

MAGAW 2017 Reflections

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MAGAW represented a unique opportunity to test a method of analysis that I am developing in the context of my PhD thesis –a taxonomy of temporal structures (see table)– and to present the results to other scholars in the game studies field. The workshop met my expectations in both regards allowing me to make needed improvements to the methodology, and to assess lines of enquiry that can arise from its implementation.

I regard my experience at MAGAW as highly satisfactory. I welcome the type of bottom-up approach to game analysis fostered by the workshop, which does away with cherry picking and can thus effectively expose flaws or shortcomings in methods of analysis.

I believe that my method was a useful tool for the analysis of Lego Worlds, since I could dissect the game’s temporal structures as expected. But the analysis also helped me detect inconsistencies in the method and rework some of the categories in the taxonomy. The category “Loops” under “Change of State” (see table) was still under consideration before the workshop. The analysis allowed me to redefine it and include it as a fixed part of the taxonomy. The category “Triggers” was previously under “Spatiotemporal Structures,” but during MAGAW I realized that it fits better under “Change of State.”

Change of state	Spatiotemporal structures	Goals and restrictions
<i>Action (and reaction)</i>	<i>Localization</i>	<i>Time Gauges</i>
<i>Progression</i>	<i>Spatial Design</i>	<i>Turns</i>
<i>Pace (constant-fluctuating)</i>	<i>Discrete/continuous space</i>	<i>Conditions</i>
<i>Triggers</i>		<i>Levels</i>
<i>Layers</i>		
<i>Loops</i>		

Table: Taxonomy of Temporal Structures

Those are two examples of ways in which the analysis stage at MAGAW helped me polish the taxonomy. During the presentation and discussion round, some comments brought me to consider the way I present the methodology and its scope (e.g. should it be a purely formal method or should it also be informative about player experience?).

Nevertheless, the fact that my methodology could be applied to Lego Worlds might have been a fluke. To truly test the applicability of a method, one should use it in the analysis of several blindly (or randomly) selected games. To this end there is still, to my knowledge, no proper methodology within game studies. This would be an interesting future project for our field. The analysis of several games would considerably extend the duration of the workshop, but this still might be something worth considering for the organizers.

Finally, the selection of the game should have perhaps taken the accepted approaches into consideration. Not doing this left at least two participants with little to analyze, because their approaches were tailored to types of games different from Lego Worlds. This might seem to contradict my comments above, since it would imply that the game should be selected already with the analysis in mind, thus introducing a top-down element. But this should not necessarily be the case. One could apply a filter to the game selection and still select from the resulting pool at random.

All things considered, MAGAW proved to be an engaging and productive approach to game analysis and discussion. My own research has certainly benefited from it and I think that the game studies field could profit from this type of practice as well.