II. Genre and the computer game

Nothing is true, everything is permitted.

Vladimir Bartol, *Alamut*
Ami, *TRUE BLOOD SEASON I*
Assassin’s Rule, *ASSASSIN’S CREED GAMES*

As we saw in the introduction, computer games can be divided into two broad categories: games of emergence (where the gameplay emerges from the game rules) and games of progression (where the gamer has to perform a set of predefined actions). This distinction is an academic one, useful to determine the theories and tools necessary to analyse a particular game or group of games, but outside the realm of game studies the terms are meaningless. The casual gamer is not aware that she is playing a game of emergence when she takes a short break to play a quick game of *ZUMA* (2003). Nor will someone who has just bought *HEAVY RAIN* (2010) realize that this is a game of progression. Like other media, games are usually categorized in genres, both from a practical point of view as well as from a theoretical point of view. However, as we will see, genre theory categorization does not necessarily coincide with the way audiences and producers use the term to distinguish media objects.

In this chapter, I will discuss how genre is interpreted in relation to the computer game¹, a subject that has been rarely addressed critically in game studies. As we will see, genres in computer games differ from genres in literature and film, which often leads to misconceptions especially when looking at narrative. I will therefore start with a short introduction presenting the classical view on genre in these two media. Then I will discuss genre in the computer game, how the taxonomy that dominates today came about, and the problems it poses. Here we will see that, despite the fact that this categorization is based on a different concept, the same or similar issues are at play as those already observed by genre theorists in (popular) literature and film. But it will also become clear that, because genre is based on a different concept in computer games, these genre issues are not as critical as they are in the older two media, especially in film genre theory. Then I will examine two recently proposed new taxonomies for the categorization of

¹ The original text of this chapter was part of my presentation “Computer Games as a Comparative Medium” (Veugen, 2009) at the International Conference Computer Games / Players / Game Cultures: State and Perspectives of Digital Game Studies, held in Magdeburg, Germany, from 19 to 21 March 2009. This text has been significantly altered and expanded.
computer games, to see if they offer viable alternatives for the issues found in the dominating categorization. Next, I will go into the reasons why computer games do not use the same genre categories as literature and film do, which will also highlight the fundamental difference between narrative fiction and film on the one hand, and story-structured computer games on the other hand. The category I will centre on will be the adventure genre, not only because this is the category I will be focussing on in the rest of this dissertation, but also because it is the category that poses the most problems when genre is discussed in different narrative media, for instance when comparing them\(^2\). I will end this chapter by discussing the merits of the existing computer game categorization and by looking into the prediction that computer game genre categories will, in the foreseeable future, be the same as the classical categorization used in popular literature and film.

**Genre in literature and film**

Literary studies, where the term genre originates\(^3\), distinguishes three basic genres which stem from Aristotle’s theoretical framework: epic, lyric and drama. Up until the seventeenth century, genre\(^4\) was used as a classificatory, genealogical, and prescriptive term. However, as more and more new subgenres, such as the letter, the diary and especially the novel, were introduced, the classical distinction of genres became blurred (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005). In the twentieth century, renewed interest in the meaning and function of genre emerged, which gradually dismissed the prescriptive function of genre. Twentieth century literary theorists furthermore introduced a genre theory that incorporated the audience. Northrop Frye, for instance, formulated a genre theory that was not based on content or form but that looked at the link between the author and his audience: “the radical of presentation” (1957, p. 246)\(^5\). His genre theory dominated for twenty years, when it was challenged by Tzvetan Todorov. According to Todorov all

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\(^1\) See also Chapter V.

\(^2\) In determining the poetic genre, Aristotle did not “distinguish poetry from other forms of verse in terms of its linguistic artistry” (Heath, 1996, p. xv) but in stead looked at “the use to which the verse is put” (ibid.).

\(^3\) I take the liberty of using the term here despite the fact that the term in itself was not used until the emergence of formulaic fiction in the 19th century (Cohen R., 1986). Of course the concept of genre is older than the term, before the 19th century terms like ‘kinds’ or ‘species’ were used.

\(^4\) Consequently he proposed four distinct forms of genre: epos, fiction, drama and lyric; of course, epos, drama and lyric are directly derived from Aristotle, but Frye, influenced by Jung, now emphasized the mode of delivery and therefore introduced fiction, which mode of delivery is print. In the epos genre the author addresses the audience directly through speech (e.g. the alliterative verse of the Anglo Saxon bard, the romances of the mediaeval minstrel, the fairy-tales of the nineteenth century storyteller and the ancestor stories of the African Griot). When stories are in printed form and author and audience are therefore hidden from each other (not in direct contact) the genre is fiction. In the drama genre (theatre, cinema) the audience is present but the author is concealed ‘behind’ the performers. And in lyric the author addresses a ‘hidden’ audience of listeners (Frye, 1957, pp. 243-251).
genres originate in human discourse, so literary genres do as well. And, although Todorov recognized the existence of already accepted ‘historical’ genres, genres should, in his view, be identified by critics through systematic analysis of source texts. These ideas mark a new era in genre criticism, a more functionalist approach, which included all types of discourse such as instruction manuals, news reports, job interviews, political speeches, as well as everyday language utterances. Consequently, genre no longer was a fixed term; on the contrary, it was now seen as changing constantly according to the needs of the social group that produces the text (Derrida, 1980). One of the most influential figures in this new take on genre was Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1982) not only expanded genre to include all uses of language, but also incorporated the social context that produced the text into genre theory. As a reaction to this synchronic approach to literary genres, Ralph Cohen argued in favour of a genre classification that viewed genre as a diachronic process as “genre groupings arise, change and decline for historical reasons” (1986, p. 88). His interpretation of genre has been widely applied ever since.

The general reading public, however, uses the term genre in a more informal way to distinguish works of fiction based on shared conventions, for which literary theory uses the term *genre fiction*. *Genre fiction*, also called formulaic fiction, denotes genre categories such as mystery, fantasy, romance, horror, detective, adventure etcetera. This categorization is based on certain assumptions and expectations the reader has (reception), which in turn influence production. According to Bloom (2002), the division of popular fiction in a variety of genres based on style, theme or content began to emerge in the more liberal climate after the First World War when books had become cheaper and more readily available, when demand for non-moralizing and less edifying material grew, and when new kinds of content emerged, for instance, science fiction in H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895)⁶, detective in Agatha Christy’s *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), and spy/thriller in John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). But although the general public, libraries and researchers⁷ used the new genre categorization (with the recognizable elements it had developed i.e. characters, iconography, setting⁸, style, and theme), it was not until the 1960s, after the rise in popularity of the paperback and the ascent of popular

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⁶ Although some of these titles were published before WWI, mass production, mass distribution and popularity in Europe only took off after the war.
⁷ Reception research based on *genre fiction* started in the 1930s.
⁸ In film theory, setting is sometimes seen as part of iconography (Sobchack, 1975 (reprint 2003)) and at other times as a separate category (Lacey, 2000).
Genres associated with it (most notably science fiction and women’s romances), that critics and publishers began to use the same categorization (ibid.).

Film theory usually uses genre to denote categories that are, to a certain extent, comparable to those distinguished by genre fiction in literary studies, i.e. a set of expectations and conventions⁹:

Any particular film of any definable group is only recognizable as part of that group if it is, in fact, an imitation of that which came before. It is only because we have seen other films that strongly resemble the particular film at hand that we can say it is a horror film or a thriller or a swashbuckler. (Sobchack, 1975 (reprint 2003), p. 104)

However, as Bordwell and Thompson put it: “genre is easier to recognize than to define” (2001, p. 94). Some genres are differentiated based on the subject matter or theme of the film (e.g. the Western, the gangster film and the science fiction film). Other genres are distinguished because of their manner of presentation (e.g. the musical) or the type of plot (e.g. detectives). Still other genres are based on emotional impact (e.g. comedy, thriller).

In short, the classification of films into genres is very heterogeneous and depends on more than audiences and institutions alone: “Filmmakers, industry decision makers, critics, and viewers all contribute to the formation of a shared sense that certain films seem to resemble one another in significant ways” (ibid.). Consequently, some categories (e.g. Art-House) tell us nothing at all about the content, subject-matter, theme or manner of presentation of a film.

In the course of this chapter it will become clear that, for various reasons, genre categories are not as clear-cut as presented here. This is one of the problems genre categorization (and genre criticism) is faced with.

The origins of game genres

Similar to fiction and film, the categorization that is most widely used for games today, i.e. a categorization of computer games which is based on gameplay skills, was not conceived deliberately, but arose naturally from the emergence of new types of games. Thus, the first category of games, the arcade games, stem from the game that started it all: SPACEWAR! (1962)¹⁰ (Image II.1). SPACEWAR! is a graphical game where two gamers fight

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⁹ What I present here is a more classical take on genre, as manifested mainly in the Hollywood film. Genre studies that look at genre from a more semiotic or structuralist approach have produced alternative film genre theories.

¹⁰ Before that games like TIC-TAC-TOE and NIM had been played on computers but solely as a marketing or research tool, either to show that computers were not as scary as many believed them to be or to explore the potential of a machine, operating system or programming language.
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each other’s spacecraft and the gravitational pull of the sun. Even though the game had been conceived as entertainment, the computer industry at the time was still some ten years removed from a possible commercial use of games.

But eventually in the early 1970s other games appeared\textsuperscript{11} which clearly used the same gameplay skills (dexterity and quick reactions) that determined the gameplay of \textit{SPACEWAR!}. At the time, these games were called arcade games (Image II.2) because they were normally played in an arcade hall. With the emergence of the home console and later the home computer these games still relied on dexterity and quick reactions because they were originally designed to be played in a limited amount of time, as ‘your dime should only last so long’. Not surprisingly, these games also became known as ‘twitch games’. Later they were termed platform games\textsuperscript{12} and/or action games. They are the games that belong to the meta-category of games of emergence.

The second basic genre, the adventure genre, followed in the mid 1970s with the \textit{COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE} (1975-76)\textsuperscript{13}. Although the original game was about exploring an underground maze, based on the real world Colossal Cave, the addition of treasure, puzzles, and score-points turned it into the new genre of the adventure game. Of course, the earliest games were not yet called adventure games, Infocom, for instance, called

\textsuperscript{11} Such as the first really commercially successful game \textit{PONG} (1972), see Image V.20, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{12} Because in games like \textit{DONKEY KONG} (1981) the gamer had to manoeuvre her game character (in \textit{DONKEY KONG} Jumpman, the later famous Mario) across a series of platforms by dodging and jumping obstacles. Later the name was also applied to other games where the gamer had to clear levels to end the game.

\textsuperscript{13} As I will show in the next chapter, the earliest material for the game stems from 1972. The game was also called \textit{ADVENTURE OF ADVENT}. 
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them interactive fiction\textsuperscript{14}. Others just referred to the \textit{COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE} or later games of the genre to explain what type of game to expect\textsuperscript{15}.

![Image II.3 The opening screen of \textit{THE COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE} (Crowther & Woods, 1975-76) as it would have looked like on an early computer monitor.]

Originally, these games were all text only, but when they were ported to the home computer, pictures were added and gradually they became all graphical\textsuperscript{16}. One of the earliest descriptions of the genre of the adventure game can be found in the first issue of \textit{Computer Gamer}:

It is not easy to define exactly what an adventure game is! [...] Unlike arcade games, adventures do not call upon the player to possess extraordinary hand/eye coordination. Adventure games do not necessarily have [...] graphics. Finally, adventures rarely rely on zappy sound effects to increase the experience. [...] An Adventure Game involves the player in exploring and understanding an imaginary scenario in order to succeed in some pre-determined task. The scenario created by the author (or programmer) may be underground, in a ship (space or otherwise), in a near-deserted town – in fact anywhere and anytime. It is normally divided up into a number of discreet locations. Your task may be as simple as getting out of the town or as complicated and involved as controlling a spaceship while in suspended animation. [...] you are in a world created in someone else’s mind, trying to unravel all the puzzles and avoid all the perils they put there – it’s your wits against theirs and only superior mental agility will bring victory. (Bishop & Wooding, 1985)

Adventure games belong to the meta-category of games of progression. If we leave computerized versions of board and other ‘real world’ games aside, a third and final genre

\textsuperscript{14} See the next chapter, especially Image III.5, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{15} See the add for \textit{VALHALLA} in the next chapter (Image III.11, p. 101).

\textsuperscript{16} The graphic adventure games from the hey days of the genre by companies like Sierra Online inc. and LucasArt are now often referred to as classic adventure games.
arising from the early days is the role-playing game (RPG), which came into being when Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle developed their game _MUD (MULTI-USER DUNGEON)_ in 1978\(^{17}\), although one could argue that this is just a subgenre of the adventure game\(^{18}\).

When new computer hardware was developed, new games emerged. Some could be played in a similar manner as already existing games, for example _FROGGER_ (1981). _FROGGER_, at first sight, does not seem to have much in common with either _SPACEWAR!_ or _PONG_ but it still relies on good hand-eye coordination and timing, i.e. dexterity (Image II.4).

But other games now demanded different game skills, such as _WOLFENSTEIN 3D_ (1992). Like the early adventure games, this game takes place in a maze, but this time the maze is visualized in 3D and in first person point of view (see Image II.5)\(^{19}\). The main goal of the game is survival. For this, the gamer will need weapons, food, ammunition, and medical kits. Certainly this game calls for good hand-eye coordination and finding objects (so both action and adventure elements\(^{20}\)), but the main skills are navigating the maze and killing opponents before they kill you. Not new but also vital to the new type of gameplay is the fact that the gamer does not lose a life immediately (as in many other games), but can take a certain amount of damage (indicated by a health percentage or a health bar) and can restore health by using food and medical kits. Consequently, unlike other action games, the game can take days or even weeks to finish depending on the skills of the gamer.

\(^{17}\) The original game was programmed by Thrubshaw, but he later handed development over to Bartle (Bartle, 1990).

\(^{18}\) The next chapter will give a more in depth history of the adventure genre and its subgenres.

\(^{19}\) Which, of course, also applies to _MYST_ (1993) released a year later, but in _MYST_ you move through static screens and the game is not about shooting or being shot.

\(^{20}\) In many platform/action games the gamer, of course, already had to collect objects. The difference is that stars, mushrooms etc. were plentiful and easily found, whereas the objects in the maze were spread out over a larger area, more in common with the distribution of objects in early adventure games.
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gamer. The first person point of view combined with the judicious navigation of the maze also makes it different from existing platform/action games of the time. And as the game calls for dexterity it is no longer comparable to an adventure game. Thus, a new game genre came into being: the First Person Shooter (FPS).

![Image II.5 Screenshot WOLFENSTEIN 3D (Id Software Inc, 1992)](image)

These ‘traditional’ genre terms (adventure, arcade, FPS, RPG, etc.) are still used today, because they denote a particular playing style and the game skills needed to successfully complete the game. Thus, they give the prospective buyer an idea of what to expect. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ERSB), for instance, uses them in their games rating database: “an arcade-style game in which players bounce a small ball at a vertical formation of colored blocks to break them apart” (description of the game BLOCKIDS for the PS3\(^21\)), while GameSpot\(^22\) writes about the new SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 game: “Super Mario Galaxy 2 is even more varied, challenging, and fun than its superb predecessor, making it the new standard for platformers” (Mc Shea, 2010). And on the back cover of the Wii version of BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS - THE DIRECTOR’S CUT we read that “an intuitive interface redefines the adventure” (2009). However, as with any categorization that originates from the bottom up, there are several problems with the existing genre categorization of games. In the following sections, I will therefore discuss the major issues that the existing genre classification has. I will start with the most important one, the lack of consensus.


\(^{22}\) www.gamespot.com.
Lack of consensus

Despite the fact that most game theorists agree that game genres should be classed according to their gameplay skills or type of interactivity, there is no consensus on the number of genres there are and their formal definitions. One of the first to use a skills-based genre categorization is Chris Crawford in his book *The Art of Computer Game Design* (1982). Crawford lists two basic categories: skill-and-action games (with six sub-categories, amongst which combat, maze, and sports games) and strategy games (also with six sub-categories such as adventures, wargames, and educational games). But he is very clear about the fact that his is only one of the possible taxonomies, one that he believes is interesting and valid from a game designer’s point of view. However, he goes on to say that:

The field [of computer games] is too young, the sample too small, for whatever organizing principles there may be to have asserted themselves. The games we now have are more the product of happenstance than the inevitable result of well-established forces. Without a wide array of games there is little opportunity to choose between games; without choice there can be no natural selection. It is therefore impossible for us to devise a single, absolute taxonomy.

Since then other genre taxonomies based on game skills or type of interactivity have been drawn up. Some of the better known ones are those by Steven Poole, Mark Wolf, and Simon Egenfeldt Nielsen et al. Steven Poole’s categorization (2000, pp. 35-57) serves no particular purpose other than to create some order in the chaos of existing games at the time, for a general reading public. As it was not his goal to draw up a formal taxonomy, he does not give a precise description of each category, but rather describes what each group entails, illustrated by examples. As his starting point is the same techno-historical genre history described above, his nine categories would be familiar to the gaming public at that time, although, for a more informed public, certain categories (such as adventure games) seem to be missing.

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23 A summary of all the different genres proposed by various authors and websites discussed here can be found in Appendix A.

24 As the book has been long since out of print this text is taken from the web version, which does not have page numbers (nor does the PDF version). The cited text can be found on the first page of Chapter three (A Taxonomy of Computer Games).

25 Although Poole is aware of and addresses some of the other issues, which I will discuss below, his book is also intended for non-gamers and the categorization reflects this.

26 The nine categories are: fighting games, god games, platform games, puzzle games, racing games, real-time strategy games, role-playing games, shoot-'em-ups, and sports games. In the 2001/2004 revised edition, he still lists the same nine basic genres (Poole, 2001/2004).

27 He does introduce adventure games in the same chapter but only as a historic genre.
Mark Wolf lists as many as forty genres (2001, pp. 113-134). His categorization is a deliberate attempt at a more formal taxonomy, which he bases on interactivity: “dominant characteristics of the interactive experience and the games’ goals and objectives, and the nature of the game’s player-character and player controls” (ibid., p. 116). Although his list is a valid attempt at categorizing games based on the formal aspects of their gameplay interactivity, his taxonomy is so detailed that its applicability becomes questionable, also because some of the categories seem superfluous. It is, for instance, unclear what the benefits are of distinguishing between Adventure games and Text Adventure Games, especially when Wolf says of the latter group: “[i]t is not necessary to cross-list these with Adventure because that is implied in Text Adventure” (ibid., p. 133). In my view, the fact that the gamer has to type in a Text Adventure game should be less of a criterion than the fact that she uses the same skills to finish both types of games. The same goes for his categories of capturing games and catching games. The former denote games which centre on the “capturing of objects and characters that move away from and try to evade the player-character” (ibid., p. 120), while the latter are about “catching objects or characters that do not actively try to evade the player-character” (ibid., p.121). A more logical categorization would list both under the category of arcade or action games, as both rely on hand-eye coordination and dexterity. Wolf’s basic assumptions are commendable but the list he ends up with is still very heterogeneous and the categories often lack a link to his own criterion. Talking about film genres, Altman describes this manner of categorization as using “a sufficient number of categories to ensure that every film will be covered” (1999, p. 125) but consequently “[i]mposing a rather idiosyncratic consistency rather than deriving it from human nature” (ibid.).

Simon Egenfeldt Nielsen et al. (2008, pp. 43-44) limit their taxonomy to a refreshing four categories: action games, adventure games, strategy games, and process-oriented games. Their categorization focuses on “a feature important to games: goals, and how to achieve them” (ibid., p. 41). For action games these are achieved by “fast reflexes and decent hand-eye coordination” (ibid.); for adventure games by “puzzle-solving skills and deductive logic” (ibid.); and for strategy games by managerial skills such as planning and

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28 When one counts the referring categories as well, there are forty-two genres. In the 2005 version of this chapter (pp. 193-204) Wolf still lists forty-two genres. See Appendix A for the complete list.

29 Before Wolf introduces his genre taxonomy he briefly looks at the merits of genre categorization in literature and film.

30 Wolf’s taxonomy also does not take into account the techno-historical process from which new genres arise, even though many of the games he lists as examples are quite old. Steven Poole at least recognized that newer games are less easily categorized in terms of their interactivity or game skills. Wolf does what many other genre critics from other media have done: he starts from clear examples and ignores ‘outside’ influences.
control. The final category, process-oriented games, deals with the growing number of games that no longer are goal-oriented but rather “provide the player with a system to play with” (ibid., p. 44). These include games like WORLD OF WARCRAFT (2003-present) and THE SIMS (2000-present). To the perceptive eye, two of the originating categories can still be distinguished in this taxonomy: arcade games and adventure games. Even the classification of the role-playing games concurs with the techno-historical origins of the genre. The single-player role-playing games belong to the adventure category that originated them, while the newer multi-player role-playing games are in the new process-oriented category. Obviously as there are only four categories, a game like PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME (2004), which by others, including its designers, is classed as an action adventure game, is placed in the action category as the action aspects of the game dominate the puzzle aspects.

Audiences, designers, developers, and producers also categorize computer games in terms of gameplay. MobyGames, the leading online game database, gives seven genres: Action, Adventure, Educational, Racing/Driving, Role-playing, Simulation, Sports, and Strategy. The immediate problem a gamer would have with this categorization is that it does not include the, above-mentioned First Person Shooter (FPS or shooter), one of the most popular genres at the moment. The FPS, for whatever reason, has been put under the class of non-sports themes along with arcade, fighting, medieval/fantasy, etcetera. The affordances the gamer expects in a modern FPS game — different types of weaponry, foraging for new weapons, ammunition, rations and medical kits, killing npc's and multiplayer elements — are inherent to the gameplay of the FPS. This cannot be said of fantasy, which features in many different game genres, each with its own distinct set of affordances. This is understandable in as far as fantasy is listed as a theme, but arcade, fighting and FPS are not themes as they refer to game skills. Therefore, they should either be classed as subgenres in the action genre, which is possible if we view the action genre as a super-ordinate class, or they should be seen as separate genres themselves.

But even if there is some consensus on the label of a genre, for instance simulation, ambiguity arises. What the term simulation entails to the gaming audience is very much dependent on the person one asks. Fans of flying automatically associate the term with flight sims. For a vast majority of others, however, simulation is synonymous with the life

32 Similar categorizations can be found in online game magazines.
33 According to the Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry, 2010 report (ESA, 2010)
34 Non-player characters.
35 If we only consider the various LORD OF THE RINGS games, we find the genres action, adventure, role-playing, and strategy.
simulation series *THE SIMS* (2000-present)\(^{36}\). MobyGames only lists one simulation genre, which not only includes flight and other vehicle simulations like *THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER* (1987)\(^{37}\), management simulations like *ZOO TYCOON* (2001), and life simulations like *THE SIMS*, but also games like *TOM CLANCY’S GHOST RECON* (2001), because this game has elements of the genres action, simulation and strategy. Wikipedia does list three separate categories\(^{38}\): construction and management simulation, life simulation, and vehicle simulation. But in the description of the individual games, they also use the term business simulation instead of management simulation. GameSpot, interestingly, does not even have a category simulation in their genre listing, but in search queries for individual games, *simulation* is used as a tag, as are *sim*, *sims* and *the sims*, as well as the combinations *management sim* and *business sim*; only vehicle *sim(ulation)* does not yield any associated games.

Where the difference in genre categorization becomes very annoying is when genre preferences are queried in surveys. Every polling agency and industry board seems to use its own genre categorization. The very thorough report *Gamers in the UK: Digital play, digital lifestyles* by Rhianna Pratchet (2005) conducted on behalf of the BBC, for instance, does not have a genre category adventure, but only the category action-adventure. The first national gaming survey in the Netherlands, *Nationaal Gaming Onderzoek 2008, een totaalbeeld van Nederlands game gedrag* (Hautvast, et al., 2008)\(^{39}\) does have a category adventure but not as a separate group, only in combination with strategy. And, probably because it was a report aimed at the industry, they also have a category casino/money, which is not found in any other genre categorization. Due to the anomalous nature of their categorization, it should come as no surprise that they do not have the categories action, action-adventure or puzzle game, but do have brain training as a separate group. The American Entertainment Software Association (ESA) does have an adventure category, but it does not have action-adventure. And the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA), who cover Europe, do not use genre preferences at all in their surveys, which, in view of the discrepancies in the other surveys, seems to be the wisest option. However, this means that it is impossible to compare the data from the separate surveys.

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\(^{36}\) Over the past five years I have conducted several game related surveys many of which included a question on genre preference. Respondents who listed one of *THE SIMS* games as their favourite game invariably also ticked simulation as their favourite category. The same was true for survey data from other Dutch researchers I had access to.

\(^{37}\) Which, unlike the book and film of the same name, is not an action-adventure thriller, but a submarine simulation.

\(^{38}\) See appendix A for the complete list of genres Wikipedia uses.

\(^{39}\) National Gaming Survey 2008, an overview of Dutch gaming activities.
surveys, which in turn makes it impossible to deduce worldwide trends and differences in genre preferences.

**Game genres are not transhistorical**

Even though the above taxonomies are all based on game skills or interaction, the lack of consensus, and the struggle to define a genre and its boundaries, is mainly caused by the reality that genrefication is a continuing process which changes through time. As Altman already showed for film and literature, a synchronic approach (used e.g. by Frye and Todorov) makes the division in genres easier as it strips away the historical differences. But it does not account for the origins of genres nor for their apparent death and rebirth. In the above taxonomies, for instance, the category of the adventure game was often left out, mainly because adventure games, at the time the taxonomy was drawn up, had fallen in popularity: “As with any form, videogame genres mutate and shift over history. If they never exactly die, they can sleep for a long time, while other newer types spring up to take their place” (Poole, 2000, p. 35). Presently, however, we see a resurgence of the genre with new games for new platforms (the genre is very popular on the Nintendo DS and its descendants, where new titles adapted the genre to appeal to gamers who came to the medium through the popular brain training games), as well as the reintroduction of popular series with new episodes that will run on today’s hardware and software (e.g. *THE MONKEY ISLANDS* series that was reintroduced in 2009 by Telltale Games), and companies like gog.com (good old games) who make adapted versions of well remembered adventure games so that they can be played on modern systems.

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40 As already noted, the upcoming categorization issues are very similar to those found in other media. On the subject of genre change in film Bordwell and Thompson noted: “Genres also change over time, as filmmakers invent new twists on old formulas, and defining the precise boundaries between genres can be tricky” (2001, p. 94).

41 The original series was published by Lucasfilm Games and consisted of four games: *THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND* (1990), *MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK’S REVENGE* (1991), *THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND* (1997), and *ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND* (2000). Telltale’s *TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND* series (2009) consists of five games, telling the story after the games’ protagonist Guybrush Threepwood has escaped from the island in the original fourth game.

42 Game companies now also have discovered this emergent market of retro gamers. Nintendo, for instance, have introduced the Virtual Console, a combination of an ‘emulator’ and a game shop channel that runs on the Wii and that: “...is making the greatest video game archive in history available for the Wii console. Download many of your favorite NES, SNES, N64, Arcade, Commodore 64, NEOGEO, Sega Genesis, Sega Master System and TurboGrafx 16 titles and relive those happy memories all over again!” (Nintendo Wii website). The reintroduction of classic games on new platforms is a booming market. The games that are reintroduced not only include all time arcade favourites like *PAC-MAN* (1980) or *TETRIS* (1984), but also adventure games such as *MYSTERY HOUSE* (1980), *MYST* (1993), *BROKEN SWORD: CIRCLE OF BLOOD* (1996) and *SYBERIA* (2002). And these games are not only reintroduced on mobile devices (such as mobile phones, PDAs, and handheld game devices), many of them, especially the arcade games and the old text adventure games can now also be played on the Internet.
Genre

Naturally, the same popularity cycle can also be observed in film. When the film GLADIATOR (2000) was released, the producers took a great risk as Roman history and gladiator films had died an infamous death with B-class sword and sandal films. Yet GLADIATOR was not a typical sword and sandal film; rather, it was primarily an epic narrative about revenge and the afterlife playing against a historic background. The film led to a renewed interest in Roman and classical history, so much so that The New York Times even talked of a Gladiator Effect that also reflected on other media. Renewal of the genre formula can also be seen in one of the oldest film genres, the Western, which has been adapted, caricatured, recycled, mixed, exported, and modernised both on grounds of new technical possibilities as well as on grounds of cultural changes. So much so that a great number of new subgenres arose, such as spaghetti westerns, osterns, curry westerns, revisionist westerns, science fiction westerns, acid westerns, and contemporary westerns. Genre taxonomies should therefore allow for diachronic renewal and change.

How new subgenres and new genres come about

As Altman showed, identification and description of genres is not only facilitated by denying the historical dimension of genre; genre critics also repeatedly stressed the repetitiveness and similarities of the existing genres, as change was detrimental to a stable and universal genre categorization (1999, p. 21). But variety is the spice of life and without variety and change new genres would not come about. The route for games is similar to that of film as described by Altman (ibid., pp. 50-62), i.e. a cyclic adjective-noun process. First a genre will develop a new subgenre which is distinguished by placing an adjective before the genre category. As the subgenre is also subject to change and variation it will gradually move away from the originating genre and eventually become a new genre in its own right, in which case the adjective usually becomes the label for the new category. As we will see in the next chapter, adventure games gradually developed a

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43 "Close your eyes and think of being somewhere else when it's 90-plus degrees in steamy New York, or anywhere. Why not, for instance, ancient Rome? Which is synonymous with romance and conspiracy, sex and poisonings, philosophy and gladiators, things grand and profane. Writers think these thoughts, and create genres. Although it's not yet a publishing trend, there are at least a handful of recent books of fiction and nonfiction about ancient Rome in the bookstores, with more on the way. It's called 'the "Gladiator" effect' by writers and publishers. The snob in us likes to believe that it is always books that spin off movies. Yet in this case, it's the movies -- most recently 'Gladiator' two years ago -- that have created the interest in the ancients. And not for more Roman screen colossals, but for writing that is serious or fun or both" (Arnold, 2002).

44 See Wright (1975) and Lacey (2000) on how the Western genre in film shows what narratives were important at certain decades in America in the 20th century. See Carroll and Nobles (1977) on how the Western illustrates the history of the United States.
subgenre that combined elements of the action genre (good hand-eye coordination and fast reflexes) with those of the adventure genre (object finding and puzzle elements). To differentiate between the new games and the other adventure games the new subgenre was called the action adventure game. But as the game skills of the adventure genre became gradually less important than those of the action genre, the action adventure game ceased to be a subgenre and became a separate category in its own right, although in this particular case the adjective did not become the new category label as the category of the action game already existed. Stealth adventure games, however, another subgenre of the adventure game, still seem to be in the cyclic genre process, as they are classed differently by different groups. Stealth games resemble action adventure games in that the gamer plays the lead in a thrilling story. But whereas the action game is won by running, jumping, climbing, swinging and shooting, the stealth game calls for subterfuge, hiding in the shadows, sneaking, stalking, and dodging your enemies. In a pure stealth game is won by not being seen:

Thief: The Dark Project is a first-person 3D action/adventure game that puts you in the role of a master thief relying on stealth and cunning. Utilizing the revolutionary new Dark Engine, the game will transport you into a dark and immersive techno-fantasy world of stealth, intrigue, deception and combat.

You will embark on a series of adventures that are woven into a compelling story of seduction, betrayal, and ultimately revenge. In order to survive, you must use stealth and evasive manoeuvres to progress through a world where shadows are your only ally, trust is not an option, and confrontation usually results in death. (Back of box Windows UK version THIEF THE DARK PROJECT, 1998)

The original stealth adventure games like THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT (1998) and SPLINTER CELL (2002) are now popularly classed as action adventure stealth games or simply as stealth games (with stealth as a separate genre). MobyGames has re-classed the older stealth games as action games, which is understandable as action game is the super-ordinate category for both types. But this is also confusing for the prospective gamer, as the gameplay expectations for stealth games are different from those of the action game. The newer stealth games, which now are classed by other taxonomies as stealth action games (and hence no longer associated with the originating genre of the adventure game), are classed by MobyGames as belonging to both categories action and stealth.

45 Taxonomies that do not have an action adventure category like MobyGames do class them as action games (e.g. MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE (2003)) although they only seem to do this for older games. Newer games (e.g. UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES (2009)) are assigned to both the action as well as to the adventure category.
Genre

Mixed genre games

Like books and film, some games are not easily classified because they belong to more than one category. In literature the mixing of more than one genre, for instance in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and more recently Manuel Puig's *El Beso de la Mujer Arana* (1976), was one of the reasons newer genre theories like those of Derrida (1980) and Bakhtin (1982) dispensed with the idea that genre categories are exclusive. The mixing of genres also applies to popular fiction. If we look at the recommendations listed in the Ballantine edition of *Jurassic Park* (Crichton, 1990), for instance, we see it classed as suspense, science fiction, thriller, adventure, action, techno thriller, and (even) dinosaur novel. In a similar vein, someone who loves historical novels and the Middle Ages would not immediately choose Michael Chrichton's novel *Timeline* (1999), as it is listed as science fiction; whereas the science fiction fan would probably be quite surprised by its historic content. Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series (1991-present), finally, was described by Gavin MCNett from Salon.com as "the smartest historical sci-fi adventure-romance ever written by a science Ph.D. with a background in scripting Scrooge McDuck comic books" (1999). In the case of film, Janet Staiger, amongst others, has shown that Hollywood has always produced 'hybrid' films as "the lack of purity broadened the film's appeal in terms both of the likely audiences who might enjoy the movie and of the film's originality" (1997 (reprint 2003), p. 195). Today, a mixture of genre can not only be found in the critically acclaimed filmic work of directors such as Ilan Duran Cohen (for instance *LA CONFUSION DES GENRES* (2000) and *LE PLAISIR DE CHANTER* (2008)), but also in epic action-adventure films which even have been termed super-genre films because they are so diverse that an overall genre is difficult to determine:

A super-genre film refuses to be categorized simply as one genre, it is eclectic. Star Wars (created by George Lucas, 1977) is often cited as a turning point for the use of genre in Hollywood. It was more than just a mix of science fiction, Western and fairy-tale fantasy, the film also harked back to the Saturday matinee adventure serials, such as Flash Gordon, of the 1930s and 40s. (Lacey, 2000, p. 216)

An early example in computer games is the game *ELITE* (1984), which was revolutionary at the time, not only because the game was open-ended, but also because it was an early example of a mixed-genre game that combined elements from the genres...

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46 *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In the case of this particular book, where the text is mostly dialogue, it is even open to discussion to call it a novel at all.

47 This is not to suggest that texts that mix genres or texts that are difficult to classify in genre terms are a modern Twentieth century phenomenon. Some of Shakespeare's plays (notably *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*) are difficult to classify as either comedy or tragedy and have therefore been dubbed the problem plays.
simulation, strategy and action. ELITE remained the exception to the rule for a very long time, but as Steven Poole showed by the end of the 20th century, mixed-genre games were quite common:

But one useful lesson is that the videogame ecology is one rife with interspecies breeding: the lines between genres are gradually being erased. [...] at the beginning of the twenty-first century we are offered driving-RPG games, RPG-exploration games, puzzle-exploration shoot-'em-up games and more. And increasingly, large-scale exploration games in particular are incorporating “sub-games” of different styles within them, as a reward for completing certain sections. Sonic Adventure (1999) lets you play pinball or go snowboarding; Ape Escape (1999) has a mini-boxing game locked away inside. (Poole, 2001/2004)

Recently, genre categorization in computer games has become even less transparent. A modern so-called ‘next-generation/open world/sandbox’ game like ASSASSIN’S CREED (2007) has been categorized as a shooter, an action adventure game, an action game, a stealth game and a fighting game in announcements, reviews and classification systems. As the game includes affordances of all these categories and as the gamer, to a certain extent, can play the game as belonging to any one of the genres mentioned, it would be impossible to choose one overriding one, especially as gamers would probably class the game according to their own genre preference. ASSASSIN’S CREED is a good example of how producers, designers and gamers change the way we play computer games (and hence computer game genres) once new technology allows it.

Games can change genre
Although it seems unlikely at first, media texts may under certain circumstances change genre. In fiction, for instance, the subgenre of the vampire story, which started life as gothic horror in Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), can now also be found in the domain of the romance or detective genre with such writers as Stephenie Meyer (Twilight Series (2005-2008) classed as paranormal or fantastic romance) and Charlaine Harris (Southern

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48 In Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al.’s (2008) taxonomy, it is the earliest game they have placed in their new process oriented category; so a game that does not have a clear goal but rather offers a playing field to be enjoyed. As I will show later on, ELITE did have a clear goal, namely attaining the status of Elite.

49 This is a new category of games that allow nonlinear gameplay where the gamer can ignore the game objectives. The most well-known sandbox/open world games are the latest GRAND THEFT AUTO games.

50 It is remarkable that a game that is set in mediaeval times should be classed as a shooter, especially when one considers that the game’s protagonist, Altair, does not have any weapon that emits projectiles. Of course, the term shooter here merely refers to the gameplay skills and affordances of the FPS.

51 Perhaps one of the reasons ASSASSIN’S CREED was discussed so vigorously at the time in various game forums (especially the clue-filled open end) is that gamers bring different expectations with them from the genres they usually play.
Genre

*Vampire Mysteries*\(^{52}\) (2001-present), classed as occult detective). The vampire romance subgenre has now even become so broad that it has generated its own subcategories: gothic, paranormal, detective, chic-lit and juvenile. What has happened is that a genre that was originally male-oriented has now become female-oriented. The same goes for the film genre melodrama, where Singer (1990) has shown that the genre, which is now generally seen as female-oriented, originally targeted the working-class man.

As the long running computer game series *CASTLEVANIA* (1986-present)\(^ {53}\) shows, despite the fact that their genre categorization is based on a completely different concept, games may also change genre\(^ {54}\). Most games in the *CASTLEVANIA* series centre around a family of vampire slayers called the Belmonts. The games are loosely based on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and much of the iconography is borrowed from the Hammer horror cinema. The monsters the Belmonts face include werewolves, mummies, the monster of Frankenstein, Death (in the form of the Grim Reaper) and of course include Count Dracula himself (often as end-boss). But as the first games were platform games, i.e. games that call for action, the main weapon used to dispose of the monsters is the Vampire Killer whip\(^ {55}\), which the gamer also has to use to kill Dracula. The usual methods employed in other media (sneaking up and staking Dracula or trapping him until dawn) do not work in these early games because they are either too passive (waiting until dawn would call for a cutscene instead of active gameplay) or difficult to realize with the same dramatic effect because of the coarse graphics and limited game mechanics of the time (stakes work better as a throwing weapon in these games). Using a whip also gives the gamer a ranged weapon\(^ {56}\) that can be used with some accuracy despite the limiting factors posed by the hardware. And even though later games allowed for other means of disposing of the vampires, the whip had by then become an integral part of the *CASTLEVANIA* iconography, and indeed it is still the main weapon in present-day *CASTLEVANIA* games\(^ {57}\).

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\(^{52}\) Popularly known as the *Sookie Stackhouse chronicles* or (in their reprinted version) the *True Blood* series.

\(^{53}\) In this period twenty-five *CASTLEVANIA* (related) titles have been released.

\(^{54}\) When new technology allows it, as major changes also involve changes in hardware. Of course for a long-lived series like *CASTLEVANIA*, changes in hardware also force the game to make new or adapted versions. However, this does not automatically mean that they then also have to change their genre. Apart from the arcade cabinet, genre is platform-independent.

\(^{55}\) The whip was created by Rinaldo Gandolfini in an alchemical process for Leon Belmont. The whip was given extra powers when it was fused with the soul of Sara Trantoul, Belmont’s fiancée. The story of the creation of the Vampire Killer whip is told in *CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE* (2004). Secondary weapons include daggers, holy water and an axe.

\(^{56}\) I.e. a weapon that can be used to hit targets that are some distance away from the avatar.

\(^{57}\) Except for the latest game, *CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW*, where the main character Gabriel Belmont now uses a retractable pyrokineletic chain whip called the Combat Cross. That he does not use the Vampire Killer whip confirms that the latest game is not another instalment in the original series but a reboot of the franchise (see below).
The first *CASTLEVANIA* game, *AKUMAJO DRACULA X - CHI NO RONDO* (1986), released in Japan for the Famicom is a side-scrolling platform game (Image II.6). Later in the same year the game was localized for the USA market in an MSX2 version (Image II.7) called *VAMPIRE KILLER* (1986) and for the European market in a NES version (Image II.8) called *CASTLEVANIA* (1986).

The next *CASTLEVANIA* games, for the early home consoles, the Game Boy Advance and the Playstation (I), were also all platform games. The first game to ‘change’ genre was the 3D version for the Nintendo64 (1999). As this console is graphically much more sophisticated, the game lost its 2D platform style to be set in a 3D world (Image II.9). But this is more of a transitory game that still contained many game-play elements of its platform predecessors. The real breakthrough came with the Playstation II (PS2) and the popularity of this platform.

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58 The developments in game graphics and the more sophisticated microchips, not only on the Nintendo64, are the reason why platform games were renamed action games. Note that one should not mistake the 3D world of the Nintendo64 for that of the the open-world 3D games of today. The dimensions of the world on the Nintendo64 were still very limited.
Genre

The enhanced capabilities of the PS2 meant that CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE (2004) (Image II.10) moved from a platform/action game to a story-structured action adventure game with more room for identification with the protagonist and his doomed love story and more in-game story information about the Belmonts and the origins of the Vampire Killer whip\textsuperscript{59}. This genre transformation continued in later games on then new platforms such as the XBOX and the Wii. Even the more action-oriented games on the (also very popular) Nintendo DS developed elaborate stories\textsuperscript{60}. The genre transition, however, was not yet completed. This happened in the latest game, CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW (2010), for the XBox360 and the PS3, which is a full-blown story-structured epic action-adventure hero tale\textsuperscript{61} (Image II.11). The game is not a continuation/recycling of the story or gameplay of the older games\textsuperscript{62}, but a restart of the franchise. Because Konami saw this game as a revitalization of the series, Hideo Konami himself spearheaded the development (Tennant, 2009). The official 2009 E3 trailer of the game even ended with the text “reborn 2010”\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{59} In the epilogue, the game even tells the story of Dracula’s origins as a vampire, and it is not Vlad the Impaler.

\textsuperscript{60} Konami also caters for the retro-gamer by porting the older games to the new platforms and by embracing the virtual console on the Wii.

\textsuperscript{61} See note 49 for an explanation of these terms.

\textsuperscript{62} Although Konami still continues to produce these types of games, usually adding new gameplay aspects in a bid to attract new gamers, as in their recent game CASTLEVANIA HARMONY OF DESPAIR (2010), which returned to the 2D arcade genre but added multi-player gameplay: “Dracula returns in Castlevania Harmony of Despair, the first exclusive Xbox Live Arcade Castlevania game. Featuring the classic fast-paced 2D, side scrolling action the series is known for, fan favorite vampire hunters from across the series will join forces to return Dracula, the Lord of Darkness, to his eternal slumber” (Konami Digital Entertainment, 2010).

\textsuperscript{63} In light of the discussion of game space and the game camera model, which I will address in Chapters IV and V, it is interesting to note that the new game, CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW, does not have a user-controlled camera.
Alternative taxonomies

The lack of uniformity in the definition of game genres and the ‘fickle’ nature of the games themselves, the game audience and game producers, have been noted in the game studies community and recently the first steps have been taken in what in other media is called genre criticism or genre theory:

As far as I know, available game taxonomies are yet subject to limitations and criticism. On one side, you'll find "empirical taxonomies", created by game publishers or expert players. These taxonomies keep on being updated, so they are indeed "current and comprehensive". However, they are deeply flawed as new categories are most of the time artificially created by publishers to stress the "new factor" of their lastests releases.

On the other side, several academicals or professionals also have proposed taxonomies. They are indeed influenced by the empirical classification mentionned above, but benefit from academical critical thinking and seems more reliable. More recently, several research works intent to create classifications of videogames from completely different approaches (activity analysis, formal deconstruction...) (Djaouti, 2008)

Before Djaouti, Aarseth made similar objections to the existing genre model, also saying that “Most of them [genre categories] seem to originate with the popular press and the game industry, as marketing categories” (2004, p. 363). Before I go into the main points of criticism on the existing taxonomies, let me first redress these assumptions. I assume that “empirical taxonomies” means ‘informally observed’ or ‘derived from experience’, and not ‘observed by empirical scientific means’. I further assume that by “expert players” Djaouti means game reviewers from well-known game magazines and game sites or writers on the subject such as Steven Poole (Aarseth’s “popular press”). But even if another group is intended, Djaouti’s and Aarseth’s assumption is wrong, because outside of academia no individual has ever named a game genre category, not even Steven Poole, whose taxonomy only consists of existing categories. Secondly, though it is true that producers label their game categories, they always have to do this in relation to what is already there (see the process of genreification above). In the next chapter, we will see

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65 The original text contains quite a few spelling and grammatical mistakes, as it is an e-mail reply to a question posed on the DiGRA (Digital Games Research Association) mailing list, and Damien Djaouti is French Canadian. I have refrained from correcting the mistakes, as they do not interfere with the gist of the message.

66 Which, according to Aarseth, are the result of “the ideological pressure of the market” and “ad hoc” (ibid.).
that Infocom and other companies opted for the term ‘interactive fiction’. But this was mainly because it was the easiest way to inform the public what to expect, as the only other category at the time were arcade games and saying that something is not an arcade game is not very informative. Consequently, they promoted their games as a new way of ‘reading’ a story not as a new category of games. When Looking Glass Studios launched *THIEF THE DARK PROJECT* (1998), which used a new kind of gameplay (as we saw above), they called it a “3D action/adventure game” and then went on to explain how the game differed from other games of the genre, using the word “stealth” three times (see their description on page 49). But only through new games (by other producers) that used the same gameplay skills and affordances did the (sub)genre stealth get its own label. In other words, genrefication is a process. New labels do not appear overnight, as Djaouti and Aarseth suggest.

But Djaouti’s and Aarseth’s objections do address one of the main points of concern with the already existing genre categorizations, i.e. that they are often implicit or informal. The same has also been said of the categorization of genre fiction and genre film. In genre fiction, for instance, all kinds of genre references are used, such as mystery, fantasy, romance, horror, detective, adventure etc., but these labels are almost never defined more structurally. In film the division seems to be even more erratic, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter. Elverdam and Aarseth noted the same problem in the categorization of computer games in their article “Game Classification and Game Design”:

Most of the time we talk about games with implicit or informal references to all possible aspects of games—be it game types, game play, or the visual artwork. Although we probably understand each aspect reasonably well on a casual level, this poses a problem if we, theorists and practitioners alike, want to communicate with at least some precision. (2007, p. 3)

To overcome these problems they propose another typology where games are classified according to:

...dimensions that describe specific game elements, such as the spatial representation used (perspective) or the type of game-agent evolution occurring (mutability). These dimensions are grouped in descriptive metacategories such as time and space. A key aspect of this typological model is that it is open ended, which means that individual dimensions can

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67 The adventure genre had not yet been labelled when Infocom produced their first text adventure games, (let alone the text adventure genre, as that could only happen when graphic adventure games became the norm). In retrospect we can see that the label adventure game more aptly covers the gameplay of the genre because, although books and text adventure games both engage their audience with written words, playing a text adventure game is more like taking part in an experimental theatre play without a script. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, it is almost like playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. 

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be modified, added, or rejected without compromising the integrity of the model as a whole. (ibid., p.4)

The main criticism of their taxonomy, which they address in the article, is of course its open-endedness\(^{68}\). Their system has to be open-ended because, although the taxonomy is based on a theoretical structural analysis of games, its main purpose is to propose a genre taxonomy that will contribute to game design (methods)\(^{69}\). A system that might prevent a new innovative category from emerging would be unsuitable for such an undertaking. Still, despite its open-ended character, their system seems rather prescriptive and therefore one could ask oneself if game designers would ultimately benefit? Making new games based on past successes (by others), as designers working for large production companies are told to do\(^{70}\), might benefit from a system that pinpoints a game’s success, but as the vast number of sequels and copy-cat games shows, such games do not have to be rigorously analysed first\(^{71}\). Moreover, independent designers tend to make games that they themselves would like to play. Their point of departure is their own game experience. Consequently, their designs draw on individual elements in games they enjoyed. Their first goal is not to make a game that is an instant hit\(^{72}\), rather it is (eventually) playing the game that, according to them, has it all. Therefore, the system will only be of use in an academic environment, where its usefulness will very much depend on the nature of the

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\(^{68}\) One of the meta-categories they use is Time. Originally this meta-category had three dimensions Pace (Is it a real-time or a turned based game?), Representation (Does Time work as in the real world or is it abstract?), and Teleology (Is game time finite or infinite?). Already we can see that these three dimensions operate on a different level. Pace is about ‘internal’ time, while Representation and Teleology are ‘external’. As other problems with the dimension Pace were found, the taxonomy was updated moving Representation and Teleology to the new meta-category External Time and adding new dimensions to the meta-category Time. This almost casual shuffle of meta-categories and dimensions shows the open-endedness of the taxonomy, but it also makes anyone involved in categorization shudder, as it clearly jeopardizes the integrity of the system. Certainly new objects can be labelled more accurately, but every object that has already been classified will have to be re-evaluated, (or one has to accept an inconsistent categorization, were older games use the older classification and newer games use the new one). Aarseth called for a taxonomy that was suited to “scholarly, analytical practice” (2004, p. 363) but I cannot see how a taxonomy that is subject to constant change (note change not expansion or refinement) should be preferred to a categorization that has slightly fluid boundaries, but does have a proven set of basic categories.

\(^{69}\) It is remarkable how many game theorists feel a need to justify their system by claiming that it is a handy tool for designers and production companies; see for example Lewis et al. (2007).

\(^{70}\) As Pulsipher pointed out in 2008, more and more games are just adaptations of other games that did well: “In the video game world, the ‘safe’ way to go is to design a game that is much like an existing successful game, but just enough different to be unique and to be perceived as an improvement” (p. 2). This, of course, also holds true for film and popular fiction.

\(^{71}\) As the production of games becomes more and more costly. Especially in the current economic crisis, where major projects are discarded or temporarily put on hold, production companies will not risk major investments in unproven innovations, but rather rely on what worked in the past, especially as they already have the technology (the game engine) to create a similar game.

\(^{72}\) Certainly, every game designer dreams of this, but independently created hit games, nowadays, are few and far between.
research\(^{73}\). In reception research a system that uses the same categories as the game audience does, is clearly more constructive.

Another alternative taxonomy proposed by Djaouti et al. (2008) emerged from an academic research project launched in 2006. This taxonomy does not base its categories on one or two criteria, but on multiple criteria (Alvarez & Djaouti, 2006-present), to wit:

**Gameplay:** Does this title feature stated goals to reach like any "game"? Or is the player totally free to make his own choices in a "play-based" way? Besides these two overall gameplay types, the core rules of each title are analysed and represented as GamePlay bricks.

**Purpose:** Besides its play value, does this title feature other purposes? For example, is it designed to train you? To broadcast a message? To tell you a story?

**Market:** What are the application domains that actually use this game? Entertainment? Education? Healthcare?

**Audience:** Which audience does this game target? This criteria gives you information about the age range and kind of audience targeted by each title.

**Keywords:** A series of keywords defining the genre and the theme of each game, based on the analyses performed by classification contributors.

Based on these criteria each game is placed in an overall category. Judging from the commentary on the Game Classification database project’s website, gameplay rules weigh more heavily in this taxonomy than some of the other categories. I will therefore focus my criticism mainly on this criterion.

To determine the gameplay rules of a game, Djaouti et al. devised a system of GamePlay bricks: “these bricks may refer to rules stating goals (orange bricks), or to rules defining means and constraints to reach these goals (blue bricks). [...] A ‘rule’ is here defined as composed by [of] two parts: the **condition** (*IF* Pacman hits a ghost...) and the **action** (*Then destroy Pacman*)” (ibid.)

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\(^{73}\) And whether or not one accepts a taxonomy that can and is changed at every level (see note 68).

\(^{74}\) In the sense of bump into.
Unfortunately, as one might expect from a system that is rule-based, most of their Gameplay bricks are derived from elements found in games of emergence\textsuperscript{75}. The only exception seems to be the brick WRITE, which literally refers to having to input text\textsuperscript{76}. Djaouti et al. illustrate this as follows: "For example, text-based adventure games like The Coveted Mirror let you type the action to perform, while interactive storytelling games like Façade let you freely dialog with virtual characters" (ibid.)\textsuperscript{77}. But WRITE clearly is not a game rule (not even by their own standards), as it is neither a goal (which they think it is, as the brick is blue), nor a means or constraint. Text adventure games\textsuperscript{78} are not games because you type in text; they are games because you have to MAP and EXAMINE your environment, FIND, EXAMINE and COMBINE objects, hints and information, which help you SOLVE puzzles and riddles\textsuperscript{79}. Pac-Man dies when you hit (bump into) a ghost. In the text adventure game ZORK (1980) you do not die because you WRITE text, nor because you incidentally bump into the Grue; you die because you omitted to bring a light source which would have prevented the Grue from killing you (finding a light source = MAP (means), FIND (means), EXAMINE (means), SOLVE (goal)). As bricks for these actions are not part of their system, the taxonomy cannot classify text adventure games. Graphic adventure games are even more problematic, as these rely on the same gameplay rules but do not have text input (so cannot be classified with a WRITE block).

As a result, the core gameplay of the second GABRIEL KNIGHT graphic adventure game (GABRIEL KNIGHT THE BEAST WITHIN (1995))\textsuperscript{80} is defined in their database as AVOID, MATCH, MOVE, and SELECT. The same goes for the third game (GABRIEL KNIGHT BLOOD OF THE SACRED BLOOD OF THE DAMNED (1999)). However, these are also the core gameplay elements of the recent action adventure game ALAN WAKE (2010), suggesting that both genres (adventure and action adventure) use the same gameplay and that nothing has happened in the past ten years. The weakness of their gameplay category becomes fully obvious

\textsuperscript{75} See the brick titles. Some of the images can even directly be linked to a corresponding game of emergence: Avoid = SNAKES, Match = TETRIS, Destroy is PAC-MAN, Move = POLE POSITION, and Shoot = SPACE INVADERS.

\textsuperscript{76} The corresponding rule they give is (translated from their French diagram): condition (IF the player types in an alphanumerical string…) action (...THEN every effect is triggered).

\textsuperscript{77} Façade (2005), at the moment, is the only interactive text of its kind and was devised as an experiment in interactive storytelling. Therefore, it is arguable whether Façade is a game at all. In Façade the gamer takes on the role of a close friend of a married couple Grace and Trip, who has been invited for drinks. However, when ‘the friend’ enters their apartment it is obvious that the couple has issues. The gamer interacts with (talks to) Grace and Trip by inputting text. Depending on the questions the gamer poses and the responses she gets, Grace and Trip either drift further apart or an initial reconciliation takes place.

\textsuperscript{78} Contrary to popular belief, text adventure games are not dead, they live on as interactive fiction, or, in the case of some classic games, they are adapted so that they can be played on modern computers, handhelds, mobile phones, or through the Internet. For interactive fiction, see Dennis G. Jerz’s webpage “Playing, Studying and Writing Interactive Fiction (Text Adventure Games)” at http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if.

\textsuperscript{79} There probably are more, but these suffice to illustrate my point.

\textsuperscript{80} The first game is not in the database.
when we look at a game that has nothing to do with the adventure genre at all: DONKEY KONG (1981). DONKEY KONG is rule-based, it is a game of emergence, and it is an arcade game, a platform game. Yet, according to the Game Classification database, its core gameplay elements are the same as those of the three games mentioned above i.e. AVOID, MATCH, MOVE, and SELECT. In other words, these games are all the same according to the key element on which the taxonomy is based.

Another major point of concern with the taxonomy of the Game Classification database is their system of (applying) keywords, especially as there are 2253 of them (plus a question mark). The main concern with their keywords is that they are not based on the same criterion. As they are presented in a cloud (on the website), it soon becomes clear that the keywords most applied are those of the techno-historical genre categories (Action, Action-Adventure, Adventure, Arcade, Educational, Fighting, First-person Shooter, etc.). However, the cloud also contains keywords like first person (game camera/point of perception), fantasy (theme) and even Wii (platform). Furthermore, if the application of keywords is not done according to strict guidelines and with exhaustively described predefined tags, errors are pre-programmed. As there are seventy-two keywords in the database containing the word sim or simulation (including the large tag Simulation), this does not seem to be the case. Of course, this is true for any database system, but the more people that are allowed to apply keywords, the greater the risk (cf. the recent inconsistencies in the categorization of action adventure and stealth games in the MobyGames database).

This is not to say that their system does not have its merits. The good points are that it uses more than one criterion, which means that they can easily incorporate mixed-genre/hybrid games. Basing the gameplay on a system of rules and conditions (the brick system) that can be easily combined also means that their taxonomy can not only be applied to (older) existing games, but also to new, yet undefined, games. However, the system just does not cater for adventure games (and other games of progression) and as there is a rising demand for story-structured games, it would be better to limit the database to games of emergence and devise another system for games of progression.

However, even Juul’s very broad and logical categorization in games of progression and games of emergence is not invulnerable to the impulses of the market, which say that gamers want stories in their games. When Jules defined the rule-based category of games of emergence, he put all strategy games in this category (2005, p. 73). Yet one of the best
selling strategy games *AGE OF MYTHOLOGY* (2002) did contain an in-depth story (a defining characteristic of games of progression):

However, with Age of Mythology (Ensemble, 2002) [...] the developers decided to provide a more in-depth and character-driven narrative in the main single-player campaign. Central to this was putting a story at the core of the game structure, and the results were well received by the hardcore audience for the game. (Pratchett, 2007, p. 193)

And, although the developers decided to return to the more traditional playing style of earlier *AGE OF* games, in its successor *AGE OF EMPIRES III* (2005): “After the studio saw how popular the story side of Age of Mythology was with the players, they knew it was going to form a big part of the new title” (ibid.). According to Pratchett the developers thus responded correctly, as story-elements keep the audience interested:

It remains the case that those games that include a narrative element have found it easier to maintain their audience. Narrative elements allow the actions in the gameplay to have meaning in a wider context and even in a basic strategy game, the implicit narratives of a game's battles become stronger when placed in the context of an explicit narrative structure. (ibid.)

As I will explain below, the context Pratchett mentions does not necessarily have to be an explicit narrative structure. Games also use narrative genres and themes (found in popular fiction and film) to help the gamer in other ways.

**Should games use the same genre categories as genre fiction and film?**

The above shows that even strategy games now have become more story-centred. Therefore, one could ponder whether computer games should be classed according to their content or theme, just as popular fiction and film are\(^83\). This is at least what Dennis Dyack, discussing the future of storytelling in games at the 2008 Games Developers Conference, expects to happen: “In 5 to 10 years I don't think there's going to be a shooter genre. It's going to be more literary: there will be horror, drama ... a shooter would just be ‘action!’” (Kumar, 2008). His reasoning seems to be corroborated by the findings of Lewis et al., who established that “players appear to group games first by content (setting or aesthetic) and second by the primary mechanic of the game” (2007, p. 107). It also neatly corresponds to the way developers of games seem to work, as according to Lewis et al. “[f]or progression games, most developers prioritize content

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\(^{83}\) Apart from the fact that this classification has its own flaws as already noted.
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aesthetics first and mechanics second" (ibid), whereas developers of games of emergence “prioritize mechanics first and content second” (ibid).

However, there is a very simple reason why game genre categories are not based on content or theme, namely that these are narrative aspects of the diegetic world of the media text, which not all games have. This is because, although some games of emergence have narrative elements as Pratchett showed, they are first of all rule-based and therefore tend to only have no or extra-diegetic narratives. In the past, when graphics were very basic, extra-diegetic story information was often used as a marketing tool. For instance, for the game *DRACULA* (1983), a side-scrolling platform game, the text on the box reads:

You are Count Dracula. Rise from your resting place in the graveyard and fly into the night! Travel in two forms - as a man or a bat. Wolves hound you when you are in human form, and vultures snatch at the bat you can become. You've got to sink your teeth into a victim soon. You're growing paler and slowing down. Constables throw stakes that'll stop you cold! Bite all the victims you can find, then return to your resting place before sunrise, or you'll never hunt again!

This information tells the gamer what role to assume and explains the basic game rules.

![DRACULA front cover and screen shots](image)

84 Unfortunately, although their idea is interesting, especially from a marketing point of view (their findings suggest, for instance, that gamers who enjoyed *SUPER MARIO BROS* (1985) will be more predisposed towards *QUAKE* (1996) than towards *TOMB RAIDER* (1996)), more than one point of criticism can be made. First of all the respondents of their experiment (124 respondents recruited from undergraduate classes and an online gaming site) were not representative of the normal gaming audience. Secondly, most of the games in their sample were more or less clear-cut (i.e. easy to classify; there were no overtly hybrid games or open world games). Thirdly, their statements about the game developers seem to be based on assumptions, as there are no references to books, articles, or interviews that corroborate them. Finally, *SECOND LIFE* is not a game, but a virtual community, as noted before.

85 Or as Ryan put it: “Even in the 1980s, when computing power allowed only rudimentary graphics, developers promoted their products by promising a narrative experience that rivalled in its sensory richness the offerings of action movies. The games were packaged in colourful boxes that featured realistic action scenes, as well as text that wrapped the player's action in archetypical narrative themes. [...] Through these advertising techniques, designers asked the player's imagination to supply a narrative that the game itself was not yet able to deliver” (2006, p. 182)
The text is backed up by the images on the box and the bat iconography and cape in the game (Image II.13 a-c), which also help with identification. The gameplay itself, however, is no different from that of most other side-scrolling platform games. There is no ‘story’ in the game, no narrative goal. Wolf would call it a capturing game with a time restraint/limit.

The main use of content and theme in games is thus to give the game’s story a setting and some atmosphere. For the gamer this not only means that the game becomes more immersive; the aesthetic and narrative elements that are being evoked also help her to identify with her game character and give her clues as to what is expected of her and what she may anticipate. As the narrative and thematic elements of the content genre used (e.g. science fiction, war, horror, vampire, western, gangster, fantasy, etc.) carry this set of expectations, the success of a game is also determined by how well these expectations are met or challenged. A masterly example of this use of content genre is the already mentioned legendary space trader science fiction game ELITE (1984). As ELITE is rule-based, it is a game of emergence and does not have an intrinsic story. ELITE came with a Space Trader’s Flight Training Manual (basically a nicely ‘disguised’ game manual) in which the opening text immediately set the mood:

Welcome aboard this Cobra Mk III trading and combat craft. The ship has been supplied to you by Faulcon deLacy Spaceways, by arrangement with the Galactic Co-operative Worlds whose Space and Interstellar Pilot’s Exams you have just successfully completed.

Other elements in the box were a ship identification chart and a short novel by Robert Holdstock to set the scene: Elite: the Dark Wheel. For the gamer ELITE was not only a very immersive game; it also was an embodiment of all the sources that inspired its designers David Braden and Ian Bell, such as the STARWARS films and the books by Isaac Asimov. Consider, for instance, the opening screen which clearly was inspired by STARWARS (Image II.14); and which would transpose the gamer immediately in the right setting and mood.

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86 The novel is superfluous. It is not required to play the game, or as one former ELITE addict commented to me when asked specifically about the novel: “I can’t remember reading the novel, I might have read the first part when I first bought the game. But I do not buy games to read novels, so I might not have read it at all”.

87 “We asked Bell and Braden about the influences that led to the development of Elite. Ian Bell cites a general interest in science fiction, plus Traveller (the RPG), 2001, Star Wars, and Douglas Adams’s Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy. Braden also mentions 2001 and Starwars (and ‘to a lesser extent,’ he says, ‘Battlestar Galactica’). In addition he mentions the fiction of Larry Niven, Isaac Asimov, Jerry Pournelle, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert L. Forward, Orson Scott Card, ‘and many others’” (DeMaria & Wilson, 2004, p. 340).
Depending on the cargo carried on the interplanetary trade routes (Image II.15), the gamer could assume the role of decent merchant helping those at the outskirts of the universe, who was now being threatened by intergalactic pirates, or that of the lone rogue trader haunted by the police for running drugs to Reorte. These and many other scenarios were evoked by *ELITE*; where one started as ‘Harmless’ and then through many hours of gameplay would finally reach the ultimate status of ‘Elite’. So profound was the impact of *ELITE* on those like me that it also influenced the way one later viewed unrelated but similarly situated TV-series, like *RED DWARF* (1988-1999), *FARSCAPE* (1999-2003) and *FIREFLY* (2002). So even though *ELITE* was a game of emergence, its exemplary use of the science fiction genre enhanced the immersion into its game world immensely, even carrying over into the world outside the game.

In answer to the audience’s wishes, nowadays many games of emergence add some kind of story in the game, giving it the semblance of being story-driven. Mindscape’s *JEWEL QUEST EXPEDITIONS* (2008) for the Nintendo DS, for instance, has an extra-diegetic background story (in the game manual) which reads:

World War II is raging and Rupert Pack has just been left by his true love, Emma Swimmingly. Setting sail for Africa to start anew, Rupert meets wise men and marauders as he continues his quest to unlock the mysteries of the Jewel Board. Help him take command of the Jewel Board when you match cascading jewels in intricate patterns with each new leg of the journey. Exploring the expanse of the continent, Rupert’s adventures take him from marketplace to waterfalls; from savannas to caves. The vile conniving Sebastian Granard looms heavily over Rupert’s adventure, but true friends like the tattooed Hani are there to lend a hand.

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88 The scenarios also brought western and other themes to mind, which was also one of the merits of *ELITE*.  
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Rupert’s adventure is then ‘told’ in the form of dialogue screens and maps showing his progress through the continent of Africa. But they are just the packaging for yet another instalment of the JEWEL QUEST franchise. When playing the game, the gamer is more focussed on solving the jewel boards than on what leg of the journey she is on. What makes her want to play on is the challenge of solving the next grid of jewels, not what happens to Rupert. This is not the kind of explicit narrative structure that Pratchett is referring to as “[n]arrative elements [that] allow the actions in the gameplay to have meaning in a wider context” (2007, p. 193). To finish JEWEL QUEST EXPEDITIONS, the gamer does not need to identify with Rupert, nor does she get any clues on how to finish a grid from the allusion to an African expedition (this is not KING SOLOMON’S MINES). She does have to become increasingly more skilled at solving the jewel grids, however. The difference becomes obvious when we compare two screenshots from JEWEL QUEST EXPEDITIONS with two from the story-structured game AGATHA CHRISTIE: THE ABC MURDERS (2009). Where JEWEL QUEST EXPEDITIONS only shows story elements in between the actual gameplay (Image II.16), which can easily be skipped, the story elements in AGATHA CHRISTIE: THE ABC MURDERS (Image II.17) are interwoven with the gameplay and cannot be skipped, as it is impossible to continue the game without them:

In addition, most games of emergence on the Internet or on a mobile phone do not have a story at all. The idea is simply to play a quick game of TETRIS to kill some time, no more, no less.

Nevertheless, even with games of progression, which have a factual in-game story, the gamer will not get far if she only has the content or theme to rely on, which would be the case if computer games used the same genre categorization as popular fiction and film
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do. Take, for instance, the open world game RED DEAD REDEMPTION (2010). In RED DEAD REDEMPTION (RDR) the gamer takes on the part of John Marston a former outlaw, who rode with Dutch van der Linde's gang. When the game starts, Marston and two federal agents alight from a Mississippi steamer. Marston is being blackmailed into capturing or killing his former gang members in return for his wife and children, who are being held captive. The game makes use of every genre element one typically associates with the Western genre. There are gunfights, ambushes, shoot-outs, gambling, saloons, bar-girls, law-men, damsels in distress, bandits, wide open plains, rattlesnakes, vultures, grizzly bears, mustangs for taming, buffalo for hunting, lone homesteads, border towns, and much, much more. Moreover, the game contains imagery and elements that remind one of well-known Westerns.

Image II.18 This scene immediately reminded me of one of the final scenes in DANCES WITH WOLVES (1990) and scenes from the TV-series CENTENNIAL (1978-1979) although they are not in Rockstar's list of recommendations.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION (Rockstar Games, 2010)

This is not surprising, as Rockstar did certainly look at what was already there in other media, as Rob Nelson, art director of RDR, told Alastair Plumb:

We were definitely inspired by films that shared similar themes to the ones we were working on for Red Dead Redemption, the Wild Bunch and its band of misfits facing difficult odds in a turbulent time of change, to the brutal means by which a government will seek to extend its reach as seen in the

89 This opening scenario is highly reminiscent of the Australian western THE PROPOSITION (2005). This is no coincidence, as the citation below will explain.
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Australian Western The Proposition, for instance, along with other classic and revisionist westerns including The Shootist, High Plains Drifter, Unforgiven, Lonesome Dove and so on. But the influences for the story of Red Dead Redemption also extend beyond film, for example to the Blood Meridian books of Cormac McCarthy, along with some real research into the region and its history. (2010)

However, the game is not a B-class rip-off of the Western genre. Its (visual) narrative can compete with that of UNFORGIVEN (1992) or DEADWOOD (2004-2006), as New York Times reviewer Set Schiesel (2010) explained:

Marston straddles more than the border between Mexico and the United States. He also stands between the Old West and modernity — between the celebration of the individual and the collective requirements of organized society — as he tries to salvage a family life from the smoldering legacy of his criminal past. [...] This is a violent, unvarnished, cruel world of sexism and bigotry, yet one that abounds with individual acts of kindness and compassion. Like our own, this is a complex world of ethical range and subtlety where it's not always clear what the right thing is. This is a world where revenge often tastes not sweet but bitter, like the dregs at the bottom of a mug long since drained.

Interestingly, his review never mentions the gameplay genre of the game but instead calls the game “the sprawling and sublime new western from Rockstar Games.”, although

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90 The interview can be found online at http://www.empireonline.com/empireblogs/words-from-the-wise/post/p779 (accessed 22 July 2010). In anticipation of RDR Rockstar regularly recommended favourite Western films, see their news page at http://www.rockstargames.com/newswire/tag/211/recommendations (accessed 21 July 2010).
Schiesel does refer to Rockstar’s famous _GRAND THEFT AUTO (GTA)_ , which could give the reader an idea of what to expect\(^1\).

Schiesel’s review is so enthusiastic that it will persuade PS3 and XBox360 owners to buy the game, even if they have never played a comparable open world game like _GTA_. And this is where it becomes clear that having a Western theme is not enough. This is because, although, after the opening sequence (which also includes a train ride that takes John Marston further west) the gamer undergoes some basic gameplay training (walking, finding ‘hot spots’, shooting, and riding a horse), the game does not give the gamer any information on what to do next\(^2\). The game manual points to the ‘journal’ which registers Marston’s last conversation\(^3\); certain objectives that will increase the gamer’s status (such as having to kill five deer to become a higher classed marksman), and possible side quests encountered (e.g. collecting herbs for the stranger or bringing medicine to Jenny). But even if the gamer stumbles on part of the main quest, she can spend many hours roaming the open world of the game, desperately trying to increase her game skills\(^4\), or after having failed a mission, try and try again until her game skills have increased enough to play on. And even when they have, the gamer still will have no idea of how to achieve the real objective: capturing or killing Marston’s former gang members. In contrast, other open world games like _ASSASSIN’S CREED II_ (2009), are far more story-structured which means that it is easier to finish the story before doing other things in the game world (if so inclined). In _RDR_, it seems that it is more important to _be in_ the game world and ‘live’ the Western than it is to complete the story\(^5\). This takes a lot of suspension of disbelief, as the normal course of action for John Marston would be to round up his former gang members as soon as possible to save his family\(^6\). In _ASSASSIN’S CREED II_ Ezio at least gets to kill the

\(^1\) Only if she is familiar with the gameplay of _GTA_, of course.
\(^2\) While undergoing the gameplay training the rest of the opening story is told. First, when he goes to Bill Williamson’s hideout to try to persuade him to turn himself in, Marston is shot by a member of Williamson’s gang. He is found by Bonnie MacFarlane, who takes him to her farm. As Marston comes round some days later, he tells Bonnie how he was shot. But when she asks him later on why he knows Williamson, Marston alludes that he cannot answer her questions because people he holds very dear are in danger. Initially, this is all the information the gamer gets inside the game. Therefore, she has to read the game’s booklet to learn what brought Marston to this place and to find out what his objectives are. One short paragraph entitled ‘Story’ tells her that Marston’s family is kidnapped by federal agents and that he has to hand over his former gang members to the law. Only by continually returning to Bonnie, the rest of Marston’s story is unveiled. However, not every gamer will want to return to Bonnie’s training chores. Some will just set out on their own.
\(^3\) From the start of that particular session, not from previous sessions.
\(^4\) This is another reason why the gamer has to return to Bonnie repeatedly (see note 92), but this is not clear from the game manual.
\(^5\) “[Red Dead Redemption] submerges you, grabbing you by the neck and forcing you down, down until you simply have no interest in coming up for air” (Siegel, 2010).
\(^6\) The game contains many instances where reality is traded in for gameplay. For instance, during a particular session my avatar was attacked by a cougar and barely survived. The horse, however, was not so lucky, so I mentally prepared myself for the hard task of having to walk for days on end in a wolf and cougar infested
person he thinks is responsible for the death of his father and brothers shortly after they have been hanged, even though he is still young and inexperienced\textsuperscript{97}. In \textit{RDR}, even if the gamer is familiar with the Western, she still will only be able to proceed in the game when she has mastered the necessary game skills at a certain level. Moreover, even though it seems far-fetched, there are gamers who are not familiar with Westerns\textsuperscript{98}, as an informal poll at G4\textsuperscript{99} showed (Johnson S., 2010). One can only hope that such gamers are familiar with the game skills of \textit{GTA} or similar open world games; otherwise, it is not very likely that they will get far in the \textit{RDR}.

In short, categorizing \textit{RDR} as a Western does not give the gamer enough information to be able to (successfully) play the game, whereas categorizing it as an open world game does. Knowing that it is an open world game will also help to accept that there is a story in the game, but that more effort is needed to piece it together\textsuperscript{100}. Still, for those who are familiar with it, the Western theme in \textit{RDR} does make the gameplay more immersive. That is why the game is so compelling, because, although graphically much more sophisticated, the evocation of the theme works in exactly the same way as in \textit{ELITE}. A gamer will want to play this game because it is a Western and because this is the closest she will ever come to being a character like John Marston. Unfortunately (and frustratingly for some) being able to do so also requires her to master the gameplay skills of the game.

The most ‘misleading’ genre is, of course, the adventure\textsuperscript{101}. Here we have a term that is used both in the categorization of game genres and in that of other media, which often leads to confusion. Content genres in genre fiction have recognizable elements\textsuperscript{102} which give the readers a specific set of expectations. This also holds true for the adventure genre, but as adventure is one of the oldest genres (think of the stories by Dumas, Scott, Stevenson, Defoe etc.\textsuperscript{103}) it is perhaps not surprising that the genre seems

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\textsuperscript{97} See Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{98} Especially given the vast number of Westerns that have been made (according to the recent BBC Four documentary \textit{Rich Hall’s ‘How the West Was Lost’} (2008) 3000 since the 1920s).
\textsuperscript{99} G4, also known as G4 TV, is an American cable- and satellite-television channel that originally was only dedicated to the medium of the computer game. Today it is about all sorts of entertainment items for the 18-34 year olds. In addition to the TV channel, they also maintain an elaborate website and Internet based social media.
\textsuperscript{100} The fastest time to finish the storyline I could find on the \textit{RDR} forum was 16 hours, but that was without playing any of the side missions. Most forum members report that they already have played 40 hours or more and still have not finished 25% of the game. http://www.reddead.net/forums/. (12 August 2010).
\textsuperscript{101} And of course the action adventure, for the same reasons.
\textsuperscript{102} Characters, iconography, setting, style, and theme, see the short overview of genre in literature and film at the beginning of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{103} And before that the mediaeval romance and the classic hero-tales (Odysseus, Jason, Perseus, the Knights of the Round Table).
to lack a formal description. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005) uses the labelling system of bookstore shelves to give a rough idea of the existing genre categories in genre fiction. They list mystery, *science fiction, *fantasy, *horror, *romance, Western, erotica and *historical fiction; where the asterisk marks terms that have their own entries in the encyclopaedia. As can be seen, there is no category adventure. Perhaps, as most of the older books that belong to the category are now considered to be children’s books, they are classed as such. Consequently, a separate category would not be needed. But should books that are part of World Literature be classed as children’s books?

Even Martin Burgess Green does not give a definition of the adventure genre in his book on the subject entitled Seven Types of Adventure Tale: an Etiology of a Major Genre (1991). As so many, he relies on images and notions the reader already has: “What is adventure? What does it mean to be an adventurer? The best answer takes the form of examples...” (p. 1). Taking the common denominator of several ‘descriptions’ of the adventure genre, I would define it as follows:

A story that centres on a hero, still usually male, who finds himself in a tight spot and has to use his ingenuity and (in the case of an action adventure) physical skills to overcome the obstacles placed before him.

Film theorist John G. Cawelti, fortunately, does give a definition of the adventure story in his book Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture:

The central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission. (1976, p. 39)

Seeing that film does have a definition for the adventure genre, the absence noted above in literature is probably not caused by reclassifying adventure books as another category (children’s book), but by a bias towards popular narrative in favour of high culture genres.

104 For instance: The Last of the Mohicans (Cooper, 1826), Treasure Island (Stevenson, 1883), Les Trois Mousquetaires (Dumas, March-July 1844), Robinson Crusoe (Defoe, 1719), Ivanhoe (Scott, 1820), Tarzan of the Apes (Burroughs, 1914).

105 Literary critic Paul Depondt recently wrote about Dumas in de Volkskrant: “Hoewel hij zijn avonturenromans voor de massa schreef, wordt zijn werk zonder voorbehoud tot de wereldliteratuur gerekend?” (2010). Translation: “Although he wrote his adventure novels for the masses, his work is unconditionally counted as part of World Literature”. This is not the first time the adventure story had to be defended: “At the end of the nineteenth century, two Scots men of letters, Robert Louis Stevenson and Andrew Lang, defended adventure and romance against realistic and ‘great characters’ fiction with some spirit, and one can also find starting points for a theory of adventure in their contemporary William Morris. One sign of their unity in taste is that all three made high claims for Scott and Dumas as novelists at a time when literature’s verdict had gone decisively against both” (Green, 1991, p. 12). See the next chapter and Chapter VI for information on the influence Lang and Morris had on the adventure game genre.

106 Cawelti based his genres on Jungian archetypes.
As may be clear by now, the above descriptions are based on content, while the adventure game genre is based on game skills and affordances. Jordan Mechner, creator of the original *PRINCE OF PERSIA* action adventure games, pinpoints this difference accurately when talking about the film *PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME* (2010):

If you summarize the movie in one sentence, it sounds identical to the first *Sands of Time* videogame, but scene by scene it's actually completely different. It has to be, because games and film are such different mediums. On the surface they're deceptively similar -- you can watch five minutes of an action-adventure videogame and think "this could be a movie," or vice-versa -- but structurally the requirements are totally different. Here's one example: The game kicks off with a cataclysm that basically destroys the world and turns all living creatures except for the three main characters into raging, murderous sand monsters. That was a great setup for the gameplay we had, which was "acrobatic Persian survival horror." But if you put that setup in a film, it would be a "B" movie, and that's not the kind of movie *Prince of Persia* should be. Our model is classic epic, swashbuckling action-adventure movies like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Zorro*, and *Thief of Baghdad*, with humor and romance and full of memorable characters. You can't get there if you turn everybody into sand monsters on page fifteen. (Spry, 2007)

Interestingly, a formal description of the adventure game genre does also not exist. The most comprehensive one I could find was Wolf's definition:

Games which are set in a "world" usually made up of multiple, connected rooms or screens, involving an objective which is more complex than simply catching, shooting, capturing, or escaping, although completion of the objective may involve several or all of these. Objectives usually must be completed in several steps, for example, finding keys and unlocking doors to other areas to retrieve objects needed elsewhere in the game. Characters are usually able to carry objects, such as weapons, keys, tools, and so on. Settings often evoke a particular historical time period and place, such as the middle ages or Arthurian England, or are thematically related to content-based genres such as Science Fiction, Fantasy, or Espionage. (2005, p. 196)

Lacking a formal description, my own definition of the genre would be:

A particular type of game in which narrative plays an important part. In an adventure game the gamer (first or third person perspective) reaches the final goal by picking up items and clues and by solving riddles and (logical) problems.

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107 As already discussed, Wolf distinguishes between text adventure games and adventure games. His definition of text adventure games is as follows "Games which rely primarily on text for the player interface, and often for the description of the game's 'world' and the action which takes place there as well. Some games may use images, but these are usually noninteractive illustrations, which are not central to the play of the game. Games range from allowing free movement throughout the game's 'world' (usually by commands such as 'north', 'south', 'east', 'west', 'up', and 'down') with a variety of options for interaction, to more linear, branching narratives. Players often are able to carry objects which are kept track of by an inventory function, and are able to converse with computer-controlled player-characters through a very limited vocabulary" (2005, p. 203; 2001, p. 133). Wolf does not have an action adventure genre.

108 The 2001 version of the text (found on page 118) is the same.
Or, more simply, the adventure game genre denotes a computer game that is story-structured and that centres on exploration, finding objects and solving puzzles. Its content, however, can also centre on other themes (besides adventure) such as science fiction, detective, horror, fantasy, espionage, history, and the like. Similarly, media objects that belong to one genre in popular fiction or film can be realized in many different genres in computer games. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), for instance, has been realized as several (text) adventure games, as action adventure games, as strategy games, as RPGs and MMRPGs109. And George Lucas’ *STAR WARS* trilogy (1977, 1980, 1983) can be found in almost every game genre, even as *STAR WAR CHESS* (1993). Consequently, it is pointless to compare *JEWEL QUEST EXPEDITIONS* (2008) to *PARADISE* (2006) because the former is a (casual) arcade-style puzzle game, while the latter is an adventure game, even though both ‘tell’ a story that is set in Africa and both use an adventure theme, setting, and iconography.

There are two simple ways to avoid misunderstandings between the two definitions of genre; at least as far as computer games are concerned. One is to use an adjective as I have done above, where content genre refers to the definition of genre used in genre fiction and film, as opposed to game(play) genre where the term refers to game skills and affordances. The other, which avoids any confusion, especially when comparing computer game adaptations to their counterparts in other media and visa versa, is to use *gameplay*

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109 Role-Playing Games and Massively Multi-player Role-Playing Games.
type when referring to game genres\textsuperscript{110}. For example, when discussing the game version of *THE DA VINCI CODE* (2006) in relation to the book (2003) and the film (2007), denoting it as an action adventure type game will prevent students and scholars from other media from questioning the categorization, as they would probably class it as a mystery/thriller. Still, the formal term for computer games remains genre and theorists from other media should take note of this\textsuperscript{111}.

One final interesting point concerning genre in fiction and film compared to genre in games is that some content genres suit some game genres, while other content genres are not featured in games at all. One of the content genres that goes well with the adventure game genre is the detective. This is obvious because the detective also centres on finding clues and using one’s powers of deduction and reasoning to solve the crime. Therefore, we find many adventure games that use a detective theme or story e.g. *LAURA BOW: THE COLONEL’S BEQUEST* (1989), *UNDER A KILLING MOON* (1994), *BROKEN SWORD: CIRCLE OF BLOOD* (1996) and *AGATHA CHRISTIE’S: THE ABC MURDERS* (2009)\textsuperscript{112}. Of course, this does not mean that the detective theme is solely used in adventure games\textsuperscript{113} or that all adventure games use the detective as content genre\textsuperscript{114}. Science fiction is also a genre that transports well to computer games\textsuperscript{115}, although here there is no preferred game genre. In other cases, some games have become synonymous with a particular content genre, for example, *SILENT HILL* (1999) with survival horror and *MAX PAYNE* (2002) with game noir. Romance, however, a genre that is well established in other media\textsuperscript{116}, does not feature as

\textsuperscript{110} It is not only useful in comparison, but also helps when discussing themes, as these obviously do base on content.

\textsuperscript{111} Literary and film theorists have a tendency to put their own medium and its terminology first. Therefore, it is very strange for a game theorist to read in the definition of genre fiction given by The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory “Genre fiction is also of great relevance to *media theorists because of its affiliation with the dominant genres of movie, *television, *comics and video-game narratives...” (2005, p. 199). Even when we take into consideration that the author of this entry (Brain McHall) is speaking about the genre of the narrative, and even though he uses the rather vague term “affiliation”, in computer games the use of fiction genres cannot be seen as “dominant”, not even when referring to games of progression. The same goes for a statement made by Henry Jenkins in his entry ‘Computer Games and Narrative’: “Although many games represent abstract puzzles or remediate traditional sports and games, some games do aspire towards balancing the competing aesthetic demands of storytelling and gameplay, building upon *genre conventions from cinema and pulp literature...” (2005, p. 80). I would have felt more comfortable if he had used “using” instead of “building upon”.

\textsuperscript{112} Some of these games will be discussed further in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{113} The well-known educational CARMEN SAN DIEGO games, such as *WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SAN DIEGO?* (1985) or *WHERE IN TIME IS CARMEN SAN DIEGO?* (1989), also use a detective content genre.

\textsuperscript{114} In 2009, MobyGames listed 4418 adventure games, of which only 17.5 percent were detective/mystery games.

\textsuperscript{115} From *SPACEWAR!* (1962) and *ELITE* (1984), through *HALF LIFE* (1998) and the unparalleled *DEUS EX* (2000), to *BIOSHOCK* (2007) and *MASS EFFECT* (2007) and their sequels.

\textsuperscript{116} Women’s romances have long since been the bestselling genre in the USA. Of all fiction book sales in 2001 in America, romances accounted for 35.8%; mystery/thrillers for 26.6%; general fiction for 17%; science fiction for 6.6% and all other fiction, including religious, action-adventure, occult, and movie tie-ins, for the rest (14%) (Kremer, 2010). In addition, in film and TV there are the ever-popular romantic comedies.
Genre

a content genre in games. Certainly, many games (those originating in Japan more so than those produced in the west) contain romance as part of the story such as the tragic demise of Sara Trantoul in *CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE* (2004) or the many, much acclaimed, love stories in the *FINAL FANTASY* (*FF*) series of games (1987-present): Squall Leonhart and Rinoa Heartily in *FF VIII*; Tidus and Yuna in *FFX* and *FFX-2* and “the most tragic love affair in the entire video game world” (Villafania, 2007) Cloud Strife and Aeris Gainsborough in *FF VII*. One could argue that *THE SIMS* series (2000-present) are the games’ equivalent of the content genre and those who play the games may see them as such, but *THE SIMS* derive from management simulation games which are rule-based and do not have an in-game story. Moreover, as, especially the early games in the series, centred on consumerism, many of the carefully crafted love couples often broke apart. However, the changing game demographics and the rising demand for more story-structured games may see more games with a strong love theme.

The merits of the game skills taxonomy

As we saw above, grouping data into named categories based on the same criterion is a prerequisite to study a particular medium systematically. This also holds true for computer games. However, as the systematic study of computer games is barely ten years old it is not surprising that this process of categorization is still in full swing. As I already noted at the beginning of this chapter, a division into games of emergence and games of progression usually does not suffice. But, apart from the taxonomies discussed above, what other groupings are useful? As computer games heavily depend on the technical advancements of the computer industry one could group them according to the hardware they are played on: pc-games, console-games, mobile games etcetera. This is a valid dissection and one that is used in distribution and marketing. However, it does not tell the prospective buyer anything about what to expect, which, as we saw, is more important in computer games than in fiction and film. Grouping games according to their specific platform is a little more insightful because we now generally associate the Wii with its *Wii-*

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117 We have already seen this happen in the past years, mostly as part of the character-arc of the game protagonist. For instance, in *ASSASSIN’S CREED II* (2009), where Ezio’s choice of possible future partner was heavily discussed on the game’s forum and *RED DEAD REDEMPTION* (2010), where many a gamer wondered whether John Marston would become romantically involved with Bonny MacFarlane, despite his love for his wife. One game stands out: *MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE* (2003), which is subtitled a film noir love story (on the front cover of the box).
mote controller with sport and fitness games\textsuperscript{118} and the PS3 and the XBox360 with games for more experienced gamers\textsuperscript{119}. The same argument holds if we were to group them based on production company, but this only helps if a specific company is associated with a particular type of game, such as Nintendo (\textit{MARIO} games, \textit{ZELDA} games, casual games and Wii games) and Lionhead (games where the gamer's actions reflect on the game character, such as \textit{FABLE} (2004)\textsuperscript{120}). Other valid groupings are: game rating\textsuperscript{121}, violent vs. non-violent games, stand-alone vs. online, single-player vs. multi-player, first vs. third person point of view, casual vs. hardcore, etcetera. But none of these categorizations seem to suffice.

However, what the discussion of computer game genres has shown is, to paraphrase Ralph Cohen's (1986, p. 88) text on genre in literature, that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{[G]enre groupings arise, change and decline for historical reasons. And since each genre is composed of \{games\} that accrue, the grouping is a process, not a determinate category. Genres are open categories. Each member alters the genre by adding, contradicting or altering constituents, especially those of members most closely related to it. The process by which genres are established always involves the human need for distinction and interrelation.}
\end{quote}

For a game taxonomy to be useful it should therefore at least meet these criteria. And for better or for worse, despite its shortcomings, the techno-historical categorization based on game skills does, as this taxonomy is open and allows change, alteration and adaptation. But is also encapsulates the historical aspect of genre. In short, it allows the process of genrefication. And it has already proven useful for game theorists, designers, developers, producers, and the gaming audience alike. A gamer has to know that in a First Person Shooter the main skills needed are a good sense of navigation\textsuperscript{122} and quick responses on the controller. A game developer therefore has to put elements in the game that support

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{118}] Of course, this does not mean that there are not any other games for the Wii. But apart from \textit{THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS} (2006), the \textit{RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS} series of games (2006-present) and \textit{MARIO} games, they are not directly associated with the platform. Wii's fitness and sports games (\textit{WII SPORTS RESORT} (2009), \textit{WII FIT PLUS} (2009) and \textit{WII FIT} (2007)) occupied places two, four and five respectively on the list of best selling games of 2009 (Chacksfield, 2010).
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] And of course the PC is associated with online gaming, first person shooters, strategy games, flight simulation and \textit{THE SIMS}, and the Nintendo DS with brain training and other casual games, catering especially to a more female and an older demographic (the latter even to such an extent that a larger version, the Nintendo DSi XL, was launched in 2010).
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] But this is mainly due to the fact that \textit{MARIO} and \textit{ZELDA} were the brainchilds of Shigeru Miyamoto and the Lionhead games were all designed by Peter Molyneux.
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] Despite the fact that games now have an obligatory rating (PEGI 3+, 7+, 12+, 16+, and 18+) the rating systems are not universal (ELSPA the system used in the UK, for instance has an 11+ and a 15+ category; other ratings just use the terms family, ten and adult, while yet others, including Australia, use E (Exempt from classification), G (General), PG (Parental Guidance), M (Mature), MA15+ (not suitable for under 15) and RC (Refused Categorization)). Categorization by rating has proven to be magnet-like. In the past some producers have even tried to get an 18+ or even RC (RC may not be sold in Australia) rate, because the more restrictive the category (the more controversial the game) the more gamers would want to buy it.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Which may or may not be supported by a small on-screen mini navigational map.
\end{itemize}
these skills, such as rations, medical kits, and ammunition. While the graphic design team must decide on which on-screen indicators (health, supplies, ammunition) are needed so that the gamer can keep track of her status (see Image II.5). The game researcher, however, could use an alternative taxonomy (e.g. a more synchronic one), but in the next chapters of this dissertation I will further show that the defining gameplay skills are partly the result of the historic process of genrification and partly the result of the technical limitations and advantages of the hardware the game is played on. Therefore, a genre categorization that includes a diachronic element, such as the skill-based taxonomy, should be preferred.

Another major advantage of a game genre categorization that is based on gameplay skills is the fact that in a skill-based taxonomy categories are basically neutral. Genre issues are therefore not as pronounced as in fiction and film, where, especially in film, genre is still heavily debated as here description and evaluation often coincide (Gledhill, 2007). And, because it is based on a different set of expectations (What game skills do I need?) than fiction and film (Let’s rent a romantic comedy), for the audience at least, it is less of an issue that the categorization is not exact and that boundaries between genres are fluid. Because once one has played or watched someone else play a game from a particular genre, one has enough of an idea of what the genre entails. And, contrary to Lewis et al. (2007), who, as we saw, found that gamers in their study grouped games according to content genre, gameplay genre was named the topmost key factor.

123 Of course genre never has been a neutral categorization. Even Aristotle tried to establish the relative importance of his three categories and “after much debate concluded that tragedy was the highest kind of poetry” (Buscombe, 1970 (reprint 2003), p. 12). In genre fiction, however, preconceptions about genre are more pronounced. The category of women’s romances, for instance, although always being very popular (see note 116), is commonly seen as more frivolous and less prestigious than other genres. Consequently, when Catherine Cookson’s novels were categorized as romantic fiction she demanded that her books should be regarded as historical novels (Jones K., 1999). More recently, Bernard Cornwell’s historical novel Harlequin (2000) was given a new title, The Archer’s Tale, for the American market, because the publishers were afraid that the readers would confuse the book with a publication by the firm Harlequin (who mainly publish women’s romances). Much to Cornwell’s annoyance: “The first book of the series [The Grail Quest series] is Harlequin, unless you live in the United States where the book, to my considerable annoyance, was retitled as The Archer’s Tale. Which is not a particularly bad title, but I hate it when publishers do that. Their reason was that there is a well-known series in the States called Harlequin Romances, much like the British Mills and Boon, and it was thought that folks would get confused and, thinking they were buying a bodice-ripper with heavy breathing, find instead that they had a tale of the Hundred Years War with arrow-spitted Frenchmen. So what? Maybe they would have enjoyed the read, because more than one bodice gets thoroughly ripped in Harlequin” (Cornwell, 2003).

124 Watching game commercials is not sufficient; what is needed is actual gameplay. Otherwise, it is like trying to dance ballet after seeing excerpts from Swan Lake on television. See, for example, some of the game-trailers for Red Dead Redemption or Assassin’s Creed Brotherhood on YouTube. Their stunning graphics have the same effect as Siegel’s review of RDR i.e. that the game is a ‘must have’. However, just like his review these trailers give the prospective buyer an idea of what to expect of the game, not of what the game expects of them (i.e. the game skills needed).
influencing a gamer’s choice of brand in an extensive survey held by GameVision Europe (2004).

However, I agree with Djaouti et al. that a system that is founded on more than one aspect is a better one\(^{125}\). But the game skills required should remain the main determining category, as “games may be different in structure, a player approaches every game with whatever repertoire of skills he or she has, and then improves these skills in the course of playing the game” (Juul, 2005, p. 5). Consequently, as I have shown above, without the necessary game skills you cannot play the game.

*The future of genre and the computer game*

Game demographics have changed considerably in the past five years\(^{126}\). More people of both genders now play games and the number of gamers over fifty has increased considerably. New types of games can be associated with these changes in demographics. We see all kinds of fitness and fitness related games (which are very popular amongst women), music and music related games (where guitar and band simulation games are popular amongst men; sing-along and karaoke games are gender neutral or lean slightly more towards the female demographic; while dance games are again very popular with women), and finally puzzle and brain training games (which cater more for an older demographic). On the personal computer, gamers aged the twenty-five and older prefer to play casual games, with *SOLITAIRE* being the absolute favourite with both genders (McMillan, 2009). Casual games, online versions included, also overshadow other genres in the number of people that play them. These developments mean that a discrepancy is emerging between the makers of the games, who tend to start from a particular genre: “Many video games originate with a genre. ‘We want to make a real-time strategy game,’ or ‘let’s make a shooter.’” (Pulsipher, 2008, p. 2) and the new game demography who do not think of categorization in this way:

Another hypothetical model in common use throughout the games industry is the genre model. In this, we assume that the audience primarily buys games of a particular type, and those types are referred to as “genres,” much as films and books are divided into genres according to their tone and content. [...] However, an essential problem exists. As mentioned before, the Hardcore is game literate, but the Casual market is not. In this sense, the Hardcore can connect a game with its genre type, but the Casual market

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\(^{125}\) Also because games already use a multi-category system of hardware, genre and rating in marketing and distribution.

Genre does not buy on the basis of genre at all, looking instead for a game that appeals to them on other terms. (Bateman & Boon, 2006, pp. 17-18)

There are several reasons why I do not agree with this assumption. First of all, industry surveys (the chapter the quotation is taken from is called ‘Designing for the Market’) usually ask about a respondent’s favourite (online) genre, not about all the genres that this person plays. From other data within these and related surveys it becomes clear that casual gamers also play other genres (which the authors class as hardcore games) and, consequently, that they are aware of these categories and what they entail. Secondly, the majority of casual gamers have played other genres before they began to prefer casual games later on in life and this shift from ‘hardcore’ to casual is not due to the emergence of new types of games (the favourite SOLITAIRE is one of the oldest games around) but solely due to the fact that they have to prioritize their time differently (Veugen, 2007). Furthermore, practically every survey shows that close to 100% of young children of both genders play games, these children grow up with the traditional genre classification and even though they might change genre later on in life\(^ {127}\), they know what will appeal to them. My own 2007 survey amongst students of the Arts and of Information Science\(^ {128}\) shows that even those who prefer casual games have a good idea of the type of game associated with each genre category, as their answers to other survey questions showed\(^ {129}\). The ELSPA surveys also show that more and more parents now play games with their children. Even if they were to play only educational games (which is not the case), they would get introduced to some of the classic game categories this way. Lastly, it is also a misconception that older gamers only play casual games. Bob de Schutter, whose PhD research focuses on 50+ gamers, found that their interest in casual games did increase as expected, but that 13.54% still play games like WORLD OF WARCRAFT or GRAND THEFT AUTO (Gijsel, 2008). And, according to his research, some of these gamers are quite fanatical (Schutter, 2010).

Concluding remarks
Audiences will need to know what gameplay skills a particular game requires, otherwise the risk of getting stuck will soon become a reality, especially for novice gamers, despite the fact that more and more games try to overcome this issue by offering different skill levels. Nicholas Baker’s remarks as a novice gamer are quite insightful in this regard:

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\(^{127}\) Until now this is the case. But demographics also show that the age at which gamers move to casual games is gradually shifting upwards.

\(^{128}\) See the introduction, p. 22.

\(^{129}\) Even respondents over fifty.
I’d never held a video-game controller until last fall. [...] since [then] I’ve been buying some of the biggest new game releases and trying them out. I say “trying” because the first thing I learned is that video games—especially the vivid, violent ones—are ridiculously hard to play. They are humbling. They break you down. They kill you over and over. Eventually, you learn how to crouch and crawl through grass and hide behind boxes. You fight your way to a special doorway and you move up to the next level. Suddenly, you feel smart and euphoric. (2010, p. 53)

Gameplay skills can therefore not be taken out of the equation:

With Games it’s not only about what I like to play, but about the skills I already have and the skills I’m willing to acquire. [...] “Jump’n Run” needs a certain amount of hand-eye coordination, an “Ego-Shooter” requires short reaction times, Strategy- and Tactic-Games call for planning and “Adventures” assume some power of deduction. [...] With a movie I’m taking the risk to have a bad time or to be bored. With a Game it just needs bad luck and I’ll not advance over level 1. (Raczkowski, 2009)

Gameplay information can be gathered from having played previous games in a series or, for the more informed gamer, even by assumptions based on the production of a particular game designer (e.g. Shigeru Miyamoto, Hideo Kojima, Roberta Williams, Jane Jensen, Peter Molyneux, Will Wright), production company (Blizard), or game associated writer (Tom Clancy, Agatha Christy, Michael Crichton). But genres offer a wider base of information about the gameplay skills and the affordances a particular game needs/uses. Even a super-ordinate category such as casual game tells the prospective buyer that game skill requirements are not particularly demanding. Furthermore, the genre taxonomy based on game skills and affordances is already a well-established categorization. Finally, in a skill-based taxonomy categories are neutral.

Of course, the categorization required also depends on the needs of the target group. In game research, for analysis purposes, a distinction between games of progression and games of emergence, or a categorization in four basic types of gameplay skills (“What does it take to succeed in the game?”) as Egenfeldt Neilsen et al. (2008, p. 41) propose, can be sufficient. But the finer categorization into game genres that is based on game skills, and that takes the techno-historical process by which game genres arise into account, is likely to be more insightful, especially when other criteria are also included. In reception research, this genre categorization familiar to the audience will also prove more fruitful. However, the value of this system would greatly improve by an
analytical classification process to give a better idea of which game skills a particular genre demands and what affordances it offers\textsuperscript{130}.

Large production companies, on the other hand, will look at profitable ventures. In the near future these will be more casual games, especially fitness and music-related games and more open-world/sandbox games as these offer a generic mix of genres that appeal to different gamers\textsuperscript{131}. Innovations will be technical, such as the Nintendo 3DS. Or they will continue to come from independent game developers who in the past have been a vital element in the creation of new genres. This is not to say that all new games should be generic or innovative, as a genre game well executed has its own merits:

The fact is that, in all artforms, genres become genres because they *work*. [...] Innovation for innovation’s sake, in other words, is not necessarily the be-all and end-all of game design, as it is not in other artforms. Not every film has to invent a new cinematic grammar like *The Matrix*. Not every novel has to do funky new things with page layout like *House of Leaves*. And similarly in videogames. Sometimes it is enough to do a familiar gamestyle, but just do it with more vigour, style and aesthetic élan than anyone else. (Poole, 2004)

\textsuperscript{130} Which goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{131} And, of course, new episodes or new games in a hit series such as Ubisoft’s *ASSASSIN’S CREED* and Rockstar’s *GRAND THEFT AUTO*. 