
Introduction

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Introduction to the Special Issue on DiGRA 2019: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo Mix

Since its inauguration in 2003, the DiGRA International Conference series has provided a venue for the presentation and discussion of digital games-related research from multiple and diverse areas. DiGRA 2019 was held at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, between 6th and 10th of August. The theme of the conference was ‘Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo Mix’. The theme built on the idea of ‘media mix’ (wasei-eigo, メディアミックス or ‘media mikkusu’), inviting “contributors to consider the possibility of ‘ludo mix’ where games and play increasingly occupy the focal point of such a diversified distribution and consumption model” (Wirman, Furuichi and

Mortensen 2019). Notably, Professor Eiji Ōtsuka, who coined the very term, offered the first keynote speech at the conference, providing true insights and inviting new perspectives into and around the theme.

DiGRA 2019 received a record high number of 414 submissions, including full papers, extended abstracts, panel proposals and applications for the doctoral consortium. Extensive work of reviewing was done by around 380 reviewers who provided more than 1200 reviews, 2-5 and typically not less than 3 for each submission, except for doctoral consortium contributions. 243 extended abstract and full paper submissions, 18 doctoral consortium proposals, 23 panels were accepted to the conference. Overall, DiGRA 2019 conference had a 62% acceptance rate for full papers and extended abstract submissions.

In the conference Call for Papers, we loosely defined ludo mix as follows:

“Ludo mixes may include several versions of a game or several different games together with other content thus resulting in novel media ecologies, business models, and development and consumption cultures.”

It was not the intention of the conference in 2019 nor the purpose of this special issue to define or fix the concept of ludo mix. Instead, the term has been used to invite the community to think widely what it means when games, together with their design, development, distribution and play are fundamentally linked to other media. With the original conference theme, program chairs wanted to encourage curiosity toward theoretical traditions of other regions. Throughout this special issue, one can find references, not only to Japanese games and Japanese scholarship, but also words and terms from the Japanese language – such as *kyara*, *omake*, *ouji*, *geemu ongaku* and *matsuri* – thus making new theoretical frameworks and popular cultural phenomena available to the wider ToDiGRA readership. This kind of contribution to our

community has, in my view, been a significant outcome of both the conference theme and the country of the conference location. One of the authors of this issue, Laureline Chiapello, aptly finishes her article (spoiler alert!) stating that “to build a richer vision of game designers’ activities, I hope that more translations of Japanese research on game design will become available”. DiGRA chapter initiatives and support for local chapters play a part in continuing this work. This issue, I hope, invites more people to genuinely build on local vocabularies, approaches and viewpoints everywhere in the world.

With an attempt to further the conversation around the possibility of ludo mixes, and to document some of the valuable discussions held at the conference, DiGRA 2019 authors, whose papers explicitly addressed the concept of ‘ludo mix’, were invited to write a new contribution on the topic of their DiGRA 2019 paper for this special issue. Authors and co-authors of five papers accepted the invitation and their articles went through a full process of double anonymous review. Each article received 2 or 3 reviews. The five articles provide five distinct views into what happens when games become part of media mixes. To highlight the different perspectives to ludo mixes, keywords are emphasized in article introductions.

Nakamura and Tosca’s article in the special issue discusses transmedia **production** strategies focusing on the *Mobile Suit Gundam* franchise. Nakamura and Tosca, among all authors, go furthest in their attempts to define and theoretically frame the concept of ludo mix. They emphasise its ‘relational’ nature, which means that meaningful analyses stem from looking into how different games and other products relate to each other in a wider ludo mix ecology. It is these relations in the *Mobile Suit Gundam* franchise that the article scrutinizes on a portfolio level.

Laureline Chiapello’s article in this issue investigates game **designers’** role in the creation of ludo mixes, keeping in mind that the concept of media mix is traditionally marketing-driven.

Chiapello discusses a departure from thinking of “grand narratives” towards working on “grand experiences” and draws on the work of pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey. By applying the idea of game authorship, combined from ‘Western’ and Japanese theories of video game creation and design, Chiapello explains how understanding franchises as aesthetic experiences can successfully guide design in games.

Nökkvi Jarl Bjarnason’s article focuses on the **development** of *The Final Fantasy XV Universe*, and thus presents a case from one of the best-selling JRPG ludo mixes of all time. Bjarnason discusses the game’s reception, together with an account of how technological, aesthetic and economic incentives in development had an impact on the game, particularly its narrative. The article provides valuable insights into current game development practices and their instability by examining what happens when some parts of a game narrative reside outside of the game itself.

Providing one example of what media mix means to games, Joleen Blom focuses on game **characters** and writes that “Game characters do not just appear in games. They travel from game to game, from medium to medium, and from story to story.” Blom goes on to explore the concept of dynamic game characters, together with the inconsistent characters of Japanese media mixes. The target audience of such characters, namely otaku, is said to consume “aggregated elements of characters and settings, but not the grand narrative”. Through analysing the game *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*, Blom shows how game characters appear unique among those elsewhere in the media mix ecology.

Finally, Constantino Oliva’s article analyses the games of the *Taiko no Tatsujin* **music** game franchise. He suggests that a certain kind of ‘musical media literacy’ is expected from the player, given the game’s range of songs that originate from anime products. Meanwhile, the game’s cultural references span beyond digital and media culture all the way to Japanese festive traditions. With the unique combination of the two ways of referencing different

practices of music making, Oliva promotes the use of the concept of ‘musicking’.

References

Wirman, H., Furuichi, M. and Mortensen, T. 2019. “Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo Mix”. In DiGRA 2019 Program Booklet. DiGRA 2019, Kyoto, Japan, 6-10 August.

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