

## **Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #1) and Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #2)**

**Nathan Matteson, MFA**

*School of Design, College of Computing and Digital Media,  
DePaul University, Chicago IL, USA [www.skeptic.ist](http://www.skeptic.ist)  
e-mail: [nmatteso@depaul.edu](mailto:nmatteso@depaul.edu)*

**Nicholas Kersulis, MFA**

*Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles CA, USA  
[www.kersulis.com](http://www.kersulis.com)  
e-mail: [nickersulis@yahoo.com](mailto:nickersulis@yahoo.com)*



### **Abstract**

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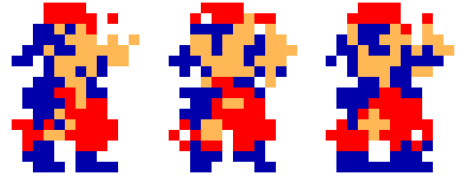
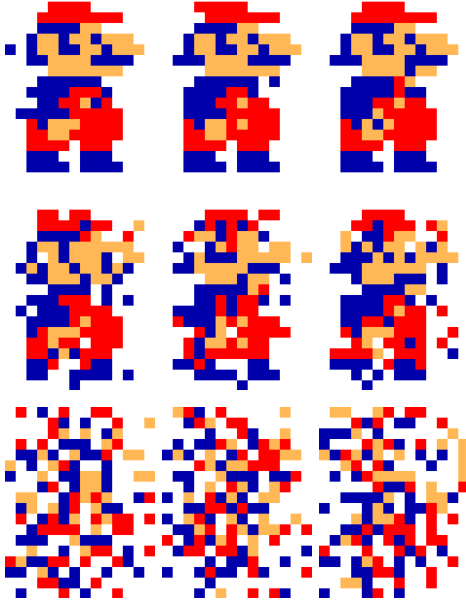
What is a portrait (What is it a portrait of)? Must it achieve verisimilitude (is it possible to achieve likeness of an entity that does not exist)? What constitutes existence (do memories exist)? These questions, and more, are all asked, and never answered, by Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #1) and

Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #2).

This diptych of good-for-nothings address Mario—one of the most recognizable 'portraits' of the digital era. Immediately identified by so many, Mario has had impact across multiple generations,—from those who first encountered him as the Jumping Man in Donkey Kong, to his outsized presence in a familial universe of pipes and mushroom, to finally a much more open universe where Mario and his ilk inhabit the roadways, sports arenas, outer space, etc. Are these in fact the same Mario—the plumber and the motorist? Is the continuity of a representation even able to imply continuity of that which is represented?

Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #1) takes as its input a canonical sprite from Mario's initial appearance in Donkey Kong. A pixel is selected at random and its position (or color, depending on how you look at the world) is swapped with a randomly selected adjacent pixel. At what point is

Mario's identity compromised to the point that portraiture becomes caricature?



From this simple numerical model of Mario-ness, a vast array Mario-like entities can be drawn—in fact were one to draw them all, a canonical Mario would necessarily appear. But which, if any, of these representation can be said to be depictions of Mario. Where does the Mario-ness lie?

When does semiosis shift from an iconic representation of Mario to a symbolic representation of an ersatz working-class Italian gentleman? Eventually ambiguity further deteriorates this symbolism, and finally the indexicality of abstraction takes hold.

Good-for-nothing (working-class Italian gentleman #2) revisits ideas we explored in Good-for-nothing (no. 2). The probability of a color appearing in each row and column of the same sprite is calculated; as well as the probability of any color appearing adjacent to other colors.

