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**Global gamers, transnational play, imaginary battlefield:
encountering the gameplay experience in the war-themed
first-person-shooter, *Call of Duty***

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Global Gamers, Transnational Play, Imaginary Battlefield:
Encountering the Gameplay Experience in the War-Themed First-Person-Shooter,
Call of Duty

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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Thesis Title:

Global Gamers, Transnational Play, Imaginary Battlefield: Encountering the
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Declaration

I certify that this thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree at the University of Westminster is my own work.

Abstract

During the post-9/11 era we have witnessed the rise of war-themed digital games, which are increasingly produced and distributed on a massive global scale. This new form of 'militainment' re-formulates 'the military-entertainment complex' industrial model, and by repeatedly simulating historical/present/fictional war events and adopting militaristic stories, creates an adrenaline-pumping interactive gaming experience that the global gamers find very difficult to resist. Before 2011 the most iconic war-themed first-person-shooter (FPS) digital game, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, achieved a new milestone of more than 20 million copies sold globally. After the release of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, the Facebook COD group became one of the top 20 fastest growing Facebook communities in 2010. At the time of writing this thesis, this network community had already attracted more than 10 million fans worldwide. Besides the well-known *Call of Duty* series, other FPS titles like *Medal of Honor*, *Fallout*, and *Battlefield* series are all fed into the global gamers' growing appetite for this so-called 'shoot'em'all' genre.

Within academia, scholars from different research disciplines also realized the importance of gaming and have been trying to approach this conflict-based digital game culture from various angles. The war-themed genre FPS is frequently challenged by people's negative impression towards its unpleasant essence and content; questioning its embedded political ideologies, the violent sequences involved in the gameplay and its socio-cultural influences/effects to individual and community etc. However, the wide range of critical debates in this field has reflected the growing interest of scholars in the complex political relationship between military and entertainment sectors and industries, and the embedded P.R. network that is running behind the games' industrial structure and cultural production (see Wark 1996, Herz 1997, Derian 2001, Stockwell and Muir 2003, Lenoir and Lowood 2005, Leonard 2007, Turse 2008, Ottosen 2009). Despite widespread academic interests in the subject, few researchers have paid attention to the gamers who are the ones truly engaged themselves to this genre. If we look at the research within game studies today, less analysis is primarily focused on this unique shooter-gamer culture. In this regard, *this research adopts qualitative research methods to explore the gamers' feelings, attitudes, and their experiences in the war-themed FPS genre.*

In terms of the research methods used, an online questionnaire was launched to collect responses from 433 gamers across different countries, and 11 in-depth face-to-face interviews with a community of COD gamers were also conducted in

Taiwan between 2010 and 2011. The data which has emerged from the two research methods reveals gamers' perceptions about war games' time narrative and realism. Based on the interviews, the research analyses East Asian gamers' construction of meanings in this 'western genre' and provides some theoretical reflections about their transnational FPS gameplay experience.

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During four years of research I have traveled to many places and attended various conferences focusing on digital games, gamers and game cultures. It has been a pleasure to meet so many experts and academics who share my interest and passion about the development of digital games. Without the CAMRI and Westminster University's support for PhD students, all these trips would not have been possible.

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Introduction: The Research Background and Thesis Structure

The Research Background

As new media has become one of the most hotly debated subjects in media and communication research today, digital games, over the last three decades, have grown to be one of the most influential forms of entertainment; attracting the attention of audiences, scholars, policy makers and industry analysts. When we consider the multitude of sophisticated ways they can be both made and played we realize that digital games can be a very complex medium. From production to consumption, a wide range of creatives, such as programmers, developers, designers, artists and gamer-producers, are heavily involved in the global value chain of game culture and business. These game specialists' long-working hours and commitment has initiated a powerful brand new cultural economy that has had a significant economic, political, social and cultural impact on societies, people and families.

Within the global digital game industry, the production and distribution of first-person-shooter (FPS) games has hugely intensified over the last ten years. Significantly, the number of FPS games featuring war scenarios and narratives has dramatically increased since the shocking events of 9/11. Featuring a combination of fiction, historical and factual elements mixed in with their original design, these militaristic games have deeply engaged millions of players around the globe. In this emerging gaming genre, conflict and war are transformed into unserious, playable interactive entertainment. *Call of Duty* is the best selling war-themed FPS game series. Its popularity has meant that it receives the most coverage; being fervently discussed in

news, press, blogs, forums and gamers' everyday conversation. The official *Call of Duty* Facebook group attracted more than 10 million fans from all over the world, making it one of the fastest growing social network groups in 2010. The latest television commercial for *Call of Duty: Black Ops* – 'There's a soldier in all of us', promotes the idea that shooting and co-operating with others on the virtual battlefield can release us from our boring everyday lives (see Picture 1). This 30 second-long clip cleverly stages an action-packed battlefield scene featuring all of the Game's characters, each one from a different profession agilely firing various types of gun in their quest to win a brutal war. Scenes like this seem to create a public illusion as if experiencing the simulated-conflict of this kind, like many casual gamers naïvely claim, is 'just playing another game.' In fact, the gamers' experiences mediated through this genre can be more complicated than one can easily imagine. Gamers' reactions and attached feelings and emotions to this particular type of game need to be carefully examined and thus require game scholars' immediate exploration and analysis.



Picture 1. The Call of Duty: Black Ops Television Commercial – There's a Soldier in All of US

The success of war-themed genre FPS has led to feelings of elation not only from the games' designers and players, but also from politicians, military forces and those who

desperately need new communicable platforms to sustain the public's awareness of and interest in warfare. It is foreseeable that the Pentagon and the U.S. Department of Defence could use this military/entertainment mixture as a vehicle to convey a new narrative and ideology for the sake of America's national interest. This increasing interest in the potential of using games as platforms to voice political ideas has been carefully examined by a number of Western historians. Foraging for evidence to prove their conspiracy theories, some claim that the American government secretly provides financial and technological support to the simulation/game industry's studios and experts, while also asserting that the US's military units officially used war simulation and games for combat training and soldier recruitment purposes (see Nieborg 2006). From these political observers' and analysts' perspective, their critical process is an extension of the previous model of 'the military-entertainment complex,' which is blurring the thin line between entertainment and militarism, and consequently leading 21st century society into a state of 'militainment'. Hence, both academics and the public have begun to wonder whether such powerful ideological intervention in the virtual game world is able to influence or twist gamers' minds. 'Game playing,' which requires gamers' full attention and immersion, has transformed the idea of 'fighting serious wars' into simply developing 'fun and playable joystick shooting skills' in our living rooms. An extreme case is highlighted in the discursive war criticism of the author of *Militainment Inc.*, Roger Stahl (2010). He argues that the war/entertainment convergence is processing and generating a new constructed identity which he calls 'virtual-citizen soldier.'

In an effort to clarify the new concept of militainment, there has already been enormous empirical evidence produced by scholars who focus on revealing the embedded political ideologies and messages in these war games; digging into the 'dark

side' of the cultural production of this genre (e.g. Halter 2006 and Huntemann and Payne 2010). It is fair to say that general research interest in this field is focused on the political-economy perspective, and supports political economists' criticism of the war games' representation of violence and how they affect players. Less existing academic resources would consider the player culture and the gamers' attitudes/experiences to be as equally important. Thus to date, contemporary researchers have yet to provide convincing results and findings on gamers' participation in this particular genre.

In order to fill-in this gap, an online questionnaire (2009-2010) was designed for this research. 433 global fans of *Call of Duty* were approached via the social networking website *Facebook*. 11 in-depth interviews were then conducted (2010-2011) with Chinese-speaking Taiwanese gamers to provide a better understanding of the war-themed genre FPS from the bottom-end gamers' perspectives. Through the analysis of the collected data (in the form of written texts and verbal interviews), this thesis will discuss the COD community's perceptions and feelings on war-themed genre first-person-shooter (FPS) games and the COD gamers' gameplay experience. More importantly, from a socio-cultural perspective, it aims to establish a fundamental understanding of gamer identity as well as expand theoretical knowledge of both the war-themed genre FPS and the gamer community attracted to this critical genre.

The Research in Summary

In reference to Mia Consalvo's suggestions (2006, 2007), if we, new media theorists, have the ambition to maximize the research target and look at the game culture as a whole, it becomes necessary to widen our views by focusing on three of its aspects: Firstly, in industrial and cultural practice (especially within the global techno-region of

Asia-Pacific, North American and Europe), secondly, in the style, formats and content (the three elements that construct various genres) of the games, and finally, in the cultural practices of the global audiences. The roots of Consalvo's proposal can easily be traced back, as other experienced media and communication theorists had proposed similar ideas. For example, Nightingale (1994) insisted audiences, institutions and texts should never be separated and that 'research always addresses part of that complex interaction between audience and text, audience and industry, and audience and media' (cited in Bertrand and Hughes 2005:37). Moreover, the genre exchange model proposed by Hansen et al. (1998) also drew our attention to the triangle value circulation of the three core-elements of industry, genre and audience (p. 181). Moreover, Hermes (2005) reminded us that looking at a particular genre and audiences' activities at the same time can reflect 'the nexus of cultural power relations that involve the industry, audiences, texts, and cultural practice more broadly defined' (p. 41). Within all their arguments is a key reminder that media research should never be too restricted to one point of interest or approach. Indeed researchers will always find it difficult to avoid crossing different aspects when he or she tries to demarcate his area of research or stick to his/her own rules and approaches.

This process began to occur during the progress of this project. As I developed the arguments towards FPS games as a sub-genre of war/military games it became impossible to get away with detailed discussions on its historical development, political context, and genre construction. Hence, much inspired by Consalvo's proposal, my thesis has humbly learned to accumulate and cover as much as possible on the three areas: the global digital game industry, the war/military theme-based conflict gaming genre, and the first-person-shooter (FPS) war-themed game players. The aim of the thesis is to fulfill the following objectives:

- To systematically review and contextualize present academic discussions in relation to digital game studies and militainment discourse.
- To capture the cultural, political and historical trajectories of global digital game culture and the war-themed FPS genre.
- To review theories relates to gamer and 'gamership' studies with focus on the conflict-gaming genre.
- To analyze war/military-themed first-person-shooter gamers' self-reflected experiences, attitudes and feelings.

The Structure of the Thesis

Based on McKenzie Ward's metaphorical *Gamer Theory*, the first three chapters aim to contextualize the war-themed FPS game genre's historical background and bridge media and digital game theories in order that readers can be more prepared for the core-research about gamer experience. The first chapter chiefly focuses on the essence of the global digital game culture by providing detailed discussions in relation to the digital games' industrial structure, digital game theories, the definition of the FPS genre, and the cultural politics played by this genre. The second chapter concentrates more on the theories of fandom and gamers. Its aim is to investigate different perspectives and studies around gamer and gameplay. The third chapter attempts to trace the historical trajectory of the 'Military-Entertainment Complex' and capture the core-meaning of 'militainment' by peeking into the wider cultural and political influences within the war-themed FPS genre from a production context. Following the literature review and the background study in chapters 1, 2 and 3, the fourth chapter presents the key research questions that have emerged from the earlier theoretical

discussions. It also gives detailed explanations of the research design and the fieldwork conducted. The key findings from the analysis my fieldworks are presented in chapters 5, and 6. Based on the results from the questionnaires, chapter 5 mainly looks at how the gamers construct meanings in war-themed FPS games like *Call of Duty*. It includes further discussions about their perceptions on wartime narrative and realism. Chapter 6 presents the evidence summarized from the in-depth interviews conducted with 11 local Taiwanese gamers. The conclusion contained in chapter 7 summarizes the entire project and draws conclusions based on the research and analysis of the COD gamers in chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter One:

The Global Digital Game Culture

’The digital and online games phenomenon, play, is global. The games bring together players in affinity communities within the same culture and across national boundaries.’

(Balnaves *et al.* 2009:273)

During recent decades we have witnessed increasing efforts by international scholars to scope and theorize the field of digital game studies. Various terms and definitions are being introduced into this new research subject to help us rationalize the emerging digital game culture. This chapter aims to provide an overview of today’s digital game culture by reviewing its cultural contexts, industry structures and relevant literature. It in turn highlights the key concepts in relation to theories of cultural globalization and digital game studies. As digital games appear to be an irresistible global economic force and have been widely recognized as a global cultural phenomenon, the chapter explores how they can be understood in terms of cultural and theoretical definitions.

1.1 Reconfiguring the Globality in Digital Game Culture

The Meaning of ‘Digital’ in Digital Games

Historically speaking, digital games have been associated with various names. The majority of people are familiar with the term ‘video games,’ whilst many others recognize ‘computer games,’ ‘electronic games,’ or ‘interactive games.’ The rhetoric of games has been in constant change and is yet to find a suitable name tag. Although the more reasonable term ‘digital games’ has recently been used more frequently by

particular game scholars (e.g. Kerr 2006, Dovey and Kennedy 2006) and game organizations (e.g. the Digital Games Research Association - DiGRA), this specifically implies that the games belong to digital media. It also clearly shows that digital games that are played in different formats and platforms can both be categorized as a type of digital product and viewed as an integral part of the growing digital revolution and digital divide.

By peeking into the infrastructure of digital games, we are able to learn how the feature of digitality is embedded in the original textual meaning of it. Firstly, the essential quality of the entire virtual game space is that it is built upon a computerized environment and constructed electronically by various user interfaces. The development of digital games is facilitated by the process of digitalization, and today all games are programmed by digital codes and numbers, and thus graphically displayed in pixels. Therefore, 'game playing' itself is in essence a human-computer mediation process and a combination of coding/decoding data, sending/receiving signals and input/output orders, which is digitally processed by and through computers or computer-alike devices, e.g. game consoles and mobile phones. The digital-oriented structure and characteristics of the games therefore define them as digital. (Kerr 2006:4).

The idea of 'digital' in the term 'digital games,' in its abstract meaning, symbolically corresponds to the discourse of the 'digital generation,' described by David Buckingham (2006) as 'a generation defined in and through its experience of digital computer technology' (cited in Buckingham and Willet 2006:1). In other words, current generations are situated in the middle of the digital revolution, with digitalization rapidly abandoning and overtaking the old-fashioned analogue media.

Cubitt (2009) asserts that in this new era both our personal and professional lives are largely framed by the digital landscape, in which the 'fundamental quality of digital media (including digital games)...is driven by minute, discrete electronic impulses, commonly characterized as 'on' and 'off' (cited in Creeber and Martin 2009:23). Without any doubt, the appearance of digital games mirrors the postmodern condition of today's overdeveloped digital-technology-packed environment and society, where gamers, as a form of new media audiences, spend a lot of their time playing, participating and immersing themselves in the 'half-real' realm (Juul 2005), completely embracing this over-exaggerated digital culture and logic.

The Flowing Gameplay Experience in the New 'Global Space'

As discussed earlier, the digital generation feels quite comfortable to live the modern lifestyle framed by digital technologies. New media and more advanced technologies are having a huge impact on people's everyday lives on a global scale. Today's new media technologies are inextricably linked to popular culture and social space, creating a 24/7 media environment. People who grow up in this so-called 'e-generation' or 'digital-generation' do not seem to consider the considerable time and energy they spend accessing this wide variety of entertainment. During the last 30 years the tremendous success of digital games and game consoles (including several generations of *PlayStation/Xbox/Nintendo* game consoles and the immeasurable quantities of simulation/computer/video game software) has led to the creation of a neo-entertainment sphere in which subcultures emerge and transform into the mainstream. This involves millions of international game culture participants. It is important to be aware that the digital game industry is now leading global entertainment trends and that, digital games continue to produce an increasing number of game players and communities across the world. The current scene has radically

changed from the state it was twenty years ago. During that time most adults negatively rejected games, viewing them as mere children's toys. In contrast, as we witness in the latest *Wii* phenomenon, we see that society today is much more open to gaming. It has now encouraged people of different ages and genders to engage deeper in this highly interactive role-playing culture. In 1984, Greenfield attempted to convince us that games were capable of growing to be a global phenomenon. He asserted that: 'video games are the first example of a computer technology that is having a socializing effect on the next generation on a mass scale and even on a world-wide basis' (cited in Kinder 1991:117).

In recent years, there has been a huge economic expansion in the entire digital game industry and a parallel growth of international game professionals and game players involved in its global production, distribution and consumption. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that studying digital game culture can be an urgent task for media and communication researchers. For instance, NPD's report on *Entertainment Trends in America in 2009* found more Americans chose to play videogames at home (64%) than go to movies (53%).¹ This same growth has happened in the UK, as the *Daily Telegraph* reported that in 2009 £1.73 billion of public's leisure expenses were spent on video games as compared with £1.2 billion on films, DVD and Blu-ray.² Likewise, the CEO of Electronic Arts, John Riccitiello, has confidently estimated at least one billion global gaming audiences play video games today,³ whilst another report claimed that the whole global video game market is expected to achieve \$46.5 billion in 2010.⁴ All these shocking figures simply remind us

¹ Source: cnet news in Gaming and Culture, <http://news.cnet.com/8301-10797_3-10245437-235.html>

² Source: telegraph.co.uk, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/6852383/Video-games-bigger-than-film.html>>

³ Source: gameindustry.biz,

<<http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/global-gaming-audience-at-least-1-billion-riccitiello>>

⁴ Source: *BusinessWeek* Online, 2006

not only that it is time to deepen our knowledge in this new medium, but also that contemporary media observers have the responsibility to examine its profound influence on people across societies, nations and cultures. Accordingly, Microsoft's Mike Fischer has reminded us that: 'as games become more sophisticated, culture becomes more suffused'.⁵ Put simply, this means that the digital game, as social, cultural, political and economic force, has moved from the marginal position it used to occupy to enter the global discourse.

Among the analysts of digital games and culture, Dovey and Kennedy (2006) were among the first few new media theorists to successfully capture the theoretical and technological trajectory of the development of digital game studies. Giving a broad account on the technological aspect of digital games, they show us that: 'technology has become our environment, and the environmental factors obviously play a major role in producing consciousness and identity' (p. 4). According to Dovey and Kennedy, digital games are empowering; bringing about a high level of intensification into our daily mediated and mediating experience. They further describe the moment gamers enter the gaming world and soon learn 'how to flow seamlessly between the virtual and actual, with their experiences in one being just as affecting as those in the other' (p. 2). Here, the intensification rephrases Robertson's cultural globalization thesis that defines the globalizing process is an 'intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (1992:8). In addition there is a strong sense that a more profound disembodied, dislocated and displaced cultural experience of an individual or a community occurs in the globalized time and space, in which geographical and physical boundaries can no longer limit the possibility of our senses flowing beyond borders and cultural

⁵ Video games that get lost in translation: why most U.S. titles don't fare well in Japan, source from msnbc.com: <
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4780423>>.

boundaries.

Flow, in this context, is closely attached to the psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) definition of the 'flow experience'. This basically explains different levels of enjoyment that a person can get from playing digital games, and defines the mode of full enjoyment during gaming as a 'state of concentration and satisfaction...an optimal experience'⁶ (cited in Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2008: 149). Flow is the most familiar psychological concept to describe a certain level of optimal experience of gaming enjoyment or any game-related 'activities that fall outside daily routines...[that] include a sense of playfulness.' Therefore, 'game play' can be read as 'a state of concentration and satisfaction that a person experiences when performing an activity' (p.149). Based on this argument, it is logical to conclude that gamers and their playing behaviour have been the main cultural force that has made the global gaming industry possible (ibid). The most significant theoretical input of Egenfeldt-Nielsen and his colleagues' is to redefine the gaming process as a gamers' reward in gaining 'the ability to lose oneself and experience ecstasy' (p.150). Displaying a similar approach, Walkerdine (2007) claimed that game playing should be recognized as an embodied cultural practice which is 'at once local and global, minute in [its] detail and enormous in [its] reach.' When we play games, 'the space of the club, the living room, the bedroom is also at the same time a global space' (p.138).

As early as the 1990s, the business strategist Kenichi Ohmae (1995), who contributed the concepts of the 'borderless world' and 'cross-border civilization,' already noticed the growth in interactive audiences and their emergent global identity (cited in Kline et

⁶ According to Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al.*, Csikszentmihalyi's flow experience can be characterized by seven elements of enjoyment: '(1) a challenge activity requires skills, (2) the merging of action and awareness, (3) clear goals and feedback, (4) concentration on the task at hand, (5) the paradox of control, (6) the loss of self-consciousness, (7) the transformation of time' (2008:150).

al. 2003:15). As intellectuals were on the verge of finding out about the transition in the next generation, Ohmae coined the term 'Nintendo Kids' to describe groups of Japanese youths whose lives were surrounded by new technologies and techno-cultures.⁷ These groups and communities, being the loyal followers of new technologies and techno-culture, are defined as 'forging links to the global economy,' while their personalities are 'much more culturally opened, questing and creative' (Kline *et al.* 2003, Tomlinson 1999). The use of digital games and other interactive media are believed to be the main reason for this cultural transformation. More importantly, this transformation is widening the generation gap by feeding unlimited information from the internet. This is why in East Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, parents and society as a whole have begun to have serious concerns about the lifestyle and mental state of the so called 'otaku communities'.

The term 'otaku' was first introduced in Japan to describe the young people who were increasingly spending more time interacting with ACG (Animation, Comic, Games) at home rather than spending time outdoors. Their social activities are home-based and these communities focus fully on their specialized interests and habits. In Western countries, young groups with similar interests in technologies, computers and computer games are also branded as 'geeks' which is a slang term that is linked to the negative meanings of 'nerd', 'fool' and 'freak.' The most relevant article on this subject, published by the sci-fi author William Gibson in 2001, reviewed the different impacts that Japanese technology has had on Western societies since the 1980s. In Gibson's analysis, a member of the otaku community is defined as 'the passionate obsessive, the

⁷ For example: Green and Bigum's Nintendo Generation (1993), Blair's 'Playstation Generation' (2004), Tapscott's 'Net Generation' (1998), Holloway and Valentine's 'Cyberkids' (2003), and Davis-Floyd and Dumit's 'Cyborg Babies' (1998). (cited in Buckingham and Willet 2006).

information age's embodiment of the connoisseur, more concerned with the accumulation of data than of objects, [who] seems a natural crossover figure in today's interface of British and Japanese cultures.⁸ This generational movement reflects an important theme: that new media and new technologies require deeper participation and engagement from individuals, while interactivity is enhancing mediated and mediating global experiences. It is also worth noting that the global audiences' personalities and lifestyles are simultaneously reshaped and shifted by the different uses of media in the new global discourse.

If we carefully review today's literature on digital games, it is not difficult to find many key references associated with media and cultural theories that evolved around the early technological prophecies made by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. McLuhan's thesis has been widely quoted by scholars such as Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Mark Poster and those interested in the digital condition of postmodern societies. Based on McLuhan's original arguments around 'the extension of men,' 'media/medium' and 'global village' thesis, McLuhan boldly predicts that future games will have the ability to 'erase the boundaries of individual awareness.' He asserted that 'Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the body politics...Games are a sort of artificial paradise like Disneyland, or some Utopian vision by which we interpret and complete the meaning of our daily lives...' (1964:235-238). For McLuhan, there is always a possibility to expand human experiences through the connectivity of games and the network features of future technologies. However, unlike McLuhan, Schiller (1999) has focused more on the interactive feature of games. He argued that 'Games in turn engaged the potential implicit in the first of cyber space's critical typifying features: its interactivity' (p. 130). Aarseth (2001) stated that 'games are both object and process;

⁸ William Gibson (2001) *Modern Boys and Mobile Girls*, *The Observer*.

they can't be read as texts or listened to as music they must be played. Playing is integral, not coincidental like the appreciative reader or listener. The creative involvement is a necessary ingredient in the uses of games' (cited in Creeber and Martin 2009:85). Additionally, Kline et al. (2003) claim that the combination of play and games provides 'a map of much broader social forces' to release us from our limited physical boundaries and deepen the connectivity and proximity between each global individual, group and community (p. 35).

However on closer inspection, these researcher's findings, particularly on games' connectivity and interactivity, are in fact echoing the theories of globalization, which tend to address the closer relationship between global citizens and the shrinking of world distances. In this regard, the thesis of Tompson's 'delocalization,' Giddens's 'time-space distanciation,' Harvey's 'time-space compression,' and Hannerz's 'saturation and maturation' of the cultural globalizing process, are all relevant concepts and can be borrowed to sum up how digital games (as a form of technology and entertainment) connect global game players and interconnect their social experiences through the constructed (in-game and out-game) time and space. In this regard, Derian (2001) made a significant comment on the nature of game virtuality; describing how it 'collapses distance, between here and there, near and far, fact and fiction...representing the most penetrating and sharpest edge of globalization' (p. xviii).

The Transnational/Transcultural Experience of Digital Gameplay

As discussed earlier, the digital game culture and the cultural practice of game playing is projecting a rising global media experience which grows people's desire to flow between the real/virtual worlds and break out people's physical limitations. This cultural process is also challenging people's general concepts about cultural and

national boundaries. Referring to Balnaves *et al.* (2009), digital games as a new form of media is one of the best examples to show us a new type of interconnected media experience by 'bringing together players in affinity communities within the same culture and across national boundaries' (273). One crucial point in their statement also implies the sense that the action of game playing itself is turned into a motivation for game players to spend time connecting and interacting with people outside their national borders. This sensational transition in human connectivity allows different cultures to flow, meet each other, and negotiate in a space intersected by dual (real and virtual) places.

Many theorists especially describe such experience as 'transnational' and 'transcultural.' For example, writing about the 'transnationalization of place' which captures this kind of de-territorialized experience, Hajer (1995) states that 'transnationalization establishes new connections between cultures, people and places, thereby altering our everyday environment' (cited in Beck 2000: 76). The sociologist, Ulrich Beck (2000) then introduced the idea of 'place polygamy' to illustrate how globalization occurs in personal life; in his opinion, transnationality provides us with 'new opportunities for discovering and testing out particular aspects of oneself'⁹. Digital games, in its given power to transform human experience, can easily be seen as a new form of media fitting into these theories perfectly. Appadurai's early writings concerning the five dimensions of global cultural flows (including ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples) also set a paradigm for the exploration of transnationality in a new anthropological experience (1996:48). If we see interactivity as a common attribute in the digital generation, it may become even more difficult to deny that the

⁹ As Beck argues, the questions that have to be solved are: To what extent is the place 'my place', and 'my place' my own life? How are the different places related to one another in the imaginary map of 'my world', and in what sense are they 'significant places' in the longitudinal and cross-section of my own life?

condition of today's gaming world is what Appadurai once called – 'a homeland that exists only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups' (Ibid). Such imagination, in the gaming context, refers to the social and cultural goals, interests and values shared by the transnational digital gamers and communities; each gamer, who exercises his/her play in a dual space – at the same time in a local-physical space of the real world (in their rooms, internet café, or on the train) and a globalized virtual space of the gaming world – bridges and reformulates his or her own awareness of nations and cultures. This self-negotiation process is able to identify the subjective player as part of a transnational audience 'involved in a complex process of negotiating a position between familiar national moorings and new transnational connections' (Robins and Aksoy, cited in Chalaby 2005: 15).

Continuing Appadurai's interpretations, several international media theorists have also developed their research efforts in relation to global audiences' and gamers' transnational experience. For example, the ethnographic research conducted by Robins and Aksoy (2005) in London mainly explored how diasporic media audiences (in their selection, the Turkish-speaking communities) negotiate their cultural positions between national and transnational spaces (cited in Chalaby 2005: 14-42). The American game scholar, Mia Consalvo (2006) concentrates more on global gamers' participation and group identity of transnational communities. Her systematic study which investigated how various (American, Japanese, and American-Japanese) cultures mixed with each other and how cultural dialogues were created through different gaming activities in certain online games, has drawn us a clear picture to see how different cultural identities flow and negotiate in between cultures. It also demonstrates how new audiences are becoming more transculturally oriented. This in turn leads them to develop new ambitions to communicate and learn (different languages, ways of

expressions, and new ideas) from gamers outside their own cultures. Furthermore, the Australian scholar, Dean Chan (2008), whose research looks in particular at the diasporic virtual communities and cultures of Asian-American, Asian-Pacific game players and their subjectivity and agency, has strongly criticized the cultural politics and the ideological problems caused by the historically constructed cultural settings of social-racial stereotypes in the gaming world. However, Dean Chan's writing is significant in exposing the social and cultural impacts and the false social orders created by the international image factory through games. Recent international research conducted by the Worldplay Research Initiative (WRI) of Trinity University in Texas is attempting to widen academics' awareness of the rising transnational ethnoscape of online gaming. The aim of this particular research group is to organize a study specifically targeting global MMORPG (Massively Multiple Player Role Playing Game) players, and analyze the new scenarios of transnational play. The other purpose of this project is to explore issues associated with cross-cultural interactions in virtual worlds; providing a strong foundation for future studies of digital games and transnational gamers. In conclusion, digital games are a new manifestation of transnationalism and create a space beyond the axis of global and local to show what David Ley (2004) has called 'cosmopolitan displacements.'

However, in this research the idea of transnational/transcultural is simply used to specify that the gameplay experience allows gamers to flow outside their national borders and physical locations and give them new opportunities to communicate with people from other cultures, regions and countries. Their virtual avatars, represent their second or third identity (of the new imagined-self), can freely move in a third (virtual) space defined as global and transnational in the abstract level. In this regard, it may be necessary to clarify that this is slightly different from mainstream political-economists'

discussions on transnationalism which tends to pay more attention to the infrastructure of contemporary media environment and have greater emphasis on the hard structure of the diffusing television platforms/channels. In this research, when using the terms transcultural/transnational, it is more of a concern about how, through the behaviour of gaming, gamers are able to break out their physical space and establish connections to 'the outside world.' It also intends to reinforce the idea that gameplay experience (when seeing it as a cultural experience) is speeding up the deterritorialization process.

The Hybridity of Digital Game Culture and Industry

Besides the transnationality/transculturality featured in the digital game culture, the emblematic notion of hybridity, as Kraidy (2005) describes, is also a powerful concept in the understanding of global culture. John Tomlinson, who is an authority on the study of global culture, once noted that the notion of hybridity can project the nature of a globalizing culture, with an original meaning of 'mixing' in it. To Tomlinson, employing the concept of hybridity to define global culture can also help us grasp 'the sort of new cultural identifications that may be emerging...in the transnational space.' (p. 147). From the cultural theorists' point of view, the body of the global culture in itself is naturally hybridized by a variety of visual and cultural representations, international/national business practices and interests, political and cultural ideologies and so on.

Digital games, as a new cultural form, are not exceptional within this kind of hybrid framework. The high level of hybridity shown in their narrative, industry and content underlines the more sophisticated way digital games negotiate global/local cultures in comparison to other media forms. The tendency of digital games to break the cultural

boundaries; reaching a global audience, simultaneously rejects homogeneity and the possibility of being culturally dominated by Western norms. For instance, the American scholar, Mia Consalvo (2006) claims the adaptations of glocalization methods and strategies from game production and business practices reflect the high degree of hybridity in today's game businesses and game content. As she suggests, it is easy to recognize the hybrid nature of digital games by focusing on three particular aspects: '...firstly, in the transnational corporations' contribution to the videogame industry's format and development...secondly, in the global audience for the global game industry's product...and thirdly, in the complex mixing of formats, style, and content within games' (p. 117). Through her detailed analysis of the business practices of the Japanese game publisher Square Enix and their fans' behaviours and cultural participation in the *Final Fantasy* game series, she demonstrates the hybrid content of final fantasy series. This can be seen as a consequence of the remix of Japanese and American businesses and cultures with Japanese cultural interests and influences imposed into US popular culture. Consalvo concluded that the whole industry 'is a hybrid encompassing a mixture of Japanese and American businesses' (ibid), and games are definitely 'cross-culture hybrids.' (p. 126). However, in her view the digital game industry has a unique structure other types of media can never imitate. Its global cultural flow differs from other media commodities and the direction of the cultural flow in the gaming world is mainly East-West, making its cultural context a complete hybrid of Americanization and Japanization.

Consalvo's analysis of digital games as a hybrid culture is especially useful in understanding the essence of today's global digital game culture. More significantly, in the 2007 State and Play Conference, she even introduced an interesting term: 'Western Otaku', to further develop her arguments concerning the transcultural relationships of

global game players of the Final Fantasy online game, and the in-game/out-game players' participation in this game. The cross-cultural practice of game play among these 'transcultural' gamers perfectly echoes Garcia Canclini's (1995) notion that 'the hybrid experience is increasingly the global experience' (cited in Tomlinson 1999).

The Rise of the Global Gamer (Fan) Communities

'Gamers, especially those playing with others online, were bridging cultures and sidestepping geopolitical boundaries'

(Williams, 2007: 256)

The technology-fostering transnational experience and the culturally hybridized body of the international game business have led to a rapid increase in the number of game fans and communities on a large, global scale. The growth of digital games directly influences both audiences' media consumption behaviour and the user culture. More media audiences have chosen digital games as their main entertainment resource. According to the Entertainment Software Association's (ESA) report on the US computer and video game industry in 2009, audiences' media consumption habits are in a state of transition. The current figure shows that 68% of American households play games. In addition, the average age of gamers is confirmed to be 35 years old (with 25% under 18 years, 49% 18-49 years, and 26% 50+ years). If we take the gender issue into account, today 60% game players are male and 40% are female. Another report found that, before 2007, there were nearly 0.8 million gaming communities spread across the globe: 22,000 in Europe, 180,000 in North America, 53,000 in Latin America, 280,000 in Asia-Pacific and 35,000 in Middle East Africa.¹⁰ As a new

¹⁰ Source: comScore (www.comscore.com), cited in Balnaves *et al*, 2009.

category of popular culture, digital games definitely offer the virtually rooted global space which serves the communities with a collection of shared imagery. These digital game communities definitely mirror Anderson's original ideal of the so called 'imagined community (1983).'

The idea of fandom can be a very useful concept in decoding the gamer culture. If we carefully observe the ways gamers access this particular medium together with their group activities, it is not difficult to see how their passion and emotion are exposed through their organized fan activities in everyday life. In an East Asian country like Taiwan, it is very common to see PSP (PlayStation Portable) gamers spend hours playing their consoles outside their living rooms. Significantly, by holding their hand consoles, they normally gather in small groups and sit on the floor in front of particular game shops along the underground shopping street. Whenever big game titles are released, not only in UK but everywhere of the world, the news and press routinely report that thousands of people, through their passion and loyalty, were driven to queue overnight for newly-released game consoles and software. In addition, a new style of sub-cultural fashion which used to be called the 'cosplay' trend is increasingly appearing everywhere across the world. This features enthusiastic fans of certain games or manga/comic books organizing regular events in which they dress and act as their favorite characters. An appropriate explanation in accordance to this fascinating game-fandom phenomenon comes from the author of the book *Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, Lewis (1992) who simply claims that: 'fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences' (p. 1).

Although the discussion of global fandom/fan studies is no longer a new subject in this decade (see Harrinton and Bielby, cited in Gray *et al.* 2007), the fandom aspect

embedded in gamers' identity is clear and certainly reflects some of the basic characteristics of gamers. Therefore, by expanding on the concept of fandom in the next chapter, we aim to explore and gain theoretical insights into the gamer culture.

The Global Fantasy in Reality: The Global Pokémon Phenomenon

When discussing digital games as a form of global culture and a cross-cultural phenomenon, one of the most recognizable cultural icons in the entertainment history can teach us how globalization precedes popular culture and digital games. There is no doubt that *Pokémon* (also called pikachu, by Japanese) is the most recognized cartoon character to produce one of the most popular digital games this century. *The Economist* magazine once called this phenomenon Pokémania. Studying the case of *Pokémon* and its game can give us a complete picture of the perfect model of the global phenomenon and thus provide us with an insight into how hybridized and transnational this particular industry has grown to be.

As previously seen in the case of the successful *Mario Brothers'* franchise, the incredible amount of cartoons, toys, digital games, movies and other relevant media merchandise produced by *Pokémon* profoundly influenced the lives and lifestyles of the younger generation on an international scale. Its famous slogan – 'Gotta catch 'em all' became a goal for kids around the world to achieve in both real life and their video game collections. Even in 2009, a 21 year-old British girl, Lisa Courtney of Hertfordshire, completed a new Guinness world record by spending 13 years building up a private collection of 13,400 Pokémon toys and associated dolls and items.

Picture 2. Lisa Courtney and her Pokémon collections (Sources from: World Records Academy)¹¹



Before the appearance of *Pokémon*, the potential growth of other Japanese animation and game characters was already foreseeable. In 1991, Kinder explored the case of the widely recognized character of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (TMNT) in her book, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Her main argument was that the TMNT myth, like other successful multiple transformers, undermined the western-dominant model, as the global audience was becoming a new global force; accelerating mass production and determining the new world order (p. 172). The TMNT comic books, animated

¹¹ It is so far the largest Pokémon Collection – the world record is set by Lisa, Source: www.worldrecordsacademy.com.

television shows, movies and video games ‘make strong use of the Asian connections...break with the traditional concept of Orientalism...[and adopt] a postmodernist form of intertextuality and accommodation’ (pp. 151-152).

After the craze of TMNT, the so-called pocket monsters, *Pokémon*, were introduced in Japan for the first time in 1996. They soon became ‘the largest child-driven phenomenon of the decade’; taking advantage of the international ‘webwork of a synergistic, multimedia, globe-spanning distribution network’ (Kline *et al.* 2003:240). According to the head of Nintendo’s game development, Hiroshi Imanishi, the main aim of the designers of the game was to remove national and cultural boundaries, as their agenda was ‘don’t find any difference in kids’ feelings nationwide or worldwide’ (Kline *et al.* 2003:190). With the intention not to segment tastes or interests among global kids, Nintendo’s president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, claimed that the Japanese anime cartoons became a global hit because from the very beginning, their design ‘[did] not see borders in this business’; pushing them to ‘go anywhere in the world’ with no cultural limitations considered at all (*ibid.*). Moreover, Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of *Super Mario Bros* and *Legend of Zelda*, analyzed the distinguishing features of the original idea in *Pokémon*: ‘Mr. Tajiri (the creator and the main developer of *Pokémon*...didn’t start this project with a business sense...what he wanted to create for himself was appreciated by others in this country (Japan) and is shared by people in other countries’ (cited in Newman 2004:13).

Responding to the success of the first *Pokémon* movie, the President of 4Kids Entertainment, Norman Grossfield, asserted that it combined the visual sense of the best Japanese animation with the musical sensibility of Western pop culture.¹² The

¹² Cited in Kline *et al.* 2003:241.

mix and remix of cultural audio-visual representations is a clear result of its hybridization. Moreover, Lister et al. (2003) thinks the transnational and hybrid forms were both important factors in making the two mega-hits, *Pokémon* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, accepted worldwide. As they note:

‘Pokémon and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles...are evidence of a meeting and hybridization of eastern and western popular cultural forms. Even before Pokémon, the videogame was perhaps the most thoroughly transnational form of popular culture, both as an industry (with Sony, Sega and Nintendo as the key players) but also at the level of content – the characters and narratives of many videogames are evidence of relays of influence between America and Japan’ (p. 268).

Their view is very much supported by the Japanese videogame producer, Masuyama. He believes that the astonishing global success of *Pokémon* should not be considered as the only way of elevating Japanese culture onto a global level. Instead, we have to see it ‘as two cultures meeting halfway in the 1990s, as Japan became more westernized and the West became more open to foreign culture’ (King 2002: 42). The two sets of animated characters in *Pokémon* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and their associated movies and videogames, brought the world a new format of the global production of imagination. Since they were introduced to the audiences, as Kinder (1991) describes, the world has moved closer to the ‘expanding super-system of entertainment’ which is ‘positioned within a larger network of popular culture’ (p. 172). Within the structure of this defining super-system, players become ‘skillful at forestalling obsolescence, castration, and death through a savoring or transmedia preferentiality, fluid movement between cinematic suture and interactive play’ (ibid).

1.2 The Global Digital Game Industry

After examining the global cultural condition and features of digital games and the implication of their cultural context, it is necessary to gain more knowledge in terms of the Industry's business structure and mechanisms. The sales of digital games in the past five years have gradually surpassed those of the movie industry and the music industry.¹³ Before 2010, Nintendo's Wii consoles sold nearly 70 million units. Microsoft's Xbox360 consoles sold 39 million units, while Sony's PlayStation3 sold 33.5 million units to the global consumer.¹⁴ PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2009-2013 predicts that the global video game industry will soon reach \$48.9 in 2011 and \$68.3 billion in 2012, with an average annual growth rate of 10.3%,¹⁵ followed by the Global Industry Analysts' prediction that the global video games software market will reach \$91.96 billion in 2015.¹⁶

From the 1970s onwards, the development of digital games has maintained stable economic growth, except for a short period of recession (This led to the so called 'dark age' of the global digital game market) in the early 1980s, which slightly held back its economic expansion. From the 1990s, the commercial and game-hardware competition between the three dominant game giants, Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo, based in US and Japan, established a new global order and capital system of production for the entire digital game industry. The emergence of the game publishers like Sega, Electronic Arts (EA), Ubisoft, Activision Blizzard, THQ, Konami, Capcom,

¹³ Source: video games blogger
(<http://www.videogamesblogger.com/2007/06/27/global-videogame-sales-surpass-music-industry-in-2007.htm>).

¹⁴ Source: MCV News: PS3 sales reach 33.5m (www.mvcuk.com/news/37437/PS3-sales-reach-335m).

¹⁵ Source: digitalmediawire.com (2008).

¹⁶ Source: PRWeb (www.prweb.com)

Namco Bandai etc., which took charge of the publishing and distributing functions of this business, have made this global niche market and its economic mechanism more mature.

As discussed earlier, the development of digital games relies heavily on cultural and economic globalization. As Consalvo argues, the Japanese-made game, Final Fantasy and its owner Square Soft, can be seen as the best example to prove that local game companies must rely on bigger and powerful American conglomerates to gain success. Considering localization to be an important stage of executing the global/glocal strategies, the bigger publishing companies sought opportunities to establish local offices by constantly integrating local game studios with skilful entrepreneurs. According to Aphra Kerr (2006), the American company EA, whose headquarters are based in California, subsidizes its international network of local offices in places such as Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand and the UK. The French Company, Atari, whose headquarters are based in Lyon, has subsidiaries in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific. The Japanese company, Konami, whose headquarters are based in Tokyo has subsidiaries in the USA, the UK and Hong Kong (p. 78). In these circumstances, smaller independent studios and game professionals find it difficult to survive and compete with these giants if they refuse to enter the mainstream global network or join the production line of bigger conglomerates.

While localization is a 'must-do' process for bigger transnational corporations to grow their global networks and develop a solid business stage, it also allows companies to operate more flexibly (e.g. adopting local languages, and finding or borrowing local interests and resources) within the competitive international business environment. As

form of business, the whole digital game industry is way ‘too globalized’ (Balnaves *et al.* 2009:273). McPhail (2006) has described, ‘video games [as] a global enthusiasm...Early on, much of the software originated from Japan, but North American, European, and other affluent cultures quickly became willing markets for a manufacturer of these increasingly complex games. Games became common property of teenagers in core nations.’ (p. 196). The economy of digital games, as Kline *et al.* define, ‘is occurring on an international scale...the global market is divided into three segments – North America (primarily the US), Europe and Asia (principally Japan, but with eyes on the possibility of Southeast Asia and China)...’ (2003:189).

Based on the evidence of the post-industrial and capitalist logic that the digital game industry tends to intimately follow, the majority of digital game studios, publishers and distributors have their bases set up within the global technological centres of the U.S., Europe and Japan. Together this triumvirate owns the majority of the market; dominating and controlling the global flow of digital game commodities. In addition, Kline *et al.* claim that: ‘the global enterprise web is made up of Japanese-owned but US-oriented multinationals...the major corporations compete simultaneously in North American, European, and Japanese theatres of operation. Video game companies contend in an international arena’ (ibid). To some extent, this echoes Kerr’s statement about the business nature and culture of digital games:

‘Digital games appear to epitomize an ideal type of global post-industrial neo-liberal cultural product. As products they are based on the innovative fusion of digital technologies and cultural creativity: as a media industry they exploit global networks of production and distribution with little no regulation: and as a cultural practice they embody the liberal ideas of

individual choice and agency?’

(2006: 1)

Transnational corporations in USA and Japan, such as Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo and Sega establish the industrial order of today’s global digital game market and act as the core finders of the global techno-regions. Based on the infrastructure of the techno-region, Consalvo adds that digital games flow on an international scale, asserting that they have ‘shifted in the last 50 years, with Japan leading production, the USA and Europe following, and other regions such as Southeast Asia trailing along at the end.’ (2006: 132). Analyzing the global spread of game publishers, the Game Developer Top 20 Publisher Report revealed that the top publishers in the game industry were mainly centralized in the US and Japan, with only a few of them located in France.

Table 1. The Top 20 Game Publishers in 2009.¹⁷

Position	Name of Publisher	Location of Headquarter
1	Nintendo	Japan
2	Electronic Arts	US
3	Activision Blizzard	US and France
4	Ubisoft	France
5	Take-Two Interactive	US
6	Sony Computer Entertainment	Japan and US
7	Bethesda Softworks	US
8	THQ	US
9	Square Enix	Japan

¹⁷ Source from: <<http://gamedeveloperresearch.com/game-developer-top-20-publishers-2009.htm>>

10	Microsoft	US
11	Konami	Japan
12	Sega	Japan
13	Capcom	Japan
14	MTV Games	US
15	Namco Bandai Games	Japan
16	Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment	US
17	Disney Interactive Studios	US
18	Atari	France and US
19	Atlus	Japan
20	Lucasarts	US

Surveying the above information, we can actually divide the world system of digital games in three tiers based on consideration of the historical developments of digital games in these countries, the maturity of their domestic markets and their global industrial influence on other countries. Therefore, the three tiers can be proposed as:

First tier: North America (US and Canada) and Japan

Second tier: Western Europe (mainly UK, Germany and France) and Asia-Pacific (mainly South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China)

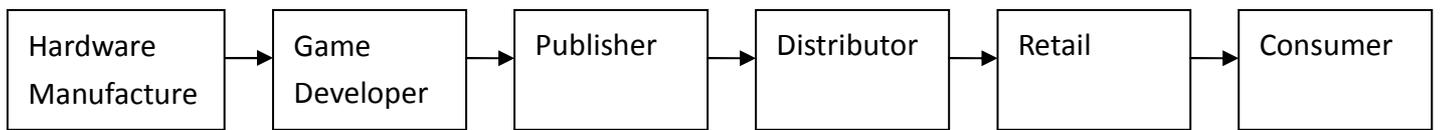
Third tier: Latin America, Australasia, Eastern Europe, Africa and Middle East

This category also refers to the way the *Euromonitor International's World Market for Video Games Report in 2005* classifies the world market. The first tier is the digital game developed countries which establish the infrastructure of the industry with strong

technological and historical advantages. Historically speaking, the US and Japan have had the greatest influence in developing the technological and cultural forms of digital games. Despite the fact that the US and Japan remain the leading countries for game exportations and dominate the cultural and economic production of arcade games, console games and handheld games markets, the recent growth of the online game industry and market in East Asia, particularly the emerging online game industry in China and South Korea, is very noticeable. The proposed second tier section represents the digital game developing countries, which are those countries normally following in the footsteps of and have a close relationship with the first-tier countries. Like the Chinese and South Korean game industries, they try to develop their own genres and games by targeting the online market in order to fill the gap in the existing game business model. Normally these countries have less governmental and financial support compared to first tier countries. The third tier represents the countries with fewer resources and smaller markets.

In order to rationalize the business flow in the digital game market, Winkler (2006) examined the internal system of the global gaming business and concluded that its business structure was built upon the institutions of manufacturing, distributing, retailing, and consuming (p. 141). Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al.* (2006) then completed the full model (as shown in figure 1) by adding developers and publishers. These two latter elements are the most important factors with regards to choosing the direction of the game content and deciding how game commodities flow on a global scale.

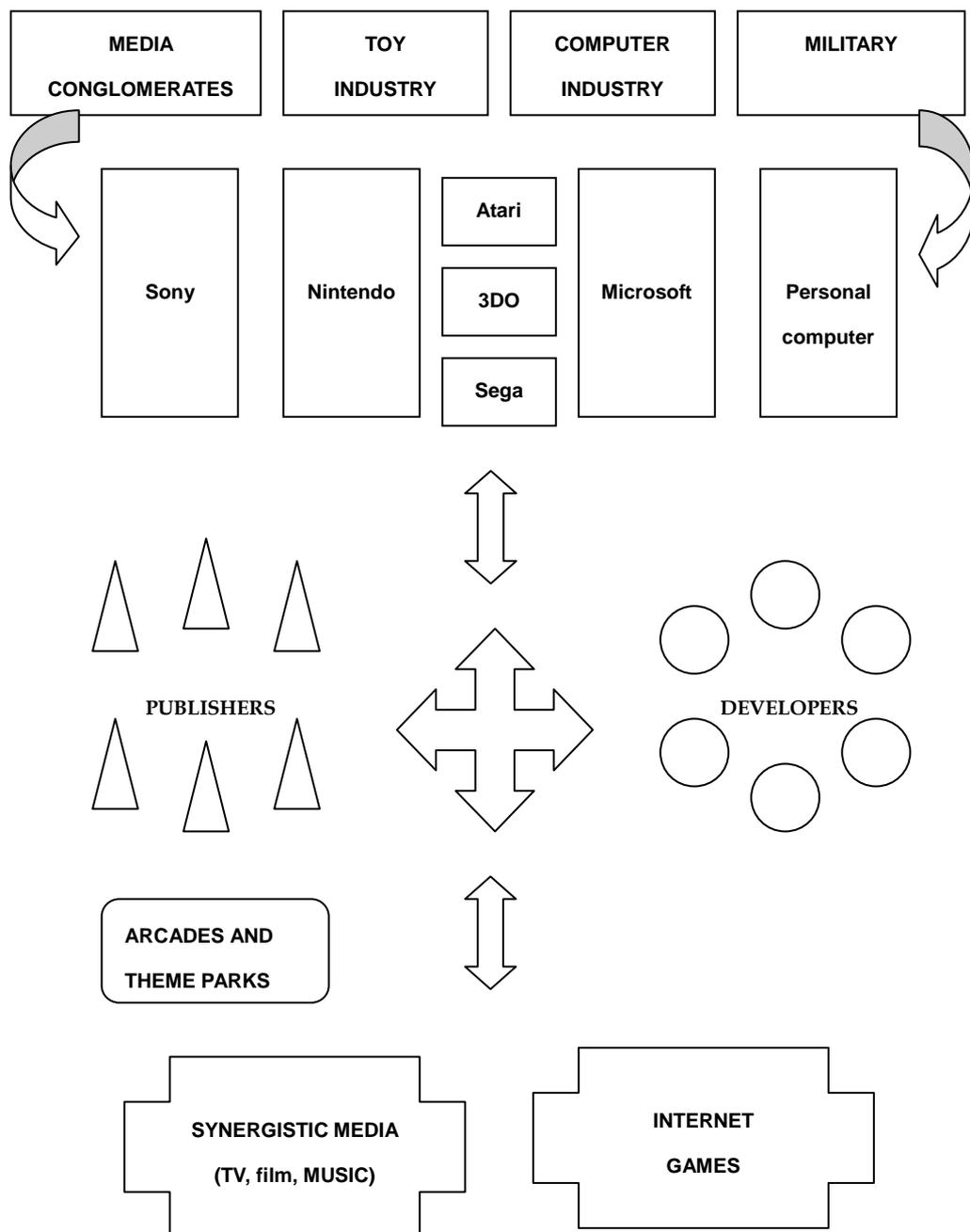
Figure 1. The Major game industry institutions (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca 2006:16)



With the method of game business flow presented by Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca, Kline *et al.* (2003) proposed a second figure to map the complete the infrastructure of the global digital game industry. The upstream companies such as Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft, and the remainder of the computer hardware producers, are mainly in charge of the production side of games; controlling the majority of the business in the industry and deciding on the direction of the development of future game consoles. Behind these business giants and smaller companies like Atari, 3DO and Sega, the real influence comes from the four categories divided on top of figure 2: media conglomerates, the toy industry, the computer industry and the military. Of the top four, the media conglomerates monitor the commercial activities of digital games and maintain good partnerships with the downstream giants. The computer industry provides technical and technological improvements and is fully in charge of inventing and developing more advanced game-based technologies for the uses of games. The toy industry sustains the public interest in particular cartoons, characters and games. The final element is the military. They are the most important player in controlling financial and governmental resources and the release of the most advanced technologies which can be used in future gaming. If we focus on the history of the development of games, the first two games (the Ping Pong-like tennis game, *Pong* and *Spacemar*) both had their origins in military research labs (the Los Alamos nuclear labs and MIT) and both were founded

by officers involved in similar military projects. This is crucially why Kline et al. argues that 'Interactive gaming is a spin-off of the military-industrial complex. – indeed a derivative of nuclear war preparations...' (ibid). In chapter three, we will further discuss the complex relationship between the military sector and the digital game industry.

Figure 2. The Interactive Game Industry (Kline et al. 2003:172)



1.3 Mapping Digital Game Genres

The concept of genre has served as an analytical tool in media studies for decades. The existence of genre can always be found in the literature of novels or films. It is a way of categorizing different styles of media content. To audiences, it provides the direct answers to define and differentiate media content with different shapes. According to John Frow (2006), genre is 'far from being mere 'stylistic' devices,' and, genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writings of history, philosophy, science, or in painting or everyday talk (p. 19). In essence, genre has consistently been used to help readers and viewers to group and identify particular characteristics and formats of films, television shows, literature or artistic works.

In reference to Burn and Carr (2006), the method of categorizing genres in digital games is very similar to the way it has been applied in film and television studies. The main difference that separates the ways genres are defined in games and television/Film is the extra component of game players' interaction. Compared to television and film, the use of genre in digital games reflects more on 'the dynamic relationships between producers, audiences and texts,' and is based on the principle that 'games involve rules...games' genre is determined by its rules' (cited in Carr et al. 2006:16-17). Wolf (2001) then argues that the main reason video game genre studies should be understood differently from literary and film genre studies is the nature of 'the direct and active participation of the audience in the form of the surrogate player-character...taking part in the central conflict of the game's narrative' (p. 114). Wolf's argument in relation to game genres re-adjusted Schatz's (1981) notion which originally defined film narrative as principally consisting of four basic elements of

establishment, animation, intensification and resolution (cited in Raessens and Goldstein 2005: 193). Wolf sees game stories as continuous texts of film narratives, and his argument is significant in that it highlights how extra components, such as the interactive experience, the goals and objectives of gaming, and the design of the game's player-character or the player controls, directly or indirectly influence the construction of diverse game formats and genres. Speaking of the condition of today's classification of digital game genres, Apperley (2006) insists that it is a pity that today's game genre system, which primarily decides, fixes and categorizes titles based on market logic, is through its focus, promoting the visual aesthetic and narrative form of games and obscuring the defining feature attached to this new medium. However, the selection of scholars shown below provides the basic idea of how, in practice and by definition, game genres are generally categorized and recognized:

Herz (1997) simply divides digital game genre into eight categories, including Action, Adventure, Fighting, Puzzle, Role-playing, Simulations, Sports, Strategy (pp. 27-31). Similarly, Newman (2004) managed to list seven of the most recognizable genres. These include Action and Adventure, Driving and Racing, First-Person Shooter, Platform and Puzzle, Roleplaying, Strategy, and Simulation, and Sports and Beat-'em-ups (p. 12). In recent years, Nieborg and Hermes (2008) have proposed five of the most recognizable genres including First-Person Shooters, Sports, Simulation, Real-Time Strategy, and Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). Providing a more detailed genre analysis, Wolf (2001) set out a longer list of various game genres. These covered 42 types of games including 'Abstract, Adaptation, Adventure, Artificial Life, Board Games, Capturing, Card Games, Catching, Chase, Collecting, Combat, Demo, Diagnostic, Dodging, Driving, Educational, Escape, Fighting, Flying, Gambling, Interactive Movie, Management

Simulation, Maze, Obstacle Course, Pencil-and-Paper Games, Pinball, Platform, Programming Games, Puzzle, Quiz, Racing, Role Playing, Rhythm and Dance, Shoot'Em'Up, Simulation, Sports, Strategy, Table-Top Games, Target, Text Adventure, Training Simulation, and Unity' (p. 117).

However, each genre on its own has a historical trajectory that can be easily followed. Arguably, in every form of media (particularly in games), genres are likely to be determined, constituted and affected by different cultural forces. This is caused by various cultural, regional or national interests. Within certain geopolitical contexts, the appearance of certain genres symbolically represents the multiple facets of cultural and social influences and values. Apparently many experienced game designers and knowledgeable game players today actually have the ability to distinguish such diversity orientated by different cultural conventions. This explains how particular game designs directly present and express the nature of their own cultures. The classic example we can find here is probably the *Street Fighter* (Japan made, representing the East) versus *Mortal Kombat* (America made, representing the West) story. The conflict between these two fighting games demonstrates that through certain styles of authentic representations and gaming, digital game genres have (and have to have) some kind of national and local significance within a competitive global market.

A game can become very popular among its formed community but rejected by others due to its culturally detached representations, aggressive/passive styles of gameplay, or offensive elements. For instance, the Japan-oriented cute and dating game genres are always seen as more accepted by East Asian gamers – a genre American gamers always feel curious about and find difficult to understand. Largely based on historical myths and ancient traditional Chinese stories and literature, games designed in Wu-Xia

(traditional Chinese oriental kung-fu stories and elements) style tend to attract Chinese-speaking gamers, who find themselves more culturally connected to them. Only a very few digital game genres, such as *Pokémon* or the *Final Fantasy* game series, can successfully invent 'odourless' (a term used by Koichi Iwabuchi) characters and stories, and become accepted by cultures segmented with different interests and tastes. However, through creating more creative fictional/non-fictional stories and interesting game characters/avatars, new emerging genres still have the opportunity to introduce 'fresh' and 'never-had' game experiences and content that can generate sales and be widely recognized as the next global legend by international gamers. As Burn and Carr once noted, 'the [game] genre pulls towards the past, as well as the future, seeking to reach new audiences who may be restless with existing formulae' (2006: 28).

1.4 The Cultural Politics of Game Production: Digital Game Genres in the Global West and East

Although much has been said about the increasing cross-cultural flows and the US/Japan-leading global system of digital game culture and industry, it is still too early to assume that gaming provides the best outcome to harmonize different cultures and flatten the world hereafter (e.g. see Wark (2007)). In Wark's work digital games are clearly seen as a 'utopian version of the world'. Not only are there variations in different games' cultural representations, but there are also people from different cultures that have varying perceptions towards gameplay. Sometimes the choice of 'where to play games' is different, depending on local gamers and communities.

The choice of gameplay environments open to players is generally dictated by their culture. People are commonly aware that the majority of Western gamers prefer to play

digital games at home, whilst East Asians are more likely to play in cyber cafes and internet cafés. In theoretical terms, Danico and Vo have demonstrated that ‘cyber cafes have become a social and cultural outlet where young Asian American men can feel a sense of achievement and assert their masculinity in a society that often demasculinizes them’ (2004:185). While gamers from different cultures have diverse preferences in regard to their ‘play environments,’ different cultural atmospheres simultaneously divide audiences’ genre preferences and geographical tastes, which in turn is varied by different styles of play. It has been argued that digital game genres cannot escape from profound influences caused by different national and cultural forces. For example, some academics notice that both orientalism and stereotypes remain in certain types of games (Douglas 2002, Tucker 2006, Consalvo 2007, Hutchinson 2007, Ketchum and Peck 2011). Whether digital games are pure fun or serious, create cultural harmony or conflict, Rachel Hughes (2009) asserted that it is the ‘gameworld geopolitics’ and the ‘patterns of genre’ that reflect ‘representational logics of games’ (p. 1).

In order to prove that cultures can be a key influence in deciding different cultural consumption, Kerr (2006) provided some clear evidence by highlighting that the ‘American Football game [does] not sell in Europe and that Japanese dating games rarely make it to the West...It appears that Japanese games sell better than Western games sell in Japan’ (p.96). Based on what he said, it is not difficult to see that different cultural contexts would cause variations in their local audiences’ personal preferences and tastes. Peeking into the activities of particular genres can help us recognize the social-cultural politics hidden behind the cause of different cultural and geopolitical consequences and contradictions. Hansen et al. (1998), whose idea is originally based on Feuer’s (1992) ideological approach, sees genre as an instrument of control. They urge us that ‘genres are seen to reproduce the ideologies of capitalism, nationalism,

individualism...’ (p. 183). Hence, by borrowing their arguments about genre, it is fair to argue that genres in digital games can also be culturally political. In this respect, Iwabuchi (2007) proposes the idea that, within different cultural trajectories, different cultural traditions and conditions determine the appeal of Japanese and American cultural products and images. As he notes:

‘Japanese cultural products are culturally neutral...animation, computer games and characters and the appeal of such products are relatively autonomous from the cultural images of the country of production...In contrast to American counterparts...they are free from any association with particular national, racial, or cultural characteristics’ (p. 8).

Again, his argument exposes the essential difference of the play-culture that distances the West from the East. In Iwabuchi’s view, Japanese popular cultural products like games and manga are what he termed as ‘culturally odourless commodities’. Unlike Western-made games, they seem to have less intention to impose certain ‘real-world’ values on their audiences (in a sense, more fictional), therefore the stories/graphic styles or characters created by Japanese artists are more cartoonish and ‘unreal.’ The best example we can find to validate his argument about this diversity is the increasing cute cartoon characters/figures invented by the Japanese industry.

Historically speaking, gamers in East Asia prefer role-playing games to be a kind of cultural experience created by the Japanese animation and game empire. A recent article written for MSNBC News by Steven Kent claims that: ‘Japanese gamers generally prefer fantasy, strategy, and role-playing games, while U.S. gamers prefer crime, shooters and sports. Even when it comes to fighting games, U.S. tastes have

been more violent, historically speaking'¹⁸ A similar perspective can also be found in Diane Carr's words: 'from literature to comics, from horror movies to militaristic FPS games, it is not difficult to find examples of Western texts that feature cultural or political bias' (Carr 2007, cited in Atkins and Krzywinska 2007:232). The next table validates their arguments that Japanese-made games sell better in the West, and Western made 'more violent' content has not yet convinced the East Asian gamers. According to the *Top Global Markets Report*, the five best selling games in 2009 were ranked as follows:

Table 2. 2009 Top 5 Video Game Titles (source: *Top Global Markets Report/Retail Tracking Service*)¹⁹

2009 Game Titles	Publisher	Total	US Retail	Japan Retail	UK Retail
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Activision	11.86 million	8.82 million	237.5 K	2.80 million
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	7.57 million	4.54 million	1.54 million	1.49 million
New Super Mario Bros. Wii	Nintendo	7.41 million	4.23 million	2.49 million	687.3 K
Wii Fit Plus	Nintendo	5.80 million	3.53 million	1.30 million	968.3 K
Wii Fit	Nintendo	5.44 million	3.60 million	588.3 K	1.25 million

Through viewing the sales figures of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* in the U.S., Japan and the UK, it is clear that the East Asian market, and in particular Japan, is not a promising market for the first person shooter genre. According to Hideo Kojima, the creator of *Metal Gear Solid*, the reason for this cannot be more simple: 'Japanese players do not like being thrown into an arena in which they are given very little instruction,'²⁰ This again reflects the diversity embedded in the gameplay culture and shows the high

¹⁸ Kent (2004) Video games that get lost in translation. Source from: msnbc.com < <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4780423>>.

¹⁹ Cited in www.mcvuk.com, *Global Video Game Market Analysis* – 2009.

²⁰ Source: MSNBC news website, Video games that gets lost in translation, available from: < <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4780423>>.

level of cultural resistance to the FPS genre amongst East Asian gamers.

1.5 The Historical Context of First-Person-Shooter Games

In contrast to Nintendo, which is already a well-established brand to represent games associated with Japan and created a Japan-centric East Asian game culture since the 1980s, the US game industry began to realize the importance of creating and developing a genre of its own. The First-Person-Shooter game genre, which is also known as the Shoot'em'up genre, was born within the context of global cultural and economical competition. We can certainly say that the first-person-shooter genre is a cultural product of the West and that its appearance signifies a high degree of genre politics and competition between the Western and Eastern game producers. This game genre has always been considered by some to be too violent and brutal. Whilst it is adored by its fans it is hated by others, particularly horrified parents. Within an environment where societies, governments and families hold conservative beliefs and attitudes, this style of game play and genre often receive strong negative criticism in regard to its core elements of non-stop shooting and killing.

The first generation of first person shooter games was invented with games like *Maze War* and *Spasim* in the 1980s. During the 1990s, as the genre became more popular, successful 3D FPS games titles like *Wolfenstein 3D* and the *Doom* series were introduced to the global market. When this all-about-killing genre was shown to mass audiences for the first time, it unsurprisingly created a new generic appetite among the global game fans. With its 3D technology, which improved and advanced from 1995, this particular genre achieved another milestone when more attractive counter-terrorist characters and fictional narratives were added to its playing features. Table 3 below

briefly highlights some key historical landmarks in the evolution of the FPS genre before the millennium.

Table 3. The Evolution of the First-Person-Shooter Genre before 2000

Year of Released	Game Title	The Significance of the Event
1973	Maze War	Recorded as the earliest FPS game
1974	Spasim	The first tank simulator developed for the U.S army
1980	Battlezone (Arcade)	The first arcade FPS made available for consumers
1983	Battlezone (Home PC)	The first home computer FPS to mass market
1992	Wolfenstein 3D	The game took FPS gaming to another level with textual 3D graphics, high quality sound, and unique playing style.
1993	Doom	The first FPS game allows multi-players competitions and turns FPS into mainstream.
1995	Star Wars: Dark Forces	The game turns the worldwide popular Star Wars into FPS style of game playing.
1996	Daggerfall	A genre was mixed with RPG and FPS - FPS blended into other genres
1996	Quake	This game improves 2-dimentional pop-up enemies to 3-dimentional models.
1997	Golden Eye 007	The first FPS game was introduced to home consoles.
1998	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six	The first FPS introduced the

		counter-terrorism theme, of using a realistic combat-simulation approach.
1998	Half-life	With much complicated and improved graphics and virtual environment, this game signifies the maturity and completion of the FPS genre.
1999	Counter-Strike	One of the most popular game to continue the counter-terrorism scenario and matured the 'tactical shooter' genre.
2000	Halo	The game broke the sales record to have one million units sold within a year and five million copies sold before 2005. It is claimed to be the best FPS by magazines and critics.

With the creation of smoother 3D graphic design and the public's familiarity with the Hollywood style of storytelling and FPS gaming, from the year 2000 onwards a new kind of title development led FPS production and gaming towards an innovative, genre-breaking direction that has made FPS one of the 'most-wanted' game genres this century. FPS games utilized historical stories of war as well as current affairs. They borrowed visual sequences from World War II as well as modern combat to successfully produce some of the most popular FPS series during a golden period. The tragic events of 9/11 in 2001 led to deeper relationships and co-operation across the U.S. government, the entertainment industry and military departments. Consequently, more movies and FPS games based on World War II and future fictional or non-fictional conflict scenarios were produced with upgraded graphics and resolutions to sustain global fans' interest in military and war. Game titles like *Battlefield*, *Call of*

Duty, Resistance, Medal of Honor, Halo, and America's Army series have shown the entertainment value and 'not serious side' of war. They have introduced virtual role-playing soldiers that have pushed games' sales figures to record levels; attracting millions of international gamers. The latest two versions of COD titles, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops* released in 2009 and 2010 respectively, each sold more than 12 million copies across the world, which in turn created \$550 million. Prior to this it had been thought unimaginable that there could be such a potentially huge global audience for war as entertainment.

Today a huge selection of FPS games is available in the market. It is also important to acknowledge that there is a deep technological connection between these blockbuster war game titles. If we look at the next figure we see that popular FPS games were actually developed using the same or similar engines. It illustrates how the FPS genre was repeatedly developed using one or two specific engines, with the same principle recycled in this genre.

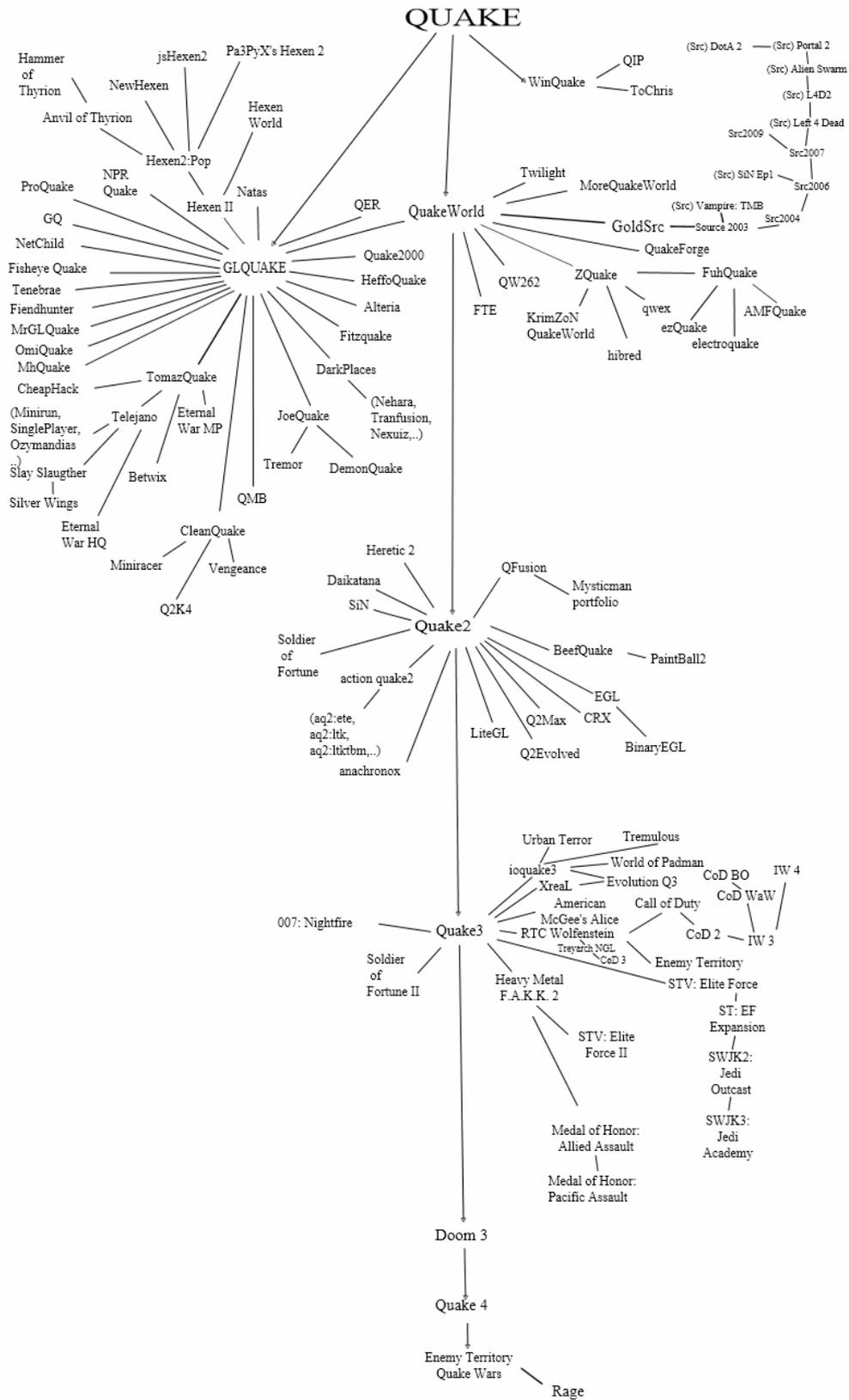


Figure 3. The Family Tree of FPS Games based on Quake Engines²¹

²¹ Source from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Quake_-_family_tree.svg>.

The growth of the FPS genre continues to push the limits of global cultural barriers, and keeps challenging the cultural boundaries framed by national and geographical rules. The western producers' desire to raise global interest in war/military games has continued to drive the market since 9/11 – it can easily be captured in producer's minds. Bobby Kotick, the CEO of the company Activision which produced the successful *Call of Duty* game series, expressed their ambitions in an interview:

'globalism. No, we don't mean the global-trotting narrative of the games, but rather Activision's plans to cash in on the rest of the planet...The popular global fantasy of being a soldier is allowing us to enter new geographies, leveraging expertise only companies like Blizzard have in markets like China and Korea...we have dedicated teams in these new markets creating content for the audience that, to date, have only been satisfied by Blizzard games'.²²

As the issue of killing and violence in games remains a controversial one in Japanese society it will be a challenging task for the American conglomerates to extend their global distribution of war/military games into East Asia. The continuing failure of FPS in Japan forced the Japanese game magazine, Famitsu in 2008 to publish an eight page article called 'Shall we shoot a little?'²³ (as shown in picture 3). In this piece a cute Japanese lady dressed in a bikini is featured holding a gun, tackling first person and third person shooters. A few years later, the famous Kotaku game news website had another article published entitled '78 Year Old Japanese Man *Hearts* Western FPS Games',²⁴ (as shown in picture 4) which reported how a 78 year old FPS game

²² Activision CEO teases Call of Duty plans for China, resource from joystiq news:
<<http://www.joystiq.com/2010/05/06/activision-ceo-teases-call-of-duty-plans-for-china-korea/>>

²³ Famitsu encourages Japanese gamers into FPS, resource from SK gaming website:
<http://www.sk-gaming.com/content/17344-Famitsu_encourages_Japanese_gamers_into_FPS>

²⁴ 60 Year Old Japanese Man 'Hearts' Western FPS Games, resource from Kotaku website:
<<http://kotaku.com/5099533/78-year-old-japanese-man-hearts-western-fps-games>>.

enthusiast kept his positive attitude towards FPS gaming from the ripe age of 65. Both articles sought to make FPS games more culturally relevant to Japan gamers. It appears that the FPS genre is yet to satisfy most Japanese gamers whose interest in games are generated within a totally different set of cultural conventions. However, in this post-9/11 era it will be interesting to monitor how thoroughly the war-themed FPS genre invades the global market, particularly the geographically significant East Asia region. Although to date Japanese gamers appear to have rejected this genre, we have to bear in mind that reports are showing that the number of FPS players in Japan (and East Asia) is slowly increasing every year; attracting particular segmented groups who have a specific interest in military and war culture. In short, the complex ways in which this genre is transforming itself correspond perfectly to Rachel Hughes' sharp observation: 'game genres play at geopolitics, they resonate with and profit from new technologies and ways of seeing made possible by the conduct of contemporary conflicts'(2009:2).



Picture 3. Famitsu magazine: shall we shoot a little

KOTAKU 24,990 views, Nov 27, 2008 5:00 AM

JAPAN Share Like 7

78 Year Old Japanese Man *Hearts* Western FPS Games

 **Brian Ashcraft** —The stereotype is two-part: Japanese people don't like FPS games, and old people only play the Wii. Meet 78 year-old Akira Kitajima. He's here to destroy those notions and snipe your ass.



Picture 4. Kotaku website article: 78 Year Old Japanese Man *Hearts* Western FPS Games

Conclusion

From a 'broad perspective, Chapter One summarized some of the most important features in the global digital game culture and focused on the emerging 'gamescape' by reviewing the global culture thesis, the industrial structure of digital games, digital game studies, genre development, and most importantly the cultural politics that have resonated in the conflict of genres. From a historical point of view, the U.S. and Japan's cultural influences and their maturing global production and distribution networks have led to the hybridized and transnational/transcultural gameplay culture that we see today. The two countries have made huge efforts to cultivate this particular industry; transforming it into an irresistible cultural-economic force. In this regard Wark (2007) appropriately claims that 'the game has colonized its rivals within the cultural realm, from the spectacle of cinema to the simulations of television. Stories no longer opiate us with imaginary reconciliations of real problems. The Story just recounts the steps by which someone beat someone else – a real victory for imaginary stakes...All this is perfectly of a piece with a reality, which is itself an artificial arena,

where everyone is born a gamer, waiting for their turn' (section 007). While the information presented in this chapter has helped us articulate the global culture of digital games and genres, the next chapter will focus more on the bottom end of the global chain to reveal the mysterious identity of gamers.

Chapter Two:

Theoretical Perspectives on Gamers and Gameplay

'Play enables the exploration of that tissue boundary between fantasy and reality, between the real and imagined, between the self and the other. In play we have license to explore, both ourselves and our society. In play we investigate culture, but we also create it.'

(Roger Silverstone, 1999:64)

2.1 Overview: Digital Game Studies

Two contemporary scholars, James Newman and Ian Bogost have pointed out that both the general public and academics have lacked confidence to engage with digital games and thus mistakenly paid little attention to this special medium. Newman (2004) warned that video games should no longer be considered 'just a game,' and argued for the analysis of the social, cultural, and political aspects of digital games and gamers.²⁵ Likewise, Ian Bogost's (2007) book, *Persuasive Games* noted that videogames still struggled to be accepted as a cultural form despite their commercial success. Responding to both Newman and Bogost's warnings, more scholars have moved towards the study of digital games and thus have a greater respect for this subject. Hence, with more academics keen to get into this new research field, digital games today can be defined as a medium, a new media and an international/cultural/popular cultural phenomenon (Wolf 2001, Masuyama 2002, Berger 2002, Lister et al. 2003, Balnaves *et al.* 2009). Digital (video) game study is now categorized as a division of

²⁵ Newman argued the two key misconceptions, which make the videogames as a forgotten medium and causes the academics to ignore computer games, are: firstly, 'videogames are seen as being children's medium,' and secondly, 'videogames are considered mere trifles - low art - carrying none of the weight, gravitas or credibility of more traditional media.'(2004: 5).

contemporary new media studies (Dovey and Kennedy 2006) and digital gaming and digital game play are considered as a projection of a new form of (new) media and cultural practice (Roig *et al.* 2009). Meanwhile, there are more contemporary researchers with different theoretical backgrounds (e.g. Semiotics, Film Studies, Psychoanalysis, Media Studies, or Cultural Studies etc.) curious about this new medium and surprised by the rapid speed of its global penetration and diffusion. The increase in scholarly interest in digital game studies has resulted in the gradual integration of a variety of disciplines and new perspectives into the global game ontology. Reviewing these different theoretical perspectives can help us unfold the myth of gaming and establish a clearer sense of digital game culture.

To begin with, Berger (2002) tried to find out the fundamental differences between the practices of TV and film viewing and video game playing:

Table 4. The Difference between Television, Film Viewing and Video Game Playing (Berger 2002:105)

Television, Film Viewing	Video Game Playing
Spectatorship	Participation
Empathy	Immersion
Social cohesion	Alienation

Furthermore, Dovey and Kennedy (2006) elaborate on the table below to explain the fundamental difference between traditional and new media studies. The features under new media appropriately apply to multifaceted digital games.

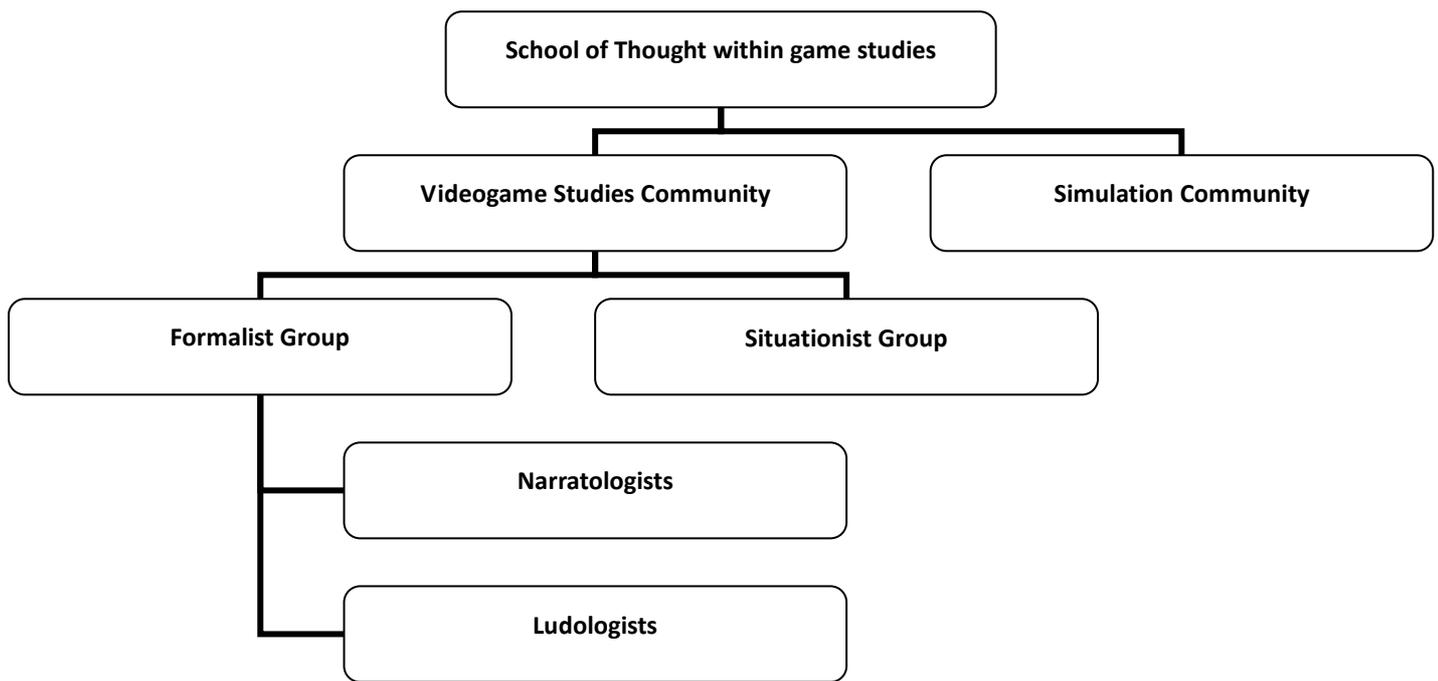
Table 5. Different characteristics of Old and New Media (Dovey and Kennedy 2006: 3).

Media Studies	New Media Studies
The effects of technology are socially determined	The nature of the society is technologically determined
Active audience	Interactive audience
Interpretation	Experience
Spectatorship	Immersion
Representation	Simulation
Centralized Media	Ubiquitous Media
Consumer	Participant/co-creator
Work	Play

Both ideas proposed above actually remind us that academic research in new media today should move forward and away from the previous understanding of media culture. Dovey, Kennedy and Berger's lists address the same point that is put across by Creeber and Martin (2009), who, in their book *Digital Cultures: Understanding New Media*, follow David Gauntlett's critics to call for a switch among academics in order to upgrade existing knowledge from Media Studies 1.0 to Media Studies 2.0. The shifting focus has happened very intensively in the past few years, as new (cultural) identities keep emerging and are constructed by the newly founded digital formats and the creative uses of interactive new media. If we compare how different the old/new media is between the 'active audience/interactive users' paradigm and the ways people interpret/experience old and new media content, new approaches and methods are urgently needed to allow more precise investigation into the body of new media and its relative, digital games. Although digital game studies are lacking theoretical and methodological input to progress, and are consequently far behind other media

subjects, they have been theorized better during the past five years. The development of the school of thought within game studies can be drawn in the next figure.

Figure 4. The Schools of Thought within Digital Game Studies (source from: Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al.* 2006:11, organized by this research)



Through Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al's* (2006) explanation, the early digital game study was divided by two leading groups, Narratologists and Ludologists – ‘one prioritizes representation while the other prioritizes rules.’ (p. 11). Generally speaking, these two groups have different philosophical interpretations and perceptions about games. Both sides constantly challenge each other based on the question of how game content should be interpreted in terms of its interactivity and sophisticatedly constructed narrative structure. By sticking to a more creative ludic approach, ludologists doubt whether narrativity in digital games is as important as simulation rules. Countering ludologists’ accusations, narratologists insist continuing traditional narratology in

digital game studies is an unavoidable process. However, these critical debates are mostly generated by experienced game developers, designers and producers who already have great knowledge in game designing, developing or programming. For example, in the ludologists' camp, the well-known representatives are Markku Eskelinen, Gonzalo Frasca, Espen Aarseth and Jesper Juul. In the narratologists' camp, Marie-Laure Ryan and Janet Murray are two of the most significant contributors.

For many years, scholars from these camps have constantly questioned each other about the mythical relationship between game content, game rules and game players. An enormous number of works and papers have therefore been produced to discuss whether game narrative studies are appropriate and should be continued in digital game analysis. In the ludologists's view, narratologists are labeled as 'game formalists' who falsely claim that digital games, to some extent, must somehow connect to particular form of narration, and wrongly assume that narratives and games definitely go together. In the narratologists's view, ludologists represent a serving ideology of 'game essentialism,' thinking that analyzing game mechanics, functions and rules of play is the only way to break down the game mechanism. It is also argued that by doing so the ludologists overemphasize digital games' 'ludic structure' over novels, films and any medium with a narrative nature.

However, these philosophical debates in relation to the essentiality of digital games and gameplay can be extremely troublesome and misleading. This is because the different genres of games, styles of gameplay and levels of engagements always vary in each game design. In this regard, Apperley (2010) has already taught us a simple rule: 'different contexts of play create completely different experiences' (p. 35). Based on his argument, we can simply assert that gamers are mostly situated in a constantly

changing virtual landscape. Their emotions and different levels of immersion and gaming experience are decided by different selections of game-playing modes which they fall into. Therefore, by engaging in different scenarios and switching between different methods of gameplay, gamers learn to find the most appropriate interactive formation that will help them create the most pleasurable gaming experience. This form of game-playing process involves different steps of negotiation and self-adjustment, the complexity of which may result in a single group/theoretical approach towards defining it a problem.

However, at the 2005 DiGRA conference, the on-going tensions and the theoretical contradictions caused by the ludology/narratology split was eventually reviewed and sorted in a sensible dialogue between the two parties (marked by Frasca (2003) as ‘a debate that never took place.’). After the event, the relationship between both parties improved and the well-categorized intellectuals from both sides were encouraged to be more open-minded. These concessions were agreed in order to create an academic environment where the further development of game theories would be encouraged and more diverse opinions and analysis could be expanded upon (Murray 2005). After both camps had agreed to allow one another more space and accept each other ideologically, methodologically and theoretically, it allowed different theoretical voices and methods in digital game analysis to be heard.

Historically speaking, the typology of game studies and game literatures was found in the second quarter of the 20th century when the two best-known ‘play philosophers’, Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois, first opened discussions around the originality of the subjects of manhood, play and games. The Dutch philosopher, Huizinga (1938) introduced the famous idea of ‘the magic circle’ in his book, *Homo Ludens* to argue that

play is central to all human activities and has existed in our civilization for centuries. He then points out that play, as a form of cultural practice, separates our real and ordinary life. Therefore different forms of ‘the card-tables, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice...’ can all be recognized as ‘function play-grounds’ (p. 10). In Caillois’s (2001) classic book, *Man, Play, and Games*, he (2001) expands Huizinga’s play thesis to identify play as bounded by rules and representing four inner modes, including ‘competition, chance, simulation and vertigo’. Furthermore, Caillois argues that games contain the significant qualities of ‘freedom, separateness, rules, uncertainty of outcome, non-productiveness and make-believe’ (2001: 9-10). Both Huizinga and Caillois’s notions towards the nature of play are an attempt to explain the basic relationship and connection between man, games, and play which settled a meta-philosophical understanding. From 1995 onwards, many fundamental game theorists and their theories are rooted on Huizinga and Caillois’s theoretical influences. The next section briefly highlights some of the most popular game writers and their contribution to the first generation of digital game studies.

To begin with, the female game writer, Herz (1997), in her book *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired our Minds*, traces the historical development of video games. She argues that videogames should no longer be considered as subculture because, right before the millennium, the gaming world already owned ‘...50 million adults whose memory and imagination have been colored by Atari, Nintendo and Sega’ (p. 1). Unlike Herz, Wolf (2001) studied digital games as an emerging medium which merged artistic forms and technological forms. He proposed that digital games should be analyzed in four parts: space, time, narrative and genre, reflecting the social and cultural functions of digital games. In addition to these four aspects, he defines a game as constituted by the basic elements of ‘conflict

(against an opponent or circumstances), rules (determining what can and cannot be done and when), use of some player ability (such as skills, strategy, or luck), and...valued outcome (such as winning vs. losing, or the attacking of the highest score or fastest time for the completing of a task)' (p. 14). Kent (2001) then uses the concept of 'Super Mario Nation' to describe the generational battles between different digital game consoles and reviews the business professionals who made historical contributions to digital games, such as William A. Higginbotham²⁶, Ralph Baer²⁷, Steven Russell²⁸, Nolan Bushnell²⁹, and Minoru Arakawa³⁰. Their inventions which have been very important in the development of digital games are all recorded in Kent's book *The Ultimate History of Video Games: from Pong to Pokemon and Beyond*. The book examines the 40 years' Cultural Revolution and transformation of digital games since 1960. Poole (2000) chooses biological metaphors to define digital games as 'programmed by nature to be as promiscuous as possible: the more humans impregnated with code, the more likely that some of the next generation would survive to breed in their turn' (p. 15). His book, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames* recounts some key historical events in the rise of digital games. As he notes, the growth of video games was predictable from two cases. The first was when Sony paid UEFA Champions League the \$10 million sponsorship fees, and the second was when the Japanese software giant, Square, made a \$80 million computer-generated (CG) sci-fi film, *Final Fantasy*.³¹ Generally speaking, Poole's study can be read as one of the few historical books to have collated a large amount of information relating to the video game industry's activities during the past 40 years. It also discusses the most

²⁶ William Higginbotham is the creator of the first computer game, *Tennis for Two* in 1958.

²⁷ Ralph Baer developed the original model of the first console system 'the Brown Box' in 1967, which was developed by the consumer electronics company Magnavox to become the 'Magnavox Odyssey' in 1971'

²⁸ Steven Russell is the inventor of the game Spacewar. The game was developed at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1962.

²⁹ Nolan Bushnell is the founder of Atari company and the co-founder of the earliest arcade game 'Pong' in 1972.

³⁰ Minoru Arakawa was the founder and the first president of Nintendo America in 1980.

³¹ The idea of Final Fantasy in movie is based on Square's previous successful Final Fantasy game series.

influential game genres, characters and titles.

More importantly, Kline *et al.* (2003) studied digital games from a more critical perspective; combining political-economy with cultural studies. Utilizing the three-circuits model (technology, marketing and culture), their work largely referenced media theory, political economy and culture studies; re-conceptualizing the mediatized global digital game marketplace. In their opinion ‘the moment of play...has to be seen within the overarching and constraining cycles of post-Fordist information capitalism’ (p. 294). Most of their views continued Raymond William’s sceptical perspective in new media, and is embedded with the worries that ‘the fate of the digital world market...is profoundly problematic and very uncertain’ (p. 298). However, their book *Digital Play: the Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* surveys a large number of theories of media and culture theories to draw a clear picture of the contemporary digital games culture and industry. Unlike Kline *et al.*’s focus on the hard structure of digital game culture, Gee (2003) chose a different approach. Viewing gaming as a learning process, he saw gaming practices as a form of social achievement. Connecting three areas of research – situated cognition, new literacy studies and connectionism, Gee contributed two controversial concepts: Firstly, he deals with videogames as ‘semiotic domains’: ‘when people learn to play videogames, they are learning a new literacy’ (p. 13). As with languages, images, or other visual symbols, the videogame is defined as a linguistic system constructed of signs and images. Gee called these design ‘grammars’ (p. 30). The gaming process is then defined as ‘situated meaning’. Gee believed that ‘video games are potentially particularly good places where people can learn to situate meanings through embodied experiences in a complex semiotic domain and mediate on the process’ (p. 26).

Other iconic intellectuals like Joost Raessens characterized computer games as part of the *'Participatory Media Culture,'* whilst Henry Jenkins defined games as the new lively art (both cited in Raessens and Goldstein 2005). Based on his analysis in the three domains of participation (known as interpretation, reconfiguration, and construction), Raessens concluded that the four principles of computer games (multimediality, virtuality, interactivity, and connectivity) '[offered] players the ability to exchange ideas, knowledge and game elements.' The participatory cultural feature can easily be found in massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG's), such as *Ultimate Online* (Electronic Arts, 1997), *Everquest* (Sony, 1998), and *Star Wars Galaxy* (Lucas, 2003), in which 'decentralized and self-organizing communities help shape the stories' (p. 374). Instead of approaching video games from social, cultural, economic theoretical perspectives, Jenkins (2005) used the category of aesthetics as a creative term to understand the artistic form of computer and video games. He said: 'The authenticities of contemporary game design...operates in a global context...our current game genres took shape as a conversation between Japanese and American industries' (cited in Raessens and Goldstein, 2005: 178).

Furthermore, Alexander Galloway's (2006) book *Gaming-Essays on Algorithmic Culture* digs into the action of gaming, and explores the continuing narrative and visual transition from films to games and the deeper connection of realism and games designed with a first person's view. In Galloway's writings, the most impressive argument is the way he divides gaming realism into three levels – representative, social, and behavioural. This typological framework is especially useful to unfold the complexity of gamers' basic perceptions about realism, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

Reviewing these theoretical notions and debates, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2006)

proposed the table below to summarize the existing approaches attached to the study of the game content, gamers, game culture and ontology. This table organized the most commonly used methods and their theoretical ground in contemporary digital game research.

Table 6. Four major types of analysis (Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al.* 2006:10)

Types of Analysis	Common Methodologies	Theoretical Inspiration	Common Interest
Game	Textual Analysis	Comparative literature, film studies	Design choices, meaning
Player	Observation, interviews, surveys	Sociology, ethnography, cultural studies	Use of games, game communities
Culture	Interviews, textual analysis	Cultural studies, sociology	Games as cultural objects, games as part of the media ecology
Ontology	Philosophical enquiry	Various (e.g. philosophy, cultural history, literary criticism)	Logical/philosophical foundations of games and gaming

2.2 Gamers as Fans

The discourse and study of gamers, as well as their gameplay agency and identity, are partly influenced by previous theoretical debates about television and film audiences. With more complicated mediating experiences, such as playability and interactivity, intervening in the communication process between gamers and game content, today's academics have begun to realize there is some kind of limitation if only seeing gamers as another form of media audience. It is now commonly argued that gamers' gaming

experience is a totally different psychological journey which has challenged the existing knowledge model of television and film viewers. Playing a game means a more sophisticated communication and interaction process between human and machine. As Lorimer (2005) illustrates, gaming is ‘more than representational, involving various doings, viewings and feelings’ (see Hughes 2009). We also have to bear in mind, gamers, instead of staring at the screen and receiving one-way images, are expected to react to what they see on the screen and ‘do things’.³² (Newman 2004). The different-kinds of actions gamers do in their routine gaming practices – for example, creating and controlling an avatar, searching maps, following plots and moving physical bodies etc., differentiate the fundamental principles of being an audience and a gamer. For a game to be judged as good or bad, success or failure totally depends on gamers’ personal interactive experience and the levels of pleasure produced and received. This is varied by different conditions of participation and immersion. Gamers’ sustainable interests and freedom of choices control and decide the selling-curve and life time of each game. John Fiske (1987) therefore notes, ‘games and texts construct ordered worlds within which the players/readers can experience the pleasures of both freedom and control’ (p.228). This type of control is then further explained by Roig *et al.* (2009) as clearly ‘over representations’ and ‘related to the notion of embodiment’. These are the two main characteristics that create the feeling of in-game pleasure. The embodiment, is however, referred to as going ‘beyond voyeuristic pleasure and vicarious identification with representations’ (p.96). Hence, exploring gamers based on established knowledge in relation to readership, viewership or audience/media relationship is therefore limited. The study of gamers definitely requires a theoretical

³² Newman has told us the motivations and expectations of gameplay are based on the principles of: challenge, immersion and the expectations of players to do, not to watch (p. 16).

breakthrough that can be carried over from and within the audience discourse.

One of the most familiar ways to approach gamers can be referred to as the 'fandom theory' presented at the beginning of 1990s. The most influential fan observers like John Fiske, Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills, all fall into the fan theorists' category. The use of the idea of fandom was meant to recapture the cultural meanings of transforming audiences, styled by more segmented, consumption-driven media genre and content. The tension of having more diverse media has created a multi-faceted audience of groups and communities glued to their personalized interests and media content. What can obviously be seen in the appearance of fan-like audiences is a complete explosion of their shared-interests and habits in different kinds of programmes or characters, reflecting an individual, a particular social group or community's cultural tastes – be it love or hate. However, the beginning of the fandom theory was reinforced by the previous audience academics who, instead of sticking to the debates on the passive/active audience paradigm and the media effects model, decided to shift their focus on audiences' power of will rooted in their subjective and decisive identity and agency. Speaking of the very basic definition of fandom, the Japanese scholar, Koichi Iwabuchi (2010) explains that fans are commonly interpreted by today's society as having 'a passionate devotion to a particular media text or icon'; and in addition the term 'is often used to objectify those people and their activities with an element of judgment, be it negative or positive' (p. 87). The otaku and geeks communities (for example, see Shuttlecock's 'Geek Hierarchy,' in Coppa 2006: 232) mentioned in Chapter One are the two extreme cases of fandom (one closely attached to the ACG, and the other attached to fiction culture and technology). This demonstrates that, whether in the West or the East, these fan-formed communities require unbiased explorations, treatments and judgments (whilst these communities

continue to be misinterpreted, misunderstood, and wrongly portrayed by the mainstream).

The study of fandom has a clear-cut theoretical root. In the last 20 years, more media theorists joined the public debates on the meaning of fans and race to investigate the paradox of fans' minds and beings. There have been an enormous amount of scholarly texts analyzing different groups of fans chosen from particular sports, music, TV programmes, movies, or celebrities. Getting familiar with the wide range of studies can help us to relate more to like-minded gamers and better understand the agency of these game culture participants.

The sudden move of scholarly interests into fandom was triggered by a theoretical turn in audience ethnography and very much inspired by some core-writers in cultural studies, such as Janice Radway, Ien Ang, Stuart Hall, and David Moley. Overall, fan studies, according to Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007), can be contextualized into three distinct waves. The first wave of fan study was very much inspired by Michel de Certeau and John Fiske, whose works purposely positioned fan audiences' cultural tastes and power struggles by considering the identity formations attached to basic ethnographical elements of gender, age, class and race. The later first generation of fan scholars, like Camille Bacon-Smith, Henry Jenkins, Roberta Pearson, Constance Penley and John Tulloch, pushed fans to express themselves openly and freely. Together, their writings forced society to read different kinds of fans with less stereotyped boundaries. In a rhetorical process, fandom at this point became a more positive subject to be read. The second wave of academic studies developed based on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical input of the sociology of consumption. It began, around the mid-1990s, to reject the notion that the appearance of fans reflects some kind of cultural counterforce which

provides total freedom and power to the consumers. As a contrast to the first generation, the critical second generation of thinkers, like Chad Edward Dell, Cheryl Harris and Mark Jancovich, claim that fans remain slaves of the capitalist mechanism, and are thus manipulated by unequal societies and discriminated by irresistible cultural forces. To be more precise; they argue that the pleasure of being a fan, and fans' feelings of self-belonging to communities are a form of social illusion created by the inescapable economic, political, social and cultural frameworks together with market interests. Through consuming popular culture, fans become objects to be ideologically controlled. Hence, Gray *et al.* highlight that the main purpose at this stage is to prove 'what fandom is not – a prior space of cultural autonomy and resistance' in which it has showed a lack of interest in 'the individual motivations, enjoyment, and fan pleasures' (2007: 6). While both the first and second waves of work challenged the typology on fans' autonomy and critically examined fandom's unawareness of the existing cultural hierarchies, the third wave (in which contemporary academics are engaging) has to deal with more complex identities and the new media ethnography. These are attached to a new format of global modernity driven by the hyper-flows of information based on the growth of the internet and techno-sphere. The third generation of fan exploration mirrors the current scene. This involves many scholars targeting bloggers, online communities, social-network users or gamers with a specific interest in these groups' creativity, productivity and ways of expression tied to interactive new media. On this level, fans obviously put more energy into media (re)production and there is certainly a shifting balance of media power that brings more audience autonomy. Next, in order to articulate the ideas of fans and gamers, we will gather and revise some of the key figures in the studies of fans and gamers. By considering them separately, we are able to develop a clearer idea of how some of the most important thinkers are helping to change the world's stereotypes against fans.

As one of the core contributors, Lewis, in her book *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, published in 1992, examined the popular culture phenomenon and reviewed the characteristics of fans. This led her to firmly state that they are 'the most visible and identifiable of audiences' and 'we are all fans of something...to respect, admire, or desire (p.1).' McQuail (1997) also asserts that, with particular ways of expression and patterns of dress, behaviour and speech, fans' 'existence is owned entirely to the content offered...such kinds of audience are encouraged by the media to form into social groups' (p. 290). Importantly, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that fan audiences, according to different levels and sets of knowledge, participation, skills, productivity and social involvements, can be categorized into four possessive types: fans, cultists, enthusiasts and petty producers. In their proposed categories, fans in the first level learn to build up a sense of material production by relying on their own interests in particular media content. These fan groups are normally formed by diffused, unorganized audiences with activities incorporated into everyday life. Cultists, who are slightly different from fans, centralize their material productivity as a main everyday-life activity, and maintain the circulation of fan production within their cult network. Most of time, these activities cause the appearance of some recognizable cult communities. Unlike the fan/cult communities which only manage to verbally engage with the texts and contribute less in their material production, the so called enthusiasts, as evolved from fans and cultists, concentrate more heavily and participate in the (re)production of things. On this level, we can argue that the material production, in itself, can be recognized as a form of fan-liked object. Enthusiastics are fans of 'fan production.' To go beyond the knowable community and show the world the complete version of 'the imagined community,' petty producers are those who wisely pick up their own skills, apply their

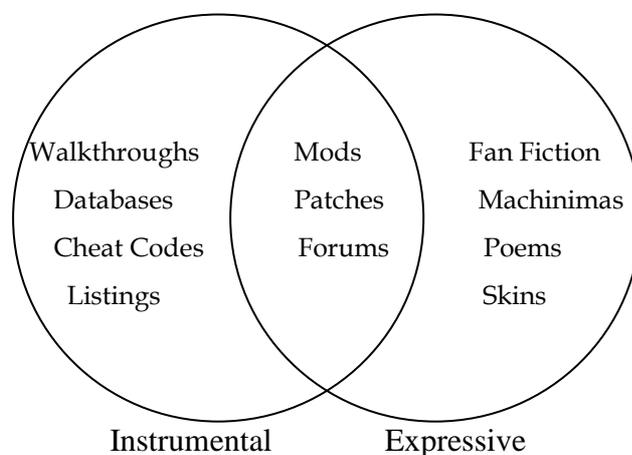
collective fan knowledge and successfully turn them into some sort of profession or professional practices linked to their holding interests and habits. At this stage, they largely produce for the market, but the main purpose of their material production is generated by activities outside the network that they originally and occasionally belonged to.

While Abercrombie and Longhurst impressively identified the four kinds of internal identities driven by fans-to-be consumers, other intellectuals like Hills (2002) look at fan culture in a simple way. They define fans as the people ‘obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band...somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom’ (p. ix). More significantly, Jenkins (2003) called himself a fan-academic. He explored the television fans of *Star Trek* and found that they have the potential to reinterpret, reproduce, and re-create the given texts. This strongly echoes his long-developing concept known as ‘fans as textual poachers’³³ proposed in 1992. Later, Hermes (2005) argued that fan cultures are positioned at a contradictory place where popular culture is intercepted by both national and international media conglomerates with the intention to ‘organize the sense of our belonging, our right, and our duties’ (p. 1). More recently, three books, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (edited by Gray *et al.* 2007), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (edited by Hellekson and Busse 2006), and *Mechademia Volume 5: Fanthropologies* (edited by Lunning 2010) collected a wide range of critical selections, reviewing the global fans’ activities and the different waves and movements which proliferate in fan culture.

³³ In Jenkins’ view, the idea of textual poachers is meant to explain the ways in which contemporary audiences of popular culture have a growing power and autonomy to select the media texts and play with them in their own interests. As he further emphasized: ‘fandom celebrates not exceptional texts, but exceptional readings’ (1992:284).

Until now, the studies of fandom have been proved helpful as a means to explore gamers. Experienced game scholars, like James Newman (2008, on playing culture), Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy (2006, on cyborg subjectivity and gameplay) and new emerging game researchers, like Robert Jones (2006, on Machinima and transformative play of video game fan culture), Hanna Wirman (2007, on power gamers and game productivity), Olli Sotamaa (2010, on motivations and practices of game modders) and Anne-Mette Albrechtslund (2010, on narrative practices of an game online community) have all begun to adopt fan discourse in their works to deconstruct and highlight gamers' different features of agency and identity. Gamers indeed produce immeasurable fan texts around the games they are obsessed with, and their deep participation in their material production, as in the forms of fan art (fanart), fan fiction (fanfic) and fan collection demonstrates how important fan productivity can be within the gamer culture. Like Wirman (2007) has already taught us, gamers are also people and fans of some kind 'with [a] special relation[ship] to a game or some other cultural text' (p. 371). Their productivity can easily be found in many types³⁴ (as shown in figure 5 below).

Figure 5. Different orientations of game-related productivity (Wirman 2007: 381).



³⁴ According to Wirman, gamer's productivity can be divided in two kinds – instrumental and expressive.

Fans are not only passively showing their love towards their favourite media content by saying they like them. Through real actions and activities they can truly express their passion to feel and identify their inner fandom quality. Digital game fans' 'must-do-something' philosophy, through their everyday gameplay and practices, can be seen as associated with previous academics' interpretations on media audiences' fandom nature. The most successful case that theoretically links audience studies, fandom studies and gamers research together is Garry Crawford's book *Video Gamers*. By referring to Jenkins' idea of seeing new generation audiences as textual poachers, Crawford (2012) proposes a key point that gamers should also be seen as special type of 'knowledge community' (p. 104-106). Crawford crucially brings in the idea of community to define the way gamers project some kind of shared and collective intelligence, a point I elaborate in the analysis chapter. Another book that sees gamers, especially the ones gathered in groups online, as a community bounded by gameplay is Celia Pearce's book *Communities of Play: Emergent Culture in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds*. In Pearce's definition, these free-migrating online tribes as what she terms 'play communities' are devoting 'a high level of effort and creativity to their play culture, often to the bewilderment of the population at large' (p. 3). Pearce's work is discussed in greater detail in the pages that follow.

Based on these established knowledge in relation to the cross-field between fans and digital gamers, the next section moves to discuss the terminology of 'gaming' and the cultural meaning of it by paying tribute to several theoretical thoughts.

2.3 Gameplay as 'Imagination Practice'

Among gamers' in-game and out-game activities, gameplay is the most obvious and

direct way of fan production. It is the first approach a gamer must take that leads him or her to begin his/her fandom journey. They have to play the game, explore his or her own insights of love or hate and then expand their fan imaginations in the different symptoms we see. From this point on, some of them will probably 'go pro' by digging into the development of game modifications and some will choose to find cheats and guides to enlarge their play experience. The remainder of the gamers shows their appreciation by editing different game videos and creating their own narratives through fiction-writing and drawing. However, playing games represents more than gamers' fandom-orientated values. Through gameplay, gamers, for the sake of their own self-satisfaction, are given opportunities to explore their dreams, exercise their fantasies, negotiate their (new) identities and find new (virtual) cultural experiences.

King (2007) in his study of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, finds that: 'In all gameplay, a tension exists between experience of the game-world in diegetic terms (an imaginary experience inside the game, in this case imaging oneself as engaged in particular military activities) and an experience of the game as a game (involves awareness of the process of play as an abstracted activity revolving around the performance of core game mechanism)' (p. 58). By insisting that the digital game culture symbolized a completion of the 'fantasy construction of identity' and borrowing Haraway's (1991) notion of 'cybord imaginary,' Dovey and Kennedy discovered that whilst in intensive gameplay, gamers experience 'a loss of a sense of time, place or self' (2006: 8). Meanwhile, to Kücklich and his colleagues, playing and gaming can also be seen as 'practices that create a cross-over between the real world and an imaginary or fictional world' (2004:29). This cross-over that allows all gamers to escape reality and enter their imagination can be seen in their preference for and involvement with various kinds of role-playing.

These numerous kinds of role-playing within different games reflect a universal truth that games encourage gamers to put their imaginations into practice. Gamers can become what they imagine themselves to be in the gaming world. In nearly every game, gamers have to convince themselves that they fall into different roles and have different missions or tasks to complete. In this regard, King and Krzywinska (2006) clearly illustrate that ‘All players are aware, at some level, that the gamescape is an artificially constructed and limited environment. Players are generally very happy, and willing, to ‘suspend disbelief,’ however, to allow themselves to be taken in by the illusion that the worlds in which they play are more than just entirely arbitrary constructs’ (p.119). Role-playing, in this kind of ‘making-self-believe’ process, helps gamers to escape from their real-life identity and play into their constructed second (sometimes third, fourth or even more) identities. Gamers wisely adjust their roles in different games and soon learn what roles the games they choose to play have to offer. Thus, a war gamer can hold his virtual rifle by playing a soldier. A strategic gamer can conduct an offense/defense formula by playing a general. A life simulation gamer can create lives by playing God. Many music games today then offer gamers the opportunity to play different musical instruments like real musicians and dancers. In this regard, Berger tells us: ‘Games aren’t models of reality and don’t claim to be; what they do is represent an emotional reality that generates the desired fantasies in the mind of players’ (2002: 14).

2.4 Recent Research on Gamers and Gaming Practice/Experience

With regards to the history of game theory mentioned earlier in the section 2.1, Huizinga and Caillois set a theoretical paradigm which came before later studies in

play/games, when digital games were not as advanced as they are today. In order to be able to find a theoretical framework which is more appropriate to our decade and help us deconstruct the contemporary 'hyper gaming' atmosphere, several studies have recently appeared, providing a series of interesting interpretations in relation to gamers' multifaceted identities as well as the nature of their psychological processes in gaming.

IDC and IDG Entertainment (IDGE) divided gamers into five segments: Core Gamers, Status Gamers, Social Gamers, Active Gamers, and Casual Gamers, judged by the way people purchase and treat games.³⁵ Looking at gamers from a game design's perspective, Nicole Lazzaro, the founder of the research company XEO Design, found that their complex emotions³⁶ can be divided in four aspects: Hard Fun, Easy Fun, Altered States and The People Factor. These can be categorized by different criteria, e.g. what players like most playing, and how they create unique emotion without story etc. Both professional findings above are rather vague and general. Their results were produced mainly for marketing reasons in order to help designers capture gamers' thoughts and minds. Although their interpretations are basic and somewhat limited and weak in academic terms, they still attempt to categorize and conceptualize gamers. Studying of different types of gamers and what they do with games has become a common approach to analyze gamers' intentions and motivations. A classic study we can think of is Richard Bartle's (1996) taxonomy which looks at gamers' four different characteristics and expressions. Bartle's typology has been widely accepted as one of the most recognized classic models to pin down online gamers'

³⁵ According to the report, 'Core gamer choose gaming as their main form of entertainment and want to maximize their time gaming. They prefer gaming over going to movies or out for dinner...Status gamers are proud of their gaming skills and enjoy being the first to try the newest and hottest titles. They also like to discuss their gaming experiences at school or work...Social gamers view gaming as a communal experience. They prefer to play games with people they care about, forming a social link, and coordinate social functions around gaming...Active gamers prefer games where movements are reflected in the game and allow gamers to get out of their chairs. They use game as a physical release...Casual gamers use gaming as an emotional release and as a way to play different roles. Casual gamers view gaming as a secondary form of entertainment and don't feel the necessity to be the first to try a new game'(Softpedia news, 'Breaking' video Game Research at E for All – 5 Different Type of Gamers, 2007).

³⁶ In her report, *Why we Play Games: Four Keys to More Emotion without Story* (2004), she listed out many types of gamers' emotions: Fear, Surprise, Disgust, Naches/Kvell (Yiddish), Fiero (Italian), Schadenfreude (German), Wonder (p. 6).

different characteristics and personalities. In his original texts in the article *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs*, the four types of MUDs players can be roughly defined as:

- 1) Achievers – are proud of their formal status in the game’s built-in level hierarchy, and how short a time they took to reach it.
- 2) Explorers – are proud of their knowledge of the game’s finer points, especially if new players treat them as a new form of knowledge.
- 3) Socializers – are proud of their friendships, their contracts and their influences.
- 4) Killers – are proud of their reputation and of their often-practiced fighting skills.

In Chapter Five, this model will be used as a key analytical tool for this research to classify gamers’ different gameplaying mentalities and purposes.

Within academia, Ryan (2001) found that different narratives of various games decide two different modes of gaming: ‘In the internal mode, the user projects himself as a member of the fictional world, either by identifying with an avatar, or by apprehending the virtual world from a first person perspective. In the external mode, the reader situates himself outside the virtual world. He either plays the role of a god who controls the fictional world from above, or he conceptualizes his activity as navigating a database (p.12)’.³⁷ Moreover, James Paul Gee (2003), by seeing games as a learning process, proposed the idea that three forms of identity can always be found in gameplay at the same time, as virtual, real, and projective. The first virtual identity is the players’ virtual characters by which their successes and failures are defined by ‘a

³⁷ Neitzal (2005) explains Ryan’s notion to give us a clear understanding: ‘action adventures and the so called first-person-shooters such as Doom and Quake work with the internal mode, whereas simulations and strategy games apply the external mode’ (p. 237).

delicious blend of my doing and not my doing' (p. 54). The second form, called the real identity, represents the real-world person multiple non-virtual identities (e.g. a national citizen, a professional, a family member, a student etc.). These identities can have a positive or negative effect in game play. They are 'filtered through' by gamers' in-game identity and affect some motivations and decisions gamers make while playing a game (p. 55). The third form: projective identity means the identity gamers use to 'project one's values and desires onto the virtual character' and see their virtually made characters as 'one's own project in the making...through time defined by my aspirations for what I want the character to be and become' (ibid). On a basic level, Gee's principle of the three possessive identities can easily be applied to decode gamers and are a very helpful tool in analyzing how gamers negotiate themselves while playing different games.

Having a major interest in the connectivity between gamers and gameplay, Egenfeldt-Nielsen *et al.* (2008) mapped gamers' activities and crucially distinguished the player culture into two particular forms: game communities and metaculture; the idea that game communities refer to players' activities within a game and the communications players extensively use. Metaculture encompasses gamers' activities around and beyond the game and includes 'fan sites, discussion forums, game magazines...modding, poaching' etc. However, Egenfeldt-Nielsen found that the key agents of game communities were driven by the following elements: membership, relationships, commitment and generalized reciprocity, shared values and practices, collective goods, and duration. Furthermore, Michael Nitsche (2008) drew on Heeter's (1992) thesis to point out that there are three different forms of presence in the virtual world: '1. personal presence – the extent to which and reasons why you feel like you are in a virtual world; 2. social presence – the extent to which other beings (living or

synthetic) also exist in the world and appear to react to you; and 3. environmental presence – the extent to which the environment itself appears to know that you are there and to react to you’ (p. 205).

With a rather sophisticated model presented by Ermi and Mayra (2005, see Mayra 2008: 110), the complexity of gameplay experience, according to Mayra’s research, is defined as involving three major types of immersion: sensory immersion, challenge-based immersion, and imaginative immersion. By his definition, sensory immersion refers to gamers’ status of controlling their own sensations and levels of involvements. Examples of this include switching off the light or wearing headphones etc., to allow themselves to feel more engaged in the simulated environment and blocking out external world interference. The second kind, challenge-based immersion appears more frequently in the action type of gameplay, in which gamers can enjoy the ‘freedom of movement’ and finds balance between skills and challenge (Mayra 2008: 108). The third kind, imaginative immersion, puts gamers in a mental state with absorbed emotional and intellectual feelings and creates an illusionary mindset. It is also a form of constructed fantasy made to really touch gamers’ deep emotions.

Aki Jarvinen (2009) saw the gameplay process as a changing experience when emotions are transformed into pleasures. Borrowing the five categories (curiosity, virtuosity, nurture, sociality and suffering) from the ‘pleasures of the mind’ found by Michael Kubovy (1999), he appropriately relates them to the context of gaming. The pleasure function of curiosity represents gamers’ feelings about ‘learning something previously unknown;’ the idea of virtuosity can be found in gamers’ performance when they have done something well; gaining ‘from making the prospect become reality;’ nurture is the kind of pleasure driven by gamers’ caring ability. It has more to do with

‘fortunes-of-others emotions’; sociality simply shows that gamers are agents of ‘to connect’ and ‘being-connected’: the basic feelings of social belonging; and finally, the category of suffering as a form of pleasure is a negative one. In Jarven’s words, such pleasure involves ‘mundane psychological pains...shame and guilt...existential pains...fears of death etc.’ (pp. 102-103).

To end this section, Wark’s thoughts certainly speak of the relationship between gamers and games: ‘As the gamer becomes attuned to the game, gamer and game become one event, one battle, one action: an oscillating between the line dividing self from other and the line connecting them as one substance’ (2007: section 162).

2.5 Revisiting the Gamer Stereotypes: Cultural Myths about Negativity

Given the public’s interest in their international growth, digital games, especially for the FPS genre have generated serious concerns and worries regarding their violent content. Famous real-life tragedies such as the Columbine High School massacre (in 1999) and the Virginia Tech massacre (in 2007) in the US, and the Akihabara murder (in 2008) in Tokyo, Japan, were repeatedly interpreted as being the result of young people playing (shooter) games. News and press journalists continue to imply that these young murderers were all gamers and blame gaming for producing killers; influencing these young murderers’ minds, motivations and behaviours. Images of random crime scenes directly touch the public’s nerve and increase social anxiety towards a new, unfamiliar medium. What we can normally see in this public discourse is the reflection of the on-going debate about the sensitive issue of game violence and aggression.

The first-person-shooter and the third-person-shooter (which together provide a

‘destroy/kill-all-you-see’ style of gameplay) are two of the most discredited game types. They have received the most criticism due to their controversial content and ways of gameplay offered to gamers. The first kind, the first-person-shooter genre, in Mayra’s (2008) words ‘nevertheless remained overtly coded as [a] masculine field’ (p. 104). Since the improved version of FPS, *Doom*, introduced by the ‘Two Johns’ (John Carmack and John Romero) in 1993, successfully forced a paradigm shift in the global gamer culture and transformed the cultural tastes towards a new genre concept. This particular genre has always been interpreted as projecting certain types of ‘demonic imagery’ and is signaled by ‘repressed and conflicting impulses and discourses’ (p. 114). The second type, the third-person-shooter genre, is even more controversial and troublesome. Among the TPS games the one which has received the most criticism is probably *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) game series. When playing this type of game from a third person’s point of view, gamers can enjoy complete law-breaking pleasure with the freedom to commit crime without any possibility of moral-judgment or punishment. They are allowed to participate in gangsters’ war, beat and kill whoever passes-by and have sex with prostitutes. One of the most shocking and extreme cases of a game influencing a player’s behaviour occurred in Thailand in 2008, when a local teenager, after playing *Grand Theft Auto IV*, robbed and stabbed a taxi driver to death. The teenager subsequently revealed that the reason he did it was because he wanted to discover whether the experience of stealing a taxi in real life was the same as it was in the Game. A one-in-a-million case like this one would have certainly increased some psychologists’ anxiety and generate greater criticism for this unknown medium. It may have led them to believe that game effects are powerfully persuasive and that gamers’ aggressive thoughts are temporarily buried somewhere. As shown in the following discussion, this big issue has been widely debated by academics with oppositional views.

Certain events can lead both society and academics to be more critical of digital game content. This regularly occurs in a time of war. The latest example of the debate surrounding the content of shooter games is related to the war-themed FPS game: *Medal of Honor* released in 2010. Some governors and sectors in both the UK and the US accused this game of being wrongly designed because in its multi-player-mode, it allows gamers to play as the Taliban and kill American Soldiers. The UK defence secretary, Liam Fox even launched a public attack on this game and asked game retailers to stop stocking it. His action was then followed by American 'Troops' bigger reaction by banning this game from all of its associated game retailers. This incident triggered a conflict between politicians, in-war soldiers' relatives, commercial game companies, and gamers, and again touched the hidden agenda of gaming. This led to questions about embedded ideologies and political interventions. Shooter games became a blasting fuse which found no balance between designers and producers' moral-free ideas and society's incoherent moral standard and value system.

As the world's critical eyes keep monitoring the consequences of gaming and boldly predicting its outcome, many media observers express different opinions against the old saying that games can cause negative effects on children and young people, and challenge the people who see violent behaviours and mind aggression as results of gameplay. From a controversial psychological angle, previous research by Anderson and Bushman (2001), Lt. Col. Dave Grossman his 'Killology' Research Group (e.g. their book series published in 1995 and 1999), and Kline and Stewart (2000) all presented different levels of evidence to support the thesis that occasionally gamers, especially children, can be mentally harmed by violent game content and that media effects do exist to cause different levels of moral panic. However, these studies are

challenged by this generation's audiences' thinkers, in particular, Barker and Petley (2001), David Buckingham (2000), and David Gauntlett (1998, 2005), who strongly argue that the previous effects model is misleading. They assert that due to the lack of evidence it is too early to assume digital games (and/or other media) can generate social effects on people and therefore cause dangerous minds and aggressive behaviours. Furthermore, the Author of *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence*, Gerard Jones (2002) made several astonishing comments to repudiate the conventional stereotypes made by experts and parents who do not really pay attention to or listen to gamers. In her defense and acknowledgement, six points are (summarized by this research) as significantly important:

1. Gamers have reactions to the environment due to their affected feelings, thoughts, and meanings. He said 'just because shooter games remind us of real shooting and military training doesn't mean that kids experience them as such when they play, any more than they experience plastic army men or chess pieces as real warriors' (p. 167).
2. Through making and exploring creatively in games, gaming is a self-discovery of emotions. In this regard, Jones put himself in the game Quake 3 with the help of a young gamer and found that 'Stepping through a door to the battlements of the castle, where the black stone suddenly fell away to reveal a vast sunset, filled me with an elation of freedom and courage' (ibid).
3. Gaming is a social activity in which skills are more important than realistic and violent representations. As Jones describes, 'players aren't cyborgs being conditioned by a machine but competitors accessing their own and their opponents' skills: who's quick, who knows the map better, who can strategize most intelligently' (pp. 171-172).

4. Playing games needs calmness, not anger. Here Jones quotes an adult gamer's statement: 'it's all about being alert, focused, but loose, having fun. Staying cool, even when guys are coming at you with guns' (p. 175).
5. Gameplay does not produce rage: by knowing more gamers, Jones did not sense rage but began 'seeing a fair amount of tension, repression, and irritability...but never the fury or dissociation or seething depression of some of the kids...who were into gangster rap, death rock, or real guns' (p. 274).
6. Society and parents feel more frightened about gaming than the gamers themselves. Pertinently Jones notes that: 'Fear and hostility can make any entertainment problematic...we are frightened by the images we see in the games, and so we become frightened of the people who love them...the hobby looks bizarre to us, we seek evidence of its effects in bizarre events' (p. 180).

A group of new media audience theorists' and Jones' reflections on audiences' autonomy contributed to a theoretical turn in the study of the (game) audience that profoundly contributed to contemporary research in FPS games and gamers. In studies of specific forms of gameplay, in particular shooter games, new research and papers are by and large inspired by their thesis and hence become willing to explore how gamers participate in these games and how gamers personally, or in groups, use these games to produce meanings. In this regard, Nieborg (2010) reminds us that 'by producing additional or replaceable game content, the agency of gamers goes beyond the mere interaction with the text itself. Gamers are able to change almost any aspect of game play of many (first-person-shooter) games and by doing so, [take] agency to another level, rivaling but also cooperating with the culture industry' (cited in Huntemann and Payne 2010: 9).

Recently, academics have taken more of an interest in the analysis of the FPS gamer culture because the number of people involved in this interactive activity is large, though the debates about media effects are still continued by particular groups with a strong background and tradition in psychology or behavioural study. Their loyal followers are still attempting to find new methods to measure violent game content and game aggression in order to strengthen their critical view, whilst others move to the interpretation of gamers' different in-game and out-game experience. Nonetheless, each research discipline will remain strong in the interpretations and thesis that they hold. Although gaming violence/aggression is not the main focus of my research, it will be quite helpful to highlight some of the interesting research related to FPS gamers. This will help us understand how, in method and practice, different studies have been exercised and executed.

To begin with, Wright, Boria and Breidenbach's (2002) article, '*Creative Player Action in FPS Online Video Games: Playing Counter-Strike*', found playing FPS multiplayer games can generate creative innovations through verbal dialogue and non-verbal expressions. By decoding texts files from 70 hours of time playing, they conclude that the uses of game talk have different functions and thus can be categorized in five types: Creative Game Talk, Game Conflict Talk, Insult/Distancing Talk, Performance Talk, and Game Technical/External Talk. As they argued, 'the meaning of playing Counter-Strike is not merely embodied in the graphics or even the violent game play, but in the social mediations that go on between players through their talk with each other and by their performance within the game. Moreover, Manninen and Kujanpaa's (2005) paper, *The Hunt for Collaborative War Gaming – Case: Battlefield 1942*, collected players' diaries and conducted participatory observations on individual gamers with an average 150-250 hours playing time. The gamers' 'perceivable actions' in an evolved FPS game like

Battlefield 1942, heavily rely on and can only be satisfied when better collaborative experiences are designed and established by the designers who can successfully meet the requirements of the ‘interaction form’³⁸

Sticking to the psychological outcome of behaviours, Eastin and Griffiths’ (2006) paper, *Beyond the Shooter Game: Examining Presence and Hostile Outcomes among Male Game Players*, still looks for the answers to the problematic themes of game effects and aggression. They selected 219 (aged 18-31) university male students (85% white, 8% African American, 3% Asian, 2% Latino and 2% Native American and other) to participate in a complicated experimental method. Eastin and Griffiths found that the gamers playing the shooter games had less ‘hostile expectations’ than when playing other forms of games requiring aggressive performance, e.g. fighting games. Their data showed no direct evidence of a first-person-shooter game link to gamers’ aggressive feelings. Likewise, Scharrer and Leone’s (2008) paper *First-Person Shooters and the Third Person Effect*, used a sample of 118 6th-7th grade students (aged 11-13). Their responses to the survey were collected within a month and demonstrated that precociously, ‘young people ...exhibit the ‘third-person perceptual’ and...generally perceive children who are even younger than themselves as more susceptible to negative media influences’ (p. 226). Very interestingly, they highlight young gamers belief that their peers are likely to be influenced by the games’ negativity. Meanwhile, Weber, Behr, Tamborini, Ritterfeld, and Mathiak’s (2009) joint paper, *What do We Really Know about First-Person-Shooter Games?* was an event-related, high-resolution content analysis which applied physiological measurements to record 13 male German FPS gamers’ (aged 18-26) heart rates and skin conductance during a 50 minute

³⁸ The original model of interactive form was more of a game design concept propose by Manninen (2002) and encompassed the following elements: ‘Avatar Appearances, Kinesics, Occulesics, Facial Expressions, Autonomous AI, Chronemics, Non-Verbal Audio, Olfactics, Language-based Communication, Spatial Behaviour, Physical Contact, and Environmental Details.

gameplay timeslot. Again, their data found a lack of clear evidence in the charge that gamers' brain activity can be patterned by the violent gaming, and their findings indicate that FPS gamers 'experience rather small amounts of violence compared to the time they spend in nonviolent gaming situations' (p. 1032).

Two very important articles written by Joey Penny and Nicolas Ducheneaut led the exploration of FPS gamers to a new direction. Penny's (2009) research, *No Better Way to Experience World War II: Authenticity and Ideology in the Call of Duty and Medal of Honor Player Communities*, is a response to his own research that proved that war games with an historical sense can influence political beliefs. He also found that reasons why gamers play the two World War history and Science Fiction genres can be quite different (pp. 195-196). By comparing two groups' (one with 49 adults and the other 46) written texts to his open-ended survey, his findings validate a crucial point: these specialized historical war/military games perfectly respond to their original purpose of being made 'as instruments of soft power' (p.203). Finally, Ducheneaut's (2010) latest article called *The Chorus of the Dead: Roles, Identity Formation, and Ritual Processes Inside an FPS Multiplayer Online Game*, chose to approach a Counter-Strike clan (called XYZ clan) as a key subject for observation. By conducting a four-month 'virtual ethnography' on this gaming community, it found that gamers can process a new form of social order and are given internal law enforcement powers to distinguish different skills according to one's familiarity with the game (p. 214).

However, with such a large amount of studies falling into place as well as society and institutions' skeptical attitudes still shadowing this particular genre, governments have begun to sense the pressure and need for control and regulation of this emerging new media. The USA is one of the few countries to have responded immediately to these

negative public rumours about game violence by reacting to this moral crisis in regard to the impact digital games may bring to our culture and society. As more controversial politicians and academics constantly showed their concerns on the issues of violence and the ideological storylines inside game production, American governments calmed these wild guesses of uncertainty. In November 2005, the US Senators Hillary Clinton, Joe Lieberman and Evan Bayh officially warned the American government that digital games may cause harm to children. This led senators to take immediate action with the establishment of the Family Entertainment Protection Act, making the US the first country to regulate digital games. After legitimizing and differentiating several classes of game certifications, digital games were categorized by the visual elements presented in the game content, and game retailers now have to take this into account when selling different games to different age groups.

Conclusion

When discussing the FPS gamers, one thing we have to bear in mind is that gamers and genre are totally inseparable within the geopolitical framework. Like King and Krzywinska have already taught us, gamers' in-game pleasure can only be enhanced when 'it is located in a recognizable context' (2006). This is especially true in the war-themed FPS genre. Whilst playing them, gamers' experiences are not isolated in a single game content or story, or ranged by a single medium. There is a continuity which constructs audiences' life-long media experience and possessive identity. Their memories (for example, of Hollywood war movies or images) are transformed into some kind of familiarity projected and articulated repeatedly in this genre. When discussing the gameplay context of this genre we need to acknowledge that behind the global cultural production of FPS games and stories, it is the American game industry

and military units acting as the main sponsors and distributors that maintain the public's interest.

To balance the outcome of the thesis, it is necessary to reveal the 'darker side' of this genre and recapture the key influences in relation to the war-themed FPS genre's geopolitical context as well as the background context of its global process. Only through further discussion can we better understand how this specialized genre is affected and outsourced by political interests. With a large collection of scholarly criticism, the next chapter will provide more detailed information to explain how this so-called 'militainment' is integrated into the globalization discourse and precedes a new emerging 'conflict gaming' genre. Its sophisticated context will be interpreted in detail and re-contextualized to help us understand how a militainment sphere has emerged to make gamers more psychologically engaged in the play of war. In this regard, I will close this chapter with Wark's (2007) perfect description about digital games and war in order to lead us into the next chapter:

'Once games required an actual place to play them, whether on the chess board or the tennis court. Even wars had battle fields. Now global positioning satellites grid the whole earth and out all of space and time in play. Warfare, they say, now looks like video games. Well don't kid yourself. War is a video game – for the military-entertainment complex. To them it doesn't matter what happens on the ground. The ground – the old-fashioned battlefield itself – is just a necessary externality.'

(Wark 2007: section 010)

Chapter Three:

The Emerging Global Militainment Sphere and the War-Themed Digital Game Scenario: Towards Conflict-Gaming

‘What I see is a vast sprawling state we would traditionally call military-intelligence complex or military-industrial complex, and this sprawling industrial state is growing and becoming more and more secretive, more and more uncontrolled. This is not a sophisticated conspiracy control of the top. This is a vast movement of self-interests, by thousands and thousands of players all working together and against each other to produce an end result...’

- Julian Assange, Editor-in-Chief, Wikileaks³⁹

Assange is one of many who has expressed serious worries about the on-going development of the world because political and industrial interests are manipulating its future. His words also reflect a deep concern that the unpredictable and uncontrollable complexity of the military web is over-developed to an extent that humanity is in danger of constructing a weaponized cultural state charged and ordered by conflict and war. Today’s global media landscape is being reformulated by digitalization. It continues to transform the ways people live in the world and audiences use media. Warfare and military activities are equally benefited by this on-going digital revolution; exercising and operating in a more dynamic, virtual format beyond what could have previously seemed credible or imagined. The study of how war is updated and improved in the process is not new however. People's fascination in this subject appears to lie in the irreversible on-going war cultural revolution (to a point that all of

³⁹ The quote is from the documentary film, *The War You Don't See*.

us are forced to be involved in it), carried out by a grand narrative and enduring historical tensions that continue to secure and maintain the global prime position for ambitious and dominant cultures and nations. Revisiting and articulating the complexity of these historical tensions can help us conceptualize the indestructible and invisible relationship balancing the power of politics, military force and popular culture, and more importantly, provide us with a sense of how a solid constructed genre is maintaining the interests and support of scandalous politics. A wide range of scholars have been trying to understand these under-table activities and interconnections across politics and entertainment and have appropriately attached a specific name to it: 'Military-Entertainment Complex'. Another more creative term, 'militainment,' indicating the idea of a converging military and entertainment sphere, was introduced in 2002 in recognition of this new facet of virtual warfare.

In Chapter Three, the main aim is to target the rise of the militainment genre and therefore redefine the games' embedded political meanings together with the emerging war-themed related digital games. The key theme of the fusion of the military and entertainment which constructs today's spectacular militainment phenomenon is interestingly interpreted in Wark's distinguished metaphors:

'THE DIGITAL emerges as military, but achieves acceptance as entertainment...The military versions of digital telethedia make the world over as a military space, but the digital does not yet become a culture other than for a small band of specialists tied to the military industrial complex. The coming together of the digital and the entertainment commodity inscribes the digital not just in space and time but in cultural perception of space and time' (2007: section 095).

Developed on Wark's thesis, the main mission of this chapter is, however, to provide some critical insights into the complicated way this genre was constructed and its background context. While the First and the Second chapters each summarized the infrastructure of the global digital game culture and the features of game audiences, the aim of this third chapter is to develop the knowledge we have gained in order to explore the core-component hidden beneath the surface of the global digital game phenomenon. We will do this by looking into the US-based 'military-entertainment complex' and focusing on the complexity of the cultural production of the war-themed first-person-shooter (FPS) digital game genre.

Viewing war games as an extension of the military-entertainment complex suggests that military departments are penetrating the public entertainment sphere with inventive ways of utilizing the new media. The world's most dominant and powerful national defense unit, the Pentagon, has creatively combined the military and entertainment to create a public war/military imagination and fantasy which can be easily appreciated by its own patriotic citizens as well as foreign fans and transnational admirers. Such imagination and fantasy refreshes the images of soldiers and war and promotes a new form of gaming culture that is thoroughly centralized by 'conflict'. This culture could be seen as an unavoidable one; embedded in the history of mankind and all human games. It has been defined by Chris Crawford (2003) as one of the most important in-game elements to 'make all challenges personal' and be '[carried] out with varying degrees of intensity' (p. 59). Although the core-meaning of conflict-gaming does not necessarily mean violence and aggression, it clearly stands opposed to the social function of digital games. In recent years, some passionate game developers and intellectuals have started a campaign for the promotion of social-gaming or

meaningful-games which involve finding solutions for societies, in order that digital games have a more positive and meaningful effect on people. As a contrast to those social movements, conflict gaming encourages contest, combat and contradiction. Eastin and Griffiths' (2006) research on first-person male shooters refers to Bowman and Rotter's findings in 1983; reporting that '85% of games required players to physically attack other characters to win the game' (p. 448). Dietz (1998) also indicated that 79% of all digital games featured physical aggression (cited in Weber *et al.* 2009:1017). The situation has not changed much since, with most games produced today still containing different forms of virtual fighting, shooting and killing. This especially pertains to the ones closely attached to war and military scenarios. Hence, by introducing the idea of 'conflict-gaming,' this chapter argues that war-themed digital games should be examined as a cultural index. This conceptual approach allows us to observe how gamers are led into a carefully designed gaming experience and how this new form of gaming culture is following the conflict principle and determined by gamers' enthusiasm to contest and win.

3.1 The First Wave of the Virtual War Critics in the 1990s

Only two decades ago, the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard critiqued the historical event of the Gulf War and the media reports of it; introducing world TV viewers to a pure media spectacle (blurring the boundaries between real and virtual, and reflecting people's obsession with simulacra). The early criticism from Baudrillard has forced the world to evaluate what is meant by virtual. He argued that through the lens of the cameras, live news reporting and images of missiles and military's actions, people are really able to imagine that they are involved in a 'happening war.' Though Baudrillard made his argument very clear, the only valid reason for the biggest imagination factory,

America, to affect this level of mass public awareness and consciousness towards war could have been to lead global viewers to believe 'this war exists, we have seen it'. This was a public illusion; millions witnessing and being immersed in an exciting war event being played out in front of them on their television screens. Baudrillard in his critical assessment highlighted the inherent irony of this media spectacle:

“There is no interrogation into the event itself or its reality; or into the fraudulence of this war, the programmed and always delayed illusion of battle...(and) the artificial dramatization...If we do not have practical intelligence about the war, at least let us have a skeptical intelligence towards it, without renouncing the pathetic feeling of its absurdity’ (Baudrillard 1995, cited in Poster 2001: 253).

The absurdity Baudrillard was referring to has continued since America’s (and the world’s) Gulf War experience, and the ‘pathetic feeling’ of virtual war has been turned into a sensational numbness today. Games like the *Call of Duty* or *Medal of Honor* series transform warfare and military battles into a new kind of fashion among kids, teens and even adolescents. Today’s war-gaming scenario exactly fits Baudrillard’s simulation thesis which asserted that: ‘The real victory of the simulators of war is to have drawn everyone into the rotten simulation’ (ibid.). The victory Baudrillard indicated can be seen in the global dream and cultural power produced by the United States. To young Americans and the growing number of global war-themed digital game fans, playing these avatar soldiers contains both historical and entertainment values. One can play games, have fun and learn history at the same time, making first-person-shooter (FPS) games a valid after-school leisure activity. The benefits gamers can get in playing war games are also durable. Gamers can receive fun, pleasure and enjoyment when playing

these games. (Unlike the TV or film viewing experience, playing a game really requires the gamer to 'participate' interactively in it). Additionally players can recapture, re-experience and learn the embellished war-histories by immersing themselves in these recreated war narratives.

The new and creative way that war survives in world culture today has moved further beyond Baudrillard's virtual war paradigm. In the past 20 years many critics have emphasized the dangers of creating this large scale global cyber-war discourse, from the analysis of toy guns and soldiers, to the studies of cyber killings and violence in shooting games. James Der Derian (2001) found in 'virtuous war' that the global war narratives are mainly driven and led by the 'guilt-free' United States. He argues:

'The United States, as unilateral *deus ex machina* of global politics, is leading the way in the virtual revolution...with an assist from Disneyland, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley, the National Training Center, full of video cameras, computerized special effects, not to mention the thrilling rides, has superseded Los Alamos and the Nevada Test Site to become the premier production set for the next generation of U.S. strategic superiority' (2001: 19).

When Afghani youths are fighting a real war against western hard-core military weaponry and struggling with the real disasters caused by real guns, bombs and explosions, American youths are consuming the enjoyment, pleasure and excitement from 'killing' others on the computerized battlefield. To remind us of the consequences of this, Roger Stahl (2010) mentioned in his book *Militainment, Inc.* that the critical problem about virtual war lies on the constructed identity of a

‘virtual-citizen-solider’. This term is a linguistic combination that Stahl coined to explain the identity crisis of the individual; the crossover between the digital war game player and the citizen’s own identity. All these worries about the intensifying convergence of militarization and entertainment demand urgent and immediate scholarly attention.

3.2 The Alliance of Militarism and Entertainment

‘What ya need is what they sellin’
Make you think that buyin’ is rebellin’
From the theaters to malls on every shore
Tha thin line between entertainment and war
The front line is everywhere, there be no shelter here⁴⁰

While some anticipate the arrival of the cyber wonderland, which provides an increasingly networked global space that many technology determinists have dreamed of and pushed to create, others remain skeptical about the question of whether new media will lead the world to harmony or more conflict. Although to date no one has provided a final answer to this difficult question, when looking at what the entertainment world is currently offering (as the quoted song above describes) together with its political-economic context, we are given a clue. The global agenda, including politics, industry and audiences seem to prefer contest rather than peace, conflict not harmony. This intensity becomes more obvious after the tragic events 9/11 and its aftermath.

⁴⁰ Song written by Rage against the Machine, ‘No Shelter.’ (Cited in Turse 2003 & Stahl 2010:1).

Since 9/11, the past few years have witnessed the rise of the digital game culture and media representations featuring wars, cultural contradictions and civil conflicts. Since Poniewozik and Cagle coined the term militainment in a 2002 *Time* magazine,⁴¹ articles and images presented by the contemporary mass media have attracted a range of responses from both political-economy observers and cultural theorists' perspectives. Political critics like Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies (2002 & 2004) wrote two books, *Why do People Hate America?* and *American Dream: Global Nightmare*. They accused the US of using its global dominance as a new form of hyper-power, consistently exporting American popular culture around the world. They claim that the American dream and the cultural narrative and fantasy that Hollywood and other dream factories fabricate are 'not just to expand and enhance the empire but also to colonize the imagination and future of all other cultures' (2004:159). Other intellectuals like Jonathan Burston (2003) listed the oppositional characteristics from both industries by defining it as 'the marriage of Hollywood and the military' (see table 7); criticizing the inseparable relationship between both parties which was inevitably creating a virtual form of 'cyber-patriotism' (p. 163). Cynthia Weber (2006) analyzed the 'meta-narrative' function of Hollywood films and observed the ways US policy is transformed into different forms of Hollywood scriptwriting and storytelling. She states that 'popular and official discourses of September 11 converge in this space to enable the production, reproduction, and transformation of ever emerging US and individual, national and international subjectivities' (p. 4). Moreover, Daya Thussu (2007) criticized the US-centric global infotainment phenomenon and the fact that 24/7 TV news and war videogames bring a dramatic visual spectacle of violence to global

⁴¹ Source: That's Militainment, in Mediawatch, *Time* magazine online.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1001943,00.html>>.

audiences. Looking at the issue from a feminist's perspective, Cynthia Enloe (2007) in her book *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*, stressed that militarization is embedded in the global discourse in a process that 'binds together the personal, the local, the national, and the global' (2007:160). She also claims that the globalization of the militarizing process is over-intensified today and that its presence can always be seen through four aspects:

1. the global reach of these business, cultural, and military ideas and processes;
2. the capacity of promoters of globalizing militarism to wield lethal power;
3. the fact that so many private companies are now involved in this globalization of militarization;
4. the intricacy of the international alliances among the players (p. 8).

Furthermore, the US journalist and historian, Nick Turse (2008), untied the complex connections between the US governmental administrations and their associated industries, including the activities of entertainment, technology, and food manufacturers. Calling it 'the military invades our daily lives,' Turse showed hundreds of examples from different industries to demonstrate that the contractors of the US Department of Defence (DOD) have penetrated every possible corner of the American society, across the fields of academic, telecommunication, entertainment or even food production. The critics above all point to the same idea that the United States is the most influential global force to accelerate the converging popular culture of entertainment and militarism.

Table 7. The Marriage of Hollywood and the Military (Burston 2003:169)⁴²

Hollywood	The Military
Glamour	Grid
Representation/Sensation	Action
Fake/Fictional	Real
Private	Public
Sensitivity	Toughness
(World of emotion)	(World of calculation)
Feminine	Masculine
Gay friendly/Gay	Homophobic
Judeaphilic/Jewish	Near-exclusively Christian
Cosmopolitan	Patriotic
Liberal/Leftwing	Conservative/Rightwing

The concept of militainment, in Stahl's phrasing is defined as a 'state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption...this state violence is not of the abstract, distant, or historical variety but rather an impending or current use of force, one directly relevant to the citizen's current political life' (2010:6). The globalizing military culture, which the above scholars had pinned down in their massive debates, is counted as part of the global flow of infotainment which has repeatedly penetrated the US; producing popular cultural products and cultural representations. These products and (moving) images are exported to global audiences. They are sometimes promoted as a fashion, a lifestyle, an attitude, a way of self-expression or a type of leisure activity.

⁴² The table is introduced by John Buston to illustrate the two parties of actors that Hollywood and the military desire the general public to own different assumptions in their perceptions about the image of the two invested bodies. The main purpose of this table is also to demonstrate the appearance of a new image management structure when the two sides of symbolic actors can be combined together.

Under the hugely built US-centric political framework, the development of technology becomes significantly important in increasing the flows of resources and creating interdependence between the military and entertainment industries. The simulation technologies have been heavily invested and sponsored, carefully researched and developed, and then wisely used in and by various US military units and departments. The film and digital game industries depend largely on these technologies in creating chaotic cinematic scenes or impressive game screen graphics and images. Kline *et al.* (2003) describe the military as being at the heart of ‘driving technological innovation, spurring economic growth, and setting cultural agendas’ (p. 179). For a long time, the Pentagon, in its role as commander of U.S. national military strategy, has heavily relied on entertainment media content and narratives to be its global window. Through what is considered as the most influential and efficient channels, the Pentagon can forcefully demonstrate the Country’s destructive technological superiority to global audiences. Through a desperate sense of nationalistic duty, the entertainment industries, such as the Hollywood dream factory and the growing digital game industry acquire innovative resources and advance military technologies/equipment to improve their production of graphical content, visual presentations and effects. Both military units and entertainment companies hugely rely on open-minded creative sectors and technological breakthroughs to maintain their momentum towards global expansion; feeding more exciting and entertaining screen experiences to audiences and fans who are always eager for more. Organizing collaborative activities and projects gives both parties the opportunity to share resources, cut extra costs in production and save time in finding suitable human resources and candidates. The best-known example we can identify is the establishment of the California-based Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT). This is a collaborative project which began in 1999 involving military

consultants and officers, entertainment commercial entities and academics, all working together to create a global militainment agenda. ICT had its centre established at the University of California, and was granted \$45 million. The Institute is monitored by the US military officials who ensure that it concentrates on the research and development of entertainment technologies. Besides ICT, a second example of a collaborative project is MAK Technologies, a company based in Massachusetts which successfully acquired support from both DOD and the entertainment industry in 1997. It was awarded sponsorship totaling \$70,000 by one of DOD's innovation research programs. This provided the company with more flexibility to work on a contract to develop a tank simulation game with game publisher BMG and Zombie Virtual Reality Entertainment (Kline *et al.* 2003: 182).

To further strengthen the virtualized (cyber-war) future, the Pentagon and the US Department of Defence had to invest vast amounts of money in the development of modeling and simulation technology. These official projects have involved many military units and commercial sectors in this technology investment process, with skillful and talented professionals and their ideas being exchanged in a variety of collaborated assignments. For instance, according to the 1996 US National Research Council (NRC) report, a California-based conference was organized by the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board in 1996. It was recorded that the participants in this particular event included a long list of members from the Department of Defense's Defense Modeling and Simulation Office (DMSO), the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), the Navy, the Air Force, Disney, Paramount, the George Lucas special effects house Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), Pixar etc. They assembled because they had the same vision to create 'the technological advances upon which future entertainment and defense systems will be built' (NRC 1996, cited in

Burston 2003: 164). Another famous event organized by the ICT after 9/11 attracted even more popular Hollywood talents including Steven De Souza (the *Die Hard* screenwriter), David Engelbach (the writer of the television series *MacGyver*), Joseph Zito (director of *Delta Force One*, *Invasion U.S.A.* and *Missing in Action*), Spike Jonze (director of *Being John Malkovich*) and David Fincher (director of *Fight Club*, *Seven*) to work on the new scenario of film narratives in the counter-terrorism period (Burston 2003: 167).

Unlike the actual collaborations which affected the flow of human resources and experiences between parties, the birth of the simulation network (SIMNET) concept in the early 1980s can be seen as a historical landmark which helped to build up the virtually networked environment and the increasing interconnectedness across industries. Although the SIMNET was replaced in 1990s, the US DOD's experience in the SIMNET project was a precursor of America's adventure in the development of the military-industrial complex. It prepared it for the prospective challenge of accelerating media, military and entertainment connectivity – what Derian defined as the MIME-NETWORK (Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network) in 2001. According to Derian (2001), the MIME-NETWORK logic projected a better, improved version of the military-entertainment complexity with an unlimited power that 'seamlessly [merges] the production, representation, and execution of war' (sp. xx). His argument is appropriately reflected in an early cyberpunk novel:

'The Distributed Simulation Internet...is to be a creature of another order entirely from SIMNET. Ten thousand linked simulators! Entire literal armies online, global real-time, broadband, fiber-optic, satellite-assisted, military simulation networking. And not just connected, not just simulated. Seamless.'

(Bruce Sterling, *Wired* magazine, cited in Derian, 2001: 17).

Whether it is the SIMNET or the MIME-NETWORK project, these developments are symptomatic of the new emerging cultural sphere, produced by the Pentagon's creativity in using simulation technology to bridge militarism and entertainment; collapsing the wall between military culture and popular culture. Such a blurring of boundaries has brought war and conflict to our living rooms. It has affected the public consciousness, encouraging them to re-assess the meanings of militarism/hedonism, simulation/real, battleground/playground, serious/fun, fight/play and so on. With more details to present in the next section, we will see how military culture penetrated the two most entertaining media of film and digital games. It will also explain how the military-entertainment complex has been updated from a screen experience into a more simulation-dependent, computerized interactive game play space – a complete digital switch from 1.0 to 2.0.

3.3 The Military Entertainment Establishment in the West

As we discussed earlier, the production of war digital games is highly influenced by America's national interest in expanding their capacity in simulation technologies in order to polish the new images of soldiers and war. Since Eisenhower coined the term 'military-industrial complex' in 1961, a series of studies has provided different sets of detailed analysis and drawn a clear contextual trajectory on how military-entertainment complex progressed and has evolved over decades (see Wark 1996, Woznicki 2002, Stockwell and Nuir 2003, Lenoir and Lowood 2005, Leonard 2007, Turse 2008, Otteosen 2009). Most of these studies paid more attention to the critical issues about American ideology and propaganda. Steven Poole's (1998) article from the UK

Guardian, for example expressed strong concerns about the ‘worrying ideologies that lurk behind so many video games’ today. The ideologies can be referred to in ‘the increasing subterranean political messages of video games’ (cited in Watson and Hill 2003:303). His concern was then carried forward in Halter’s (2006) book *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games*, which examined the time when Hollywood was positioned as a propaganda machine operated by the U.S. government to circulate American values across the world. The implicit ideology in both films and digital games can thus be seen as a continuing hegemonic process and an expansion of U.S. military power. History unceasingly constructs a public mind-set and ‘positive illusion’ towards military culture, re-interprets war discourse, and re-brands soldiers.

Accordingly, this part of the research focuses more on the impact of America’s global entertainment industry and the creative ways it spreads the messages through its globalizing film and digital game industries. 9/11 created a historical tension which split the two different periods of military-entertainment complex. Before 9/11, the Pentagon mainly focused on the technological development of simulation with its control even penetrating Hollywood’s screen production/experience and script setting. After 9/11, the success of the official free-downloadable online game, America’s Army in 2002, and the growing demands created by several big blockbuster war/military-themed game products, a change occurred in the popular cultural landscape. Consequently, the Pentagon and US Department of Defence have given more attention to digital game production and narrative. As discussed earlier, this transition can be recognized as an upgrade from Military-Entertainment Complex 1.0 (MEC 1.0) to Military-Entertainment Complex 2.0 (MEC 2.0). This is a critical process transforming the passive viewer into an active participant, audiences’ seeing experience into playing experiment, third-person spectator into first-person performer, and more

importantly, citizens into imaginary soldiers.

The MEC 1.0: the Pre 9/11 Hollywood War Cinema

From an industrial point of view, Hollywood has always been considered as the most functional media tool for the U.S. government because the way it portrays American society thus promotes American values and creates the public imagination. It is not only a vehicle for persuasion for American citizens, but also deeply influences its global viewers in the way they choose dress, speak and live as a life/fashion index. Historically speaking, the American dream factory's mature techniques in creating convincing narrative and storytelling speak of the dominant Americans' view of world (in Hozić's words, 'an excessive, speeded-up, larger-than-life reflection of the American way') (2001: XI). By repeatedly representing previous war events on the big screen, the well-developed moving-pictures provider has tried to remind the global viewers of the might of its combat history, from World War I, World War II, the Vietnam war and Gulf war, to its latest invasion in Iraq. Since America decided to enter the Second World War in 1941 and the first popular Hollywood war film, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (starring John Wayne, 1949) was released, Hollywood has faithfully served the American government with its original ideological function to magnify the evil side of its so-called 'enemies.' Most scripts written in Hollywood do not pretend to hide America's foreign interests, political strategies, and military power at all; as in Burston's words, Hollywood helps to 'show the world who's boss' (2003: 172). In this regard, Guy Westwell (2006) argues that, 'for all their protestants to the contrary, Hollywood movies tend to show the war as necessary, if not essential, and present the armed forces as efficient, egalitarian and heroic institutions' (p. 3). In many occasions, the intention from the industrial parties of trying to (sometimes, too-aggressively) impose American values can divide the dual feelings of the foreign audiences towards the

embedded textual meanings and messages; and, this kind of make-all-frightened superiority and the fracturing memory of war is repeatedly reproduced and transformed into visual sequences and characters' dialogues, in which we, as audiences can easily sense and smell the United States' determination in defeating 'the terrorists and the enemies' (see Buston 2003: 172). Seeing films like *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Pearl Harbor*, or watching TV series like *24* (2001-2010), *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010) make the global viewers wonder whether they dislike these (for the way they portray the non-Americans, for example) or we love these (for these movies' intensity, rhythm and creativity).

As Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard asserted in their book *The Hollywood War Machine*, Hollywood definitely presents 'a quintessential Western/American film genre.' As they argue, 'Westerns, in their dominant form, were always most representative of the combat picture, complete with all the battlefield mythology that attracted millions of viewers to the military productions' (2007: 59). Without pulling back, the combat genre has become a strong symbol of the West, as Hollywood consistently suggests in its war narration. 'The Combat and Western genres share a venerable cultural myth: courageous warriors fighting noble battles against demonic foreign savages, enemies lacking any shred of humanity' (Ibid). This also mirrors Thomas Schatz's statement that, 'this [Hollywood] legacy has been an overwhelmingly false one tied to discourses of colonialism, racism, and militarism'(1981, cited in Boggs and Pollard 2007: 59). In addition, Weber (2006) notes that 'popular and official discourses of September 11 converge in this (film) space to enable the production, reproduction, and transformation of ever emerging US individual, national, international subjectivities' (p. 4). All these accusations about Hollywood and its internal political mode of assisting

American government's long-lasting global propaganda campaign are reflected in the enormous quantity of war-themed movies Hollywood has produced.

Examining Hollywood's production of war-themed films, the freelance journalist, David Robb (2004) boldly calls the Western film industry as 'Operation Hollywood,' arguing that the environment of American film production has been simultaneously shaped, censored and infiltrated by the Pentagon. As he further defines, there are two key functions in war-themed movies: Firstly, they set up positive images of warfare, and secondly, they avoid damaging the Pentagon's image (pp. 91-100). In his view, Hollywood was undoubtedly America's best propaganda machine in the 20th century. Furthermore, Hozic (2001), from insiders' views in Hollywood discussed its space revolution, power relation, and fantasy creation. As written in his chapter 'Hollywood in Cyberspace,' Hozic borrowed Taylor's (1999) portrayal of world system hegemony as an approach to enhance his own argument of defining the role Hollywood plays in the global popular cultural environment; signifying an American style of hegemony (2001:158). As he notes: 'By blurring the boundaries of public and private, allowing for the emergence of new hegemonic blocks, and constructing a new spatial comfort zone, Hollywood movies and suburbia have seemingly found a new way to take us into the new millennium' (p. 158). Referring to Hozic's argument, the overlapping public and private transposes the hegemonic power into a creative format in which ideology finds the most suitable route to reach the global audiences, along with the underlying political messages and cultural influences from US propaganda.

From 1990 onwards, the increasingly sophisticated ways of using communication technologies in Hollywood film production has warned the world of the coming of a futuristic cyber-war era. Using these technologies and showing them in its movies

made the film industry the most representative popular cultural force on a global scale. The attractive and sensational action scenes and iconic characters, settings of soldiers and military officers provide its global viewers with a great opportunity to feel the American experiences in major wars they have fought in the past. Engaged deeply in these touching narratives, audiences are irresistibly trained to admire the heroic actor/actress, who always honours and has faith to their own country. In this regard, Cynthia Weber in her book, *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film*, illustrates that along with its global culturally originated meta-function, Hollywood projects what she has called 'moral grammars of war', which appropriately describes 'how moral America casts its character and constructs its interpretative codes for understating itself' (2007:8).

However, Hollywood faced its biggest challenge in 2001 when the on-going production of war-themed movies proved to be a failure after 9/11 and America's second invasion of Iraq in 2003 (branded as the '9/11 after-effects' by film makers), the global voice of resistance to war reached a higher level and movies with an anti-war and American power theme performed well at the box office. Acknowledging that games are slowly eating the shares of the film market and that war-themed movies can no longer work as efficiently as they did in the past, the US Army wisely changed its focus to interactive engagement and the immersive participations that the gaming experience can create. Following on from the success of its intervention in the entertainment business that created the Hollywood war cinema genre and military-entertainment complex in the past, it encouraged military games to articulate wars and digital narratives in order to provide more a more engaging experience of war. In this new vision, the task of entertainment companies in relation to the military and a new facet of military-entertainment complex were modified in the post-9/11 and

‘War on Terror’ era – a period defined by Power (2007) as providing ‘a space of cyber-deterrence’ and introducing ‘new geographies of militarism’ (p. 271).

The MEC 2.0: the Post 9/11 America’ Army (AA) and War-Themed Digital Games

Hollywood’s contribution to a vast number of war-themed movies (the Military-Entertainment Complex 1.0) paved the way to further the development of war-themed digital games and provided fresh ideas in war/military gaming narration and design. There is a long history showing how the US Army managed to involve itself in digital game production.

As early as 1983, Ronald Reagan’s speech at Walt Disney World’s EPCOT Centre had drawn us a clear picture of how the U.S. government already foresaw the power of this new medium and revised how the nation was fully prepared to embrace this newly found media resource:

‘...you’re being prepared for a new age. Many of you already understand better than my generation ever will, the possibilities of computers...I recently learned something quite interesting about video games. Many young people have developed incredible hand, eye, and brain coordination in playing these games. The air force believes these kids will be outstanding pilots should they fly our jets. The computerized radar screen in the cockpit is not unlike the computerized video screen. Watch a 12-year-old take evasive action and score multiple hits while playing Space Invaders, and you will appreciate the skills of tomorrow’s pilot...What I am saying is that right now you’re being prepared for tomorrow in many ways, and in ways that many of us who are older cannot fully comprehend’

As Reagan cleverly predicted, that generation has already arrived, as today the numbers of war/military-themed games produced have reached an all time high. The present gaming world allows gamers to play any professional role they want, from soldier, pilot, tank driver, sailor, military strategist, sniper, to politician and even president. His statement indicated the earliest political interests in digital games and inspired U.S. to creatively adapt digital games in military use earlier than other countries. Not only do the games continue to take over the movies' responsibility for spreading the word about American power, but Hollywood's ideological function also keeps shadowing game narrative and storytelling. In this aspect, Bignell's (1996) essay 'The meanings of war-toys and war games,' in the edited book *War, Culture and the Media: Representations of the Military in 20th Century Britain*, critically examined the ideology and core-cultural meanings of war-toys and war-games. His statement echoed most criticism asserted that war toys and games are made to serve and create the male-dominated, masculinity-driven discourse (see Alloway and Gilbert 1998, Walkerdine 2007, Burrill 2008, Kirkland 2009). In Bignell's words, 'War-games mirror the ideology of Western culture in their elaborate organization, their complex rules and their qualitative and evaluative character' (1996:167). From a similar angle, Lull (2000) argues that: 'computer games, toys and board games pick up media/military sloganeering such as *A Line in the Sand* and *Gulf Strike* as ideological representations to legalize the use of propaganda...ideology must be represented to be effective...whose significance is manifest not only through representation, but through interpretation and use' (p. 74). A crucial point reflected in Lull's text is that ideology is now negotiated and contested within a new virtual setting, making games one of the most effective ideological vehicles for politicians. In this regard, Power (2007) notes, this form of military gaming ideology signifies a new type of economic desire, which can always be found in

and around American-made consumer products. The specific rise of the War-themed genre FPS, in Nieborg's eyes, has certainly proved that digital games 'become a powerful vessel for disseminating U.S. Army ideology and foreign policy to a global game culture' (p. 63). To the ambitious American governors, these war games can definitely be recognized as a useful psychological tool to influence gamers' thoughts or political stands.

Despite that, games extend ideology and thus form part of America's propaganda strategy. Many military forces have been using digital games for training and recruiting purposes for years. In this regard, Prensky (2001) reminds us that:

'The military uses games to train soldiers, sailors, pilots and tank drivers to master their expensive and sensitive equipment. It uses games to train command teams to communicate effectively in battle...to teach mid level officers how to employ joint force military doctrine in battle...to teach officers the art of strategy...games for simulating responses to weapons of mass destruction, terrorists incidents, and threats; games for mastering the complex process of military logistics...'

(Cited in Dovey and Kennedy 2006: 12)

The most well known case about the military's use of digital games is probably the free-downloadable online game called *America's Army*, which was officially developed and distributed by the US Department of Defence in 2002. This game was released in a very sensitive time: one year after 9/11. Since then, this game has been used as an official platform which allows the U.S. Army forces to target and recruit potential youngsters, collect their personal information and increase their interests in the military

style of life. It is a very creative way to find young people who are attracted to military activities through their virtual imaginations and gaming experiences. This is potentially why, according to U.S. army research, 90 percent of US army recruits are casual gamers and 30 percent are ‘hard core’ game players (Thussu 2007). The key meanings of adopting this war gaming are two-fold. Firstly, it upgrades the traditional Military-Entertainment Complex with improved gamer/content interaction features by which it reduces extra costs in combat training. The uses of war games in military departments bring more fun and excitement into day-to-day military practices. Secondly, it offers a more creative and convenient solution for contemporary military organizations to efficiently target any possible human resource in this digital era. The table below documents war games used by different US Armed forces in their day-to-day training and lists the original developers/publishers of these games. The whole table demonstrates the high level of popularity of war games among military departments.

Table 8. War games used by U.S. military (Source, Department of Defence, cited by Nichols 2010: 42)

Game titles and year released	Armed Forces branch using game	Developer and/or publisher
Air Force: Delta Storm (2001)	Air Force	Konami,
America’s Army (2002)	Army	MOVES Institute
America’s Army: Rise of a Soldier (2005)	Army	Ubisoft
America’s Army: True Soldiers (2007)	Army	Red Storm Entertainment
Battle Command 2010 (2000)	Army	MaK Technologies

Battlefield 1942 (2002)	Army	Digital Illusions CE/Electronic Arts
Battle Stations 21 (2005)	Navy	IDEAS
Close Combat: First to Fight (2005)	Navy/Marines	2K Games
Falcon 4.0 (1998)	Air Force	MicroProse
Flight Simulator (1982)	Air Force/Navy	Microsoft
Full Spectrum Command (2003)	Army	University of Southern California, Institute for Creative Technologies
Full Spectrum Leader (2005)	Army	University of Southern California, Institute for Creative Technologies
Full Spectrum Warrior (2004)	Army	University of Southern California, Institute for Creative Technologies
Harpoon2 (2000)	Navy	Strategic Simulations, Inc
Jane's Fleet Command (1999)	Navy	Electronic Arts
Medal of Honor (1999)	Marines	Electronic Arts
Operation Flashpoint (2001)	Army/Air Force	Bohemia Interactive/Codemasters
Saving Sergeant Pbletti (1998)	Army	Will Interactive
SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals (2002)	Navy	Zipper Interactive/Sony
Soldier of Fortune (2000)	Marines	Raven/Activision

Starcraft (1998)	Air Force	Blizzard
Sun Command (2001)	Navy	Electronic Arts
24Blue (2006)	Navy	Breakaway, Ltd.

According to Roger Stahl (2006), the global popularity of war games reached an all time high after 9/11 and has increased dramatically after the US global campaign of War on Terror. Big war game titles like *Medal of Honor*, *Frontline*, *Prison of War*, *Conflict: Desert Storm*, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, *Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Room*, *Raven Shield* and *SOCOM: Navy Seals* etc. have the tendency to militarize our social life. Stahl described this as an ‘expansion into the domestic sphere,’ in which serious wars are made a fun and pleasurable leisure activity (p. 119). In the same respect, Power stressed that, through playing war-themed digital games, Americans are allowed to ‘play through the anxieties that attend uncertain times and new configurations of power’ (2007: 271). All the role-playing actions taken in war gaming and the increasing time spent by game players help accelerate the blurring sense of being a citizen or a soldier. As Stahl (2006) proposed, when gamers are mediated in the gaming process, an intriguing ‘hybrid identity of virtual-citizen-soldier’ is consequently birthed (p. 125).

The process from MEC1 to MEC2 totally proves and unpacks Stock and Muir’s (2003) assertion that, ‘propaganda has always been served as entertainment’. In broader terms, the war genre in digital games, which is purposely designed to provide an exciting virtual killing screen experience, directly serves the global image systems to expose the desire of an aggressive nation. Although most game professionals would claim that

war games are simply another fantasy creation where gamers pay no consequences, the inherent potential of this emerging genre for propaganda means that it finds it hard to defend itself against the public's criticism that it is chained to ideological function and political motivation. Thus, Marsha Kinder (2001) stated that the 'punctuated use of violence in films and video games may be a particular American product' (cited in Raessens and Goldstein 2005: 341). Goldstein then emphasizes that these different forms and 'acts of violence are used in a comic way to further a story about guilt and punishment' of particular nations (ibid). The guilt and punishment to which he was ironically referring point to the historical reality constructed by empirical nations which are mostly in control of the global media resources and who tell stories framed around their own chosen discourse.

Donna Haraway (1990) once called this large scale Western production of military theme-based popular culture as 'militarized imagination.' In her thesis, the whole digital game culture 'is heavily oriented to individual competition and extraterrestrial warfare, destruction of the planet and a science fiction escape from its consequences. More than our imaginations is militarized; and the other realities of electronic and nuclear warfare are inescapable' (pp. 210-211). In other words, these war games sell and seem to push the gamers to experience a defining 'necessary conflict' through gameplay. This form of gameplay can be found in Richard Schechner's (1998) critical statement to define that play, in the Western context, 'is a rotten category tainted by unreality, inauthenticity, duplicity, make-believe, looseness, fooling around, and inconsequentiality' (cited in Pearce 2009:3).

However, the pleasure of playing this type of conflict-based war-themed FPS, according to King (2007), is mainly because 'a tension exists between experience of the

game-world in diegetic terms' (the first term is refereeing to an imaginary experience inside the game, in this case imagining oneself as engaged in particular military activities), and the second term refers to an experience of seeing the game as a game (which means the involving awareness of the process of play as an abstracted activity revolving around the performance of core game mechanics) (p. 58). Gameplay is itself an expression of self-performing and a kind of 'imagination practice' that guides gamers to their gaming pleasure. One thing that requires our immediate attention in the process is the never-ended debates about the 'game effects model'. As we discussed earlier in chapter two, conservative theorists and physiologists claim that playing shooter games is a dangerous pleasure and is thus defined as causing mental aggression and violent behaviours (see Anderson and Bushman 2001). Through the psychologists' accusations and news' articulations, the FPS genre has always been in the centre of the spotlight and automatically linked to crimes and other negative output threatening parents and society. Although FPS's alleged negative influences on gamers remain difficult to prove among academics, and lose credibility because of the limited evidence provided, it is fair to say that all contemporary FPS games directly present an obvious function of conflict, presented in the styles of shooting, killing, knifing, bombing, combating and so on and so forth. Their original design is centralized by conflict, and at the first sight, gamers want to experience it.

In this regard, I will later adopt the concept of 'conflict gaming' to help us relocate this genre, based on the consideration that the original design of games in this genre 'must' contain the key elements of contradiction and conflict. In a critical sense it is also that the game genre itself becomes an admirer of conflict. This mentality was originated in the game designers' intention to believe conflict can make games (sell and played) better. This is clearly reflected in my interview with Tim Ponting (the

ex-European PR manager of Activision Blizzard, which produced several series of *Call of Duty*) quoted in my Master's dissertation in 2008. As he said:

'I have heard from the directors they are trying to make it (war games) quite shocking and quite brutal. It is very difficult and there is a fine line you have to tread morally with video games. You know between violence and...well...you know even though you want to make a video game about war, it would be very unpleasant to play and probably quite boring. So completely boring and absolutely horrible...well, it has to be entertaining.'

We can also grasp the essentiality of conflict-gaming by paying attention to the famous marketing slogan of the 2004-released game, *Kuma War*. The game is described in the following way: 'in a world being torn apart by international conflict, one thing is on everyone's mind as they finish watching the nightly news: 'Man, this would make a great game.' In a broader context, the idea of employing the rhetorical term 'conflict' also refers to the conflict culture that our century is leaning forward to (see Power 2009). These critical words from Tim Ponting and the *Kuma War* campaign show us the clear struggles faced by many of today's media artists and producers. Infotainment has trained us into seeing the entertainment value of horrific images. The audience of the mass market are now tired of boring images and features. It is fascinating to see people acquire more brutal content to stimulate their human senses, and this is potentially why producing violent content has become a favorite weapon used by television, movies, news and game producers to catch the public's attention.

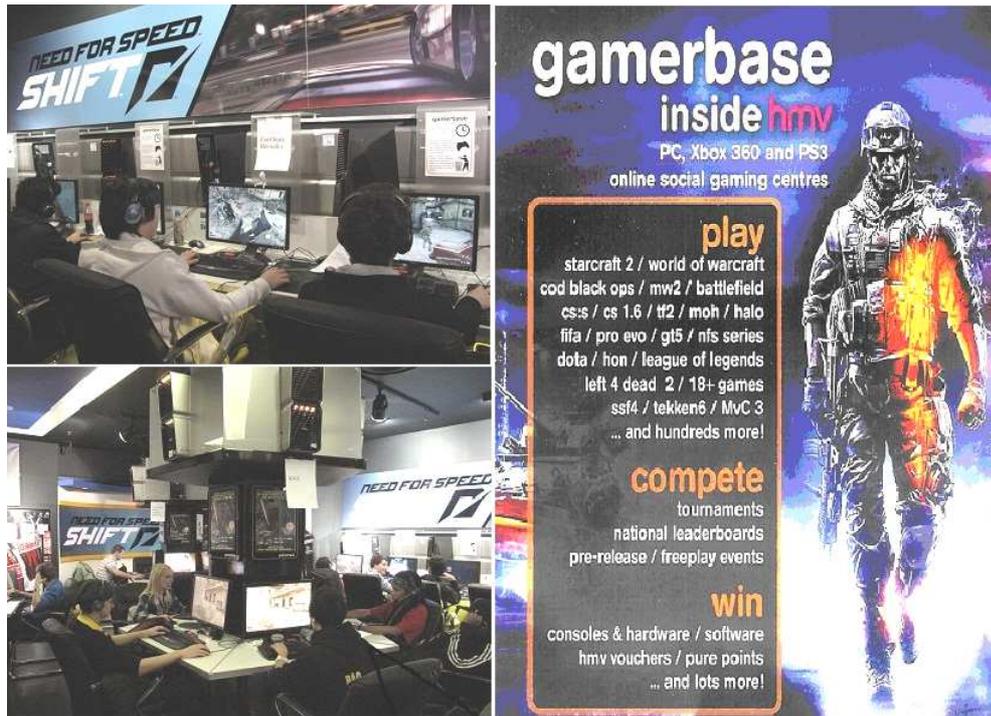
However, the establishment of militainment genre in the West and the articulations of war movies and war-themed games FPS together provide a new communication

channel to stimulate gamers' desire towards conflict. As the war games landscape keeps expanding globally, genre seems to have a different meaning and is no longer a naïve cultural category. On this point, John Frow expands on the general function of genre which simply taught us that: 'genre is not just a matter of codes and conventions, but that it also calls into play systems of use, durable social institutions, and the organizations of physical space' (2006:12). The development of the militainment genre and the evolution of the military-entertainment complex in the past ten years, as they were revealed, validates Frow's claim that the war/military genre, as a form of codes and conventions has transformed into our physical space and interactive cultural (play) activity. It has been organized by institutions and organizations, such as the Pentagon, the well-planned military units and commercial game developers and publishers.

3.4 National Identity in (War) Gameplay

War games are not only largely used by military departments to engage and train soldiers in (virtual and real) conflict, but they are also by and large played and exercised by ordinary gamers who enjoy competing against each other online and offline. Digital games (in particular some fixed genres providing more challenges and contests) have been developed as a new form of sport in the past ten years. They have been branded as 'e-sports' or 'cyber-sports'. In the world of global gaming during the last ten years, there have been regular transnational events organized in an Olympic style to allow professional gamers to represent their country and compete for medals and prizes in different big game titles. Like many forms of sports we know, digital games set up an international platform where gaming nationalists can (re)negotiate their nationalistic pride and compete with other countries.

Since the first global professional contest event, World Cyber Games (WCG) was organized in Seoul, South Korea in 2000, several international gaming tournaments, including Electronic Sports World Cup (ESWC), Major League Gaming (MLG), ESL Extreme Masters, World Esports Masters (WEM) have set up a new world stage for gamers to perform their skills in front of millions of global gamers. Most of these big game titles played at these large events have to be conflict-oriented and full of in-play tension in order to increase the on-air excitement during various contests. These forms of man against man, team against team battles are not played underground. In fact, they are massively broadcast to millions of global viewers. Today in many countries (for example, Taiwan) the channels showing professional game contests have even become the most-watched sports programme on TV and online. The winners in these contests are celebrated and embraced by their fans and can turn themselves into the next national heroes to represent their own country. Gamers have to experience several stages to achieve these ultimate goals. This involves first joining a local, smaller format of online competition. If they are noticed, they may then be invited by certain big name professional gamer companies to have their skills properly developed, then sign a contract to finalize their dream of being a star gamer. Anyone who visits internet (game) cafés today is likely to find many gamers practicing ‘conflict-based games’ provided by the ‘training camps’ shops. (The picture shown below lists the top online games provided by the biggest London-based internet gaming centre, gamerbase.com, and the setting of the shop).



Picture 5. The List of Games Distributed in the Game Menu of gamerbase.com in 2011

The online war-themed FPS games, similar to many sports and e-sports games, provide an open, masculinized battle space to encourage gamers from different countries to hunt down ‘others’ based on the principle of contradiction and conflict. These communities and teams, however, are preferentially grouped by people who speak the same language, share similar cultural interests and experiences, and if better, have the same nationality or cultural background. Consciously or not, when playing these games online with others, gamers are quite aware of the country they represent due to the same spoken language and the diversified geographical, cultural, and communication settings of the game. Through in-game conflict and challenging gamers from other countries, gamers are able to evaluate, reformulate and reassure their durable (at the same time fixed-national and changeable-virtual) identities. In this aspect, Lewis Lambeth’s study on Nationalism, Nationhood and Identity in Virtual Worlds and MMORPG’s has clearly demonstrated that the occurring behaviours that flow in online

games all implicate and symbolize a certain degree of nationalism. Such cyber-nationalism was already proved by Pearce's (2006) study. She believed that it was defined, blended and formed by what they called the 'shared sense of solidarity' (p. 22). Based on Pearce's cyber-ethnographical study on 'Uru Diaporas' – a specific immigrant community move in and around the gaming worlds, Lambeth claimed the gamers' actions significantly dress out these social groups' self-awareness of their own culturally distinct identity and their desire to maintain their shared-cultural identity. More importantly he suggested these gameplay communities maintain at least some level of self-consciousness of existence by continually doing so (p. 26). More discussion in relation to gamers' national identity (shown in different ways of self-expression) and nationalistic tendencies will be further elaborated on in the findings of the remaining chapters in the thesis. Only from gamers' direct responses we are more likely to see gamers' nationalistic tendencies.

3.5 Conceptualizing 'Conflict-Gaming'

'Everything the military-entertainment complex touches with its gold-plated output jacks turns into digits. Everything is digital and yet the digital is nothing. No human can touch it, smell it, taste it. It just beeps and blinks and reports itself in glowing alphanumeric, spouting stock quotes on your cell phone. Sure, there may be vivid 3D graphics...pie charts and bar graphs...swirls and whorls of brightly colored polygons blazing from screen to screen. But these are just decoration. The jitter of your thumb on the button or the flicker of your wrist on the mouse connect directly to an invisible, intangible gamespace of pure contest, pure agon'.

(Wark 2007: section 009)

Based on Wark's emphasis, the main purpose in this final section is to adopt the new concept of 'conflict-gaming' which was introduced to reposition and redefine a particular digital game genre that, by and large demands gamers to engage in the process of 'conflict' and experience it. This crucial element is necessarily planted in the original design of the combat-based games and can be obviously seen in most war games. The year of 1992 was the first time that James Dunnigan in his book *The Complete War Games Handbook* used the term 'conflict simulations' to aptly describe the computerized war games based on historical military conflicts. In summary of the first three lengthy chapters, the motivation of introducing 'conflict-gaming' is therefore to develop a collective point to bridge designers and gamers' philosophy of wanting to create and experience conflict, and intends to find a balance between the over-emphasized game negativity (in terms of violence and aggression) and gaming agency, and possibly, to essentialize the cultural form of today's war games.

The implication of conflict in its basic meaning can be traced back to Caillois' original idea of 'agon' – the first category and fundamental idea he used to explain the originality of any form of game. As Caillois defines, '...the spirit of agon is found in other cultural phenomena conforming to the game code: in the duel, in the tournament and in certain constant and noteworthy aspects of so-called courtly war' (2001:15). As well as Caillois' theoretical interpretation, other legendary game academics have all coincidentally mentioned this heavily embedded in-game element. The game design legend, Chris Crawford, for example, named the four most common features contained within a game, including representation, interaction, conflict and safety. In his defence, conflict is one of the most pleasurable and one that can never be removed from any presentable challenge. Moreover, Prensky (2001) defines the digital

game as a combination of twelve elements. The ninth element in his list highlights that 'games have conflict/competition/challenge/opposition ...That gives us adrenaline' (p.5). From different angles, these studies have all coincidentally touched on the most vital component: conflict. Like Wark (2007) emphasized, the conflict/agon becomes the key attraction in these type of games, implying a sense that the games become admirers of the imported conflict:

'Images appeal as prizes, and call us to play the game in which they are all that is at stake. You observe that world after world, cave after cave, what prevails is the same agon, the same logic of one versus the other, ending in victory or defeat. Agony rules. Everything has value only when ranked against something else; everyone has value only when ranked against someone else' (section 006).

Conflict can be represented in various forms of expression, be it killing, fighting, punching, shooting, and attacking etc. It is always considered by most gamers and designers as one of the most important elements to create pleasure and decide whether a game is entertaining and fun, playable or not. In theory, conflict in digital games is caused by the contradiction that has split gamers into different groups, and is certainly one of the most essential ingredients to establish war and build up oppositions; the most direct solution offered when an individual or a group faces certain challenges and tasks, or deals with difficult situations. In many in-game combat situations, conflict directly reflects gamers' reaction and response to any ideology that contradicts their own beliefs. In order to help us make more sense of it, Crawford interprets conflict in this way: 'conflict makes challenge personal...enlivens and animates challenge; without conflict, challenge is limp and passive...Narrative operates under the same constraint; conflict puts the protagonist under stress, forcing choices that reveal character' (2003:

55). No one can deny conflict exists everywhere in the game culture. As Burston notes:

‘Games of all sorts – video games, board games, and games kids play in the backyard – have historically been about conflict and warfare. Whether you’re playing chess, which is a simulated battlefield, or a game like Go, and ancient Chinese game that is also a simulated battlefield, or you’re playing a board game like Risk or Axis and Allies, you’re essentially at war and you’re playing out military conflict. The story continues with electronic games.’

(Cited in Stockwell and Muir 2003)

The basic element of conflict is very essential to the creation of FPS games as well as in many other forms and genres of digital games. Conflict, especially in this FPS style of gameplay, is purposely constructed to find and build up opponents and enemies. It is clear when gamers play the conflict-oriented games, different forms of conflicts are constantly negotiated in varying degrees. It is also important to be aware that conflict must be expressed in the forms people can actually feel and see. In this regard, the game design guru Chris Crawford presents four dimensions of proceeding game conflict which are evolved from human instincts to be integrated into the game culture. These are categorized as the physical, verbal, political or economic forms. The physical presence of conflict is defined as ‘the oldest and most fundamental dimension of conflict. Bash the guy on the head, kick him in the butt, or punch him in the nose’ (2003:57). The verbal presence then presents a linguistic way of conflict and verbal assault. We can always see this form of expression in gamers’ use of swearing before, during and after a game. The political presence describes how combatants find allies and undermine their opponent’s social alliances. The economic presence is related to the ways gamers occupy resources. These four dimensions are invisibly and randomly

displaced in the games and their narrative structure which require a higher intensity of conflict, particularly in the war-themed FPS genre.

However, as well as proposing these four dimensions of conflict, Crawford, more critically provides the answer to the common question of why some games have to be designed in a violent format: 'Violence is the most intense, direct, and physical form of conflict available; therefore, kids want to experience it...it's intensely pleasurable...'⁴³ (2003: 66). Backed-up by Crawford's thesis, this research adopts the idea of 'conflict-gaming' in order to move away from the previous criticism and understanding of war-games as being equal to violent games. Conflict gaming does not necessarily mean violence and aggression in its direct sense and meaning, but it definitely associates with 'fighting-against' in its created playful content. What conflict-gaming tends to suggest here is also the 'dynamic-process' that gamers motivate themselves to do, experience and participate in during conflict situations. Conflict games certainly encompass the category of the first-person-shooter genre. Indeed, the majority of these types of games are created and distributed by the giant Western game conglomerates like Electronic Arts and Ubisoft to increase the public's interest in them. At this point, it is worth mentioning that Japan recently adopted this genre and integrated it with its softer cultural style of representation to recreate a new version of cute FPS games. Cute shooter games like the *Paper Man* and *Gal Gun*⁴³ made some decent changes to the brutal-graphics and play features of the 'traditional bloody and violent' FPS genre, making the new version of FPS games in Japan look less aggressive and offensive than the ones made in the West (see Picture 6 & 7). In these new

⁴³ Both *PaperMan* and *GalGun* were developed and distributed in Japan. Comparing to Western FPS genre, the characters and graphics designed in them are cute and fictional and more relevant to Japan-oriented manga style. They represent a strong contrast to Western FPS genre, in which characters and stories are more historical and based on previous fought war events told by retired military consultants and soldiers. However, it is argued the focus of these games is more to do with erotic than violent.

developing Japanese FPS games, gamers basically shoot at cute, young Lolita-like ladies instead of realistic deadly soldiers and monsters. This has created a scene that stands in contrast to the shooter games made by Western designers and developers.



Picture 6. The Cute Graphic Style of PaperMan



Picture 7. GalGun and its in-Game Shooting Image

Today the global production of conflict war games keeps growing, while the fans of this genre are dramatically increasing. Between 2009-2010, four specialized books were published to discuss the fascinating war-games and the global militainment phenomenon: *War isn't Hell, It's Entertainment* (Schubart et al. 2009), *Militainment, Inc.* (Stahl 2010), *Joystick Soldier* (Huntemann 2010) and *Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies* (Wright et al. 2010). These books have collected a large number of essays which all aimed to deconstruct the complexity embedded in the global diffusion of militainment and capture the critical moment of a conflict-oriented culture in which we are all involved, witnessing and experiencing. However, the majority of these papers concentrated on the games' representations, narratives, ideological implications and political framework, while only a small amount of the studies chose to focus on gamers' experiences and feelings attached to conflict gaming. Among the latter is Joel Penney's study on *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* gamer Communities. It was the most significant research in this area and successfully produced impressive findings to review the relationship between gamers' experiences and fictional/non-fictional game content. Although much has been said about the growing global militainment, war-themed movies/games, and their cultural context and political implications, the different ways gamers engage in and with this particular genre certainly require further examination.

Conclusion:

Based on my observations on its cultural context, this chapter has argued that the representations of soldiers and heroic images of war in news, advertisements, films and digital games converges military and popular culture in a softer and invisible way, and proposes the idea that a (homogeneous) culture of conflict is, however, embedded in the process and avidly encourages gamers to immerse themselves in a well-planned

and constructed imaginary battlefield. In this regard, this chapter introduces the idea of 'conflict gaming' as a point of departure which allows us to redefine the game genre designed and played based on the 'conflict/contest/agon' principle.

The state of the contemporary popular cultural scene, which can be summarized as the triumph of the 'hyper-real' dynamic, where war has now been acutely simulated in a very creative way post-Gulf War, was accurately predicted by Baudrillard. The current militainment phenomenon neatly fits his statement: 'The real victory of the simulators of wars is to have drawn everyone into this rotten simulation (cited in Poster 2001: 253).' The United States of America, which sits at the world's highest position in technological development and global entertainment production, has done an incredible job of making the global citizens, whether consciously or unconsciously, accept and live with the invisible, enjoyable and playable virtual conflicts. In regard to this, Stahl (2006) warns us that: 'the video game is increasingly both medium and metaphor by which war invades our hearts and minds' (p. 127). As many critical thinkers like Stahl have reminded us, the war-themed digital games are not only a product of conspiracy which are produced to rewrite and adjust the history and discourse of war, but also a creative attempt to alienate and numb (game) audiences' senses and feelings towards war and conflict. Morris (2002), for example, additionally claimed FPS games should be seen as some kind of 'artificial psychosis' (an idea borrowed from Baudry), which 'gives the player the illusion of full control' (p. 95). Gamers seem to lose their autonomy and somehow become mindless victims caught within a powerful political force and framework. However, to go beyond these assumptions of seeing gamers as a powerless, manipulated community without subjectivity and self-awareness, Ryan (2007) pins down a very significant characteristic in FPS gameplay:

‘Games like Quake or Doom are generally not played for the sake of the story, and the function of the narratives and themes is to lure the player into the game, rather than to support gameplay in a strategic way. When hard-core players are engaged in the heat of the action, it does not really matter to them whether they play good guys or bad guys, human protecting the earth, or destroying angels trying to turn the world into apocalyptic chaos’ (cited in Atkin and Krzywinska, 2007: 13-14).

Ryan’s key argument demonstrates that the FPS genre is preferentially focused by the gamers in its more ludic gameplay function than the original narratives and stories would suggest. In other words, the games’ embedded narratological ideologies and messages may not be as important or mean something completely different to the gamers. Ryan's emphasis echoes Gerard Jones’ understanding of shooter gamers, which has already been explained in Chapter Two. The war-themed FPS genre today is there to offer much more than game researchers expect at first sight. As I will demonstrate later, the gamers may only spend two or three days going through the stories and never play the story mode again. They in fact spend months and years repeatedly playing the online missions with friends and team mates. At this point it might be the case, as ludologists’ claim, that gameplay becomes more important than narrativity.

However, many would ask whether the power of FPS digital games has been overstretched to become such a dangerous interactive medium that they can have a bad influence on gamers to twist and damage their mindsets. Or, is it the case, as in Taylor’s (2006) more positive view, that during the critical mediation process the agency shifts, and thus the power IS removed from the designers/developers and given to the players.

In order to solve these challenging questions, as Jones suggests, researchers have to really pay attention to gamers, listen to what they say, and understand what they think before imprisoning them with false interpretations and stereotypes.

Chapter Four:

Research Questions and Methods

‘What’s missing from contemporary debate on gaming and culture is any naturalistic study of what game-playing experiences are like, how gaming fits into people’s lives, and the kinds of practices that people are engaged in while gaming.’

(Squire 2002: 2-3)

4.1 Research Aims

As Squire reminded us, contemporary research on digital games lacks knowledge and understanding of gameplay itself, particularly in regard to gamers’ experiences. With the cultural context and the grounding theories around the central themes of global gaming culture, gamers and militainment genre carefully structured throughout the last three chapters, this research has progressively developed profound interests in today’s gaming community and gamers who regularly spend time playing the war-themed first-person-shooter digital games and immerse themselves deeply in this conflict-gaming culture. Joey Penny (2009) urged that: ‘because many different kinds of people play shooter games, any analysis of the socio-cultural or political impacts of these games must take this fact into account’ (p. 195). By and large inspired by Squire’s reminder and Penny’s thesis, the key aim of this research is to target and capture the shooter gamers’ feelings, experiences, and attitudes with a primary focus on the community of the most popular game series - *Call of Duty*. With the aim of finding how games of this kind are visually exposed to audiences, there have been a tremendous number of excellent studies focusing on game design, representations,

graphic styles and content. This research therefore does not concentrate on debates and discussions in relation to the representations of games, but rather focuses on gamers' personal experiences and imagination processes. Hence, one main goal targeted by this research is to understand what COD gameplay means to the fans and what meanings are created by the COD gamers in this critical interactive gameplay process. Another vital point I would try to put across in terms of methods is the reflection on the gamers' self-identity and self-reflexivity. By depending on such reflexivity, this research heavily relies on what the sample of gamers wrote and said about their own relationship and experiences with the genre.

The reason for choosing the *Call of Duty* gamers and community as the key samples for this study is very simple. The different series of COD produced in the last few years has obtained the highest number of gamers among all FPS games. This success automatically underlines the significance of it. Robert Bowling, the Infinity Ward director of communications once announced that a total number of 25 million unique game players play Activision's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. In this single series, Activision grossed \$550 million within five days of its launch, putting this shooter game in the record books as the best-selling game title in 2009 and 2010. In regard to the global success of the COD series, there have been eight versions of *Call of Duty* produced between 2003 and 2012, including *Call of Duty* (2003), *Call of Duty 2* (2005), *Call of Duty 3* (2006), *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), *Call of Duty World at War* (2008), *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (2011). However, at the time of this study, the two latest versions played by the gamers were actually *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. In the mean time, fans were waiting for the release of the new version of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* before the end of 2011.

4.2 The Research Questions

The reasons gamers play war games, according to the definition of Dunnigan (1992), are because they are a contestable practice where an individual simultaneously wants to ‘obtain information’ and ‘enter a competitive gaming experience’ (p. 37). In essence, these two principles explain gamers’ subjectivity of choosing what they want to experience and learn from their chosen medium. This research believes in these rules; seeing gamers as the clever owners of their identities, and attempts to remove the unfair accusations and assumptions forced onto them. This includes seeing the gamer as a ‘weak subject’ to be harmed and damaged by ‘inappropriate’ game content. Through an analysis of what has been written and said by the gamers themselves, key themes will be developed based on the respondents’ responses, views and thoughts in the next chapter of the thesis. Hence, the research does not concern what war games do to gamers, but concentrates more on the gamers’ understanding of the games they are playing and their own participatory gameplay experience. With this understanding, the main research questions can be stated as follows:

- What are the gamers’ experiences in the *Call of Duty* gameplay?
- What does war-themed First Person Shooter (FPS) mean to the gamers?
- What are gamers’ feelings and attitudes towards this conflict-oriented genre?

In order to find the answers to these research questions, the thesis employed two particular methods.

4.3 The Research Design

Some recent game-related research has been trying different methods to analyze gamers. For instance, Colwell and Kato (2005) stuck to one of the most utilized methods by designing a series of questionnaires to comparatively research 204 British and 305 Japanese school-student gamers aged 12 to 14 years old. Hung (2007) audio-recorded the conversations of a game session and videotaped participants' in-game actions and reactions. Chen *et al.* (2008) textually collected and observed the in-game activities on a total of 62 Taiwanese World of Warcraft (WOW) servers. Hussian and Griffiths (2009) developed their research themes based on their interviews with 71 online gamers from 11 different countries, aged 18 to 54. Most data collected by Hussian and Griffiths was actually sent and received through emails and MSN Messengers. After revising the wide range of trial methods, this research has been mostly influenced by Hussian and Griffiths' qualitative study and chose to use the most time-saving and efficient methods of online questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

However, as mentioned earlier in the second chapter, recent studies on war-themed FPS gamers has always been limited to the Western gamers, who are culturally and historically synchronized to shooter games (this means, when compared to East Asian gamers, they are more familiar with the historical development of the game, its design, graphics and style of gameplay). To a certain extent, these Western gamers were defined as more easily and directly influenced (or manipulated) by certain forms of taught ideologies, where nationalism and patriotism were chained to the games' design, content and narrative (e.g. the story of America's Army: its official core-function of military recruiting and military knowledge feeding, and its success in boosting the

number of recruits when America faced a shortage in army recruits). Accordingly, Joey Penny (2009), in his article *'No Better Way to Experience' World War II: Authenticity and Ideology in the Call of Duty and Medal of Honor Player Communities*⁴ already demonstrated that the gamers who play World War II history-related and science fiction story-based genres, play for different reasons and with different intentions. According to Penny's findings, the gamers' political attitudes may vary between these two groups (pp. 195-196). However, it is important to understand that most studies on contemporary gamers, similar to Penny's research and findings, are still very much limited within a 'Western context' and have yet to account for a broader picture. They either ignore foreign gamers' views because the play number is too low, or do not realize that foreign gamers' experiences can be different when engaging to the same games and play contexts. Recognizing foreign gamers' transnational experiences as equally important as the mainstream gamers', I decided that the main areas of my research should involve directly and dually approaching (the global and foreign-local) COD gamers. This has resulted in some interesting findings which reflect different dimensions of the gamers' attitudes and feelings towards this specific genre. From a methodological perspective, the main research processes were designed, conducted and executed in two forms:

Method One: Qualitative Online-Questionnaires with Global COD Gamer Community

In order to turn the designed methods into practical fieldwork, in the first stage I created an open-end online questionnaire and randomly attached the links to the official Facebook COD community sites and forums. This online community had attracted nearly 10 million fans prior to 2012. The main purpose of this process was to find the self-selected gamers who were willing to spend time clicking the links and

answering set-questions. The different sets of questions asked in this survey were rather general, and were designed to enquire about respondents' gaming life, their reasons for being attracted to their favourite games/genres, their in-game experience, and their opinions in relation to the mainstream criticism about game violence in this genre, etc (see Appendix). There were also a few quantitative questions made to collect the respondents' basic information in terms of their age, gender, hours spent gaming and nationality etc. The self-selected participants were encouraged to write as much as they could in accordance with the wide range of (sensitive) issues that I raised in open style questions. The gamers who participated in this stage were given the flexibility to type down – what they really thought about the war games they are playing, the different styles of gameplay, and the controversial issue about gaming violence and aggression. The whole questionnaire was divided into four parts and contained 27 questions in total. It was made in two language versions: English and Mandarin Chinese.

Between 2009 and 2010 the research successfully collected back 433 completed questionnaires (n=433) from the 746 returned ones. The response rate is 58% as the uncompleted questionnaires were considered not to be included because of the issue about credibility. As presented in the tables below, there were 401 questionnaires answered in English, while the remaining 32 were completed by Chinese speaking respondents. In terms of age, 126 respondents were under 16, 289 respondents were between 18 and 35, and only 18 respondents were over 35. As regards genders, many more male respondents (413) participated in the survey than female respondents (20), which seems to imply that this type of game is still a masculinized one; appealing more to male gamers. The composition of the samples and analysis of the results will be thoroughly reviewed and presented in the next chapter. Although the whole collection

of 433 questionnaires encompasses gamers' responses from 51 different countries, a large percentage came from the 'Western' gamers based in the US, UK, Canada and Australia. The four tables presented below show the breakdowns of the respondents' use of language, age, genre and nationality.

Table 9 Breakdown of the collected questionnaires by language

Language used	Number	Percentage (%)
English	401	93%
Chinese Mandarin	32	7%

Table 10 Breakdown of Respondents by age group

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
Under 16	126	29%
16 – 35	289	67%
Over 35	18	4%

Table 11 Breakdown of Respondents by gender

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	413	95%
Female	20	5%

Table 12 Breakdown of Respondents by nationality

Country of Origin	Number of Questionnaires Collected
US	125
UK	89 (England 72, Scotland 3, Wales 2, Ireland 12)

Canada	45
Taiwan	32
Australia	16
Belgium	8
Sweden	8
Germany	7
Finland	6
Poland	5
Norway	6
India	5
France	5
Denmark	4
Malaysia	4
New Zealand	4
Pakistan	3
Slovakia	3
Mexico	3
Singapore	3
Laos	2
Argentina	2
Italy	2
Holland	2
Bulgaria	2
Mongolia	2
Philippines	2

Venezuela	2
Russia	2
Romania	2
Lithuania	2
Bosnia	2
Jordan	2
South Africa	2
Iran	2
Greece	2
Costa Rika	1
Nepal	1
Angola	1
Turkey	1
Nigeria	1
Japan	1
Venezuela	1
Bahrain	1
Thailand	1
Sri Lanka	1
Haiti	1
Kuwait	1
Indonesia	1
Switzerland	1
Croatia	1
Vietnam	1

Brazil	1
Morocco	1
Palestine	1
Bangladesh	1
Trinidad	1

In this first stage, the research tried not to narrow down the respondents to a particular age or gender group only, or limit who has the right to go through this questionnaire. It is one of the key aims to collect back as many questionnaires as possible in a short period of time and develop a general gamer demography. This qualitative-based data collected on a large, global scale automatically also reflects the essence of the gamer culture as a cross-cultural (global) community (there is no doubt a Facebook community is made possible and formed by the fans' connectivity, and these international gamers subsidize and are connected to it because of their specific shared-interests in the same game). As Pearce (2009) suggests:

‘...contemporary world cultures must be looked at in a global context, online virtual worlds must be looked at in the context of the ‘ludisphere,’ the larger framework of all networked play spaces on the Internet, as well as within the larger context of the ‘real world’ (p. 137).’

The main purpose of using the first method in the survey is to explore the relationship between gamers and games, and investigate how gamers look at themselves when dealing with the basic issues about war games' representations and realism. The main results and findings which emerged from the reviewing of the data will be illustrated

and analyzed in the next chapter. While the first method targeted self-selected global gamers, the second method chose to focus on a smaller sized, foreign-local COD community in Taiwan.

Method Two: In-depth interviews with Taiwanese COD Gamers

In the second stage of research, I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with Taiwanese gamers who have spent a huge amount of time playing the different series of *Call of Duty*. These selected interviewees are familiar with this genre and have standard knowledge about these shooter games. The search for COD gamers in Taiwan was basically following the ‘snowball’ style of research process which involved getting in touch with more gamers when one introduced another. Many of them began to know one other and became good friends when they first played these shooter games online together. The members in this community all play their COD games on the PlayStation3 console. Outside of their gaming time, some members within this type of local community arrange regular leisure-time meetings and social activities.

Each interview in this research lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Most interviews were meant to be unstructured (or semi-structured) and were made to appear informal in order to make the interviewees feel more relaxed. This enabled them to freely show their passion and express their thoughts and opinions. In certain situations, I even chose to talk to some of them when they gathered and played games together, or simply asked some questions in the middle of their ‘community style’ gameplay sessions. In choosing an informal setting and by not using properly designed, serious interviews, I found that the interviewees were willing to talk a little bit more, tell more stories about themselves, show their emotions and feelings, and contribute more answers to my questions in reflecting their thoughts and experiences.

The interviewees were all male adults aged 29 to 35 with stable jobs in various professions. This research prioritized gamers around 30 years old for several reasons. Firstly, according to my previous interview with Tim Ponting, the ex-Head of European Corporate Communication of Activision (the company published several series of COD), I was told that the official target age group for war games like *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* was clearly between 18 and 35 for marketing reasons. Secondly, in comparison to youths (under 18) and university students (18-24) who were still involved in study and developing their career interests, people around 30 have gained more social experiences and are mature enough to think independently. Thirdly, most of the chosen respondents had reached the age where to have a stable job and an ordinary life was not associated with military activities directly (although some of them did serve and complete 1-2 years compulsory military training and service, which the Taiwanese government requires every man to do). As a quick summary, the next table lists the name of the interviewees and their precise age, professions and years of playing digital games.

Table 13 – The list of interviewees

Participants	Names	Age	Profession	Years of Gaming
1	Samuel Chuang	30	IT Sales Executive	20
2	Arthur Lin	33	Hair Salon Manger	23
3	Yung-Shi Liu	35	Self-employed	8
4	Aaron Chen	30	Photographer	18
5	Min-Jang Roy	30	Insurance Sales Executive	10
6	Leslie Tung	32	Cameraman	20

7	Bob Chang	31	Furniture Sales Executive	15
8	Li-Chiang Hsiao	35	Bank Officer	20
9	Ralph Chen	33	Self-employed	20
10	Jason Ni	31	Vet Practitioner	20
11	Paul Yang	30	International Trader	20

Instead of being a researcher monitoring their behaviours, I tried to interact with the gamers and community and played as a COD gamer myself. This subjective position made me more easily accepted in their circle and freely participated in their gatherings in the process.

For a long period, playing digital games has been one of the most popular leisure activities for Taiwanese society. In 2011, the TV rating on the e-sports channel had reached an all time high amongst all of the domestic sports channels and programmes in Taiwan. According to Hong and Liu's study (2010), amongst a population of 23 million Taiwanese citizens, there are 5 million regular game players, and seventy percent of these 5 million game fans spend an average of 2 hours playing games online on a daily basis. With such a great national interest in gaming, Taiwanese shooter gamers can be seen as a significant case for study if we look at the country's geopolitical condition in the virtual world. Its digital game industry is in a the category of the second tier country and a highly hybridized and dominated one, which, like most East Asian countries, has been mainly influenced by American and Japanese popular culture and gaming trends. Since the first generation Nintendo console NEC (Nintendo Entertainment System) and Sega's Mega Drive arrived on the Taiwanese market for the first time in the mid-1980s, and was then accompanied by Sony's first

generation of PlayStation in the mid-1990s and Microsoft's first generation of Xbox after 2000, the Taiwanese game console owners could only purchase games software that was imported from and produced by the American, Japanese and European studios. The entire Taiwanese national console game market is completely dominated by Nintendo, Sony, Microsoft and other overseas game providers and distributors. In fact, before Microsoft's Xbox, general Taiwanese console gamers were more familiar with the Japanese oriented RPG (Role-Playing Games) genre and the 'made-in-Japan' style of games. They had very limited knowledge of the West-centric, shooter style of games. Only a small group of home computer owners had the chance to play with a few Western-produced computer games. Therefore, within a niche computer-based game market, they only developed their interests in particular kinds of western-made strategic game genres and fixed game types, such as the *Age of Empire* (AOE), *Starcraft* or *Warcraft*. However, when the famous online shooter game, *Counter-Strike* (CS), which initially could only be played on a PC and run by Microsoft Windows, was introduced to East Asian gamers and the Taiwanese market in 1999, there was finally significant growth in the number of people playing the shooter game genre. From this turning point, the local gamers in Taiwan could finally recognize and have a better understanding of the innovative style of shooter gameplay, which was originally designed as a western genre and made from a first person's point of view.

Another feature that makes Taiwanese gamers unique is related to the Country's compulsory national military service. Due to the Country's complicated and embarrassing political condition and relationship with Mainland China, every Taiwanese male, age 18 to 35 must by law serve in the army when they have finished their education. The system forces the healthy men to experience at least one to two years basic combat training and military education dependent on their differently

assigned military positions and programmes. Like the chosen interviewees in this research, after finishing their military duty, the majority of the Taiwanese grown-up male adults would have part of their memory associated with their previous army experience and have gained standard military knowledge taught by the Taiwanese armed forces. No matter what military units (Navy, Air Force, or Army) they used to serve in, the once-in-a-life-time experience of being a real soldier can possibly cause varying degrees of influence on their ordinary life after they have retired from serving in their military units. Such experience would certainly be carried forward and be simultaneously projected in their media experience and cultural imaginations. Further discussion of this topic will be developed in the latter chapters, particularly Chapter Six.

However, apart from Taiwanese gamers' military duty, another important point worth mentioning here is the occurrence of the military-entertainment complex in Taiwan in the last few years. By learning and borrowing from American creativity and their successful experience of using media to stimulate the public's interest in military affairs, the model of the military-entertainment complex and the use of gaming for recruiting soldiers and promoting military values were recently considered and adopted by the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence, MND (see Hong and Liu's Evaluation Study on Military Recruitment Promotional Strategies by Games, 2010). The Taiwanese MND's strategic move of using new technologies/media to re-brand the military images prove that the Taiwanese government is slowly changing the military recruiting system and considering abandoning the traditional compulsory military service. Unlike this research's interviewees' generation, the next generation of Taiwanese male adults may walk free from the national service if the Taiwanese government completes the administrative process and has 100 percent volunteer and paid soldiers recruited in the

future. One way or another, the changes to the national military system may still vary, and a final decision is yet to be made because of the unstable, difficult and changeable political scene between Taiwan and the Mainland China. However, such a sophisticated political framework fosters a special feature of the Taiwanese virtual military/war gamers' self-identity, and explains their complicated emotions and feelings towards military and warfare.

In contrast to the survey, interviewing Taiwanese gamers directly provide deeper insight into gamers' feeling and thoughts. Through face-to-face interviews, the respondents have time and space to express what they want to say. The results from employing both methods set out a logical pattern in looking at gamer experience more closely.

4.4 Differentiating Soldier-Gamers and Ordinary-Gamers

Before focusing on the proper analysis of the research in the next three chapters, it is necessary to point out the essential difference between the two groups of gamers; what I would call the 'soldier-gamers' and the 'ordinary gamers'. Like the term suggests, the idea of soldier-gamers simply means the community of soldiers playing or using games and simulations for training purposes. It is part of their job and duty to see war games as a positive training tool which prepares them for the real war events and world conflicts when bad scenarios occur. As a contrast, the idea of ordinary-gamers refers to the general people who play games for fun in their everyday lives. It is in their nature to distinguish and flow between the real and the virtual world, and play with their multiple in-game/out-game identities. To a certain extent, many academics and articles today mistakenly generalize them, and have thus misleadingly suggested that the

emergence of militainment would make these two communities more alike. We therefore have to remember that the motivations and purpose of these two groups using/playing war games can be very different and should never be mixed together without further judgment.

In essence, the soldier-gamers are meant to take their in-game actions and what they learn from the games into real military practice and war conflict, because in reality they are trained by their environment to do so. Ideologically speaking, playing war-related shooter games can teach them to deal with real war situations and help them learn to kill the real enemies, as they would in the virtual playing space. For example, the UK Ministry of Defence invented the free online game, *Start Thinking Soldier*. It was framed in a traditional film narrative style and designed to inspire young players in regard to the actions they should take in various real battlefield situations as well as the methods conflicts should be dealt strategically. In simple terms, games related to war are to the soldiers an open resource and facility they can use to develop and sustain their interest in military affairs. It is also an efficient training process where they are able to improve their skills and knowledge. In this sense, war gameplay is a training tool and programme, by which the soldiers virtually pre-experience the conflict of war. Therefore, when comparing them to the ordinary-gamers' mindset, there is a huge difference in their perceptions about war games and personal experience towards war gaming.

Contrary to the soldier-gamers' transformative gaming experience, which can in their roles in the military be experienced for real, the main reason ordinary gamers play war games is for pleasure of entertainment. The ordinary-gamers' experience in war gaming fulfills their own imagination. It enables them to find something they may

never experience in their real lives. Playing with something does not necessarily mean that they want to experience them or do the same thing in real life. In war games, the gamers' given in-game identity as a particular character (e.g. Alex Mason, in the single-player mode of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*), provides them with the opportunity to play a fictional role and face all kinds of difficult challenges which they are fully aware have no real life consequences attached to them, even when they get shot or die. The main reason gamers choose to play these heroic characters, experience different guns' qualities, or strategically shoot down different enemies, is not because they want to fight a real adversary, but because they are interested in and curious to experience something they do not normally have the opportunity to in their everyday lives. It may be true that some gamers will decide to become a real soldier after playing these games just because 'the game experience they had teaches them to do so.' Their positive experience playing war games may in some way have influenced their decision-making in different stages of their life or career. Certainly there have been and still will be rare cases where some individual gamers decide to apply for military jobs because of their personal interest raised by military gameplay. However, the majority of people know the rules when they are playing a game, and are intelligently able to distinguish between reality and fiction, and between what the real world and the virtual world are there to offer.

Based on the clear division emphasized above, the focus of this research centres on the ordinary-gamers and their experience and process of self-imagination.

4.5 On the Gamers-Interviewees' Self-Reflexivity

The two methods executed in this research and the wide collection of respondents and

interviewees' reflexive responses contributed by both methods were potentially settled by the gamers' orientation of self-reflectivity. Such reflexivity, as a symbolic term (e.g. see Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994), is commonly referred to by leading social scientists to explain contemporary people and audiences' ability to use different forms of media to identify, explore and construct their identity. In Gauntlett's (2008) interpretation, it is a process of 'self-identity' in the making and 'a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography' (p. 107). However, the reflexivity addressed here is less relevant to its implied second methodological meaning about ethnographers' reflexivity, which mainly concerns the researchers' intervention in the research process and the bias reasoned by their subjective experiences.

Digital games, in a post-postmodern form, extensively expose the new generation audiences' special feature of selecting and constructing their own (make-believe) in-game characters and avatars to tell their own stories. This is particularly relevant in the context of digital gaming, which as a new form of cultural practice and social activity, demands so much 'doing' from the gamers, and is made possible by their sense of control and self-awareness. By playing games and challenging themselves again and again in different given tasks and missions, the process of gameplay becomes a mirror of their reflexive actions and a complex interactive process which gamers use to examine their own learning ability; self-identifying their sense of exploration, reformulating their understanding of the world, and thus creating cultural meanings. In this regard, Rutter and Bryce (2006) acknowledge that 'digital gaming is indicative of how identity formation is increasingly centered upon self-identity, and that this has become a 'reflexive project' through consumption activity' (p. 176).

Within various game genres and scenarios, the existence of the First-Person-Shooter

relies more on the gamers' self-awareness and self-reflexivity. This idea was highlighted in Crogan's (2004) statement: 'In the case of a genre of games such as the First Person Shooter, what is also evident is an evolving generic awareness or 'reflexivity' about how the game is played and evaluated as a cultural form.' As the FPS game's design provides the player with a first person's point of view; creating a realistic simulation of the movements of the human eye; panning and viewing the world, it is a more immersive 3-dimensional experience than other genres. In addition, it successfully rearticulates and repositions the gamers' subjectivity and leading role at play, to create what Crogan defines as the astonishing 'enemy-man-weapon interface.' Moreover, by looking into the FPS gamers' self-reflexivity, Wright et al.'s study (2002) on the gamers' in-game conversation and their different kinds of verbal expression in FPS games (clearly illustrated in their case study of *Counter-Strike*, in which they constructed the new typology of the five gaming talk forms: creative game talk, game conflict talk, insult/distancing talk, performance talk, and game technical/external talk) is an excellent example of research that successfully examined and presented the gamers' deeper psychological and physiological engagement with shooter games, and sensibly read one part of the many complex forms of the gamers' self-reflexivity.

In summary, the research focused on the gamers' reflexivity and chose to use the collected notes and textual/verbal expressions as key evidence to explore *how the war-themed genres FPS, particularly the Call of Duty games, are used/interpreted by their fans, gamers and community to construct meanings*. This approach was partly a response to Wright et al.'s suggestion that 'the player's perspective and understanding of play must be included in any meaningful discussion of FPS games, indeed of all video games.' With the combination of the two methods, of one paying more attention to gamers' connections and general perceptions about this genre and the other more precisely

looking into gamers' feelings and experiences within this genre, the analysis into the data in Chapter 5 and 6 should help us make more sense of the 'gamership' and 'game-gamer proximity' in the case study of the shooter game *Call of Duty*.

Chapter Five:

The Feelings and Experiences of the Global Call of Duty Gamers: Perceptions and Meanings

‘The basic reason of gaming is – in the gaming world I could do something which in real life was not possible.’

(19-year-old student, India/R55)

‘I have always enjoyed having the opportunity to play games where I can experience things I would never have an opportunity to experience in real life. Videogames can bring you to places far too dangerous to really go, or far too imaginative to ever truly exist.’

(23-year-old self-employed, Canada/R81)

‘I enjoy games because they stimulate my imagination, allow me to feel in ways that I might not normally feel, see myself do things that I couldn't ordinarily do.’

(41-year-old graphic-designer, US/R123)

In presenting both quantitative and qualitative data summarized from the first method of an open-ended online questionnaire, Chapter 5 aims to provide a study of the *Call of Duty* gamers' experience. By examining the 433 self-selected respondents' written texts as direct evidence of their gameplay experience, this chapter will present several findings in relation to the COD gamers' feelings, experiences and their construction of meanings in their interactions with the war-themed genre FPS games. The enormous textual data sourced by the respondents recruited from the Facebook COD community has contributed a tremendous amount of textual evidence which shall

provide us with some critical insights into gamers' gameplay presence, agency and self-identity. Reviewing their thoughts and writings in response to the open questions can also help us make sense of contemporary FPS gamers' social-cultural imagination. As Pearce (2009) already taught us, every game community and play culture should be seen as 'deeply tied to imagination, fantasy, and the creation of a fictional identity (p. 3).' This inseparable psychological connection between gameplay practice and social-cultural imagination predominates and takes hold of every ordinary gamer's gaming life.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into five parts. The first part reveals the relationship between FPS gameplay experience and personal imagination. By developing six key themes from the enormous textual database, the second part of the chapter discusses the composition of the group of participants in our online-questionnaire. Based on a well-known typological model, the third part specifically looks into different gamers' motivations and interest in FPS play. The fourth part shifts the focus to the gamers' perceptions on the COD game series' settings on the different wartime narratives. The last part of the discussion pays more attention to the COD gamers' construction of realism from the style of FPS.

5.1 FPS as Imagination into Play

When compared to other types of digital games, the shooter game genre in particular provides an easily recognizable style of game control and a fairly standard format of interaction; relying heavily on gamers' own imagination and psychological construction of human fantasy. The growing popularity of digital games and the growing public demand in new, adrenaline-rush games expose certain degrees of social escapism and

social unrest. The virtual world seems to have the power to comfort people who have become stressed by their busy tempo lives and the pressures of modern society. When entering this virtually-constructed entertainment space, every gamer expects to forget his or her own real-life vexations and discomforts. They hope to feel an escapist pleasure gained by 'being someone' they have never been but really want to be. When they have achieved this feeling of distraction, they are given the opportunity and platform to live/perform another life/identity, and to experience something unordinary in ordinary life. The uprising FPS games are not exceptional in this 'dream-fulfilling' context, and like other game forms, the FPS genre generates a cultural imaginative space that engages with all kinds of people's self-consciousness and subjective self-projection.

The visual settings in FPS games are displayed from the staged characters' point of view. The player therefore looks at screen objects as if through his character's eyes, without a visible avatar projected onto the screen. This makes it easier for gamers to straightforwardly project themselves into the unseen body of the imaginary hero. By virtually repositioning the subjective-consciousness into the imagined body right in front of the screen, it becomes a ritual act for gamers to take up the main character's role and fight with his or her new given militaristic identity. In comparison to other genres, a subjective-transition of this kind creates a more imaginary space that enables gamers to convince themselves that their bodies represent the soldiers' bodies. One of our questionnaire's respondents explained this inner principle in simple terms: 'You do what the character does, you see what the character sees, you are the character' (28-year-old self-employed, Thailand/R73). Normally after several rounds of practice, when gamers become familiar with the man/guns/enemy interface, they (especially beginners) become more relaxed operating in the 360-degree virtual environment and

less troubled by the possible dizziness caused by the fast moving and constantly-shaking camera shots. When gamers pan their in-game views and move around the 3D environment looking for their moving targets during their fights, the objects they regularly see in the frame of their monitor are mostly their firing weapons and some visible non-playable-characters (NPC). These include their enemies, computer-generated teammate soldiers, or (if playing online) other clan members participating in the same death match. Gamers' perception on realism in FPS games is totally established based on this sort of psychological mechanism and virtual-physical design. In a biological sense, a complete FPS gameplay experience can be seen as preceding a string of expected mental and physical activities. Whether inside or outside the game, FPS gameplay experience largely depends on gamers' psychological articulations, interplayed by their individual motivations, performance of masculinity, desires towards conflict, and emotional desperation for fun and pleasure.

This puzzling of self-identity in FPS gameplay as interpreted by Christ Bateman (2010) is determined by a special form of representational 'make-believe,' embedded in the human nature as a way of processing the 'principles of fiction.' The development of the imaginary which Bateman refers to can always be spotted in a person's transition from childhood to adulthood and is profoundly integrated into everyone's role-playing experience. It can be randomly captured in people's performance and media experience in their everyday life. This private imaginary space within the shoot'em'up game exploits people's innate desire to experience a conflict without the real-life risk of personal injury or death. A well-protected play experience should neither be too fictional nor too real. However, when playing the role of a shooter, the gamer has one important expectation: the virtual conflict must provide a certain level of excitement and pleasure to satisfy him or her. From this perspective, we can again refer to the

argument earlier raised in this thesis that *conflicts produce, decide and determine FPS games' entertainment value*. In essence, children's cops and soldiers role-play, teenage and adult groups' paintball and airsoft guns experiments, Hollywood's war and conflict motion pictures, and interactive 3D digital shooter games, all offer people a realistic simulation of a battlefield experience. These 'false-realistic' games and cultural activities have given people the opportunity to discover their most self-fulfilling real/fictional intermediary experience. We have to understand that all the participants are aware that these conflict experiences are fictional constructs and meant to cause no real physical harm. It is also important to highlight that the *war-themed FPS game genre provides a very protective and safe imaginary space*. For example, any FPS gamer who finds him/her-self getting shot and killed during a match would know that they only have to press a button to resume the game, when they are able to begin again with a new life.

What is most fascinating in Bateman's interpretation about the virtual shooter experience is his key argument that today's shooter games' design is believed to be more realistic and engaging. He believes that this is because in the receivers' view, it supersedes the passive movie-viewing experience; actually triggering viewers' mental reactions and physical responses to what is happening around them. Improved photograph quality graphics, an easily controlled interface and the games' interactivity, all help to provide the public with a more intensified role-playing soldier experience. This makes players feel more physically involved in the virtual fights. However, there are still different levels in people's everyday play of imagination. By applying Kendall Walton's 'prop theory'⁴⁴, Bateman questioned and compared the diversified meanings of guns within three different cultural settings. From kids' playing with stick toy/cap

⁴⁴ In Walton's (2000) 'make-believe' and prop theories, 'what is true in a fiction, or fictional, depends on real world facts...facts about them (props) generate fictional rules' (cited in Bateman 2010:95).

guns, Hollywood's representations of guns in war action movies, to the virtual guns in FPS games, he finds that individual actions in shooter games 'are more like the child playing with the cap gun than the viewer of the action movies (p. 95)' In his view, interactive virtual FPS guns, when compared to the unplayable representation of guns in movies, are 'intrusive enough to be engaging and compelling (immersive)' because of their extra 'playable' function. Bateman also asserted his belief that although there is a great sense of cultural continuity in gamers' perceptual development in regards to war realism, the majority of gamers definitely understand that games are games because they have rules to be followed. Put simply, gaming is nothing but another imaginary practice that is all about play.

Using the above idea of the shooter game as a cultural prop for the player to generate a world of make-believe, the following analysis will explore the global COD gamer community from a socio-cultural perspective. However, one particular point I have to clarify before entering into the proper analysis is that, depending on each participant's different social experiences and life-stages, games play different roles for different gamers, are used by people differently, and have different personal meanings. In this regard, Dimitri Williams (2007) explained that:

'Games are not the silver-bullet answer to a looming energy crisis, class warfare, and international conflicts. What matters is that their use is affected both by the way they are made and the way they are played. Meaning and use starts with the developer and then is *refashioned* and *recoded* by the player. And that...is a complex and rich process (p. 257).'

Strictly speaking, the main reason gameplay is such a rich and complex process is

because gamers are able to personalize the medium in order to satisfy their own social/cultural needs. This point was expanded upon by Salen and Zimmerman (2006), when they emphasized that: ‘player experience can take many forms, be framed in many guises and is always expressed in a diversity of social and cultural contexts’ (p.7). Similarly, when in Ko’s study (2009), 33 ordinary Taiwanese gamers who constantly played two popular online games, *Ragnarök Online* (RO) and *Maple Story*, were interviewed, he discovered that although they were engaged in the same game content, the levels of their self-engagement and play motivations were hugely diversified. Ko stressed that:

‘Depending on individual needs and desires, they (gamers) have different textual interpretations and produce different meanings of their own. They can even divert the original textual meaning and reproduce their gaming connotations, therefore some people play games to make their boyfriends feel better, some try to fulfill their dreams, some look for their community belongings and some just want to be entertained. All these expressions are just another reflection on contemporary active audiences’ enthusiasm and autonomy.’

(p. 116)

Ko's idea about gamers echoes Linda Hughes's (1999) theory that although academics argued that games have rules to be followed, these rules may be changed by gamers and for different purposes.

‘Game rules can be interpreted and reinterpreted toward preferred meanings and purposes, selectively invoked or ignored, challenged or defended, changed or enforced to suit the collective goals of different groups of players. In short,

players can take the same game and collectively make it strikingly different experiences (p. 94).’

In other words, *people/gamers determine their own meanings of the games they play*. As we begin to analyze gamers’ autonomy while examining the research on gamer experience, it becomes necessary to reposition and prioritize their thoughts and voices over external hypotheses and criticism which views gamers as manipulated communities. Hence my analysis at this point is not to suggest that there is one specific type of gamer identity to be constructed politically or ideologically, which is an approach that has always been forwarded by some conspiracy theorists. In contrast, in acknowledgment of gamers’ autonomy and empowerment gained when using this medium, this study intends to illustrate some sensible arguments and radical explanations based on the evidence derived from the gamers themselves. As Gerard Jones’ (2003) proposed, what gamer research needs today is someone who really pays attention to gamers, expresses a real interest in what they say, and can patiently listen to their opinions.

5.2 The Composition of the Respondents: Gaming and Everyday Life

As much of the information with regards to respondents’ age, gender and nationality has already presented in the previous chapter, the first part of this analysis continues to provide detailed quantitative breakdowns of the collected data and the composition of respondents. Further interpretations according to their notes will be enhanced based on this composition. Each of the following key themes highlights the essence and diversity of the people who chose to participate in the online questionnaire. Unfortunately, due to the substantial size of their written texts, it will be impossible to fully use each statement provided by every respondent. Therefore, only the significant

ones will be used and referenced for interpretation when necessary.

In order to better understand the self-recruited respondents, this research developed six themes by considering their occupations, years of gaming, weekly gameplay time, self-identification of their own gamer status (split into three categories of gamer types), gaming platforms, and online/offline gameplay habit:

Mix Occupations

All respondents who successfully completed the questionnaire were required to reveal their professions and describe what they did for living. Inevitably, the results included a wide range of occupations. After further examination of their answers, it was found that most respondents declared themselves to be either students (n=230, including students in different levels, e.g. high school, college, and university etc.) or unemployed (n=55, including people who claimed themselves to be self-employed, house-wives/husbands, or job-seekers). The remaining group of respondents (n=148) were combined of people with very different professions. These ranged from teachers, police officers, computer programmers, writers and designers, to nurses, cashiers, salesmen, builders and so on. The previous stereotypical assertions that 'digital games are only for kids,' 'gamers are all anti-social geeks,' and that 'violent shooter games are only made available for adults' certainly lose credibility when the results of this survey are analyzed. My data simply shows that people spread across a broad age range, with different social backgrounds and professions, based different countries have become engaged in one particular type of gaming genre. It is also evident that the people involved in the shooter game culture, as reflected in our COD gamer samples, are hugely diversified and not segmented to one targeted age group or type of players only. With millions of global gamers now attracted to their content, playing shooter games

is becoming a new popular cultural activity. It can engage people from different professional backgrounds to simultaneously participate in the same gaming cultural genre. From viewing their multifarious occupations, it has been shown that various kinds of people in different age groups/social classes are all involved in the growing shooter gameplay culture and willing to share their personal interactive experience with this creative medium. In order to help us better understand each participant's social status and life stage, the respondent's profession will be noted when his/her statements are referenced for interpretation in the following analysis.

Years of Gaming

Within the total 433 questionnaires, 41 respondents (across all gaming platforms) have played digital games for less than 5 years. A larger number of 295 respondents revealed that they have been engaged with gaming for periods of 6 to 15 years. The remaining 97 respondents have played games for more than 16 years. As the second and third groups have both played digital games for more than 5 years, we can conclude that most respondents in this study are experienced gamers.

Table 14 Breakdown of Respondents by Years of Gaming

	English	Chinese	Total	Percentage (%)
< 5	40	1	41	9.5
6 – 15	272	23	295	68.1
> 16	89	8	97	22.4
Total	401	32	433	100

When the respondents were asked to describe how they originally began to play digital games, many of them explained how as children they were heavily influenced by particular games and console systems that they came into contact with. For example:

‘Started with playing on *Game-boy*;
moved over to the first computer games: Pong, Tetris;
moved to shooters: *DOOM*, *Castle of Wolfenstein*;
moved to higher performance engines, *Halo*, *Halo2*, *Unreal 3000*.’

(23-year-old primary school teacher, Belgium/R23)

‘From 1976 or 1977, I used to hang out at different gaming halls and played a lot of the arcade games like *Space Invaders*, *Pac-man* and so on. I think it was 1982 that my parents got my brother and I an *Atari* gaming system, I was already hooked on gaming when the *Atari* system was great.’

(44-year-old emergency operation chief, USA/R89)

‘I started with PC games such as *Doom*, *Quake* unreal tournaments. After playing *Half-Life 2* and *Counterstrike* for a while, my PC blew up and I was looking at an expensive replacement. I bought a console (*Sega Saturn* at first) then followed the trends such as *N64* and *PS2*. Then the *Xbox* came out I jumped at the chance to play online with and against mates. I’ve been hooked ever since.’

(34-year-old painter, New Zealand/R182)

‘I started like every little boy, craving something entertaining. Back in the day, the *Sega Mega Drive* was the thing to have, it was seen as if you had it you were amazing. After buying the *Sega Mega Drive* I got attached, I couldn't stop playing but

when my mum asked me to donate it I was really sad but in doing so I upgraded to further and new technology. When I hit the age of 10 my friend introduced me to *World of Warcraft*, a massive MMORPG that was a well known and most talked about game there was. This entitled me to a whole new world of fascination on the sheer entertainment, that the achievement and a sense of pride you get for doing something amazing in the game was a amazing feeling, oh, and the fact that you can brag to your friends.’

(14-year-old GCSE student, UK/R388)

However, when further reviewing the respondents’ stories concerning their gaming lives, one significant factor that they regularly mention is their relatives’ and friends’ involvement in their introduction to gaming. Common sentences like ‘my dad (mom) got me...when I was...’ or ‘I used to play...with my brother (or friend)’ appear very frequently in their writings. For example:

‘My sister handed me the controller to my family’s *NES* and let me play *Super Mario Bros.* From there, I became a video game addict/fanatic.’

(16-year-old student, US/R37)

‘My parents got me a *PSX*, and *Crash Bandicoot*. From there I learned to play video games to escape from how harsh this world is.’

(20-year-old video game programmer, US/R67)

‘My cousin gave me a *Nintendo 64* when I was 5 and I enjoyed it so much I my dad bought me a ps2 when I was 7.’

(16-year-old student, UK/R96)

‘Well my friend introduced me to *Halo Combat Evolved* and I was hooked.’

(15-year-old student, Canada/R140)

‘I was watching my brothers play video games all the time, and I decided to try it out and now gaming is my life aside from school.’

(16-year-old female student, US/R189)

‘My dad loved all the shoot’em’ups in the 80’s and I naturally liked them when he allowed me to play them.’

(14-year-old student/US/R243)

‘My dad played the original *Duke Nukem* when I was in diapers. I always played that with him almost every night. Then I had a *Nintendo Entertainment System* so I played *Duck Hunt* and *Mario* around the same time.’

(19-year-old student/US/R247)

‘My friends are into playing first person shooters on line, from that I got into them.’

(22-year-old cooker/US/R258)

Although the majority of the quotes above are from the younger respondents, one core-theme we can find within these texts is that digital games are deeply associated with the players' childhood memories. These selections of texts can be read as an iconic symbol which serves to identify how the new generation has grown up under the huge influence of digital games. Mentioning someone like a family member or a

friend directly, demonstrates how gamers have attached personal feelings to this medium. Their statements concerning their personal relationship with games speak of the way in which gamers unconsciously and unintentionally integrate the dual 'semiotic domain' and 'lifeworld domain,'⁴⁵ The two concepts introduced by James Paul Gee (2003) specify games' meaning and literacy to human society. As Gee explains: 'video games are potentially particularly good places where people can learn to situate meanings through embodied experiences in a complex semiotic domain and mediate on the process (p. 26).' Without exception, our data clearly shows that to gamers, games and gaming are integrated into people's different life stages and have become part of their own biography. The quotes illustrate an intimate space where gamers are able to store meanings and memories with this new cultural medium. Games' impact on the new generation's minds is unpredictable to the extent that one respondent felt that his long-term gaming habit had changed his identity and the way he looked at himself:

'I already game for so many years since 1994. I started to like games because of the *Mortal Kombat 2* and since then I was associating with this world...today not anymore I feel myself only as a player, more also an analyst of games and can travel in world through the games, the things that we cannot have or to be, the games in giving the possibility to them of being what we cannot be in the reality, for me games are way beyond entertainment and a technological device...'

(19-year-old design student, Angola/R326)

When looking at the respondents' written accounts of their experiences in gaming,

⁴⁵ In Gee's interpretation, semiotic domain refers to 'words, symbols, images and artifacts have meanings and the meanings have 'design grammars.' Life domain represents different 'cultural groups have, more or less, different ways of being, doing, feeling, valuing, and talking as 'everyday people' (pp: 13-39).

what clearly emerges is the players' positive attitude in regard to the games' profound influence on their everyday lives. Their responses also illustrate the possible cause of a deeper intimacy between humans, technology and the machine. As a new form of technology, computer games have undeniably opened up a cultural space to allow gamers to reposition their subjectivity in order to self-examine and (re)explore their own identity and cultural behaviours. Garry Crawford (2012) highlighted this development in his book *Video Game*. He defined it as a significant step towards games becoming integrated into people's everyday life. He stressed that gaming is 'not just an act of playing a game, but also a source of memories, dreams, conversations, identities, friendships, artwork, storytelling...' (p. 143).

Weekly Gameplay Time

According to our findings, the average number of hours our respondents spent playing games per week can be divided into 5 levels. 95 respondents claimed that they only played games between 1 and 10 hours per week. More than 144 respondents spent between 11 to 20 hours gaming, while 104 respondents dedicated approximately 21 to 30 hours. A smaller number of 42 respondents spent 31 to 40 hours playing games. The remaining 48 respondents represent the group of more addicted players who dedicated more than 41 hours to games on a weekly basis.

Table 15 Breakdown of Respondents by Weekly Gameplay Time

Hours	English	Chinese	Total	Percentage (%)
1 – 10	87	8	95	21.9
11 – 20	137	7	144	33.3
21 – 30	95	9	104	24

31 – 40	36	6	42	9.7
> 41	46	2	48	11.1
Total	401	32	433	100

When respondents were asked to think about the main reasons that made them attracted to (shooter) games, there were some typical statements that explained why people were willing to spend so much time on gaming. For example, one respondent gained pleasure from playing games because progressing through them allowed him to unpack the game designers' intention of creating certain type of game. In addition he was keen to discover what the creators were attempting to express through their game:

‘Good games create a fantasy world where anything's possible besides I always get this feeling that I know what the makers are thinking or like. It's like walking in someone else's brain and exploring that chaotic fantasy which they are willing to share with me.’

(30-year-old motion graphic artist, Nigeria/R24)

By arguing that games could possibly overtake old-fashion media like books, one younger respondent believed that:

‘...gaming is a one-of-a-kind form of entertainment. It gives an escape into virtual, often impossible worlds and scenarios that are not just amazing achievements in technological terms but that are also just down right entertaining. Not only that, but I hold firmly to a personal opinion that videogames are the most entertaining and advanced form of entertainment media that has ever been created by mankind.’

Suck on that books.’

(22-year-old college student, US/R64)

Besides the games’ uniqueness being overtly and repeatedly appraised by many respondents like the two mentioned above, another respondent's statement clearly shows that it is the embedded competitiveness and personal sense of achievement a person can attain that sustained his personal interest in gameplay:

‘I feel like it’s just a part of me. I game for the rush, the excitement, and competition. I do play for fun but it feels more like an achievement when I get the high level in that RPG, race a perfect lap in *Grand Turismo*, get the highest rank in a shooter online play. I enjoy the fun playing my games. Videogames are just my way of having fun or getting entertainment. It’s not my only method for those things but it's my main thing. I’m a gamer for life and I always will be and it’s not something I can easily change about myself. Even though I wouldn't want to be a professional gamer for life for the reason that when you start to grow old your reflexes die down and I wouldn’t be the extreme top gamer I was when I was younger. I would still game just wouldn’t compete to the extent of knowing I can win due to my lack of reflexes. And So I major in accounting but still hard core game for most of the day off of work. My reasons for attachment to videogames are equal to the reason in which some people just don’t understand why we gamers game. It's just in the blood and a part of my nature to be who I am.’

(19-year-old university student, US/R340)

Additionally, one teenage respondent’s statement clearly highlights the reasons he believed digital games deserved to have people dedicate so much of their time and

energy to them. He used the most popular genre of shooter games as an example:

‘First person shooters seem to be the most exciting. I am big fan of *Call of Duty: MW2* and *Battlefield Bad Company 2*. These FPS games are designed to be fun and full of action - running inside buildings for cover, blowing up an oblivious enemy tank etc. The creativity is endless, team death match, free for all, rush, hardcore, and many other things like perks, kits, buffs, and classes, ranks, blood level, clan wars, friends, microphone communications and so much more.’

(15-year-old student, US/R158)

As shown in the above statements, gamers are able to provide many reasons why their passion for and deep participation in this medium was originally ignited. To a large extent, these statements contradict the general consensus that the violent content of games is the key attraction for players. This point, however, was already argued in a piece of gamer research conducted by the two psychology researchers Richard Ryan and Andrew Przybylski from the University of Rochester. They concluded that:

‘People like videogames because they introduce them to worlds where they can feel freedom and where they can feel a sense of accomplishment and competence...it just happens that a lot of games that have those elements are combat or war type games and include violence’⁴⁶

Whether gamers play games for different and multiple purposes, e.g. real-life escape, stress release, mental training, self-exploring, self-achievement, making friends, killing

⁴⁶ Quoted from ‘Violence Not What Attracts Video Gamers’:
<<http://www.sciencentral.com/video/2009/01/16/violence-not-what-what-attracts-video-gamers-says-study/>>

time, or developing a new interest or habit, one thing we can be sure of is that the word 'gamer' is becoming a more personalized term. As reflected in gamer discourse, each game necessitates demanding skills and is highly professionalized to a degree that people need to put in enough time and effort in order to attain a higher rank, reach higher levels of play, get rewards and build confidence. When a person decides to participate in a chosen game (culture), he or she soon becomes the 'willing audience' (see Long 2009); prepared to invest their time and emotions in the growth of their constructed virtual identity. This peculiar phenomenon, as McKenzie Wark (2007) describes metaphorically in his theory of 'The Cave'⁴⁷ (session 025), projects gamers' 'heightened rhetoric of faith' to games (session 013).

Self-Identification: Casual, Hardcore or Professional Gamers?

When the respondents were asked to identify their own gaming status and categorize themselves into three common gamer (stereo)types of casual, hardcore and professional gamers, 160 of them chose the casual gamer option, more than 205 respondents defined themselves as hardcore gamers, while an unexpected number of 68 respondents believed that they belonged to the professional gamer category. The original purpose of dividing the respondents into these three types was to provide a general idea of their gamer status as well as finding out how gamers see themselves. We have to bear in mind that the terms 'casual' and 'hardcore' gamers adopted in the questionnaire were discursively oppositional. This means that both groups of people try to prove their own existence and reassure themselves of their own identity by criticizing the other group's behaviour. Jesper Juul (2010), for example interviewed people who described themselves as casual gamers to discover whether they would

⁴⁷ As a very important part of Ward's gamer theory, his idea of The Cave basically describes gamers are bounded by the digital logic in which they repeated themselves by 'step out of The Cave and returning to it'(session 019). In his critical view, gameplay is no less than 'a great slogan of liberation' (session 016).

purposely say things to distance themselves from the hardcore gamers. As such:

‘When I call myself a ‘casual gamer,’ I mean someone who just plays for leisure, who doesn’t devote a tremendous amount of time to playing. I knew people in college for whom gaming was a way of life: they would miss sleep...skip classes to play, and some of them would rather play games online than hang out with people in real life. Those are ‘hardcore’ games...I just play to amuse myself from time to time, and honestly if a game gets too hard I lose interest – I play to relax, not to be frustrated.’

(Cited in Juul 2010: 62)

After asking our respondents to put themselves into these fixed categories, we found one emerging issue that was rather disturbing and contradictory. The data we received provided strong evidence to suggest that the amount of time each person spent gaming did not directly reflect the way they saw themselves or influenced the way they defined their own gaming life condition.

Table 16 Breakdown of Respondents by Their Self-Identifications

Gamer Type	English	Chinese	Total	Percentage (%)
Casual	140	20	160	37
Hardcore	197	8	205	47.3
Professional	64	4	68	15.7
Total	401	32	433	100

As presented earlier in table 15, more than half of the respondents (with group 1 and

2 together: 55.2%) spent less than 20 hours gaming per week, while less than a half (with group 3, 4 and 5 together: 44.8%) dedicated more than 20 hours. In contrast, table 16 shows that nearly 63% of the respondents chose to call themselves hardcore or professional gamers and only 37% categorized themselves as casual gamers. This contradiction, despite being reliant on the respondents' subjective opinion of their gaming status and judgment of the number of hours they spend playing, gives weight to the public's negative stereotypical perception of gamers. However, one factor that has emerged regarding these numbers is that according to our respondents the amount of their time spent on gameplay did not necessarily define the type of gamer category they each believed they belonged to. One 17-year-old Canadian student was one of many respondents who had an individual interpretation of the meaning of the gaming categories. He explained that he had put himself in the professional category because: 'my definition of professional gamer is – a gamer who plays more for experience than enjoyment' (R124). The term 'professional gamer' is normally understood to be 'gamers [who] play games for their income' or 'people [who] play games as their career'. A surprisingly high number of 68 respondents believed that they were professional gamers despite many previously stating their 'real' professions at the beginning of the questionnaire). The research also revealed that certain gamers prefer to be socially recognized as heavy users. It is clear that there are a large number of gamers who like to see themselves as 'hardcore' or 'professional'; explaining how much they are involved in this gaming culture. In this regard, relevant studies in Steven Conway's (2010) exploration on the *Pro Evolution Soccer* community and Garry Crawford's (2012) proposed model of the sport fan/video gamer career (as seen below) both revealed that when gamers became involved with specific types of games and genres, they felt peer-pressure to improve their skills and progress their gaming careers.

general public ↔ interested ↔ engaged ↔ enthusiastic ↔ devoted ↔ professional ↔ apparatus

Figure 6. The career of a sport fan/video gamer (Crawford 2012:63)

Arguably, in a general sense, the three gamer types adopted by this research have proven to be over-simplified and misleading in their own nature. For future reference, a detailed typology and category should be introduced and developed in order to more precisely target and identify different types of gamers within a specific game genre type or gaming style.⁴⁸ A more precise typology on gamers' gameplay motivation can be found in Richard Bartle's exploration on four MUD (Multi-User Dungeon)⁴⁹ gamer types. Depending on the different kinds of pleasures gamers sought and playing styles, he defined and divided them into achievers, explorers, socializes and killers. In the session 5.2, this research will try to adopt his model and expand on his typology in order to look at different features of the COD gamers.

Gaming Platforms

In regard to the set question about gaming platforms/devices, our result shows that 146 of the respondents played games more often on Sony PlayStation3, 144 on Microsoft Xbox 360, 129 on a Home PC, 9 on a handheld devices (PSP, DS and Mobile Phones), and only 5 on Nintendo Wii. The numbers presented below should only be read as a quick reflection of our respondents' personal tastes and preferences on gaming device.

⁴⁸ The best example successfully categorized gamers is the recent study made by Jackson, Gauntlett and Steemers (2008). In their research on the children played BBC online game *Adventure Rock*, 8 types of gamers were found, including Explorer-investigator, Self-stampers, Social climbers, Fighters, Collector-consumers, Power-users, Life-system builders, Nurturers.

⁴⁹ MUD: a form of computer program can be run over the internet. It is opened for multiple users and players to participate and communicate in one virtual gamespace.

Table 17 Breakdown of Respondents by Personal Preferences on Gaming Platforms

Different Types of Consoles	English	Chinese	Total	Percentage (%)
Sony Playstation3	140	6	146	33.7
Microsoft Xbox360	143	1	144	33.3
Nintendo Wii	4	1	5	1.1
Handheld Devices (PSP, DS, Mobile Phones etc.)	5	4	9	2.1
Home PC	109	20	129	29.8
Total	401	32	433	100

However, it is necessary to highlight the fact that most of our respondents were not playing games on one single type of game console. Many respondents said that they actually own more than one gaming device in order that they can play as many game genre types as possible. Part of the reason for this is that certain big game titles can only be played on certain consoles. For example, the *World of Warcraft* series were only designed for PC and the *Halo* series were made to be played in Microsoft Xbox only. This means that today's ordinary gamers are engaging in several gaming genres simultaneously. This is crucially important in regards to into our understanding of contemporary gamers' gaming habits. As shooter games are only one genre type among many, gamers play to explore and develop one side of their sophisticated self-created identity.

Gameplay Online and Offline

Of the 433 respondents, 412 said that they generally preferred to play games online, while only 21 claimed that they normally played games alone offline. In this regard, Taylor (2006) argued that: ‘One of the biggest lessons from internet studies is that the boundary between online and offline life is messy, contested, and constantly under negotiation’ (p. 153). When virtual games integrated an internet connection, gameplay created more freedom for social interaction. The ongoing contestation and negotiation with and without others in the game space, is indicative of the differences between the online/offline gamer experience.

Table 18 Breakdown of Respondents by Gameplay Online/Offline

	English	Chinese	Total	Percentage (%)
Play Online	383	29	412	95.2
Don't Play Online	18	3	21	4.8
Total	401	32	433	100

Gaming online is a far more complicated play experience than gaming alone in the single-player mode without a connection with others through the internet. In normal circumstances, an offline single-mode gamer only has to deal with the linear storyline and the games’ original narrative structure and set rules. After playing for an extended period and gaining a familiarity with the rules, single-mode gamers normally develop a fixed pattern and find a routine way of gameplay which can regularly guide them through different stages again and again. By repeatedly progressing through the same stages, gamers can feel more and more in control of the monotonous ‘man vs. computer’ situation. In essence, what the single mode players are competing against are computerized logics systematically programmed to act in the form of virtually staged

enemies and monsters. Thus, it is fair to say that the offline gameplay's pleasure mostly comes from the original 'hard design' of the game itself.

In contrast to offline gameplay experience, the pleasure that drives online gaming largely depends on a more unpredictable 'man to man' interaction. An online gamer, in varying degrees, must strategically account for other 'real' gamers' actions and behaviours e.g. co-operating or competing with friends or strangers in order to complete certain tasks and missions and receive rewards. With a more sophisticated interactive interface mixed with NPCs, avatars controlled by other gamers, communication tools and changeable combat situations, online gamers have to learn to survive by constantly negotiating with different people and working with or conflicting against others. This is essential if they wish to achieve the goals and targets they desire. Within the equally set-up multiple-players online environment, the gathering of strangers/friends generate more psychological variations in the overall play experience. This is because other people's actions and styles of gameplay can be totally unpredictable; their decision-making affecting the course of play. In comparison to offline single player mode, playing games online creates more uncertainty and sociability. In a detailed description, one respondent explained the boundary between the two:

"The blurring action and realism...people want video games that are life like and interesting. Usually war is very life like and interesting as people can become entangled in a tough one-versus-many environment or in a cooperation-oriented multiplayer one. People may play war games for different reasons though; stress reliever is common reason for this type of game, another reason is general personal or community interest in war (especially when if the person becomes 7-9

years old) other reasons include professional gamer and hardcore gamer types, historically interested gamers or storyline interested gamers, leading FPS or TPS type (i.e. when *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and *Halo: Reach* come out this fall people will buy one if not both to have the latest in top Fps quality) and finally peer pressure. Peer pressure is usually indirect though, for example, most of your friends have the new *Call of Duty* game, you still have the old one and you rarely play with them now because of this, therefore you have two options: Buy the game or don't play with your friends. This is why all games that possess multiplayer capability can be potentially harmful; most people enjoy playing with friends and not just themselves.'

(17-year-old student, Canada, R115)

Nevertheless, gaming online is now considered by gamers as one of the most efficient ways to meet (new) friends and other gamers from different countries. All online gamers would agree that the benefits produced by online gaming are multiple. At the same time, people have fun, learn to work together towards the same goal, share resources and are socially bonded together. In many circumstances, online gamers can be seen as an ideal version of a social community. As Salen and Zimmerman asserted: 'joining a game community means entering into a shared social culture' (2006: 340). Online gaming functions as a global-social system and is chiefly maintained by the players' shared-values, which attract other potential content lovers and fans across the world. In this regard, Williams (2007) eventually pointed out that: 'Gamers, especially those playing with others online, were bridging culture and sidestepping geopolitical boundaries (p. 256).' It may be the case that in this virtual space social/cultural/racial/gender conflicts may still occur. Nonetheless its social function suggests a profound sense of equality and global unity. Many gamers had a clear idea

of the possible cause of this ‘cultural harmony.’ One of our respondents thought that racial issues disappeared completely in online gameplay:

‘I do like playing games with/against players from other cultures because we can chat and talk about our cultures and how we spend time in our countries doing different stuff. But mostly because I do no exceptions in making friends even if they are black, green, blue or yellow.’

(15-year-old self-employed, Greek/R3)

Similarly, another respondent thought that online games had the ability to remove racial stereotypes; believing that in the virtual space all people are equal:

‘I love my life, my friends (real friends!) and I love to be outside. I’m practicing downhill and enjoying meeting new people during races but online gaming give you the power to be someone different. I mean, what you do in your real life so cool it can be, the online gaming give you the same thing with more facility. There is no culture, no nationality, no yellow, no white, no black... just people who are together for the same thing: enjoying!’

(26-year-old football analyst, Belgium/R236)

One 14-year-old Polish student also gave credit to the increasing connectivity of the online game space.

‘That gaming as a medium is constantly improving, innovating, and ever changing. There are so many possibilities when it comes to gaming that it’s a serious challenge to become bored at times. Especially recently since online play has

become possible, user created content has become so widespread, there is almost limitless possibilities within gaming!’

(R7)

As reflected in these respondents’ comments and discussed in the first chapter, the connectivity digital games provide undeniably speeds up the process of cultural flows and negotiations. Mia Consalvo (2007) has already shown us the abstract structure of gaming: ‘...in the software, the global meets the local, as the games of necessity be played by real people, in actual locations, using specific hardware (p. 7).’ When discussing the gamers’ gameplay habit of online/offline play and the online gaming world’s globality that bring together international gamers, one of the most debated issues is the unsolvable myth about culture difference in terms of gamer culture and gameplay. Issues like this have been randomly and informally discussed between game academics, industrial people and gamers. In order to provide a better understanding of this mystery, Tom Apperley (2010) even adopted the concepts of ‘gaming rhythms’ and ‘situated ecologies’ to break down the complex relationships between the global (online) virtual gaming space, gamers’(offline) local social space and experience, and their everyday lives and gaming practices. By repositioning global gaming as an ethnographic subject, he highlights that:

‘The interaction of the global rhythm of gaming and the local rhythms of everyday life in the situated ecology set particular rhythmic parameters for digital games. Games are played that suit the rhythms and produce eurhythmia between the material, social, and cultural concerns of the situated ecology and the actions of play and configuration. The digital games played in the situated ecologies are similar, but the difference in styles or approaches to play demonstrates the material

unevenness between them' (p. 100).

In response to Apperley's assertions and the complex issue about gamers' personal experience within the sophisticated online game setting; negotiating the global/local, the respondents in this study were asked to reflect on their previous online gaming experience and encouraged to give some opinions in this regard. More than half of our respondents (n=283) said that they do not see such thing as cultural difference in gameplay, while less people (n=150) thought gamers from different nations/cultures, in various degrees, can play games very differently. Between the opposed opinions, one respondent gave a fair comment on this unsolvable issue:

'From time to time I have enjoyed matches with other cultures. It can be very entertaining, however, depending on cultural variance communication can be difficult and there have been some issues with someone being kicked out of games for not being a part of another group's player culture. In most cases they are fun and interesting events, but one thing to note, those who play without microphones do not really affect the game. *An individual learns to play from the game, not from their culture, so there is no real affect barring communication.*

(30-year-old self-employed, US/R334)

Although the cross-cultural gameplay mechanism can be judged as not directly influencing the gameplay experience, miscommunication may occur for non-western gamers. This is because most war-themed FPS content is only provided in English. Further discussions on local gamers' cultural struggles in relation to their national identity will be emphasized in the next chapter, when we will focus on a group of local COD Taiwanese gamers.

To sum up the six themes addressed above, many discussions in the first part of the analysis corresponded to Chapter One's contextualization of global gaming culture and the essence of gameplay. One thing we have to bear in mind is that to ordinary gamers (as defined in the last chapter), gaming is integrated into their everyday life and consciousness. Players have a strong awareness that a game is a game; a production of fantasy. People understand fighting the virtual war in a game is a totally different experience to the 'real life-matter' wars. This argument was already proven by Gee (2003), who, as a gamer observer and academic-gamer himself, played a FPS game called *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. He began to sense the essential differences between the real war events and war games, and developed 9 arguments⁵⁰ to prove the differences after playing with his squadmates. The ability to distinguish between the virtual-gaming and real-world experience is echoed in one respondent's testimony. He said he thought that gaming is something more than the means of the game, stressing that an imaginative experience can be very different from 'real life' experience:

'I have always enjoyed having the opportunity to play games where I can experience things I would never have an opportunity to experience in 'real life'. Video Games can bring you to places far too dangerous to really go, or far too imaginative to ever truly exist.'

(23-year-old painter, Canada/R81)

More precisely, one respondent made an interesting comment on a game's design to

⁵⁰ The 9 things Gee learned from playing *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* are: 1. War is, for the most part, boring. 2. Soldiers need to move as if they are constantly paranoid. 3. When war is exciting, it is also confusing. 4. Following orders is a vexed matter. 5. Things don't go as planned. 6. Situations on the ground don't resemble people's generalities and plan about them. 7. No one knows what people at the top know and whether they really know what they're doing. 8. The guys next to you on the actual battlefield often do know what they're doing. It's hard to know what you can take credit for as an individual. 9. 'Manly' behaviour often gets you dead quickly, Rambo-type behaviour even quicker.

demonstrate that games and real life should never be mixed together:

‘For the sake of playability, many games have to adopt things would never happen in real life. For example, the shield you hold in *COD: Modern Warfare 2* is purposely designed to be unbreakable. It’s totally impossible in real life, isn’t it?’

(22-year-old workers waiter, Taiwan/CR26)

With all the above comments presented to unfold the basic composition of our respondents, the next section re-adopts Richard Bartle’s classic typological model of gamers to help us distinguish between the different characters that make up the COD gamers.

5.3 Re-adopting Bartle’s Typology on COD Gamers

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Bartle’s typological model, first shown in 1996, hugely influenced the direction of gamer studies and was widely referenced by game scholars who have a specific interest in studying gamers’ behaviour and psychological condition. For example, Nicholas Yee (2002), using Bartle’s model, carried out a qualitative study of four MMORPG games: *EverQuest*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Asheron’s Call*, and *Anarchy Online*. His aim was to successfully capture five of the most significant motivation factors experienced by online gamers: relationship, immersion, grief, achievement and leadership. Although Bartle’s basic definition of gamer types has commonly been criticized for its imprecision and lack of clarification on some of the overlapped gamer qualities (e.g. the similarities between the Achievers and Explorers), his model can still be seen as a useful tool for contemporary game researchers to refocus on gamers’ personalities and motivations, and identify their mixed characteristics and different

layers of thinking modes. On different levels, the four types Bartle proposed could also be sensibly applied to our collected data. Some of the qualities he highlighted are reflected in the respondents' statements. Hence, using Bartle's typology, four similar categories can be proposed and developed to approach the COD gamers and identify their different intentions of gameplay with relevance to gamers' personal experience:

The COD gamers focus on *achieving* certain goals:

'I am hunted by the experience of being able to make split second decision, the scoring, and the customization...with upgrades and customizing things, and adding new parts to them etc.'

(23-year-old unemployed, US/R61)

'I like to make progress in a game and in some shooters, you only have to kill but with the system of COD, it's very fun when you see your stats going up and can level up with prestige.'

(19-year-old student, Belgium/R204)

'To me, there's a sense of accomplishment in leveling up, earning and unlocking, discovering things within games. It also provides distraction from life. I also use it as an advanced meditation technique, testing my awareness against such distraction from inner peace and outer compassion and kindness.'

(32-year-old entrepreneur, US/R386)

The COD gamers focus on *exploring* new elements:

‘The fun and pleasure comes form my own personal targets to beat the game, collect every star, reach the maximum level, and unlock the secret ending. It is all about exploring new frontiers, experiencing new stories, and being able to say I found and did everything offered.’

(16-year-old student, US/R47)

‘I just find them (FPS) more fun and have more freedom to roam the area of the maps compared to other games were your stuck to set paths.’

(34-year-old security officer, Australia/R85)

‘When playing a game, I like to explore and unlock new abilities’

(18-year-old sales representative, Canada/R245)

The COD gamers focus on *socializing* with others:

‘FPS lets me interact with people I've never met but talk too every night. We use our strategy and win most of the time. The other thing is that we get to play war, without really hurting anyone.’

(44-year-old firefighter, US/R89)

‘I most enjoy playing the online experience with friends and others, as well as it being a very good outlet to socialize, and relieve stress.’

(35-year-old carpenter, US/R342)

‘Why do I play? I play frequently because of school. Gaming allows me access to a social network that follows me wherever I go. I am a sociable person, but it is nice

to come home turn on the computers and hear the same voice. From Montreal to Aleppo I can access this social group anywhere.’

(25-year-old student, US/R354)

The COD gamers focus on *conflict-building* and *killing* (in Bartle’s phrase, imposition upon) *others*:

‘I enjoy the thrill of hunting people down and shooting them along with my team. I enjoy the competition and how I am able to use so many weapons and customizations. I will mostly play the multiplayer games such as MW2 or GTA4.’

(12-year-old student, US/R92)

‘It’s just my thing, I like weaponry and I like being able to have bragging rights if I kill someone creatively.’

(15-year-old student, US/R177)

‘I need action, the challenge...I need blood....in action games you can do things you can’t do in the real life, so it’s a lot of fun! You don’t have to think about your actions, if it’s wrong or right. Just lay back and kill!’

(22-year-old car tuning specialist, Germany/R352)

Each proposed category above provides a few quotes to help us identify and distinguish gamers’ gameplay tendencies and intentions when playing games. The quotes also highlight some key elements that individual gamers would prioritize when pursuing their pleasure. However, we have to be aware that in actuality there is no clear line separating the four different categories of a person’s play. The reason for this is

because with constantly changing intentions and motivations, gamers can possibly find themselves fitted into multiple categories at the same time according to their different requirements and needs in different life stages. The four gamer types can possibly be re-puzzled and put into different orders depending on how gamers adjust and negotiate their own experience and want it to be. Bearing in mind the complexity of today's online games, a player is very unlikely to become a successful achiever if not experiencing the other three stages in order to explore the details of the game elements, socialize with others for information, and kill whatever things block their progression.

In hindsight, the four proposed categories based on Bartle's model gives us some clues about how gamers' different characteristics, through their expressions, can be read when considering their personal gameplay motivations and intentions. Bartle makes clear in his argument that game researchers and designers must understand their players. The use of gamer typologies can be quite a significant step towards this goal. As shown by the various approaches of previous game academics, there is certainly more than one method to establish an appropriate typological system in order to contextualize different characteristics and motivations of gamers and identify their nature. Another good example that can be grasped here is Schuurman *et al.*'s (2008) research which divided multiplayer online gamers into four categories of fanboys, competitors, escapist and time-killers. Each of their categories also explained the main thing that drove their target gamers' pleasure. Nevertheless, the different theoretical injections on gamer typologies again reflect the multi-faceted gamer culture that needs to be further explored, analyzed and interpreted with careful examination of people's gameplay intentions and motivations. In order to explore the experience of the COD gamers more thoroughly, from 5.3 onwards this research will specifically look at the respondents' perceptions about wartime narrative and FPS realism; reflecting on their

conflicting identities and socio-cultural imaginations towards soldiers, military culture and war.

5.4 Between Past and Present: The COD Gamers' Self-Consciousness towards the Wartime Narrative

In *The Complete Wargames Handbook*, James Dunnigan (1992) coherently broke down nine wartime periods most commonly used for different forms (tabletop/board and digital) of war games. These included Ancient (Rome, Greece, Biblical, 3000 B.C. to A.D 600), the Dark Ages and Renaissance (600 to 1600), Thirty Years' War and pre-Napoleonic (1600-1790), Napoleonic (1790 to 1830), Civil War/19th Century (1830 to 1900), World War I (1900 to 1930), World War II (1930 to 1945), Modern (1945 to the present), Fantasy and Science Fiction (p. 229). Many strategic computer games today prefer to adopt stories based on historical war and conflict events from the Ancient to the 19th Century's Civil War periods. However, in the contemporary war-themed genre FPS, the most frequently seen wartime scenarios are those rewritten or scripted about World War II, modern war or futuristic scientific-fiction war conflicts. Breuer and Quandt's (2011) research on FPS content, together with their review on 77 FPS game samples in the period 1992-2010, found that 63.9% (n=49) games portrayed WWII stories, 16.9% (n=13) Vietnam War conflicts, and 6.5% (n=5) the global war against terrorism. Their results confirm that WWII stories have always been FPS game developers' top choice in this decade. In the seven series of *Call of Duty* games published by Activision, five of them adopted elements and stories based on WWII history-based conflicts, while the central themes of the other two: COD: MW 1 and COD: MW2, were mainly inspired by contemporary real world war events. To be more precise, MW1 set up its play context based on the American invasion in Middle

Eastern countries, and MW2 developed the core gameplay storylines in Afghanistan and Russia, where their main characters were staged to fight against local extreme terrorist groups. With split settings on either previous or contemporary war conflicts, FPS gamers' gameplay experience and personal preferences on different types of weapons and background settings may differ due to the replaceable narrative bodies and displaceable screen plays in relation to past, present and future war/military events and materials. One Chinese respondent made an interesting comment about the duality of weapons:

'WWII and modern war provide totally different feelings. The historical burden may be heavier in WWII games. In modern wars you won't get much background but get to use more advanced weapon – very modern ones, very hi-tech you know. When you play in WWII, it's a bit like driving a posh old car. Do you understand? Why some people choose to drive a 50's benz when there are so many modern cars out there. The weapon you are using may be a Thompson rifle or American M1. In that case you have a chance to play with antiques. It gives you a different pleasure'.

(26-year-old student, Taiwan/CR17)

To the external real-world, these different virtualized gun models within the war-themed genre FPS have intelligently built up a very collective, knowledgeable and referential sign system. To the internal gameplay-world, it acknowledges the situated wartime periods gamers engage with. The availability of old and new guns used in different eras of real world conflicts, together with simulated battlefield landscapes presented in FPS games, play a huge role in stimulating ordinary gamers' immersive feelings and their 'being there' presence. The existence of guns in these shoot'em'up

games, as Lucas (2010) argues, ‘...has a connective power that in addition to bringing people together gives space a sense of purpose’(p. 88). Guns in FPS have a key function to ‘link together people, situation, ideas and forms of culture’. This particularly applies in the case of the war-themed genre FPS. The games’ embedded time narrative is deeply associated with the developers’ first selection of gun types and military costume styles. These are included at the first stage of a game’s design (ibid.). The players’ awareness of historical era is sourced through the game content which is there to be decoded. An FPS gamer can actually locate the historical background and wartime settings not only through the linear walkthrough narrativity, but also by recognizing the names and ages of the guns held in his or her projected screen hands. In this case it would be very single-minded to assume that war-themed FPS genre games are only about ‘shoot and kill’ and nothing more. Every weapon is symbolically and automatically tied to real world history and given some serious political meaning for conflicts. This special gun/time connectivity mirrors an important psychological mechanism in the war-themed FPS gameplay experience. The most talked-about topics in today’s FPS forums always concentrate on different guns’ histories and their in-play function, precision and accuracy (e.g. short or long shooting range, number of shots/per second etc.). Consequently this information directly affects the gameplay style and the level of war-playing pleasure. Accordingly, one of our respondents used an interesting example to explain the implication of a particular rifle:

‘Guns just represent some countries’ nationalism. When you see a particular type of gun, without second thought you can get the idea of which side he is on and what camp he supports. Do you have any idea why everyone thinks AK47 is a rifle only bad guys would use? To every FPS gamer and military fan, gun and equipment types are hell important. Some people would rather die than holding an AK47 in

his hands because it's the gun only communists would use. This gun is so classic that it even draws a line between the countries support democracy and communism. Guns like M16, M16A1, M16A2 and the current model M4 actually brand America's military power and they are used to fight against communist party's AK47.'

(34-year-old shop sales/CR 18)

Although history has forced a high degree of political meaning into guns' features, another respondent also explains that the representations of weapons and costumes in today's war-themed FPS are basically divided by the dual historical/contemporary background settings and split past-present-future time narrative:

'With historical wars, you have old school weaponry and essentially some choices on classic killing tools of all sorts. Contemporary conflicts usually have futuristic weapons and great costumes. Though the classic type of weapons actually help you to feel the history and old soldiers' war experience, but today's weapons are definitely looked cooler and more playable and fun because they get you quicker gun-reloading time and better firing power during a fight.'

(28-year-old childcare provider, US/R30)

In this respect, the different models of guns and military costumes can obviously be seen as a time-indicator gamers use to make sense of the virtually staged war environment, historical background, and conflict time/space in their situated position. By playing with these elements and gaining knowledge of them in and outside their gameplay, gamers are allowed to find, puzzle, establish and contextualize the 'purposely-designed presence of realism.' In a broader sense, Claudio Fogu (2009)

once argued that game producers' uses of historical representations in digital games are all for the same purpose of creating more experiential feelings of time-intensity and 'immediacy'. In his thesis the virtualization of the historic events/props and the way people's 'historical consciousness' is embedded and grown in and out of digital games inevitably 'marginalize the oscillation of the modern historical imagination between historical facts and historical events, transcendence and immanence, representation and presence' (p.103). A similar argument can be found in Joost Raessens' exploration on what he called 'documentary computer games.' He gave two game examples: *JFK Reloaded* and *9-11 Survivor* to stress that 'even when these games succeed in being more or less historically accurate, they always occupy a comparable tense position between fact and fiction' (2006:218). Within the same context, the recreation and adaptation of WWII and contemporary war events and stories in today's war-themed FPS production, as reflected in different series of *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor*, perfectly echo Fogu's interpretation. He believes that contemporary people's awareness of historical events and their historical imagination is reconfigured, shaped and transformed by the enhanced virtuality of digital technology. In such a procedural and rhetorical process, the reproduced historical (political or war) events are 'out of the realm of the real and into the semiotic realm of our consciousness as a sign that simultaneously renarrativizes the relationship between past and present, and opens the latter toward a (new) future' (p. 109). Fogu's idea of the 'new future' (of combining the past and present) fits into Jesper Juul's analysis about game time. He indicated that the subjective experience of time in its duality (at the same time one plays as self and the character), allows gamers to 'define their worlds much more loosely and less coherently than we would accept in most other cultural forms' (p. 139). However, what is fascinating in this reprocessing of time and transformation of gamers' self-articulation and construction between the past and present, time and memory, is

the exposure of their contradictive self-consciousness. This can be partly reflected in war-themed FPS gamers' perceptions and thoughts about the clear division of wartime narratives, and it is inevitably negotiated in every possible game player's FPS-cultural experience.

Hence, to help us understand gamers' psychological play and response to the embedded complexities of wartime narratives, the respondents in this research were asked about their preferences and their feelings about the different series of CODs that had different historical or contemporary conflict scenes inserted in them. The feedback received from the three options that were provided in the questionnaire was fairly similar. The respondents were also able to choose and explain why they 'prefer historical war-based FPS,' 'prefer modern/future war-based FPS,' or 'don't mind playing both.' However, part of the gamers' unpredictability was shown when they struggled to choose between the war-themed FPS games containing historical and contemporary war elements. For example, a 34-year-old painter mentioned that the weapon system appeared to be a major influence in his personal gameplay experience and choice, as he expressed his preference is in:

'...contemporary wars usually, but historical games still have a place. It's fun to 'dumb it down' gear wise. With contemporary games we get to see the new weapons and vehicles such as the G36C assault rifle, Barrett sniper rifles, stinger and javelin missiles or the best example the USAS12 auto-shotgun, but again it still is fun to fix bayonets and charge the machine gun nest.'

(New Zealand/R183)

This player's response does not only reflect his personal interests and struggle to

choose between historical and modern wars, but also shows his profound knowledge of military weapons and facilities gained through gaming. However, several respondents with rather conservative attitudes said that the historical pain and suffering inflicted on soldiers fighting in WWII with what is now considered as rudimentary weaponry, is often the main reason that they prefer and feel more comfortable playing FPS games that portray the sophisticated technology and materials of modern war. As such:

‘I’ve always been uncomfortable to see games about WWII, knowing the number of casualties caused by this war, and the awful things that have been committed. I’d rather prefer a modern and fictive conflict, where you can use brand new weapons and technologies.’

(23-year-old student, France/R25)

‘I suppose I like contemporary war more, because historical games tend to try and do the history justice. I don’t much care of accuracy on the given stories, only that it’s a good game to interact with. I wouldn’t call Castle Wolfenstein accurate depicting Hitler as a pissed off robot with chain guns. But do I want a game where I fight robot Hitler with chain guns, or do I want a game where I’m sent on a grunge platoon to battle Nazi soldiers but never once see an important character because that wouldn’t be historically accurate? If it’s going to have history, it should be fun history, just like I can change the future where neither America nor anybody else discovers nuclear physics until years later. It’s easier to make fun of and imagine possibilities for the present than the past.’

(25-year-old security officer, US/R224)

However, several respondents were opposed to the people who preferred modern war FPS. The next two quotes highlight some potential reasons why certain gamers chose to disregard the games based on current war conflicts and were more interested in playing history-based war shooters:

‘I think to make a game using recent real war is...well disgusting. Glorifying violence that happens to real people isn't the right kind of energy. It is better when the games have made up nationalities for recent conflicts. In historical simulations like WW2 or Vietnam as long as both sides are equal/different and respect and understanding is shown (terrorist vs. freedom fighter) it would add a lot to the game. Personally I would love to play a ‘Three Kingdoms’ or ‘Viking vs. Saxon’ FPS.’

(34-year-old corporate trainee, Canada/R127)

‘I lean more towards historical wars. I think it has a different feel, and I like to think of how it was to be in a battle in history. Not to mention, today’s military is a lot less personable, where as today is more ‘man vs. machine (i.e. computer)’ as opposed to ‘man vs. man’ as was most of the past conflicts’.

(35-year-old carpenter, US/R344)

Unlike the above comments showing the respondents’ completely different thoughts and critical selection between history-based and modern war-based game scenarios, one Australian respondent reflected that he was hoping to see how the future production of war-themed FPS games can one day challenge and fix the stereotypes which always spotlight American soldiers as the (only) world hero:

'I don't mind the context and setting the games are in, generally. I actually prefer shooters that offer accounts of an untold faction or side instead of the clichéd American up themselves 'we'll kick their asses' kind of atmosphere - I want an FPS to break that stereotype like World at War (COD) did and allow me to play as a Nazi soldier or Imperial Japanese officer, or a French rebel in Vichy France, without developers having to fear the wrath of censors and over-exaggerating pricks who think because one man killed millions of people, a soldier in his army shouldn't be able to tell his own version of the war - I know from documentaries of Nazi soldiers who were forced to fight, or had their families killed by their own officers to get them to fight; THAT, I think, is much more interesting than having constantly play a green American marine called 'Jimmy' as he does the exact the same thing you'd expect the German to do - except he's a German, so HE gets to be killed and the American stereotype decides to live. That said, I'd like to see a WWII game that pushes that boundary VERY FAR without banned by idiots; and I also like to play contemporary military games, and I do also enjoy playing post-contemporary wars, where it's not way into the future like Halo, but more something along the lines of an alternate history context or something like Gears of War.'

(18-year-old actor, R341)

This respondent's notes perfectly echo Breuer and Quandt's (2011) FPS content analysis which has found that the majority (82.3%, n=130) of the set protagonists (as the main characters) who appeared in their 189 FPS game samples were identified as US-Americans (p. 9). They explained that the main reason behind this choice of protagonist was simply because 'most game developers and publishers are American or British companies, and two of the world's biggest markets for digital games (and this

shooter genre) are the United States and the UK' (p. 13). In other words, the only way to change the existing model of war-themed genre FPS being repeatedly produced from an exclusively Western perspective and have such an unhealthy imbalance of global FPS production culture and stories of FPS content, is to have different cultural forces inject different war perspectives and/or with different narrative frameworks and elements. The release of the game *Mission of Honor*, to be produced and distributed by China's People's Liberation Army next year, will probably be the first with enough resources and power to change the global FPS landscape and bring new challenges to the international market and global gamers' perception in terms of war game narratives.

Another interesting point was made by a Canadian respondent who argued that today's FPS games lack a sense of 'real' reality because they are not projecting real war's cruelty and negativity, or what war is really like:

'One thing that I have noticed in FPS games is that the effect that weapons have on other players is usually censored or toned down. There are no screaming bodies. No amputations, no gore. If people want to see what war is like you might also want to throw in the screaming bleeding children and civilian population that is usually involved with wars and who have no choice other than the fact that they live in the areas of conflict. War atrocities are also seldom included in these games.'

(32-year-old military officer/R46)

From the last two comments, we can see that when gamers decide to participate in certain game culture, they do not 'just play the game.' At the same time they judge them against their moral standards. Often having more understanding about the

content than the researchers do, the gamers have a more critical attitude to the content they are engaged in. This idea perfectly matches Huntemann's (2010) sceptical view about the possible cause of critical engagement in war-themed FPS games. In his article, *Playing with Fear: Catharsis and Resistance in Military-Themed Video Games*, he revealed that he could not be fully convinced by Stahl's interpretation on this sort of 'militainment-manipulated-identity' discourse because the gamers he had interviewed 'retained their scepticism about current military actions, questioning the motives, strategies, purported goals, and likely success of US foreign policy and military intervention...while players clearly do not wholly accept the ideology about militarism embedded in these games' (Stahl, 2010: 232). In his research, Huntemann found that some of his respondents also showed resistance to the content by questioning the narrative structure of the games.

It is unsurprising to see that every gamer is willing to express their personal likes and dislikes about the carefully-designed war game texts and show their acceptance and resistance towards the different settings of wartime narratives. When they were asked to look back at their previous gameplay experience, it made sense to ordinary gamers that they either preferred historical wars or modern/future wars, while some liked or disliked both.

As the historical/modern war representations and the split previous/present wartime narrative partly influences the gamers' gameplay experience, another important aspect we should account for in the research are gamers' perceptions and ideas about game realism. As the famous game designer, Bruce Shelly already acknowledged, both historical information and realism appear to be the key resources or props designers use to add interest, story, and character to the problems they are posing for the players.

Thus, the next section will explore gamers' perceptions of FPS realism by reviewing and referring to gamers' self-interpretations.

5.5 Negotiating the Realness and Un-Realness: The COD Gamers' Perceptions about FPS Realism

Since the FPS genre was first introduced to global fans, the constantly evolving realism of its games has raised many public concerns and debates. Central to people's skepticism about this genre's simulation of reality are some rather unsolvable questions. These include how visually and interactively realistic should FPS be, and to what extent can a FPS game be judged to be too real or unreal? From these open questions we can see that realism in games remains a very complex and difficult subject to analyze and define due to its abstract, unsettled meaning.

Today a successful FPS game experience can only be truly defined as 'realistic' when a fine balance between 'designed realism' and 'perceived realism' has been achieved. The designers' ultimate aim is to create games in such a way as to make them sensationally realistic. Consequently, when gamers play them, their experience will match the designers' expectations and make them feel that the games are somehow real. Invariably, the level of these games'(un-)realness is justified by their graphics or the way they are played. When considering the potential external influences on game realism, the rapid development in visual and interactive technologies are probably the key factor in games' ability to simulate realism.

Within a broader context of aesthetic evolution, it is the core-governments' and IT industries' financial and technical support and guidance that have encouraged the

enthusiastic mainstream game studios into the 'chasing-realism' competition. In the process, developers are forced to think extremely hard about how to make real world conflicts look realistic and the games to play in a convincing way through their virtual design. The pressure for companies to achieve this level of realism in the market is intensified because of war-themed FPS games' global level of production. It is useful to look at the recent technical race between the *Battlefield*, *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* series. If we focus on their different design principles and the diverse qualities of the graphics and gameplay mechanisms, e.g. the first person's view movements, the detailed information about the guns, and the simulated shot accuracy, it is not difficult to see that the realism in FPS games is becoming more important and competitive than ever in the context of game production. When facing industrial pressure and the huge demand for realism, we find that today's producers and designers of FPS games can experience difficulties when attempting to find a balance between realism and playability.

Unlike the notion of designed realism, which is more about how realism should be implanted and placed to bridge game texts and gamers from a production perspective, perceived realism is concerned with how gamers construct reality in their perception towards game texts. The concept of perceived realism is more related to the way it affects gamers' subjective feelings, attitudes, experience, and in-game actions. Therefore, being able to see how gamers perceive this genre, how they make sense of FPS game realism, and how they negotiate the (un-)realness through the game content they are fed, can definitely advance our understanding gamers' FPS experience.

Generally speaking, the notion of realism is commonly used as a graphical or representational term. When adopting it in the concept of digital games, realism is not

only associated with the visual effects, but should also be defined by the level of interactive and immersive experience that the game mechanism provides. When people begin to think that the game they are playing looks real or their experience of playing it feels real, certain levels of realism have been generated to fill in the perceptual gap between a game and a gamer. In normal circumstances, realism is used to imply whether a particular game's content or a type of game genre can truly engage gamers' senses, minds, emotions, and even trigger their physical reactions. As many game researchers have noted, gamers' perception about realism is basically constructed and flows between fact and fiction inside the language of the game. In many cases, adapting the real world's social and political issues and events into a game's content may reinforce gamers' perception towards game realism and thus further increase the level of their pervasiveness inside their gameplay experience. For instance, Gonzalo Frasca's two popular games, *Madrid* and *September 12th*, some well-branded political games like *JFK Reloaded*, *9-11 Survivor*, *Endgames: Waco Resurrection*, *Escape from Woomera* (Raessens 2006), and the new emerging so-called 'news gaming' genre, were all created by designers following the same principle of strategically adopting some factual elements into their content creation. This was done in order to enhance a higher level of real-ness in the progression of realism. Using a similar method of blending some historical facts and fictional stories, the war-themed FPS genre has developed a special form of realism which is widely recognized as one of its key attractions to gamers.

Galloway (2004) argued there are basically three layers of realism to be found in digital games, known (and summarized by this study) as – 1. the *realistic-ness of the audio-visual representation (graphical realism)*, 2. the *social realism*, and 3. the *behavioural realism*. These three undividable types work the same way in the war-themed genre FPS as many other gaming genres; the designers' aim being to simulate a high level of overall realism.

From a perceptual perspective, successfully combining the three can give the gamers' interactive process more integrity and can create a more astonishing, embodied gameplay experience. Galloway's ideas concerning how games can create a lens of realism are reflected in some of the respondents' quotes. They reveal how realism is incorporated into gamers' perceptions:

The Realistic-ness of the audio-visual representation (graphical realism)

Among the three types of realism, the realistic-ness of the graphical realism refers to the fixed game graphics/texts directly presented to gamers at the first sight. It is basically a question of whether gamers think that the virtual objects they see on screen are as real to them as if they were seeing them in actuality. Today's image production in digital games is led by two leading artistic trends. The first is a realistic photo style (in a sense cinematic, Western-looking, like the RPG game *Heavy Rain* that has '*the real looks real*' approach). The second is a comic-book style (in a sense more cartoonish, Eastern-looking, like the RPG game *Final Fantasy*, that I would define as '*the unreal is the real*' approach). In the design context of contemporary war-themed FPS games, it is now common for many western graphic artists to choose to adopt the first approach because this form of authentic construction (also called photo-realism) can directly relate gamers' cinematic imagination (this crucial point will be further discussed in the next chapter). From this perspective, one of our respondents' quotes can be used as a good example of how the first layer of graphical realism impacts on gamers' FPS gameplay experience:

'It's mainly my love for the way FPS and many other similar games are constantly being reshaped to look more and more realistic to the real world. It's a bit like I can move and run in the photos. I especially find it amazing about the development

engines like graphics, game mechanics, physics, etc. I've been more interested in the creative design and concepts for games rather than the programming - I'm not too good with the whole coding thing - the way a game is made is by what people think up for it and contribute to it. I also generally just play games as a good past time; it's an awesome escapism when you feel like just generally relaxing and playing online.'

(18-year-old college student, Australian/R341)

In simple logic, being graphically-realistic is definitely the first thing a good 'realism-branded' game requires. It is also a basic component that gamers would notice and use to justify the level of a game's realism. However, we have to bear in mind that the general view setting from the first-person perspective in these shooter games automatically provides extra 'realistic-feelings' when gamers engage with the content. In this regard, one respondent said that his feelings about FPS realism mainly came from the original 'first-person design' of the game. What he said proves that in this genre the subjective view strengthens a person's perception of realism:

'I'm a big fan of military shooters, especially FPS. I don't know exactly how to put it, but what I do know why I prefer it probably is because of the sense of realism you get when you see two arms holding a firearm, which are positioned to look like you are the one holding it. My subjective view adds so much excitement into this sort of realism. Depending on the improved realism of the game graphic styles and its mechanics, this can work really well in its favor. It's also the adrenaline I suppose, and the fact that small machined parts are capable of dealing extreme lethality to other human beings and environments. The whole 3D thing makes me feel real.'

(18-year-old actor, Australia/R341)

In Galloway's work 'Origins of the First-Person-Shooter', he extensively explains how the uses of first-person perspective shots in films are wisely adopted and transmitted into digital games. Galloway distinguishes this viewer-centred screenshot into two types – POV shots (in which audiences are 'led to see') and subjective shots (in which audiences 'lead themselves to see'). Unlike many films that have only used POV shots in an attempt to mimic what the staged characters are seeing from one camera shot to another, the first person's view-based games are more dependent on the subjective shot of the second type, because, as Galloway cleverly observed, they leave more space for gamers to reveal and identify the game space by themselves. This technique directly stimulates the audience's curiosity and desires towards an uncertainty. It also 'resides in a third moment of realism' that goes beyond the first (realism in narrative, as in literature and novels) and the second (realism in images, as in painting, photography, and film) (p. 84). Galloway's explanation on the constructive subjective experience is clearly reflected in one of our Chinese respondents' testimonies:

'It is definitely the graphics and screen realism that drags me into it, but let me think...there must be something more, there seems to be something more real connecting me to these games. Oh. Maybe it's like in the COD games, the weapons and guns that you know really exist in the world create a better experience in war simulation.'

(30-year-old trader, Taiwan, CR24)

Although his quote, as in the previous two, seems to repeat the same point that gamers' main attraction to this genre is primarily driven by its visual realistic-ness and

graphical realism, it unwittingly reveals the existence of the second layer of social realism projected through the things already built into the game. These are the virtual objects gamers find and use to confirm their connection to the real world and to pacify their anxious situated-sense flowing between the virtual/real.

The Social Realism

In contrast to graphical realism, social realism in games, as Galloway claims, is a sort of perceptual input based on game texts and gamers' articulation of the external world's narrativity and factual reality. Huntemann's study similarly found that 'players were aware of and appreciated games that reflect contemporary geopolitical events and tensions in the real world because those narratives add to the authenticity of gameplay' (2010: 230). Finding and using a realistic medium presented in games' texts to capture their relationship with the real world is a very important part of the process with regards to gamers' psychological perceptions and feelings about realism. To conceptualize different forms and levels of gamers' perceived realism, Steven Malliet (2006) looked into the way adolescents construct their sense of realism across different gaming genres, and proposed that, the five dimensions: factuality, authenticity, character involvement, virtual experience, and perceptual pervasiveness, should all be considered if one wants to understand how social reality is placed into gaming practice. Thus, Malliet asserts that:

‘...many specific videogame features are considered realistic with respect to specific parts of reality. The following examples were frequently given: the modeling of weaponry within a number of first-person shooters (factual realism), the humanness of role-playing game characters and storylines (authenticity) or the freedom of choice that is offered in the virtual world of games such as *Everquest*

(virtual experience)' (p. 392).

Social realism is a form of self-persuasion and thus can be seen as a key factor in maintaining games' built-in 'believe system.' As Millet's research attempted to prove using gamers' reflections on their own virtual experiences, it is possible to see how gamers perceive social realism. In essence, they find and connect real objects to create 'meanings of the real' into gameplay. The following quotes taken from our collected data give several examples that reflect gamers' self-construction of social realism:

'I am so attracted by the realism or seriousness presented into these shooter games. For example the controversial MW2 leveling that takes place in an airport shooting civilians is condemned for its violence, but it is more than realistic that something like this could really happen anywhere in world. News has been showing us similar incidents.'

(17-year-old student, Canada, R115)

'Well...a wargame is a game that deals with military operations of various types, real or fictional. Though sometimes it can be more fun to play a game that is based on a historical war, because you know that is it based upon 'real events' and attempt to represent a reasonable approximation of the actual forces, terrain, and other material factors faced by the actual participants.'

(21-year-old air traffic engineer, US, R317)

'Nowadays some games offer exclusive real feeling. Putting the real gun in the virtual world can inspire this feeling somehow. For example shooting with AK47 on COD: MW2 is very close to the way you fire it for real. I shoot with AK47

many times in real life and I love the feeling of shooting, however only the games offer the opportunity to do it everyday, unless I go to the army.’

(18-year-old project manger, Bulgaria, R398)

The above quotes demonstrate how gamers borrow something real (a real world event, a gun, a true story, a person etc.) as a prop to mediate their thoughts about game realism and make sense of and engage with the game texts. Similarly, this special characteristic of gamers can also be found in some academics’ interest in games’ ability to sustain the so-called ‘suspension of disbelief’. This is the way gamers ignore or re-orientate their perception of realism in order to feel more psychologically involved with the game. In this regard, one of the respondents gave a very interesting observation on the way he split himself in order to smooth his experiential negotiation of social realism:

‘First of all, games have huge influences on the imagination part of me. Anything could happen in a video game, so you could expect yourself being struck from where you could never imagine on a number of times. The world you play in is unrealistic as much as it is realistic, meaning: for me, it’s just another stupid game that I pass time with. But for my ‘other’ me, the ‘Me’ in-game, things matter just as much as real life when I put them into practice. When I am in it, I need to seriously think things through and think hard enough about the different ways to execute my following actions while advancing through my game.’

(25-year-old information specialist, Kingdom of Bahrain/R68)

These respondents’ notes can show us how the second layer of social realism is psychologically constructed in order to better facilitate gamers’ mind-activities, and

also help them immerse themselves deeper in an unfamiliar constructed reality. The last quote unwittingly exposes the existence of the third layer of realism. Literally speaking, it is an extension of realism based on how FPS gamers, through various 'doings' in games, respond to their visual perception of realism and completely lose their sense of disbelief in regard to the unrealistic aspects of the game.

The Behavioural Realism

Grounded upon the concepts of graphical realism and social realism, Galloway's idea of behavioural realism generally means the way gamers intentionally use their interactions and virtual actions to reassure and confirm their feelings and perceptions towards an embodied reality. This can be read as a version of 'realism involved in/through actions.' Every kind of virtual behaviour (whether logical or illogical) that occurs in games, as interpreted by Frostling-Henningsson (2009), is a significant reflection of 'the hallucination of the real' of some kind. It can be viewed as 'a hallucination of lived experience that is both reconstituted and without substance' (p. 561). To a large extent, behavioural realism is basically employed by gamers to blur this hallucination and prove their acceptance of the unrealistic-reality. Hence, what gamers try to do through their trial on different 'allowed in-game actions' is basically to locate a sense of real-ness into the virtuality they are witnessing. Again we can rephrase it as a psychological process of disregarding and suspending one's own disbelief. A person has to choose whether he or she is willing to completely surrender themselves to the imaginary. In the gaming world, all gamers clearly understand that they have to play by the simple philosophical rule that 'I do therefore I am.'

Moreover, this third layer of realism and the different ways of gaming (as an act of play) give gamers the power to flow further beyond visual reception, reflecting digital

games' different perception level in contrast with television and film. In addition, King brings in the concept of 'interpellation' to capture the idea that, unlike in TV or films, gamers in their own play experience can create more meanings through (the uses of) actions. Thus, he reminds us that: 'the form of interpellation offered by games here would include the role of the player as a player, a playful subject self-consciously aware of the act of playing (p. 63).' In our survey a number of gamers articulated a very similar sense of self-awareness when they tried to explain the various kinds of actions that they carry out within the COD gamespace:

'You have a sense of 'being there' and 'I need to do something' sort of feelings when you are placed within a 3D virtual game environment. That's why you see people don't just stand and walk peacefully in the map. They jump or wave their hands or weapons and do all kinds of things from one point to another. It's very absorbing. It's as close to 'real' as you get in games. You have a sense of direct interaction with others then you are allowed to use your actions and moves to prove your existence – just like every one is doing in the game: pointing the sight of your gun at someone across the battlefield and shooting them down before they shoot you. In other game styles you only get a sense of playing a character, or controlling an object. But the 'human' interaction isn't there.'

(30-year-old IT analyst, UK, R130)

'The fast-tempo actions that some of the other games don't have gives me the maximum pleasure. It also includes the amount of concentration and logical thinking you have to put in to be really good at a FPS & TPS game. All the details *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* has, for example, a good gamer needs to put a lot of concentration into the screen, map, and really know what he should be doing or

shouldn't do next, trains you to better control yourself. I play COD: MW2 all the time so when I play I instantly spot this little head half the map away so I can easily snipe them. When my cousins who don't play all the time come over and play cod mw2 they won't be as sensible as I do in the map. It's simply because their eyes are not trained to that extent that mines are from the result of playing so much.'

(19-year-old student, US/R340)

'The actions I take during the match excite me so much. However false it may be, there's a sense of accomplishment in leveling up, killing, discovering things within games like COD. These things I do provide distraction from my real life. I use it as an advanced technique, testing my awareness against such distraction from inner peace and outer compassion and kindness.'

(32-year-old entrepreneur, US, R386)

Based on all three respondents' notes, it becomes quite clear that graphically realistic games can still mean nothing if the behavioural realism does not function as it is meant to. As demonstrated by the respondents' testimonies, the greatest pleasure of FPS comes from the way they can interact with the content and the things they do. Despite gamers' natural instinct to look at games' graphical and social realism and their relation to the material world, gamers' doings and practices are what really connect the subjective-self and the gamespace. To a large extent, pushing the controller buttons allows gamers to activate their virtual-self on screen; making the games they are playing more meaningful.

By analyzing the respondents' quotes, we also learn that, through playing CODs, gamers develop an ego-driven desire to test their given powers in the context of a

‘virtual-physical freedom’ (this factor may be similar to the approach Gosling and Crawford took in their thesis concerning ‘elective belongings’). This characteristic instinct can be easily spotted throughout gamers’ confessions and complaints about their creative use of actions, as well as in the way they address what they can or cannot do during play. We have to bear in mind that this freedom in the virtual world is still realistically framed by the facilities and capabilities of today’s technologies and developments in virtual space. From this respect, designers’ and gamers’ ongoing search for better, more advanced behavioural realism will continue to change and revolutionize players’ interaction within some fixed game genres. For instance, the way FPS games are able to be played has improved significantly through successive generations. For example, the latest bodily experiment device, Kinect, allows gamers to fire their virtual rifles without holding a controller and keep pushing the buttons in their hands. By giving them more physical freedom to use their arms or fingers to fire virtual weapons as they would in the real world, gamers gain a greater sense of verisimilitude. To date, some major studios are introducing FPS games which can be totally controlled by using different parts of the human organs. This change of direction in the design of gameplay has started another revolution in game technology and shows that the constantly changing and readjusting realism/freedom of gaming is driven by the whole industry as well as the gamers themselves.

Today’s technology does not currently allow complete freedom for players in games. If this was to be realized it would be a perfect combination of the real/virtual, human/machine, senses/materials. Currently, game creators are attempting to enhance the realism of players’ behaviour. They are developing a (human-machine interactive) system that allows people more behavioural freedom and physical inclusion within gameplay. The best example of these technological advances featured in one of the

most popular human-technology-games experiments conducted by the UK's Channel Five Gadget Show in 2011. In one episode a team creatively designed a very impressive virtual shooter system and built up what they proudly called the 'Ultimate Battlefield 3 Simulator.' Within a constructed 360 degree projector tent, the show spent \$650000 to integrate games and different technologies (e.g. the latest *Battlefield 3* FPS game, Kinect motion tracking automated paintball guns, HD projectors, and high-tech moving floors), and successfully set up an astonishing virtual-physical system to run 'the most-sense-engaging' gameplay experience. The person playing in the doom would be physically hit by the paintballs and felt real physical pain. The system created by the show indicates the future trend in (FPS) games' development in the context of games' realism and gamers' higher demand on a full bodily participation in the virtual battles. This is all based on the assumption that a more realistic input of human physical action creates more freedom and better behavioural realism.

To sum up from the above three points to FPS games' construction of realism and gamers' perceived realism, it is not difficult for us to see that the gamers' engagement with war-themed FPS games like COD present a sophisticated combination of mental and physical work. From visually receiving what have been seen on the screen, then psychologically negotiating the real/unreal parts between the outside world and the game content, to virtually executing their in-game actions, the process of gamers' perceived realism reflects the complexity of how one specific game text or genre has a unique way of building-up the relationship between the real world, the machinery of the virtual medium, and the subjective-self. This appropriately corresponds to King and Leonard's (2010) argument that:

'Wargames aren't just selling the excitement of war, or hoping to capitalize on

masculine yearnings for boyhood military fantasies, but they are capitalizing on the realism and the supposed historic accuracy offered in their virtual reality' (p. 101).

Expanding on this idea of wargames' simulation of a compelling 'virtual reality' through historically-grounded realism, as well as developing the different themes addressed above, the next chapter will provide a comprehensive critical analysis of the different ways foreign gamers negotiate themselves in this generic culture.

Conclusion

By examining the composition of our respondents and their responsive texts in our survey, this chapter discussed several aspects of the war-themed FPS gamers. Its aim was to search for answers to questions including: What is the relationship between COD games and gamers? How are COD games related to gamers' everyday lives? How do gamers perceive this gaming genre? How do gamers negotiate their perception of wartime narrative, and how is realism constructed and processed? The chapter also managed to present several sets of data and gamers' thoughts and responses (more of the significant ones) to help us better understand the essence of the shooter gamer experience. Similar approaches which centralize gamer experience and motivations can also be found in Kallion, Mayra and Kaipainen's (2010) socio-cultural study on gamers' mentalities (in which nine reasons of gameplay are systematically categorized)⁵¹, and in Gosling and Crawford's (2010) theorization on game audiences (in which the relationship between gamers and everyday life is revised

⁵¹ There were three methods conducted in their research. The entire process includes – short structured interviews with 73 informants, in-depth interviews with 33 (of the 73) gamers, and two focus groups. The 9 mentalities of gaming can be roughly summarized as: 1. gaming with kids, 2. gaming with mates, 3 gaming for company, 4. killing time, 5. filling gaps, 6. relaxing, 7. having fun, 8. entertaining, 9. immersing.

based on their qualitative data)⁵².

As in the final two sections which laid out the key discussions on gamers' perceptions about FPS games' wartime narrative and constructive realism, we have seen some evidence in accordance with gamers' real feelings and experiences. From a gamer's perspective, this data is no more than a reminder that despite the fact that the production and content of this genre has had political intervention, the players react to this new media in multiple ways; playing them differently depending on their various motivations and intentions. This is potentially why there is yet to be a study that can draw a firm conclusion and prove that in certain types of games and genres, players live and exercise as one kind, are influenced by and act upon particular types of ideologies and play with the same goals and motivations, or in the same way. In other words, gamer's interaction with this media form is definitely diversified and creative, and their perceptions flow between and are based on their different intentions and individual needs. This has been the key argument repeatedly illustrated throughout this chapter.

However, within the larger global community, some sub-groups of local clans, clubs, and teams continue to be formed by gamers with similar interests and an attraction to the same playable content. By playing in different regions and being segmented locally, some gamers may still decide to gather together when geographical and language boundaries may have their own influence. In this regard, King and Krzywinska (2006) claims:

⁵² Their argument aimed to clarify and redefine the idea of seeing gamers as game audiences. In their study, there were some empirical works based on their qualitative research which interviewed 82 UK gamers between 11 to 56 years old.

‘Gamplay does not exist in a vacuum, any more than games do as a whole. It is situated instead, within a matrix of potential meaning-creating networks. These can operate both at a local level, in the specific associations generated by a particular episode of gameplay and in the context of broader social, cultural and ideological resonances’ (p. 38).

Based on their claims, the next chapter will specifically look into a gamer community of COD Taiwanese gamers.

Chapter Six:

The Confessions of the Taiwanese Call of Duty Gamers:

A Transnational Experience

‘A 3D shooter game like COD gives you a chance to participate in the wars you used to read about in history books or see in movies. Now the only thing you have to do is to push these buttons then you get to be a Western hero like Rambo that people have dreamed of being for a long time.’

(Jason Ni/I10)

The previous chapter provided some thoughts regarding gamers’ perceptions about the FPS game’s construction of wartime narrative and realism. Chapter Six will narrow down the focus to a smaller size of samples and is aimed at providing some core-analysis based on a local, non-western group of male Taiwanese COD gamers. In relation to this, Gosling and Crawford (2010) already observed that: ‘It is important to recognize that even when gameplay is mediated across trans-local (or ‘virtual’) spaces, such as gaming over the internet, the participants are still physically located somewhere’ (p. 148). This simply means that the gamers’ physical locations and their locality should not be taken for granted when gamer experience is explored. Playing games gives many local gamers, who (in their real lives) are located in different cities and countries, a chance to play with their online ‘virtual friends’ - but this is not all. As mentioned several times in the previous chapters, digital games can also act as a communication platform which allows the users to socially engage with local people and friends with the shared interests in certain games’ culture and content.⁵³ However,

⁵³ Kallio, Mayra and Kaipainen’s research specifically discuss the sociability of gaming and define the three diverse social roles of games – gaming can be taken place at the same time in the physical space (allied, against, alongside), virtual space (allied, against, alongside), and outside gamespace (sharing experiences, knowledge and views) (2011: 337).

to precisely explain how these gamer communities are normally bound together, Pearce (2009) assert that:

‘...the game’s own values and ideologies predispose it to attract a certain type of player, even before the game is actually played. Once those players come together, their communities’ forms and develop around these shared values, which also intersect with the values embedded in the game itself. In many communities, players may not even be aware of the values and ideologies that attract them to a game in the first place, let alone the ways in which they influence play and social interaction’ (p. 73).

Pearce’s notion perfectly fits into the main theme of this chapter. A community of 11 Taiwanese gamers were found locally in Taiwan’s capital city of Taipei and then approached individually for in-depth interviews. In comparison with online-based communities which on the whole have to maintain their communications and friendship through internet and virtual platforms, locally-formed and geographically-framed game communities reflect a deeper cultural intimacy between their associate members due to their naturally given spatial convenience. In simple words; it makes it easier for ‘local gamers’ to physically meet each other face-to-face, so strengthen their ‘gamership.’ Very often there happen to be more ‘actual’ group activities and meetings around these local gamer communities.

During the time this research was conducted in Taiwan, by getting to know one COD gamer, I was introduced to the other 10 gamers and invited to join one of their randomly organized gameplay meetings. For a typical local gamer community like the one I encountered, it is very common to see its associate members put in more effort

and time to establish a shared social life by constantly contacting each other and organizing regular face-to-face meetings. On a weekly basis, the group members may visit other members' locations several times for the 'play and chat' sessions as they called them. Situated in one of their ritual type social-gatherings, I was given an afternoon to observe and witness the routine of their activity and their members' social interactions. With only one TV and PS3 console set in the living room, the members randomly take turns to play their favorite shooter game online with/against other gamers while the rest of the members sit on the sofa, have a chat and watch him play.

In this gaming-centered time for local social bonding, various categories of topic and conversation can be involved in the routine. The participants can freely comment on the game content, give their strategic opinions about their gameplay styles, discuss the fun parts during play, or purely talk about their personal everyday life and business. Two previous studies have examined the gamers' different inter-social modes. These studies provided some detailed discussions about the online FPS gamers' multiple uses of verbal language and their different types of conversation while engaged in the process and can be found in Wright *et al.*'s (2002) and Ducheneaut's (2010) research. What can be roughly concluded from their studies is, essentially, that every gamer has to find his/her own (cultural, social, and self) belonging somewhere, and by going through and testing themselves in and around different community activities they are more likely to achieve this goal. To help us better understand how a gamer community is normally formed and how these between-gamer relationships develop, one of our interviewees; Arthur Lin (I2), explained in detail how he accidentally joined his COD community and became part of his community's inner circle:

‘Most of us used to play CS (Counter-Strike) in the past, but every game you normally play for 2-3 years then you would quit. After abandoning CS, I managed to buy a Bluetooth earphone when I got my first COD game on PS3, but most quality FPS games today are still Western-made and you will see that most people playing online only speak English. Foreign players like me can be very quiet sometimes during the online match. Not until once I heard someone speak Chinese on the other side. I felt so excited and tried to talk to them and they introduced me to the forums in ‘Baha’ (www.gamer.com.tw: Taiwan’s biggest games-related internet news/resource website). I began to discuss the games with them everyday and so I was naturally accepted as one of their team members. It then became a daily routine that you have to play and meet these friends online in a certain time of a day. Some of them even phoned you and asked about your absence if you didn’t show up online on time. Soon after more people joined us, we began to organize formal meetings. I remember once we booked a very large café and 4 to 5 of our members even brought their consoles and controllers along with them to the party. In an event like this you get to see people with different background who have all kinds of professions. In this shared culture and community like this, we have no conflicting interests and all just want to have fun together.’

The geographical advantages of having all of this team’s members more or less located in the same city makes it easier to get in touch with one another outside the virtual space of the game. However, there is another crucial element bringing them all together which should also be considered; their common use of the same language. The language gamers choose to speak and write to communicate in the game can directly influence their online gaming and community experience. Especially in today’s

online FPS games' settings, winning online matches is heavily reliant on the combat team's internal communication skills and collaboration. Due to the games being designed to be played in English and some foreign gamers lack of English-speaking skills, it is natural to see these Chinese-speaking gamers find each other online in order to obtain the communicable partners they need and use the language they feel more comfortable with. As well as all the gamer-interviewees in this research playing the English-based COD games in their native language, the 11 interviews were conducted in mandarin Chinese and the conversations with the gamers were all fully recorded/transcribed into Chinese and further translated/re-transcribed into English.

As explained earlier in Chapter Four, another distinctive trait of male Taiwanese gamers' identity is their life's association with compulsory real army experience. Gender-wise, this is the biggest reason for my research to focus mainly on male gamers at this stage. Without much doubt, there is a natural subjective connection between male Taiwanese gamers and militaristic movies/games. For example, one of the older interviewees, Yung-Shi Liu (I3) described that:

'When I was in the Army, most equipment we were allowed to touch was that previously used by American soldiers in the WWII period. So every time when I watch *Band of Brothers* or *The Pacific*, or play games like the *COD* or *MOD*, I always get these feelings back to the days when I learned to serve the country and play with those weapons. I am impressed by the way these stories portray soldiers' hearts and minds.'

In the most common interpretation of this case, a male wargame player like Yung-Shi would probably be identified as a typical example of an individual using war movies

and games as a tool for self-projection. Such media experience also allows him to re-articulate his feelings of previously being a 'real-soldier'. So, as many critical academics would put it, there is a striking sense that war movies and games, in this context, are transformed into a critical medium in which male gamers keep enjoying sustained masculinity and male-dominance. However, it is partly true that war-linked cultural products like movies and games continue to perpetuate the unequal gender agenda by exciting the male audiences in their fixed content format, but certainly, in the particular case of male Taiwanese gamers, more of the socio-cultural context and popular cultural environment should also be considered to understand their significance. Here three points can be roughly concluded:

1. Within the eastern Asian entertainment business environment, Taiwanese people show a very high level of local interest and acceptance of foreign popular cultural products (especially those from US, Japan, and South Korea), across music, movies, TV dramas and games. Within the Chinese speaking region, Taiwan has always been seen as a 'cultural hub' and has been recognized as the initial market to be tested if a foreign entertainment company is about to launch a popular cultural product into the Chinese market.
2. With Taiwan's society largely influenced by US, Japan and China in terms of politics, economics, (popular) culture, as well as its social trends and values, Taiwanese people (gamers) represent a 'neutral hybridity' – like in many post-colonial countries. This special geopolitical position and cultural complexity is frustrating the Taiwanese people themselves as a whole, whilst the society is experiencing some struggles in developing its own

cultural/national identity. Without much censorship in its liberal system, Taiwan's open-market structure has trained its people to quickly adopt, choose and consume particular forms of imported popular culture which can excite the public (especially younger generations) most within a short period of time.

3. In comparison with Western gamers, the gamers in Taiwan do not have a direct (historical, ideological and political) relationship and historical feelings towards (war and) the war-themed FPS games' (in particular WWII-based) content, narrative and elements. As argued before, the COD games still appear to be a typical style of Western text and product carrying profound Western cultural meanings and values. The less-relevant East Asian gamers' cultural experience to the Western war discourse can provoke diverse views and experiences towards the same content.

These three points related to the geopolitical situation of Taiwanese popular culture indicate the background context of Taiwanese gamers. Beside the three points addressed above, more reasons about the Taiwanese COD gamers' socio-cultural background can be traced back to several points already made in the methodology-based Chapter 4. Hence, based on this background context, the research proposes that studying the Taiwanese gamer community can contribute to answering the questions: How do non-English speaking (Chinese-speaking) communities engage with the well-branded, globally-trendy, war-themed FPS games?, and, What are these gamers' shared-values and experiences in the trans-local (trans-national) process?

To ground my arguments based on all the things mentioned above, the following discussions are divided into five parts. The first part of the discussion focuses on the

inter-textuality revolving around the Hollywood war movies and the war-themed FPS games. Such obvious intertextuality projects a deeper cross-media referential textual relationship in this genre and can be easily tracked down in the way our gamers reveal their life's engagement to the COD game series. The second part of the discussion specifically looks into the critical issue of the gamers' online conflicts and the nationalistic type of bullying occurring in internet-based FPS games – it shall set out a key argument that any nationalistic expression inside/during/outside the game is all part of the gaming performance. The third part provides a key discussion about the gamers' feelings towards the (distractions of) network failure. In many circumstances, the downside of the internet and the unstable connection can directly reduce their gaming pleasure and manipulate their experience when interacting with the games. And, the fourth part of discussion sets out to draw our attention to a particular case study on one of our interviewees; Paul Yang. From the way he talks about his own gaming life and his relationship with CODs, we can understand the idea of how a gamer is able to jump from one genre to another, and for what reasons he managed to change his cultural tastes and gaming interests. The final part of discussion looks into the issue of gaming violence in this genre and demonstrates how the mature, over 30-something gamers respond to this controversial issue.

In the first three sections are some core-themes which emerged, developed and are summarized from the conversations and interviews I had with the 11 gamers. The second and third sections in particular are more of a reflection on gamers' 'unpleasant gaming experience' when the COD game series are played online. The following discussion about Paul Yang provides a typical example to help us further examine how, in the process of struggling to resist/accept a game genre, a subjective gamer can practically and psychologically adjust and readopt himself to the constantly changing

virtual game landscape and culture. With all the presented data, we will be able to learn more about the 'gamership' (game text-gamer relationship) inside the war-themed FPS (COD) gaming genre and culture. Overall, this chapter is aimed at unfolding the question of how a foreign community, as in the examples of the Taiwanese gamers, perceives these western-made, conflict-based game series.

6.1 The Perceptually Detected Intertextuality

When distinguishing wargames as a genre in itself, it is imperative to pay some attention to this gaming genre's intertextualized body, which is believed to be deeply linked to the US-made war movies and dramas in their roots of production and consumption. It is also necessary to single out a very crucial point; that the representations of war in the cinema world had already gained a steady global popularity before and during the appearance of war games. Today everyone can easily name a few war films they have seen recently. Generally speaking, contemporary media audiences and gamers are definitely not strangers to the American war movies. People have been quite used to the way Hollywood's war movie genre portrays and narrates the American values and expectations about global warfare.

Not only do the production sides of both movies and games continue to benefit from sharing their screen experiences, but at the same time people and experts are also claiming that, at the authentic level, mainstream movies and games are learning from each other. This means that, in the graphical and visual sense, the two are more like each other. For example, in the recent blockbuster action movie *Gamer* (2009), starring Gerard Butler, the viewers see more typical gaming-like first-person-shooter camera shots and angles used to portray a more intense battlefield situation. However, as the

main receivers of these militaristic moving-images, the average gamers (if following war movies on regular basis) are sensible enough to spot the growing cross-media fusion and intimacy. For example, one of our interviewees, Samuel Chang (I1) explained that:

‘The reason I like western games like COD is very simple. Firstly, Hollywood has a long history in making very high quality hi-tech action movies and I believe the technologies attached to Hollywood’s production culture are strengthening and facilitating their game industry as a whole. Secondly, everything they (Hollywood and the American game industry) produce is international. The games produced there always guarantee global connections – where you can really meet and challenge global gamers. When you hear a big global brand like EA, without a second thought you know the whole world is playing it. Sadly, the ‘global’ online games produced and made in Taiwan only seem to attract some local Taiwanese gamers.’

Samuel’s words confirm a key point; that it is impossible to isolate war gamers’ experience only in the context of gameplaying. All game producers and gamers know very well that the existence and meaning of this genre and the pleasure of ‘playing wars’ have to be built on top of the already established viewing experience from film and TV. To give a good example, one of our interviewees, Leslie (I6) put it this way:

‘When you first had these games in hand, you would probably spend a week or less just to go through the story mode. Although the story mode is quite short and can be quickly done, it sets out the whole background of the game and helps you to get the sense of what this new series is really about. When your friends call you for

online battles, with your gained sense and knowledge about the timeframe, types of weapon, and styles of the equipment in the story mode, you can settle yourself quicker in the online environment and more properly immerse yourself in the fight. It's just like going through a war movie or drama series but this time you are the one in it.'

A decade ago, John Fiske showed us that the theory of intertextuality can be quite useful in deconstructing the ever-increasing mixed format of diffusing media texts, as its core value promotes the main idea that:

'...any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it. These relationships do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually. Intertextuality exists rather in the space between texts' (cited in Kinder 1991:45).

Though what has not been addressed by Fiske is simply that, if the readers do become familiar or have enough knowledge with specific (or the same) texts, the deeper audience-text familiarity negotiated throughout the mediated process can definitely reinforce the readers' imagination into the media texts. The same point was made again and again in King and Krywinska's (2002) book *ScreenPlay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*. Audiences and gamers intertextual mind and consciousness can always be strengthened when the trans-media references and intertextualized codes are (intentionally or incidentally) found.

On this point, this research proposes to suggest that the war-themed FPS games and

gamers set a good model for us to look more closely at a special form of gaming genre's implicated intertextuality. Especially to a foreign gamer (or say, game texts-receiver) like Samuel, the COD games automatically symbolize a 'better, western-made global experience,' and thoughts like that must come from somewhere. His belief in the 'western-made' war-related entertainment products reflected in his personal life's profound engagement with the war movies and games largely relies on this bearable intertextuality – a broad systematic value/meaning-making system originated in games' graphical language. As in Samuel's case; that he seemed to show more appropriations of the western productions of games than the local games made in his own country, it exposes more of the great mind-planting results and efforts made by the successful collaboration of the two media forms of Hollywood war movies and the war-themed FPS games. To an extent, it is also fair to argue that an average gamer's life is not totally engaged in one game (genre) only. At the same time, one's life remains open to various media types and contents, as well as, by choice, his/her experiences freely flow between and across different media forms, genres and sub-genres.

Historically speaking, Hollywood's use of war narratives and storytelling techniques are not unfamiliar to many foreign cinema goers. Just like Samuel who already carried a fair amount of knowledge about Hollywood's war film genre, other COD gamers also expressed very similar opinions and intentionally linked their own shooter gameplay experience to certain war movie scenarios in their flash memory. As such:

“There are so many times when I played these WWII games, *lots of their scenes kind of remind me the Normandy Landing in the old time movies and Black Hawk Down*. You can tell these games are all a sort of copycat. When you play these set scenarios, you

know you've seen it somewhere in some big-hit action war movies. It's interesting to find such relevance and graphic codes during gameplay though. Have you seen the movie *Enemy at the Gates*? In one COD there's this first level you have to pick up a sniper and runs with it. The way of playing it through is exactly like the beginning part of the film.'

(Aaron/I4)

From the audiences' perspective, Aaron's quotes and the earlier quote from Samuel have shown us that, the Taiwanese gamers do not show much resistance to the Western values which may or may not be posed in and around the CODs. Instead, they both very much enjoy talking about the pleasure of finding these coded Hollywood references. From what they said, it is easy to sense a successful trans-media formation by which war movies and games are purposely re-designed into a new media fusion. In different degrees, such multi-layered media fusion has posed to be the core-element supporting and making the war-themed FPS gameplay experience more interesting, especially to foreign gamers. For example, another interviewee, Ralph (I9) described that:

'I have to tell you. If you play these games *without the Hollywood war movies support your gameplay, your gaming experience won't be as pleasurable as you could expect today*. Let me put it this way, these war movies impose this militaristic information in your head and games give you a platform to puzzle over them and work them out. There is definitely some connection here and there. You know, to an extreme, many hardcore war game players would turn into a special kind of individual - many end up of buying and collecting all the military equipment and accessories, and some even move into playing a more realistic version of wargame called survival game

(paintball/airsoft ball). 'Trust me. You don't just see these heavy war-engaged communities in Taiwan. There are definitely more all over the world.'

As detected in our interviewees' words, the gamers' COD experiences played along with the so-attached intertextuality transmitted from war films/movies to games are *positive, non-fractured*, and have a strong sense of *consistency*. This perfectly echoes Burn's (2006) emphasis, saying that: 'Engagement with the game does not finish when the game sessions end and computer or console is switched off. Players continue to think about, imagine, even dream about, the events, landscapes and characters' (p. 88). It is especially so in the war-themed FPS gamers' experience, when later, more evidence will be shown to demonstrate how nearly every one of our gamer-interviewees coincidentally make the same articulations of linking the COD games to a set of famous blockbuster war movies or dramas.

However, by arguing the FPS experience is a fundamentally designed psychological process meant to transpose war-movie viewing experience into playable game content and experience, Sue Morris (2002) employed the concept of 'the cinematic apparatus' to compare the similarity and difference between films' and FPS games' technical basis, and explain how the 'game apparatus' actually functions. She asserts that,

'...FPS game apparatus creates for the player a highly immersive media experience, in which a first-person point-of-view, player agency and the operations of interactivity combine to create a sense of primary identification greater than that of cinema' (p. 95).

In response to Morris' conceptual input on game apparatus, the following quotes provide a few examples to demonstrate how, in normal circumstances, the war-themed FPS gameplay experience is by and large overshadowed by Hollywood war movies. By reading through this verbal evidence, we can more precisely capture the tension of intertextuality:

'Playing these games is all about executing your own and your team strategies. These things are always reflected in the plots of those classic American war movies. Whoever watches Hollywood movies and plays the WWII-based games can tell that so many of these brilliantly-made game scenarios actually copied the Gulf War. Some even remind me of certain parts of the movie in Black Hawk Down or some rescue missions in Saving Private Ryan. They just look so similar. The ways of making your attacks are so similar too. By applying the experience from the movies into the gameplay, I see the heroic projection of myself as the handsome warriors just like in those films.'

(Bob/I7)

'They (war games) are so exciting...just like these war movies, Pearl Harbour, Saving Private Ryan and Black Hawk Down. Sometimes I do connect movies and games together. I sense that the movie always came first and then you got these games all about war. A lot of things between them are quite similar, because you shoot, you kill, you get anguished.'

(Li-Chiang/I8)

'You felt like in the movies sometimes when you play these games. But I want to specify that at certain points, you won't say clearly this is this movie and this is that movie. At least I don't associate them this way. So how did it make me feel real? Well...You

have seen wars as a part of the history. You have seen them in book and movies. A lot of things are added together, so you build your sense around those things. The game makes you feel you are there somehow and you can join the biggest military operations in human history.’

(Jason/I10)

Based on the following texts, it is not too difficult to see how foreign gamers have to re-adopt their previous Hollywood war movie viewing experience to more make sense of their gameplay and use such experience to reinforce their transcultural imaginations towards the western soldiers and military culture. In a critical sense, the way in which the Taiwanese gamers negotiate the COD games’ trans-mediated meanings proclaims a triumph of the western way of production in creating a global war imagination, as the Hollywood movie experience is totally blended into the war gameplay experience. The next two quotes expose more of the gamers’ self-articulations in and around the subjects of war, movies and shooter games.

‘I began to develop more interest in these (war) games when I grew up. *Most COD I have played are made just like the movies Black Hawk Down and Enemy at the Gates.* If someone is always interested in history, WWI, WWII, and war stories, then he will definitely be drawn into these games...The way their camera pans and the animations inside these games are just more and more like movies. With the perfect background music added to it, you just can’t help but throw yourself totally into these games.’

(Arthur/I2)

‘You know a while ago, there was this film called *The Hurt Locker* and I think it won

the Oscar in 2008. It's directed by James Cameron's ex-wife, Kathryn Bigelow, and its main story is about an elite Army bomb team. *I remember after watching this movie, I really felt my hands get very itchy and so wanted to kill some 'bad guys' in the game.'*

(Samuel/I1)

Not long ago, Kucklich (2006) taught us that today most games made will be based on two things – one is the fixed pattern of gameplay (game-gamer interactive styles); and the second, which is also the more important one, is the iconography based on a long-standing genre tradition (conventions) within a particular form of literature or film. As in the latter one, our gamers' responses highlight a key theme that Hollywood war movies, as a convention of a genre, play a significant role in the essence of the foreign gamers' perceptual experience towards the COD games. This is certainly one of the key findings proving that Hollywood's efforts and the early industrial model of military-entertainment complex does pay off in planting a sensational war/military imagination into the foreign gamers' minds. The same argument can also be found in Walkerdine's study, in which it is proven that:

'...boys (occasionally girls) make constant reference to the action movie genre. In this way their performance of gameplaying is made to signify within a wider intertextuality and intercorporeality of media products and practices in which action masculinity is constituted' (2007:40).

Although this cross-media intertextual implication of CODs was mostly mentioned in the context of the gamers who refer their experience to the single-player story mode, when gamers fall into a more intensive experience online, in terms of gamers' perceptions it remains to be a very important psychological aspect of allowing gamers

to relate with their ‘other’ media experience in order to establish a deeper relationship with the culture of the game and the game itself. This is especially true when they approach a unfamiliar game genre for the first time). In this regard, Garry Crawford, who grounded some of his ideas upon Jenkins’ discourse, tells us that, by studying games’ intertextuality and gamers’ intertextual-consciousness to it, we have more chance to witness ‘the more active audience, who are more willing and want to seek out and follow narratives and themes across multiple texts and media forms’ (2012: 87).

6.2 The Conflicts and Performance in the COD Gamers’ Online Negotiations between ‘the Self’ and ‘Others’

‘The gameplay (in CODs) to me is all about self-abreaction. Of course sometimes you really need to think hard and put some effort into it to win, but the most pleasurable moment I would say is when the efforts you invested are paid off and you get to kick some foreigners’ ass and see them crying-loud. You know when you keep playing online matches you can sort of sense a particular nation’s national characteristic and a player’s personality.’

(Arthur/I2)

‘Killing people in this game can really let me work off my anger. It becomes even more pleasurable if you have or create some imagined enemies of your own. If I know the people I am about to take down are some Koreans or Americans, I’ll definitely get more excited by that.’

(Min-Jiang/I5)

As these two quotes show, the key aim in the discussion here is mainly to deal with the gamers' nationalistic tendency and social conflicts when their COD gameplay experience takes place online. Again, we have to bear in mind that, in the online game culture, social interaction plays a very important role in allowing a gamer to enhance his/her gaming experience by walking through the same game with friends, and to create more personal meanings and pleasure by cooperating with teammates and contesting with strangers. As Wright *et al.* (2002) already emphasized, a large part of the gamers' 'meaning-making' and 'pleasure' in the online version of FPS games 'is not merely embodied in the graphics or even the violent game play, but in the social mediations that go on between players through their talk with each other and by their performance within the game.' This is very much so in our gamer-interviewees' COD online gameplay experience, as each one of them passionately reflected that playing COD online with friends/against real-people definitely created more fun and pleasure than playing in the single-player-story mode alone. By reviewing the 11 interviews, their coincidentally-shared 'unpleasant experience' in the online virtual-social space projects a fascinating 'grey area' in their social interactions between themselves and the unknown players ('the imagined others').

The ways people portray themselves in the virtual space can be quite a disturbing and depressing process, especially in a contest-driven game environment which essentially encourages conflicts in its original design and settings. Not only in the FPS type of games but also in other (most-seen, MMORPG and sports) gaming genres which can be played online by multi-players to involve some level of social interaction and competitiveness, it is very common to see unfriendly, aggressive comments and messages exchanged between the game contestants. In the online FPS games, the most seen conflict is probably chat-insults and message-insults, and they are used mainly

with the intention of establishing self-confidence, to dominate a win-lose situation, manipulate the enemies, mentally overtake the opponents, and most importantly, take on a psychological advantage. Generally speaking, these are the *main purposes* behind people saying or doing things to harass other people in an open contest.

The type of language used in the online verbal or textual abuses normally implies negative images and stereotypes about a person's (and sometimes, a community's) age, gender, race or nationality. For foreign gamers (non-English users), they very often cannot get away from being targeted on their racial types or nationality. In many situations, these nonsense verbal/textual attacks in the cyber space can turn out to be some unpleasant, ugly insults which directly influence and frustrate a player's gaming experience. For example, in one part of my interview with Samuel (I1), he desperately pointed out that:

'You know everyone playing this game online has to wear earphones to communicate with other people, but in an actual match, the play styles and spoken languages can be quite different because you've got to meet gamers from different countries. If you play long enough, you will probably have to face the same problem of receiving all kinds of verbal abuse and personal attacks. Then you will be forced to learn how to adjust yourself and deal with some aggressive racists or stupid patriotic idiots. Very commonly in the middle of the game you hear people swearing and shouting disturbing things all over the place, to you, or to your teammates, like fucking Chinese, fucking Korean...this and that.'

Another interviewee, Jason (I10) made similar complaints about some pop-out abusive messages:

‘Even when I jumped out from the online match, I still received these very abusive messages from the opponents afterwards. I have no idea what’s wrong with these people. You lose then you lose. You win then you win. Why do that? Sometimes I just ignore them, but most of the time I would shout back or write back.’

And, in Bob’s (I7) personal experience, he found many of the assaults come from younger gamers:

‘It is not difficult for other gamers to guess your nationality by checking your teams’ spoken language, team’s name or logo, or from your accent. Once they, especially some racist kids, find out those things about you, they will use them to laugh at you and make fun of it. Some gamers play to annoy other human beings. Sometimes you really feel powerless and don’t know how to shut them up...Well...Online game space is still a free space where some people can abuse their own rights for being there.’

Very similarly to Samuel, Jason and Bob, Ralph (I9) pointed out exactly the same problem about several online verbal assaults he had dealt with in the past. He specifically explained that many times he found the online strangers’ provocative behaviours very disturbing when his team was prepared to play against the foreign (mostly American) gamers:

‘Sometimes when the two teams are waiting in the (virtual) lobby, the other foreign teams can be very annoying and impolite. So many times we have this same situation with all of their people shouting at us and playing very loud rock music in

the background before and during a match. Can you not play the game calmly? What they do and say are disrespectful and can make you really upset and angry you know.'

Additionally, Ralph seemed to believe nationalism was the factor triggering the assaulters' improper behaviour.

'Americans are more likely to feel shame when they lose a game to foreigners. It's definitely part of their national pride. Unlike them, we really appreciate every match we win. When playing online, we Asians' personality is more subtle, so are players South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong.'

What Ralph said simply validates the point that an online shooter game space like COD can provide a meeting point where people with different nationalities are allowed to put themselves forward to challenge, contest and mentally wrestle each other. Although Ralph's thoughts on the American gamers' online assaults shows a typical example in which one may overtly generalize the characteristic of one nation and the personality of its people, his bad impression of some American gamers' inappropriate gaming behaviour does expose an individual gamer's difficulty and anxiety when dealing with online games' cross-cultural complexity in such open, free-speech, virtual space. However, in massively-multiple-player online games, it is very common to see gamers, initially, grasp nationality as a tool simply to identify, distinguish, differentiate and divide the self and others. As we occasionally see in many international sports matches and contests, abusing one's race and nationality has always been counted as a very direct strategy. It is a common and powerful way for a contestant to succeed his or her own mind games, when one carries the intention to humiliate the opponents for

a greater chance to win. It is important for us to establish a basic understanding here of seeing gamers' nationalistic expressions as only a psychological tool and strategy in this context and gamers' nationalism/patriotism does not play as the prior motivation here. It may also be worth noting that focusing too much on gamers' nationalism and patriotism can lead us to an endless debate and draw us into a more difficult reading about this kind of online game abusers/victims relationship.

However, the best way to look at Ralph's and the rest of our victims' quotes of complaint is to temporarily forget assaulters' nationalist tendencies, although in those cases we have clearly been shown how some foreign and American gamers purposely use very sensitive words to provoke the foreign gamers who may or may not have the ability to speak English properly. Instead, it seems more appropriate to reposition such provocative gaming behaviours within the wider context of 'cyber-bullying' for discussion. From this perspective, every type of online harassment (whether it is in verbal or textual forms) regarding a person's gender, race or nationality can all be more appropriately defined and categorized as a symbolic action of bullying and seen as a rather aggressive type of internet gaming behaviour and performance. Although gamers' original nationalism/patriotism may partly influence gamers' ways of self-expression when the virtual-bullying is taking place, the use of the nationalistic type of verbal abuse is still motivated by the primary intention of one gamer wanting to annoy other gamers and obtain his own power. Within a limited time frame gamers can only judge and grasp what they see and hear at first sight, and they use those things to attack in order to cause a certain amount of damage to another gamers' mood, feelings and mind and therefore influence their gaming performance. Without much understanding of and with very limited information about the opponents in a virtual place where conflicts are allowed and have to be executed, abusing someone's

nationality certainly becomes one of the quickest methods to humiliate ‘the others’ and cause psychological damage. Giving a neutral view about online gamers’ general abuses on foreign gamers’ nationality, a more sensible interviewee Leslie (I6) maturely described that:

‘Although it (the nationalistic type of bullying) does happen quite often in the online FPS games not necessarily every American gamer you meet is that childish and aggressive. I think they swear a lot because they have the ability to speak that language fluently. I did meet some good foreign players after a game or two and they wanted to make friends with me. It’s very hard to say sometimes. I think it’s all down to yourself and how you handle their abuses. For example, one of my teammates always says that – it’s time to kick some foreigners’ ass.’

However, as most of our interviewed gamers expressed huge concerns about this ‘negative atmosphere’ in their own online COD gameplay, this emerging problem with regard to the different types of online conflicts between people, the imbalance of cyber-bullying and the mysterious abuser/victim relationship began to attract much attention from the general public and experts who care about the development of online and gaming culture and their impacts on the younger generation. Within game study, the type of gamers who have the intention of making other gamers’ experience miserable are officially branded as ‘griefers.’ In Mia Consalvo’s interpretation, this specific type of gamer plays games ‘mainly to cause distress in other players’ (2007:110). In a general sense, griefers’ every in/out-game performance is called ‘grief play’ and it has been considered as an unhealthy type of gameplay. Accordingly, Foo and Koivisto’s (2004) study developed a taxonomy around the idea of grief play, and suggested there are four main proponents involved in the ‘griefing’ process. These are

known as; harassment, power imposition, scamming, and greed play. In the cases of this study, the type of bullying which our gamer-interviewees experienced can simply be read as a combination of the first two elements of harassment and power imposition.

One way or another, our 'Taiwanese gamers' unpleasant experiences in their online matches help us see that not entirely every gameplay experience is pleasurable and enjoyable. As part of their transnational gameplay experience, they explained how they can become the victims and be disturbed by this kind of nationalistic cyber-bullying. These mentally harmful bullies greatly interfere with the original gaming pleasure. Within such context, we also see gameplay can 'act as a resource for social performances that are not based exclusively on gaming,' be it positive or negative (Crawford and Rutter 2007: 271). The gamers' quotes have shown the unpleasant side of the global virtual space, where miscommunications, false-stereotypes, language barriers, and cultural conflicts still very much occur impacting on 'real' people's feelings behind their unseen avatars. In the broader context of online culture, the things gamers can do and cannot do, how people should behave virtually, and how gamers should be punished for what they do virtually, definitely raise a bigger ethical issue to both game producers and regulators.

6.3 The COD Gamers' Feelings of Frustration on Connection (Internet) Failure

'Let me put it this way. There is no such thing as best gamers, but only gamers with best internet connections.'

(Yung-Shi/I3)

Similarly to the last part of the discussion, this section will pay more attention to the gamers' negative feelings in their COD gameplay experience online. The key point that will be elaborated here is that, no matter how imaginative and visually realistic the game content is made, the whole game experience, in essence, is framed by the physical form of technology and largely affected by the technologies' functionality and stability – this unchangeable hard-structure decides a game's limitations and capabilities. As one of our gamers described, every possible technical problem can become something that is 'totally out of us, gamers' hands' (Paul, I11). In many situations, if things go wrong in the machine-network-gamer communication process or certain parts of the technologies do not function well as expected, the users normally experience huge frustrations and disappointments.

Because of the unequal development in the information communication technologies and the global division of the establishment of the internet infrastructure, people's geographical locations are now considered to play quite a central role in internet gaming and can pose some advantages and disadvantages to gameplay. The picture below is an example directly showing the inequality of a particular online games' global network and its gamers' real physical locations in the Xbox version of COD. It also tells us that most COD gamers (in white dots) are located in the main territories of North America, West Europe and Japan, and the rest (in weaker green signals) are individually spread in some small parts of South America, Africa, and East/South East Asia.

By looking more closely at the picture, we are certainly reminded that many regions of the world still have limited or no access to COD online. In a general sense, such inequality is mainly caused by different countries' local accessibility to a particular type

of game console, game product or online game service. The location of game servers, gamers' distance to the servers, and the country's overall internet quality can all be some possible factors enlarging the geographical and cultural gap of online gaming. By looking at China as an example, its governments' full control and strict censorship on public's internet use is the biggest reason to explain why the majority of Chinese gamers cannot and are not allowed to operate Xbox live (the Xbox network service). In the picture, we can barely find an area covered by the spots of Chinese COD gamers in the virtual world map.



Picture 8. The screen shot of the global gamers' physical locations in the Xbox version of COD.

However, as the thesis is about to show, some of the unexpected network failures and technical problems, especially the downside of internet speed/connection, can simply

decrease the pleasure of gameplay and create a bad impression towards the online games being played. Diana Pozo (2012) wrote a brilliant piece of study specifically on online FPS games' connection problems and sharply revealed the geographical imbalance of today's internet-based gaming. By looking into the intrusions of 'glitches' and 'lag', she argues that:

“The space of multiplayer gaming is a physical space in that it is inextricably connected to the physicality of the internet and the worldwide geographic inequalities of internet connectivity’ (n. p.).

Besides one part of her analysis on glitches which emphasized the way in which gamers use special game codes to enable them to do some unrealistic spatial movements and behaviours within the 3D game space, her main analysis of the disturbing 'lag' problem in most online game experience is especially relevant and useful in understanding the gamers' responses in this research. In Pozo's view, she says that what the occurring internet games' lag problems are projecting is that the gamers hold a clear 'self-awareness' of their own unchangeable geographical position, especially those from countries with slower internet connections. She therefore asserts that:

‘Firstly, lag ruptures game immersion, returning gamers to their physical body and geographical location and frustrating hard-core gamers' feeling of entitlement to an experience of game mastery. Secondly, lag demonstrates that game mastery of contingent on global technological inequalities on the level of scale, which are marked by a continuing history of Euro-American imperialism. Hard-core gamers, in an attempt to avoid lag, become increasingly aware of the geographic and

economic factors form the basis of game mastery in virtual multiplayer game spaces.’

Her observation appropriately echoes many of our gamers’ complaints about the internet speed when they talk about their unpleasant game experience in playing COD online. For example, Samuel (I1) described that:

‘You know, now and then nearly every new game is designed to have the online mode so you can play with friends or strangers through internet connections. The internet speed becomes so important in deciding how good you are and you can be in this mode. But the problem is that where you are and your real location basically decides your internet speed, and to win or lose in the game is totally influenced by the quality of your broadband. There’s nothing you can do about that if your connection is bad, and it is the only one thing really out of every gamer’s control, unless you are rich enough (and can afford the more-expensive, better internet package) to beat everyone. So far, the general Taiwanese gamers like me are very disappointed with the internet environment we are in.’

Many gamers showed exactly the same disappointments to the same issue about COD’s problems with lag when it is played online. Other examples like Arthur (I2) mentioned that in fact such bad experiences sometimes force the gamers to abandon the game:

‘One point I want to say. You know these online games are closely linked to how complete your country builds up the overall structure of the internet servers nationwide. Taiwan’s internet environment is not so advanced so sometimes we

have to get used to be taken advantage of by the foreign gamers with better online speed and internet connection. Sometimes the games just keep lagging to a point we all get fed up and decide to sell the game and give up playing it.'

Min-Jang (I5) made a comparison with other countries and expressed the same frustration towards the lasting lag problem that seems to be totally unsolvable:

'Taiwan's internet connection is way behind Japan, Hong Kong and South Korea. The best we can get is 20m. The most common problem for Taiwanese gamers is when you face Japanese or Korean gamers, you can't kill them or they never get shot. Because of the never-ended lag problem, many people are pulling out from this game.'

Li-Chiang (I8) was also troubled by the way the lag problem realistically influences the general actions in the game:

'So many times when I play the COD online, I suddenly die and have no idea how I was shot. Not until I check the replay, do I realize someone was actually standing in front of me and shot me in the face. I hate it when things like this happen. You don't get to see them because the internet sucks and you sort of feel cheated.'

Similarly, Ralph (I9) showed his dislike about the disturbance of game lag when he was asked whether the different internet speed can affect his gameplay experience:

'Playing online is totally reliant on your internet speed. Mine is ok, but there is always a better internet connection somewhere else. Sometimes when I play online,

it's just like – Boom!! You just die, and then you get shot then just die and die again every 2 to 3 seconds. I really don't find it fun to play that way at all.'

From these cases we can easily detect the Taiwanese gamers' deep geographical awareness of their unequally set geographical position. The most recent case of *Diablo 3* is also a case in point reflecting Pozo's view about the problems occurring in online games' internet connection. Unlike the COD series, *Diablo 3* is more like a typical type of multiplayer role-playing game. Since *Diablo 3* was released in May 2012, it attracted more Asian gamers than its production company Blizzard Entertainment expected. Its three main servers were based in America, Europe and Asia (mainly in South Korea), the Asian server began to suffer with overload - gamers all trying to log in. Many gamers in Taiwan had to queue for hours or even a day just to log into the game (Battle.net) and get connected to the servers. The company soon apologized to the Taiwanese gamers and issued a formal statement saying that the capacity of the server was over-used 100% more than the expected 20%, and 35% capacity would be added into the South Korea-based Asian servers within 7-14 days. However, as more gamers have researched this incident and tried to understand the main problem, they began to sense the inequality of *Diablo 3*'s server structure and felt unfairly treated. After running a few experiments with the games' built-in connection system, many gamers complained that only Taiwanese IP were strictly controlled and the instability randomly kicked them out in the middle of the game, but logging in with fake South Korean IP or playing on the American or European servers caused no such problem. As the incident got worse, some conspiracy theories were drawn-up by several gamers who suspected, blamed and accused South Koreans of playing as Taiwanese gamers to limit Taiwan's internet flows and uses. Similarly to what our interviewed COD gamers were expressing in frustration, the whole incident between *Diablo 3*'s server problem and

Taiwanese gamers' demands validates the point that, through the lag and connection problem, the gamers have this in-depth awareness and sense of their geographical locations in real life. From pressing the controller button to activating the virtual-self on screen, what gamers are hoping for is a smooth mediated process. However, the unexpected technical problems can always cause a certain extent of damage to such an experience.

6.4 A Snapshot on One Gamer's Gaming-Life Transition and Psychological Engagement to the CODs: the Case Study of Paul Yang

This part of the discussion singles out the particular case of Paul Yang from the 11 interviews and uses him as an example to probe into an individual gamer's personal relationship and life-engagement to the COD game series. Targeting this one gamer's personal experience will allow us to more closely observe his psychological transformations and self-engagement in this genre. Some previous studies have already suggested that focusing on a smaller amount of gamers can potentially help researchers to precisely 'capture the ongoing life stories of people living in a particular period of history (in great details and personal terms)' and avoid over-generalizing the data (Selfe and Hawisher 2007: 6). By paying more attention to gamers' self-empowerment and autonomy and largely relying on a smaller quantity of gamers' autobiographies, Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's (2007) book, *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* set a good example of following and developing such an approach and has convincingly proven this type of small-scale methodology could be operated successfully. The authors included in this book are all influenced by James Paul Gee's thoughts on gaming literacy, and used very similar research techniques to observe, interview, record and portray one or two gamers' individual gaming-life and stories. To

revisit the same approach and concentrate in particular on one gamer's personal relationship and experience within the *Call of Duty* series, this section looks into Paul Yang's gaming-life and revises his verbal-descriptions of 'the gamer-self'. Through studying his case, we can make better sense of how a gamer is able to flow between different gaming genres and make compromises to the peer pressure around him.

When sitting together and having some sensible and passionate discussions about the war games' possible personal meanings with Paul, he showed an open, positive attitude throughout the one-hour interview and carefully reflected how he has lived his gaming-life and enjoyed his COD experiences. When digging into his self-descriptions, his quotes give us more clues about an ordinary, subjective gamer's thoughts and feelings towards conflict-based games, and help us capture why a gamer plays certain types of games. Among the 11 interviewees, Paul's case is a very interesting and special one because it shows how a person changes his cultural tastes and attitudes from disliking (resisting) a genre to actually liking (accepting) it.

Interviewee 11: Paul Yang, Age 30, International Trading Agent

'To be honest with you, I think many people are so into gaming today because, except what they do for living, they don't have the second or third personal interests, skills or talents in certain things. Musicians would probably use their extra time to practice their instruments, but for gamers, like me, we fill these time-holes simply by playing more games.'

Paul has a degree in the subject of psychology and is now an independent international trading agent in Taipei. Like the other 10 Taiwanese gamers, he played games from a

very young age and has played many games across various platforms, but in the last 5 years he has focused more on playing PS3 games. Among all the games he has played, the games he has mostly played and is still playing on his PS3 console are the *Tekken* (fighting game) and *Grand Turismo* (race game) series.

Paul considered himself as always a very loyal, hardcore gamer, especially of the *Tekken* series, but in the past two years he has slowly changed his appetite to the war-themed FPS games and decided to spend more time playing and practicing this type of game online. As well as the many varied reasons gamers play games, Paul understands the main reasons he is so immersed in the virtual world are to 'kill time' and 'want to have the kind of feelings of being good at something.' He also believes that playing games can 'let a man show his most childish side.' In terms of personality, Paul defined himself as a type of person with very high self-demands, especially when he switches himself into gaming mode:

"This is very serious: as a man, I wouldn't allow myself to be bad or look bad in the game. I just can't take it if I haven't been up to certain levels in playing certain games, especially in those very competitive ones. With my ability and intelligence, I always ask myself why can't I handle this game or that game? Am I really that stupid? That's the thing that drives me forward and it is this mentality which pushes me to train myself harder and be good at it. If you have the same ego towards some games, I assume you are already addicted to them. What is poisoning you is not the games themselves but the things you really want from the games.'

Because of this inflexible attitude and his many years' efforts in practicing his fighting skills in different *Tekken* series, Paul proudly described that it has been difficult for him

to find some challengeable opponents and not many online gamers can really beat him these days. He said that normally after winning the online matches, the comments most often sent to him are those telling him 'to get a life' or calling him 'sickly-skilled.' With so many years of being a very loyal fan and player of the game *Tekken*, Paul found it difficult to change to the unfamiliar, trendy game (genre) of the war-themed FPS games. He seriously considered this personal change was necessary because more of his friends were playing the CODs and he did not want to feel detached from those friends. To briefly quote from what he said in the interview, it is mainly this kind of peer pressure which forced him to pay more attention to the shooter games:

'I tried to play *Doom* and *Counter-Strike* that kind of low-quality shooter game a long time ago, but gave up straight away...Recently, I found this game (*COD*) had begun to penetrate into my social circle. The thing is if you don't get involved in this game (culture), you will miss many important and interesting topics between you and your friends and can really feel quite left out when most of your friends are talking about it. If it's a game no one talks about, you just won't play it. Well...a game doesn't cost you that much and won't really bring you any financial burden, so I quickly bought it and gave it a try. The thing is that I have a high loyalty to the genres I used to play and have been really comfortable with playing them. It's very difficult for me to make this change, you know.'

To some degree, wanting to be more socially connected highly influenced Paul's decisions on his gaming habit and is probably the main thing spontaneously motivating him into playing the CODs. Due to Paul's fears and anxiety towards the possibility of being left out in friends' conversations, he decided to take more effort practicing this new game and participated in this unfamiliar game genre in order to make himself

more socially accepted to ‘gain more experience to brag about in front of friends.’ However, such self-adjustment in one’s personal experience in the game world is never easy, as Paul, who has always been a skilled, high-ranked player successfully dominating another game world, had to learn and catch up in a new game and become what other gamers normally call – a ‘newbie.’ In Paul’s view, this process of learning to become more familiar with a new game’s controller mode, gameplay style and mechanism was a ‘shameful downgrade from a master level.’ For a while, he had these huge struggles and could not accept ‘being looked-down by other gamers.’ In one part of the interview, Paul explained he experienced a tough time to find his own play-style when he had first few attempts of playing COD online with friends and strangers:

‘I remember the pain of being the ‘meat-target’ in the first few months’ practices online. Seriously, that period of time of me being so humiliated gave me zero interest in this game. The first time I finally felt involved in this game was when I managed to kill more than two enemies in one match. It was the turning point when I finally found the attraction of the game and felt I was achieving something. Seeing everyone killed 30 to 40 people but I got to be killed 30 to 40 times every time is sarcastic and unacceptable. I remember I was so scared to do even one move on the map. It was so not fun when I tried to walk and suddenly got shot, and had no idea how it happened. You know my friends told me that I only had to take care of myself and make sure I didn’t die and this is what a newbie should do.’

Despite Paul’s worries about being socially alienated in his friends’ circle for having too little COD knowledge and experience to show, this special mentality of wanting to ‘rank-up’ and ‘achieve something’ is what gave Paul more confidence to spend more time playing this game. In the online version of CODs, the rank system has a key

function to represent the skill levels among gamers, and allows one to judge whether their opponents are good or bad, how advanced their enemies are, or how long a gamer has been playing the game. Besides the fundamental thing about sociality outside the game text driving Paul into this game in the first place, 'being better than other people' and 'being able to feel more achievements' attach more meanings to the play context of the game, and give Paul the main reason to sustain his personal interests in this game and make him want to work even harder for the game. He therefore asserts that:

'At the beginning shooter games really meant nothing to me and I couldn't understand why people have been playing them so much. I thought the essence of the game boring, and to be honest, I felt it's totally meaningless to do all these killings. Not until I forced myself to try it and was more into it, I realized I could've easily integrated my own strategies into different ways of play, and by doing that, I can also become quite good in this game. Maybe I am just trying to prove myself again in a different game. It's just every time when I see my rank leveling up in the chart, I can't stop feeling so pleased with myself. Things like that can really motivate me to do better next time and beat more people during the match.'

So far we have already witnessed that, although the war-themed FPS genre was not one of Paul's favorite types of games before, Paul adjusted his attitude and learned to accept and build up the attractions of the game all because of the peer-pressure. From his quotes, we can also see that Paul decided to stay in this game because his desire to achieve and outperform other gamers drove him to train harder and engage deeper. The way Paul identified himself, takes us back to Richard Bartle's taxonomy of the

four motivations already mentioned in the chapter 5 – that one gamer can always play with the mixed intentions to ‘find achievements, explore the game, socialize with others, and impose power upon others’ all at once.

However, among the four motivations, the most enjoyable part in the COD online gameplay, according to Paul, is what he calls ‘the detailed psychological techniques’ and ‘strategic mind games’ – the two things mark the type of achievements he looks for from the game:

‘On average, I can now manage to kill 20-30 people per match. To maintain this killing rate, you have to know it’s all down to the details of your own strategies. Basically, by gaining more experience in a win or lose situation you learn to predict what other people are thinking about and going to do, and what their actions and reactions may be. Your fate in the game is decided by this very careful calculation of where your enemies may be hiding, which direction they will be coming from, or how tricky they are playing against your will, and so on and so forth. Killing someone in the game only creates a small part of the pleasure in the online shooter games. Strategically beating someone definitely creates more of it.’

However, another key point which should be accounted for in Paul’s confessions is how the COD games have totally changed his life-views and personal preferences towards military culture. From being much troubled by Taiwan’s system of compulsory military service and negative about this national army system; Paul said he used to mentally resist/reject everything associated with war and military before getting involved with the CODs. He also explained that when he was younger he ‘hated army stuff’, although he did play with war toy figures sometimes in his childhood like every

boy does. Unlike the other 10 Taiwanese gamers who seemed to enjoy their own manly instinct and accept military-things in their nature, Paul insisted he had no desire to gain knowledge about the military or watch military-themed movies before he played the CODs. Though such psychological resistance has been turned on its head since the CODs slowly migrated into his personal life. As he said:

‘In the past, if someone came to me and talked about all these army and military stuff, I got really bored and would think there’s something wrong in his head. After I played the game, I began to learn a little bit about gun types and imagined what a person can be like in the military mode. It’s a total shock to me to have this incredible mind switch. I never believed one day I would have this kind of desire of wanting to play and experience some military-associated things and culture grow in me.’

Playing CODs evidently triggered Paul’s curiosity towards real-world conflicts and makes him care more about things and news related to military and war. As Paul’s life is now more engaged in the CODs, he explained that he never imagined he would begin to develop this ‘unusual’ interest in war movies and military culture, and became more willing to look for resources and knowledge about different types of guns and weapons’ uses and soldiers’ lifestyles from magazines or internet. After playing the CODs for nearly two years, Paul has already established a great deal of knowledge about various types of guns’ names and their historical background, different camps of soldiers’ outlooks and equipments, and some military organizations’ logos. He is now more open to any information associated with military activities, movements and warfare. Also, his prospects and thoughts on military affairs have changed rapidly along with his increasing obsession with the CODs. He mentioned the ‘militarized-self’ of

him today ‘even doesn’t mind holding a real gun and shooting a few rounds with it.’ Many times, Paul desperately searched for some YouTube clips with real soldiers professionally demonstrating real gun shootings, and attempted to find out the differences between shooting a real gun and a virtual one. Although Paul confessed his taste in games has changed considerably and he has been influenced by the CODs to build up these interests in war and military-related information, he strongly suggested that he is mature enough to understand clearly ‘it’s just a game.’ As he said:

“The way you stand up for the play by holding your favorite gun and running about with it in the games’ maps is different from the real battlefield. Every gamer knows that although the game is made to be as real as possible; there are still limitations and some fictional elements in it. For example, M16s in the game settings are fired three bullets in a roll, but in real life, M16s can actually be shot continuously like a machine gun. Such diversity simply reminds you of the difference between what’s real and what’s virtual. No one can say that if you give me a real gun I can do it the same just like in the game. It’s just impossible...A normal person can always tell the difference, unless you are crazy.’

As in Paul’s case, one may begin to develop an unexpected level of interest in a particulate cultural form and become enthusiastic towards it because of the information fascinatingly implicated and provided through the game texts, but there is yet no evidence of suggesting that, because of this, a person would lose his or her ability to distinguish the so-called worlds of the ‘real’ and ‘virtual.’ In the way Paul tried to identify, compare and differentiate the virtual and real worlds using the guns’ functions, it suggests the intention of a mindful gamer who *wants to distinguish the two* in his heart.

Looking back at what Paul has said and searching for some theoretical connections, many parts of the discussion on Paul's decision-making (of learning the CODs and making himself more socially attached to his friends) correspond to Maria Frostling-Henningsson's paper 'First-Person Shooter Games as a Way of Connecting to People: Brothers in Blood.' Her key argument of suggesting that FPS games are becoming a new form of human communication and the virtual killing in the games should be recognized as a valid social act can be shown in this research's dialogue with Paul. Several themes which emerged in Paul's descriptions are perfectly linked to her conclusion saying that 'online gaming among these gamers was motivated by sociality, cooperation, communication, control, escapism, flow, experience and as a hallucination of the real' (2009:561). Paul's words correspond well in this respect:

'It's now such an important event that my friends and I all so look forward to every Friday night. We normally call it COD night and we just want to gather together (or connected to each other), have drinks and food together, work through the same goal together, and enjoy some laughable and happy time together.'

The last point to be made in Paul's case is relevant to the public misperception about the relationship between gamers' gameplay habit and genre. For every gamer, the idea of genre always plays a significant role in deciding what their gaming preferences and habits may be. With false impressions towards certain type of games and genres, we sometimes accept the idea that the similar types of games, played with the same mechanism, within the same format of a genre are all made to compete with each other for attracting gamers' attention and their spending power. For example, when a gamer plays the game *Street Fighter*, he or she is normally assumed to have chosen

against other fighting games like *Mortal Combat*; or, when a gamer is heavily engaged to *Call of Duty*, he or she is seen as having less or no intention in trying out other shooter games like *Medal of Honor* or *Battlefield*. Such assumptions should be challenged as we further probe into Paul's case again:

'When I buy a game, I sort of check other games similar to this one and do some research around them. But it's funny most of the time I end up of getting and playing them all. Looking back, I sort of started playing fighting games from the classic *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters* series and moved into my favorite *Tekken*. And now, as well as COD, I am actually thinking of trying *Battlefield* and *Medal of Honor* series since I have become quite familiar with how this type of game is played. I have to say the mentality of playing certain types of games is all similar and as a gamer you just have to get used to it.'

What this study would like to suggest, supported by Paul's quote is a crucial point that, instead of seeing gamers' gameplay as conflict where playing one game is opposed to playing another, it looks to be more of the case that the existence of genre preoccupies gamers' tastes and is what really differentiate gamers' gaming habits in a broader sense. As we witness in Paul's gaming-life, when a gamer becomes used to a genre's designed gameplay mechanism, it will take more efforts to retrain him- or herself in another games' pattern of play and functional logics. However, to game companies and producers, the rise of certain fixed type of games and genres in a particular time period creates a win-win situation –because when a gamer is engaged in that genre, it means he or she is more likely to try out similar games and spend more time with a specific type of game and gaming form. In this context, a gaming genre is no longer only a category made up of certain types of game content only. More, it

pinpoints the way in which meanings are partially channeled with and negotiated in *that* neglected time and space.

To briefly conclude this part of the discussion; Paul's relationship with CODs games shows us a broader picture of the intensifying relationship between human imagination and the virtual gaming world. The way Paul explained how his secondary soldier-identity was awakened by the COD games, remarkably down-plays an individual's intimacy with the playable medium of digital games:

'The whole thing is a bit like, in my body, there has always been a soldier. He has his own principles and rules to do things. The game sort of woke him up, so I am not only a fighter in the Tekken like I used to...By playing and learning another game and more games, they widen my personal space of imagination and allow the multiple-me to do more things without physical burden.'

6.5 What the 30-something Gamers Said about the Controversial

Gaming-Violence Issue in FPS Games

'In these virtual battles I can kill people without really killing them, plus it's really fun to keep finding cool things and solving difficult puzzles in the process of the game. Come on, everyone knows today's shooter games are not only about killing people or shooting someone in the face.'

(Leslie/I6)

Leslie's quote is a typical one showing a FPS gamer's desperation to dispel 'the bad reputation' around this genre. By highlighting a few more similar quotes from the 11

interviewees, this final part will briefly discuss the key issue of gaming violence in FPS games, whilst today, many people still believe these type of games have hidden effects and can potentially trigger gamers' aggressive thoughts and behaviours.

From the early case of the Columbine High School tragedy to the latest shocking Norwegian mass-killing incident, the murderers' common gameplaying habits continue to raise the public's suspicion towards digital games' psychological influences on people's minds and human-beings. Especially when recently the Norwegian killer was reported to actually spend 16-18 hours per day playing and practicing the two most popular games *Call of Duty* and *World of Warcraft*, the public and academics were again stunned and haunted by the question of whether or not there is a tiny chance that violent game content can motivate someone to act so heartlessly.

However, similar questions remain unsolved in this field of research and even today's leading (social) scientists find it difficult to pinpoint the violent games' 'mind-control' ability. In Steven Kirsh's (2006) lengthy article *Playing With the Beast – Violent Video Games* (in his book *Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research*), the entire development of different types of violent games in different generations and the historical pattern of the (what he called) 'inconsistent' game-effects models have been largely revised, contextualized and defined. Though none of the game-effects research Kirsh gave examples of provides enough solid evidence to affirm the link between violent game content and gamers' minds/behaviours. Within various research disciplines, the endless debates on 'this missing link' only leave a bigger question mark in terms of what methodology is more appropriate and how gaming violence should be approached. In light of recent developments in human science, it still awaits convincing results and theoretical breakthroughs. With this background, this section is

not intending to provide more answers in this regard, but the data presented later should help us to reconsider the same subject *more from the gamers' perspectives*.

By trying to understand most FPS gamers' standpoints and giving a rather rational explanation about the FPS gamers' psychology, in the book *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence*, Gerald Jones insisted that:

[Just because shooter games remind us of real shooting and military training doesn't mean that kids experience them as such when they play, any more than they experience plastic army men or chess pieces as real warriors' (2002:167).

Jones' words tell today's media experts and psychologists that the gamers' behaviours and gamer experience cannot be fully explained or analyzed if only relying on scientific methods and results (e.g. monitoring their brain activities, counting their heart rate and pulse, or measuring their in-game physical and biological changing curves etc.). Because gamer experience is only one part of a person's complicated life-experience, his/her environments' socio-cultural influences should always be taken into account. Accordingly, by examining the so-called 'aggression model' (a series of research systematically developed through Dill and Dill(1998), Huesmann *et al.* (2003), and Anderson *et al.* (2004)'s experimental projects), Rutter and Bryce (2006) argued that, beyond the laboratory-based human-testing methods putting gamers in rather unnatural settings, more theoretical values and efforts should be considered and added to understand how individuals play and experience violent game content *in the context of their everyday lives and leisure activities* (pp. 216-217). They emphasized that: 'Gamers are not a homogenous group; factors such as frequency of play, commitment, gender, age, and genre preference all create different sub-groups of gamers' (ibid.). As both Jones'

and Rutter and Bryce's studies implied, more contemporary game ethnographers have reflected what gamers say about themselves, their gaming habits, and their personal lives' relationship to the games they play. By doing this it is more likely to capture what makes up gamers' mindsets. In this regard, all of our 11 interviewees' critical responses in this research have shown a great deal of what the over 30-years-old, mature FPS gamers' reactions are when facing the tricky question about gaming violence.

For example, one of our interviewees, Aaron (I4), boldly expressed that it is down to every individual gamer's self-responsibility to be sensible about the content; in other words, a gamer should always learn to distinguish the reality of the real world from the imagined world that games have been creating:

'I think it's the responsibility of the individual gamer to separate himself from the simulation that he is playing, and remind himself that it is not an accurate portrayal of war by any stretch of the imagination. FPS only gives a small taste of what combat is like and is very warped at that. Things like personal safety are never considered, especially since no one is in any real danger, people take chances in FPS games where as they would not in real life.'

The way in which Aaron mentioned that there is no real physical danger caused in the virtual space of FPS further demonstrates, that a mature gamer like him can easily sense the limitations of a game and what the fake (unreal) part of gameplay is like when comparing certain actions in the game with them in the real physical world. Another interviewee, Yung-Shi (I3) expressed his view from a similar angle and explained that:

'I believe people that show aggressive behaviour are not doing so purely because of video games. I believe the behaviour would manifest itself regardless of whether or not the person was spending some time pointing a digital fake gun at other digital images; which often show no blood. Most of the time in a FPS, when a person is 'shot' in the middle of the game, his avatar merely falls down, there is rarely blood. There is rarely any 'violent' reaction. Most of the time, things are happening too fast to really even notice what's going on.'

Aaron and Yung-Shi are two typical examples among many to spot the unrealistic side of the way FPS games are actually played – whenever the unseen virtual-self gets shot, rarely do people see the gamers' avatars fall down, and after every death, gamers are always able to restart and progress the match again. In the sense of what has been said and the way the FPS games' play mechanism was explained, it becomes even more difficult to sense that the repeatable in-game violent shooting exercises in FPS can be influential in an individual's personal out-game aggressive behaviours. Giving an even stronger opinion, the gamer Li-Chiang (18) expressed that the shootings (considered as violent actions) in FPS games should be more positively treated as purely an individual act of/for self-relief:

'These people haven't done enough research to make such a bold assumption. Extremely violent games often give a distraction from the stressors of everyday life. Some people cook or workout to relieve stress. Videogames are no different. Violent videogames often diffuse violent behaviours and tendencies. Deep down everyone has the potential for random violent behaviours. Gamers satisfy such needs through gaming. That's all.'

The same intention of using games to work out one's real-life stress also appears in Jason's case (I10). He also believes playing FPS games in his life allows him to temporarily relieve the life pressure inside him. As he said:

‘There are so many FPS out there. Some are similar and some are different, but this genre to me, overall, is nothing better than a stress-reliever – simply I play it, I get it done and say good bye to it. Most online FPS games set the rules very clearly that you can shoot at something with your mates for 10-15 minutes. I do that and often play the games quickly. When I finally feel relaxed, I head back to my normal life and do something else.’

Both Li-Chiang and Jason's quotes are relevant to Frostling-Henningsson's research on ordinary FPS gamers. In her studies she claimed that, besides the online FPS games' embedded sociability, escapism is another significant factor to motivate the gamers playing this genre, and FPS thus provide the gamers with 'a valuable break from anxieties in real life' (p. 560). In this context, the FPS games seem to play the opposing function of helping gamers release their anger rather than encouraging aggression. The idea that games can produce more aggressive gamers has already been challenged by Patrick Kierkegaard (2008) in his study, *Video Games and Aggression* and echoes a very well-known article, *Could Violent Video Games Reduce rather than Increase Violence?*. Both papers suggest violent-gaming brings more benefits by reducing peoples' feelings of anger, just like in the cases of Li-Chiang and Jason.

One way or another, all the above gamers' responses have clearly shown us that gamers are themselves critical thinkers when they decide to throw themselves into the virtual world. As an imagined community of one kind, they were trying their best to give

some sensible comments in order to protect their own social position and challenge the stereotypes attached to where their interests lay. As well as some interviewees desperately trying to prove that the virtual acts of shootings and violence in FPS games bring no harm and does not change their original identity or life routines, several others then elaborated a little bit more about what society has done in this regard and how parents should exercise their responsibility properly. These comments are indeed fascinating and also worth a brief look.

With the main concerns about how people should use games ethically, the gamer, Arthur (I2), for example, described that today most games made with sensitive content have already been regulated by an age-classifying system like DVDs, so it should be parents' responsibility to make sure their children do not cross the lines:

'First of all, war games are often 18+ rated, so I don't understand why children could even play with those. Anyway, I think saying war games can trick people's minds is bullshit. The only aggressive behaviour I have during the play is against other online players. I'm not playing at CODs to become a psycho, just to own some noobs.'

Like Arthur, Ralph (I10) also mentioned the rating system when the controversial issue about FPS games' violence content was brought up during the interview:

'I personally get very aggressive and intense when playing a FPS game....but that being said, when I turn it off, I do exactly that, 'turn it off', I can separate reality. This is why they put game ratings on the game box, and parents need to be more respectful of these ratings, I do believe the games can lead to some behavioural

changes in younger children who shouldn't be playing the games, and parents should not be buying the games without researching them, just because little sons want to play them. Parents should show a little bit more responsibility in making a purchase for their child, and the gaming industry needs to add a few more safeguards in relation to children obtaining 'mature rated' games.'

Similar to the above comments, Samuel (I1) then expressed that:

'I think games are no different than any other medium like television, film, literature, or music. The content might resonate differently among different people, but people's actions are determined by their brain chemistry, psychology and environment. In the 80's, the world blamed D&D (Dungeons and Dragons), after that they then blamed movies, and now it's certainly video games' turn to take the blame. People don't want to accept responsibility for their children's actions so they blame the entertainment. Ratings systems are there for a reason to make sure your children are being entertained by appropriate materials, and teach them proper human values.'

The three quotes from Arthur, Ralph and Samuel clearly indicate that, whether or not the link between games and violence truly exists and has been proved, society and parents should always be more cautious about the young generations' gameplaying habits. At this point, we can safely borrow Jon Cogburn and Mark Silcox's (2009) conclusion in their article '*Realistic Blood and Gore: Do Violent Games Make Violent Gamers?*' (in their book *Philosophy through Video Games*), in which they readopted the Aristotelian concepts to interpret that the FPS gameplay, more or less, is like any habit – 'too much of anything is bad' (p. 71). As they coherently described: 'In this

cultural environment, one can safely admire the brilliance of some such games without substantial risk to the development of one's moral character' (p. 72).

So, the gamers counter-opinions to this sensitive issue reflects their deep-down resistance to the way public discourse generally treats this genre, as well as their denials of the criticism of assuming shooter games of this kind already generate a high level of negative, pleasurable stimulus to enhance human aggression and make people more violent. The gamers' responses also lead us to see how the average gamers are shadowed by an unseen anxiety and empathy when this gaming genre has always struggled to cope with the public's mistrust. They push us in the same direction as the Harvard Medical School-based couple; Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl Olsao's (2008) joint research. In their book *Grand Theft Childhood*, they made these comments:

'For most kids and most parents, the bottom-line results of our research can be summed up in a single word: relax. While concerns about the effects of violent video games are understandable, they're basically no different from the unfounded concerns previous generations had about the new media of their day. Remember, we're remarkably resilient species' (p. 229).

All the arguments developed throughout this section lead us to a simple conclusion; that the traditional way of seeing contemporary war-themed FPS games as 'killers' games' may no longer be valid, and it is becoming more and more pointless to ask the same question of whether FPS games would turn gamers into killers in real-life. Especially in today's design of FPS, the multiple options and different ways of gameplay are creatively provided by the game makers. The more advanced gaming world is nothing like the early stage of FPS games like *DOOM* and *Quake*, where old

technologies limited the gamers' control and all the gamers were allowed to do was 'turning and shooting'. A war-themed FPS like *COD*, increases the playability of how it can be played – a gamer can focus on the different parts of one game to fulfill their motivations and find the personal pleasure they are after. Violence may be one of the key attractions at that time in this genre. However, what today's technologies and play mechanisms can provide is more than shootings and killings. As in the first quote of this section, with a more advanced design where game experience is accumulated, gamers can have many ways of enjoying the same game in different modes, and the changeable playability is diffusing gamers' attentions on game violence and concentrating it more on how fun and pleasure can be imaginatively created in and around play.

Conclusion

'I know this will sound weird, but, to me, it (COD) may or may not be 'just a game.' If you really want to look inside the shape of this genre: well...you can see it as a game like me, or, you can even see it as a political strategy, a training tool, or even, some kind of evil consumer product. By continuing to produce games of this kind, a nation can at the same time be profiting in revenues and earn the 'un-money' things. Well. Americans are always good at this and you know their history and no one can do anything about that. So why not surrender yourself to it and enjoy it more like nothing really matters...'

(Samuel/I1)

Based on the 11 interviews, this chapter has collectively mapped out different aspects of the COD gamer experience, based on some Taiwanese gamers' self-reflections.

From the first section (illustrating how the gamers link the war-themed FPS games to Hollywood war movies) and the third section (exposing the gamers' bad experience of lagging connection problems), they remind us that the gamers have this embedded self-awareness of their real geographical position when negotiating themselves between the virtual and the real physical worlds. The cross-war movies/games experience also explains the nature of this game genre's continuing dominant cultural position and exposes the foreign gamers' 'mediated-imaginings'. Besides that, the second part of study gave details of how non-English gamers dealt with bad treatment and regained their confidence by negotiating between the self and others in a more complicated online social space. Further, in Paul's case in the fourth part, we witnessed how peer-pressure drove him into playing this genre and forced a gamer to completely change his gameplaying habits. The final part of reviewing gamers' responses to the gaming violence issue then helped us accept the idea that, this accumulated FPS genre should no longer be defined as simply killers' games and thus more attention should now focus on studying the different ways gamers negotiate themselves *in the games' networked space and in the online format of the game and in the ways gamers use them to create their 'preferred meanings.'* As Wright et al. (2010) emphasized:

'...the meaning of play is not reducible to a clear-cut simple narrative analysis or subjected to ideological determinism that is reflective of capitalist domination. While the audience's reading the complex media texts is not detached from ideology embedded in the narrative, meaning is more dependent on already existing subjective positions' (p. 250).

What has been said in this quote is largely reflected in our 11 interviewee's responses. The meaning and pleasure of gaming can create a more personalized experience today

whilst war is turned into a form of entertainment, and entertainment is turned into a gamers' 'experience tool' for furthering their friendship/confidence/pleasure, as well as testing and identifying themselves.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

‘These war games are placing us right in the middle of the action. We are men. We like to play army games all the time - since we were young. We always enjoy playing soldiers...Every time when some war movies and games are out, somehow you just feel you are part of *that world*. Therefore you decide to immerse yourselves in it so deep, that, although it’s known as virtual, unreal, you don’t care. Because it lets you play out your childhood fantasy and execute your male instinct to participate in a war.’

(Li-Chiang/I8)

By probing into the war-themed FPS games from the three aspects of industry, genre and gamer, this whole research, in theory and practice, has revealed much about the socio-cultural position of this genre within the global digital game culture, the historical development of this genre, the gamers’ experience in their interaction with this genre, and the war-themed FPS games’ personal meanings to the ordinary gamers. In Chapter One, we learned about the rise of war games and the establishment of this ‘Western gaming genre’ – being fostered to compete with a different gaming cultural force driven by the Japanese game industry from the early days. Broadly speaking, Chapter Two then provided a literature review of game fans’ and gamers’ basic characteristics and talked about the recent development of academic research into different sides of gamers and gameplay. The third chapter provided some evidence to decode the war games’ political implications and exposed the genre’s tradition and intimate relationship with the American government and Defence Department. The main analysis from Chapter Five to Chapter Six precisely illustrated the ways in which

the COD gamers establish their connections to and experiences of the games and their different reasons for playing them. To be more precise; Chapter Five was concerned with the global gamers' general perceptions about this genre, and Chapter Six concentrated on a group of foreign-local gamers' transnational COD gaming experience. From different angles, every chapter was intended to help us examine the different parts of this special gaming genre and make sense of its highly complex nature.

Table 19 The First Day Sales of the latest three COD Titles (Organized by this research)

	Copies	Earnings
2009 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	4.7m	\$310m
2010 Call of Duty: Black Ops	5.6m	\$360m
2011 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	6.5m	\$400m

Nevertheless, as the global sales of the war-themed FPS games are still increasing steadily (as shown in Table 19), and millions of global gamers whose numbers continue to increase are trapped into the pleasure of playing virtual war, it becomes impossible to ignore the human experience negotiated and contested in the process. This draws out the main purpose and core-value of this research. Increasing numbers of scholars are frustrated with the way the war-themed FPS games have been mass-produced to re-circulate and spread one or two imperial nations' glorious histories and ambitions. Some are still concerned with the question of how political forces (as hard power), have largely influenced the uses and functions of this particular entertainment form (as soft power). This research should provide more insight beyond the games' social, cultural, and political context and help us understand what meanings

ordinary gamers attach to their experience of playing this specific type of games. What this specific type of games' personal meanings can be to the ordinary gamers.

7.1 Two core themes emerging from analysis

To briefly sum up this study, I will emphasize two core themes which emerged from the research process. The first theme relates to the different expectations of what the industry is after and what the gamers are trying to obtain from this genre, and how such a gap is widening and allows 'the multiplicity' of expectations to grow in contemporary FPS games. The second theme is specifically linked to the autonomy of the ordinary gamers. This autonomy, according to Rigby and Ryan (2011), unlike people's natural instinct of looking for conflicts (in their definition, as 'needs for competence') and another instinct of wanting to feel connected to people (in their definition, as 'needs for relatedness'), is what features gamers' freedom and self-choices and reflects the gamers' real motivational insights. As this study strongly suggests, the increasing autonomy that people are leaning to when choosing to engage in certain media forms or cultures, should be carefully considered in any audience research related to new media/digital games.

The Accumulated Multiplicity of WHAT in Contemporary FPS Games

By looking into the historical development of the FPS game genre, it is easy to spot a contrast of expectations between the game makers and gamers. On one hand, the producers and developers, with the governments' assistance and ideological concerns, pay more attention to the realistic design, representational style and narrative body (overall, the games' capacity) to make sure the game plays its part in driving technology forward. On the other hand, the gamers keep monitoring the narrative and the quality of game content

and testing the subjective freedom, the games' playability and sociability (overall; the games' flexibility) allowed in the virtual world. These diversified prospects and demands merged into the FPS genre consequently create an unbelievable result in the latest war-themed FPS games we see today. As Rigby, the co-Author of *Glued to Gamers*, once explained in an interview:

‘As gaming has evolved, both game developers and gamers themselves have gotten more sophisticated. Of course technology has allowed for much more ‘fantastic’ graphics and complexity, but more importantly this technological capacity has enabled games - when well designed - to satisfy multiple needs simultaneously, thus creating even greater value for the player and motivational pull. So for example: First-Person Shooter games used to be largely about competence satisfaction. They didn't offer a lot of choices about where to go, nor did they let you play with others. You just picked up a gun and started firing away. Today's FPS games provide more open environments with more meaningful choices (thus adding autonomy satisfactions), and also allow for complex team play with other players in which team members really rely on each other - which also simultaneously satisfies relatedness needs. When games can hit this kind of ‘trifecta,’ they can be particularly compelling’⁵⁴

Due to continuing technological innovation and the spread of internet connectivity, modern war-themed FPS games have been largely improved and no longer made like the first generation of monotonous FPS games like *DOOM*, *Quake* or *Castle Wolfenstein*. Driven by all kinds of gamers' various demands, today's developers are forced to think harder and

⁵⁴ Source from:
<<http://mimi-cyberlibrarian.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/glued-to-games-how-video-games-draw-us.html>>

add more 'playable possibilities' and choices into the gameplay mechanism. In only one FPS game pack, gamers are now given so many options to decide whether they want to – train themselves in the practice mode, directly play along in the single-player story mode, or cooperate their team play with friends in the multiple-players online mode. More specifically in the online mode, the gamers then have to choose from more options to personalize their gameplaying styles (by designing their own names, logos, and maps, or selecting their army camps, firearms, and their avatar soldiers' belongings and so on and so forth). By digging further into the complex multi-layers of the networked matches, the gamers then have more freedom to decide and set their own ultimate goals by targeting themselves – to kill more people, to get killed less, to achieve higher scores/hitting rates, or to be the first team member to capture the opponents' flags etc. As this genre becomes more complicated in its basic coded graphic structure and interface, such 'accumulated multiplicity' presented in most of today's FPS games has been revolutionized to a degree that it is possible for people's multiple self-needs to all be found and satisfied during the play.

Through experiencing the on-going debates and dialogues between game creators and gamers about the FPS games' 'goods and bads,' the genre continues to learn from technical mistakes and has become highly evolved through borrowing and readopting more creativity into different ways and modes of gameplay. Like the two motivational psychologists Rigby and Ryan (2011) described, FPS games, like all types of games, are now in a crucial transition as their function has been shifted from being the fun provider to 'need satisfaction' (pp. 9-13). It will therefore be more important in the future design of the FPS games whether one particular game or another can really capture and fulfill people's original needs. As we look deeper into this progressive body of FPS games, it is not only the gamer's desires towards conflict which will make contemporary FPS games

more meaningful on a personal level, but more, like Rigby and Ryan clearly demonstrated, their ‘real-world-escaping’ functions will be developed based upon whether the games allow more space for the gamers to satisfy their individual needs for autonomy and relatedness, apart from conflicts or competitiveness.

Ordinary Gamers’ Autonomy

‘At its heart, autonomy means that one’s actions are aligned with one’s inner self and values; that you feel you are making the decisions and are able to stand behind what you do’ (Rigby and Ryan 2011: 40).

As some political-economists have been warning us, the alliance between the military and entertainment industry (triggering militainment) is promoting a consumable, desirable and enjoyable form of ‘conflict culture.’ As already demonstrated in chapter 3, the element of conflict has to be there in the FPS games to liven up the entertainment value, and it is through conflict that gamers locate their basic *needs for competence or mastery* (Rigby and Ryan 2011: 15). But even though this is the case, is it fair to assume these playable wars and conflicts are manipulating the gamers as a whole?

At least from what we have seen in several of the presented quotes, the ordinary gamers clearly showed that deep down in their hearts they understood the very simple principle that ‘games can be about a war, but real war is not a game.’ More than once or twice our respondents and interviewees demonstrated that they have the ability to tell the difference between playing a virtual war and participating in a real one. Their curiosity and complaints about the FPS games’ ‘unreal/unusual’ design elements, and the great difficulty in trying to distinguish the reality/virtuality by comparing the things

and props inside/outside the games are all clear proof showing us that *playing war games like COD is another disposable media experience that can be substituted any time they feel tired of it at any point in their life.* This decision of whether or not they will continue to play this game and genre is fully controlled by their individual autonomy.

We may also be aware that whoever wants to become a top gamer and gain respect from other gamers in a game world, must put in an incredible amount of personal (and sometimes, group) effort and invest a lot of time to obtain enough rewards and achievements to reach such a goal. As researchers of media audiences, we face the situation that some highly engaged audiences, fans or gamers know much more about the media subjects (especially their content and cultural practices), than non-fans and cultural-outsiders do. This is due to the huge efforts they put in. Not only in games, but also in novels, 'TV drama series', movies or sports, people are determined by the same autonomy to study and work hard towards their goals and perform their high personal interests in different medium and content. Such high commitment and self-involvement in something, whilst turning oneself into an expert, reflects a deep sense of subjective autonomy.

As this research has demonstrated the games' originated ideological function can possibly be dissolved and distracted by the games' growing multiplicity. When gamers are given so many options while playing one game, thereby giving them the choice and thus control of their autonomy. In this regard, Nina Huntzman notes that:

'While players clearly do not wholly accept the ideology about militarism embedded in these games, they do not wholly reject it either. Instead, players use the sanitized fantasy, uncomplicated by ethical questions and the gory details of

warfare, to calm the terror inside. The game becomes a device by which the player temporarily anesthetizes his fear and uncertainties about terrorism. The clear-cut missions, infallible technology and visible enemies offer the play simplicity that *does not* reflect the confusing reality, another important appeal of wargames' (2010: 232).

This is exactly what gamers do – they digest whatever they see and learn in the gaming process, and adjust and personalize their experiences to their own liking to make them feel safe and valued. Sometimes, it is too easy to forget that gamers, as an extensive form of media audience, are also recognized as the most active type of ‘prosumers’– a fancy term commonly used to describe today’s consumers and audiences who are active and very much involved in contributing to the new media production and content - and hence can grasp back their power to decide what they want to use, watch and play in the over-developed, high-tech environment. Such interpretation, of course, reminds us of the evolving media audiences’ autonomy. In fact, all the gamers who responded to our questionnaires or took part in interviews for this research were all reflecting this highly embedded autonomy and the similar abilities of turning their thoughts towards the games and changing their minds accordingly in order to meet their original psychological requirements, intentions and purposes of gameplay.

In many situations, we also saw gamers wisely creating their ‘preferred meanings’ in the process of gameplay even when they had to reject certain ideologies and sacrifice certain pleasures. For example, in the case of the Taiwanese COD gamers, we saw how they searched for people from the same region who spoke the same language, then formed a community and clan to fight against ‘the imagined others.’ These actions all reflect a certain degree of autonomy, allowing gamers to decide what to do, and how

to use them to calm their feelings of unfamiliarity towards a new game or new game environment. The way the Taiwanese gamers largely adopted previous Hollywood war movie experience into play, to allow themselves to feel closer to the game texts, also demonstrates the extent to which the gamers would psychologically go to create more meanings for themselves and the games. Gamers follow their autonomy to change the rules. As Linda Hughes described:

‘Game rules can be interpreted and reinterpreted toward preferred meanings and purposes, selectively invoked or ignored, challenged or defended, changed or enforced to suit the collective goals of different groups and players. In short, players can take the same game and collectively make it strikingly different experiences’ (1999: 94).

In simple words, the ordinary gamers can always reformulate their ways of playing. They flexibly interact with the games. By re-positioning gamers’ autonomy over all the elements that make up the action of gaming, Rigby and Ryan’s (2011) book *Glued to Games: How Video Games Draw us in and Hold us Spellbound*, also suggested that, when reading into gamers, whether youth or adults, we should understand that digital games satisfy people’s three basic needs (already existing before the appearance of the games) – including the gamers’ needs for competence, for autonomy, and for relatedness. The three human needs (what they called; Player Experience of Need Satisfaction/PENS model) which people have always been searching for in their lives, can eventually be found and fulfilled when playing today’s war-themed FPS games. This PhD research agrees with their view, and the evidence gathered through the questionnaire and the interviews appropriately echo their interpretations and explanations about gaming, at the same time fitting into general people’s self-requirements in life and the need to cope with the psychological losses from

their real life. As we desperately look for proper answers as to who is really in charge in the gameplaying process, most respondents' note and interview conversations in this study point in the same direction; that gamers, as a subjective-self, are the ones to define and decide their own readings within the war games and they determine their means of gameplaying.

Now the so-called augmented reality (AR) technologies and more advanced gaming forms are arising quickly for the next generation of digital games and more body sense-based games are in development to transform the 'gamership'. These things mean that how the militainment will proceed and different war experiences develop, in the new human-machine structure, definitely deserve further exploration. Overall, this thesis is suggesting a shift of focus in the public discourse towards the FPS genre of war games, so the next level of research in this field should move beyond the 'violence and aggression model' and pay more attention to how the gamers actually construct their different identities and virtually operate themselves in the virtual space.

7.2 Contribution, Limitations and Future Developments of Games Research

Generally speaking, this research brings contributions to many aspects of the subject. Firstly, it provides both theoretical and empirical readings into the new subjects of digital games, gaming, and gamers. Game studies are now becoming more mature, segmented and demand a more detailed analysis into different genres, subgenres and gaming styles. This research thoroughly investigated the (war-themed) FPS games, one of the most significant genres in the global gaming culture, and established a fundamental understanding of the FPS games' socio-cultural implications and meanings. Secondly, this research can fill in the knowledge gap between media studies

and digital games studies. By articulating globalization theories, media studies and newly established game-related theories, materials and data, the thesis helps to build-up a theoretical and textual connection across various disciplines. As increasingly globalized digital gaming integrates further into media, culture and communication studies, this study will hopefully contribute to creating interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary trend in scholarship in this dynamic and rapidly emerging field of academic inquiry. Thirdly, the study compensates for the general lack of research and public understanding about the East-Asian gamers in the FPS gaming genre. As already mentioned, most of existing studies in this field tend to focus on mainstream Western gamers of FPS games. Hence this study can provide new and solid evidence of the East Asian gamers' gameplaying experience and self-engagement in this genre. Finally, some findings and interpretations illustrated throughout this thesis essentially challenge and clarify some general misperceptions and stereotypes towards the FPS games/gamers, and also, it suggests a shift of focus in the public discourse and debates about this gaming genre.

Besides all the positive outcomes, like all research, this project has its own limitations. Kallio, Mayra and Kaipainen (2010) once remarked that: '...unless we try to investigate the playing practices of old as well as young people, both women and men, those who are eager and dedicated gamers as well as those who are not, we are not going to be able to provide reliable knowledge about games and play (p. 328).' Taking on board their comment, whether referring to our first or second research method, this study only managed to provide some case studies based on a fixed number of, mostly, male gamers, and all the following interpretations and analysis had to rely on these limited resources and evidence. Thus, more research looking into wider gamer communities and different genders is needed in the future study of this genre.

Moreover, in the study of war gamers, separating those who play the games for fun and those who play them for training and killing can also be an important step when researching the different types of gamers' mentality of gameplay. This thesis could only manage to target a manageable number of normal, ordinary, everyday gamers. If one is more interested in or concerned about the particular political influences and ideological works generated by the war games, a piece of comparative research on real soldiers who regularly play games for training purposes may be necessary.

In terms of methodology, there were some practical difficulties in conducting the research. For example, the questionnaires were only designed in English and Chinese for English- and Mandarin-speaking gamers. Therefore there was always the chance of losing the COD fans who did not have the basic language-skills to go through and answer the questions. Also, I was only able to manage to conduct 11 in-depth interviews. This was due to some real difficulties in finding willing interviewees during my short stay in Taiwan. Although low in number the interviews were rich in terms of insights that I gained from them about the self-perception of gamers and the complex ways in which they consume and contribute to gaming culture.

Bertrard and Hughes (2005) also commented that, when relying on audiences' responses in interviews, researchers can always face the same problem that people choose what they want to tell, and the results all depend on what has been told – in the process, the interviewees may lie and say things based on their preferences and choices (p. 55). In response to this issue, likely to happen in all interview-based research, future research following this project should consider conducting interviews alongside other ethnographic methods, such as observing and taking notes on the gamers' in-play

behaviours and expressions, or monitoring their different ways of communicating during experiment-based research design. Certainly there would be more hidden problems to be examined and evaluated, but within a limited time frame and budget, the research has done its best to study the gamers qualitatively.

Based on this project, lots of research can be developed and elaborated in the future. For example, the recent academic discussions about 'serious games' (defining how digital games should be more seriously applied into different social services, such as health, military, and education etc.) are changing the basic concept of gaming. How this paradigm shift can cause impacts on public perceptions towards war games could be an interesting field to be explored. Other extended questions, for example; how certain war games have to be localized and changed in their content in order to fit into different countries' socio-cultural context and censorship requirements should also be looked at in future research. And, as mentioned earlier, the growth of augmented games allowing more bodily controls into FPS games, with gamers no longer needing any controller and instead using their hands to pretend they are holding a gun to point and shoot, will need to be studied for the next level of FPS games. Although, as argued in the thesis, the debates about violence and aggression may misleadingly generalize the FPS gamers' different experiences, other relevant issues regarding the FPS games' negative side, such as the gamers' addiction to this genre still has its value for more debates and discussions.

In gamer research in particular, there are far too many options to be followed and expanded from this research. For example, in terms of the FPS gamers' productivity; looking into how the specific group of gamers record their play and upload it to certain websites, or, how they spend time doing radio/TV-type commentary on their

gameplaying clips etc. can lead us to see different dimensions of the games' agency. Within a broader context, more in-depth ethnographic research looking into people's general interests of consuming different war-themed entertainment and games (as shown in figure 7) should also be looked at in order to contextualize the 'war-playing' culture.

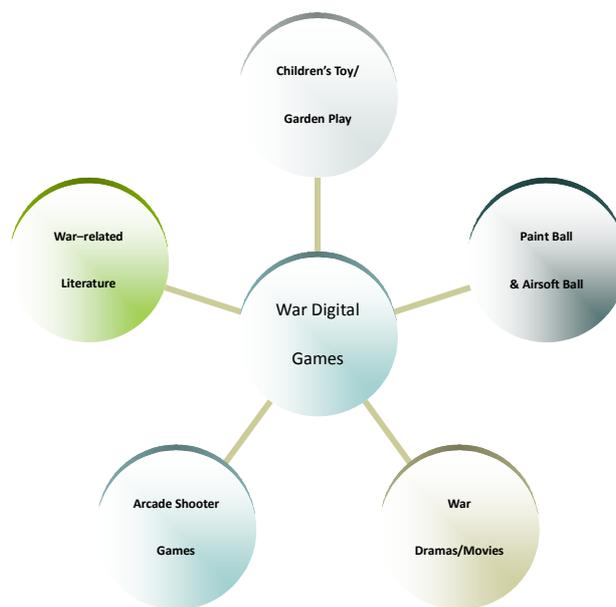


Figure 7. The Relevant War-Related Entertainment Media Experience

A few more words can be added before closing this research. Contemporary war-themed FPS games represent a form of entertainment within a larger framework of militainment. Fundamentally, it fulfils a human instinct; it helps to satisfy people's basic need for conflict (from which they find excitement) as well as their need for autonomy (from the way they imagine they are willingly doing something meaningful) and relatedness (from the way they imagine they are doing something meaningful

together). As the game genre is becoming a popular global phenomenon reaching different local-communities, across different countries, the never ending negotiated human experience, of symbolizing a closer man-machine relationship certainly requires more exploration, discussion and debate.

Appendix

1. Online questionnaire website one (English Version):

<http://academic.imorsedesign.com/>

The Online Questionnaire: Digital Games, Culture and War Gamers

This research is conducted and organized by

Philip Lin /PhD Student

Communication and Media Research Institute

University of Westminster, London

Your response to this questionnaire will only be used for the PhD research project titled 'Global Gamers, Transnational Play, and Imaginary Battlefield.' The key aim of the research is to explore the cultural differences and genre preferences in gaming.

This questionnaire needs you to spend some time thinking and reflecting your own gaming life and experience. Most questions were designed to be open questions, so you are free to type down any thoughts and opinions that come to your mind. Please answer the questions with patience. There are four parts to the questionnaire. Please finish all of them to complete the questionnaire.

Page One: General Questions about You.

1. Your name:

The nick name you commonly use (online or in the game):

2. Your gender (M/F)?

3. How old are you?

4. What is your nationality (country of origin)?

5. What is your occupation?

6. How many years have you played video games?

Less than 5

6-15

More than 16

7. Which game platform do you prefer?

Sony PlayStation

Microsoft Xbox

Nintendo Wii

Handheld Consoles (including PSP, DS and Mobile Phone)

Computer

Why?

8. Which one of these is your favorite videogame genre?

Action and Adventure

Driving and Racing

First-Person Shooter and Third-Person Shooter

Platform and Puzzle

Role-playing and MMORPG

Strategy and Simulation

Sports and Fighting (Beat-'em-ups)

Other _____

Please explain why?

Page Two: Questions about Your Game Playing Life

1. Please tell me when and how you stepped into gaming world?

2. How many hours do you spend every week playing videogames?

1-10

11-20

21-30

31-40

More than 41

3. What according to you are the main reasons that sustain your personal interest in gaming?

4. How would you categorize yourself? You are a:

Casual Gamer
Hardcode Game
Professional Gamer

5. Please list three games you enjoy playing the most?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

6. Do you play games online?

Yes
No

7. Do you like to play games with/against players from other cultures? (If yes, please explain why. If not, why not?).

8. Do you find people from different nations/cultures play videogames in different ways?

Yes
No

If so, how different, please give us a few examples.

Part Three: Reflect Your War/Military Game Experience

For gamers who have played, enjoy playing and will continue to play First-Person Shooter (FPS) and Third-Person Shooter (TPS) games (especially the fans of war/military games), please take some time to reflect your own experience seriously.

1. What are your favorite FPS/TPS games?

2. What make FPS and TPS games different from other genres?

3. Why do you like this particular genre?

4. What are the differences you find between FPS games and TPS games (For example, between *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*, or between *Saint's Row* and *GTO*)?

5. What elements in these games do catch most of your attention? What do you think are the key elements that make these games interesting and fun to play? Please give some examples if possible.
6. Which type of games do you prefer – those based on historical wars or contemporary military conflicts?
7. While playing, do you sometimes imagine yourself battling in these war events?
8. If you are creating a game, which previous/contemporary war or political event you think you must add to your game creation?
9. If you reflect your own gaming experience in your favorite games, what were the most enjoyable (pleasurable) moments you ever had?
10. Do you undertake extra research or read material that relates to your gaming? (For example, reading related books and articles or joining online forums etc.)
11. Critics claim that war games and violent gaming can contribute to aggressive behaviour among the young. As a FPS/TPS war/military gamer yourself, do you have anything to say about it?

Part Four: The End of the Questionnaire

Besides the questions addressed above, do you have anything you would like to add in relation to war/military games and your own experience?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

If you have more things to say about your gaming experience in war/military games, please leave your personal contacts. I will soon contact you for an in-depth interview:

Your Email:

Your Telephone/Mobile Number:

For any further enquiries about this research, please contact Philip Lin:
t.lin@my.westminster.ac.uk

2. Online questionnaire website two (Chinese Version):

<http://academic.imorsedesign.com/ch/>

網路問卷: 遊戲玩家，文化與戰爭電玩

本研究由 Philip Lin 整理和設計，
屬於西敏寺大學，傳播與媒介研究中心的一個博士研究項目

您在本問卷的回答將會用於「全球玩家、跨國電玩、戰地想像」的博士研究論文中。這份線上調查的要旨在於初步地探討電玩遊戲過程中的文化差異與類型偏好，並試圖概括性地了解戰爭遊戲類型玩家的基本特質。

這份問卷將需要您花上一些時間回想和回顧您本身的遊戲生命和電玩經驗，請耐心回答所有的問題；本問卷包含四個部份，其中多數的問題設計為開放式問題，您可以自由地表達你的任何想法和意見。

第一部分: 關於你的一般問題

1. 您的名字是:
你較常用於網上或遊戲中的個人暱稱是:
2. 您的性別是? (男/女)
3. 您的年齡是?
4. 你的國籍是?
5. 你的職業是?
6. 你目前接觸電玩幾年?
5 年以下
6-15 年
16 年以上
7. 你最喜歡在以下哪一個平台玩電玩?
Sony PlayStation
Microsoft Xbox
Nintendo Wii
手持式主機 (包括 PSP、NDS、或電話手機)

電腦

原因是？

8. 你最喜歡以下哪種遊戲類型？

動作與冒險類

賽車類

第一人稱或第三人稱射擊類型

益智拼圖類

角色扮演類

策略類

運動與格鬥類

其他

原因是？

第二部分: 您的遊戲生命

1. 請簡述你的個人故事，你是如何開始你的遊戲生涯，大概從幾時開始接觸電動玩具？

2. 你每週花多少時間在電玩上？

1-10

11-20

21-30

31-40

41 以上

3. 請分析一下你自己的經驗，你認為是什麼原因讓你想要與不斷持續地接觸電玩？你認為是什麼原因維持著你對電玩的興趣？

4. 你會如何定義你自己是：

一般玩家 (Casual Gamer)

硬派玩家 (Hardcore Gamer)

專業玩家 (Professional Gamer)

5. 請列出三款你最喜歡的電玩遊戲？

1.

2.

3.

6. 你是否上網玩遊戲?

是

否

7. 你是否喜歡和來自其他國家/文化的玩家較量？

8 你是否有發現玩家來自不同國家或文化在參與類似遊戲類型時會採取不同的方式？

是

否

差異在哪，請舉例:

第三部分: 反身思考您的戰爭/軍事遊戲參與經驗

這部分針對玩家特別偏好軍事戰爭電玩，尤其針對特定軍事/戰爭迷、與玩家尤其熱衷於第一人稱(FPS)或第三人稱(TPS)為主的軍事殺戮遊戲類型，請誠實並盡可能仔細地反映出你的個人想法與意見。

1. 你最喜好的 FPS/TPS 遊戲是?

2. FPS/TPS 與其他遊戲類型最大的區別為何？

3. 你為什麼特別偏好這種類型(特別是戰爭遊戲)？

4. 在不同的 FPS 或 TPS 遊戲中，你是否有發現些許不同？請舉例。

5. 在 FPS/TPS 類型的遊戲內容或要素上，最吸引你的地方為何？你認為哪些元素會讓這種類型玩起來更有趣？請舉例。

6. 考慮歷史戰爭(政治)與現代戰爭(政治)事件，你比較希望哪一樣出現在今天的戰爭遊戲開發上？

7. 你曾否想像過你自己實際參與在這些不同歷史戰役之中嗎？

8. 如果你今天要研發一款遊戲，哪一個歷史、政治或戰爭場景是你最想看到在遊戲中出現的？

原因是

9. 回想你過去的電玩經驗，你有特別享受的時刻嗎？

10. 除了你電玩所花的時間，你是否會另外閱讀或上網尋找與遊戲相關的資料？請舉例。

11. 今天的新聞與媒體經常針對戰爭遊戲所具有的暴力內容存有疑慮，身為一名戰爭遊戲玩家，你如何看待這類問題？

第四部份: 問卷結尾

除了上述所有問題，有任何個人意見(與軍事戰爭遊戲個人參與相關)你想要特別提出討論嗎？

最後，感謝你寶貴的時間完成了這份問卷。

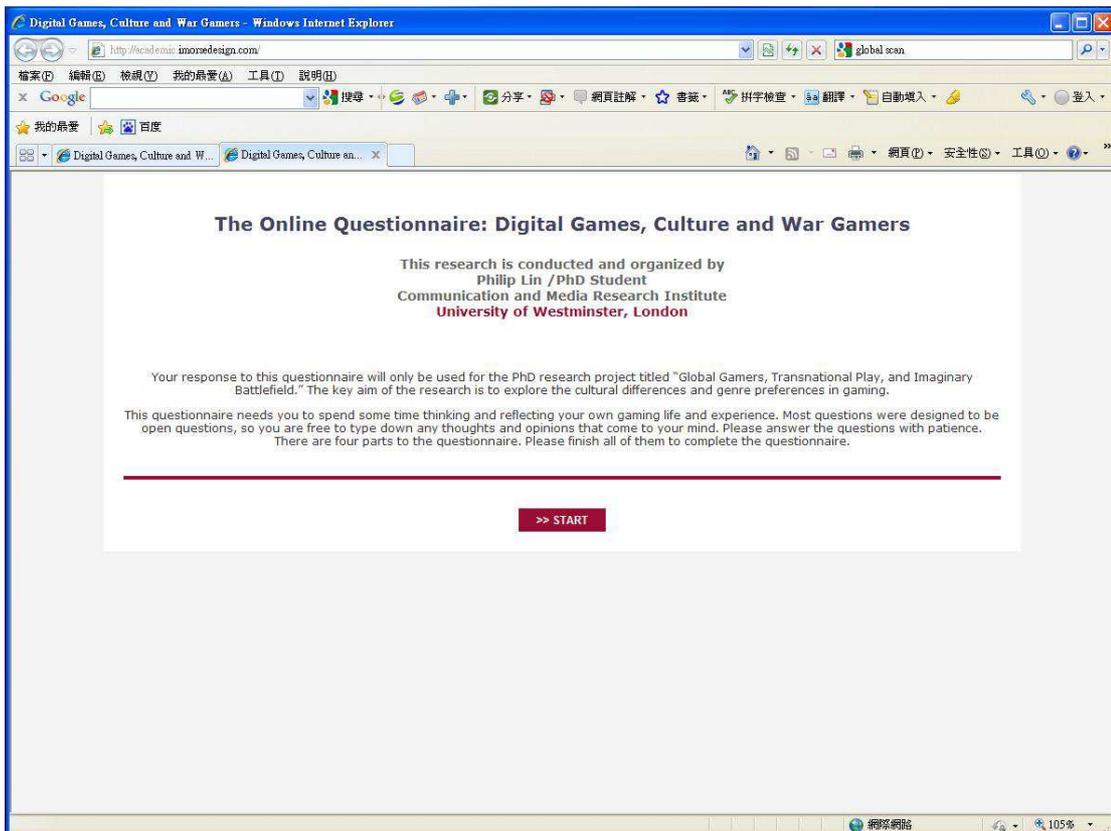
如果你願意再多分享你的個人遊戲經驗，請留下你的聯絡方式，我們會盡快與你聯繫進行更深入的訪談。

您的電郵：

您的電話/手機號碼：

如果有更多疑問或建議，請聯絡 Philip Lin: t.lin@my.westminster.ac.uk

3. Photos of the completed websites:



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