Age-Restriction: Re-examining the interactive experience of 'harmful' game content

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ABSTRACT
Similar to the classification rating of films, screen depictions of violence within digital games are issued with an age restriction rating. Such approaches still fail to adequately incorporate players' experience of the screen, confounded by the medium's interactive nature, in their assessments. The current failure to account for, or describe subsequent interactions between player and game text leaves the classification process largely inferential. This paper presents a framework that forms the basis for an empirical assessment of the interactive experience of games. In it, we aim to account for the processes and outcomes of play and the extent to which play relates to the design of the game text. By operationalizing game studies' extensive theorization of the distinct quality of games, a new model of media 'usage' is sought to enhance regulation processes and better inform the public's perception of games (specifically within New Zealand). In this paper we draw specifically on data produced from one part of a mixed methodology research design (Schott & Van Vught 2011). A structured diary method was employed to allow game players to chronicle different elements of their gameplay experience with a single text as they progressed through it. By demonstrating the applied value of game studies' contribution to knowledge, the research project aims to contribute to a new paradigm that is capable of accounting for the 'actual' *experience* of play and the ways game texts are activated under the agency of players once they enter everyday life and culture.

Keywords
Gameplay analysis, classification, diary study, player experience, game legislation

INTRODUCTION
If films were classified on the basis of their soundtrack alone it is likely that most people would consider this unrepresentative of the full film experience. Yet, a scenario

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comparable to this is currently operating when interactive games are being classified. With the same classification framework developed for linear media (film, television & literature) still being applied to the rating of games, the experiential or interactive properties of games remain a nominal value.[1] In doing so, there is an attempt to predict potential effects of games without sufficient understanding or evidence of how specific game texts are interpreted and configured (both positively and negatively) once they eventually enter society and culture.

Game studies is a testament to the complexity and hybrid nature of the medium, at once a 'text' that can be read, and an activity that demands players participate in the construction of its structure. However, despite its many contributions to scholarly knowledge, game studies has yet to make a significant impact on the social perception and political treatment of games. We put this down to a certain essentialism that was required to pervade game studies' early focus on the structural characteristics of games. This consequently means that the protection of individuals from harmful media content is globally counselled by social science 'media effects theory.' Although this research has produced an abundance of works that argues both for (Anderson 2004; Anderson & Bushman 2001; Gentile et al 2004) and against (Ferguson 2007; 2008) the 'digital games are poison theorem,' the research paradigm has done so without a developed understanding of games either as *texts* or *processes* (Kontour 2009). We suspect that one of the reasons for this is that the gameplay experience has many complex and hybrid elements that are not easily quantifiable.

In this paper, we present the beginning of our attempt to transfer a sound theoretical base of knowledge on gameplay experience into a model of media usage with the long-term goal of supporting the classification of game content in the context of New Zealand classification processes. The empirical testing of this model will provide data that will either validate existing theoretical accounts of gameplay or delineate the difference between theoretical understandings from actual player experiences. Falling back on several years of theoretical advancement in game studies, our working model borrows from fruitful, albeit sometimes normative scholarly debates which cover essential dichotomies such as story versus game (Aarseth 2004), rules versus fiction (Juul 2005), simulation versus representation (Frasca 2003), and interpretation versus configuration (Eskelinen 2001). In the initial attempts to position the medium of digital games among other existing media like film, the distinctive interactive properties of games were highlighted extensively and have therefore served to aid our understanding of the gameplay experience considerably. These dichotomies lead us to propose a working model that focuses on the gameplay experience as an activity that falls between interpretation and configuration and involves meaning attribution between the game and the fiction. Our aim is to use this model to 1) structure accounts of actual, lived and directly reported experiences of play, 2) locate where current classification processes concentrate their assessments and value judgments, and 3) identify areas of research that will bridge the gap between abstract knowledge existent in the game studies community and more concrete legislative treatment of games in society.

One of the methodologies administered within our study (that includes game-metric data, bio-metric storyboards (Mirza-babaei & McAllister 2011), eye-tracking and retrospective player commentaries with game play footage) included diary entries from game players, in which we captured their progress across several game sessions. The study's first substantial application of the diary method was conducted around play experience with the game *Dead Island* (2011).[2] Ten University students and employees (all male)

participated in the study for a period of seven weeks and completed their diary entries via a semi-structured online diary tool. This tool allowed for private individual diary entries based on open and closed (multiple-choice) questions as well as the opportunity to ask follow-up questions where desired. The online format enabled the experience of gameplay to be assessed longitudinally and in the comfort of the participants own homes. The questions were structured according to six different types of player involvement (Calleja 2011). Because we played the game in advance of the study, we were also able to ask participants to consider particular relevant experiences or instances in the game. Besides questioning players about their choice or character or their general opinion about story elements or controls, we asked the participants questions about specific game incidents every time they completed a game chapter. This meant that the diary entries were mostly determined by the nature of the game experience and not constructed in advance.

THE GAMEPLAY MODEL AS A FEEDBACK LOOP

Gameplay is an umbrella term we use to refer to the formalized interaction of a player with a game system (Salen & Zimmerman 2004). It involves complex cognitive processes of meaning construction, cognitive task performance and extranoematic activity (Aarseth 1997), accompanied with different emotional states that are both effects of- and motivators for the perceptual and behavioural activities of the player. We therefore began the construction of our model with a simple cognitive feedback loop (Figure 1). Presenting the player's interaction with the game system as a feedback loop namely allows us to account for both the perceptual and behavioural activity of the player and the way that meaning is constructed through the use of certain clusters of knowledge (schemata). The basic feedback loop that we borrow from the constructivist views of Holland (1988) includes three essential elements: a perceptual element, a behavioural element, and an internal construct that functions as a standard for comparing our perception and guiding our behaviour (the schema).

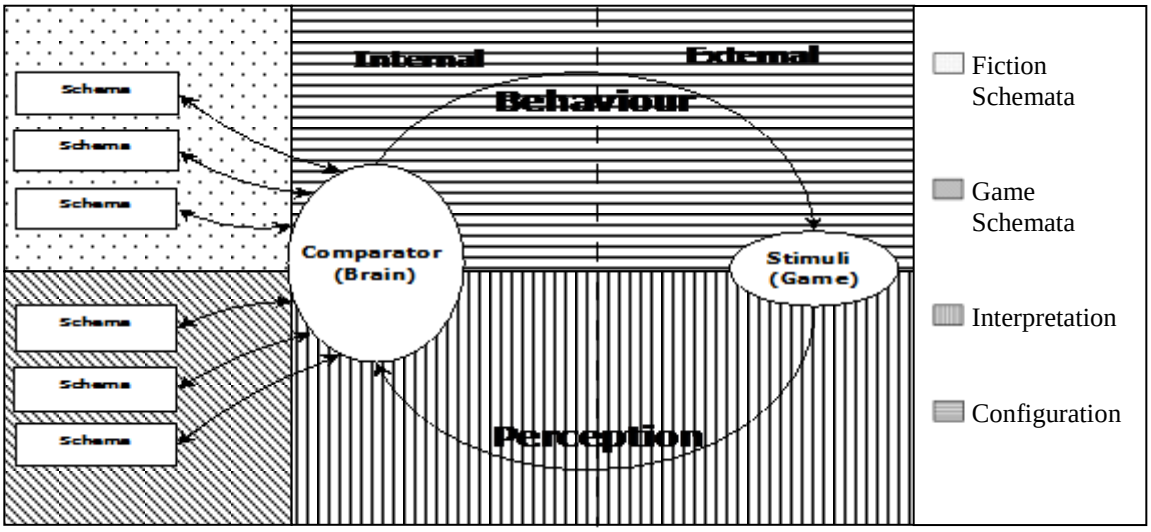

Figure 1: Gameplay model as a feedback loop

Interpretation versus Configuration

In the gameplay feedback loop the perceptual end of the loop is considered to be the ***interpretative activity*** of the player. This is the activity of attending to the stimuli and comparing it to appropriate schemata in our brains. The interpretation also encompasses

the construction of hypotheses that are put out there to be tested. The behavioural end of the feedback loop is represented by the ***configurative activity*** of the player. This is where we act on the input both physically (pushing buttons) and mentally (constructing a strategy). Other than scanning the screen (as when we are watching films), we also perform nontrivial activity (Aarseth 1997) to control what happens on that screen. As Holland (1988) states, the behaviour generally controls the perception, which would support Eskelinen's (2001) argument for configuration as the dominant user function of games. However, because perception also guides behaviour and because the feedback loop always exists as a whole (there is no start or finish), we wish to argue that the dominant player activity is where the player's attentional focus lies at a particular point in the game. This means configuration and interpretation can be viewed as two extremes of a continuum that a player moves between while playing.

In our diary study, for instance, we asked our participants to discuss their choice of character. One of the participant's entries illustrates how the configurative activity of the player was an essential element in anticipation of the gameplay experience:

> *(Example 1)*
> *Two factors influenced my decision on character choice. One of the tag lines for the game itself says that it's a melee based game, so I stayed clear of the lady with the guns. Despite that being my weapon of choice in other games, I felt taking a gun person in a melee game was a bit cheating. (…)*
> *Second and my main reason for choosing Xian Mei is that in most games I have played (…) I have a strong affinity to dexterity/agility based melee fighters. I personally like the idea of speed and finesse in fighting. So I would always choose the lightly armoured swordsman over the heavily armoured knight etc.*
> *Race, colour, creed, voice of the character to me made no difference. It is the one that fits my play style*

This participant showed a distinct preference based upon the configurative abilities of the character. The way that the player can act with his character appears more important than the character's representational qualities. The character becomes a vehicle with certain attributes that the player can control (Newman 2002). Other entries noted the different types of environment the game presents. Again, instead of focusing on the environment's representational characteristics, the player clearly articulates how the environment is a place to perform actions:

> *(Example 2)*
> *I quite enjoyed the sewer environment (...). The groups of zombies were smaller and because of the narrow tunnels they could only attack a couple at a time. (...) It provided multiple paths and had many nooks and crannies to explore in my search for better loot. (...).They [the environments] have been designed in such a way, and rewards have been placed frequently enough, that I want to explore everything the environments have to offer (...).*

This configurative way of experiencing the game environment as a place for action or a place that requires a specific type of strategy is very different from the way that we would

look at an environment in other non-interactive media. These two diary entries are representative of the sample of players that participated in this study. When the player articulations of their experiences (numbered per example in this paper) are represented along an axis that moves from configuration to interpretation (see Figure 2) the importance of the player's configurative activity becomes evident. Considering this active element of the experience for classification is essential since the configuration of the player may come to the forefront in those moments of violent conflicts rather than interpreting the aesthetic or representational qualities of that conflict.

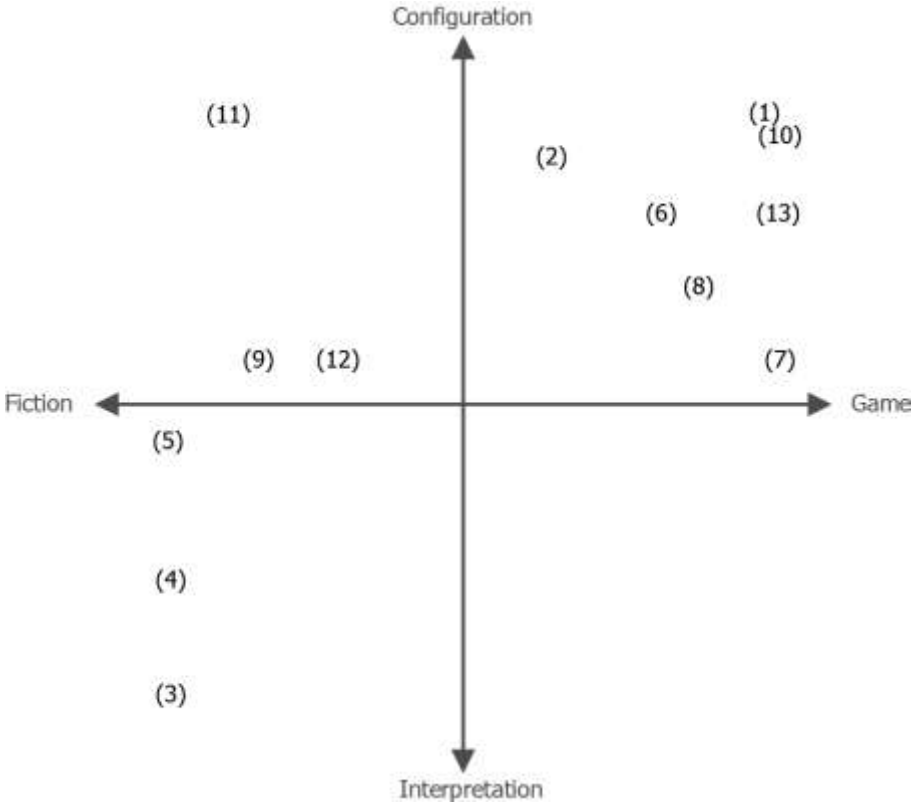

Figure 2: The gameplay model showing diary entries situated along two axes

This is not to say that games do not also allow for a more interpretative appreciation of its elements. One of the other participants for instance wrote:

> *(Example 3)*
> *I was actually really impressed with this environment. The lighting was amazing. I had to stop myself from staring at the tree canopy. It was quite stunning.*

However, as this example shows, the interpretative appreciation of the game does by no means solely involve recall of violent imagery. Players' capacity to reflect on the wider characteristics of the virtual world highlighted factors that rarely feature in classification judgements (as we noted in several written reasons for classification decisions provided by the NZ Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC)). In fact, in general the diary answers reflected a move away from interpreting the violent images such as corpses or the killing of zombies to a focus on the interpretation of other elements of the game external to conflict such as the environments. This shift is thought to be caused by the

fact that the image and activity of zombies being killed got quite repetitive after a while, which was confirmed by several diary entries. Once players progressed through the game their interpretative activity focussed for instance more on the narrative in a game. Although the uncovering of the narrative always requires more active player participation (configuration) than in non-interactive media, the 'reading' of a game's story elements can be considered a player experience where interpretative activity plays a dominant role. As one of our participants remarks:

> *(Example 4)*
> *I was starting to be motivated more by story and uncovering the mysteries behind events occurring in the game rather than collecting items or racking up kills. Moving to new areas meant uncovering plot elements which was the most exciting part for me.*

A focus on the activity of interpreting the game's story elements comes closer to the way that we experience film content. And it cannot be denied that narrative forms an important element in digital game experience that needs to be accounted for in game classification. In this sense two possible impacts of games' stories can be considered. On the one hand, the interpretation of story elements compromises the degree of player agency since the player is manipulated into performing actions which may be particularly violent. On the other hand, a game's story also contextualizes the player's actions which can make violence a by-product of the story (and even justified). More research is therefore needed to identify the interrelation between configuration and interpretation during the play experience and how this relates to the experience of violence in games. Of course we acknowledge that the interpretative and configurative activity can always take place simultaneously, since, as Klevjer (2002) already argued, the events in games are communicative as they are being performed. However, we are exploring whether the player's attentional focus is likely to put forward one dominant player activity during a specific game event which may considerably change the player's experience of that event. The attentional focus is dependent on the insufficient internalization of 'skills' needed to understand and use a dimension of gameplay (Calleja 2011), but also on the player's preference or enjoyment of a particular gameplay element.

Fiction versus Game

The third element of the feedback loop consists of the schemata or the mental images which function as a standard or reference to compare perceived stimuli. We have schemata for many things (ourselves, others, objects, events, social constructs etc.) which exist at different levels of abstraction (see Hastie 1981 for an interesting distinction). Schemata help us make sense of what we perceive and guide our attention, expectations and behaviour. During media usage they may help us make assumptions and inferences about characters and their emotional states, they may help us create a story from a plot by applying cause and effect logic, and they may have us craft hypotheses about what will happen next thereby triggering suspense or curiosity (Bordwell 1985).

In the gameplay feedback loop we propose a division of schemata into two realms that cover the most essential properties of the gameplay experience. Lindley and Sennersten (2006) already proposed a hierarchical, time structured organization of schema structures in games. On the lower level (the smallest scale of time units) they speak of gameplay schemata that are used for guiding and making sense of player's selection of game moves. On the higher level (larger pre-designed time structures) they speak of story schemata, used for comprehension of story structure, and game structure schemata, used

for comprehension of thematic changes or the changes in difficulty. Although this organisation of schemata makes sense at first glance, the hierarchical division of player activity (lower level) and story or game genre comprehension (higher level) is unsatisfactory. When we play a game we continuously borrow from 'lower-level' direct audio visual clues and 'higher-level' genre conventions, cause and effect correlations, and game conventions for both action and comprehension. In fact we even borrow from personal experiences, other games we played, films we watched, social interactions we engaged in etc. In this sense there is no difference with watching a film other than, as Lindley and Sennersten (2006) already argue, the fact that schemata used during gameplay seem to be much more behaviour generating. Making a distinction between lower level schemata for understanding and generating direct player behaviour and higher level schemata for understanding and generating player behaviour in a larger structure of story or game conventions does therefore not tell us anything distinctive about the gameplay experience.

We therefore wish to discard the hierarchical organization of schemata and instead propose a model that organizes the schemata into two coexisting realms that are more exclusive to gameplay. Lindley and Sennersten (2006) already hint upon this with their explanation of game structure schemata and story schemata and the way that a player's activity can be interpreted from different perspectives. The two coexisting realms are distilled from the idea that games combine elements of both classical games and stories or fictional worlds. Gameplay is attributed meaning between playing in the actual world, and acting in a fictional world.[3] So when we play a game we use two different sets of schemata. One set makes sense of, and guides the perceived and executed actions as part of a coherent fictional world. We call these the ***fiction schemata***. The other set makes sense of, and guides the perceived and executed actions as part of what Lindley and Sennersten call the 'competitive, rule constrained form of a game' (2006, 6). These are called the ***game schemata***. During gameplay we tap into both these sets to guide and explain different elements of the game. In referring to Juul's (2005) example of *Donkey Kong* (1981), we may tap into our fiction schemata to comprehend Donkey Kong kidnapping Mario's girlfriend, but at the same time we may tap into our game schemata to comprehend why Mario has three lives. Sometimes one set of schemata may be more prominently used than the other but most recent digital games will at least require the use of both these schema sets during gameplay. Just as the configurative and interpretative activities, the fiction and game schemata can be viewed as two extremes of a continuum. Considering the different ways that game content can be attributed meaning with the use of different schemata is essential when classifying games. When players for instance dominantly understand and guide their violent killing behaviour through the use of game schemata, they are likely to recognize that they are playing, not killing (confirmed by our participant's diary entries). This means the violent content is clearly appreciated as something not serious, as also observed in the player's facial expressions (Smith & Boulton 1990). Studying the dominant use of schemata per age group may then lead us to propose very concrete recommendations for the classification of games.

The diary entries collected to-date show the use of these different schemata. In a more general discussion on player-character-relationships, one of the participants for instance explained the way he would normally create a player character (if the game allows for this).

(Example 5)
When I create a character (...) I create the look of the character, (...) and then try to find a personality and background story that I think fits those looks. I then play the game trying to stick to that personality that I came up with in the beginning, whatever that personality might be. It is almost like creating and writing a character for a novel or movie, but within the parameters of the game world. The exception to this is when I use a character from fiction that I am familiar with. Then I am adhering to someone else's creation and sticking to the already established personality of that character.

We can see how the participant creates a character as one would create a character for films. In an act of interpretation he imagines a background story and a specific personality. Then, during play (configuring) he presumably adheres to these characteristics to try and create a coherent fictional world. He thus addresses his fiction schemata to understand his character and guide his behaviour.

In a similar example, a participant commented on a moral dilemma encountered during play. Besides blood thirsty zombies, *Dead Island* also presents the player with human enemies which the player has to kill in order to progress in the game. The comprehension of this event with the use of fiction schemata clearly produced a dilemma. However, since the player is *forced* to kill these human characters, the player finally complies and contextualizes the event with game schemata that tell him the game put these opponents in the way of his objective and therefore have to be killed.

(Example 6)
I felt bad about shooting the policemen, and during this section I thought that I was on the wrong side. (...) I tried to sneak around the policemen at one point, to avoid killing them, but they have an uncanny knack of spotting the player. After this I decided to simply shoot them. Even though I felt a bit bad about it, it seemed as if the game wanted me to kill them so I did. (...) I don't recall the game supplying a good reason why I should kill the policemen either, other than that they were in the way of my objective. By this point I had come to dislike my character and had disassociated myself from him.

This example clearly shows the shift from the use of fiction schemata to game schemata. In the end the player does not make use of fiction schemata anymore to create a coherent and emotionally involving fictional world. He understands there is no fictional function to the characters individually, their hostility is indicative only of the mechanics of the game. There is nothing to be gained from trying to connect to these hostile characters. He therefore decides to understand the killing of these characters as simply overcoming another challenge that the game puts in front of him, similar to the way that other games do. It does not matter if those opponents are humans, zombies or something else.

By accounting for both the interpretative/configurative activity of the players and the game/fiction schemata that they use to comprehend and guide their activity, we are able to get a better understanding of the distinctive elements that make up the gameplay experience. By simply turning these two continuums into an ordinate system (see Figure 2), we can try to pinpoint the players' experiences along two axes. As shown, some game

sequences may then require players to tap more into game schemata than others. Some sequences may involve the player much more in the activity of configuration than others. And some groups of players (perhaps under a certain age) may prove to make more use of fiction schemata than other groups of players.

Undeniable and Deniable Content

As the last example in the previous section shows, the game sometimes require us to take certain (configurative) action or take notice of a specific element in the game because not taking that action or ignoring that element means automatic failure.[4] Leino (2007) refers to these elements as *undeniable* which constitute the build in physics of the game that the player cannot deny without significantly decreasing his possibilities to act or progress in the game. For example, the famously controversial *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) mission *No Russian* requires the player to tag along on a terrorist attack in an airport that leads to the death of many innocent civilian characters. Although the player does not actively have to participate in the killing, he is also unable to try and prevent it, since turning against the terrorists immediately leads to a failed mission.

On the other hand, games may also present us with *deniable* elements that we can ignore without such consequences. In a RPG like *The Elders Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011) for instance, the player can choose to pillage villages and kill innocent people and animals. However, the player does not have to do this in order to advance in the game. In fact, the game system punishes him for these acts by giving the player a bad reputation and turning the other characters against him. Similarly, in *Dead Island* one of our participants stumbled upon a hidden hut with some disturbing imagery. The fact that no other players, nor the research team had encountered this hut, shows that this content is deniable since the other players were all able to finish the game without it.

Although gameplay will ultimately remain a subjective experience, there are certainly triggers in the stimulus that guide our perception, behaviour and meaning attribution in a certain way. Taking notice of these triggers (during play) can also considerably aid the construction of a more exhaustive classification system. As Juul's (2005) *Donkey Kong* example shows, there are game elements that are more likely to be assimilated in game schemata such as the fact that Mario has three lives or Heads-Up Display elements such as Health level, or Score count. For this reason we are currently analyzing the player's gaze behaviour with eye-tracking equipment that helps us draw inferences about the player's attentional focus during gameplay. One player in our diary study for instance remarked how the stamina bar disrupted his gameplay experience by making him aware of the artificiality of some game elements.

> *(Example 7)*
> *The developer probably would have added this system to add a strategic element to fights, but in my experience it takes away from the game as it just makes me aware of the HUD.*

DIGITAL GAME CLASSIFICATION AND THE GAMEPLAY MODEL

Contrary to common assertions by game studies scholars that gameplay is a different kind of mediated activity, compared to other forms of media reception, the New Zealand *Film, Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993* stipulates that games be treated as 'experiential equivalents' to film on the basis of their shared 'moving image' content. While this may work for classification decisions that refer to coarse language or sexual imagery which is often non-interactive, examining the experience of violence only

through its audio visual representation leaves the role of interactivity and the way that content is perceived and appreciated by players unaccounted for. The OFLC has however acknowledged the capacity of the 1993 Act to permit weight be given to other criteria such as 'dominant effect', 'merit' and 'purpose' when classifying games (OFLC 2009). What is required is the empirical evidence to justify incorporating distinctive gameplay elements into the classification process.

When games are classified on the same assessment criteria as films we can assume that the rating board does not take into account the configurative activity of the player let alone the existence of game schemata that may contextualize the onscreen activity as something very different than coherent fictions. This means that the current classification system is skewed toward games as fiction representations that we interpret (not configure) and comprehend through the use of fiction schemata (focussing on the lower left corner of the gameplay model in Figure 2).[5] The result is an assimilation of games into a pre-existing classification system, perpetuating **media-blindness (**Hausken, 2004**)** to the unique properties and demands of games that prevents more exact modes of assessment for classification. The further implications of this, is that players do not interpret classification labels using the codes from film while parents do. This consequently leads to misunderstandings and generational frictions about the demands of games (Schott & Van Vught 2011).

Taking the game schemata into consideration may certainly lead to a re-evaluation of game sequences. It could for instance be argued that game schemata or 'elements that defy conventional [fiction] schemata' can disrupt a player's 'immersion in the text' or have him assume 'an extra-textual perspective' (Douglas & Hargadon 2001, 156). This means that because the player has to tap into game schemata to understand some elements of the text he is not as involved in the violent fictional representation onscreen as a film viewer who only uses fiction schemata. As one of our diary study participants says:

> *(Example 8)*
> *It would seem strange to me that in a world overrun by zombies, people would be selling things, but money seems to be an easy game mechanic to utilize, even if it is unrealistic.*

However it could also be argued that the use of both these sets of schemata does not disturb an immersion in the fiction since they complement each other in the understanding of the text. In this case the additional level of game elements may even enhance immersive play since the player is required to have a higher level of attention. As one of our participants wrote about the use of a stamina bar in *Dead Island*:

> *(Example 9)*
> *I believe these elements [the stamina mechanics] are added to give it [the game] that much more realism and to also increase your horror/stress/worry. It's all designed to heighten the urgency and fear you have, as a real human, fighting zombies.*

Similarly, by accounting for the configurative activity of the player together with the interpretative activity, the classification process can start to consider a broader range of experiential elements. As Grodal for instance argues, the configurative activity of the player make his affective responses to games much more dependent on his own active coping potential rather than on the passive appreciation of a character's coping potential

(as in films). This may mean that possible 'aggressive game-induced arousal is (...) more closely linked to the player's own activity and less directed at hostile others than in films' (Grodal 2000, 207). This could make the gameplay experience an exercise in 'playful mastery' where, instead of the representational content, the level of skill is related to the elicited arousal of the player. We witnessed this in our participants' diary entries, when comments were made on how the rise in difficulty led to an increase in character deaths, and frustration, for example:

> *(Example 10)*
> *The learning curve is quite steep and I died quite a few times trying to work out how to defeat the new creatures I was encountering. It was about this time in the game where I was starting to feel comfortable with the user interface and how the mechanics of the game worked, but the increased difficulty meant deaths were far more frequent than in previous chapters (...). This sort of balanced out the comfortable feelings leaving me feeling quite ambivalent about this chapter. I think I felt more relief than anything else when I finished this chapter.*

Similarly, Goldstein explains that a player's (perceived) control over the events (such as violent images) can reduce the emotional or stressful effects of these events (1998, 60). This is explained through the use of the arousal equilibrium theory which argues that we always seek out media (sequences) with the appropriate level of arousal to achieve an optimally arousing experience. As Grodal states: 'We [players] can seek out stimulating spaces when bored and take shelter in some other spaces when overstimulated and in need of rest (2000, 204). One player shows how he uses the environment to control the zombie attacks and therewith the amount of arousal he experiences.

> *(Example 11)*
> *The first thing I do is scout the local terrain to determine if there is anything I can use (doorways for choke points), obstacles I can hide behind, pools I can kick zombies into. Then I see if there is an escape route before planning how to manage the zombies that are around. If there is more than one, I will try to pull them separately. If more than one comes I contemplate running away or manoeuvring to the best tactical position.*

The contrary can also be argued. The ability of the player to actively participate in a violent representation could induce aggressive behaviour because it might enhance social learning, the priming of violence related information nodes, or just generally arousal levels that can form the basis of violent acts (Sherry 2001). One participant for instance showed his anger and lust for payback after a plot twist in the game that revealed that a befriended character was not that friendly after all.

> *(Example 12)*
> *I definitely felt cheated and a bit angry after all I've been through in the game, bending over backwards risking life and limb to buy my characters passage off the island. I am really looking forward to some payback in the last chapter; I will be quite pissed off if I am to be denied that, but it looks like I will find out soon enough.*

It should be noted that this certainly does not mean that in-game aggressive behaviour is learned and repeated in 'real life'. In fact, as this particular participant remarks in one of his other diary entries:

> *(Example 13)*
> *In the background is the feeling that you are playing a game, and your choices do not have consequences in reality.*

Finding the exact implications of the distinctive experiential properties of gameplay in regard to the experience of violent content requires more research. In fact, studying the demands that games put on their players needs ongoing theorization and experimentation, since the continuous evolvement of games, game systems, players and context means that impact differs over generations. However, by highlighting and structuring those elements of gameplay that are currently unaccounted for in the classification processes, this model functions as an important step in finding the implications of violent game content.

CONCLUSION

In all the diary examples discussed in this paper, the experience is dependent on what the player decides to do, how he makes sense of what he does, and how the game guides these processes of behaviour and meaning making. Our research therefore foregrounds the importance of a firsthand experience of the gameplay elements through play. This not only leads to a better understanding and fuller appreciation of the different components of gameplay but is also part of a different type of game classification research that does not look for a public's value judgement but simply asks players what it is they experience during play (Schott & Van Vught 2011). Trying to find a public opinion on a medium that leads to such value laden attitudes and judgements can be difficult since the *Hawthorne Effect* (Riley 1963) tells us that social standards can easily lead to the same politically correct answers every time. By looking at the firsthand experience of play more spontaneous expressions of opinions about game content can thus be gathered.

Also, taking notice of certain textual triggers, such as the deniable and undeniable or the triggers that will likely be assimilated by game schemata, helps to structure the significance of game content for the play experience. Understanding how some textual triggers relate to certain player configuration, interpretation or use of schemata, can eventually lead to very concrete recommendations to the classification office. This correlation between text and experience will however require much more quantitative and qualitative gameplay experience studies. With the use of data derived from diary entries, gameplay commentaries, player observation, psychophysiological measures, and onscreen gameplay analyses, our continued research on digital game classification will eventually provide the empirical validation of the different qualities of the gameplay experience and the textual clues responsible for bringing these about. At this point, however, the operationalization and experimental validation of essential gameplay elements in our gameplay model functions as an important first step for this research. But perhaps even more importantly, the model opens up possibilities for our field of game studies to have a real impact on the social and political attitudes and beliefs about the medium of digital games.

ENDNOTES

1 See for instance the PEGI content and assessment form available at http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/1184/media/pdf/354.pdf or the Films, Videos, and

Publication Act 1993 used in New Zealand as a basis for classifying digital games (OFLC, 1993).

2 The reasons for choosing *Dead Island* were its R18 classification and its recent release at the time of the study (which allowed for analysis of anticipatory experience). During future subsequent diary studies of this sort, other game genres will also be explored.

3 The two coexisting realms are distilled from the idea that games combine elements of both classical games and stories or fictional worlds. Several game theorists have emphasized these two realms especially in their efforts of exploring and defining the player's engagement in the game. McMahan (2003) has for instance emphasized the player's diegetic ('immersion') and non-diegetic ('engagement') involvement in the game. Similarly Ermi and Mäyrä (2005) identified an imaginative and challenge based immersion and also Adams and Rollings (2007) divide immersion into narrative (imaginative) immersion and tactical and strategic (challenge based) immersion. Perhaps most notably though, this distinction was made apparent by Juul (2005) who explains gameplay as an experience that involves playing with real rules in fictional worlds.

4 Zizek (1999) calls this interpassivity. Interpassivity happens when we as players have our player characters fulfill the demands of the game system which makes our player characters ultimately passive.

5 As Bordwell argues, when we watch a film, the schemata that are consulted will generally help us make sense of the stimuli as part of a coherent fictional world. This means that even when the film presents us with unexpected stimuli we are prepared to justify those stimuli as part of a realistic fiction (1985, p. 47).

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