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ANALYSING THE EMERGING IMMERSION OF ARGS THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF TRANSIMMERSION

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ABSTRACT

The immersive element in alternate reality games (ARGs) is considered a fundamental component of the genre, yet it is problematic due to the characteristic blurring of fiction and reality. This study aims to analyse the immersive regime of ARGs, conceptualising its distinctiveness through a new term, transimmersion. The conditions necessary for considering immersion and its specific adaptation to ARG forms create a unique context. The hypotheses positing a mutable immersive nature of ARGs, varying in its manifestations and levels, are substantiated, revealing a new conceptual framework.

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1. Introduction

One of the core elements frequently highlighted when discussing alternate reality games (ARGs), provisionally defined as gamified narratives that do not overtly identify as games or fictional artefacts, infiltrating the player's reality, is their immersive component. This is the capacity to imbue the user with an altered perception that replaces their reality with another, typically more thrilling one.

Immersion appears to be an inherent quality of ARGs, part of their primordial essence and almost exclusive to their purest form. Where better to discuss the immersive process than in a genre aspiring to the diegetic colonisation of reality? However, there are reasons to question whether the concept of immersion is entirely applicable to the nature of ARGs or whether, upon rigorous analysis of their anatomy, immersion can be discussed without requiring a series of qualifications. The first reason is that the concept seems, in some sense, to have been stripped of meaning: immersion has become a sort of ethos of new media, proliferating as an added value without much discrimination (Murray, 1997). The second reason for doubt relates to the distinctive nature of ARGs and how they create their fictional illusion. The fact that ARGs manifest in the player's real world—as if a film emerged from the screen or a reader encountered a story without needing to open a book—may inhibit the very act of immersion, lacking the essential initial stage that leads from the book's cover to the title of the first chapter, to continue the analogy.

For these reasons, it is pertinent to undertake an analysis of the immersive component of ARGs, a process that must begin with a preliminary reflection on the concept of immersion itself, as a necessary step to examining its application to the unique nature of this phenomenon.

1.1. State of the Art

To achieve the most comprehensive and in-depth approach to the object of study, at least two epistemological domains must be considered: 1) the study of immersion, its definition, and its structural characteristics; and 2) the study of alternate reality games, their substantive definition, canonical description, and breakdown into primary components.

The first domain addresses immersion from an ontological perspective. Scholars in this area include Bolter y Grusin (1999), Murray (1997), Ryan (2001), Salen y Zimmerman (2003), or Wardrip-Fruin et al. (2009), among others. The second domain focuses specifically on alternate reality games and their fundamental components. In contrast to the former, this field is substantially less explored, necessitating a combination of specialised academic research, more general studies, and journalistic sources. Authors in this group include Askwith (2006), Barlow (2006), Dena (2008), Jenkins (2006), McGonigal (2011), Palmer y Petroski (2016), Ruiz-García (2022, 2023, 2024) Scolari (2013), Stacey (2006) and Szulborski (2005, 2006), among others.

2. Hypotheses and Research Objectives

This research is grounded in a series of hypotheses that precede the establishment of objectives and the application of a methodology.

The first hypothesis (H1) posits that immersion, as a quality, occurs under a set of identifiable minimum conditions that can be attributed to any case studied.

The second hypothesis (H2) proposes that alternate reality games can be considered immersive insofar as they meet these conditions, albeit by adapting the concept to their distinctive mode of articulation.

The third hypothesis (H3) suggests that this transgressive nature can be defined, conceptualised, and labelled, capturing the unique immersive form of alternate reality games in a nominal and graphic manner.

Based on these hypotheses, three research objectives (RO) are proposed (Table 1). The first objective (RO1) is to identify the minimum conditions necessary to define immersion or, in other words, to determine the common minimum elements shared by all immersive processes. The second objective (RO2) seeks to verify that ARGs are immersive devices, meeting the aforementioned conditions, while also identifying transgressions within this component. Finally, the third objective (RO3) aims to

conceptualise and label the proposed framework of normativity/disruptivity through a specific and novel form.

Table 1. Hypotheses and objectives

H1	Immersion is a quality that occurs under specific minimum conditions.	**RO1**	Identify the minimum conditions that determine immersion.
H2	ARGs are immersive but in a disruptive way	**RO2**	Verify that ARGs meet immersive conditions and identify transgressions within these.
H3	The immersive form of ARGs can be synthesised, conceptualised and labelled.	**RO3**	Define the immersive form of ARGs

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

3. Methodology

To achieve the proposed objectives, a series of methodological techniques are employed. In relation to the first objective, a literature review and case study analysis (M1) are conducted. The literature review examines the ontological aspects of immersion as a concept, including its definition and its relationship with another concept, interactivity, as well as its analysis as an aesthetic property of narrative. Key reference authors include Murray (1997), Ryan (2001), and Salen and Zimmerman (2003), among others. Subsequently, a case study analysis is undertaken to identify the mechanisms of immersive action (Table 2).

Table 2. Cases analysed

CATEGORY	CASE
Panorama. Italy, 17th Century	The Ship of St. Ignatius by Andrea Pozzo.
Panorama. England, 19th Century	Panorama by Robert Barker
Play	Night of January 16 by Ayn Rand (1936)
Play	Six Characters in Search of an Author by Luigi Pirandello (1925)
Film	Kinoautomat by Raduz Cincera (1967)
Film	Mr. Payback: an interactive movie by Bob Gale (1995)

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

In addition to the aforementioned cases, attention is given to the structure of a typology of ludic experience generally recognised as immersive, an escape room, specifically The Study of Sherlock Holmes by the Sevillian company El Reto (2024), and the phenomenology of three popular cases of urban legend or hoax is analysed: the Paul-is-dead conspiracy case (Weisman in Askwith, 2006), the Ong's Hat Incunabula case (Erostarbe, 2010), and the Publius Enigma case (Askwith, 2006).

The second methodological technique (M2) is a new literature review that leads to evaluating the more or less relevant deformation of immersion, once its presence in the anatomy of alternate reality games has been verified. Here, the aim is to ascertain the way in which immersion becomes visible, the form of its transgression, and the range of possibilities it presents. This analysis is supported by studies from researchers and journalists from different fields:

1. Researchers specialised in alternate reality games: Askwith (2006), Barlow (2006), McGonigal (2003, 2005, 2011, 2020) and Szulborski (2005, 2006), among others.
2. Blogs and forums specialised in alternate reality games: www.argn.com, www.unfiction.com.
3. Researchers who, from the academic sphere, address the topic tangentially or investigate elements related to ARGs but are not necessarily explicit about them: Dena (2008), Jenkins (2006) and Scolari (2013).
4. Generalist, cultural, or technology-themed journalism: Gabarri (2018), Iat20 (2021), Miguel Trula (2017) and Torrebejano (2019), among others.

To address the final objective, a term capable of capturing the exceptionality of the alternate reality game as an immersive entity (M3) is proposed, transimmersion, and a graphic that establishes a scenario of possibilities for implementing said concept.

4. Results

4.1. Conditions for Considering Immersion

Following the relevant analyses, three conditions that determine immersive processes have been identified:

1. Boundary condition.
2. Presence condition.
3. Agency condition.

The boundary condition refers to the delimitation of the immersive plane in relation to the real plane. This demarcation is crucial for enabling the act of immersion itself, as immersion can only occur if there is a defined space to enter. It also involves the participant's awareness that immersion depends on their voluntary engagement and the assurance of a conclusion and return to the starting point. This condition, inspired by the studies of Murray (1997), is evident in several of the analysed examples, such as the two immersive theatre plays, where spectators access the theatrical space upon purchasing a ticket and engage with the proposed dramatic mechanisms, fully aware of the underlying fiction and the imminent conclusion. Similarly, in the case of the escape room, participants literally enter the immersive dimension, the play area, or the "magic circle" (Huizinga, 2007), actively suspend their disbelief, and ultimately exit the immersion, satisfied or not, depending on whether they have solved the ludic challenge.

The presence condition refers to the sensation of being elsewhere, of temporarily relocating or travelling to a different place without physically leaving one's seat or room. This condition, informed by the studies of Heeter (1992) and Lombard and Ditton (1997), becomes apparent when technological mediation is involved in the immersive process—for instance, when accessing a virtual reality environment through headsets or a semi-immersive system like the CAVE system (Cruz-Neira et al., 1992). Here, the participant experiences a juxtaposition of two planes: the real plane, encompassing their seat, body, haptic devices, and sound system, and the immersive plane projected by the headset and speakers, such as a beach on the other side of the world or a dilapidated cabin filled with eerie sounds and paranormal shadows. However, the presence condition is also evident in entirely analogue situations, such as in a constructive role-playing game where players transport themselves to imagined worlds using nothing more than their own imagination as the immersive vehicle.

Finally, the agency condition, inspired by Murray (1997), underscores the participant's significance in the immersive process, their protagonism, and the sense that their actions are consequential, even if these actions do not translate into explicit interactions. The agency condition is most evident in cases involving interactivity. For example, in interactive films, the spectator, transformed into a kind of player, has (or believes they have) the ability to influence the plot's outcome. This creative or at least decision-making self-awareness is one of the most evident guarantees of immersion. However, agency can also be detected among spectators of conventional films, such as those involving a murder mystery. In such cases, when spectators identify with the protagonist investigator, a form of agency may emerge, as the spectator finds their place within the narrative structure, exercising a kind of vicarious protagonism.

4.2 The Peculiar Immersion of ARGs

In alternate reality games, the three immersive conditions apply with certain singularities, with the boundary condition perhaps being the one with the most evident impact. Talking about ARGs usually means talking about a series of concepts that underpin the previous statement. The first of them, the TINAG, articulates the aesthetic conception of the device, this is not a game: what the participant experiences is not apparently a game but their own reality. This approach is implemented through a series of artefacts, such as rabbit holes or doors to the gameworld camouflaged in the player's routine and predictable world, or the conception of the director of the experience as a puppeteer, a sort of demiurge who guides the participant through the plot hidden in anonymity. The objective of all this is precisely to blur the boundary between the real plane and the diegetic plane, something that must function in aesthetic terms, as mentioned, but that in operational terms requires participants who are perfectly aware of the fictional and ludic nature of the experience to generate satisfactory immersion.

In fact, another of the traditional concepts of ARGs, the curtain, preserves this prescriptive knowledge. The curtain is nothing more than the metacommunicational plane, that dimension in which

the rules are agreed upon, objectives are established, and necessary help is offered in moments of ludic blockage. Thus, it could be said that ARGs are sustained by a collective pact between creators and players, all of them pretending that what they are doing is not playing, but at the same time, all of them in a complicit game, with absolutely clear boundaries.

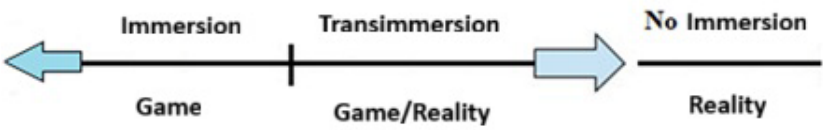
The presence condition again suffers anomalies, insofar as the immersive plane and the real one live overlapped. Participants in ARG experiences do not need technologies to feel like they are travelling without leaving their homes, as the fiction seems to jump into their lives and colonise the quota that they themselves allow. ARG players slip into the skin of investigators, heroes, or rebels without even needing to change identity, let alone place or clothing. Being present in an ARG is being present in one's own life, aware, however, that there is an immersive plane that lives juxtaposed to the everyday one

Finally, the agency condition seems to experience a state of paroxysm in ARGs, translated into an apparent total protagonism of the participant. ARGs usually seem to revolve around the player to the point of being structured according to them, their routines, their times, and their needs. From the analysis, it could be said that ARGs are immersive insofar as they meet the conditions, although, yes, transgressing them to the extreme or whimsical blurring. This circumstance shows a variable scenario, a wide casuistry or, if you will, an ecosystem of different ARGs, with different levels of immersion. Therefore, it seems necessary to undertake the definition of an immersive statute of ARGs with the aim of incorporating the broadest possible overview.

4.3 Transimmersion as a Mutation of the Immersive Component in the Genre

A concept is proposed here to address the mutation of the immersive component in ARGs, termed transimmersion, within a scale that, in relation to the ludic component, follows this principle: the greater the dissociation of the ARG from its traditional game nature, the more transimmersive its character will be (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Transimmersion Scale of ARGs.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

At the left end of the scale, cases are proposed that are presented as games without camouflage, even to the point of becoming encapsulated experiences, absolutely delimited in spatiotemporal terms. Here, one could speak of immersion in a classical sense.

To the right of this, cases of anomalous immersion are proposed, as referenced by McGonigal (2003) or Szulborski (2005), which are suggested to be termed transimmersion, or immersion through reality, based on the use of technologies inherent to the real world rather than the creation of an artificial world to facilitate the immersive act.

Finally, at the far-right end, forms are presented that are interpreted by the player as real, such that, without awareness of the game, fiction, agency, ludic satisfaction, or a magic circle to enter, there is no immersion, only a pathological confusion that transforms fictional events into reality.

The proposition of the transimmersion concept should be considered within a much broader scenario and, therefore, as a possibility within the framework of ARGs. In other words, ARGs may or may not be transimmersive devices, depending on the type of immersion they exhibit in their operation. The concept of transimmersion would represent the maximum degree of a peculiar type of immersion or, if preferred, the immersion of ARGs in their purest (and theoretical) state.

5. Discussion

The results obtained must be compared with previous studies, some of which are closely aligned and inspiring, while others diverge in certain aspects.

5.1. The Definition of Immersion and Its Interplay with the Concept of Interactivity

The results are based on the premise that the concept of immersion is controversial, perhaps polysemous, and varies depending on the approach, necessitating an examination of several definitions and questioning its existence as separate from the concept of interactivity.

The first definition selected is that of Janet Murray from Hamlet on the Holodeck (1997):

> The experience of being transported to a highly elaborate fictional place is a pleasure in itself, regardless of the fantasy's content. This experience is what we will call "immersion." It is a metaphorical term derived from the physical sensation of being submerged in water. In a psychological immersive experience, we seek the same sensation as when diving into the ocean or a swimming pool: the feeling of being surrounded by a completely different reality. (Murray, 1997, p. 111)

The second definition selected is that of Marie-Laure Ryan from her work Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media (2001):

> In the phenomenology of reading, immersion is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings. For a text to be immersive, then, it must create a space to which the reader, spectator, or user can relate, and it must populate this space with individuated objects. It must, in other words, construct the setting for a potential narrative action, even though it may lack the temporal extension to develop this action into a plot. (Ryan, 2001, pp. 14–15)

Finally, the considerations made by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman in their work Rules of Play (2003) are taken into account, addressing what they term the immersive fallacy, based on the postulates of game designer Francois Dominic Laramee:

> The immersive fallacy is 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. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 31).

Within the considerations of the concept, it is common to identify immersion with the user and their situation in a kind of parallel space to which they have been sensorially transported, which is not limited to remaining static but offers possibilities for interaction. This latter aspect is essential for the process to be complete, though the strategy should not be confused with the goal—that is, the interactive potential with the objective of immersion. As Szulborski points out, "While interactivity is certainly one of the first steps a creator can use to try and induce a feeling of immersion, it is certainly not the only element necessary" (Szulborski, 2005, p. 28).

Moreover, Szulborski warns that there is a tendency to definitively link the two terms, as if interactivity necessarily entails immersion:

> It is entirely possible for a game to be interactive and not immersive in the least. Games like Tetris are entirely symbolic and make no attempt to present any kind of virtual world for the player to be immersed in, yet they are undeniably interactive, in that the player obviously manipulates elements on the game screen through the mechanical interface of the game system. (Szulborski, 2005, p. 29).

On the other hand, immersion without significant interactivity can be considered, for instance, in cinema, where the spectator can readily experience the classic sensation described by Victor Nell of being "lost in a book" (Nell, 1988) or, in this case, in the film's narrative, without interactivity between

the observer and the medium. They are carried away by a narrative so compelling that it can be experienced as if it were virtual reality (Murray, 1997).

In summary, although immersion and interactivity are undeniably interconnected concepts, they can diverge at certain points; immersion is more immersive when it can be actively engaged with, just as interactivity is refined if it can generate a genuine sense of immersion.

5.2. Boundary, Presence, and Agency Conditions in Relation to Previous Studies

Among the proposed conditions for defining immersion, the boundary condition draws directly on Janet Murray's studies on immersion as an aesthetic property of narrative, alongside agency and transformation (1997). Specifically, the boundary condition aligns with reflections on the visit as a structure of immersion, a perspective that focuses on the spatiotemporal limits of the immersive moment. According to Murray, this perspective seeks to define a dividing line between the real world and the immersive environment, which, once delineated, is consciously crossed as a temporary visit to the other side.

The regulation of emotions as an immersive technique also shares affinities with the boundary condition. In this regard, Murray reflects on the regulation and balancing of emotions engaged in the immersion process through narrative conventions. To achieve this regulation, a series of medium-specific narrative conventions are employed to provide participants with rules and, ultimately, to remind them of the existence of the boundary. The preservation of the immersive ecosystem thus sustains the state of immersion itself.

Finally, the creation of the mask can be seen as an influence on both the boundary condition and the agency condition. The mask represents an alternative identity, a clear distinction between those participating and those who are not, thereby reinforcing the nature of the shared reality. As Murray states, "The mask identifies the threshold" (Murray, 1997, p. 126), meaning it enables entry into the artificial world while protecting the real self. As Murray notes in relation to the theatrical experience, "Spectators construct the magical place where the actors move" (Murray, 1997, p. 128); within the ritual, each participant is a particular guardian of the collective illusion, preserving the pact that ensures the smooth progression of the hallucination, though in certain cases without clarifying who is the actor and who is the spectator.

Regarding the presence condition, it is necessary to connect it to the concept of telepresence as described by Heeter (1992), defined by Lombard and Ditton as the perceptual illusion of non-mediation (1997). This notion of being in two places simultaneously prompts reflection on the role of technology in the process, particularly virtual reality—a dimension generated by computer technology, accessed through a set of interfaces, and perhaps the fastest (and most widely recognised) vehicle for achieving ubiquitous trance. Virtual reality induces a distorted perception of one's location, an illusion of being in two places at once, literally, albeit to varying degrees, as there is a gradation between highly immersive systems and those with lower levels of immersion. Examples of the former include 3D environments with real-time interaction, stereoscopic vision, high frame rates and resolution, and multiple sensory channels (visual, auditory, and haptic) (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). For the latter, semi-immersive systems like the CAVE (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment) can be cited, a technology that creates a virtual reality environment in a cube-shaped room where the user, positioned at the centre with virtual reality glasses, observes images projected on the walls and hears ambient sound from various parts of the room (Cruz-Neira et al., 1992).

Beyond virtual reality, the presence condition in dialogue with technology raises an existential question about the fundamental concept of immersion: is it possible to speak of immersion without technology? While it is true that technological advancements and the advent of multimedia digital worlds have significantly amplified immersive possibilities, it cannot be ignored that immersion, as an aspirational state, stems from an individual's mental capacity and their primal desire to experience realities beyond their everyday life. Immersion appears to be what Murray calls a liminal state, "A threshold experience between external reality and our minds" (Murray, 1997, p. 112). It therefore seems erroneous to subordinate the immersive process to specific, technologically advanced interfaces, as if immersion induced by a three-dimensional artificial simulation were inherently more valuable than that produced in the performative act of a role-playing game, where the extraordinary space—the destination of the journey—exists on a cardboard game board or even solely in the players' minds.

Regarding the agency condition, it is necessary to compare it with the concept of agency as handled by Murray, among others. According to her, agency is the power to carry out meaningful actions and subsequently observe their consequences:

> The more successful immersive environments are, the more they stimulate us to want to participate actively within them. When our actions produce visible results, we experience the second type of pleasure provided by electronic environments: the awareness of our own agency. (Murray, 1997, p. 139).

This is how agency precedes satisfactory immersion and reveals itself beyond mere interaction:

> Due to the excessive use of a term as vague as interactivity, the pleasure of agency in electronic environments is often confused with the ability to move a joystick or click a mouse. But mere activity is not agency. (Murray, 1997, p. 141).

Agency requires something more, a kind of appropriation of the content, a shift in roles that evokes creative collaboration and thus goes far beyond simple manipulation of the interface. As Mateas reflects (2001), the physical act of manipulating an input device (such as a mouse) with a response to that manipulation cannot be considered agency, as it reveals nothing about the relationship between input and output. Agency goes beyond mere interaction and is posited as a phenomenological category describing the player/user's disposition when observing the effects of their actions in the game, though this is only possible through a balance between expectations and outcomes, serving as a tool to engage with the game world, understand it, and modulate desires for control over that world. As Wardrip-Fruin, Mateas, Dow, and Sali reflect:

> Agency is not simply 'free will' or 'being able to do anything'. It is interacting with a system that suggests possibilities through the representation of a fictional world and the presentation of a set of materials for action. (Wardrip-Fruin et al., 2009, p. 7).

Furthermore, agency brings up the always contentious issue of collective authorship: "One of the most important questions posed by narrative agency is: to what extent are we authors of the work we are experiencing?" (Murray, 1997, p. 166). For Murray, the answer may lie in the genesis of the work, in that initial stage where creation, its form, and above all its limits are conceived. Playing a creative role in a pre-designed environment is not the same as being responsible for the conception of the environment itself. Thus, as Janet Murray notes, the user may be an author, but of a specific movement within a choreography previously designed by the true author of the system, which brings us back to the concept of interauthor:

> Contemporary critics attribute authorship to users because they do not understand the basis of procedural succession underlying all composition (...) The user is not the author of the digital narrative, though they may experience one of the most exciting aspects of artistic creation: the power to shape compelling pre-existing materials. This is not authorship but agency. (Murray, 1997, p. 166).

5.3. The Mutable Immersion of ARGs in Relation to Previous Studies

Regarding the second result obtained, it is pertinent to compare it with other studies on immersion in ARGs.

From their inception, ARG gaming experiences have been regarded as unequivocally immersive, albeit revealing a novel approach to the concept. Jane McGonigal (2003) addresses this in her pioneering analysis of The Beast, considered the first alternate reality game in history. In it, she discusses an innovative type of immersion that, instead of emulating reality in artificial environments, simply uses reality as the immersive framework, establishing, as she puts it, "A virtual engagement with reality" (McGonigal, 2003, p. 3). For the creators of The Beast, immersion meant integrating fiction into the players' real lives using the network of everyday technologies rather than creating an ad hoc technology (such as virtual or augmented reality interfaces). Thus, this new immersive form gave rise to a new immersive situation, a reality that, rather than being simulated (virtual reality) or enhanced (augmented reality), was a reality of superimposed layers.

As the author recounts, The Beast players lived simultaneously in 2001 and 2142 for several months, sometimes answering real telephone calls, other times receiving calls from non-player characters (NPCs), receiving emails of ambiguous origin, accessing real websites alongside those belonging to the complex diegetic framework, and ultimately exercising a stereoscopic vision that allowed them to distinguish fiction from reality.

The Beast, as a paradigmatic example of Alternate Reality Games (or at least of their initial phase), was an exceptionally refined manifestation of immediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), one of those artefacts where the medium is erased in favour of the content, featuring an "interfaceless interface" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 23). This immersive potential can be observed in the testimonies of some players, such as that of a prominent cloudmaker and future researcher, Andrea Phillips, to whom reference has already been made:

> You find yourself at the end of the game, waking up as if from a long sleep. Your marriage or relationship may be in tatters. Your job may be on the brink of the void or gone completely. You may have lost a scholarship or lost or gained too many pounds. You slowly wake up to discover that you have missed the early spring unfolding into late summer…. yet now here we are, every one of us excited at blurring the lines between story and reality. The game promises to become not just entertainment, but our lives. (Phillips in McGonigal, 2003, p. 5).

Another researcher who theorises along similar lines to McGonigal is Dave Szulborski, delving into the idea of a nuanced immersion based on the shift from an artificial to a real environment. For Szulborski, ARGs leverage the real world and its components to embed their mechanics and disguise their narrative without needing to generate an artificial environment to inhabit. The author even suggests that the name itself is misleading:

> Once again, this implies that the very name—alternate reality game—is misleading, because you don't really want the player to think of the game world as an alternate reality at all. The ultimate goal is to have the player believe that the events take place and characters of the game exist in his world, not an alternate reality. (Szulborski, 2005, p. 39).

Like McGonigal, Szulborski (2005) suggests the existence of an immersion that reverses the order of elements, but he goes further, proposing a complete fusion of the game world and the real world in the player's mind. This proposition might conflict with the very awareness of immersion or with narrative verisimilitude. As Murray argues, the awareness of immersion acts as a brake on excessive intensity and prevents players from losing control (immersion can turn into distress when one is unsure whether they are playing or not). Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the narrative premise of ARGs often revolves around unrealistic themes (science fiction, horror, thriller), and even though real-world technologies are used naturalistically, the awareness of the fiction remains evident.

5.4. The Transimmersive Scale in Relation to Previous Studies

Based on the observations, ARGs demonstrate that they meet the necessary conditions to be considered immersive devices, with this immersion understood within a scale ranging from transimmersion at one end of the framework to more traditional immersion at the other (non-immersion is considered outside the scope of analysis). In other words, discussing immersion in the ARG universe means delineating an ecosystem where cases closer to normative gaming and conventional immersion coexist with cases where the immersive plane emerges within a context of potential counter-gamification (Ruiz-García, 2023). This encapsulates the defended stance: not all ARGs should be considered transimmersive, as this depends on the type of immersion they aim to achieve.

Another circumstance limiting the consideration of ARGs as purely transimmersive entities is that, in practice, ARGs do not exhibit excessive zeal in concealing their paratextual dimension. Even in forms that could be considered more transimmersive, there is no extreme fixation on hiding the fictional nature of the experience, which in turn protects against potential emotional excesses (Murray, 1997).

As a reference for the proposed term, the concept of emersion put forward by Samuel Gallastegui in his 2018 doctoral dissertation can be cited:

> The concept of emersion proposed in this thesis is, above all, a counter-metaphor to immersion, arguing that the interface between the physical and virtual space is not, as commonly imagined, a one-way passage, but rather allows the action and content of the game to move in both directions. (Gallastegui, 2018, p. 100).

For the author, emersion is a kind of reflexive response to the immersive act, a journey presumed to be one-way but which demonstrates consequential reciprocity. Invoking Dansey:

> […] He compares it to a swing door: one 'pushes' the action and content of the game into the virtual environment; this is more typical of traditional video games. The other option is to 'pull' the action and content of the game, manifesting it in the physical space and the person's life. The latter corresponds to the phenomenon being shaped in this thesis. The content that the player 'pulls' towards themselves (pulled content) is what emerges from the game into the physical space. (Gallastegui, 2018, p. 100).

Drawing on Dansey's metaphor, the transimmersion of ARGs could be considered as a threshold without a door, an open passage where it is difficult to determine what is immersive and what is emersive, or as if the act of pushing results in a kind of pulled content, in a strange interplay of opposing physical forces.

6. Conclusions

The immersive component in alternate reality games is fundamental to understanding their primary concept, their purpose, and what they demand of their participants, as well as their functioning, their immediate practice, and their persistent tendency towards transgression and redefinition of what is conventionally understood. The very concept of immersion undergoes the effects of this disruptive impulse in its anatomy, resulting not only in something distinct from what it typically is but also revealing an ecosystem, a casuistry of multiple immersive forms. The objectives of this study were manifold: to identify the minimum conditions that promote immersion, to verify their operation in the ARG phenomenon, to detect their potential mutations, and to converge on the definition of a new immersive framework capable of shedding light on the genre's singularities. These objectives are deemed to have been achieved in each of their phases. The first objective was met through the identification of several necessary conditions for considering an action immersive, following a literature review on the ontological aspects of immersion and a case study analysis to determine its influence on certain ludonarrative devices. Subsequently, the second objective was accomplished by confirming that ARGs can be considered immersive insofar as they meet these conditions, while also transforming them within their unique landscape. Finally, the third objective was achieved by capturing the peculiar nature of ARGs through a novel label, transimmersion, and a graphic representation that, through a scale, could measure the degree of transimmersion in each alternate reality game. As a final conclusion, an ecosystem of diverse cases is considered: in general terms, alternate reality games present themselves as a unique species demonstrating evident immersion, while in specific terms, within the ARG ecosystem, some entities are more immersive and others more transimmersive. Moving forward, it seems pertinent to remain attentive to the evolution of the genre itself, which may require a shift in its epistemological foundations to encompass all its dimensions and which, regardless, remains as challenging to scrutinise and analyse as it was when it emerged twenty years ago.

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