

**MTO 32.1 Examples: Jeremy W. Smith, Semiotics of Glissandi in Video Games**

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.26.32.1/mto.26.32.1.smith.html>

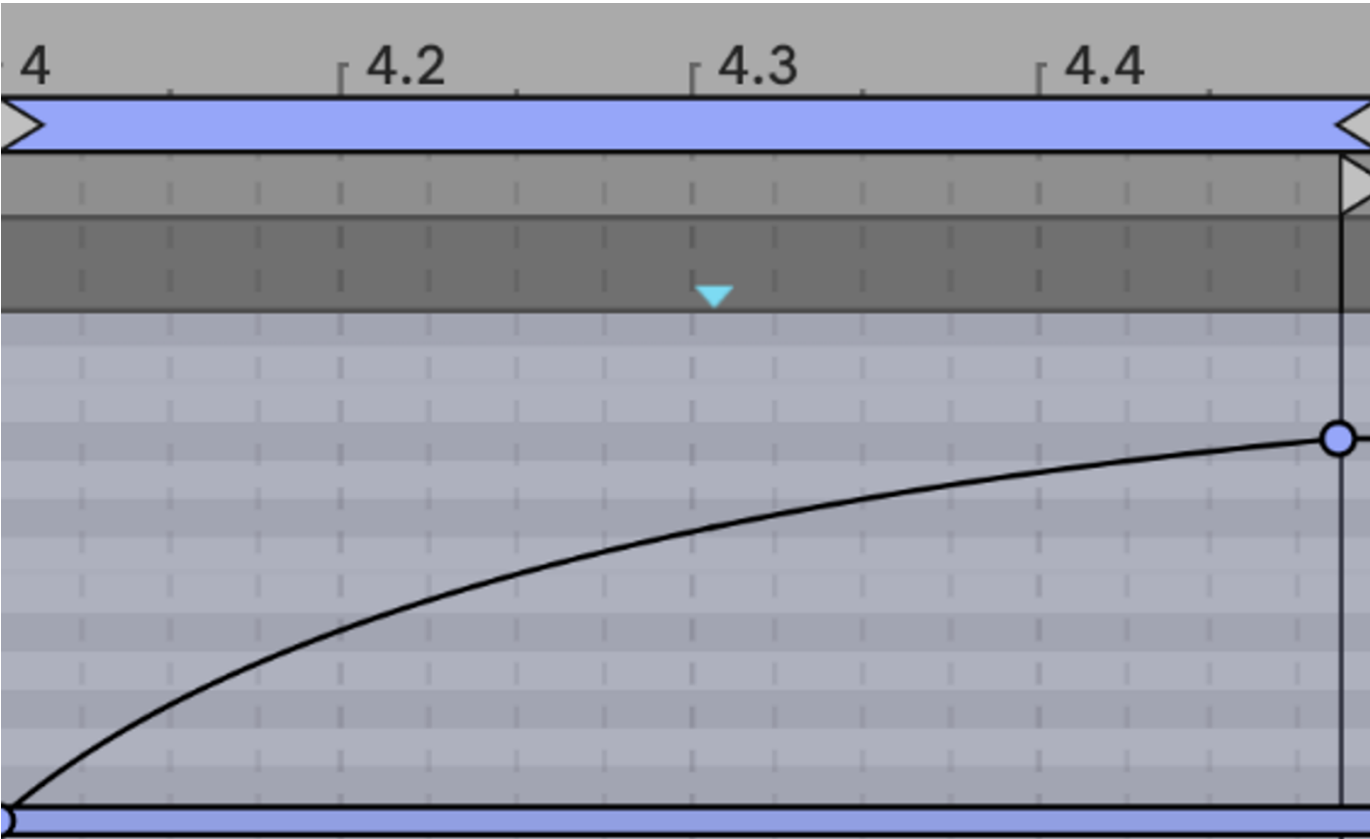
Example 1. Table summarizing compositional trends of glissandi in video games for each of the four primary semiotic categories

Semiotics	Timbre	Register	Speed	Shapes, prevalence	Examples
In-game movement or status	Variable	Variable	Fast (one measure or less)	Ascending or descending, single gestures, prevalence variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Super Mario Bros.</i> jumping- <i>Pokémon</i> healing items- <i>Death's Door</i> boss phase transitions
Humor, irony	Trombone or other brass, sometimes distorted	Low	Fast	Ascending, descending, or wobbling, prevalent (multiple consecutive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Trombone Champ</i>- <i>Pizza Tower</i> D ranking- <i>Skyward Sword</i> "Grooseland" scene
Horror, suspense	Strings, electronics	High	Slow	Ascending, infrequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Batman: Arkham Asylum</i> Joker escaping cutscene- <i>Resident Evil 4</i> "Infiltration"
Paranormal, futuristic	Electronic instruments, theremin	Variable	Variable	Ascending, descending, or wobbling, prevalent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>EarthBound</i> "Threed, Zombie Central"- <i>Super Mario Kart</i> "Ghost Valley"- <i>Ocarina of Time</i> Shadow Temple- <i>Undertale</i> "Amalgam"

Example 2. A common way of indicating a glissando in traditional staff notation



Example 3. Automation curve made by the author in Ableton Live 11



Example 7. Transcription of the ranking music from *Pizza Tower* (2023)

♩ = 130 Same basic pitches and rhythms for all ranks Unison, in multiple instruments and octaves

Pitches

Fade in

Drums

Pitch

Dr.

D rank ending

Pitches and rhythms approximate (prominent glissandi between each note)

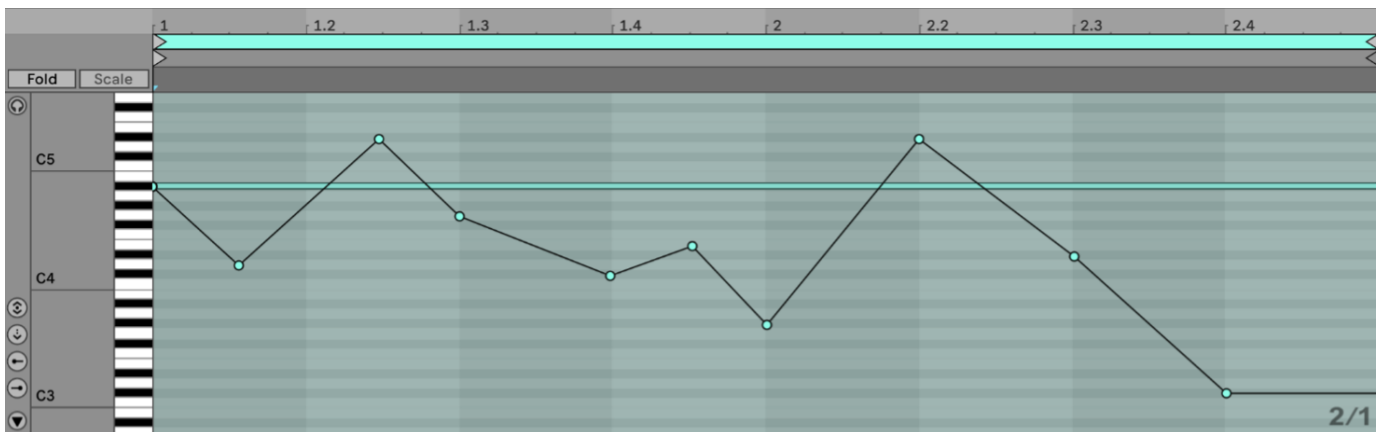
B, C rank ending

A, S, P rank ending
(each different timbres)

Pitch

Dr.

Example 8. DAW recreation of the glissandi for the end of the D-rank music in *Pizza Tower* (created using Ableton Live 11)



Example 9. Video of the author's gameplay for "Mario Kart Stadium" from *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* (2017), along with a transcription of the melody and DAW recreation of mm. 3–4 in the transcription, approximating the pitch wobbles

♩ ≈ 150

3

5

7 continued...

1 1.2 1.3 1.4 2 2.2 2.3 2.4

Fold Scale

C6

C5

Example 10. Video and accompanying transcription of the author's gameplay for the "Grooseland" cutscene from *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (2011, played on 2021 HD remake)

♩ ≈ 88

Rapid harp arpeggios throughout, starting when previous dialogue box ends

Vibrato slows down and gradually increases range to extreme levels

Cut off when player presses A button

Strings

Trombone

Example 11. Video of the author's gameplay from a cutscene during *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009), along with a transcription of the low-brass melody and a spectrogram of the video

♩ = 88

Ascending string glissandi in background

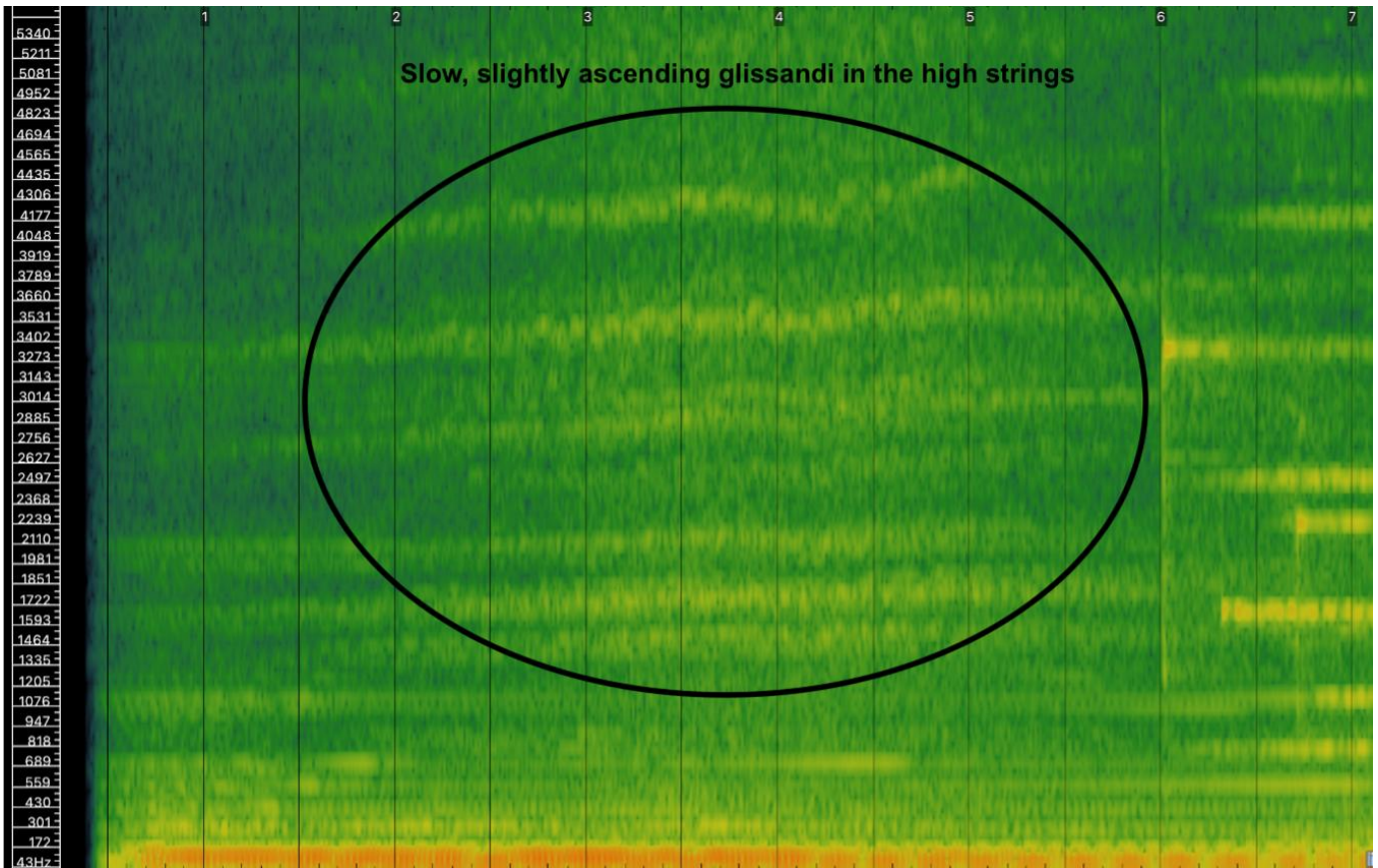
Pitch-class collection is OCT-02 subset

Glissandi and crescendi

1. 2. Stinger chord

5 You OK? He surrendered almost without a fight. I don't like it. 10 At least he's back where he belongs. [Ascending glissandi] 15 Get up! Now! [Headbutt] 20

Example 12. Spectrogram and audio excerpt from “Infiltration” on the *Resident Evil 4* original soundtrack (2005)



Example 13. Transcription and audio excerpt of “Threed, Zombie Central” from *EarthBound* (1994)

$\text{♩} = 78$
Ascending chord, approx. P5 ascent

Glissandi

Chords

Vibrato, lower octave doublings

Glissandi

Chords

Bass

8^{vb} throughout

Example 14. Transcription and audio excerpt of the “Ghost Valley” music from *Super Mario Kart* (1992)

♩ = 112

Two timbres (whistling and metallic) in both top and bottom parts

8^{va}-----| 8^{va}-----

Bottom part chromatic (0123), top part diatonic (024)

This system shows the beginning of the piece in 4/4 time. The tempo is 112 beats per minute. The music features two timbres: whistling and metallic. The top part is diatonic (024) and the bottom part is chromatic (0123). The notation includes a glissando in the bass line and an 8va marking for the treble clef.

4 (8)⁷| 8^{va}-----

gliss.

This system continues the piece from measure 4. The top part continues with the diatonic pattern, and the bottom part continues with the chromatic pattern. A glissando is indicated in the bass line. The 8va marking is present for the treble clef.

6 (8)⁷| 8^{va}-----

gliss.

Modulation up a whole step (T2 transposition).

This system shows a modulation up a whole step (T2 transposition) starting at measure 6. The top part continues with the diatonic pattern, and the bottom part continues with the chromatic pattern. A glissando is indicated in the bass line. The 8va marking is present for the treble clef.

8 (8)⁷| 8^{va}-----

gliss.

Modulation up a whole step.

This system shows another modulation up a whole step starting at measure 8. The top part continues with the diatonic pattern, and the bottom part continues with the chromatic pattern. A glissando is indicated in the bass line. The 8va marking is present for the treble clef.

Example 15. Video and accompanying transcription of the high-register voices (0:12 and 0:23) in the author's gameplay from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998, played on the Nintendo Switch virtual console version)

