

Toshio Iwai: digital games as musical realizations

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Abstract

Despite the abundance of resources chronicling the evolution of digital games, the process of historicization of this data started relatively recently. As per Huhtamo (2005), “the current state of writing on game history could be called its chronicle era.” As such, chronicles are considered to lack the critical stance that a proper historical reconstruction must adopt.

According to Bordwell and Thompson (1994), a biographical history can be one of the different explanatory frameworks available to build film histories. By adapting this concept to digital games, this paper will provide a short biographical history of Japanese digital game author and media artist Toshio Iwai. From 1987 to 2006, Iwai has experimented with creative use of audio in games with the musical shoot'em up *Otocky* (ASCII Corporation 1987), the audio visual mash-up *Sim Tunes* (Maxis 1996), and the more accomplished *Electroplankton* (Nintendo 2005).

Ludomusicology, or the field of studies concerned with the analysis of sound in games, is particularly lacking critical resources concerning Iwai, with a few exceptions (Herber 2006). This paper argues that the common trait of Iwai's works is found in the possibilities afforded to the players, which are able to use the potentialities of digital games as tools to actualize musical realizations. Such affordances will be analyzed in light of Small's concept of *musicking* (1998), focusing on music as a human behaviour, rather than a pre-constructed piece of work.

References

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