

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

*Block I, session 1*

*15.01.21, 10:15 – 16:45 h*

„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)

„Game spaces are spaces that we can experience through our presence within them as other spaces.“

(Domsch 2019: 105)

## **Space and Narrative**

### **Navigable Landscapes and Cartography**

### **Spatial Experiences and Perspectives**

„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)

“The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story.” (Jenkins 2004: 120).

- **Evoked:**
  - Spatial design evokes a sense of immersion within a familiar world or new narrative experiences through creative manipulation of environmental details
  - Transmedia storytelling
- **Enacted:**
  - Story may be structured around the character's movements
  - Stories held together by broadly defined goals and conflicts
  - Micronarratives
- **Embedded:**
  - Embedding narrative information within the mise-en-scene
  - Player needs to reconstruct a pre-authored plot
  - „Memory palace“ (p. 126)
- **Emergent:**
  - Rich with narrative potential and possibilities
  - Not entirely prestructured/preprogrammed
  - Story-constructing player's activity

„Game spaces, therefore, have a very high narrative potential, as they have “the ability [...] to evoke the mental representation that we call story” (Ryan 2008, 412). They do so as an integral part of the gaming experience, rather than an external element like a cut scene. This is maybe the most important reminder or qualifier when talking about narrative and games: narrative is what happens in the minds of those who experience.“  
(Domsch 2019: 105).



**In-game map**  
**Out-of-the-game world map**  
**Mental mapping**

(Cf. Gazzard 2018)

**Ludoforming** (cf. Aarseth 2019: 127)

"The rule-based worlds of games are landscapes, that model value systems and ethical considerations, not only on the level of action within the place, but within the place itself."

(Murray 2017: 167)

„Every game is about manipulating configurations of space the player mainly perceives in the form of images.“

(Schwingeler 2019:1)

## Forms of presence (cf. Nitsche 2008)

Personal presence

Social presence

Environmental presence

„(F)low represents an optimum psychological state of play, where activity is seamless, highly engaging and highly rewarding. Likewise, presence suggests the player is focused upon the contents of a representational system, rather than the system itself“

(Pinchbeck 2015: 82)

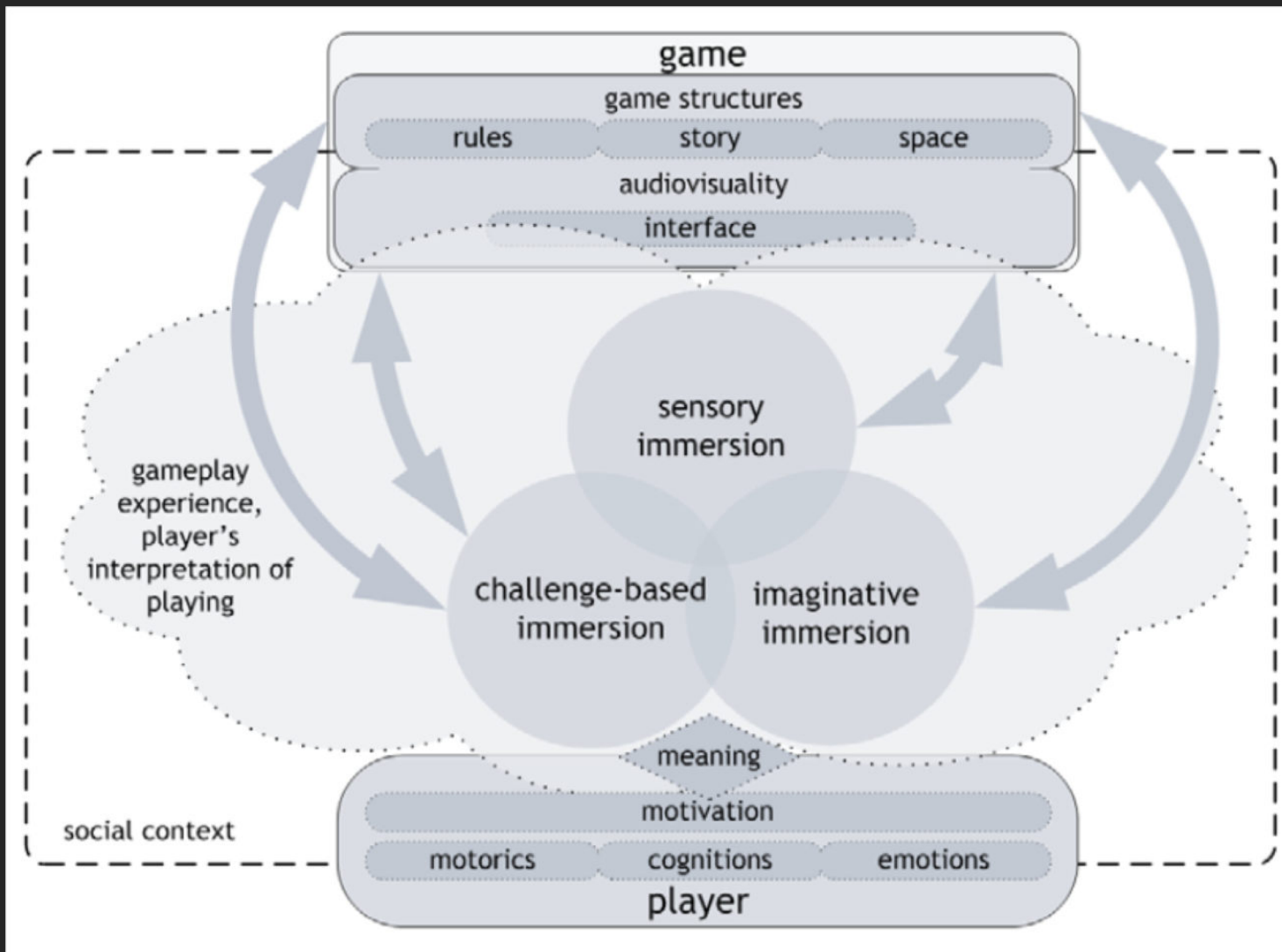
## Immersive fallacy

The idea that the pleasure of a media experience lies in its ability to sensually transport the participant into an illusory, simulated reality.

„According to the immersive fallacy, this reality is so complete that ideally the frame falls away so that the player truly believes that he or she is part of an imaginary world. (...) It grossly overemphasizes sensory pleasure“

(Salen/Zimmerman 2004: 451).

→ Frans Mäyrä's analytical model of immersion (sensory, challenge-based, imaginative) would be more fruitful instead



The SCI model of gameplay experience (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005)