Music, interaction and *cinematicability*: between *Bound* and *Abzû*

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ABSTRACT

Videogames, being an audio-visual media which makes use of presentation and visual techniques mainly linked to cinema, are distinguished due to their focus on interactivity and the relationship between media and user. Interaction is key not only for the image itself but for the music that accompanies it. And the soundtrack of a videogame only *exists* if there's an agent that controls the universe, allowing its audition and perception. However, it's possible to note the convergence between videogames and visual characteristics of films regarding image and what's present on the screen in the last decade of the mainstream overview – videogames aim to be, in a growing rate, more *cinematic*. The absence, or reduction of informative elements in the screen, the increased development of graphic quality and design, alongside the notion of spatiality and open environments, are being frequently integrated and invested in by not only big companies but also independent studios. Through two case studies — *Bound* (Plastic Studios 2016) and *Abzû* (Giant Squid 2016)—, this paper examines the role of cinematicability and its use as a narrative tool where music builds an ergodic process of communication, meaning and interactivity. The soundtrack, game mechanics and the cinematic compose an interactive musical experience where the user is, at the same time, the interactive and performative agent in the narrative universe.

KEYWORDS

Soundtrack;
Cinematic;
Interactivity;
Narrative.

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1. INTRODUCTION

God of War 4, an exclusive PS4 videogame launched in April 2018, received excellent reviews, critics and scores. Already being considered not only the best *God of War* game of the franchise but "(...) one of the most beloved (...)"videogames in the last decades (Plante 2018). In an online review in *The Guardian*, the author points out the visual mechanics of the game and its cinematic aspect:

The game is one continuous shot, with no interruptions; irritating necessities such as loading screens are hidden so effectively that you barely realise they are there. This cinematic commitment to Kratos' point of view enhances the story's efforts to humanise him. (MacDonald 2018)

The interruptions like loading screens (and probably the author also thought about the cutscenes) — considered *irritating* — are totally disguised throughout the visual and narrative arc in *God of War*, thus following the main character, Kratos, in the sense of, as Macdonald puts it, *cinematic commitment,* which aims to humanize him (in an emotional and affectionate way). I find this remark quite curious — the development of technology for videogames has allowed to reduce loading screens' time, avoid interruptions in the gameplay flow and improve cutscenes quality and depth; however, *God of War 4* goes so far to try and give the illusion of a continuous action, crossing direct interactions of the player and more passive moments, such as dialogues. If cutscenes are, in essence, a narrative tool for this medium, and if *God of War 4* presents a more narrative-oriented gameplay, how are these mechanics renegotiated and actually improve the entire experience?

I believe that, in the last 7 years, the growing proximity and usage (and consequent transformation) by videogames of the *cinematic* idea is based not on the appropriation of the term by this medium and its techniques similar to films, but in cinema itself, on a visual and design levels. That is, videogames which employ an interactive audio-visual apparatus which is, in essence, clean: a minimal or no interface, no external information (such as map, objectives, HP, orientation guide, etc.), development of graphics quality and design, and new visual perspectives that, sometimes (and at a flourishing rate), are similar to a camera that limits our own interaction, *forcing* the player to look or focus at a certain aspect (but never fully removing his control of the gameplay). At the same time, videogame music is being a target of more and more attention. Shifting the development focus in this industry for the production and investment in this area, resulting in carefully designed soundtracks with more resources, sound quality and more possibilities of composing and recording (Kamp, Summers, and Sweeney 2016). The

convergence between the cinematic dominance referred to before and this soundtrack paradigm result, in my view, in *cinematicability*, an audio-visual framework which transforms videogames in an interactive musical experience, where music is key in defining and maintaining the continuity that these games aim to achieve. In an ergodic communicational process, music is one of the semiotic forces working in the renegotiation of meaning by the player, reinforcing and deepening his gameplay.

It's important to note, however, that this framework does not apply to all videogame genres; this cinematic shift can be observed in, primarily, narrative-based games, walking simulators, storytelling, exploration and other similar tags, both from mainstream and indie studios. Being an initial and ongoing research, still in an exploratory and reflection stage, my aim in the context of this paper is to examine and discuss two case studies with the mentioned characteristics, *Bound* and *Abzû*, both from two indie studios that I believe are clear examples of how *cinematicability* is applied in them.

1.1 ON CINEMATICS

It's important to consider how the term *cinematic* is applied in videogames and how it's usage and development created its own set of characteristics. In a general sense, cinematic is directly linked to cinema — from the medium itself to the employment and borrowing of certain techniques and tools (McDonald 2016). In videogames, Karen Collins notes that "[G]ames often contain what are called *cinematics, full motion video (FMV),* or *noninteractive sequences*, which are linear animated clips inside the game in which the player has no control or participation" (Collins 2008). It is possible to verify more than one term for this type of audio-visual sequences in this medium, such as: *in-game cinematic; in-game movie;* or *cutscene*, the most common one. As Hooper claims,

(...) a commonly encountered definition is that cutscenes—also referred to as 'cinematics' or 'in game movies'—are pre-determined/pre-scripted audio-visual sequences which do not involve direct player intervention - or which, as Sicart puts it, are 'devoid of any procedural agency' (2012, p. 120). (Hooper 2018, 115)

The usage of this resource has as a main objective the narrative development in a videogame through the edit, or cut of that same arc — cutscenes are, essentially, cut scenes (Zagalo 2009). Despite the medium in which this tool is discussed about, the terms mentioned are used for the same purpose. In fact, on the one hand, cinematic either applies to the cinematic aspects that define an audio-visual sequence, or the sequence itself. Cutscene, on the other hand, is always associated to the non-interactive scenes. While some

terms can be used with different perspectives[2] (Collins 2008; Genvo 2008) or Hancock (2002), it's possible to conclude that the most important aspect to notice in the different terminologies in videogames studies is the crucial differences between the active gameplay moments and its *interruptions* — or bridges — through three synonyms: film sequences; cinematics; or cutscenes.

The distinction between active gameplay, that is, the direct participation and control of the player in the narrative action of a videogame, combined with the cutscenes, question the role of interactivity in the context of their use and presentation. As King and Kryzwinska claim, the use of cinematics is one of the most obvious links between cinema and videogames, where in this type of sequences used in many titles the player generally assumes a closer role as an independent observer than in cases of active periods of gameplay (King and Kryzwinska 2002). The opposition between the experiences offered by the two formats is often formulated in a very simplistic way — according to both authors, "[I]t is easy to set up an opposition between game-playing and film-viewing that falls into an overly simplistic distinction between ' interactivity 'or' activity ', on the one hand (games), and' passivity 'on the other (cinema)." (ibid. 2002).

One relevant aspect to briefly mention in relation to cutscenes is precisely its increasing development and integration in videogames. At a growing rate, this medium integrates in its story arc that limit the direct interaction of the player, betting on the development of the narrative, characters and emotional involvement. The significant presence of cutscenes can be observed, for example, in the case of *Metal Gear Solid IV: Guns of Patriots* (Kojima Productions 2014) that broke two records concerning its usage in the *Guiness World Records*: the greater cutscene between two moments of active gameplay lasted 27 minutes; and the largest sequence of cinematics (71 minutes) developed for a videogame (Series Achievements 2017). The recurrence of this audio-visual strategy is perceived by some users as excessive, and even negative, being a factor that eliminates the interactive component that characterizes this format. There are

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[2] In the Portuguese academical field, see Gouveia (2010), Filipe (2016), Luz (2009) and Zagalo (2002, 2012).

even discussions and entries in videogame forums about the "hatred" regarding the cinematics and their unimportance: "The main reason I do not like cutscenes personally, is because it ignores the main 'advantage' of video games as a medium has over other art forms. Namely, interactivity. "(JasonpressX 2013). The reference to this type of resource as a "mixed bag of interactivity and cinematics" in the article by Melissa Loomis (2015), which seeks to verify what kind of cinematics is more efficient not to overlap player interactivity with the action of "mere observation" is not the only one, thus revealing a critical position on the part of players and authors regarding this narrative device.

This discussion is not one of the main topics in the context of this paper. It is, however, important and valid for the analysis and discussion of key components in videogames. In my point of view, cinematics is a valuable and important audio-visual strategy for the action of certain videogames. Particularly, if its embedded in narrative-oriented genres. Cinematics are the result of an increased investment of the development studios in this format in order to transmit narratives and expand the roster of interactive tools between the player and action. In fact, there are few video games that do not allow skipping the visualization of cutscenes; most titles that include them introduce the possibility of pressing a certain key to advance with the segments and move on to the following moment of active gameplay.

In addition to the narrative, interactive and emotional aspects that characterize the cutscenes, they also allow the development, or the introduction of new musical material that either characterizes the narrative moment in action, or the general arc. Working alongside with the roles that the soundtrack can play during active gameplay, cutscenes are also an audio-visual enhancement of music itself and how it can define environments, space, time or characters. Thus formulating a relationship of reinforcement and complement between non-diegetic music in non-interactive segments and active gameplay.

In the context of this paper and the two videogames in analysis, it's possible to observe the dilution of the barrier between non-interactive and active moments of the gameplay, creating the sense of full continuity and control, which, besides the visual mechanics employed, music plays an undeniable part in reinforcing this consistency. Thus, as it will be discussed, *Bound* and *Abzû* simultaneously define and employ *cinematicability* as the conceptual base of their gameplay, aiming to remove the gap between what's interactive or not through camera and music.

**BOUND:
MUSIC AND DANCE
BETWEEN THE REAL
AND IMAGINED**

Bound, developed by Plastic Studios and launched in 2016 exclusively for PlayStation 4, appears to be, according to the trailers[3], a 3D platform videogame in which the protagonist, a woman (the Princess), moves only through dance, blending ballet with contemporary elements.[4] The narrative is based on the order that the Queen — the main character's mother —, gives her when she states that she has to save the kingdom because a monster is threatening to destroy it. The player, controlling the Princess, traverses the various levels of this world through jumping, running and dancing for exploration and defence, while at the same time understanding the main objectives of the story. In fact, the trailers do not give any other information about this videogame without being in this abstract world, geometric and spatially infinite; it is necessary to play, just like in any videogame, to understand the system. The first minutes of *Bound* present the first narrative component and the first musical element: a pregnant woman, only carrying a book, who remains alone on the beach, accompanied non-diegetically by solo piano with a short melodic motif.

Fig. 1
Two examples can be visualized and *played* in *Bound*. The elements present in each illustration are a reference to one of the woman's memories and that integrate each section of the alternate/danced world.

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[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aE37l6RvF-c

[4] It is recommended the visualization of the audiovisual excerpts – accessed through the hyperlinks – while reading this paper in order to ease the understanding of the descriptive and analytical sections of both videogames and any other elements referred to. These excerpts will also be accessible in the final references section.

This sequence[5] will begin the narrative in the alternate world, the geometric space, abstract, luminous and infinite, where the player controls the Princess that moves exclusively through dance steps and movements. It is necessary to spend the first moment of danced play and return to the beach to understand that this woman's book contains the various moments that will be played in the alternative (danced) world. Each page contains illustrations by the woman (as a child) with graphic elements that can be visualized during the gameplay in the alternative world. At the end of each level, the player unlocks a memory of this child — always containing the parents in different situations, usually of discussions, tension, nervousness and anger. The narrative course culminates in the separation of the parents of this woman, still a child, where the father leaves home.

This video game is, essentially, linear. It is possible to choose the order of the diary drawings and to experience the different levels of memory in the danced world; however, in this universe, the only option is to follow the paths that are being built as the player progresses using *Bound's* available mechanics, i.e., running, dancing, and jumping. The underline soundtrack of *Bound*, produced by the Ukrainian composer Heinali, is about 1h15 in duration. Its main sonorities are based on the exploration of synthesizers, piano, organ and percussion in a minimalist, repetitive register and instrumental tracks, setting on the progressive building through layers and blocks in the entirety of the soundtrack. Music, in this sense, is one of the agents that allows the maintenance of the idea of continuous movement, either by the character itself or by the *obligation* to follow a single route. Simultaneously, the contrast between the digital sonority of the danced universe and the solo (acoustic) piano of the beach reinforces the aesthetic division between the real world, the loneliness of the character and her thoughts; while the virtual world projects strangeness, constantly in mutation and infinite, where it's only possible to dance as a defence and action mechanism. The maintenance of this continuity — except in actual (but short) cutscenes to introduce dialogue, or narrative elements — reflects

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[5] https://youtu.be/64FlkreVBMM?t=7s

the lack of actual danger or stress. The player knows that, if he misses a jump or doesn't shield himself by dancing when passing through aerial attacks, he just starts over a few steps behind, with no music changes of other elements that represents failure. This game is a flowing experience and music is key for this objective.

Fig. 2
The two worlds where *Bound's* narrative take place: the reality and the imagined.
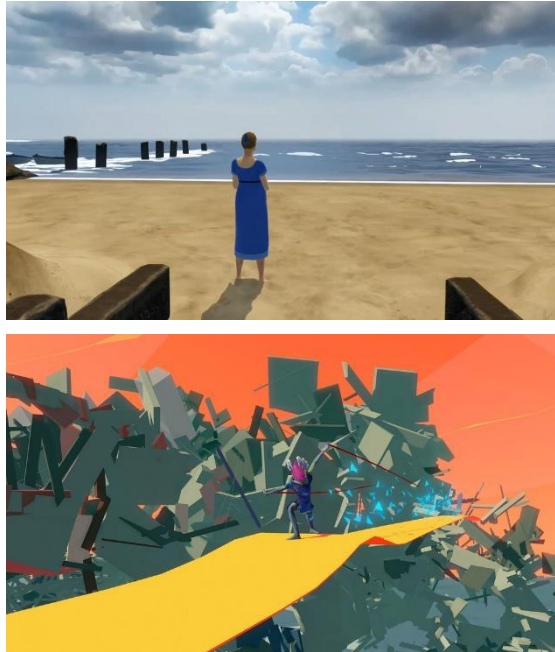
Each memory of the danced world has its own sets of tracks with barely any gaps or noticeable changes between them. The referred minimalist register and short but expanding melodies accompany and define the constant movement of the protagonist, reinforcing this main mechanic. In key moments of the narrative, it's possible to observe the introduction of key instruments — such as the piano or organ — primarily associated with the *real* world due to its acoustic nature. Music is always present, connecting not only both worlds but, mainly, the player to the protagonist through her dance and flow.

Like any audio-visual media, it's necessary to examine its music in and out of its original context; in this case, the *paratext* (Genette 1982) of the soundtracks is an important component to understand the narrative as a whole in *Bound*. Amongst the twenty-two tracks (two of which are bonus), it is possible to verify the *Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression* and *Acceptance* titles, the 5 stages

of grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005). In this context, it is the pain of the pregnant woman by the memories that, progressively, are building up information for the player to know how exactly, and why, the father left the family. This process of separation, or divorce is, thus, the central axis of the narrative that shapes the gameplay of *Bound*. These tracks always include the piano — the acoustic element of "real life" — the organ and percussion, creating a moment of realization of the player when finishing a certain level when walking through a red stripe that creates the transition to the *real* world of the woman.

ABZÛ: MUSIC AS NARRATIVE IN AN AQUATIC UNIVERSE

Following the idea of reality, the videogame *Abzû* focuses on a linear narrative based exclusively on the ocean. The possibility of interaction with the most diverse aquatic beings, which are identified in the lower right corner by their common name or the Latin scientific name, appears, at the outset, a videogame whose collection of data on these ecosystems also enables learning and familiarity to the player about this universe. However, this first impression is only one of several levels of meaning that this videogame contains, and it is mainly through music that we can understand all the joint semiotic forces in action that reveal a narrative that, regardless of being linear in terms of results and choices, is complex and based on several metaphors.

Launched in 2016, *Abzû* is a game of ocean exploration, divided into several sequential stages corresponding to ecosystems and areas in which the player has, to a certain extent, influence. One of the main mechanics of *Abzû* is the sensory interaction with fish, accompanying drones and 5 temples to which the player must re-establish the pre-existing life. As the narrative progresses, the player understands that in the depths of the ocean there are robotic mechanisms and entities that control and manipulate the animal life in this environment, and everything is related to the balance of nature. The narrative, being ambiguous, gives room to diverse interpretations and discussions that, through the gameplay, allow for the player to form his own conclusion. However, through the soundtrack, it is possible to reach certain consensuses that, according to my point of view, can contribute to an in-depth understanding of *Abzû*.

The soundtrack, composed by Austin Wintory, is based on a main theme. The first sequence is an introduction to a set of musical materials, however, the base theme in the oboe is the first major musical reference. In fact, the first moment of active gameplay is when the main character controlled by the player — the *Diver* — is

waiting for the *dive* control to be pressed. In surface environment, out of the water, there is no soundtrack - through diving, this action is automatically accompanied by the solo oboe that introduces the *Abzû* theme (Fig. 3)

Fig. 3
The main leitmotif of *Abzû*. Transcription by the author.

During the first minutes of gameplay, the soundtrack intensifies and adds more instrumental textures, accentuating the harps and introducing a chorus, emphasizing the female voices with open phonemes. The orchestra, in *Abzû*, represents all the present life in the different "oceans" that the player can (and must) explore, repeating and transforming the main theme, creating small motives that facilitate the empathic relation of the player with the narrative. This main theme is also associated with another character of *Abzû*, the Shark, who appears at specific moments in the protagonist's journey and who, initially seen as a threat, is in fact a guide and potential divine entity in this oceanic universe.

Fig. 4
The different areas and ecosystems that you can explore in *Abzû*.

In addition to several statues, murals and reminiscences of a sunken civilization, it is possible to verify in the final credits the reference to writings of *Enuma Elis,* the Babylonian myth of the creation of the world (Mark 2018), whose first text is sung by the final chorus. The development studio, Giant Squid, drew on the narrative for this videogame through references from Sumerian mythology, thus removing textual information from the first tablet to the two final tracks of the soundtrack, *Their waters were mingled together* and *Then were created the gods in the midst of Heaven*.[6] All this intertextual density is only accessed by the player if there is a research investment during or after the gameplay. Abzû does not contain information throughout the narrative that will help to understand it; however, music plays a pivotal role. It is possible to affirm that the thematic musical transformation throughout the narrative is the clearest link that the player can create in order to decipher it — from the death of the shark (that sacrificed himself for the Diver), whose theme of the oboe is distorted and dissonant — until the final climax of Abzû where the theme is potentiated throughout the orchestra and choir, it is mainly through the soundtrack that we understand the different situations and actions that occur in this videogame.

TOWARDS CINEMATICABILITY

The various functions of music in audio-visuals, especially in the field of cinema and theorized, or discussed by multiple authors (Adorno and Eisler 1946; Gorbman 1989; Chion 1994; Citron 2000; Kassabian 2001, 2009; Neumeyer 2014; Elferen 2012, 2013, 2016), are similar to the way in which music in videogames acts, accompanies and also defines action. Kathryn Kalinak points out that film music can: specify the time and space of the narrative; create and form an atmosphere; emphasize both present and non-action

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[6] It is important to mention that I could not get access to the text sung by the choir, either by the game studio and the information online about the myth in which is based on. However, through the English translation found in the article by Joshua Mark, it is possible to cross some of the verses of the myth with the paratext of *Abzû's* soundtrack: whether these citations or adaptations, there is a direct intertextual relationship between the musical paratext and the narrative inspiration. For example:

- *They had mingled their waters together* (original text) / *Their waters were mingled together* (track title)
- The game's name, *Abzû*, is the direct link between two Mesopotamian words: *AB*, ocean, and *ZU*, knowing. It can be interpreted as "ocean of wisdom", but this direct junction thus gives name to the introductory music of the videogame, *To Know, Water*. (Takahashi 2016)

elements, enriching the development of the narrative; and also contribute to suggesting emotions, or emotional relationships between characters or situations and the audience (Kalinak 2010, 1-2). The various properties that film music presents, from rhythm and tempo to pitch and timbre, work together effectively through musical conventions whose meanings are conveyed through the idea of association (ibid., 14).

Directly linked and reinforced by the soundtrack, I propose in this paper that *Bound* and *Abzû* employ a set of visual techniques and game mechanics to guide, focus and, sometimes, to force the player's point of view and actions in certain narrative aspects, where the idea of cinematic — previously discussed – is conveyed not only through the design of both games but also through the various tools that determine those actions and images for the player. This *cinematicability*, alongside music, structures an illusory narrative progress of agency and freedom by the player when, in fact, the story and mechanics are linear.

Both games make use of cutscenes in key points of the narrative — either to reveal the outcome of a certain action by the player or to introduce new material for the story — but it's a minor resource. In fact, the transition between non-interactive sequences and the gameplay is noticeable, but no elements of the GUI are renegotiated. In *Bound* and *Abzû*, the visual design and graphics aim towards the idea of an interactive movie. There are practically no external objects to aid the player in her progress, such as a map or HP. One must interact, explore and make use of the settings themselves to understand the objectives in hand.

The only element that is never removed — and, in fact, is reinforced — is the music. The soundtrack is always playing a role, producing and receiving layers of meaning by the player interaction. Even with the non-diegetic techniques of using leitmotifs and thematic material with specific functions, mainly to identify spaces and characters, the timbre of the instruments used is extremely important for these interactive musical experiences. While Monelle (2006), Potter (2003), and Piotrowska (2013) discuss the idea of the musical topic and the representation of water in music — from the waves that represent the tonal flow, or progression in Debussy's *La Mer* or Haendel's *Water Music* woodwinds — Donnelly (2013) and Deleon (2010) explore the use of digital and synthesized sonorities for a futuristic or strange representation of the reality in which we find ourselves, while acoustic instruments, such as the piano, give the listener a sense of familiarity:

The film's score [Star Wars], composed by John Williams, is full of sweeping orchestration, classical conventions and brass fanfare. The score supports the action and aids in the creation of a strong foundation that allows for easy narrative comprehension, which in turn creates an environment that promotes the viewer to be open to that which is unfamiliar. The use of the band at the bar gives credence to the space, but also comfort and stability. As Williams states, "Music should have a familiar emotional ring so that as you looked at these strange robots and other unearthly creatures, at sights hitherto unseen, the music would be rooted in the familiar traditions" (qtd. in Kalinak, 198). The score adds a few musical elements to cue the viewer to understand that this is a science fiction film, but maintains the familiar structure to allow for easy readability. In essence, the film states that these characters, while placed in new and strange worlds, are relatable and thus the action and narrative understandable (...)

(Deleon in Bartkowiak 2010, 10-21)

In this way, on the one hand, *Bound* bets on the direct gap between the use of synthesizers for the otherness in the virtual world and the piano, the idea of familiar and acoustic, for the reality of the woman. On the other hand, *Abzû* incurs on the use of established musical tropes of woodwinds, harps and chorus's representative of the aquatic movement, of its fauna and flora, as central sonorities in its soundtrack. Both musical languages contribute, therefore, to a direct relation between the audio-visual literacy of the player with musical traditions used and transformed in western classical music already since the 18th century and conveyed particularly in cinema and, later, videogames (Elferen 2016; Freitas 2017). With the soundtrack in this model of production and usage, it functions as many of the visual absent elements usually present in games, functioning as narrative itself, thus constructing *cinematicability*.

This framework is, then, dependent on dynamic elements that constitute a complex process of negotiation and production of meaning not only by the object but mainly by the player — an ergodic interpretation —, namely, audio and music. Following the *cybertextual* theory proposed by Aarseth (1997), this model was a new perspective in the late 90s in literary studies to include new forms of text; videogames are a type of *cybertext* in which each interaction with the player produces new interpretations, creating a new flow of meaning in every new *reading*. If every player has her own perception, social context and identity, then every narrative segment of the same videogame will be read differently. However, music is a crucial part of this dynamic experience, also contributing for the depth of the communication process. On the other hand, Newman (2002) claims that videogames can be looked as a vehicle

of ergodic or interactive elements, discarding the possibility of a single type of experience and involvement. Trough the weaving of the narrative arc with different sequences, videogames can also be an interrupted experience of gameplay due to the cutscenes and the removal of interactivity. While both narratives are linear, as the mechanics themselves, each playthrough is regarded as an experience to deepen the narrative involvement, comprehension and interpretation of the player, aiming to remove potential interruptions of interactivity and, as Aarseth mentions, demanding a non-trivial effort of the player to interpret his own process of playing. The dilution — or its illusion — of a continuous gameplay is possible through the musical accompaniment, contributing to the ergodic flow of the narrative and the interpretation of the player of its progress.

In my point of view, *Bound* and *Abzû*, alongside other videogames like the renown *Journey*, the series *Telltale* or *Dear Esther*, and indie titles such as *That Dragon, Cancer, What Remains of Edith Finch*, are transforming and setting a new paradigm of games with the tags n*arrative-based, storytelling, walking simulator*, or known as *interactive movies*, as I previously mentioned. The discussion among fans and critics of videogames getting closer and closer to cinema has more than a decade — forums and articles dating back to 2008 (skitz8 2008; CPAYNE93 2012; Kain 2012), criticize the introduction of longer cinematics, effects that remove player's control and less gameplay. However, that notion of interactive movies isn't the same as we can observe from the last decade with the rise of narrative games and other formats that challenge the usual mechanics associated with each genre (RPG, action, FPS, etc.). These videogames are constructing a genre in which one of the main mechanics that characterize this medium — failure — isn't present. Removing this component — which sometimes is perceived by players as not challenging enough because there are no legitimate threats — is a way to let the player focus on the story, the characters, their development, and even how music is working towards this objective. In fact, Nicole Clark writes that *walking simulators*, "gaming's most detested genre" (2017) can be considered "true art" (*ibid.*), and how, as I mentioned, becomes also an identifiable tag for this type of videogame:

In true form, the reification of the label "walking simulator" does a better job of describing the kinds of people who create such labels than it does the games it purports to define. The bevy of mainstream backlash coincided not with the creation of walking sims, but rather with the positive critical acclaim of walk-

ing sim titles like "Dear Esther" and "Gone Home," and later "Firewatch" and "The Vanishing of Ethan Carter." Critics resisted the inclusion of walking sims in the greater gaming oeuvre. Though the label has become nearly neutralized as a descriptor – "walking sim" is a searchable genre on the game distribution platform Steam, along with "adventure" or "narrative" game – people still get stuck on the idea of these games as subtractive, rather than additive.

(Clark 2017)

This genre is dependent of what I call, then, *cinematicability*. While mainstream videogames launched by AAA companies are also betting more and more in a cinematic experience, as we can observe particularly in RGPS from the last 3 years and new launches this year such as *Assassin's Creed: Origins, Horizon: Zero Dawn, The Last of Us, Detroit: Become Human,* the new *Spider-Man* and the much expected *Red Dead Redemption 2*, "walking simulators" and narrative-based games propose new ways of exploring the universe through a smaller range of mechanics options. It's also important to note that this genre of videogames propose a reduced time of playability and gameplay, sometimes lasting only one hour. However, independently of the duration of the game itself, music is one of the main components that has the same, or more tracks to fulfil the entire gameplay and out of the original context. This model is dependent of the soundtrack — be it non-diegetic or other — and is key for the entire narrative process of communication. Since there are no other sources of information, music (and audio) only functions because there's an agent to manipulate the environment and explore the narrative. Thus, these games are, at the same time, an interactive musical experience, revealing the increased role and attention this industry is paying to music and how it can be more than accompaniment — a mechanic.

This paper is an attempt to shed some light on what I believe it's the establishment of a new paradigm of an (audio)visual construction of videogames from various studios, teams and, consequently, budgets. While it's possible to affirm that many videogames are getting similar in what concerns visual design, GUI, musical investment — being the orchestra the main resource and sonority for almost every type of universe — and plot, narrative-based games are creating their own niche of production and reception. With such a heterogeneous industry, new narrative formats, stories, characters and identities can be proposed and worked on to reach larger and more diverse communities that, simultaneously, transforms and challenges different audiences and *aca-fans.*

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