

SEIN UND ZEIT

Being and Time

(Final Fantasy Edition)

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Coauthored with...

Sorely missed as well



Plan of the talk

1. Introduction;
2. Truth in Fiction (TIF) and Truth in Videogames (TIV);
3. Spacetime, Mereotopology, Videogames.

1. Introduction

We analyze games from two perspectives:

1. ‘from outside’ – the way *we* talk about games and make sense of what happens *there*. We shall analyze the concept of truth in videogames (TIV) in close analogy with David Lewis’ (1978) treatment of fictional discourse.
2. ‘from inside’ – the way the structure of the space *within* a game constraints its own dynamics: in particular, some insights from mereotopology will be used to analyze the difference between, say, the space Super Mario lives in from the rich universe traveled by Cloud Strife in Final Fantasy VII.

2. Truth in Fiction (TIF)...

Consider for example the following true sentences related to fiction:

- 1) Holmes lives in Baker Street (true *in* the fiction);
- 2) Holmes lives nearer to Paddington than to Waterloo (truth *implied by* the fiction);
- 3) Holmes is a fictional character. (truth *about* the fiction).

Lewis (1978) is built around the idea that sentences such as (1) have an hidden modal operator, the *in the fiction* operator:

TIF_{def}) ‘*In the fiction* P’ is true only if P would be true if the fiction was told as known fact rather than fiction.

Truth in Fiction (TIF) (cont'd)...

1 *) *In the fiction*, Holmes lives at 221/b of Baker Street.

The truth conditions for (1*) are thus the following: (1*) is true if ‘Holmes lives at 221/b of Baker Street’ would be true if the fiction was told as known fact.

In a standard semantics for counterfactuals (say Lewis (1973)), we can further unpack the conditions with possible worlds: (1*) is true if, in the closest world w where the story of Holmes is told as a fact, Holmes in w lives at 221/b of Baker Street (which is certainly the case).

...and Truth in Videogames (TIV)

TIV_{def}) '*In the game* P' is true only if P would be true if the game's events were real rather than simulated.

4) Sephiroth kills Aeris.

would then be true if in the closest world w where Final Fantasy VII is reality and not a simulation, Sephiroth in w kills Aeris (which is certainly the case).

Contingency and necessity in TIV

Let's say that a particular session of *FF VII* is a *run*. Now, let's collect the set of all *complete* runs of *FF VII*, that is, any sequence of events going from the first screen of the videogame to its end: this is the space of possible events for *FF VII*. Any such sequence will contain exactly one Aeris' death, but most of them will contain a different number of Chocobos.

Problematic issues (TIF and TIV)

Multiverse comparisons

- 7) There are more planets in Star Wars videogame than in Star Trek.
- 8) Harry Potter is more like the perfect husband than Edward Cullen.

Gappy sentences:

- 9) Shinji was secretly in love with Asuka/Rei.
- 10) Cloud Strife was secretly in love with Red XIII.

Fiction/World comparisons

- 11) Ortho “The Darkness” Stice won less matches than Michael Stich.
- 12) It’s harder being a major in SimCity than in a real city.

A TIV's issue of agency

Fiction and agency:

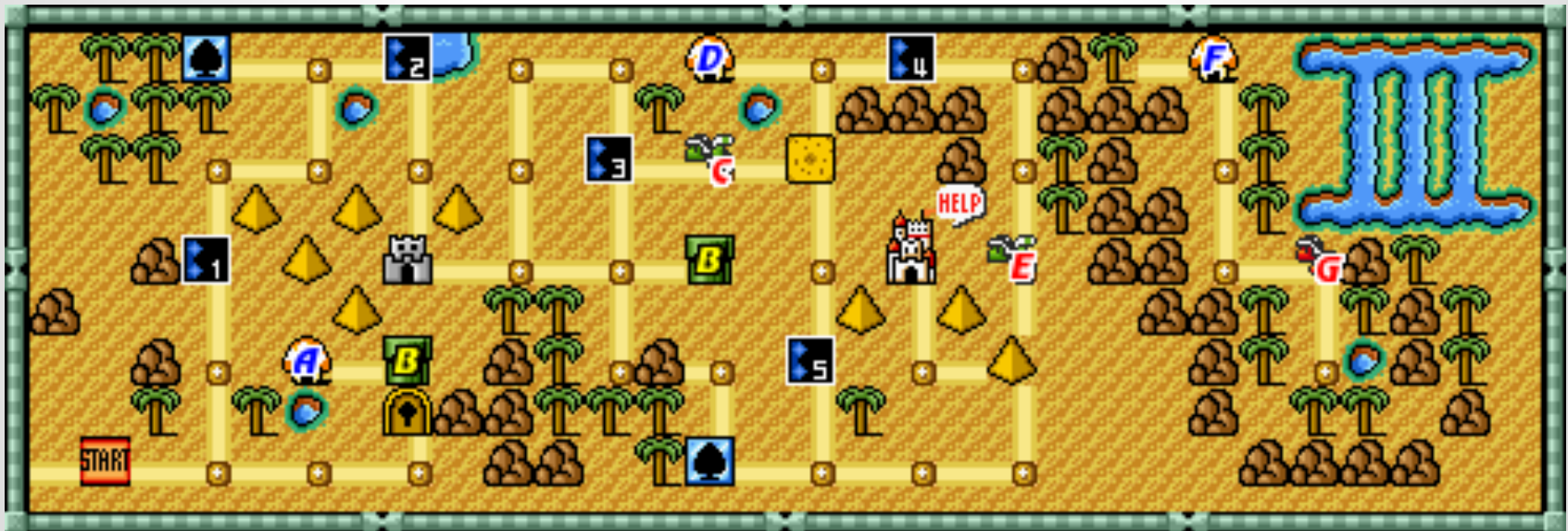
5) Cloud died because I pushed the wrong button.

6) Anna Karenina died because I turned the page.

To track this issues down, we need to somehow go formal and consider spacetime representation of videogames.

3. Spacetime, Mereotopology, Videogames

Consider a Super Mario game...



1D-Markovian space

At any given point in time, Mario is in one, and only one “block” of the game. Moreover, we can single out two “special points” in Mario space: the *beginning* and the *end* – the only two points in this space that are connected to just one cell. These special points are connected through what we may call a *path*:



PH_{def}) A *path* from cells c_1, c_n is a sequence of cells, $c_1 \dots c_n$, such that for each c_m in the sequence (except the first and the last element), $Cc_m c_{m-1}$ and $Cc_m c_{m+1}$. [aka: there is something before and something after]

1D-Markovian space (cont'd)

We need a way to express the fact that Mario is in position p – so we need some constraint to express *location*:

A character is located in only one cell at each point in time.

Second, we need to say that cells are not just connected, they have a *linear ordering*: Mario can only go *forward* because winning the game is in fact tantamount as travelling the whole universe.

If a character at t_n is in cell k , the character at t_{n+x} will be in cell p , where $p \geq k$. [aka: there is a privileged spacial direction]

1D-Markovian space: Conclusion

Super Mario is basically a “Markovian” game, i.e. a game where the set of action available at any point in time depends on events which generally just happened some moments before.

On the contrary, *FF VII* has a much richer causal structure, so that choices you made in a long forgotten past still may influence the present.

Adding dimensions (changing games: RPG)

FF VII (and typically RPGs) do not force on the player any such linear ordering constraint. You can travel through the game's universe in (almost) any way you like.

(Except when gaming narrative necessities kick in, e.g. you cannot go back into Midgar's Reactor once you blew it).

Adding dimensions (changing games: Adventures)

Games like *Tomb Raider* are another story: usually, characters can explore *a given level* in any way they like, but there is no way to go back to the cells of level 1 once you reach level 5. In other words, games *like Tomb Raider* behave like several small *FF VII* one after the other:



While in each colored part of the space characters may move freely, a linear ordering is required at the edge of each region, i.e. when you end one level and begin the next: in that case a “topological miracle” occurs –there is a connection between two cells in two colored regions but you can only go forward (the connection – so to speak – falls down as soon as you reach the new level like a suspension bridge from *Indiana Jones*).

Adding dimensions (changing games: driving simulations)

Obviously enough, many other types of games can be modeled in this framework. Consider this interesting fact:

- while driving simulation games (such as *Gran Turismo* or *Ridge Racer*) usually allow the player to go backward, a “normal” session would look pretty much like *Super Mario* – winning the game means travelling the cells of the universe in a precise order;
- *Doom* and *Tomb Raider* have the same kind of space-time!

Insert coin to continue (game over?)

In both our explorations the tools borrowed from “standard philosophy” came up short, for some reason or the other (or maybe – just maybe – we played too many videogames to actually have time to properly learn “standard philosophy”).

However, not everything is lost, as our partial failure may well just mean that videogames can be a fertile area to test and develop *new* philosophical tools.

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FINAL FANTASY VII