
Introduction

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Introduction to DiGRA Italia Issue: selected articles from the 2017-2018 conferences

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This special issue of ToDiGRA gathers some of the best papers presented between 2017 and 2018 at the first three national conferences of the Italian division of DiGRA. The selection is emblematic of the diversity of the contributions received so far. Authors were invited to submit proposals at the end of the third national conference in June 2018. We received a total of 13 proposals, eight of which were invited to submit a full article. The triple-blind peer-reviewing process was used to select a final list of four articles. The selection process was more complex than what would normally be expected in the preparation of a journal issue. The theoretical framework supporting most of the submissions

was not necessarily aligned to the literature, methodologies and questions that can be found in anglophone studies on digital games. On the one hand, knowledge of relevant international literature was considered a prerequisite for being accepted for publication, and on the other, we decided to preserve the originality of those submissions that were drawing on literature and methodologies not typically represented at international DiGRA conferences. The selection was carried with due consideration of various approaches, to find a compromise that could work for both the authors and the expected readers of this issue. Overall, the process involved continuous revisions and rewriting over the course of one year, aimed at preserving the original methodologies and arguments, while establishing a dialogue with the international scholarship.

Indeed, this preliminary observation does not apply to all submissions in the same manner. The article by Marco Liboà ('Hardware Design and Representation of Graphics in Videogames. A case study: the Sega Saturn') was originally prepared while studying at ITU in Copenhagen, Denmark. The research project was developed in the years that followed by drawing on recent literature in the areas of platform and hardware studies. Liboà takes the Sega Saturn as a point of departure to analyse the technological and historical complexity of studying video game hardware. The main case study is the porting of *Virtua Fighter* from coin-op to console, and the aesthetic and technical choices made during this process by the developers. The article combines an archaeological perspective with a cross-media problematisation: the object of study is analysed in its transition across platforms. The article was first presented at the national conference at IULM in Milan on May 12th, 2017. The conference (titled *Testi, contesti e pretesti videoludici*) attracted more than 90 attendees and featured 15 presentations, two panels, and international speakers such as Cindy Poremba (OCAD University in Toronto), Sebastian Möring (University of Potsdam) and Daniel Vella (University of Malta). Papers were very diverse, and included interventions in semiotics, pedagogy, critical design, and

media arts. An unexpected success which motivated us to organize further conferences and events.

The article, ‘The Italian Mafia in Video Games: Influences and reframings from Cosa Nostra movies to contemporary games’ was originally presented by Giulio Pitroso at our second conference in December 2017. The event was hosted by Vigamus, the video game museum in Rome, and gathered contributions on the history of the Italian game industry and the representation of Italian culture in video games. The article is more closely aligned to the tradition of semiotic and textual analysis that is largely present in Italian academies. Pitroso analyses how representations of Mafia migrate across media, from cinema to literature and video games. The article investigates the representation of Italian Mafia in games such as *The Godfather* (US Gold, 1991), inspired by the more famous novel by Mario Puzo (1969) and film by Francis Ford Coppola (1972), and more recent titles such as the Mafia series (2K Games). The article looks at how these texts influence the representation of organised crime in series such as *Grand Theft Auto*, where Mafia symbols and values make frequent appearances. These representations are built on a general framework of sociolinguistic tactics, which replicate and reinforce stereotypes about a generic ‘mafia’ that does not necessarily correspond to a specific criminal organisation. Moreover, these games tend to reinforce a mythological perception of criminal groups that have a tragic impact on the lives of many (in Italy and abroad). As discussed in investigative journalism on organised crime, such as the work by Roberto Saviano (see Gomorrah, 2006), the myths surrounding fictional Mafias and their more tragic enactments often inspire each other in a vicious circle.

The third and fourth contributions to this issue were originally presented at the 2018 conference in Palermo. The event was hosted by the Sicilia Queer Film Festival and organised in collaboration with Women in Games Italy and CIRQUE (a student association for the study of queer cultures). The conference explored the

relation between gender studies and game culture, and hosted talks on game design practices within LGBTQI networks.

Dalila Forni, a PhD student from the University of Florence, is the author of 'Horizon Zero Dawn: The educational influence of video games in counteracting gender stereotypes'. Forni analyses the game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017) through its internal dialogues and narrative. The game is explored as if it was an educational tool for teaching gender stereotypes, drawing on literature on both pedagogy and gender studies. *Horizon*, according to Forni, is not just an inclusive game with a varied representation of genders and sexual orientations. It also frequently hints at the very process of questioning gender norms, making it a unique case of mainstream video game which explicitly challenges societal conventions on sexuality. Forni has been drawing on the work carried out for her doctoral research project at the University of Florence, while opening her perspective to the international scholarship that has been developed in recent years on gender and games. The outcome of this process is a (queer) cut across various disciplines.

The fourth contribution to this issue was received from the United Kingdom and is more closely aligned with the anglophone tradition of game studies. The article 'The Streetfighter Lady: Invisibility and gender in game composition' by Hillegonda Rietveld and Andy Lemon from London South Bank University was originally presented in Palermo, and later developed in a full article. The analysis follows the story of Yoko Shimomura, the female composer of the soundtrack of *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991). The story of Shimomura is emblematic of a double process of invisibility. First, she suffered from the invisibility of music composers, who are not always credited and given the deserved merit in the production of video games. Second, she also shared the invisibility of women in game studios and game culture. Shimomura, according to Rietveld and Lemon, performatively reproduced the imagined hyper-masculinity that was expected by consumers of video games, hiding her own practice of gender role-

play behind her composition. The case study is significant from a historical perspective, as it highlights the complexity of gendered forms of exclusion in video game culture.

We hope that the articles will be of interest to the game studies community. They represent only a sample of the breadth of research presented so far at our national conferences. Game studies in Italy have been extremely prolific in recent years, and have only recently started to communicate more closely with the anglophone research community. The presence of Italian scholars abroad, and of international scholars at Italian conferences, and events such as the international DiGRA conference that was held in Turin in 2018, are certainly contributing in a positive manner to this process. The imminent (at the time of writing) national conference at the University of Turin in October 2019 is further evidence of the growing interest in game studies, and will provide a forum for knowledge exchange with scholars expected to travel from the United Kingdom, Germany and Scandinavian countries.

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