

Reflections on MAGAW 2017

Environment Design as Interactive Background and World Building

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I proposed an analysis on objects interactivity and in-game space interconnections with a doubt in mind: does more interaction equal to better game experience? I was questioning the usefulness of bloating rooms with dynamic assets (objects that you can pick up or store in a UI inventory, buttons to be pressed, doors that unlock, and even NPCs to talk to), not with a pragmatic perspective, but with a communicative, aesthetical need. When the Map of the Empire becomes the size of the Empire in Borges' tale¹, it is of no use but the exact one as the land itself: navigating it becomes as challenging as to reach all of its corners; there is no message to deliver but the world itself, in all its entropy.

As I mentioned in my proposal, you can pick up almost everything in titles like *Skyrim* or *The Witcher 3*, yet there is an inherent hierarchy that positions first everything that is important for the current mission, either shown in the UI or player-planned. There are ways to arrange assets on their importance for the play, and that is something that I started to understand while analysing *Lego: Worlds*.

The main "but" to my approach was that I did not consider the change of state of the player character. Things and NPCs around you would behave differently depending on the weapon you holded, on the animal or machine you rode. The particularity of this game is that everything is built with Legos, hence everything is interactible. I made a classification of level of interaction between objects, but not in relation with the player status. Houses made out of bricks were normally pure landscape, a way of conveying variety in each of the worlds you visit, but they became destructable, clonable and inkable house-shaped bricks with the correct tool active.

As a cursor, even the player's avatar transforms into a background element when holding a creation gun, allowing the players input reflect on the target zone. Does that make own avatars another element of interaction?

I believe this and other considerations (what does "better" mean in this context? What will I do when I am done with my survey of interactible objects? How do goals affect the hierarchy of interaction? And a considerable etcetera) arose in the proper space, MAGAW.

1 BORGES J. L., «On Exactitud in Science» in *A Universal History of Infamy* (translated by Norman Thomas de Giovanni), Penguin Books, London, 1975.

I do not think my analysis was successful in terms of that it was not a complete method, but it succeeded in making me see how much there is to learn, where my next tiny steps can go. As a game designer I want to make conscious decisions on how much and what kind of interactions I want to allow the players to experience, as for painting oil on canvas, how thin my brush will be, when it will be enough.