Generic experiences

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Introduction

My argument in the following will be that experiences tied to video games are potentially generic in the sense of having the potential to be experienced as similar to other experiences. This is partly because human experience is inextricably bound up with typicality and generality, partly because video games themselves are generic products.

While games may utilize a very large set of intersubjectively shared generic resources, players are also individuals with individual biographies: This is why game experiences are only potentially generic.

I will start by introducing some initial claims about the nature of experience to constrain the otherwise intractable problem of analysing player experience *in toto*. This amounts to a brief argument that experiences are to a large extent generic in the sense of exhibiting typicality and similarity. I will then move on to a discussion of the more specific issue of genre in the cultural industries which in several ways build on the first set of claims and attempt a synthesis where I further make the case for potentially generic experiences of gameplay. I then provide a sample analysis of generic properties of video games, including some comments on the role of technology and authorship. I end with some remarks on intersubjectivity and typicality.

Preliminary arguments for the nature of experience in general

1. Human cognition is arguably based fundamentally on the recognition of categories and patterns (Lakoff, 1987; Tomasello, 1999). While it is, of course, an open question whether categorical structures exists in the world or are merely imposed on the world by the human mind, this distinction between ontological claims and epistemological ditto comes in a slightly different form here, since we will restrict ourselves to dealing with artifacts. This, in turn, means that if we grant the cognitive assumption we have some grounds for granting the ontological assumption as well: Artifacts will plausibly exhibit type-related characteristics since they are at least partly shaped by human cognition and agency. The first claim is thus that the embodied human mind structures its products, i.e. thoughts as well as artefacts, in terms of categories and patterns.

2. Human experience is tied to the exercise of intentional agency (Davidson, 1980) and the fundamentally embodied nature of this agency (Gallagher, 2005; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Intentional action understood as projects of action is a major component of the experience of everyday world (Schutz, 1962). Embodied human agency is constrained and enabled by material and social structure (Giddens, 1984), and, crucially, by at least a partial and potential awareness of

the ways in which such structures help and hinder projects of action. Even if much of everyday situated agency is below the radar of consciousness (Giddens, 1984), a central component in the subjects ongoing evaluation of action is experience of past actions and a notion of action as typical (Schutz, 1962). The second claim is thus that embodied agency is central to experience, that human experience is to some extent experience of the various structures within which agency is exercised and that it is tied to the typical.

3. The human mind has universal features but it also has culturally specific features as well as individual and idiosyncratic features. Following this, cognitive sociology (Zerubavel, 1994) assumes that the experience of the everyday world has universal, culturally intersubjective and individual dimensions. As per assumptions 1 and 2, these dimensions are all founded in the experience of the typical, but they are shared by all, some and potentially only one individual(s) respectively. The third claim is thus that everyday experience, including the experience of situated projected agency, is grounded in an (often implicit) notion of the typical, and that there exist both intersubjective and subjective realities within this realm of everyday experience.

It is necessary to elaborate with a couple of related claims at this point related to differences in viewpoint. An individual may have an experience which is to him or her more or less typical from the viewpoint of that individual. Experiences may thus be *experienced as* more or less typical. It will often be the case that typicality is not experienced as typicality, but rather not really experienced since this element of experience has a tendency to fade into the experiential background. One might even argue, as Schutz does, that it is the very typicality of everyday life that allows us to function relatively unproblematically. In that sense typicality is a premise for everyday experience, but the experience *of* typicality may also be brought to conscious attention of the individual where experiences are seen *as* typical. Experiences experienced as atypical by an individual may be considered typical once an outside observer considers more than one individual. Near-death experiences, for instance, may thus be experienced as exceptional and singular experiences by each individual undergoing these experiences while still being deemed relevantly similar by an outside observer. This point is important for understanding how individuals may have an experience which is not marked as typical and generic in relation to an artifact which exhibits typical features to an outside observer.
It also introduces a fundamental question, namely that of how experiences can be experienced *as intersubjective* experiences, but this is not the issue here: Suffice to say that communication between individuals is what facilitates such processes, and that these processes can be partitioned in two, where this demarcation is an analytical heuristic. One process is that of interacting with the same portion of reality, in this particular case the same video game. This serves the purpose of establishing a common frame of reference. Another related process is that of individuals communicating *about* media products such as games. These two processes feed into each other in a continuous loop and can be difficult to separate. The present focus is on the first hand experience of the game artefact and deals with the potential for generic experiences related hereto.

This introductory argument serves two purposes here. First, it establishes the background for the following observations about certain experiences exhibiting various degrees of specificity in terms of specific categories. We should be justified in assuming that such specific experiences are in most instances based in the notion of the typical. Second and by way of extension, it allows us to engage with genre theory. Genre theory is, to some extent, a set of theories which applies assumptions of (limited) generality to specific subareas of human culture and social interaction which we can call cultural products and communicative acts, in the following referred to as works and utterances.

These genre theories differ in scope, since they most often deal with specific domains such as literature, film and television or everyday interpersonal communication – but they share the intent to categorise and generalize works and utterances into kinds. As such, the initial argument allow us to connect these various theories under the same heading, namely that of dealing with the possibly generic nature of human experience when it comes to the popular arts and communication.

The typical, the unique and the place of games and the study thereof

Before moving on, I want to fend off some possible complaints and related misinterpretations. First, with regards to the possibility of unique experiences broadly speaking, my aim here is not to demean or debunk ideas about unique experiences, but I take it that this discussion is a little like discussing the proverbial glass which may be seen as either half-full or half-empty. The present argument aims at making a plausible case for typicality and the generic nature of experience, but others may take the other approach – and one might argue that the present argument could help us identify any a-typical aspects of experience, since the atypical would stand out clearer on the background of what it is not.

Second, with regards to possible misinterpretations more closely related to the identity of video game studies as a field, it would perhaps be bolder and more in the spirit of ludology to state that, contrary to the field of experience in general, video games has the potential to offer *unique* experiences. First of all, the above comment applies: anything could be seen as yielding a unique experience, given that inclination. One of the questions broached by ludologists is rather whether the ontological category of video games leads to human experiences which are meaningfully different from other categories, and most often the comparison base are categories well known from the popular arts. My argument is neither that video games as a category cannot be individuated experientially, nor that video games offer the exact same set of experiences as any other popular art in existence[1]: It is simply that video games offer potentially generic experiences. I assume, without arguing this point here, that experiences offered by video games are in certain respects relevantly dis-similar from the experiences offered by other popular arts. I do, however, reject the notion that on these grounds video games should never be analysed as being relevantly similar to other categories established both outside and within the arts. We should also remember that these arguments depend crucially on the comparison base and the perspective chosen – video game experiences may be more or less dis-similar to other domains in many different ways.

Third, it could be argued that any argument based on the notion of similarity is inherently flawed, since this is so unconstrained as to yield an infinite number of similarities. While this is theoretically true and not entirely unwarranted even in a pragmatic frame – the concept of similarity is admittedly very problematic – we seem to be lacking an alternative. Thus, in the absence of a bedrock for categorizing experience (and anything else, for that matter), the pragmatic approach of the cognitive experientialist position outlined above allow us to bracket this skepticism and instead opt for the very real similarities that both scholars and audiences routinely recognize in the world around them.

Fourth, the argument as presented here only outlines an answer to how the generic experiences of video games relate to typical experiences offered by video games and other popular arts without going into other realms of experience such as, for instance, the actual experiential content of everyday life. This is not to imply that the former way is the only way that games can deliver

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[1] The ludology vs. narratology debate is a version of the latter claim where the comparison frame is the cultural domains of narrative fiction.

generic experiences, and the approach outlined below allows for identifying typicality of experience across any set of domains where one can identify and compare typified actions.

The notion of genre

We now have a quickly sketched argument for typicality of experience which should eventually allow analysis of player experience as potentially generic experiences tied to the exercise of embodied agency in relation to generic video game design structures: In other words, analyses of potentially generic aspects of experience by analyses of game genres. I will thus now turn to genre theory in order to sketch a video game genre framework to substantiate the latter part of the argument. It should be noted that the following applies most readily to games with virtual environments.

Genre is arguably both the most fundamental and most popular means of categorising objects within the popular arts and communication; overviews of genre theory can be found in Frow (2007) Neale (2000) and Altman (1999). As often noted, even if genre is just the French word for category, any old category does not a genre make – it is quite possible to create, say, a category of works of popular art with the words "Dead" in their title, but this category is not a genre. The discussion about what it takes for a category to be a genre is both endemic to genre theory and fairly complex, but in this context I will bring out one central notion common to most genre theories, namely that genre brings participants in communication and/or artifact use into a shared understanding of what *kind* of activity is taking place. In Frow's words, genre is "a systemic existence" and "a shared convention with a social force" (p. 102) which organizes a large set of cognitive structures with the overall purpose of establishing *what to expect* from a given utterance or work. Genre texts are "uses of genre", which means they make use of a collective set of shared cognitive resources that allow participants to converge toward *shared understandings* of utterances or works. Genre "presupposes certain kinds of knowledge" (Frow, p. 81). This presupposed collective understanding hinges crucially on the overall framing of the work, but also on the myriad relations between different works that genres offer to the producers and consumers.

Typified actions and generic resources

Frow's theory of genre incorporates insights from rhetoric, ethnography and organizational studies, where genre has been broadened to include literally any typified communicative action, e.g. business letters, sermons, greetings etc.. This may irk some readers who might want to reserve the notion of genre for much more specific concerns, such as analyzing and categorizing literary fiction, for instance. This is another thorny issue in genre theory as an overall endeavour – what does it take for *a domain* to allow the application of such categories as genre labels and not other categories? – but an emphasis on *typicality of communicative actions* traceable to Miller (1984) suits the present argument rather well since what we really want to establish is the element of typicality as a potential component in experience of utterances and works. Genre theory could be seen as a specific way to get at this typicality – and since we are merely shooting for reasonably typical and generic here, one could argue that situations and products such as games can be *generic* in the sense that the typical nature of the situations is recognized, even if the word "genre" might seem inappropriate in certain cases for some reason or another.

This leads into a related and important point of Frow's that we have already touched upon, namely that any individual work not so much instantiates a genre but rather *makes use of the resources associated with it*. Additionally, Frow maintains that a given work or utterance participates in or performs many genres at once. Genre frameworks thus do not allow us to reduce works to having

one specific set of properties. Rather, the relationship of genre to works is that of genres and genre systems being a resource for the performance of many genres in one work. This makes for a much more flexible approach to genre, and it is demonstrably useful when looking at what are commonly called hybrid genres; as e.g. Altman's (Ibid.) analysis of film genres demonstrates, cross pollination has always been the case in film genre development. What emerges is a picture of genre which is much more fluid than stable, especially when considering actual historical developments in modernity, where individual works seem to share traits with an almost infinite number of other works in the collective backlog of the cultural industries and pre-industrial art and culture. This, again, need not be a big problem for the present analysis, since one can often identify a smaller set of generic constituents (see below) which could be said to dominate the work. In other words, even if genre works are hybrid and similar to many things at once is often possible to say that a given work is much more similar to certain works than to others. And this also means that genre-hybrids can still be very generic, but in a heterogeneous fashion in that they may resemble many works and make use of requisite genre frameworks at particular points.

If this seems abstract, what I aim at here is a framework which will allow us to capture the many generic aspects of a particular game related experience, where generic is understood more in the vein of "due to the use of generic resources" than in terms of stable genres. Games can be generic in very many ways; sometimes in very local aspects, sometimes much more globally so. In short, the typical understood as similar to something else is a continuum and not a case of either-or and we can identify relationships of similarity at several different levels in games.

Finite provinces of meaningful experiences

A final point relates to Frow's inspiration in the work of Alfred Schutz, who has already played a role in the initial argument in this article. Frow uses Schutz (1962) to argue that genres project specific worlds of meaning, i.e. universes where only particular relationships can be established. He uses Schutz's notion of "finite provinces of meaning" to describe such worlds. Frow himself refers to the representational aspect of genre and states that Schutz "defines these provinces as experiential rather than representational" (Frow, p. 87), but by following Schutz instead of Frow the resulting conceptualisation of genre offers an approach to experiential worlds defined as *finite provinces of meaning where a particular set of meaningful experiences can be had*. The work of Schutz thus opens up what I find to be a particularly fruitful approach to the issue of the projections of worlds of meaning in video games: Not only do fictional works project a genre-specific fictional world, but video games constitute a world of meaning in their totality which goes beyond the fictional world[2]. My argument is now that video games as total systems and not solely as fictional worlds – i.e. represented worlds as well as embodied interactions related to that represented world –create such finite worlds of experience. The further argument is that these finite worlds of experience are potentially generic and typical.

The generic resources used in video games

Socially shared and commonly acknowledged generic resources serve to establish a common frame of understanding of works and utterances, I will now move on to a slightly more detailed description of what such resources might be in the field of video games. What follows is thus a brief synthesis of contemporary genre theories from the field of literature, film and television and rhetoric with video game studies.

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[2] I will forego any discussion of whether video games are fictional or not. Note, however, my use of "represented world" and simulation in the following.

Genre games yield a generic and finite province of meaningful experience, where players are invited by video game design to exercise agency within a designed structure which includes a material interface and interactive simulation and audiovisual representation of a virtual environment. Genre games employ generic semantic units, generic syntactic relationships, and generic structures of interactivity. Semantic units are agents, objects and settings. Syntactic relationships refer to both temporal plot structure and the atemporal thematic structures among semantic elements (Altman, 1999). The semantic units and their relationships are employed by the game engine in its simulation and representation of both physical and social structure of the virtual environment. Game specific interactivity involves meaningful choice and strategic agency, often challenging, with defined success criteria for interaction within this virtual environment (Wolf, 2001), (Juul, 2005), (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2008), and often in the form of quest structures (Aarseth, 2005) [3]. Video game genres additionally structure embodied interaction modes of players by way of their generic material interfaces and their mapping to virtual actions (Gregersen, 2011). This synthesized framework is able to capture the genres normally used in the popular video game press although the framework does not in a sense "output" those genres[4].

In addition to the self-professed genre theories incorporated above, another approach to classification should be mentioned here, namely that exemplified by Elverdam and Aarseth's (2007) game classification scheme[5]. Such classification schemes should, I think, not be seen as antithetical to or incompatible with genre theories, since both are at root involved in classification. One simple argument for classification schemes is that they allow for categorizing without making larger claims about genre and may be used to pick out categories which may fall outside of traditional genre concerns while still being useful. On the one hand, classification schemes offer a less stabilizing view of the processes inherent in classification, since they do not "put objects into boxes" – but as we have seen, this is not the face of modern genre theory, but rather the position from which it departs. On the other hand, classification schemes may in fact be even more stabilising and monolithic than modern genre theory, since a claim, implicit or explicit, would be that once the requisite boxes are ticked, a full and consistent profile of the object is given. It might be possible to build a formal faceted classification scheme from a synthesis of the available resources outlined above and tie this to genre concerns, but this goes way beyond this paper, and the motivations for such formalizing would run somewhat counter to the aims here. The primary argument is that games can be and are routinely classified as exhibiting typicality and similarity by people interacting with games and, in addition, that games may be said to utilize a vast collection of generic resources and in doing so instantiate similarities on many different levels. The argument is then that all of these similarities may be seen as the generic scaffolding of the potentially generic experience of playing.

Embodied agency, experience, and projects of action in games.

Although I have already argued for the usefulness of conceptualizing generic resources as not exclusively game related I will briefly elaborate on a few generic traits which are special if not unique to video games as a popular art. I will here concentrate on the notion of embodied agency

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[3] I owe an apology to Dominique Arsault, whose work on genre I have not had the time to integrate into the above. I suspect that we agree a lot more than we disagree on the uses of genre theory.
[4] Even if the framework results in different categories, the means for categorization are compatible in that it picks out qualities which correlate directly with distinctions employed in the gaming press and gaming blogs.
[5] A parallel in communication theory can be found in Herring's (2007) faceted classification scheme.

and tie this to the specific kind of interactivity which has been identified as quests, which, I argue, are really designs for projected action.

As argued elsewhere (Gregersen and Grodal 2009), an important and consistent aspect of video game interactivity is not just the interactivity as defined in terms of game goals, but also in terms of actual embodied interaction. Players interact physically with the control interface which registers actions and maps these into meaningful action in the audiovisually represented game world. I have recently argued that this aspect can be tied to genre developments (see Gregersen, 2011): Both controllers and control schemes are standardized across platforms, genres and series of games. Control interfaces form an important component in the experiences scaffolded by video game systems and several game genres have co-evolved with their material interfaces. That is, when conceptualising genre as tied to audiences and their genre-specific knowledge of what to expect from a given genre, the physical interaction is clearly part of this set of cognitive competences. This is thus one set of experiences which is generic, namely that of the experience of embodied interaction.

But these generic embodied experiences are not just experiences of moving the physical body in generic patterns: The meaningfulness of embodied interaction derives from a fusion of primitive physical action and the feeling of being-present-in-the-game-world by way of representations of those actions. This compound experience is an experience of the body-in-action in a generic world of meaningful experience. This kind of standardized embodied knowledge has a tendency to quickly become tacit and fade into the background of embodied agency – it quickly *feels* familiar without thinking about it *as* familiar. Standardized control schemes and their ties to particular mappings of action are prime examples of how generic knowledge becomes background knowledge as part of generic experience: Players know how to manipulate controllers but they also know how it feels to take cover and aim a gun in a third person shooter series such as *Gears of War*, and they know both how much to turn the Wii Wheel in *Mario Cart Wii* and what it feels to slide into a corner on a particular track.

Another aspect of embodied interaction is the larger-scale intentional action which Schutz (1962) calls projects of action. These larger scale projects have been identified by Aarseth (2005) and others as quests, and Aarseth also offers a taxonomy consisting of the limited numbers of quests. Now, this in itself makes for a certain kind of generic experience, namely the potential recognition of standardized ways in which the game orchestrates player actions as projects and the experience of these as generic and familiar. These overall large scale projects give the smaller embodied interactions particular meanings. These are often tied directly to the other generic resources such as overarching thematic concerns such as moral structure and the simulation of social structure in the game worlds but also to the possibilities for further exercise of agency since they often yield particular rewards in the form of otherwise unavailable resources. This is particularly visible in overall genre frameworks such as RPGs and its many subgenres.

A final point related to embodied interaction and typified actions is that we must acknowledge that the repetitive nature of certain types of video games means that a single game in itself may offer typified actions, i.e. an intra-game potential for generic experiences. This is where games seem to depart – and at times quite radically so – from other works of popular art which rarely demand repetition of specific actions to the same extent: Many games demand that the player performs the same small set of micro-actions over and over, not just in the micro-actions of manipulating controllers, but also in the meaningful actions such as jumping, running and shooting. Many arcade

games based on skill demand that the player learns and routinises the layout of the virtual environment and the required set of actions. Games with virtual opponents will often feature certain generic attack patterns which make for generic strategies of action. Difficult sections may demand that players reload and re-try etc. The potential for generic experiences must thus be considered both intra-game and inter-game.

Brief analysis: Red Dead Redemption

To give a specific example of how all of these similarities and connections inherent in the concept of generic resources can be tied to game analysis, I will take a quick look at *Red Dead Redemption (RDR).* The most obvious set of connections is that of the various generic structures inherent in the genre of westerns. This set of connections cuts across representational modes and includes several non-interactive ones such as film, television, literature and popular music. RDR employs semantic units such as horses, six guns, cowboys, sheriffs, stagecoaches, steam locomotives, train stations etc in its simulation of physical and social structure. These semantic units are organized by syntactic temporal/causal progression such as fights or flights, chases and captures and the related atemporal thematics such as civilization vs. wilderness, lawfulness and crime, honor and dishonour, etc. These two dimensions, i.e. semantic units and their various generic syntactic combinations are coupled directly to interactive player choices in that the player controls the avatar in a series of causally connected situations (i.e. quest chains) which recruit both semantics and syntax for meaningful player agency. These projects of action are thus laid out in time and space to be potentially fulfilled by the embodied actions of the player. Note that this aspect of projected action is both similar and dis-similar when comparing games with the rest of the popular arts: The projects may be well-known from other media - rescuing the girl from the Indians, identifying, tracking and confronting a traitor to a common cause etc. – and may be recognized as similar to specific works using (and supplying) generic resources of westerns. However, the cognitive style of the video game experience is importantly different in that the player supplies the actual embodied agency that realizes this project of action fulfilled in time and space. It is also important to note that the actual amount of choice in the realization of such projects will vary from game to game, and RDR often employs a binary structure in that agents may for instance be either caught or killed, befriended or confronted etc.

Further aspects of the generic nature of RDR may be brought out by comparing the game to another game which partially shares authorship and technology, namely *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Here we move into more game-specific territory, even if we want to maintain connections between the various levels and other domains of popular art. The control mechanics of locomotion and combat using a standardised controller (e.g running, taking cover and aiming of weapons) are similar between the two games, and so are many of the underlying laws of simulation related to the virtual environment. If we look at previously mentioned semantic aspects of genre, many semantic units used are obviously different when one compares the games, but the syntactic level of honor, law, violence, and society are related and so are parts of the quest structures where the main protagonist has to deal with loyalty and former allies. The particular combination of semantic elements in GTA IV obviously correlates with the genre of the urban crime drama, but this is an overall genre framework which has several overlaps with the western in terms of generic resources, most obviously on what is here called the syntactic level.

Additionally, if we look at the game design structure, for instance the expositional strategies used, we find similarities both with regards to the protagonists back-story (akin to the story level in

narrative studies) but also in the formal devices used to deliver this information: Both games use extensive amounts of pre-recorded dialogue delivered in both non-interactive cutscenes and during interactive transport across the virtual environment. The simulated physical environment also plays an important role in both games, but not just in terms of its simulation of physical and social structure. Rather, the two game worlds share a feature which offers an example of how game technology facilitates a very particular kind of experience: the streaming technology pioneered by the developers Rockstar has led to the expectations of experience of continuous locomotion in a vast simulated world populated by objects and agents.

The finite provinces of meaning offered by these two games are thus similar because of many generic relations across several levels of design structure – not at all surprising, of course, if one finds notions such as authorship and authorial vision but also brand management and path dependency in the cultural industries to be meaningful. Rockstar is expected to deliver a certain kind of engrossing open world experience which focuses on the criminal element in society and, in the case of GTA, to deliver an experience which plays ironically and self-consciously with the genre resources employed in much of the cultural industries: Especially in the case of the early GTA games the player is meant to make the connections to various experiences related to both everyday experience in the consumer society and to the experiences offered by the cultural industries. While the playfulness in appropriation of genre resources may be somewhat specific to Rockstar, the two games also offer examples of how we may engage questions of modality, e.g. comedic or tragedic, within the framework of generic resources. While these two modes are often seen as cutting across genre, they are highly generic in the sense that they play important roles in establishing and upholding much of the structure which makes the province of meaning a coherent one.

One might comment that these particular similarities are highly uncontroversial, since these games are authored by the same developers[6]. This may be true, but the aim here has been to identify and thus allow for tracking of similarities across several layers of design structure as the basis of experience: As such the paper aims to provide some ways to identify the basis of *how* games can give rise to very similar experiences, and not primarily *why* these similarities in the products exist – in other words, the concept of authorship presupposes but does not usually itself supply a theoretical framework detailing where and how to track authorship. But it could still be relevant for the relevance of the framework to consider a case involving charges of plagiarism, i.e. similarity of product without commonality of authorship[7]. This is of course a contested issue which cannot be dealt with satisfactorily here, but one might get a sense of the issues involved by looking at the recent allegations of plagiarism arising from the copyright complaint filed by game developers Spryfox against the company 6Waves LOLAPPS, where the claim is that the latter company's *Yeti Town* is a copy of the game *Triple Town*. The complaint[8] argues that the defendants has produced "a virtual duplicate of the Triple Town game" (p.5) , and it mentions several aspects of similarity between the products, using terms such as "game play, rules, player interaction with the game, […] layout and arrangement, visual presentation, sequence and flow, scoring system, and [the two games'] overall look" (p. 8) as well as "overall plot, theme, mood, setting, pace, characters, and

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[6] Even if the same company, i.e. Rockstar, made Rockstar Table Tennis with the same engine, i.e. RAGE.

[7] This is a brief attempt to engage the comment put to me by Clara Fernandez-Vara during the Q & A at the conference.

[8] Available at http://www.edery.org/uploaded_images/TripleTown_YetiTown_FullComplaint.pdf. Accessed 13th of March 2012.

sequence" (p. 12)[9]. The complaint does not use the word genre but does make reference to "the same parameters based on a match three order of play" and quotes a facebook message referring to "a similar match-3 style"[10]. A key issue here, obviously due to this particular discourse genre and its purposes, is that Spryfox does not stand to gain anything by implying that these elements are generic in the sense of being *collective resources to be freely used by developers*, but the list of elements and quotes from the games press is used to make the argument that the games are similar enough for people to mistake them for each other, i.e. that *generic resources are recognizable and shared by audiences and lead to similar experiences*.

Conclusion

I hope to have made the case for potentially generic experiences in relation to video games based on their usage of generic resources. A final comment bears on the connections between works and utterances which exhibit obvious generic structure and my use of the word "potentially generic". In this regard, the experience of popular art can be very different from the experience of everyday life. It is very plausible that the majority of everyday experience is both typical and tacitly experienced as typical, both in terms of the overall patterns of perception, cognition action and in terms of communication understood as typified communication actions: Much of everyday life is just like it always is, so to speak, and individuals quickly become socialized into this typicality. Now, although one can make the argument that media play an integral an increasing part in socialization, and that the cultural industries deliver content that is highly generic, this does not mean that the experiences of generic media content is always experienced *as* generic. Rather, this depends on the genre repertoire of the player in question. A player may experience a game as completely new and original and unique, simply because s/he has never experienced similar games. As a player becomes more and more knowledgeable in the field of video games s/he may come to see such a specific game more and more in terms of the general and the generic resources it employs. This may be a banal observation, but it only follows logically when one adopts dual perspective one genre which includes a cognitive and experiential viewpoint as well as one considering design structure: It is not immediately visible if one merely looks at the often highly generic and formulaic output of the game industry.

This analysis of generic experience does not presuppose experience to be predetermined, but it presupposes that many conditions for human experience will more often than not be generic. There is no assumption that genericity of situation will directly cause genericity of experience – if this were so one would only need to assume genericity of structure – what is assumed is rather a connection between generic structures and the generic experiences through partial awareness of these structures and a tendency for the human mind to experience the world categorically. Apart from the implications in adoption of a cognitive and experiential genre theory, one of the upshots particular to video games is that if video games involve strategic action, choice and decision making within designed structures, a key aspect of genericity of player experience lies in *the experience of the generic conditions under which player agency is exercised*, i.e. generic situated agency. Clearly, much remains to be said about the actual unfolding of game related agency as a process in time and space, and about cognitive, emotional, and skill differences of players, but the framework delivered here offers a baseline for the analysis of player experience as potentially generic.

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[9] The issue seems to be a straightforward example of what Juul (2005) has identified as theming, namely that games can be themed or skinned, while still being relevantly similar – similar enough, in this case, to lead to accusations of plagiarism.
[10] See Juul (2007) for a formal and historical analysis of this category of games.

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