

# MMAJams - Multi-Method Analysis of Games in Research and Education

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## MULTI-ANALYSIS OF GAMES

Consider a canonical artifact in game research such as The Sims (The Sims Studio 2009). Our understanding of it might be very different depending on how we approach it. Do we see it as a game? A simulation of late capitalist society? An authoring tool for creating narratives? A virtual doll house for grown-ups?

Many researchers are aware of the plenitude of available analytical lenses, yet, most of the time, there are only enough resources to pick a single one. At the same time, it seems clear that a combination of lenses - essentially a multi-method approach - will yield additional insights.

With this paper we propose concrete steps towards making multi-method analysis (MMA) more accessible and more widely used. We understand this approach also as a reaction to Detering's (Deterding 2016) warning about an increasingly close-mindedness of games studies focusing only on "native" methods.

## WIKIS and MMAJAMS

We propose two steps, 1) the creation of a multi-analysis wiki as a shared knowledge base for comparing insights about particular games and 2) the introduction of a specific method, MMAJams, to enable multi-agent analysis in a classroom setting or at a workshop.

## Multi-Method Wiki

The goal for the Wiki is to enable an overview how different analytical approaches change our perspective of the same artefact and thus enhance our overall understanding. To that end, it will start with an initial list of design and analytical methods and a short list of exemplars for analysis.

We propose the following analytical methods initially for the planned comparisons:

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- Play testing (Fullerton et al. 2004) and user studies, in particular a) observational studies of users playing a game, and b) asking players about their play experience using methods such as formal, semi-formal or deep interviews (Cote and Raz 2015), stimulated recall studies (Pitkänen 2015) or teach-back tasks (Van der Veer et al. 1990; Puerta-Melguizo et al. 2002).
- Frameworks for game analysis. Amongst the specific methods used to analyze games in a more general sense, are the MDA model (Hunicke et al. 2004) and its extensions by Winn (Winn 2009) and by Walk et al. (Walk et al. 2017). Aki Järvinen's model (Järvinen 2007), Callois's (Callois 1958) and Huizinga's (Huizinga 1938) classifications as well as Björk and Holopainen's notion of game design patterns (Bjork and Holopainen 2005).
- Social studies methods, especially ethnographic methods and methods used in social anthropology, where researchers observe and analyze play in virtual game worlds and other close-knit communities of play practice (Taylor 2003).
- Biographical and autobiographical descriptions of designing games, such as post-mortems written by developers and researchers (Khaled et al. 2018).
- Close-playing, using methods derived from the tradition of close reading (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011).
- Content analysis (Hodder 1994), e.g, making observations of what exists in particular games.
- Analyzing corpora of second order narratives about a game. Examples of this approach include data mining of game reviews and the categorization of critical criteria (Eladhari 2018).

The main pieces of information at top level of the wiki would be the specific games, and the specific methods. Studies would link games and methods. As a resource, the wiki would allow users to see what studies have been made of a certain game, and what method(s) were used. Alternatively, the starting point could be to look at a certain method, and see what types of games have been analysed with that particular method, and what type of research questions have been asked.

Ideally, researchers and teachers would also provide information about their publications and their students' theses, specifying which games were studied, using what method(s) and if possible, summarise the main research question and findings. As a communal effort, this could further help grow the knowledge of the field of game studies.

Our initial list of artifacts to enable multi-method comparisons are: The Sims (The Sims Studio 2009) representing multi-agent sandbox games. Half-Life (Valve 1998) first person shooters (FPS), Planescape: Torment (Black Isle Studios 1999) single player computer role playing games, and World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) Massively Multi-Player Role Playing Game (MMORPG). Finally, Firewatch (Campo Santo 2016) represents personal exploration games (PEG).

## **MMAJams**

Game jams are a well-established method for ideation and in education (Kultima 2015). In a game jam, individuals or groups of developers create game prototypes in a race against the clock with limited time and resources. We propose to adapt the 'jam process to the analysis of games in order create an environment where groups of people come together to produce several analysis in a short time. In order to create the first round of multi-method analyses, we are planning a 'multi method analysis jam' (MMAJam), where researchers come together in groups to analyse one particular game. Each group in the jam would use a distinct method for analysis and be given a specific time frame to complete the analysis. After the assigned times ends, the results would be made available in a wiki (special for the occasions) for the different groups to see. In a final round, each groups would describe their chosen method in contrast to the other analysis, focusing on advantages, issues and possible blind spots. The results of such an analysis jam are thus two-fold: a game analysis using multiple methods and a set of meta-analysis of the respective methods.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we proposed to combine multiple analytical methods in a multi-method analysis (MMA) of games as a way to gain a broader understanding of games an overcome the limitations inherent in individual analytical methods. We have proposed concrete steps towards making MMAs a practical and accessible option for researchers and educators with the help of a public wiki containing an initial set of methods and exemplars and the introduction of MMAJams, as a structure to create MMAs in workshop and educational settings. We are aware that the list of methods for study above might be incomplete, and that some items may need to be on different levels of abstraction and thus require further adjustments. Hence, we invite the researcher and teacher communities to help us in taking this endeavor further.

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