

Of Affordances and Flow, a sociomaterial perspective on consumption experiences

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Introduction

- **Flow** in consumption experiences has been theorized as being achieved “when a context exists that pushes individuals to **near their physical and mental limits**” (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 12, added emphasis).
- Csikszentmihalyi (1974) emphasizes how **flow** can be **achieved in a multiplicity of practices**.
- Being enabled by **Affordance Theory** allows us to avoid **purely phenomenological** assessments of flow and focus on how the **objects** of practices **constrain or enable** flow instead.

Research Question

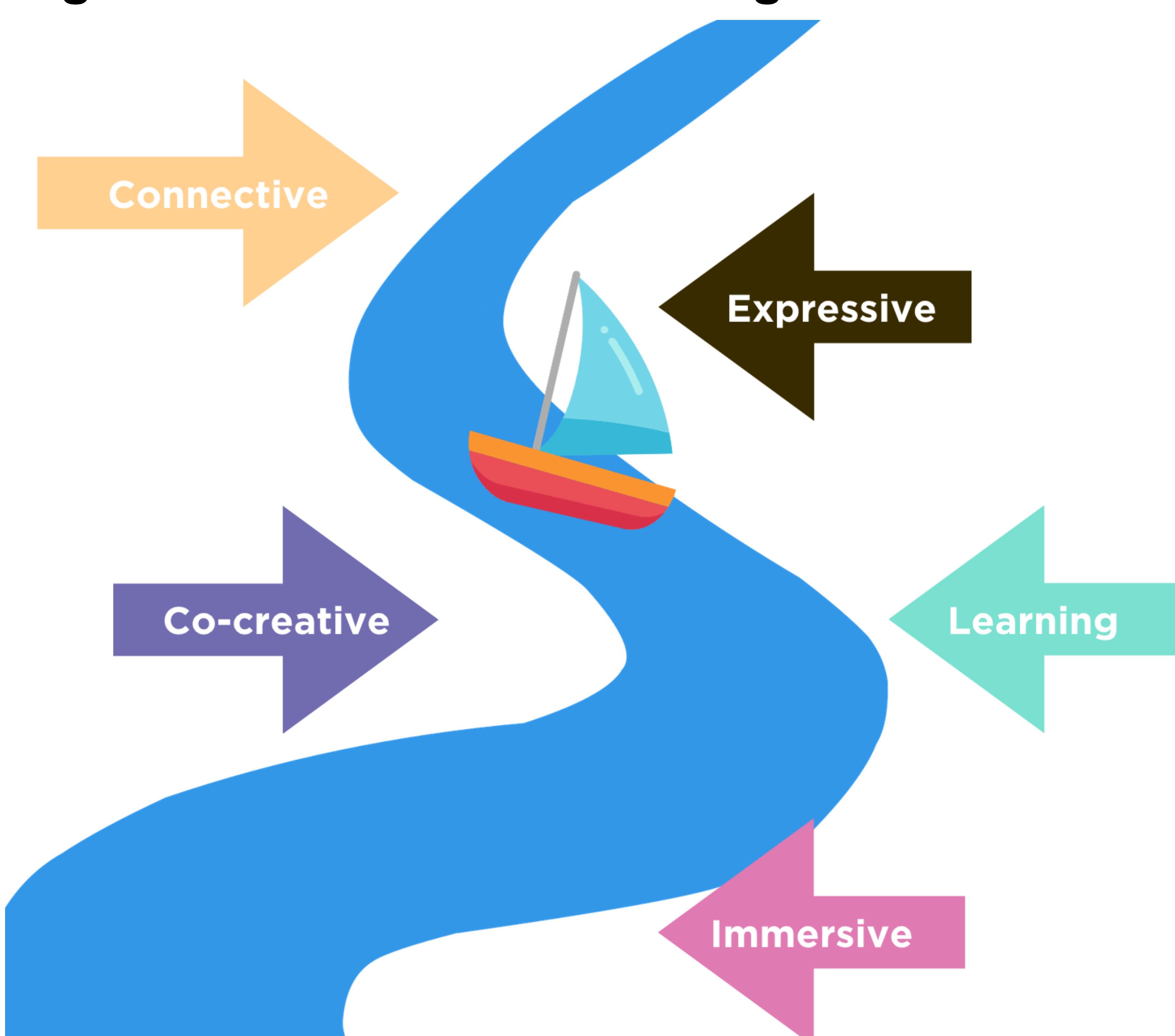
- What are the **affordances** that emerge in the **video game experience**?
- How do they **enable** players to achieve **flow**?

Method

- **Walkthrough Method** (Light et al., 2018)
- **Autoethnography** (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993)
- Game Studies methods (Aarseth, 2007; Larsen & Walther, 2020; Schmierbach, 2009)

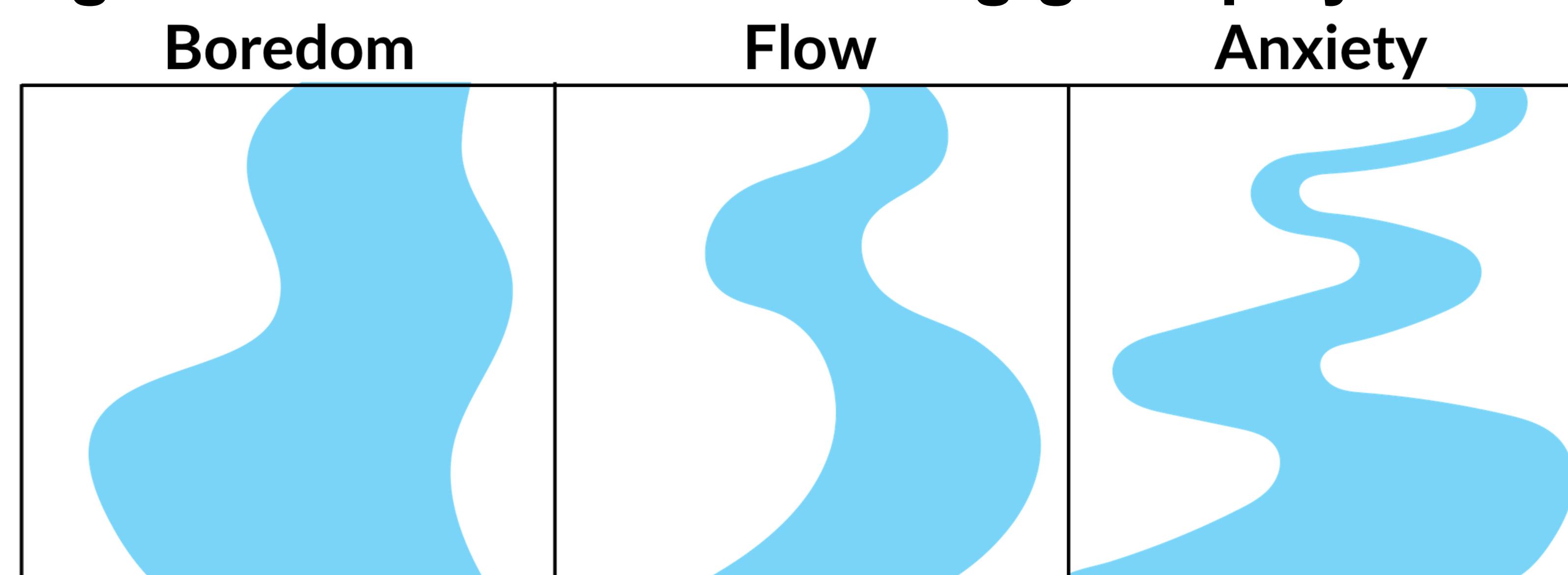
Results

Figure 1 – Affordances framing flow



- Games can be thought of as **bundles of affordances**. We identify five affordances: **connective, expressive, co-creative, learning, and immersive**.
- The flow experience can be thought of as a river **shaped by the interaction** among the **game's affordances** and the **player's skills**, as seen in Figure 1.
- The player's skills are formed by the **perceptive and dexterous capabilities**, both previously acquired, or **built during gameplay**.

Figure 2 – Three states during gameplay



- Thus, experiences **fluctuate** between boredom, anxiety and flow **from moment to moment**, morphologically imagined as in Figure 2.
- Over time both the **game changes** and the **player acquire skills**, so that the river is in a **constant state of change**.

Discussion

- Previous CCT conceptualizations steeped in a **phenomenological** tradition, **reducing flow** to a narrow set of **high-risk consumption activities**.
- This established rendering of flow might have resonated with CCT's **earlier humanistic experientialist episteme**, but it also **elides** how **flow emerges** from the interaction **between an actor and a system of affordances**.