

Digital Escapes. On the Importance of Spatiality in Game Design.

Introductory session
08.01.21, 10:15 – 13:45 h

Course Goals

- Gain in-depth insights in how digital games represent, implement, and construct space
- Conceptualization and design of a digital escape room

Introductory assignment: Personal game history

Think about your personal relation to games and playing. Start by making notes of your games history – what kind of digital and non-digital games did you play in your childhood?

Just freely write down names and titles of games you have played and try to focus on creating a short summary, where you reflect on the kind of gamer you represent. Or, alternatively, why games might not have played a major role in your life.

Childhood defining games

Adolescence defining games

Current favorite games



Introductory assignment: Personal game history

Think about your personal relation to games and playing. Start by making notes of your games history – what kind of digital and non-digital games did you play in your childhood?

Just freely write down names and titles of games you have played and try to focus on creating a short summary, where you reflect on the kind of gamer you represent. Or, alternatively, why games might not have played a major role in your life.

„The defining element in computer games is spatiality. Computer games are essentially concerned with spatial representation and negotiation, and therefore a classification of computer games can be based on how they represent – or, perhaps, *implement* – space.“

Aarseth 2001: 154

Cf. Espen Aarseth (1998: 159)

Distinctions in the world models of games:

1) Relationship between user representation and world representation

2) Two different spatial representations (open ,outdoor‘ landscape and closed ,indoor‘ landscape)

3) The player’s level of influence on the game world

„I will posit spatial representation in computer games as a reductive operation leading to a representation of space that is not in itself spatial, but symbolic and rule-based.“

Aarseth 2001: 163

→ Aarseth hereby draws upon Leirfall (1997) and Lefebvre (1974)

„Cyberspace“ and other such phenomena (e.g. computer games) are constituted of signs and therefore already dependent on our bodily experience in, and of, real space to be „hallucinated“ as space.“ (Aarseth 2001: 162).

„As spatial practice, computer games are both representations of space (a formal system of relations) and representational spaces (symbolic imagery with a primarily aesthetic purpose).“ (p. 163)

→ „Spatial representation in computer games is ambivalent and doublesided: it is both **conceptual** and **associative**“ (p. 163)

“(C)omputer games could be attempted to be understood as exemplifications of spatial concepts, i.e. symmetrical representations of asymmetrical denotations or, in short, as thirdspaces or representational spaces.

Computer games then are not conceived of as designating a certain space or place, but as demonstrating how a certain (historically contingent) truth of space can look like. So it is not the 'what?' of space or the 'where?' of place, but the 'how?' of space; or its 'likeness'.” (Günzel 2019: 22).

„If a film audience were to step through the camera and onto the film set they would see a modern film studio [...] This space is not the world of the story but that of the production of the film. The illusion created by the fictional world would be broken.

In contrast, it is a defining characteristic of video game spaces that they allow this step into the represented space. The result is a hybrid between architectural navigable and cinematically represented space.“

(Nitsche 2008: 85)

„Game designers don't simply tell stories, they design worlds and sculpt spaces.“

Jenkins 2004: 121