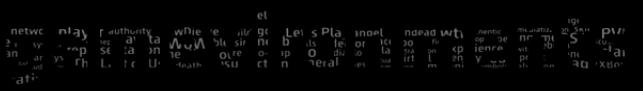
Novigrad in the evening sun. *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* (CD Project Red 2015)

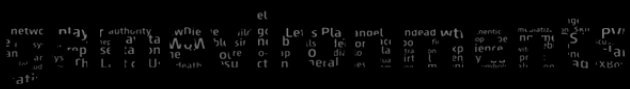


Special Issue

Gamevironments of the Past.

by

Derek Fewster and Ylva Grufstedt



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The HGR Framework: A Semiotic Approach to the Representation of History in Digital Games

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Abstract

Many game designers exploit elements, events, characters and narrations retrieved from human history in order to build consistent and intriguing settings for their digital games. The use of historical elements often involves the creation of a complex *playground* created by a huge quantity of historical tropes. Historical digital games do not limit themselves to *represent* the past, but they attempt to reproduce the different levels of relationships and correlations between events, causes and consequences. In this article we describe and propose the HGR framework, an analytic tool for scholars and designers alike, capable of taking into account all the layers and processes necessary to transform history in the setting of a game. In particular, the framework focuses on the three processes needed for creating an historical discourse (Lozano 1987) and on the three translations that the past undergo to become a game: perspectival, digital and ludic. The HGR framework is finally tested on a double case study: the representations of Roman Republic and Empire in *Total War: Rome II* (2013) and Sid Meier's *Civilization V* (2010).

Key words: History-Game Relation Framework, history and digital games, setting, modelling, representing, perspectival, digital, ludic

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Introduction

Historical settings are among the most popular in digital games – along with fantasy, sci-fi and horror. If the World Wars and the Middle Ages are by far the most fashionable, many other games focus on less exploited periods, such as the Stone Age (*Far Cry: Primal* 2016) or the French Revolution (*Assassin's Creed: Unity* 2014). Similarly to historical novels, digital games employ history as a privileged setting in order to immerse the deeds of fictional characters in coherent and convincing virtual

worlds.

History and games share a long lasting relationship: not only because war and warfare involve some ludic features (Huizinga 1938), but also because of the recurring presence of historical elements, logics and settings in many distinct kinds of games – and since very ancient times. In Ancient Rome, the *ludii gladiatorii* (the "gladiatorial games") often consisted in the re-enactment of some past famous battle of the glorious history of Rome (Sumi 2005). Modern and contemporary toy soldiers are also very often representing fighters from different eras: ranging from the Napoleonic wars to World War II, from medieval warfare to "Cow-boys and Indians".

Digital games, on the other hand, are now able to create sophisticated historical simulations and re-enactments: many strategy games, for example the *Hearts of Iron* (2002-2016) *Civilization* (1990-2016) and *Anno* (1998-2015) series, interpret, analyse and digitalise the past in order to create playful reconstructions of historical environments. In this setting, the player experiences the flowing and unfolding of history and has an active part in it, shaping alternative narratives (sometimes far from realistic) or fulfilling its factual development.

The aim of this article is, therefore, to create a framework for analysing the presence, use and meaning of history in digital games, in order to provide insightful resources both for game studies scholars, designers and historians. This framework – focusing on History-Game Relations (HGR) and based on the analytic tools of historiography and semiotics – will focus on the intersections between game elements and the different methods used to construct history (*setting, modelling and representing*) and to translate it into digital games (through *perspectival*, *digital* and *ludic* translations). Semiotics will help us to address the importance of history's meaning: it is only through an *interpretation* of the past that it is possible to select and translate

historical facts into digital games. Our paper, however, is directed to game scholars and designers with different backgrounds and, thus, we will provide a non-semiotic explanation of all the theories involved.

In the second part of this article we will test our framework by applying it to two case studies, belonging to the most famous series of historical games, *Civilization V* and *Total War: Rome II* , to show how they represent the Roman age and civilisation[i]. We hope to demonstrate, through these examples, the effectiveness of the HGR framework at providing a simple, yet in-depth model of analysis for historical digital games.

An Analytic Model for Digital Games with a Historical Setting: the HGR Framework

The Elements of the Historical Discourse

The relationship between history and digital games is both deep and multi-layered. On the one hand, digital games are a relatively new medium, object of a young discipline still in evolution; on the other hand, history is one of the most ancient disciplines and deals with the key issue of defining something extremely ambiguous and complex as the concept of "historical development".

As it has been noticed by many scholars (see for example Greimas 1976, 161-174) the term history itself has a twofold signification in many Indo-European languages: meaning, at the same time, a set of past events (in a reified sense: all that happened – what we also call "the past") and, at the same time, the discipline that operates their reconstruction, with its own theories, criteria, methodologies and research products. There is, therefore, a potentially dangerous confusion between the discipline and its object – complicated even further by the fact that in some

languages, such as French and Italian, the same term is also used to indicate narrations (or "stories") as they also are, in facts, descriptions of events.

In order to approach fruitfully the semiotic entails of the relationship between history and digital games, then, we must avoid any conceptualization of history as a mere set of past events. Unable to have any direct relationship with the past, history for us is always a matter of interpretation, which is the product of a specific historiography that can never be neutral or naive.

In this article, therefore, we will exploit an abstract definition of historical discourse, such as the one introduced by Lozano (1987). According to him (not differently from Carr 1961 and Kapell and Elliot 2013), history as a discipline is an activity that involves 1) selecting elements; 2) ordering and drawing connections between those elements; and 3) putting them into perspective through a reconstruction or narration. Historiographies, therefore, are consistent with different ways of applying these procedures to the study of the past, following specific methods and survey models. Lozano's model, although in an abstract way, enables us to make the difference between historiographic theories. For example, the so-called evenemential history (Braudel 1969) selects its elements focusing on nobility, warfare, treatises, lineage and affiliations. The Annales, on the other hand, focus on the organization and connections in the long-term relationship between economics, demography and geopolitics. Finally, the reconstruction hypothesised by Stone (1979), the so called "revival of narration" uses a style and development similar to historical novels. If we apply Lozano's model to the representation of history in digital games, we can outline three distinct procedures used to implement history into digital play:

1) Setting

Game designers have to select specific elements to employ in their games. They use the past as a setting, retrieving scenarios, places, characters, motives, themes, events and situations and implementing them into their games. Some games may merely exploit some visual elements (as for example chess pieces that represent Roman soldiers and politicians) while others may build complex representations of entire play-worlds (for example the reconstruction of the places and environment of car races in 1967, in *Grand Prix Legends* 1998). The element-selection is operated in different scales: first, the selection of the historical-frame – where and when – together with the time extension (that can range from the whole history of human civilisation to the mere battle of Gettysburg); secondly, on a macro-level, the selection the aspects that will actually be present in the game. Among the elements belonging to the chosen historical-frame (war, commerce, politics, conspiracies, everyday life, etc.); finally, on a micro-level, the selection of the details of the specific elements: the appearance of buildings, clothes, weapons, technologies and characters that will actually be implemented.

2) Modelling

Digital games are simulations. For this reason, they design relationships and interactions between the historical elements and dynamics selected to be part of a game and, in this way, they construct a model. Some models keep a clear distinction between gameplay dynamics and setting (e.g. *Risk!*'s warfare), while, on the contrary, other models feature "historical engines" that try to reproduce the different levels of relationships between events, motives and historical figures (as in the *Europa Universalis* series 2001-2013).

The gameplay dynamics used to simulate the historical development may feature different levels of accuracy and also different levels of complexity. On the one hand, it

is possible to base the gameplay on some features of the historical setting in an unsophisticated or limited way. It is the case, for example, of the *Medal of Honor* series (1999-2012), in which the setting influences only some part of the gunplay, or the *Age of Empires* series (1997-2015), which units are only vaguely inspired by specific military units from various eras and cultures. On the other hand, other games develop complicated algorithms that take into consideration many variables – social, economical, political and cultural. These variables have dynamic correspondents in the gameplay in order to simulate in a more precise, yet fictional, way the development of historical events (see the complex socio-economical and political simulation of the world wars in *Hearts of Iron*).

3) Representing

Last but not least, digital games employ specific forms of visual and textual narration in order to tell the historical events. The narration selects privileged points of view on the events and operate a "cinematographic" direction that highlights some of the elements and hides others. From this perspective, digital games establish forms of representation by adopting the point of view of single historical figures (as Napoleon in the game *Waterloo* 1989) or, on the contrary, that of a wide and omni-comprehensive general narration (in strategic games such as in the *Civilization* series).

Choosing the stories to tell and the points of view to employ depends both on the historical elements that have been selected as part of the setting and on the genre of the game. RPGs and Adventure games tend to adopt the point of view of single characters (but framing them into the general development of history – see the *Assassin's Creed* series) while strategic games and simulations will adopt extra-diegetic quasi-omniscient points of view, positioning the player in a god-like position in which they are able to observe and influence directly the entire course of the history represented (which is why they are also called "God Games").[ii]

This brief typology, based on Lozano's model, allows us to underline some of the different ways in which history can be implemented and represented in digital games. However, this model focuses on the processes of construction of historiographies and is not enough to explain completely the relationship between the process of shaping historical discourses and implementing history into games. To this end, a further step is needed: we need to take in account how history is translated.

Translating History into Games

Uspenski (1988) claims that the processes of collective representation of history can be approached as a semiotic translation. If we apply this concept to the use of history made by digital games we must deal with three distinct forms of translation: a perspectival one (from the past to the present), a digital one (from the sources to the digital languages) and a ludic one (from narratives and theories to a game system). These three translations are simultaneous and interact with each other.

1) Perspectival translation

This kind of translation is common to every process of cultural appropriation and representation. The past, according to Uspenski, can be metaphorically considered as a language that we can only partially understand, but that it is not completely foreign. This “language”, therefore, must be translated in the language of the present, which is understandable by the community and/or by historians and academia. Like every translation, also this process involves a deformation of the original meaning in order to adapt it to the new language. When the past is translated into the present, thus, the latter will project on it its own value systems and ideologies: this is why we chose to call this process a perspectival translation. In every game with an historical setting, the choice of the time-frame, the role and significance of the period, the elements that are selected and so on, will all, at least partially, depend on these projections.

In fact, it is no different for history itself: despite the accuracy of the discipline (and, on the contrary, also because of its many different trends and theories), the same period of time can be interpreted in different ways and according to different perspectives, in relation with the changes of the language of the present.

The modern trends in reading the past influence deeply the choice of specific time settings for digital games (for example, it is impossible to ignore the over-representation of the World Wars and Middle Ages in games) and also the choice of geographical settings (such as Medieval Europe or Ancient Egypt). Perspectival translations determine also our ways of perceiving and imagining certain eras, the differences and similarities that we are expecting to encounter and the perspective according to which we put in order the events. For instance, technology trees in games such as *Rise of Nations* (2003) or *Civilization* (1991) are believed to mirror the Western idea of progress as a linear, uninterrupted movement towards development and they project this idea also on other civilisations that may not have shared that ideology (see Bitz 2002).

Also visual representations of the past undergo the same translation: the visual appearance of the elements (clothes, buildings, places) is often the result of a compromise between the sources and the contemporary taste (the latter influenced also by the interpretations of other media, such as cinema). The influence of the present on the visual representation of the past is even stronger when there are gaps to bridge in the sources: even the most realistic game has to fill these blanks with fictional elements that will be necessarily influenced by a modern point of view. The key elements for visual representations of the past, are, therefore, consistency and coherence – in other words: believability (see Thibault 2016).

2) Digital translation

This translation indicates the transition from written narrations (the original sources, essays, educational texts) and non-written sources (archaeological evidences, artefacts and so on) to the languages of digital audiovisual representation. Digital games' graphics engines require the translation of all the images, sounds and elements that must be represented in the game into digital objects.

The virtual reconstruction of real-life objects (artefacts, people, places) requires the latter to be transformed in lines of code, and therefore in numbers and algorithms – generally decomposing them into a set of modular elements. Due to hardware limitations and budget costs, this translation also necessitates some simplifications – for example, in many games there is only a limited amount of "faces" available for all passers-by and a limited number of facades for all the buildings. The increased rendering possibilities and hard disk capacity of current computers allow for digital games more realistic simulations – also thanks to the use of the random variables of procedural generation – but we are still far from complete plausibility. Any digital representation and simulation of the past, thus, can be created only within the current technological boundaries of software and hardware.

3) Ludic translation

This last kind of translation focuses on the second term of the expression "digital *games*". Games as a medium have their own rules, and every ludic representation of the past have to be shaped accordingly. Game rules and dynamics do not necessarily encourage historical accuracy or plausibility and, sometimes, they can even limit them substantially. The conceptualization proposed by Juri Lotman (1967) describes games as *models* that translate the ineffable complexity of reality into a precise set of rules that can be mastered by the players. The first element of the ludic translation, therefore, is a simplification. At the same time, a simulation cannot be considered a game if it doesn't feature a place for the player: it must always offer some degree of

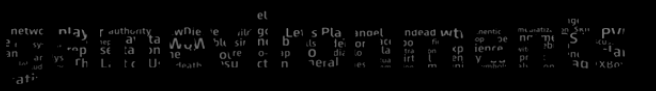
agency to the players and its gameplay structure should integrate their actions inside its own system. On the one hand, the historical elements are integrated to the gameplay (and became game mechanics), while on the other hand, the dynamics of the historical process – and of digital representation – are transformed in game dynamics. The ludic translation also requires several levels of coherence: between representation and game rules, among the specific rules themselves (i. e. *balancing* – between bonuses and maluses, players' choices and more) and finally between the gameplay of the games of the same series (Gazzard and Peacock 2011, Winnerling 2014).

At any rate, a process of representation capable of taking into account all the aspects of reality is, of course, impossible. On the one hand, a similar operation would require a perfect understanding of historical events and their causes and, on the other hand, it would require the creation of a "historical engine" able to describe and simulate the totality of the past. Digital games, therefore, more realistically, are based on a specific perspective (or narration): they select a set of meaningful elements for their representation and determine a net of dynamics in order to realise an effect of plausibility. Realism, then, is not the result of an accurate representation of the past, but of a representation that feels authentic to the modern-day player (Elliot 2010, cap. 9, Keith 2004). Attaining this degree of believability, is the result of different kinds of mediation between the representation of history and its simulated ludic counterpart. These solutions may seem simplistic or wrong for history as a discipline, but are coherent and functional for the creation of a game. For example, in the *Age of Empires* series the progress of each faction is articulated in several "ages" representing different historical eras. The passage between one "age" and another is enabled when several conditions are met (the construction of some buildings at the expense of a certain quantity of resources) and is absolutely sudden: the visual aspects of all the buildings immediately change to a more "modern" one while new

units and technologies become available to the players. These games transform something complex, laborious and manifold as historical progress in an in-game choice of the player, a possible strategy in a horizon of agency.

The interactive nature of digital games is one of the biggest challenges for historical simulations: the relationship between the players' agency and the interactive dynamics of games leads to the possibility of creating *counterfactual* history (Ferguson 1997, Peterson, Miller and Fedorko 2013): the possibility of transforming the apparent linearity of historical events (*a posteriori*) in an unpredictable set of possibilities influenced by the choice of the players. If watching Napoleon winning at Waterloo is part of what makes this sort of games appealing, it also brings up new issues of game design. Counterfactual history challenges the designers to distinguish between *unrealised* historical possibilities and historical *impossibilities*. A superficial ludic translation, therefore, risks to transform highly unlikely events in perfectly plausible outcomes or, at the contrary, to make the historical reality impossible to replicate in-game.

The sum of these three processes of translation lead the historical past into its modern, digital and playful version, irremediably modifying it. Each one of these translations entails different approaches and solutions in regard of the procedures that we called of setting, modelling and representing. The next paragraph, therefore, will be dedicated to the formulation a framework combining the two perspectives described above, in order to describe coherently all the characteristics of the representation of the past in digital games.



Building the HGR Framework

The three procedures necessary to implement history in digital games (*setting*, *modelling* and *representing*) intersect with the three types of translation required to translate the past into digital games (*perspectival*, *digital* and *ludic* translations). The framework for History-Game Relations that we propose is a tool meant for the analysis of these simultaneous processes and translations in order to shed some light on their interactions and to highlight the features and solutions adopted by specific games. We must underline that the aim of this framework is not to evaluate the historical accuracy of the elements implemented in digital games; it is a tool to conceptualise the ways in which history is shaped and adapted and to approach how this adaptation influences the representation and perception of history itself. Taking in account both the *processes* and the *translations* should allow us to focus on the interactions and synergies between the different elements, or, when appropriate, on their contradictions. The following schema draws nine slots resulting by these interactions: each slot, in relation with the others, allows to trace the coherences and incoherences of the game and its design, along both axes.

	Perspectival translation	Digital translation	Ludic translation
Setting (Selection of the elements and of the setting based on:)	Contemporary trends, influence of other media, fashionable historical periods	Hardware limitations and software potentials	Presence in the era of elements adaptable to the medium (wars, iconic figures...), Adaptability to specific digital games genres.
Modelling (Building relations and dynamics of the simulations according to:)	Theories of historical development, Historiographies, Educational narratives and storytelling	Limits and features of the historical engine (i.e. gameified historical dynamics)	Basic elements of gameplay, Players agency, game-genre dynamics, Features of playfulness.
Representing (Creation of representations and narratives based on:)	Narration models commonly used to represent history (historical fiction, novels, documentaries, etc.)	Graphic regimes, Ergodic/linear narratives, narration potentials determined by the graphic engine, use of other media (images, cinematics, comics, texts)	Game genre typical perspectives, focus on controllable elements, informativeness of the vision/narration

Table 1. The History-Game Relations framework schema.

This schema can be read both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, we can see how every process of history implementation depends and determines the interaction between the three different, simultaneous translations – that can be coherent or feature different degrees of contradiction. For example, the choice to set a game in the Battle of Midway (*Battlestations: Midway* 2007*)* (*setting*) could be based on the popularity of the historical period of World War II (*perspectival*), requiring enough rendering power to represent the position of many planes in the sky (*digital*) and can be integrated in several genres of flight simulators (*ludic*). On the other hand, a specific genre is not always adaptable to every historical period, but often requires features that make it meaningful. Historical First Person Shooters, for example, are rarely set before the First World War because of the distinctive features that

soldiers/shooters acquired in the 20th Century.

The creation of a working simulation (*modelling*) also works on these three layers. If a game uses the historical setting as a mere aesthetic decoration, most of the system of rules will be determined by the game genre and the specific design. The approach to history is likely to be based on stereotypes and focus on elements easily taken out of context (*perspectival*). The historical engine, on the other hand, will be extremely simple if not non-existent: the progress of the game, in this case, won't be strictly linked to the progress of history (*digital*). History, finally, will have a limited influence on the gameplay which will be based mostly on the game genre or on the designers' choices (*ludic*). On the contrary, if the developers aim at creating a complex and plausible historical simulation, the interaction between the translations becomes capital. A non-trivial historiographical approach must be adopted (*perspectival*) in order to build a system able to take into account the fundamental features of the historical process (*digital*). This system, however, when interacted by the players, must allow the reproduction of processes similar, up to a certain extent, to those of factual history (*ludic*).

Finally, the *representation* of history in games and its transformation into a narration will depend on the systems of value that the *perspectival* translation imply: the construction of a narration will be based on the styles and forms of other successful forms of historical storytelling such as novels and films. Also the specific features of the *digital* storytelling will have a deep impact: if the hardware limits what can be represented on-screen, the software allows the use of cybertextual elements (Aarseth 1997) such as ergodic structures and non-linear progressions (as in sandbox games or multiple-ending games). In addition, the *ludic* nature of the medium requires that these representations leave a space of agency for the player who should be able to influence the representation itself. For instance, in the *Assassin's Creed* series, the

technical possibilities of construction of detailed open-world environments – managing many characters on screen at all time – allows a complex and convincing representation of the cities through which the players move and, at the same time, is used as a base to build a narration that has much in common with contemporary cinema, both as direction and themes (thriller, conspiracy theories). The open-world game system, moreover, is coherent with the will of encouraging a sensation of "touring in the past" and is concurrently appropriate to host typical action-adventure missions, which are linear and goal-oriented, with a specific objective and an unambiguous conclusion.

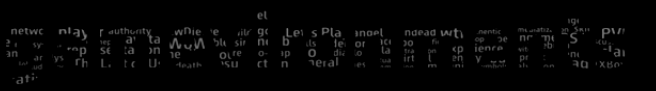
It is also possible to read the schema vertically, in order to observe how the specific translations, interact with all the operations of construction of the historical discourse. If we examine the *perspectival translation*, it appears clear that the system of values through which the past is reinterpreted can be subject of strong biases in the construction of the setting, for example through the use of "we against them" structures (Uspenskij 1973) – structure that select only specific subjects as part of Western history and will force the role of "others" to different groups (Native Americans, Barbarians, Nazis, etc.). Very few games allow the players to impersonate these "others" or recognise their ability to influence the historical development (Bembneck 2013). Similarly, if the dynamics of history undergo a similar translation, they may give birth to a rhetoric asserting that Western development was inevitable or that its predominance was already foreseeable far in the past (e.g. the dynamics of progress in *Civilization* and *Empire Earth* (2001) or the idea of development as conquering "empty" space in *Age of Empires*.

In regard of the *digital translation*, as we have already mentioned, the limits and possibilities of the digital allow different selections of elements, different possibilities of representing specific historical dynamics and different prospects of narration and

representation. The *Total War* series, for example, has been the first one to exploit the high speed rendering possibilities in order to display and control large armies on-screen (compared to the skirmish-like dimension of other RTS), taking into account, at the same time, several elements of ancient warfare – even if in a basic way, it features a psychological dimension, a combat based on masses of individuals and not on single soldiers and several rules regarding the terrain and the weather. On the opposite side, games, such as *Hearts of Iron*, focuses on the creation of a powerful historical engine that, together with a minimal graphic investment, through deep and detail-oriented design and coding, is able to exploit the potentials of the digital in order to create a complex environment able to simulate the convoluted development of history and to give meaning to all the players' actions.

Finally, the interaction between the processes is fundamental for the *ludic translation*. The historical elements that are retrieved as mechanics must interact with gameplay dynamics – that is, if they are not totally dependent on the models of a specific genre (the combat rules in the series *Empire Earth* are left basically unchanged by the passing of diegetic centuries). The gameplay dynamics are also integrated with the choice of a point of view for an efficacious narration, that aims at being coherent with the typology of game and the role of the player – present either through an *avatar* (d'Aloia 2009), either observing from an extra-diegetic point of view which helps him managing and following the development of the game and to interact with it with a high degree of agency. For this reason, many simulations favour a point of view that is omniscient and meta-subjective (from which the name God Games comes), which aggregates several roles that pertain to multiple historical subjects and entrusts them to the players.

On the contrary, games that use history as a mean for immersion – and not to create a complex model – chose a point of view strictly related to a specific *avatar* that



embodies a hero or an important historical figure. In this way the players are able to experience historical events from a perspective at the same time collective and symbolic. This kind of games generally features a linear narrative that follows a main character or group of characters, in a way that may undermine the understating of history as a multi-layered set of processes that are often influenced by aleatory elements (as stated in De Groot 2008, 133-145).

The selection of historical elements according to the needs of the ludic medium causes specific topics (such as the everyday life of slaves or the food habits in the Roman provinces) to be completely ignored (while they could be the main topic of an academic paper). However, games that attempt to reconstruct the mechanics of the historical process with complex models are based on the coherent connection of elements of the setting and play mechanics as well as play dynamics and a narrative (or, in general, a perspective) able to give meaning to the system. This is why, regardless of the historical accuracy of the elements, digital games can still teach an important lesson for historical education: the importance of *contingency* (Brown 2008); history is a complex, multi-layered set of events and processes and it is not a manifestation of immanent principles, but deals with the intimate complexity of humanity.

The HGR framework, therefore, aims at being a ready-to-use analytic tool for game scholars and historians and, eventually, also a guideline for game designers interested in adopting a historical setting. The framework is adaptable and highly flexible and it can allow different ways of travelling through it in order to highlight different features of the games, to follow a specific leading thread or simply to foster the clarity of the explanations.

In order to test the effectiveness and flexibility of the HGR framework, in the

following paragraphs we will engage to case studies: *Civlization V* and *Total War: Rome II,* two games depicting the Classical Roman civilisation. For the analysis of *Civilization V*, we will follow a horizontal path, focusing on the three translations of each historical process (setting, modelling, representing). Proceeding in this way, allows us to propose a general analysis of the main *history-to-game* process of design, covering the whole elements and categories of games and providing a broad and descriptive insight on the game.

For *Total War: Rome II*, on the contrary, we will propose a peculiar U-shaped path: first we will observe the effects of *ludic translation*, then we will describe the process of *representation*, and finally we will analyse the effects of *perspectival translation*. This path fits to the needs of the analysts: its U-shape makes it possible to observe how the interconnections between different translations and processes works, by focusing explicitly on an argumentative path that links different rows and columns to explain the direction of the whole history-to-game process.

Other ways of using the framework are always possible, such as following a vertical path or even to focus only on some of the intersections (being aware that it is part of a larger picture). Furthermore, the HGR framework can also be efficiently applied to the comparison of multiple games at once. Focusing intensively on a single process or translation, the comparison would be based on a general comparative chart for games related by genre, historical period, time of publication and so on.

Roma Aeterna: The Representation of History in Sid Meier's *Civilization V*

The *Civilization* series was born in 1991 with the release of homonymous game, developed by Sid Mayer and Bruce Shelley and published by MicroProse. The game

popularised the 4X genre (named from "explore, expand, exploit, exterminate") and introduced the great attention to detail that later become a standard for this kind of games. The games of the series are turn-based strategy god games in which the player controls an entire civilization through millennia. Even if every new game of the series features several improvements and new content, the basics of gameplay have been the same since 1991.

In the next few paragraphs we will apply the HGR framework to *Civilization V*, the last game of the series, and in particular to its approach to the Roman civilisation.

***Civilization V*: Gameplay and Characteristics**

In *Civilization V* the players embody prominent historical leaders (such as George Washington, Caesar Augustus and Gandhi) and lead their civilisation from pre-history to the near future, developing its technology, culture and military power, negotiating with other leaders and exploring the world. Starting with the foundation of cities, it is possible to create buildings (that give resource bonuses or enable new construction possibilities) and units, both civilian (builders, colons) and military.

The victory conditions are based on the different strategies that the players may adopt: scientific development (winning the "Space Race"), cultural development (project Utopia") or world domination.

In the next three paragraphs, each dedicated to one of the processes of history implementation in games, we will approach how *Civilization V* manipulates *romanitas* in order to make it become a coherent part of its system.

Setting: Selection and Translation of Historical Elements.

Civilization V represents the whole of human history and it doesn't focus on a specific time-frame. The importance of *development* in the game draws a strict

parallel between the advancement in time and that of the game (many of the victory conditions are impossible to attain before diegetic modernity). The objective of the game therefore, is to cross all history from the beginning to the end, while the players must adapt their choices and strategies to different eras. The perspective adopted, therefore, is one that sees progress as the driving force of history, while regress – always possible in history – is not contemplated. The progress of a civilisation, in addition, is absolutely linear, and do not allow any bifurcation. In addiction, the identity of these civilisations is persistent: they feature the same name and characteristics for thousands of years, regardless of their socio-technological evolution and their factual rise and fall. Also the leaders have no evolution whatsoever: Gandhi will wear his glasses in pre-history and Bismark will never change his uniform. This perspective appears to fit particularly badly with the Roman civilisation, that is known to have split in two – Western and Eastern Roman Empires – which have both "fallen" far before modern times. In *Civilization V* Rome is always united and might never fall.

The elements that are selected, therefore, are all functional to the game's structure. Each civilisation features different bonuses: one to the use or collection of certain resources and another to create special units or buildings representative of that culture. A special kind of buildings are the wonders: inspired by the wonders of the ancient world (like the Great Pyramid or Stonehenge) they are available to any player despite the civilisation, but can be built only once in each game (there cannot be two Notre Dame).

The name and appearance of several generic buildings and military units is roughly retrieved from every time-period and is at the disposal of every civilisation. The great wonders, on the other hand, are specific historical buildings even if, in-game, they are not linked to a single civilisation. The game features only one wonder built by the

Romans, the Circus Maximus, but it does not ensure that it will actually be the Roman civilisation to build it – it is possible to see, for example, the city of Rome featuring the Great Pyramid and Stonehenge instead (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Detail of the city of Rome with foreign wonders from *Civilization V*.

Similarly, the Great Persons are special units bearing the name of some important historical figure that appears automatically when certain conditions are met and allow some special actions or bonuses. Also named after important historical figures (generals, scientists, artists and merchants), will appear randomly in different civilisations (coherently, however, with the in-game current age). Several names are retrieved from Roman history, such as Spartacus, Gaius Marius, Scipio Africanus, Pompey and Belisarius presented in the game as "Great Generals" and Virgil and Lucian as "Great Artists" and Marcus Licinius Crassus as "Great Merchants". There are

not Roman figures in the list of “Great Engineers” and “Great Scientists”. These figures are randomly assigned to different civilisations, so it could very well happen that in a game Spartacus belongs to the American civilisation, while the Romans will obtain Coco Chanel when they reach modernity. Finally, even if the world maps for a *Civilization V* game are procedurally generated, it is also possible to play in a replica of the real world map. The initial positions of the players (and of the civilisations they lead) will still be random, though, while the position of the cities will be decided by each faction independently by actual history. This make highly likely situations in which the positions of civilisations on the world map are completely counterfactual (see Figure 2).

Between the historical elements that are selected and implemented in the game, only few actually depend on the choice of civilisation. The first one is the figure that leads the civilisation – each civilisation has one for the whole game. In the case of Romans is Caesar Augustus. Every civilisation has also two unique units or buildings, inspired by history; for Romans they are the Ballista (an improved version of the Catapult) and the Legion (a strong and cheap infantry unit). Lastly, the capital and the cities built by the player will have as default names those of important cities of the culture, such as Rome, Antium, Cumae, Neapolis and Ravenna (see Figure 2). The players, however, can choose to rename the cities or to keep the original names.

Figure 2. A Roman civilisation unlikely developed in western Africa and in the Sahara desert.

All the historical elements selected have, of course, been digitalised in order to become part of the game. All the names, for example, are written modern Latin alphabet and sometimes translated in the language selected for the game (in Figure 2 they are in Italian). The units and buildings are digitally represented in a very simplified way, as many of them are on the screen at all times. The military units, for example, are symbolised by a few soldiers (around a dozen) or tanks (three) that are identical to each other. Some of the soldiers may "die" to indicate a damaged unit. Similarly, cities display only few buildings and not in scale, in order to give a general visual idea of the city more than a proper representation. The aspect of units and buildings are, again, common to all civilisations, even if cities can have different appearances according to the civilisation that is chosen. Also the civilisation leaders

are represented digitally: they appear in small icons used to indicate the faction, in a digital image that accompany the description on the civilisation (see Figure 3 for the Roman leader) and on animated cutscenes when the players engage diplomacy. In these representations Caesar Augustus appearance is fairly different from what narrated in the sources while, in the dialogues, the registered voice speaks in ancient Latin – symptom of the fact that regardless of accuracy, the game aims at giving an effect of authenticity.

Figure 3. Caesar Augustus in *Civilization V*.

Modelling: Between Historical and Game Dynamics.

Civilization V is the fifth instalment of a very well established and world famous series. Regardless of many changes and improvements, the peculiar gameplay of the series had a cardinal influence in the creation of the game's dynamics. The game is, most of all, a 4x turn-based strategy game. So said, the perspective model of history adopted by the series has played an important role in establishing the genre and the series themselves.

The gameplay focuses on the development of the player's civilisation through the use of several material and immaterial resources produced by cities and by their environments: *food* is the primary resource to increase the number of citizens, *production* allows the construction of new buildings and units, *gold* is an important resource for economy, *science* allows to research new technologies and, finally *culture* allows to adopt social policies (such as freedom, devotion or autocracy) which offer several bonuses.

In the *Civilizations* series, progress is considered the driving force of history, and it takes the form of a *race*. Every civilisation can reach the same level of development and attain the same achievements, but those that do it first have a considerable advantage over the others. History is therefore seen as a race towards the present, presented in a very positivistic way. Historical events and characters, when featured, are not considered important (we are far from evenemential historiography). Historical progress is embraced in is multi-layered nature (scientific, cultural, military, artistic...) and therefore similar to the approach of the Annales, but it is also conceived as a continuous improvement in which the efforts of all the people of a culture and the exploitation of every resource of the land are finalised solely to the advancement of the civilisation.

This idea is realised by transforming every aspect of a society – its politics, technologies, resources and so on – in variables of a system. Every element is transformed either in a resource tracked by a counter, either in a product acquired by spending resources. Also the military aspects of history are reduced to relatively simple numbers that take into consideration a rather restrict set of variables and resort to a certain degree of randomness.

This fairly complex system of rules is only barely influenced by the differences of factions. The most important feature determined by the digital translation is the definition of the "personality" of the leader, i.e. the characteristics of the AIs that play against the human players. Every leader's personality is described by a series of indexes determining its likeliness to perform certain actions and to pursue certain strategies. In the case of Caesar Augustus, he prefers the scientific victory, which acknowledge the importance of technological progress for the Romans, even if it finally means that their final objective is to launch a shuttle into space. All the other indicators construct a leader which is cautious although not a warmonger, that aims at expanding rapidly his empire and to build a good road system and that attempts to keep a high value of *happiness* among his population (reducing the possibilities of uprising). Other than that, the only game element of the model that is determined by the choice of civilisation is a specific bonus. For the Romans it is called "The Glory of Rome" and it basically encourages the players to develop their capital city (Rome, by default) in order to be able to develop more easily the other provinces of the Empire. Although simplistic, the personality of the leader and the civilisation bonus are enough to give a basic representation of the popular ideas on the Roman culture (with a strong capital, good roads, in rapid expansion, ready to war but inclined to internal peace) by merely exploiting the game dynamics and without needing to make any actual change in the gameplay.

Representing: The Spirit of a Civilisation and U-cronia.

The point of view proposed in the game is a "godly" one, omniscient and all controlling, embodied by a famous historical figure taken outside history and proposed as eternal. It is a quite peculiar point of view, also related to a unique narrative: that of a race between historical civilisations which happens in a different world from the real one. To clarify this position, it may be useful to mention the introductory text that appears when a player starts a game using the Roman

civilisation.

> "The blessings of the gods be upon you, Caesar Augustus, emperor of Rome and all her holdings. Your empire was the greatest and longest lived of all in Western civilization. And your people single handedly shaped its culture, law, art, and warfare like none other, before or since. Through years of glorious conquest, Rome came to dominate all the lands of the Mediterranean from Spain in the west to Syria in the east. And her dominion would eventually expand to cover much of England and northern Germany. Roman art and architecture still awe and inspire the world. And she remains the envy of all lesser civilizations who have followed. O mighty emperor, your people turn to you to once more reclaim the glory of Rome! Will you see to it that your empire rises again, bringing peace and order to all? Will you make Rome once again center of the world? Can you build a civilization that will stand the test of time?" (*Civilization V* 2010, opening cinematic for a Roman civilisation game).

Since the first sentence, there is a strong identification between the player and the historical figure. The players are told immediately that they are Caesar Augustus and the text enumerates the merits of his civilisation. However, it seems something that is already happened, something that belongs to the past of Augustus as well as of the player. This could seem nonsensical, as the game has not even begun yet. However, the last paragraph clarifies everything revealing the u-cronic nature of the game. Augustus, and the player, are invited to reclaim the glory of Rome *once more,* the empire should rise *again* and Rome should be at the centre of the world *once again*. The setting of *Civilization V*, therefore, is not an historical setting, but it is more similar to a "civilizations' arena" in which history is exploited as a set of materials that can be dissembled and used to create the identity of a civilisation. The leader is not an individual, but the representation of the "spirit" of the civilisation, a sort of tutelary deity embodying and directing the culture at the same time. *Civilization V*, therefore, does not represent history but "a history", a period of time that is not simply counterfactual, but starts from completely different premises and is in continuous dialogue with actual history in order to have meaning. The representation of this highly u-cronic history is entrusted to different digital and ludic devices of

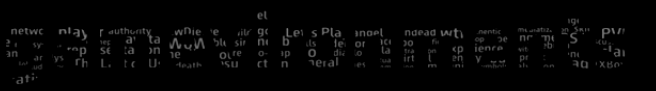
storytelling.

On the one hand, the potential of the digital are well exploited. The narration makes use of simulations, images, cinematics and audio tracks that explain and direct the action. The game also features multiple-options dialogues as part of diplomacy, in which the player interacts with an ergodic text, a non-linear narration system that simulates the negotiations with other leaders. However, one of the most interesting uses of digital multimediality is probably the existence of a *Civilopedia,* an encyclopedia that is part of the game and contains information both on its rules and on the civilisations and historical figures displayed.

On the other hand, the gameplay shapes the narration along the 4 "x" that give the name to the genre: "explore", "expand", "exploit" and "exterminate". The progression through the narrative is based on turns and on the players' execution of these actions in order to advance their civilisation. The victory conditions, all based on progress, are both the objective of the game and the end of the narrative. Finally, the loosely connected historical elements present in the game allows the players to chose if they want to imitate some of the characteristics of factual history, or if they prefer to wallow in the u-cronic nature of the game.

Summary and Conclusions on Civ5

The HGR framework allowed us to distinguish the different elements contributing to a specific depiction of historical process in *Civilization V*. On the one hand, the series propose a view of history as a linear and unidirectional process, according to a positivistic ideology of development, that culminates with West-centered narratives (the UN, the space race); on the other hand, the historical elements employed (civilisations, characters, events, discoveries etc.) are only loosely connected to the process of historical development: untied from spatial and temporal coordinates, they are like puzzle pieces with universal purposes that can be freely exploited in



different ways.

If the final result of the historical process is taken for granted, the means, the tools and the elements that will allow a civilisation to reach it can be u-chroniquely mixed and matched – as long as they are not in contrast with the general model of development of the series (the 4X gameplay). The resulting process is a playful re-enactment of an alternative human history, created through a de-historycisation of historical elements and seen through the point of view of a God-player. The players, hence, have to follow and to direct a counterfactual mix that will develop *a* history in front of their eyes.

The historical characters, cities and factions are the ultimate elements of this historical alchemy: it is their interaction that creates the setting. This explains their stiffness: they have to be fixed and irreducible, because, if the game's history is the result of their interactions, they are *not* the result of history themselves – just a part in the unmodifiable rules of the game.

In conclusion, our analysis of *Civilizations 5* can be summarised in the schema that follows:

	Perspectival translation	**Digital translation**	**Ludic translation**
Setting	History is seen as a human race towards development (military, economic, cultural), in a a process of linear, unidirectional and unmodifiable progress	Simplified and fix representation of units, virtual image of Augustus, names in modern alphabet	Loosely connected elements: units, city names, historical figures, world map generally independent from time/age/place
Modelling	Connects everything to progress and to the resources to achieve it	Multiple, quantifiable resources, system of points and costs, AI related to the personality of the Leader.	The series standard is predominant (4x genre). Only change for Rome is the rule "Glory of Rome"
Representing	Point of view of a leader/deity and of a civilisation seen as organic and with a "spirit"	*Civilopedia*, audio introduction, Dialogues options in diplomacy	Victory conditions as specific events, Re-enactment and playful u-cronia

Table 2. *Civilization V* as seen through the HGR framework.

Framing Romanitas in Total War: Rome II

Total War is strategic games series featuring a historical-setting, whose first game (*Shogun: Total War* 2000) allowed to play the role of a Daimyo during Sengoku period. In its later instalments, the series has been set in the European Middle Ages (*Medieval: Total War* 2002), in ancient Rome (*Rome: Total War* 2004), in Early Modern *(Empire: Total War* 2009) in the 18th-19th Century (*Napoleon: Total War* 2010) and,

recently, in late Antiquity (*Total War: Attila* 2015).

The *Total War* series has been, since its release, an innovation in computer strategy games. Through a double game map, *Shogun* conjugated the turn-based structure of TBS to the real-time battles of RTS. Inspired by the *Civilization* series for political and strategic planning, and by wargames for combat, the series expanded and enhanced its peculiar gameplay, adapting its basic game structure to different historical settings.

In the next paragraphs, we will analyse the way in which *romanitas* is shaped and represented in the game, starting with a brief description of the main historical elements, dynamics and perspectives of the game.

***TWRII*: Gameplay and Features**

Total War: Rome II (from now on *TWRII*) is set in the Classical Antiquity, in the days of the Roman Republic. While the tutorial takes place in 316 BC, during the Battle of Capua, the main campaign starts in 272 BC, and goes on for 300 years (the game, however, can continue even further). The game distinguishes between the setting of the different historical campaigns (the tutorial, Caesar in Gaul, Imperator Augustus etc.) and the "main campaign" – the freest one, that allows the players to re-enact the entirety of the Antiquity. From a geographical perspective, the playable map reaches its maximum extension in the main campaign, modelled on the maximum size ever achieved by the Roman Empire.

The game features a rich repertoire of names, places, events and situations of the history of Rome, but with significant differences between the historical campaigns and the main one. The former includes historical figures, more detailed maps (featuring minor settlements, routes etc.) and well-known battles, while in the latter certain historical elements are randomly generated (names of generals, agents and

legions), disconnected from their context (construction techniques or legislative changes) or based on arbitrary selections.

The player is entrusted with both the command of a Roman *gens* and the command of Rome itself: his actions are addressed outside (towards the other territories or opposing factions) and also inside (promoting his relatives, killing political opponents or contracting marriages of interest). Nevertheless, the player can take control of characters outside of the family, using them as the generals of his own faction. He receives at the same time assignments by the Senate, which is not a faction in itself, but simply a source of optional quests during the campaign. As well as romans, the players can choose to embody other "cultures" and their "factions" (populations as Getae or the Volsci are so indirectly compared to the Roman *gentes*).

In historical campaigns it is possible to directly control well-known historical characters and their faction. Typically, these campaigns feature an introductory sequence that aims to tell the story from the perspective of the main character involved (Caesar, Octavian etc.). At the beginning of each campaign, the faction's military advisor provides a framing of the geopolitical situation and at the same time suggests possible routes and strategies to follow to ensure the success of his own side. These missions are generally coherent with the optional objectives proposed by the Senate.

Figure 4. Strategic map, a newborn Rome just conquered the Etruscans.

Figure 5. Real-time map, the Roman army attacking Carthago.

Ludic Translation of *TWRII*

First of all, the main historical elements and dynamics are well integrated within the genre of *Total War*, a mixture of real-time and turn-based strategy. The elements of the *romanitas* selected as core elements are drawn from the contest of military conquests, economic and geographical development and internal and external policies and diplomacy, coherently with the typical elements of RTS games – featuring conflicts and economic growth and/or technological development– and also with the typical elements of TBS, especially the 4x subgenre. The absence of some substantial historical perspectives (the daily life of the population, law-making and its effects, natural disasters, religions and faith, etc.) depends on the difficulty of providing "meaningful" dynamics for the genre based on their characteristics. As a result, most of the above-mentioned key elements of the historical discourse are almost completely absent – or, alternatively, present only in simplified forms, depending on the key elements mentioned above (e.g. the number of slaves in the region – a value which provides wealth for the region, but increases the internal instability as well).

Such a "selective" use of historical elements mirrors the way in which historical dynamics are translated into gameplay dynamics. The four elements of the 4x genre are not only key elements of the system, but also structurally intertwined dynamics, so that each action taken by players will directly affect the others. In particular, the expansion of the army requires greater financial resources and food production, but allows the players to acquire new cities and regions, which bring new cultures, increasing instability while allowing new places to build into. Conversely the exploration of the map, coupled with diplomacy or war, not only allows to obtain new territories, but also to exchange resources and create trade routes and defensive alliances, ensuring economic and military benefits. This tight interaction is confirmed by main campaign's victory conditions: the three types of victory (military,

technological, cultural) always require close interaction between conquest, production, expansion and negotiation, although in different ratios. Even if present, the above-mentioned historical dynamics can only exist in the game as marginal aspects of the key game dynamics.

The freedom guaranteed to players within the system allows them to act in a partially independent way, developing a more or less counterfactual history (Ferguson 1997) remaining within the game elements and dynamics: to the point where players can also shape a history of Rome that heavily contradicts factual history. Opting, for example, for a peaceful republic, by limiting to doing business with their neighbours. The features of the Senate missions and the military advisors, however, act in the opposite direction. With their initial strategic advice and optional goals during the game, they have the task of direct the player towards factual history, or at least towards a generally coherent narration within the possibilities of historical development.

This is connected to the second issue related to the creation of "historical engine" mentioned earlier: the fact that historical consistency is also built through balancing elements, dynamics and game events. For example, it would be useless for the counsellor and the Senate suggest the Roman player to defeat the Etruscan to the north, if they had been designed as a challenge beyond the player's ability. On the contrary Carthage is designed to be a much more serious obstacle to the development in the Mediterranean, and the player should not be able to face it right from the start. The nature of historical sandboxes on the one side and the limits of the historical engine on the other, also allow possible unforeseen developments of counterfactual histories – even unrealistic or unexpected (as the Volscians become conquerors of the Mediterranean). Yet, it is precisely in this playful element of unpredictability (Lotman 2013) that players feel the meaning of their choices, the

possibility to explore the depths and reach the limits set by the game.

Lastly, considering the process of *representing history*, the gameplay interacts with historical assets in a double way. On the one hand, according to the features of the strategic games genre, it deploys perspectives and narratives “from above”, which allow the players to analyse the circumstances and provide a wide array of information. On the other hand, it employs "close up", focused perspectives and narratives, centred on notable individuals, units or special events. This perspective diverts from the characteristics of strategic genre and act in a partially incoherent way: in-game shoots centred on characters (as Octavian in Imperator Augustus) and especially the "cinematic mode" battle visual are the fittest example of this. These examples show a tendency to cinematic representation that we will discuss through the study of the game perspective translation.

Representing History in *TWRII*

We briefly observed how the ludic representation is driven by two main processes: the typical storytelling of strategy games and a cinematic representation. The latter is the result of a gradual attempt in TW series to support a "close-up", direct drive storytelling, which allows to tell and live the action from the inside. This is exemplified by the "cinematic mode" available during battles, which eliminates the HUD and draw the camera amongst the military units. For the same purposes, *TWRII* largely uses character-centred video sequences at the beginning of historical campaigns and historical battles (for example, the Battle of Teutoburg features a brief narration sequence, and the battle begins with a close-up of the legions taken by surprise). These dynamics of direction (in a cinematographic sense), focusing on the point of view of specific historical figures, have the task to introduce the event through specific and partial perspectives.

These perspectives are backed by a graphic engine specifically created to allow this back-and-to between top view and close view, together with a complex digitalization work in order to represent soldiers and elements as differentiated entities and not simple copies of the same model. This level of detail requires a hard work on textures-making, and an engine flexible enough to allow switching from low-detail scenes (with long field of view), to scenes based on a high polygon counts and high details.

From the point of view of *perspective translation*, it is clear that the Roman faction is considered the centre of the historical events in the game, and is believed to be the driving force of history in Classical age. Although players can control other factions, most of the mechanics and dynamics are grounded on the idea of controlling the Roman Republic. As an example, the internal politics dynamics seem primarily structured to reflect the struggles among *gentes* in the Senate, although they are shared by all factions. In a similar way, secondary goals are assigned by the Senate for the Roman player, but by an undefined entity for the other factions. In addition, all the historical campaigns (with the exception of *Wrath of Sparta*) deal with the history of *The Urbe*, and allow to control their heroes and leaders. *TWRII*, unlike *Total War: Medieval*, it is not a title "simply" focused on a historical period (classical antiquity), but it is also focused on the subject considered the most interesting point of view of the period, located for this reason at the centre of the scene and on which the whole game dynamics are grounded.

Figure 6. Diplomatic map, Rome gaining control of the Mediterranean.

Close-up representations, on the one hand, and Roman-centred point of view on the other, produce a specific historical perspective: closer to the style of film storytelling, akin to the imaginary of historical blockbusters (old or new), in which the focus is on telling stories of iconic characters within their historical environment, reinterpreted in a more or less accurate way. The main difference here is the fact that *TWRII* is a strategic game. For this reason, it involves limits of direction and narration that are not always easy to overcome. Moreover, the gameplay makes it difficult to create empathy towards characters, due to their nature of "pawns" in a much larger environment (differently from the *Assassin's Creed* series which focuses on adding a personal feeling). If the spectacular storytelling of *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen 2004) or *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott 2000) still produces empathy towards single characters, the *Total War* series aims, instead, at creating *immersion* in a historical setting, in which the point of view can shift from bird's-eye-view to close-up view, making the player feel as part of a coherent historical scenario that he can explore and control.

Perspectival Translation in *TWRII* and Conclusion

It is now possible to define the main cultural codes through which past history is put into contemporary perspective in *TWRII*. The dual perspective (omniscient vs close-up) is joined on the one hand by the elements of gameplay and on the other by a strong immersive and focused cinematic representation. As a result, the perspective from which past history is interpreted is not at all unintelligible.

The historical dynamics portrayed in the game, as noted above, are coherent with the typical features of the strategic genre. Yet these dynamics also interact with the players' expectations and the modern-day perception the development of history. The most relevant difference about the perspective translation lies in the distinction between the main functions of gameplay (war, economics, politics), the secondary ones (slave issues, provincial acculturation) and those which are completely absent (law-making activities, the role of the Senate, faith and religion). The minor role played by these dynamics within the game does not reflect just the gameplay needs: through this representation, it promotes the idea that their impact on the history of Rome was in itself limited.

This perspective is consistent with an *evenemential* approach to history (Braudel 1969), common in works of popularization and entertainment among different media. According to this approach, the main pillars of historical discourse are based on key events (dynasties, politics, economics, war and famine), described by chronicles and ancient treatises. These events and narratives are not interpreted as the interaction of complex and multi-layered variables, but as the relatively linear result of a series of understandable and visible effects. The military conquests become, thus, the outcome of a limited number of decisive battles; economy is depicted as a mere gain or loss of assets; politics are a simple game of alliances, betrayals and weddings to accumulate power at the expense of rivals; and so on.

The result is the suppression of those phenomena that (independently from their importance in Roman history) are not easily perceived and narrated in a linear way or related to specific events. This is the reason why, in the game, slavery becomes a mere economic and governing dynamic, or why the acculturation between factions is only translated into a penalty for the internal public order. For the same reasons, the social classes issues of Rome are ignored and law-making is limited to issuing "edicts" that provide military, economic, or technological bonuses. What is not immediately ascribable to evenemential perspective is therefore translated into clearer, consistent and linear dynamics according to which the historical development is read, interpreted and ludified. The authenticity that the developers want to create trough the *Total War* series is given by the coherence of the represented history with our cultural filters, while it is integrated into well-established game mechanics and dynamics.

Roman civilisation, thus, is narrated as the emblem (retrospectively interpreted) of empire-building, realised through the "great pillars of history" (war, politics and economics) in a series of well defined and historic events, icons and narratives. The games consistent interaction of real time and turn based gameplay, backed by the shift between views form above and close-ups, represents the relationship between the main historical processes and the individual elements and dynamics that confirm, reflect and transform them into a narration.

The schema above summarizes the main key points of our analysis through the HGR Framework. In the end, what is said above should not be interpreted as a deficiency or a limit of *TWRII*, but as the consequence of the interaction of history with digital games as entertainment.

	Perspectival translation	Digital translation	Ludic translation
Setting	Evenemential history, told through the great pillars (war, politics, economics), involving well-known characters and factions	Mix of in-game engine (war and main map, avatars) with 2d iconic representations (game buttons, icons, buildings and advisors)	Coherent with both RTS and TBS typical elements (war, economics, politics)
Modelling	Key events shape the course of the history: great battles, economic wealth, political conspiracies or trans-empire alliances	Algorithms and point-balance are applied to create believable balance of power and behaviours between factions	The main dynamics of the genre are applied, while specific dynamics are created/adapted to match a Roman setting
Representing	Point of view of a Gens and of the Roman republic as a whole. Kolossal style in depiction of the past	Feasible game engine, able to show both long-range aerial views and high detail close ups	Both bird's eye view (typical of strategy games) and close-up view (typical of action/adventures)

Table 3. *Total War: Rome II* as seen through the HGR framework.

Conclusion

The use of the HGR Framework applied to *Civilization V* and *TWRII* highlighted several similarities and differences between their systematic uses of history. Despite being both 4x God games, they embody quite different visions and enactment of history. First, they adopt different perspectives on the historical development: while both features rhetoric of linear historical progress, the former depicts history as a sort of arena of civilisations, a puzzle of elements that can be u-chroniquely recombined by the god-player; the latter focus on a single faction and a specific period, providing specific pillars of historical development (wars, commerce, diplomacy) the players have to master and make their own in order to re-enact the heritage of the Empire.

Secondly, the two games employ different ways of constructing digital historical environments: the former focusing on leaders, implementing specific encyclopedias, portraits and UI style; the latter focusing on factions, implementing coherent geographical and geopolitical scenarios and specific units and buildings. Where *Civilization V* carries on a digitalised playful historical performance, *TWRII* deploys coherent big-scale historical scenarios.

Lastly, they employ different game dynamics in relation to historical structures: both connected with their genre (strategy games, TBS or hybrid RT-TB) and series, yet configuring different paths and leading to different outcomes: an u-cronic, sandbox-like way of playing with historical elements (*Civilization V*), and an historical scenario re-enactment, apparently faithful, while possibly counterfactual, evenemential and spectacular.

The HGR framework, in conclusion, has proved itself a useful tool to analyse the main features of the process of turning history into games: it helps us understand and explain how and why very different representations of historical process arise from the use of generic elements of a common genre (4X).

Instead of investigating the fidelity of the ludic re-enactment of history, it spurs us to focus on the way through which every historical representation is the result of a series of choices involving the interpretation of the past, the use of the digital medium and the features and nature of games.

We believe its flexibility makes it easily adaptable to the users' needs and to the peculiarity of the objects, providing at the same time an all-encompassing, meaningful and comparable framework for the study of history in digital games.

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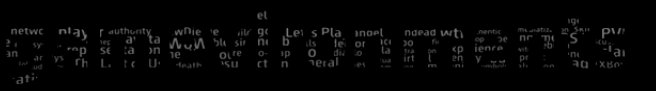

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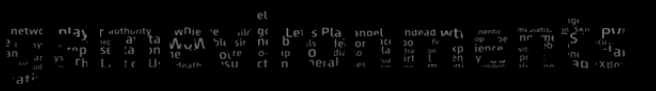

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[i] Among the many historical games taking place in the Roman age, worth mentioning are also *Centurion: Defender of Rome* (1990), forerunner to the *Total War* series, *Europa Universalis*: *Rome* (2008), belonging to the Paradox interactive model of grand strategy games, and *CivCity: Rome* (2006), a city builder spin-off of *Civilization* Series.

[ii] God games are simulations or strategy games that let players act on large scale scenarios with powers and control over the game beyond that available to individual characters or plausible for organizations, hence the "godly" attribute. Players in *Civilization* series, for example, although represented by an avatar, control the totality of the military, technological and cultural development for over a millennial year arch.