitfire Audio, 2018). Finally, it is worth noting the *trigger*, which can be defined as any event in the game that sets off the music. According to Oscar Osicki (Inside the Score, 2020), a good trigger should not be too obvious as it may distract the player or bring down the game's fourth wall. Good use of layers can often be used to disguise a trigger, says Osicki (2020).

'Gris', an artistic video game

Studio and creators

Gris is a platform adventure game developed by Nómada, a studio founded by Roger Mendoza and Adrián Cuevas, developers with many years of experience in large studios such as Ubisoft Montreal and IO Interactive, where they were involved in developing games such as *Assassin's Creed* (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). The artistic

side of the studio is provided by illustrator Conrad Roset, known for his watercolours and who has a background in advertising. 79% of the team had never worked on a video game before and some were not even gamers. This was not a coincidence, since the creators' goal was to create an artistic experience accessible to everyone, regardless of whether or not they were gamers (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). This means that the dynamics of the game may seem simple or too easy for more experienced gamers, and this is reflected by some of the comments on social networks⁵.

As previously mentioned, the music was composed by Berlinist, a band from Barcelona started in 2011 by Marco Albano (piano and vocals), Luigi Gervasi (harmonium) and Gemma Gamarra (vocals). Their discography is characterized by delicate pieces of dream-pop blending acoustic instrumentation with electronic processes.

The band joined the studio at the request of Conrad Roset, who had previously heard their music and thought they could provide the right musical setting for the video game (Montoliu, 2019). Berlinist had no previous experience in composing for video games, but one of their members (Marco Albano) was a keen gamer so the group eagerly accepted the challenge.

The background to 'Gris'

When asked about their influences, the game's creators cite *Journey*, *Limbo* and *Ori and the Blind Forest* (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park). Even though Roger Mendoza and Adrián Cuevas both mainly refer to the visual and plot aspects of the video game, there are some common points in these games at the musical level.

Journey is an adventure video game developed by the independent American studio Thatgamecompany and released in 2012 for PlayStation. The plot follows a traveller's journey through a vast desert as they try to reach the top of a mountain, exploring the ruins of an ancient civilization along the way.

Aside from the music, composed by Austin Wintory, the gameplay is silent, with only visual and musical elements guiding the player. For this reason, it is one of the most studied video games among scholars and academics. It is also an online game in which the player must interact with other players all over the world solely through music. A detailed analysis of the video game shows that instrumentation is added within a given scene depending on whether the main player is alone or with someone else. In fact, this study uses the analytic model proposed by Zúñiga Jokela (2013) as an example, this being a thesis which analyses the game's development in parallel with the musical elements that interact and enrich the story.

Limbo is a logic platform video game developed by the independent Danish studio Playdead and released in 2010 for Xbox Live Arcade. The plot follows the experiences of

⁵ "For me, an exquisitely beautiful experience, but a terribly basic/mundane game. I think in this instance the presentation is absolutely the sole entry ticket, because the gameplay feels barebones and simplistic". Tommy Millar [Nombre de usuario] (2019, January 19) Comentarios del vídeo de Youtube *The Animation of Gris*. (Video Game Animation Study, 2018).

a child looking for his sister in a sinister environment. The game stands out for its monochrome graphics, ambient sounds and minimalist mechanics, which led to it being classified as an “artistic video game”. Martin Stig Andersen composed the MS based on his experience with acousmatic music, which results from the mix of sounds.

Ori and the Blind Forest is a platform adventure game designed by Moon Studios, an independent developer. At its launch, the video game was acclaimed by critics and gamers who lauded its system of play, artistic style, story, action sequences and ambient design (Hoss, 2014). The music was created by British composer Gareth Coker, and is entirely orchestral. This MS is the most reminiscent of music that may be heard in an animated film.

'Gris' case study

The plot of 'Gris'

The story revolves around a girl named Gris, who wakes up in the palm of a statue. She begins to sing but loses her voice and the statue's hands crumble, dropping her into a colourless space. When she begins to walk around, she discovers ruins that seem to be powered by points of light. The player soon finds that collecting these lights gives the character new skills and creates new pathways made of constellations of stars.

After reaching Meridian⁶, a building that resembles a temple, the girl can travel to four new locations to collect lights and bring the colour back to her world. These include a red desert, a green forest, blue underwater caverns, and a city littered with yellow lights. Along the way she meets various creatures. Some of them help her during the journey but others, such as shadowy birds or eels, threaten to eat her.

When she has gathered enough stars to form a path to the sky, the girl's final destination is blocked by the creature. However, she begins to sing, and the statue starts to rebuild itself through the power of her voice. The girl and the statue embrace and the game ends when Gris climbs up the constellation she has been building throughout the game.

A personal journey

Although the concepts of *Gris* and *Journey* are similar in that the main character must overcome obstacles as they travel through the game, Joseph Campbell's *Journey* is an example of a hero's quest, whereas *Gris* is based on Kübler-Ross's model of the grief process (Elizabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation, 2020a). This is no secret; as levels are unlocked throughout the game there is a clear correlation between them and the Kübler-Ross model. In fact, in an interview, the creators said that the game is about a character trying to overcome depression (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). To this end, they based the game on the five stages of processing a loss or depression: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, as authors such as Friedman and James or Maciejew-

⁶ The name Meridian appears on the *Gris* FM, since no name is given to the places the character runs through during playthrough. It can be heard at: <https://open.spotify.com/track/4VjyBWppQzuQh2XNiYvwxb>

ski have pointed out, the lack of experimental evidence for this theory makes its veracity questionable. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the model from being used countless times in popular culture (Elizabeth Kübler Ross Foundation, 2020b) and in the video game discussed here.

In *Gris*, the model is made visual through specific colours, each of them representing the character's state of mind. Between each stage/colour there are recurring elements that mark the transition between worlds. These include a colour change that occurs every time *Gris* reaches the statue, which is ever more complete, and the stone figure is accompanied by the motif that *Gris* sang a cappella during the cinematic at the start of the game. Instruments are added to each new version of the motif, thus indicating that *Gris* is getting closer to her goal. The four FM tracks linked to this scene relate to elements of the game that appear in the levels *Gris* unlocks: *Lift*⁷ for Red, *Opaque*⁸ for Green, *Symmetry*⁹ for Blue and *Sparks*¹⁰ for Yellow.

The temple of Meridian, a meeting point between worlds, also indicates the changes that are taking place. This location is also where we see the path to the sky that the character must create using constellations of stars, and how she builds it bit by bit. On a musical level, however, the piece heard is always exactly the same. This stability within the change was probably conceived as a way to remind the player that they have returned to the same location since it may be unrecognizable because of the constant modifications.

As will be seen throughout the analysis, music has a similar function in *Gris* to in *Journey*: to make up for the absence of dialogue or text that helps the player understand the dynamics. It is the music that indicates the progress of the game during each stage and that comments on the character's emotions. The game is therefore almost unplayable and incomprehensible without music.

Denial: Black and White

This is one of the shortest stages of the game. In it, the player discovers some of the game mechanics, such as collecting stars in order to create constellations and jump from one space to the next. After a simple puzzle, the character comes across the hand of the statue. Thus begins the first stage of the game: the colour red, or anger.

At this stage, the music indicates that *Gris* can start to move through the game. While there is no music, the character walks very slowly and stumbles easily. As soon as the music starts, the player realizes they can continue in a normal way. The *animatto* rhythm of the piano encourages the player to run, contrasting with the quiet moments immediately beforehand.

Anger: Red

This stage begins in Meridian which, as mentioned, is always accompanied by the same

7 <https://open.spotify.com/track/2LcPmyfnKpSk5SB5FPJQbn>

8 <https://open.spotify.com/track/4CCCqWJfC3W9YZfiY1doOw>

9 <https://open.spotify.com/track/1azM3gGpZzkHRYFYX1RumV>

10 <https://open.spotify.com/track/4y9ae01qaJGOF1fywu8IO6>

musical track. The first motif associated with Red does not start until the character begins to descend a slope. In this scene the player can only watch and enjoy the music and images before them. The beginning of the motif is reminiscent of the one heard during the first level; a theme mainly driven by a piano with accelerating ascending chords. In this case, a new layer of violins is added, which uses long, slow notes to give the track depth. This establishes the character's progress. The first motif ends when the character reaches the bridge, and silence accompanies her until she climbs the tower. At the top of this building the previous motif ends and Gris's main motif (*Incipit*¹¹ on the FM) is introduced. This motif will return every time Gris gets closer to her goal.

There are then a few more seconds of silence until *Perseverance*¹² (on the FM) begins. This track features a slow and deliberate piano, giving the barest outline of a melody. Suddenly, the ominous sound of an organ appears, which coincides with a storm that prevents the character from continuing. This is the fragment in which the music is most interrelated with the mechanics of the game; on hearing the first notes of the organ, the player realizes they need to find shelter and wait until the storm passes. In fact, according to the creators, this fragment was based on the music (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). The decision to use an organ was also deliberate and Berlinist explains why it is the main instrument in this section:

We liked it because for us it is an instrument that represents the invisible air that fills the spaces and moves the wind. The organ could reproduce the concept of paralysis and movement at the same time. In the ruins, it fills the spaces; in the desert, it moves the main character. It is always there and is an optimal way to convey the player's emotions depending on how it sounds (Berlinist, 2020).

This dynamic continues until Gris gains her first power: to turn into a block of stone. This will allow her to cross the last stretch of desert. In fact, a change in the organ melody indicates that this storm is unlike previous ones and that the character will have to face it to continue. With each step, the music intensifies and layers are added, representing the wind that tries to prevent the character advancing. After overcoming this obstacle, the organ disappears and Gris enters the cave of "denial", decorated with women hiding their faces, and the Gris motif is heard again on violins.

From here the player enters a new space featuring windmills and clocks. The concept seems to be significant here, as music reinforces this idea with distorted effects that make it sound as though it is being played backwards. This may be part of the character's denial, as she refuses to let time pass. However, as the character progresses on her journey, the music departs from this effect and the rhythm begins to accelerate. In this way, Gris final-

11 <https://open.spotify.com/track/3ycQaTzqpCH8Ys33DjeKPJ>

12 <https://open.spotify.com/track/5naAIP8Bi485QEXR6w6Izw>

ly manages to set denial aside and take a step forward in her grieving process.

Bargaining: Green

The main characteristic of the track (*Komorebi*¹³ on the FM) that floods this new space – the forest – is the peace it transmits. The slow notes seem to imitate the character's walk through the woods. Then, when a little robot begins to follow Gris, the cello enters, reflecting their friendship. This is a strategy similar to that used in *Journey*, in which a viola is heard every time a companion appears (Zúñiga Jokela, 2013). When Gris's travelling companion says goodbye for the first time, the player might think he would not be seen again were it not for two unresolved ascending notes played on the cello. Nevertheless, Gris goes back down to the caves where her friend lives, and he rewards her with a star. From here, Green begins to disappear and return to Red, while the music becomes a mere echo. *Komorebi* does not reappear until Gris gets a second star. Red, once again, coexists with Green.

When Gris gains a new power, the double-jump, the music gives way to the organ, with a slow, ceremonial tempo. The character continues upwards, until she meets the first enemy that she must "confront". This is a bird made of black butterflies that previously appeared in the anger stage. In this fragment, the music changes entirely and creates a tension that would be difficult to maintain throughout the entire scene, since the game mechanics prevent the character from dying. The player is never therefore in any real danger of losing or going backwards by not evading or attacking the bird at the right time. However, the abrupt change to strong musical dynamics, staggered notes and a fast pace causes tension for the player. The music also makes the player aware that danger is still lurking, as there are times when the music maintains its intensity despite the bird not being visible. Creating this precedent also serves to disorient the player, since later on the music disappears, leaving an uncertain silence. The player cannot therefore be sure whether the music has faded out because the enemy is not going to return, or whether they are being misled.

It is also worth noting that Gris cannot get rid of the bird until she makes a bell ring. This is the first time that diegetic music has appeared since the beginning of the game, when Gris sings. The bell is the determining factor in defeating this demon. In addition, as we will see, the bird is a representation of Gris's inner demons, who try to prevent her from progressing through her recovery process, and music is the element that will help her defeat them.

After passing this test, Gris is able to get back to the statue, which is gradually being rebuilt. At this moment, the player also becomes aware that, just like the statue, the music is also more complete: it includes percussion, choirs and cymbals. With this bold music, Blue is introduced.

13 *Komorebi* in Japanese, means "sun rays that filter through the leaves of the trees." According to Berlinist, the Japanese names were chosen because the game has many ties to the Studio Ghibli imagery and because some words such as *Komorebi* express concepts on their own. (Berlinist, 2020). <https://open.spotify.com/track/6X3XKLMWHQys2tMe5uIw7S>

Depression: Blue

This stage begins with the sound of rain and music is not heard again until the character is underwater. When it begins, the track used is *Komorebi*¹⁴ since Gris is once again journeying through forest landscapes, now enveloped in rain. This time, however, the track does not play on a loop as Gris walks through the woods, instead changing into a new track titled *Rain*¹⁵ as soon as it finishes. This new motif is based on synthesizers and uses an echo effect as if representing the reflection of the water. The music is also distorted so that it sounds “opaque” when Gris is underwater.

This first stage of Blue ends when Gris returns to Meridian, where the motif appears again. In this second stage, the player supposedly descends to the depths of Gris’s subconscious as we see her dive into an increasingly dark underwater world. The track on the FM for this stage is appropriately called *Descent*¹⁶. In fact, Gris’s new power consists of being able to move like a fish and to descend even further. In this fragment, the piano and synthesizers predominate. Again, sonic distortion is used to give the effect of being reversed, as if the character was going backwards in her recovery process. In this section, the player must solve one of the most complicated puzzles in the game, which is made up of several challenges. This is one of the few places the character has to go around several times to solve them all, although some are easier than others. Not until Gris is about to pass the final test does the music stop looping and introduce her motif. At this point, the coordination between the player’s movements and the music is not too well synchronized: if the player arrives at the meeting point before Gris’s motif ends, the music simply stops. Once the character reaches the meeting point, the central shape turns into a turtle that helps her continue in the dark. Here, a new motif appears (with no version available on the FM). This is related to the previous one but has a stronger rhythm, drawing the player onwards.

In this way, Gris is reunited with the statue, which now has a face. During this transition, the player hears a voice similar to Gris’s in the cinematic at the start of the game. It brings with it the last colour of the game: Yellow.

Acceptance: Yellow

This stage begins differently from the others. As soon as Gris manages to unlock the colour Yellow, the shadow reappears, this time turning into an eel that tries to eat her. Once again, it is the music that generates tension for the player, as if the controls are set aside, it soon becomes obvious that the character is on autopilot and there is no real danger of dying. Music not only helps to generate tension here, it also gives the player a false sense of security in the interlude when the eel disappears. The calm music encourages the player to relax

14 <https://open.spotify.com/track/4Ljxr8XrVAVNEUwvhGO9PW>

15 <https://open.spotify.com/track/3XHEC8nVkVaiW67GCmOu9R>

16 <https://open.spotify.com/track/5vtF3FsdToNb3EUFJPchTG>

(although the drum roll indicates that the danger has not entirely disappeared), enabling the eel to take the player by surprise. This time there is nothing Gris can do except run away and wait for the turtle – who will help her get back to dry land – to rescue her.

Henceforth, Gris retraces the path travelled during the Blue stage, accompanied by a track titled *Ascension*¹⁷. The piece is in a minor mode and has a slow tempo, with long, slurred notes. The piano is hardly audible, and synthesizers and strings predominate.

Gris returns to Meridian, the music unchanged despite the city being more complete. For this level, she needs her three powers: breaking things, jumping and swimming. A new space appears as a magical city lit up with yellow lights. The music seems designed to represent night-time since it emulates a lullaby, with a slow tempo and sounds similar to a glockenspiel or xylophone.

This new level also poses a new level of difficulty; it is a reflected world in which the player must guide Gris through an upside down space, while music adds a layer of distorted sounds and echoes. This sound layer is added or removed depending on whether the space is normal or upside down.

Soon, Gris will discover her last and most eagerly anticipated power: singing. The phrase she sings will be longer or shorter depending on how long the player holds down the button. The ability to sing allows Gris to breathe life into the world around her – flowers, birds, or mechanical creatures.

At the end of the level, extra content is available for players who have collected all the stars. A secret grotto opens in Meridian which allows access to a memory of Gris with her mother (the statue at the beginning). Thanks to this fragment, the player learns that the stars are something that mother and daughter share. Yet the music, through the use of distorted and reversed sound, indicates that the scene is a memory of the past. In this way, the game leads players to understand that Gris is on a personal journey as she tries to come to terms with the loss of her mother.

Before taking the final step, the shadow again appears, accompanied by tense music that warns of danger. Here the player sees that the shadow is actually Gris herself and her reluctance to overcome her pain.

The ending: all the colours

In this final stage, musical silence and black and white colours reign again. Gris climbs the broken statue until she reaches the hand and she rebuilds it with her voice. Although singing means Gris being consumed by her own darkness, the memory of her mother also responds to her singing, casting aside the black and white world and allowing the colours to return. Thus, the statue finally helps Gris reach the constellation of stars she has created throughout the game to climb to the heavens. Meanwhile, the voices of mother and daughter, accompanied by Gris's footsteps through the stars, allow the character to reach her

¹⁷ <https://open.spotify.com/track/4HTpDwckdexJSbRaY5hagG>

destination.

Discussion

As the analysis has shown, music has several functions in *Gris*: it emphasizes the emotions of the main character, warns of danger, gives the player information, misleads them, and adds meanings. According to Berlinist, colours were used to define each space as a way to identify each musical tonality with a specific colour, as proposed by some synaesthesia tables. However, we have established that firstly, the distinction between tonalities is not something most players notice; and secondly, some tracks are heard in more than one space, such as *Komorebi*, which can be heard in both Green and Blue; in addition to the fact that the Meridian motif does not modulate in any of the stages. To summarize, even though the music achieves the objectives required by the game, synchronization errors can sometimes be detected (as in the Blue stage, in which *Gris*'s theme may or may not be heard) and its presence only affects the mechanics of the game on rare occasions, such as when the organ warns of the approaching storm. Thus, in terms of innovation, the analysis of *Gris* does not reveal a particularly ground-breaking game regarding the use of music. That said, it is also worth asking whether this was ever its creators' main goal. The answer to this is probably the same as the response to those who complain about the simplicity of the game's mechanics or its puzzles, which is that it was not their goal to be eminently innovative. Ultimately, the emphasis in this game is on art, and it is certainly true that particular scenes in which *Gris* is limited to walking or descending a hill would be dull without the music (Canòdrom Creative Industries Research Park, 2019). Berlinist use the metaphor of an art gallery to hint at the purpose of their music in the game:

We have always thought about music naturally filling the landscape (and not being as mechanical as in other platform games) and giving the feeling that the character is breathing together with it. This was done by considering each space as a painting hanging in an art gallery in which music could make you travel without moving. We included some musical elements to interrupt this peace and make the player understand that they could lose control at any moment (Berlinist, 2020).

In this way, we once again find a characteristic of a video game that is difficult to apply to a traditional audiovisual resource: the ability to allow players to enjoy the space as if it were a painting. In a linear audiovisual product, time is defined. No matter how much the director wants to recreate certain scenes or construct shots similar to a painting, it is they who decide how long viewers will spend watching a scene. In *Gris*, however, the player chooses what they want to see and for how long. And music, art that lives in real time, can remain with us on an infinite loop

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, I put forward a relatively simple challenge: to provide tools for video game analysis based on a case study. In order to make use of the terminology and knowledge provided by previous research into film and television, a linear video game, *Gris*, was chosen. But video games are still an interactive type of audiovisual product, and it was necessary to take this into account to develop the analysis. For this reason, the work in the field of video games has been reviewed and analysis of other games taken as an example.

On this basis, a chronological analysis of the game has been carried out, highlighting the role of music in its development. From this study, I have shown that the music is used in an appropriate way but does not provide any notable innovations. What is more, one of the original proposals of this article, the relation between music and colours, has proven to be one of the least relevant aspects of the video game. However, moving away from the canonical expectations of video games and revisiting Berlinist's point of view, which considers the game as "an art gallery" that has been "filled with music", provides a different perspective. The music not only guides or accompanies the player, it also invites them to play around with their own experience. This approach is hardly comparable with a traditional audiovisual product, in which the viewer is unable to recreate or lengthen a scene as they wish. In a video game, the player decides how to direct their experience, how much to lengthen or shorten it, and can even relive it in different ways if they so wish.

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