GAMING INTERACTION

CONVERSATIONS AND COMPETENCIES
IN INTERNET CAFÉS

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CONTENTS

Part I: Gaming interaction

INTRODUCTION.....	9
GAMING AS SITUATED PRACTICES.....	13
On-screen and off-screen interaction in computer gaming	13
Situating play at internet cafés	18
Competencies, performance and identity in peer group play	20
Aims	24
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	27
Ethnomethodology	27
Conversation Analysis	32
METHOD.....	37
Setting	37
Participants and games played	39
Recordings	42
Observations and informal interviews	48
Analytical procedures	49
Transformation and transcription	51
The analyst as a member	54
SUMMARIES OF STUDIES.....	59
DISCUSSION.....	67
Showing competence	67
Identity and hierarchy	69
NOTES.....	75
REFERENCES.....	79

Part II: The Studies

STUDY I

Gaming as a situated collaborative practice.....	99
Björn Sjöblom (2008). <i>Human IT</i> , 9(3). 128-165.	

STUDY II

Professional vision in co-located computer gaming.....	133
Björn Sjöblom. <i>Submitted for publication</i>	

STUDY III

Participant categorizations of gaming competence: <i>Noob</i> and <i>Imba</i> as learner identities.....	161
Björn Sjöblom & Karin Aronsson. Forthcoming in J. Sefton-Green & O. Eerstad (Eds.). <i>Learning Lives</i> . Cambridge University Press.	

STUDY IV

You suck! Playing the blame game in collaborative gaming.....	181
Björn Sjöblom. <i>Submitted for publication</i>	

PART I

GAMING INTERACTION

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation takes as its object of study the practical ways in which computer games are played in internet cafés.¹ It is a dissertation about practical action in gaming, the concrete ways of acting on and around the screen when played in this specific context. It is a study of *gaming interaction*: of how players interact amongst themselves within both on-screen and off-screen spaces.

Entering one of Stockholm's internet cafés, the first thing the unaccustomed visitor will discover is that which people are using these places for: the predominant activity in the café is playing different forms of multiplayer computer games. These games can, however, all be played over the internet, and so playing these games actually does not *require* players to be co-located (as long as they have access to the technology). There is obviously something about internet cafés that makes the teenage boys that make up their customer base want to spend their time and money there.² Another thing striking to a visitor, at least one not previously familiar with this kind of a setting, is the ways that playing computer games is obviously a social experience. Players are constantly talking to each other, hurling verbal commands, instructions, insults and praise over the rows of computers. They narrate their ongoing course of action and burst out in emotional verbal and gestural responses to surprising or exciting on-screen events. The game playing is decidedly not done by people staring at their own screen, withdrawn from communication with the world outside the game play in an "atomized experience" (as claimed by, for example, Lee, 1999). Rather, players are constantly looking at other players' screens, pointing at them or moving around in the room, looking over the shoulder of other players, discussing their game play. Novice players experiencing difficulty with some part of a game have more experienced players lean over towards their computers, instructing them

on how to address their troubles, in what can be seen as “over the shoulder learning” (Twidale, 2005). Players are interacting with long-time friends or people they have just met, discussing everything from game play to girlfriends. The “magic circle” of game play (Huizinga, 2004) seems not to be a definite circumscription of game playing in these settings, but more of a loose “membrane” (Crawford, 2011; Linderoth, 2004) constantly penetrated by actions that reshape the players’ activities. In internet cafés, social interaction between players seems to be a defining feature.

Computer games have been at the centre of society’s ambivalent attitude to children and media use (Buckingham, 2000, 2004). On the one hand, computer games have been the object of what Cohen (2002) called *moral panics*, for a variety of reasons. Not only have computer games been seen as having violent content, making players more likely to engage in violent behavior (see for example Anderson, 2004; Anderson et al., 2010; Dill & Dill, 1998). Addiction, obesity and escapism have also been added to the list of vices that computer games are related to (e.g. Griffiths & Davies, 2005; Vandewater, Shim, & Caplovitz, 2004). On the other hand, playing computer games has been seen as providing a number of positive effects on players, from greater social and communicative skills to cognitive and perceptual enhancement (Gee, 2003; Green & Bavelier, 2003; Prensky, 2006). *Serious games* are used for learning in a variety of contexts, even classrooms (Michael & Chen, 2006; Ritterfeld, Cody, & Vorderer, 2009). Whether seen in a positive or negative light, the search for the “effects” of computer games on players has been a strong, and continuing paradigm in research on games and gaming (Crawford, 2011).

A different sort of research, that is more in line with the interests of this thesis, covers cultures, practices and audiences of computer gaming (Crawford, 2011; Gosling & Crawford, 2011). Computer gaming as a social activity has been studied across a variety of settings, from online virtual game worlds (Brown & Bell, 2004; Crowe & Bradford, 2006; Pearce, 2009; Taylor, 2006) to domestic contexts (see for example Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009; Giddings, 2007; Schott & Kambouri, 2006; Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy, 2008) public arcades (Lin & Sun, 2011) game clubs (Jakobsson, 2007), LAN-parties (Keating & Sunakawa, 2010; Taylor & Witkowski, 2009) and after school centers (Fields & Kafai, 2010; Ito, 2009). Social and communicative behavior in and around computer games is seen in all of these domains, refuting the stereotypical image of isolated and socially inapt *gamers*, instead highlighting the rich and multifaceted social milieus centered around computer games.

Social aspects of internet cafés has been explored in a number of studies (e.g. Apperley, 2010; Beavis, Nixon, & Atkinson, 2005; Chee, 2006; Frostling-Henningsson, 2009; Gajadhar, Kort, IJsselsteijn, & Poels, 2009; Powell, 2004). These places offer opportunities for engagement with online activities and virtual worlds (Laegran & Stewart, 2003; Liff & Laegran, 2003; Lindtner & Dourish, 2011; Lindtner et al., 2008) and for the informal acquisition of various forms of *digital literacies* (Beavis et al., 2005; Cilesiz, 2009). An internet café can be considered what Oldenburg (1991) called a *third place*, where young people meet in a public place away from home and school, with, at most, a marginal adult presence (Beavis et al., 2005; Gajadhar et al., 2009; Jonsson, 2010; Skelton & Valentine, 1998).

There are a number of studies that describe internet cafés and other contexts for co-located gaming as settings for adolescents' peer culture (e.g. Apperley, 2010) but there are few that relate social aspects of such contexts for gaming to the actual gaming interaction itself (but see Hung, 2011). I argue that the social life of internet cafés, and indeed any context of computer gaming, is inextricably linked to the practical ways in which the games are played in that place. In particular, gaming as a social activity is structured by the ways in which players interact with each other using verbal, gestural and on-screens resources, in what Goodwin (2003, p. 22) calls an "ecology of signs." By analyzing how gaming is organized on a level that is grounded in the players' practical actions, novel aspects of game playing and game-centered peer culture can be examined.

The preliminary findings of this investigation of gaming activities indicated that computer gaming involves not only player collaboration, but also disputes, blame, contestation, and social hierarchies. Each of the four studies in this thesis serves to detail different aspects of these sorts of gaming interaction.

This thesis adds to a growing number of studies of "ecologies of gaming" (cf. Salen, 2008), that is, studies of the specific settings in which games are played, addressing questions of peer group participation, knowledge distribution and competence as well as identity in different sorts of gaming contexts and cultures. By closely analyzing gaming interaction "in the wild" (cf. Hutchins, 1995), the present studies contribute to an understanding of how these phenomena are made observable and reportable, that is, *accountable* (Garfinkel, 1967), by the players themselves.

This book is divided into two parts, where the first explicates the theoretical and methodological points of departure of the four empirical studies that follow. The first part is divided into three sections. The first of these contains a review

of the literatures relevant to the investigation, and a further detailing of the aims of the thesis. In the second section, the thesis' analytical perspectives are explained. The last section describes the methods used for studying computer gaming at internet cafés. A summary of the studies and a discussion of the research findings conclude the first part. The second part of the thesis contains four empirical studies, each examining a different aspect of co-located computer gaming interaction.

GAMING AS SITUATED PRACTICES

ON-SCREEN AND OFF-SCREEN INTERACTION IN COMPUTER GAMING

Players' interaction has been studied in a wide range of contexts, in both schools and domestic settings, and as part of both ethnographic and experimental research. The aims of such research has also varied, from explicating the interactional methods for interacting across on-screen and off-screen spaces, to discussing in what ways interaction in computer games provide opportunities for learning. Common to all of these studies is the realization that the co-presence of several players in situated activity systems (Goodwin, 1997, 2000) affords interaction not only between each player and the screen, but also *between the players*. A common element in these studies is how the gaming activity takes place not only on the screen, but also in the physical space in front of it.

This intermixing of on-screen and off-screen interaction has been one of the more prominent themes in interaction analytical studies of computer gaming. Rather than subscribing to ontological notions of the "virtual" and the "physical" as incommensurable arenas of actions (cf. Turkle, 1996) such studies examine the detailed production of interaction using the various interactional resources at hand. The analytical theme of examining the ways in which players make connections between "game, room and world" (Stevens et al., 2008) is pursued in several studies of co-located gaming.

Keating and Sunakawa (2010) examine the features of such interactions through the concept of *participation cues*, which "helps explain how interactants are able to orient to, plan, and execute collaborative actions that span very different environments with very different types of agency, possible acts, and consequences." (Keating & Sunakawa, 2010, p. 332). These cues serve to

coordinate the multiple actions and attention of participants in co-located gaming, across on-screen and off-screen spaces. Players have to make intelligible (i.e. accountable, see Garfinkel, 1967) what sorts of actions they are undertaking. This is done both through talk (e.g. announcing what you are about to do) and through embodied and spatial actions, such as changes in posture or gaze, or through deictic gestures, such as pointing to the screen.

Mondada's (2011/in press-a, 2011/in press-b) work also examines how players mobilize multimodal resources in order to coordinate action across on-screen and off-screen spaces. Specifically, she demonstrates how these resources constitute a dynamic *interactional space* for the production of coordinated action. She specifically highlights how temporal and spatial aspects of the gaming changes participation within the setting. She sees in-game and out-of game talk as tied to different "praxeological ecologies" (Mondada, 2011/in press-a, p. 16) that are driven by different temporal logics: whereas "in-game talk" is adapted to "fit" the on-screen events, "out-of-game talk" is adapted to the regular sequentiality of conversations. This is seen as a possible way of understanding the players' dynamic relationship to their avatars and to their co-player:

Whereas in the first [the in-game ecology] they are mainly animating their avatars and identifying with them, in the second [the out-of-game ecology] they treat each other as authors of the game moves, claiming and attributing rights and responsibilities related to the game. (Mondada, 2011/in press-a, p. 16)

Within the context of children's domestic gaming Aarsand and Aronsson (2009) describe a similar orientation to temporal aspects of the game in a study of *response cries*, a notion adapted from Goffman, (1981). Such response cries, the "public displays of emotions in the form of vocalizations such as self-talk, imprecations, and audible surprise" (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009, p. 1557) were temporally ordered with respect to the unfolding events on the screen. These response cries, along with a range of other verbal and non-verbal actions (code-switching, singing along with the music in the game or physically animating an avatar's moves) served as resources for the epistemic positioning of players as competent. The authors claim that response cries and other such resources are of specific importance in co-ordinating children's game playing, both in how they serve to manage intersubjectivity among players, and of managing players' attention in and out of the game.

Players' joint practices for planning upcoming game play, in front of the screen, have direct influence on the ways the game unfolds. Even in games with no formal conditions for "winning," players will, both before and during the game, discuss and set up local goal and rules for the game (Peterson, 2008, 2011). Using locally established rules, even in games that involve formal winning conditions is an important dimension of co-located game play (Hung, 2007). Such locally negotiated rules are also constitutive of specific gaming cultures and the participants identities as particular kinds of players (Jakobsson, 2007). The rules of computer games, even though they are inscribed in the artifacts, should not be considered the "dead centre" of gaming interaction. Rather, "placing rules at the center of the formal model of games and the formal aspects before social and cultural perspectives creates a skewed understanding of games." (Jakobsson, 2007, p. 392). Instead, the rules should be seen both as structuring in-game action, and as means for player's identity work. Players situated procedures for playing the game may also lead to their defying "conventional" ways of playing. For example, children playing adventure games may disregard (or fail to understand) the game's overarching narrative, and instead treat specific scenes in the game as discrete and disconnected from each other, rather than as being part of a series of events (Phillips & Scrimshaw, 1997).

In an ethnomethodologically informed study, Hung (2007, 2011) used audio and video recordings to study the situated sense-making practices in computer gaming amongst adolescents in New York. He showed how the situated character of gameplay, including instructions, teasing and cheating behavior changed the way that the game is understood by participants, given that players co-constructed meaning in differing ways, depending on the local contingencies of play. Several researchers have also shown that marginal participants of a gaming session may exert influence on the ways in which the game is played (e.g. Carr, Buckingham, Burn, & Schott, 2006; Schott & Kambouri, 2006), and thereby radically change the social experience of playing the game.

Learning is another of the recurrent themes in many studies of gaming interaction, even though computer games may have inherent inadequacies for the transfer of school-curricular content (Linderoth, 2004, 2009). Informal peer pedagogies has been one area of study in gaming contexts, and studies have shown practical knowledge of gaming moves being distributed in local communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was done through the interactional means of observing, questioning, monitoring and intervening (Fields & Kafai, 2007; Fields & Kafai, 2009). While studies of situated learning in

computer games show how players can acquire practical know-how of the games they play through peer tutoring, the question of whether players can learn skills transferrable to out-of-game contexts is much debated (for a review, see Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006). An emergent theme within such research is the recommendation to study the players' dynamic and unfolding understandings in some sequential detail (Hung, 2007; Linderoth, 2004), related to its spatial and social context (Stevens et al., 2008). Code-switching, as a specific conversational resource in gaming, was discussed by Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) in a study about situated and cooperative second language learning in game playing. They found that written information given by the game, as well as the players' repeating and "voicing" of in-game characters showed potential as a site for learning English.

Studies of interaction in games trade on the principle of studying gaming as a situated, social and embodied practice, and claim that by abstracting the gaming situation and practical gaming actions from studies of gameplay, important aspects of the activity can be misconstrued. Examining how talk and other forms of interaction is used to shape the players' behavior in the game enables an understanding of how off-screen activities enable players to "influence, complement, or give alternate meaning to their online actions" (Feldon & Kafai, 2008, pp. 576-577).

This does not mean that all co-located gaming is supported by verbal interaction. In a study of the communicative behaviors of *Counter-Strike* teams at a LAN-event, Manninen (2003) found that how much players talked while playing was correlated with how "serious" a given match was, in that a ranked game was more likely to elicit verbal communication among the players. However, even in high-stakes games, players sometimes played silently, forgoing any benefits to coordination that talking to co-players would have granted. Wright, Boria and Breidenbah (2002) documented how talk figured as part of players' creative actions in *Counter-Strike*, through the use of, for example, jokes and humor. The meaning of playing *Counter-Strike* resided not only in the graphics displayed on the screen, but in contextures of on-screen and off-screen behaviors.

On-screen interaction can be scrutinized in order to understand the competencies that go into handling the game in accomplished ways (Reeves, Brown, & Laurier, 2009; Sudnow, 1982). In these studies, expertise is described from ethnomethodological and phenomenological perspectives. Accomplished player action is, for example, understood as the ability of chaining together

elementary actions (such as turning a corner, ducking under a window or running up stairs) into longer sequences. Also, as part of demonstrating expertise, the player must collaborate with co-players, as well as be able to successfully negotiate the in-game “terrain” of the game, relying on an acquired familiarity with the features of the “maps” the game is played on. (Reeves et al., 2009).

Studies of social interaction in online virtual worlds

A number of studies have examined player actions in details within the context of online multiplayer games. Studies of “pure” online actions are, in effect, concerned with an activity that is quite different from studying co-located play. From an interaction analytical standpoint, the analyses presented in this thesis follow the dynamic use of the semiotic resources that the players have at hand (Goodwin, 2000), and how these resources are used to construe and exhibit the players’ sense of their actions. In a “pure” online context, the available ways of communicating are different, and in some sense more limited than in face-to-face interaction (cf. Bennerstedt & Ivarsson, 2010). Playing a multiplayer game side-by-side allows for players to monitor each others’ actions by looking at each others’ screens. In contrast, such monitoring, when part of players’ online practices, is wholly mediated by each player’s own screen. Verbal interaction cannot be used without the use of external systems for voice communication, such as Skype or Teamspeak. Instead, written chat is used to communicate among players. In all, this creates a very different ecology for interaction. However, some of the prior studies of online interaction do provide insights into co-located gaming, and are therefore worth discussing.

Studies of online virtual worlds (such as *World of Warcraft*) demonstrate, first of all, that these places are designed for social interaction (Brown & Bell, 2004; Muramatsu & Ackerman, 1998; Taylor, 2006). They contain resources for players to interact textually with each other (through built-in chat interfaces), and through the embodied actions of the players’ avatar (such as *emotes* or spatial positioning) players may co-construct joint activities (Taylor, 2002). These virtual worlds are persistent over time (players simply “log on” whenever they want to play) and players tend to form stable social structures, associations of players called *guilds* (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2007; Nardi & Harris, 2006). The games will often support such social interaction, and indeed, many parts of these games are only practically accessible when being part of a social group. Long term ethnographic studies of such virtual worlds (Taylor, 2006) as

well as demographic studies of their populations (Yee, 2006a) show that player populations are diverse and that players do not fit the stereotype of socially inadequate teenage boys. In virtual worlds, game play can be highly repetitious and even boring, blurring the boundary between “play” and “work” (Taylor, 2006; Yee, 2006b). In a study of the online role-playing game *Everquest*, Taylor (2003) found that “power gamers” were one category of players especially devoted to instrumental play, and for whom enjoyment in game playing was not so much about immediate “fun” as about being rewarded for hard work. The actions and attitude of such players dissolve some of our understandings of what constitutes play, such as being done voluntarily and for enjoyment (cf. Huizinga, 2004).

A second strand of research on player action in virtual worlds concerns interaction and collaboration in such places using methods closer to multimodal interaction analysis (e.g. Goodwin, 2000; Mondada, 2007b). These studies have demonstrated that virtual worlds incorporate different, and in some ways “impoverished,” resources for interaction compared to what is available to participants in face-to-face interaction (Manninen & Kujanpää, 2005; Moore, Ducheneaut, & Nickell, 2007). Avatar actions in virtual worlds show much less information to co-players than what embodied action in physical space does, which means that everyday accountability of action is disrupted (Moore et al., 2007). Certain features of the game’s design, such as how the player’s view of the virtual environment can be different from his avatar’s view are especially troublesome, as the players have difficulties determining whether objects in the game are within sight of his co-players. However, Bennerstedt and Ivarsson (2010) demonstrate how accountable action is nevertheless constituted out of the specific resources available. Rather than seeing interaction in virtual worlds as impoverished versions of face-to-face interaction, the focus of these studies is to understand how players make use of what they have at hand for communicating and enacting tightly coordinated sequences of action.

SITUATED PLAY IN INTERNET CAFÉS

The term “internet café” is, in one way perhaps, somewhat misleading. The computers are connected to the internet, but players do not attend these places because they need internet access. Rather, what these places provide is a locale for playing games on relatively high-end computers, together with friends, in an environment that is largely unsupervised by adults. There are several other terms

used for this sort of establishment, with *LAN-café*s (Beavis et al., 2005), *cybercafé*s (Liff & Laegran, 2003; Liff & Stewart, 2003; Stewart, 2000), *game café* (Jonsson, 2010), and *PC Bang* in Korea, (Chee, 2006; Stewart, 2004), being the most common ones.

Previous studies have, to a large extent, focused on internet *café*s as public places in which “virtual” on-line action is interconnected with social interaction in physical space (Beavis et al., 2005; Powell, 2004; Wakeford, 2003). Virtuality can be understood as a local and practical accomplishment of the material culture of internet *café*s (Wakeford, 2003). Online activities are not independent of their social, spatial and material contexts. Rather, they are always embedded in the *café*'s material space and in the embodied skills of its customers and staff. Internet *café*s can be considered *technosocial spaces*,³ in which “the technical, the social and the spatial is entwined and must be understood together” (Laegran, 2002, p. 159).

The physical layout and setup of computers shape the activities that take place there (Miller & Slater, 2000; Wakeford, 2003), and at the same time shape the relationship between customers and staff (Laegran & Stewart, 2003). Monitoring other players' screens, for example, has been found to be much more difficult in places where boards separate the computer stations from each other into cubicles (Wakeford, 2003). The spatial configuration of players and computers contributes to the enjoyment of gaming in *café*s:

The physical proximity of players provides much of the pleasure of LAN [*café*] gaming, with roles, game play, instructions and relations flowing across the boundaries of the screen and back again. Virtual and physical space coexist in a fluid concurrency where each draws on the other in the course of game play, and in the talk and interaction. (Beavis et al., 2005, pp. 51-52).

In contrast, Lee claims that internet *café*s do not afford public and joint consumption of screen activities, but rather lead to “individuated and atomized experience” (Lee, 1999, p. 341). The issue here could also be what is culturally driven rather than “spatially”. In a Korean context of gaming at a *PC Bang*, players were quiet, focusing on their own screen and did not verbally communicate with anyone else, despite coming to the *café* as parts of a larger group of players (Stewart, 2004).

South Korea is home to the vibrant culture of gaming at Pc Bangs, which has been the focus of some ethnographic research (Chee, 2006; Huhh, 2008; Stewart, 2004). In Korea (as well as in Taiwan), activities in internet cafés are almost exclusively gaming oriented, whereas in other places internet cafés may serve a multitude of functions (Chee, 2006; Stewart, 2004). They provide cheap places for people to hang out and meet friends and partners, most often in and through playing games. A type of game-related practice in Korean PC Bangs is that of “making wang-tta”, roughly translatable as “bullying”, where the worst player of a peer group is singled out, excluded and ridiculed (Chee, 2006). *Wang-tta* activities, motivated by the perceived lack of player skill, have implications for how the PC Bang is used and experienced. Players may, for example, withdraw from playing altogether when risking being at the receiving end of wang-tta. It may also lead to players “[...] taking every opportunity to practice the games of their peer group to become more skilled and less subject to such ridicule” (Chee, 2006, p. 235). Through studying practices of wang-tta inclusion and exclusion in gaming activities can be understood in relation to the players’ ways of demonstrating competence and expertise.

COMPETENCIES, PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY IN PEER GROUP PLAY

As can be understood from the previous section, there is a relative scarcity of studies where digital gaming is analyzed as a situated, interactional activity. Also, in studies of internet cafés, the ways that *gaming* is a central feature of these places are conspicuously absent. As yet, there has been little work that directly relates the situated practices of co-located computer gaming to positioning and identity-work in peer groups. Even though co-located computer gaming is historically prior to both solo and on-line gaming, there are actually only a few studies of computer gaming as a co-located phenomenon.⁴

But, in studies of children’s playing of rule based games, in schoolyards and playgrounds (e.g. marbles, hopscotch, foursquare etc.), the situated and interactional nature of gaming practices have been studied more extensively. Through the use of ethnographical methods and conversation analytical perspectives, game playing has been studied as something that is ongoingly organized by the players who are engaged in it, in a shift from cataloguing what games children play (Opie & Opie, 1959) to how they play them (Aronsson & Thorell, 2002; Evaldsson, 2003, 2009; Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998; M. H. Goodwin, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2006; Kyratzis, 2007; Schwartzman, 1976).

Evaldsson (2009) identifies several reasons for studying play as a situated activity. The central place of play and games in children's peer cultures is cited, along with the ways that play figures as a social arena for peer group interaction and socialization, as well as for the accomplishment of children's social identities. Moreover, play can be studied as a locus for the children's own situated production of social order, and of how these orders mirror, refract and caricature the social orders of the "adult world" (Evaldsson, 2009).

Positioning is a central theme in the studies of children's play and games. Through the ways that games are played, the players strive for favorable positions within the game (to be seen as a competent player), and, in extension, within the peer group (M. H. Goodwin, 1985, 1995). This is done both with respect to in-game performance, and to the possibility of joining the game in the first place (the latter also being a central theme in the studies of play in peer groups, see Kyratzis, 2004). Several sorts of interactional competencies are required when players position themselves in favorable positions. Evaldsson (2003, 2004) analyzes how this is accomplished in a game of foursquare, where it can be done by, among other things, "slamming" the ball in a demonstration of strength, physical empowerment and assertiveness. Such embodied in-game moves are shown to have the ability to dissolve some gendered divisions in game play. Girls were seen to have the ability to control and dominate game space, challenge other players (girls and boys) as well as mock and tease them in contrast to prior notions of girls as sidelined in schoolyard gaming (cf. Thorne, 1993). Thus, peer group interaction within the game can simultaneously be seen as accomplishing and upholding local social order as well as situated identities.

Evaldsson's and Goodwin's studies demonstrate that participation hinges on the players' acquisition and, crucially, *display*, of game-relevant competencies. The rules of the game structure the players' possibilities of participation as well as their performance of situated identities in the games. Repeated failures to successfully perform well at in-game tasks involve a public display of incompetence, and is likely to lead to status degradation in the gaming situation. For example, in a study of jump rope, Goodwin (1985) showed how failed gaming actions forced players into less favorable positions (i.e. the "turner" of the jump-rope).

In peer groups "participation also involves the acquisition of repertoires of verbal play" (Aronsson, 2011, p. 479), that is, play and games are, at least in part, linguistically mediated (see also Kyratzis, 2004). This entails that participation in these games requires a moderate amount (locally determined) of language-

proficiency and interactional competence. In relation to hopscotch, jump-rope and foursquare, language is seen as a key aspect of gaming. Rather than players following rules “mechanically”, the rules were seen as actively invoked, negotiated, and transformed in and through the player’s interaction with each other (see also Hughes, 1995). In physical games such as hop-scotch, foursquare and jump-rope, the players are responsible not only for acting within a specific rule-based framework, but also for instantiating their activity as a rule-based game. This is done through a variety of interactional means. Marjorie Goodwin (1995), for example, shows how a group of children involved in a game of hopscotch utilize semiotic resources available in the participation framework in order to both engage in cheating as well as “calling out” the cheater. Thus, cheating actions take place not primarily as an infringement on “objectively” available rules of the game, but in the embodied and publicly displayed interactions of the players engaged in “cheating” and “making cheating public” respectively. These studies can therefore be understood to engage in ethnomethodological *respecification* (Garfinkel, 1991) of ordered phenomena in peer groups’ game play: from an understanding of the participants as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 68) following rules mechanically to actively interpreting members of the activity that they are engaged in).

Playing games is done in-and-through players’ involvement in a social ecology of the local peer-group, language practices and mutual orientation to the gaming activity at hand. Within this “huddle” (Goffman, 1961) disputes, hierarchies and displays and negotiation of social identity are frequent. Favorable social position in games could also be displayed through symbolic economy, where the trade and play with for example marbles (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998) or pogs (Sparrman & Aronsson, 2003) categorize both the player and his goods in relation to the ongoing play activity (Aronsson, 2011).

Danby and Baker (1998) discuss, territorial disputes over a “block area” in a pre-school classroom, and claim that boys show each other ways of enacting specific masculine identities in play. Even though these disputes are wrought with hierarchy and exclusion (denying someone the possibility of participating in the game) the less experienced practitioners are shown the “rules” they need to play in order to be allowed to participate. Danby and Baker (1998, p. 168) find that the “central purpose [...] is the negotiation of the social order and display of how to participate as a masculine member in the block area, and hence is ultimately inclusive”. The underlying conditions for participation were thereby seen to be the competent performance of specific, and locally valued, identities,

through bodily, verbal and material action (see also Björk-Willén, 2007 and; Cromdal, 2001 for two studies on how children orient to these matters).

There are a few studies that examine the categorical underpinnings of children's play, using Sacks' (1974) framework of membership categorization analysis (Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006). This analysis reminds us of how children's play is organized in recognizable categories, with specific rights and obligations assigned to them. The rules for associating actions to categories are understood as of central importance for the recognizability of the game (that is, that in order for a game of mother-child-and-baby to be recognizable as *this* game, the incumbent players have to engage in behaviors that are recognizable as actions that "belong" to that category). Even so, "categorizations and rules of play are, however, somewhat flexible and offer opportunities for resistance and negotiation" (Butler & Weatherall, 2006, p. 464). However, players' actions need to be accountable, in the ethnomethodological sense of the word (that is, "observable-and-reportable") in ways that make sense within the game in order for the game to not break down:

given that categories and the rules associated with their use are a central resource in children's play, a breach of their application or enactment can threaten the organization of the game as a whole. (Butler & Weatherall, 2006, p. 464)

In sum, participation in peer-group play requires a host of embodied, interactional and cultural competencies. The successful recruitment of these allows a participant not only to be included in play, but to show himself as a competent player. Doing this is far from devoid of competition and disputes, in that

[...] not only Rousseauan playful explorations but also comparisons, competition, and hierarchies are central features of children's own play activities" (Aronsson, 2011, p. 480).

In play, players are "doing being" (Sacks, 1984) competent players; that is, they invoke the identities and positions of skillful and experienced practitioners. This is done not only in benign cooperation with peers, but also with the peer-group as actively trying to suppress this performance. Engagement in game-play is therefore not without risks. That a player may lose a computer game is given by the very rules of the game (a "valorization of outcome" is usually seen as a

defining feature of games, see Juul, 2005). However, as will be shown in the studies of this thesis, players may also lose rank, status and the rights to participate if a competent performance is not publicly enacted.

AIMS

The overarching aim for this thesis is to study gaming interaction in co-located settings, and thereby to explicate how players' practical actions structure gaming as a social activity. In order to clarify these aims further, the three areas of research, namely studies of interaction in internet cafés, interaction analysis of co-located gaming practices, and studies of peer group interaction in playgrounds have been outlined. Each of these highlight specific aspects of gaming, and by combining aspects of all three a set of questions for the present investigation can be outlined.

First of all, studies of internet cafés provide rich analyses of the ways in which these places function in the everyday lives of children and teenagers. Being places where online and offline (or rather, on-screen and off-screen) worlds intersect, the physical and spatial configuration of the gaming setting set some of the conditions for participation in gaming activities. Almost all studies of internet cafés, and most other studies of co-located gaming, work with interviews and participatory observation, and therefore do not illuminate the practical ways in which games are actually played. These studies, in most cases, fail to account for how gaming interaction is an important, perhaps even essential, element of these places.

Secondly, interaction analytical studies of co-located gaming practices explicate the interactional underpinnings of gaming. In studies digital gaming, players are seen to manage complex multimodal tasks, and studying these has provided new insights into the ongoing interactional "work" required to play the games (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009; Hung, 2011; Keating & Sunakawa, 2010; Linderöth, 2004; Mondada, 2011/in press-a, 2011/in press-b). In these studies, the use of video has enabled the detailed analysis of multimodal interaction across interactional spaces, demonstrating the ways in which the players' interactional practices structure the gaming situation. But, most of these studies fail to develop accounts of how the players are also able to demonstrate their skills and show themselves as competent and knowledgeable practitioners. In other words, a missing aspect in studies of gaming interaction is how gaming practices function in players' invocations of desirable positions and identities.

This is an aspect that has been highlighted in several studies of playground games, where ethnomethodological and interaction analytical perspectives have been used to study peer group interaction in gaming activities. Specifically, embodied and interactional competence has been understood as underpinning participation and social positioning in peer group play. Recently, questions of local social order, status degradations and exclusion have become foregrounded in some of these studies (e.g. Goodwin, 2006). While this is in line with this investigation's initial analyses of peer group interaction in internet cafés, there are, obviously, huge differences between playground practices of and computer gaming.

However, by combining some of the analytical insights of recent research of peer group gaming, with a keen interest in the specifics of the interactional ecology of co-located computer gaming novel questions can be posed. How do the players make use of various semiotic resources in engaging in collaborative gaming actions? How do players, in and through their gaming actions, shape and invoke local hierarchies? How do players position themselves and others as “competent” and “incompetent”, and how do they resist such categorizations?

ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES

The studies included in this thesis all take as their analytical point of departure the practical and methodical ways in which the players themselves, in and through their interaction, engage in game playing. The analyses in the studies do so by carefully examining players' practical gaming actions and the contextual contingencies that are part of the activity. This interest in the players' methodical practices for conducting their game playing in recognizable, intelligible and concerted ways, can, in other words, be called a study of the *ethnomethodology* of computer gaming in co-located settings. As a part of this analytical perspective, *conversation analysis* has been used to examine how linguistic and other forms of interaction are part and parcel of this activity.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethnomethodology, as a name for an academic discipline, works from the assumption that all of society is accomplished, through-and-through, by the members' methodical practices (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002). It is the study of the ordinary methods by which people produce and make sense of their everyday activities, and, in this way, it is not a theory or a method, but a name for an analytical interest in *members'* methods for the production and recognition of social order. To be a member means, in the ethnomethodological sense of the word, not to be a member of a predefined social group or culture, but of the social interactional competence necessary for participating in an activity

(Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). “Member” is in this way respecified in performative terms, and is echoed in the way “being” is respecified into “doing” (Sacks, 1984).

Routine and ordinary interaction lies at the heart of human sociality, and is the bedrock of relationships and institutions (Schegloff, 2006). It is in and through this interactional work that the order of society (or the “social facts” of society) becomes observable-and-reportable in the first place (Garfinkel, 1967). People continuously act in ways that produce and exhibit this order. The orderliness of actions, and the possibility to intelligibly produce practically adequate accounts of those actions (i.e. the “account-ability” of action, see Lynch, 2011) is not provided by something *outside* of those actions. Members routinely act in rational and ordered ways, and are able to talk about how they act in ways that are “good enough” for whatever their purpose may be. The aim of ethnomethodological studies is, then, to “discover the things that persons in particular situations do, the methods they use, to create the orderliness of social life” (Rawls, in Garfinkel, 2002, p. 6). This means to make available for inspection the ordinary work that is overlooked by both lay and professional analysts of society. In studying co-located game playing, ethnomethodology does not primarily provide theoretical concepts with which to furnish explanations of this activity, but rather a set of analytical “policies” to consider (Garfinkel, 1967). For the current purposes, the most important of these are *studying the interactional “what”*, *procedural explication* rather than explanation as well as *ethnomethodological indifference*, each of which will be clarified in the following sections.

The interactional “what” – the seen but unnoticed details of work

One of the central tenets of ethnomethodology is that although an analyst may account for members’ actions by, for example, using sociological theories and methods, such explanations come second to the members’ *own* exhibitions and explanations of their activities. Members’ are already engaged in “practical sociological reasoning” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 1), using their *own* methods for doing so. These methods are not ordinarily available for sociological analysis. They are the “seen but unnoticed” details of everyday interaction (Garfinkel, 1967). These common sense and taken-for-granted methods are something that members (researchers and first-hand participants to a situation) rely upon as resources for their activities, as means for doing whatever it is that they are doing. Ethnomethodological studies strive to, in the analyses of specific activities, make these methods the topic of their investigation, rather than tacitly

relying on them for the intelligibility of that activity (Zimmerman & Pollner, 1971)

In drawing attention to the taken for granted character of social life, Garfinkel introduced the concept of the interactional “what” in ethnomethodological studies (Lynch, 1993, p. 271). This concept is intended to highlight how, in social studies generally, the local, situated, real-time organizational specifics of social activity is missing from analyses (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 3). Instead of detailing the methods participants to an activity use for making that activity into what it observably and reportedly is, the analyses tacitly rely on those methods in order to produce theory-driven accounts of that activity.

Uncovering (or, rather, rediscovering) this “missing what” is done in a range of settings, from the mundane and routine practices of everyday life, to what can be subsumed under the umbrella terms of ethnomethodological *studies of work*. These studies therefore come in many varieties. Some of the phenomena are utterly mundane, such as walking (Ryave & Schenkein, 1974) reading a tourist map (Laurier & Brown, 2008) or having coffee in a café (Laurier, Whyte, & Buckner, 2001). Others are studies of high-tech environments, many of them being “centers of coordination” (Suchman, 1997) of for example rapid transport systems (Heath & Luff, 2000) or flight decks (Nevile, 2004). Ethnomethodological studies examine a huge variety of subjects and domains, which may require more or less specialized competence in order to participate. In any case, whether it be a routine every-day activity such as walking down a busy street (Ryave & Schenkein, 1974) or advanced, technologically mediated scientific work (C. Goodwin, 1995), these studies seek to explore how an activity is accomplished from within the activity itself, by the participants in that activity, using the resources that they have at hand.

What these studies have in common is the insistence that, in order to understand work practices, the researcher must pay careful attention to that work as practical, accountable talk and actions that is reflexive of the setting which produces it. The local specifics of that work should be studied, not by a reformulation of that work in order to render it more coherently, but by finding how rationality, order and structure are exhibited in-and-through the interactions that make up the activity at hand (Garfinkel, 2002; Lynch 1993). Instead of *reformulating* an activity in more “definite” and theoretical terms, ethnomethodology seeks to demonstrate how an activity is made coherent and accountable through the ordinary practices of those who participate in it. Defining what an activity is can be a routine accomplishment in interaction

(Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970), rather than as something done by an analyst from outside the activity, as a “metacomment” (Lynch, 1993, p. 186).

For the purposes of the studies at hand, this policy entails that the focus of analyses is, in the first instance, the players’ own practical ways of interacting in the game sessions. This means a focus on both the ways that they behave on-screen, in the game-worlds, while simultaneously being attentive to how the players formulate these actions. This is not to say that the players’ talk provide on-screen actions with their “definite” sense. Rather, such formulations are part of the ongoing game play activity, and because a formulation “becomes a part of the selfsame occasion of interaction, [it] becomes another contingency of that interaction” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 344-345), meaning that it may be further negated, contested, appreciated or negotiated in a myriad ways.

Explication

Ethnomethodology does not furnish social reality with an additional “layer” of explanation, on top of the understandings that members’ already show each other. Rather, ethnomethodology “[...] just brings to light what is already available for all to see; it is, then, just an eye-opener” (ten Have, 2004, p. 146).⁵ This can be related to Wittgenstein’s “therapeutic” project in philosophy (Wittgenstein, 1953), where philosophical conceptualizations are ultimately shown to bring confusion to a world that is, for practical purposes, *already* understood (cf. Coulter, 1989). If we see the social world as understood-in-common-for-practical-purposes, the objective for analyses is not to furnish “another” understanding, but rather to unpack the procedures members have for making sense in the first place. In other words, “the concepts that ethnomethodologists pursue are not part of a causal *explanation* of events and action, but of a procedural *explication*; they are ‘procedurally descriptive’” (ten Have, 2004, p. 146). This implies picking apart and showing the constituent practices that make up specific activities, and describing the ways that members practically engage in their “work.”

What you can do, as a researcher, is to demonstrate how the world is demonstrably understood in particular and local circumstances. This means, for example, describing the ways in which players in an internet café are “showing someone how to play” and “following instructions of how to play” in its interactional detail, bringing to the fore the ways in which actions are produced and recognized, that is, are accountable (Garfinkel, 1967) *as* “instructions” and “following instructions”. It does not mean showing “teacher” and “novice” as

stable categories and identities, but as modes of acting, and of showing the practical procedures for acting in such a way that it is identifiable as “the work of instructing how to play” and “the work of following instructions on how to play.”⁶

Ethnomethodological indifference

The policy of ethnomethodological indifference plays an important part in the present studies. It is an operationalization of ethnomethodology’s insistence on the primacy of the member’s own perspectives of their affairs. This means leaving aside any judgment on the “adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practical success or consequentiality” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 344) of a member’s accounts of formal structures.⁷ There is no room for normative or prescriptive accounts of what members *should* be doing in order to conduct their affairs in “better” ways (but see Button, 2000 for a discussion of how ethnomethodology can be incorporated into the design of technology). The phenomena being studied are the ways in which members’ organize their activities; however it is that they are doing so.

This means “bracketing” and being “indifferent” to any other *possible* ways of understanding members’ practices

[...] the adoption of the device of bracketing allows one to get away from asking whether things really are the way members of the society say they are in order that one may examine what members of the society say they are and how they satisfy themselves that things are in that way. (Sharrock & Andersson, 1986, p. 106)

It is not a question for these studies, for example, to answer whether or not a player is “correct” in categorizing a co-player as a “noob” (see study III). Instead, what *can* be studied is the way that categorizing someone as a “noob” functions as a resource for gaming activities. Categorizations of an activity (of the game play or of the players) should be the players’ own, rather than categories imposed *on* the activity from outside of the setting. The policy prescribes that the researcher be indifferent to the *possible* ways that players or game play should be characterized, instead focusing on the *actual* ways in which this is done.

One such *possible* way of describing the players is as being children, adolescents or teenage boys. While in some sense all the participants of this study belong to one or more of these categories, they can simultaneously be described in innumerable other ways (Sacks, 1974). This does not mean that every possible categorization is equally important *for the participants* in organizing their game

play. It is undeniable that the players at the cafés are almost exclusively teenage boys, and that they therefore, in this sense, constitute a specialized subset of those who play games (see Juul, 2009). In studies of games and gamer culture, issues of differences in gaming preferences and the exclusion of particular groups (older players, female players) from gaming has been a frequent topic (Crawford & Gosling, 2005; Enevold & Hagström, 2009; Fron, Fullerton, Morie, & Pearce, 2007; Jenkins & Cassel, 1999; Kafai, Heeter, Denner, & Sun, 2008; Schott & Horrell, 2000; Wakeford, 1999). To what extent the special social characteristics of particular players are relevant to the analysis of their gaming interaction is, however, a different question. While it may be true that, for example, a group of girls would play the games differently, it is not necessarily so (cf. Evaldsson, 2003; Goodwin, 2006). Analytically, that the participants are male teenagers “[...] is bracketed off and not used as an explanatory resource in describing the organization of sequences of action” (Butler, 2008, p. 114). In the ways that players interact when playing, they do not make their membership in the categories “child”, “teenager” or “male” an issue. There are moments when these categories *do* come into play (for example a player being told by a parent, on the phone, to stop playing and come home) but they are not ubiquitously relevant. The analytical focus in these studies has been on how players in gaming demonstrate gaming competence in various ways, and the categories of “competent” and “incompetent” player feature prominently in the players’ interaction. This is not to say that “masculinity” or “age” could never be used as analytical categories when examining the present data. Rather, that in doing the analyses, it was discovered that “competence” was a much more pressing and relevant matter for the players than age or masculinity ever was.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

In this thesis, conversation analysis (CA) is used as an important methodology, more than anything else. Conversation analysis shows how recorded data can be obtained, transcribed and analyzed in ways that concur with ethnomethodological standpoints, even though there are important differences (see for example Crabtree, 2000; Lynch, 1993). While CA spans many areas of interactional behavior, a foundational one, and the one of the greatest analytical importance for these studies, is how CA can be used to analyze participants’ own practices for demonstrating understanding and intersubjectivity (Moerman & Sacks, 1988).

Conversation analysis and interaction analytically oriented ethnomethodology focuses on the sequential ordering of utterances and gestures. The reason for this is “[...] the recognition that, in a variety of ways, the production of some current conversational action proposes a here-and-now definition of the situation to which subsequent talk will be oriented.” (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 5). All utterances are produced in relation to the structural ordering of utterances preceding it, and likewise provide a resource for the production of relevant next actions by participants (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 288). “No empirically occurring utterance ever occurs outside, or external to, some specific sequence” (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 6) and Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974, p. 728) claim that “generally, a turn’s talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn’s talk”, with specific techniques have to be employed in order to direct an utterance at talk that occurs in turns earlier than that. Also, relating an utterance to a prior utterance is a manifestation of the speaker’s analysis and understanding of that prior utterance (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 8). This orientation gives interactants and analyst alike a resource for understanding an utterance. In other words: “[...] speakers understand an utterance by reference to its turn-within-sequence character provides a central resource for both the participants and the overhearing analyst to make sense of the talk.” (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 7).

Two turns of talk that structurally fit together, where one is regularly produced after the other, is called an *adjacency pair* (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). These are ubiquitous in talk-in-interaction (the most obvious being a question/answer pair). An adjacency-pair is an easily recognizable instance of what in its general form is called sequential implicativeness of a turn (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The production of a first pair-part normatively requires the subsequent production of a second pair-part (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). Producing a relevant second pair part of an adjacency-pair displays the orientation, analysis and understanding of the first pair part in-and-through its production (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, pp. 297-298). The sequential production, or lack thereof (what Schegloff, 1968, calls “notably absent”) comprises a *proof procedure* (Sacks et al., 1974) that the participant or analyst can use in order to give an account of just how members themselves *manifest* understanding. The linking of next actions to preceding ones ties into the general notion of the reflexive character of interaction, that actions “build” the social scenes (and thereby their rational, observable and reportable character) of which they are part. This essentially sequential structure of human interaction has been the

prime analytical beacon for the analyses, building on the notion of actions being ordered so that they are both “context sensitive”, that is, produced in relation to preceding actions, and “context renewing”, that is, the action produced in itself provides a new contexture for actions that follow it (Sacks et al., 1974). In this way, interaction displays properties of reflexivity (Garfinkel, 1967).

Lynch (2011), however, highlights the fact that in order to talk about an event, action or utterance as *something*, it must have been seen to be that something in the first place. The participants *demonstrate* understanding of a prior turn’s talk in their next, but this does not tell the analyst the methods used by the participant for arriving at *that* formulation, rather than another. Therefore, the next turn “proof procedure” needs to be used in conjunction with a prior familiarity with the setting: “Unless the analyst can follow what the participants are doing and saying, a current ‘turn’ will provide little leverage for deciphering the sense and pragmatic import of prior ‘turns.’” (Lynch, 2011, p. 555).

The sequential next-positioned linkage between any two actions is a critical resource by which a first speaker can determine the sense that the second speaker has made of his or her utterance (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 8). The sequential organization of situated interaction is neatly summarized by Heath & Hindmarsh (2002, pp. 105-106):

In interaction participants produce their actions with regard to the conduct of others, and in particular the immediately preceding action or activity. In turn, their action forms the framework to which subsequent action is oriented. So for example, participants produce actions with regard to the prior action and the frame of relevancies that it establishes; moreover, it is understood by virtue of its location with regard to the preceding action(s). Actions are also prospectively oriented, designed to encourage, engender, even elicit subsequent action, which in turn form the basis to the participants’ assessment of each others’ and their own conduct

In this way, members can use the sequential ordering of actions (utterances, gestures, gaze and the use of material artifacts, for example) as resources for understanding and reflexively producing the on-goings of the situation. Such resources are often dubbed as *semiotic resources* or *semiotic fields* (Goodwin, 2000, p. 1494). As the orientation to the sequential organization of actions is a powerful resource (i.e. *method*) for understanding-and-producing interaction, it

also becomes a topic for ethnomethodological analysis. The expansion of the conversation analytical framework into multimodal interaction provides new avenues for analysis. Gestures and gaze have been shown to organize interaction in intricate ways, for example, through projecting the end of a turn or through selecting next speakers (Mondada, 2007b), and for displaying mutual orientation (Goodwin, 1981). Also, posture has been described as both reflective of an ongoing conversation, as well as in itself being an influential resource in its organization (Schegloff, 1998). Video recordings enable the detailed sequential analysis of embodied as well as verbal interaction (Goodwin, 2000; Heath, 1986; Heath & Luff, 2000; Jordan & Henderson, 1995; Mondada, 2007b, 2011). This becomes a necessary condition for being able to study how on-screen action, talk and embodied actions are employed in gaming interaction. Studies of sense-making practices in various settings, ranging from control rooms (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Suchman, 1997) to computer gaming (Keating & Sunakawa, 2010), document how participants engage in interaction across multiple arenas of action, and how they conduct their work simultaneously on computer screens and through verbal and embodied means. One important aspect of this sorts of multimodal analysis, is to consider the participants' own analyses of their multimodal interaction and how it in itself reflexively provides the intelligibility of actions (Mondada, 2006a). In this way, behavior across multiple modalities are embedded (Goodwin, 1981) in each other into coherent actions.

METHOD

The principal method of this dissertation involves the recording and analyzing of naturally occurring gaming interaction. The guiding principle of this work has been to study computer gaming “in the wild” (see Hutchins, 1995), that is to study gaming activities as they are organized from “within,” by the people playing *while* they are playing. To this end, video recordings that serve as data for the present studies have been collected at internet cafés, using video cameras and, occasionally, video capture software.

SETTING

The data collection for these studies was conducted in two internet cafés. These places differ somewhat in their size, style, and mood, but their basic function is the same: to rent out computers by the hour for multiplayer gaming. The internet cafés where the recordings took place are both located in Stockholm’s city centre. Internet cafés in Stockholm’s city centre vary in size, and the biggest seat over 200 players, and in relation to this, the cafés I used for recordings were small and medium-sized. The primary reason for recording at two different cafés was that I wanted to use screen capture software to complement at least parts of the recordings. This uses considerable processing power, and I therefore I sought a second café that housed computers that would be able to handle this (the second café had somewhat newer computers).

The first of these cafés is a combined internet café, gaming club and game shop, selling tabletop and role-playing games. The café houses around 30 computers in its front room, adjacent to the “shop” part of the locale. Downstairs, a labyrinthine basement is home to a wide variety of gaming clubs for tabletop

gaming, role-playing games and digital gaming on arcade cabinets. The second place in which recordings took place is devoted entirely to pc gaming, with around 120 computers in four rooms.

At both of the internet cafés, the majority of players were teenage boys, aged 13 to 19. This age bracket constituted the vast majority of customers, even though there were exceptions. No formal quantification has been done, but girls were overwhelmingly absent from both of the cafés, which is consistent with studies of female gamers in other “public” contexts (see Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Jansz & Martens, 2005; Lazzaro, 2008). Of those girls that were present, many were there in the company of male (boy) friends. They were not usually engaged in playing games, but rather participated as bystanders (see also Crawford, 2011). Bruce and Rutter (2003) trace the dominance of males in these contexts to the historical development of gaming in public places, where games were played in traditionally male-dominated places such as pubs or arcade halls. Together with a gendered stereotype of the male, teenage computer gamer, a male-dominated games industry and “the competitive and masculine nature of public gaming spaces” (Bryce & Rutter, 2003, p. 8) this creates a “circular and reinforcing process whereby stereotypical representations of gaming and its associated spaces place and reinforce restrictions on female access and participation.” (Bryce & Rutter, 2003, p. 9). Such limitations may, slowly, be dissolving as female game players appropriate spaces that were previously unavailable to them (Taylor & Witkowski, 2009).

There were older customers at the cafés, some of whom played games, but who also used the cafes’ other facilities, such as word-processing and printing. During evenings and *night gibbs* the demography of the cafés changed somewhat, with an influx of older players.⁸ Activities at the cafés are, in this sense, rhythmical (Apperley, 2010), in that the number and type of customers vary with the time of day as well as term-schedules in schools. From late afternoon, as well as during school holidays, the cafés became extremely crowded, which effectively hindered video recordings. Also, especially in the second café, the manager was weary that recordings would be a disturbance to customers and staff, which was cited as a reason for restricting recordings to the daytime.

The customers usually attended nearby schools, taking the opportunity to play with their friends after school hours, during recess or simply skipping classes in order to play computer games. Some lived in suburban areas far from Stockholm’s city centre, and the cafés thereby provided a geographically central place for classmates to play together after school before going commuting home

in separate directions. Others, still, travelled to the cafés after school in order to play games (and possibly do other things around the city centre). In all, this emphasized the role of internet cafés as third places (Gajadhar et al., 2009; Oldenburg, 1991) in the lives of gamers, a sociable place away from home and school. The players usually paid 15-20 Swedish Kronor (ca. 1,5-2 €) per hour of gaming, prepaid into personal accounts managed by the cafés staff, and, when playing in afternoon, it was quite common for players to only play for an hour or two.

PARTICIPANTS AND GAMES PLAYED

In total, 53 players were recruited for participation in video recordings. The players that participated in the recordings were in the age bracket of 15 to 19 years of age (one player is 21 years old), and they represent a subset of the ages of players at the cafés.⁹ The decision to record only players in this age-range was due to the possibility for them to consent to being recorded themselves, without a need for obtaining permission from their parents. All of the participants are male, but one.¹⁰ The selection of participants was guided primarily by pragmatic considerations. While there were groups of players that thereby were excluded from participating in the study (those under 15 and those playing in very large groups, which made video recording them problematic), the recordings document the predominant group of players, the one that most prominently set the mood for the cafés.

The players were approached and asked to participate in the study in one of two ways: either as they entered the café, or after they had already commenced playing (the latter was more frequent). I actively sought out groups of players that were seated so that the camera would be able to capture as much of their activity as possible (see below regarding the practical procedures for recording). This meant that I generally approached groups of two or three players, seated next to, or in close proximity to each other. In these cases, I did not change the players seating arrangements, and they chose freely what games to play.¹¹ In a few early recordings, single players were recorded, even though they were still engaged in multiplayer gaming, and interacted with bystanders while playing. Most of the recorded game sessions ended with the players either running out of time (i.e. money in their account) or because they had to return to school or get back home.

The players that I approached and asked if they would consider being recorded were, for the most part, surprised and a little confused about my motives for wanting to do this. I explained my basic aims of studying interaction in computer gaming, being careful to explain that I had no interest in finding out whether or not the games “influenced” the players in any negative (or for that matter positive) direction, but that I was interested in finding out “what it is people do when they play computer games together at internet cafés.” After explaining my interest in verbal and on-screen interaction, the players often joked about both the amount of profanities I would hear, providing me with vivid examples of discourse ridden with cursing and *leetspeak* in a typical gamesque fashion.¹² A frequent question was whether or not the recordings would be shown on TV, something they often hoped was the case.

The participants mostly played a few select games, even though a wide variety of games were available at the cafés. All of the games played in the recordings are multiplayer games of one of the other variant. The opponents in the games are controlled by the computer (*PvE* or *Player vs. Environment*) or by other players (*PvP* or *Player vs. Player*), but hybrid forms also exist. Online role-playing games (*MMORPGs*) were very popular, with games such as *World of Warcraft* (WoW; Blizzard, 2004) and *Warhammer Online* (Mythic Entertainment, 2008) being the most frequently played. In these games, players develop their online characters over a long period of time (several years in some cases), sharing a persistent online world with other players. They can be played both solo and in collaboration with other players.

In real-time strategy-games (*RTS*) the players build military bases and units in an attempt to defeat the opponent. The player sees the game-world from above and maneuvers several units simultaneously. Usually, resources have to be harvested in order to be able to build new units, highlighting an economic aspect of game play. *Command & Conquer: Tiberium Wars* (EA Los Angeles, 2007) is the only RTS being played in the data.

In *multiplayer online battle arena-games* (*MOBA*), a derivative of RTS-games, the player controls a single character, which they develop over the course of a single game (most commonly between 30-45 minutes). The players engage both player-controlled opponents as well as computer controlled monsters, the goal being to advance across the game-world and conquer the opponent’s base at the other end. *Defence of the Ancients* (*Dota*; Icefrog, 2005), as well as other varieties

of *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002) were the most frequently played games of this genre.

In first person shooters, such as *Counter Strike* (Valve Corporation, 2003), as well as several variants of this, *Call of Duty 3* (Treyarch, 2006); *Team Fortress 2* (Valve Corporation, 2007) and *Left 4 Dead* (Valve Corporation, 2008) the players each control an avatar, and the player sees the game-world from that avatar's perspective (i.e. a first-person view of the game world). Generally, the players win by scoring more kills (*frags*) than their opponents, or by completing some specific task (such as placing a bomb on a specific spot in *Counter-Strike*).

Ethical considerations

The research project has undergone external ethical review. The participants were given information about the project and its aims prior to beginning recording, and gave their written consent to participate. The players were informed that they would be de-identified in research publications, meaning that made-up names would be used. Also, the players were told that, in those cases where images would be used, their faces would be altered so that they could not be identified. This was accomplished either through blurring of images or through using drawings.

After passing along information and consent forms, I ensured that the participants took the time to read them as well as answering any questions they had. There were no participants who, after having read the form, objected to being part of the recordings, and generally very few who did not want to be part of the video recording once I asked them. Those that did decline generally did so because they were leaving shortly.

In most cases, the participants displayed a distinct lack of interest in what was written on the information slip. I did explain to them that their identities would be concealed, and that my interest in their actions was confined to their activities at the cafés. The general lack of interest of the formal and ethical aspects of the recording process may be considered something of an ethical problem in itself. Most of the time, the participants would not bring the information slip with them when they left, but mostly left it in front of the computer or gave it back to me immediately after reading it (despite my assurance that they could keep it if they wished so). However, given that they were given written and verbal information regarding the voluntary aspects of participation, the use of recordings for research purposes only, and that they would be unidentifiable in any publication, they were given all the necessary information to consent or to

object to taking part in the research. This naturally trades upon the participants' agency and their own ability to judge the information given to them, in effect treating their partaking in the research just as I would an adult's (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

I also informed the participants that they would be given the opportunity to review the video recordings afterwards in order to point out sections that they did not want to be included in the data. This never happened, with the exception of two players who wanted to review and study closely their own in-game actions (that had been recorded through the video capture software) for the purpose of improving their skills.

RECORDINGS

In total, ca. 28 hours of video was recorded, in a total of 24 gaming session. The distribution of players, games and type of play can be seen in Table 1. Seven players participated in more than one game session. The recordings contain a wide range of gaming. Playing World of Warcraft, for example, varied in whether it was played solo or in a group, if there were any co-players or spectators physically present (and if so, how the participants were seated), if it was played against the computer or against one or more human opponents, and of how the outcome of the players' performance was measured. The effect of documenting the players' own organization of their game play, rather than influencing which games were played and with whom, means that the resulting data covers a wide range of configurations of players and types of game play.

The work of recording gaming sessions was more or less the same in both café settings, although there were some technical improvements made for the second one. Sessions 1-9 took place at the first café, sessions 10-24 at the second. Sessions 1-9 are the only part of the data used in Study I.¹³ An overview of the recorded sessions can be found in table 1. One or two video cameras were used across all the recorded sessions. Most of the time, one of these functioned as a "primary" camera, positioned so that it captured as much of the participatory framework as possible. This meant an over-the-shoulder or oblique angle, showing the players' heads, shoulder and torsos, as well as their screens. Often, this view would also include the players' hands. In a two-player setup, this allows for the use of only one camera whilst still being able to capture the most prominent modalities of interaction. External microphones were used to capture audio.

Table 1. Overview of recorded gaming sessions

Session number	Number of players in camera view	Games played	Type of play	Length of recording
1	2	WoW	Solo PvE	0:45
2	2	WCIII – Angel Arena	PvE/PvP	0:44
3	2	Dota	PvE	0:52
4	2	WoW	Solo PvE	0:38
5	1	WoW	Solo PvP	0:18
6	2	WC III – mod	PvE	0:42
7	1-2	Dota	PvE/PvP	1:18
8	2	WoW	Solo PvE	0:10
9	3	WoW	PvE, PvP, Solo PvE	4: 30
10	2	Rune	PvP	0:10
11	2	Counter-Strike, surf mod	PvP	1:46
12	2	Counter-Strike; Team Fortress II	PvP	0:58
13	5	Dota, Warhammer Online	PvP	1:48
14	2	Team Fortress II	PvP	0:24
15	3-4	WCIII – Heroline; Dota; Counter-Strike (various mods)	PvP	2:18
16	3	WoW, Dota	PvE	1:36
17	2	WoW	PvE	0:10
18	3	Call of Duty 3; Command & Conquer 3	PvP	1:02
19	2-5	WCIII – Dota	PvP	1:15
20	2	WoW	PvP	1:05
21	2	WoW, Counter Strike; WCIII – Dota	PvP	1:43
22	2	Counter Strike	PvP	0:45
23	2	Left 4 Dead	PvP	1:28
24	3	Counter-Strike	PvP	0:58
Total				27,5 h

In order to understand practical and local contingencies of social action, of any setting, “[...] we must, metaphorically, move the camera to eye level.” (Livingston, 1987, p. 22, in ten Have, 2004, p. 160). This is related to ethnomethodology’s insistence on taking the “members’ perspective” of the activities that are studies. It can also, I claim, be taken literally as a practical methodological maxim: in order to study participation in game playing the recordings, to some extent, attempt to emulate the participants’ point of view in what amounts to an “approximation of a *participant’s perspective*” (ten Have, 2004, p. 160, original italics). The key here is that the recordings approximate *a* participant’s perspective, not that it captures a specific participant’s point of view. This methodological principle is thereby not about capturing a “geometrical”

first-person perspective, but rather the aim is to record a social scene so that the semiotic resources that are constitutive of that scene are recoverable in later viewings.

The side or “over the shoulder” position of the camera mimics the viewpoint of an observer of the gaming session. This position is one that allows a bystander access to what is going on in the screen, as well as communication with the one handling the game’s interface. This way of framing the gaming situation is therefore one that is endogenous to the setting. It displays, more or less, the same things as an observer would see. This is not meant to make the point that the camera is just another observer, but that its point of view allows for inspection of gaming much in the same way that a bystander would.¹⁴

A secondary method of recording on-screen interaction, always used in conjunction with a primary video camera, was using video capture software (this was done only in the second period of fieldwork). This software allows real-time recording of whatever is shown on the screen directly to external hard drives. This allows for a “perfect” recording of on-screen interaction (i.e. every pixel on the screen is recorded in the file). However, while using it is normally a simple procedure, in the field conditions of the café this was not completely unproblematic. First of all, it required that I intervened a lot more (in order to handle the software) or had to instruct the players on how to use it. This disrupted the players’ game play to some extent. Second, it restricted the games that were possible to play, as well as limited their choice of computers to the ones with pre-installed video capture software (this was due to incompatibility of the screen capture software and the software for handling the licenses for the games at the café’s). Both secondary cameras and the screen-captures were used as a complementary source of data when the details of the recordings of the first camera were insufficient.

Reflections on Video Recordings

There are several features of co-located computer gaming that warrant the use of video recording as the primary method. First of all, interaction in the internet cafés goes on simultaneously in on-screen and off-screen space, and is thus organized through multimodal semiotic resources. Players dynamically integrate actions in different modalities in order to display accountable action, and the details of this integration is difficult to capture in field notes based on observations (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). A video camera, when adequately positioned, has the possibility of recording this sort of multimodal interaction as

an integrated “package”. A second feature of co-located computer gaming is the often frantic pace of the interactions. The temporal dimension of computer gaming is, on a basic level, set in the design of the game: players have to keep up with it or suffer consequences, such as losing the game. A video recording captures the minute details of game play to be preserved, allowing for multiple re-viewings, where parameters such as speed can be altered to increase the visibility of the minutiae of the interaction in the gaming sessions (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Recording means preserving interactional details, something that would have proven hard to do using, for example, field notes written “on the fly” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Using video recordings can thereby “be seen as an effort to at least partially repair the unsatisfactory qualities of ordinary ethnographic descriptions” (ten Have, 2004, p. 130). Even though video recordings have their definite shortcomings, and can never claim to capture the “totality” of interaction, they inscribe lived interaction in ways that is not possible through other methods. This line of reasoning should not, of course, be seen as a blanket dismissal of interviews or observational methods when conducting ethnomethodological research, and Garfinkel’s (1967) foundational studies is a case in point. Rather, it should be seen as a highlighting of the unique properties of video recordings for the purposes of interaction analysis.

There were several occasions where the quality of the recordings was insufficient for analytical work, which in turn structures what sorts of questions that are possible ask. This, in part, has to do with the technical difficulty of video-recording computer screens, but also with the side-by-side configuration of players, where one player would often occlude the visibility of another’s on-screen or off-screen action. At times, this is also related to the specific configurations of players and computers. While the players would prefer to sit next to each other, sometimes other set-ups were used, which hampered the details of the recordings. One aspect of the gaming that was consistently left out of the recordings was the game-sound. The players would use headphones at their own discretion.¹⁵ Even though game-sound may be an important resource for collaborative action in computer games, it was deemed too difficult to capture.

Using video, for research or any other purpose is a skilled practice in itself (Mondada, 2009). In several studies of the use of video in a wide variety of activities, the ways that camera operators use their equipment reflexively constitutes the scene recorded as activities of particular kinds (Broth, 2009; Mondada, 2006b). That recording in this way frames (in literal and metaphorical

senses) the actions that takes place is a feature of *any* work with video (Mondada, 2009), and is not a unique feature of recordings for research purposes. The embodied production of video recordings, as well as editing (such as juxtaposing multiple images through the use of split screen) and later practices for viewing it (such as using slow motion) are practices for the “configuring and assembling of relevant details” of the scene in such a way as to constitute is as an object for analyses (Mondada, 2006b, p. 56). In this way, how research recordings are produced is a topic for ethnomethodological investigation, not only as a matter of methodology, but as a proper domain of research in its own right.

The recording preserves the camera operator’s interpretation of the scene. This is the case both when using a static camera on a tripod (Laurier & Philo, 2005) and when cameras are moved, panned and zoomed, where “the camera sees and indeed anticipates the unfolding production of action as it is locally accomplished” (Mondada, 2006b, p. 58). In the present task of recoding ongoing computer gaming, to be able to capture the phenomenal details of these sessions meant being sensitive to their ongoing production. When using static cameras, this meant anticipating the movements of participants and the sorts of participation frameworks that they would orient to during the course of the session. When using dynamic cameras, this sensitivity to the situated order of the gaming is revealed, for example, in how I zoomed in when participants jointly focused on some detail on the screen or use pan to capture a player’s dialogue with a bystander. Far from being a natural “window” to an objective world, the camera operator’s actions are part and parcel of the production of this world, as is the rest of the assemblage of practices that goes into parsing the lived gaming into fragments that can be used for specific analytical purposes in individual studies. Indeed, this view of working with video recording as the researcher’s practical work

[...] problematizes what “data” are. Although metaphors of “recording,” “capturing,” “acquiring,” and “gathering” are often used to speak about the constitution of video corpora in the social sciences, video data are neither “offered,” “found,” nor “given.” Rather, they are actively assembled by a range of practices: they concern the shooting of videos during fieldwork, and include negotiating the activities to be video recorded, choosing the adequate technical equipment, installing the equipment within the ordinary context of the action to be recorded, and actually filming it. (Mondada, 2009, p. 69)

Importantly, then, “capturing data” is a “gloss” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970) and a shorthand for all the practical work that goes into video production and editing for research purposes. Recordings are not “naturally occurring data” (data do not somehow materialize, but takes considerable work), but the activities being recorded are “naturally organized ordinary activities” (Garfinkel, 1991), and the situated production of these activities is, in the first place, an underlying condition for the possibility of transliterating them into “data” (Lynch, 2002). But, it should also be pointed out that the recorded gaming sessions were “natural” in the sense that they were not premised on the presence of a researcher, as would be the case when using experiments or interviews (Potter, 2002).

Camera effects

A recurrent objection to the use of video recordings in social science is that of the *observer’s paradox* (Labov, 1972). This states that whenever an event is observed, the fact of that observation changes the event, making an “unbiased” view impossible. In interaction analysis, this “problem” is solved in a local fashion, where “being observed” or “noticing the camera” is not seen a ubiquitous feature of the interaction. Rather, “being observed”, and changing your behavior in relation to this, is seen as an interactional activity in itself. If being observed influences the activity under observation, this will be available to members (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). They will, in other words, display and make accountable this influence to each other. There were some such occurrences during the recordings. For example, after a player had uttered some extreme profanity in response to an event in the game, his co-player reminded him, humorously, that they were being recorded. Displaying an orientation towards being recorded was therefore not primarily signs of discomfort or unease with the camera, but rather, the camera could create new possibilities for playful interaction in the game-sessions. In this sense, players would “exploit the camera as a resource for their own activities [...] accomplishing another action related to the camera as inaugurating a stage or a scene” (Mondada, 2006b, pp. 61, italics removed). Being recorded was therefore a local and public accomplishment rather than some inner and private state. This is of course not to say that camera-induced changes in behavior were, in every case, recognizable when viewing recordings.

But, an important factor to take into consideration in this discussion is how gaming, in itself, is an activity that is (in) famous for its immersive and

engrossing qualities. The sorts of computer games played at the internet cafés (predominantly first-person shooters, real-time strategy and online role-playing games) require active and focused engagement by the players in order for them to be successful. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that the players would only intermittently orient to the camera.

OBSERVATIONS AND INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

I spent considerable time at the cafés, even when not recording, engaged in observing and talking to players. I actively sought to talk and interact with both the participants of the recorded sessions, and other people present at the cafés. It is difficult to draw a definite line between observation and interviewing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), especially since much of the informal interviewing consisted of the kinds of “shop talk” that goes on between players, such as what games people like to play, where they come from, what school they go to and the like. The observations and informal interviewing should not be seen as a “formal” method in this study, but rather as an auxiliary means for gaining an understanding of the people that inhabited these places, and their practices of playing computer games. This should be seen in the light of the overarching aim to explicate the players’ interactional practices as endogenously organized from within the gaming activities. With this in mind, the reason for observing and talking to the players was not to correlate practical gaming actions with the players’ backgrounds or biographies. Even though talking to players furnished me with narratives of who they were, where they came from, why they were at the café or what they liked to play, this information has primarily been used to gain a familiarity with the context in which the gaming took place, rather than giving insights on the practical actions of gaming.

The reasons for conducting observations, and striking up conversations with players, were two. First of all, they served towards building rapport with customers and staff at the café. By talking to the people present, I was able to make my presence and motives for being in the cafés known, trying to explain, for example, how I was not there to study the negative “effects” of gaming (something that many players suspected at first). Secondly, observing people playing games together allowed me to get a sense of the kinds of ways in which games were played. This could then be used to furnish themes for the analysis of the recorded sessions. Taking part in some of the daily operations at the cafés allowed me to recognize routine practices of co-located gaming, such as

restricting visibility of your screen to other players (when competing against each other), of instructing novices on how to play, calling out cheaters or scolding co-players for not playing well enough. Thus, the case-by-case analyses in the empirical sections of this thesis are grounded in an understanding of recurrent activities in the cafés. Observations were conducted in one of two ways. Either, I roamed the rooms, looking at the players, as they played, and talking to them as well as to any bystanders, or I stayed seated and played games myself. This allowed other players to observe me, and initiate conversations in the same manner as I would, such as asking questions about what games I played and how experienced I was in playing them. Both of these sorts of conversations therefore traded on the internet café as a place for game spectatorship (cf. Taylor & Witkowski, 2009). Seated next to other players, the “mutual visibility” (Heath & Luff, 2000, p. 121) granted in part by the physical configuration of screens side-by-side, invited me to observe and discuss other’s on-screen activities. Also, even when not directly interacting with other players, being seated at a computer allowed me to overhear other players’ verbal intercourse, overhearing how they discussed everything from ongoing game play to school, parents, friends and foes and all the rest of their everyday dealings with their lives. The ways observations, overhearings and informal “shop talk” were conducted was thereby native to the cafés. In effect, they were not the product of a preconceived ethnographic methodology, but rather of the ordinary, routine and recurrent ways in which players at cafés inspect each others’ game play, and the ways in which their conversations take place in a public space.

The observations were accompanied by writing “jottings” (Emerson et al., 1995), which were then expanded into lengthier field notes. This was not, however, done extensively, and the field notes have not been a central part of the data. Primarily, writing down events, moods and my own reflections was done as a mnemonic device with the aim of remembering “key events and incidents” , (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 27) from the cafés. My focus during the periods of observation was on participating in various ways, building rapport and finding people who would be willing to be video recorded.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Apart from the first of the studies (where bodily action is in focus) the analysis of the cases has primarily been developed out of the players’ verbal interaction. When looking at the video, listening to the players’ conversation was the primary

means of locating episodes in the recordings that were considered “interesting”. This might create something of a “verbal bias,” positioning talk as primary over other modalities. However, once an episode had been deemed relevant for closer transcription and analysis, the full range of semiotic resources (Goodwin, 2000) that the players used in interaction was taken into account.

The studies that are part of this thesis all draw on excerpts from the recordings. Each study foregrounds some phenomena of gaming interaction by explicating its in-situ organization. Even though the analyses were done on a case-by-case basis, the excerpts were selected on the basis that they would show aspects of gaming that took place with some regularity. The extended periods of observations at the cafés, and the ethnographic familiarity with the setting that this brought, allowed for the selection of cases that are relatively common (even though they might show up only once or twice in the recordings). The selection of cases for analyses was necessarily an iterative process, where a selected portion of the recording could be transcribed in detail only to be left out at a later stage of the writing process.

The selection of cases from the recorded data was done on distinct basis depending on the aim of each study. In the first study, that investigates embodied collaborative action, cases were selected that illustrate how the players used their body in game play. The excerpts that were eventually included in the study show a range of bodily practices that the players routinely use to engage in various activities.

For the second study, professional vision (Goodwin, 1994) was the selected topic. Here, two cases were selected, one of an expert-novice and one of an expert-expert dyad. These two cases were picked out on the grounds that they would be able to show something of how vision becomes differentially topicalized in different constellations of players. The selected two cases, both viewed through the analytical framework of professional vision allows comparing the two cases in this respect.

The third study deals directly with the players practices for categorizing each other (Sacks, 1974), and for to differentiating between players of different skill. The excerpts included here were selected on the grounds that they show both explicit and implicit ways of positioning players as competent and incompetent. This means the analysis of cases that involve common ways of labeling players (*noob* and *imba*), as well as cases where such categories are inferred through the ways in which players assess in-game performance and progress.

The fourth study examines how blame is used by players, and a collection of instances of blaming is presented. These were often easy to locate in the recordings, as they often involved high-strung disputes between players. This study presents range of cases of blaming, each one illustrating a separate aspect of how blame is used on collaborative gaming.

TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

The recordings collected during fieldwork were transformed in several steps, from crude tapes and files to transcriptions. The video tapes were transformed into digital files. The recordings were then viewed and content logs (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) were written. These were crude representations of the goings-on in the video recordings, providing an overview of players' practices. They served as a sort of index for future reference, and were not used for any sort of systematic analysis in themselves. These logs marked possible "places of interest" for future research, time-coded comments linked to specific media files with recordings. They were written in an ad hoc fashion, not working from a predefined set of categories. The categories used were, naturally, glosses of the interaction which they represent, and each category functioned as a heading for episodes of, for example, "instruction," "positive assessments," "negative assessments," "taking over another player's controls" and "formulations of rules." These logs contain information regarding the use of different semiotic resources (such pointing), or players moving around in the room (i.e. they are not based solely on verbal interaction).

In order to make salient the interactional organization of the gaming practices more detailed transcripts were written when some part of the recording had been selected for further analysis. These transcripts provide, for an analyst, an "instruction" on how to see and hear a particular piece of data (Ashmore & Reed, 2000). They are thereby one of the tools of the trade in conducting interaction analysis, indispensable in exhibiting the detailed sequential ordering of actions in different modalities. For a reader, to whom a video recording is not provided, they instead stand proxy for the interaction in the recording. These transcripts underwent a process of gradual refinement, depending on the specific reason for their assembly. This is also reflected in the different texts, and the transcripts are not consistent between the different studies. Generally, the transcripts use notational conventions adapted from conversation analysis (Jefferson, 2004).

For the most part, the verbal interaction served as a basic “timeline” which other types of actions (e.g. gestural and on-screen actions) are related to in the transcripts. Using verbal action as a sole timeline for the transcription of multimodal interaction risks leading to “verbal bias” (cf. Mondada, 2006a), where talk is seen as analytically primary to actions in other modalities. However, because verbal actions were comparatively easy to understand when viewing recordings, they were used as a starting point for the development of more detailed transcripts of multimodal interaction. This is, perhaps, deceptive: even though verbal interaction may be an important part of co-located gaming, games are not played through verbal talk alone.¹⁶ Verbal accounts are not essential in providing a situation with its “order” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). Rather, accounts function as indexical discursive devices for doing specific things in the gaming.¹⁷ Talk *can* be used for, for example, asserting just what something on the screen really was, just as the meaning of talk (being necessarily indexical) can be found, by members, with reference to some aspect of the ongoing on-screen or off-screen interaction. Verbal and non-verbal actions are used situationally in the reflexive constitution of understanding.

Therefore, in order to understand what sorts of actions are undertaken in and through the talk, both the gameplay and other non-verbal actions were included in the transcripts. The level of detail in the transcripts varies, however, with the sorts of analysis being developed. The guiding principle in this has been to display how on-screen and off-screen actions are connected by the players in an interactional contexture, and in this the timing of actions in different modalities was paramount.

Transcription is “theory” (Ochs, 1979) in that it shapes what is available for analysis. What can be shown in a transcript is necessarily partial and dependent on the researcher’s questions and aims. There can never be a “neutral” transcript (Psathas & Anderson, 1990), and when transcribing, choices have to be made regarding for example the level of detail and the spatial organization of the transcript (Jordan & Hendersson, 1995). In conversation analysis, analysts should be careful not to “fetichize” the transcript, and use it instead of the recorded data (Ashmore & Reed, 2000). Representing multi-modal and technologically intensive interaction is especially challenging (Crabtree et al., 2006), and a number of different ways of representing these sorts of activities have been developed (see Broth, 2008; Goodwin, 2000; Heath & Luff, 2000; Jordan & Henderson, 1995; Lindwall, 2008; and Mondada, 2007a for different examples). Mondada (2007a) points out that transcripts should not be seen as

disembodied objects steeped in theory, but instead to see the transcription as a situated, technologically mediated, and skilled practice in its own right. In this perspective, “the indexicality of transcribing results from [...] mutual configuration between the emergent analytical aims of the transcript on the one hand and the technologically enhanced professional vision as well as the technical gestures of the transcriber on the other hand” (Mondada, 2007a, p. 819). Especially in representations of multimodal actions, where the researcher must move beyond many of the conventions of conversation analysis (e.g. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) and instead rely on more ad hoc practices of rendering interaction intelligible, transcription is an analytical achievement in itself (Mondada, 2007a). The transcripts included in the studies all attempt to show interaction in the full range of multimodal resources, including actions taking place on the screen. Care was taken to display the organization of the interaction through showing how verbal, bodily and on-screen actions were temporally related to each other. Still, this principle was subject to the analytical relevance of including a specific modality in the analysis. For example, in Study III, excerpt 4, the players are discussing the levels of their characters in World of Warcraft. Even though one of them is simultaneously engaged in playing the game, this does not have any demonstrable effect on their verbal conduct, and so the on-screen action is not included in the transcript.

Translation

Another step in the transformation from lived game playing to “publishable transcript” is translating the interaction into English. This was not done “word for word” but instead as translations of whole utterances. In this process, there are several things to take into account. One noticeable feature is that there is, in the players’ talk, considerable use of game-specific terminology, which in turn is almost universally derived from English terms in the first place. These are often lexicalized using Swedish grammar, most frequently through adding “-a” to English terms in order to transform them into Swedish verbs (a term in English, such as “to spawn-kill someone,” becomes “att spawnkilla någon”). In the English translation, this incorporation of English terms is lost. Code-switches are frequent, both generally in the players’ talk and specifically when reading out loud from the screen (see Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009, for a study of this). Such code-switches needed to be marked in transcripts and highlighted in the analysis in order for them to be available to someone reading the English translation. There are also terms in Swedish that are difficult to translate into

English in any context; the word *ju* is one such example (Heinemann, Lindström, & Steensig, 2011/in-press), and one which was used with great frequency. When part of the analysis, such terms demanded extra explicative work. Lastly, these teenagers' talk was shot through with slang, the nuances and connotations of which were often notoriously difficult to translate (see Andersson, 2007, for a study dealing with these issues). When it was analytically motivated, these terms were explicated in some detail as part of the analysis of the excerpt. The aim of translation was, throughout, to retain the variability in the players' talk, of translating colloquial talk in Swedish into English that adequately reflected this register, taking care to not translate "youthful" vernacular into more formal ways of speaking. Translation of these sorts of discursive material carry implications for the sort of categories and identities that the reader ascribes to the participants, and being sensitive to linguistic style is therefore part of the analytical work of inscribing interaction into a textual object (Buchholtz, 2007).

THE ANALYST AS A MEMBER

Even though I was present at the café for very different reasons than the rest of the customers, I did share the same interest in computer games as they did. Even though this extends to an academic interest in games and their relation to people's live-worlds, my practical interest in playing and enjoying the kinds of games that were played in the café provided a way of negotiating and gaining access and report with the participants. Because gaming, at least to the people playing at cafés, was frequently seen to be "misunderstood" by the larger community (by parents, teachers and in the public debate), I was careful to point out that I was not looking for any effects that games might have on players, but that my interest laid in the communicative practices of players. As a part of this, I was frequently asked what games I played myself. Many times, I thought of this as a kind of test of whether or not I really understood anything of what playing games is all about. To be able to portray myself as a competent and interested gamer was therefore part of my "presentation of self" at the cafés, and a way of gaining the participants' trust. Displaying competence in gaming was a way of ensuring that the customers knew that I had at least a basic insight into why and how games are played, and that I therefore could be trusted to not "ironically" (Watson, 1994) recast their gaming into common discursive tropes of games as causing violence, addiction and anti-social behavior (Buckingham, 2000)

In some situations I did, however, become “the adult on the monkey bars” (Butler, 2008, p. 58), an anomalous presence which had to be accounted for. Using cumbersome and highly visible camera equipment in an environment completely dominated by teenage boys put me in the spotlight for bouts of banter. Being a man with a camera, exhibiting a curious interest in the behavior of a group of minors minding their own business led to at least one player warning others of participating in the research because, as he claimed, “he’s a PEDOPHILE” (this was publicly announced for everyone at the café to hear). Even though this was done humorously, it exhibited an orientation to a peculiar aspect of my presence and to the sensitive nature of video recording children and teenagers (Aarsand & Forsberg, 2010).¹⁸ There were other ways in which I demonstrated my “strange” relation to the setting, for example through not providing minors with cigarettes with reference to being “at work”. This could to some degree be characterized as a “role conflict” (Adler & Adler, 1987, in de Laine, 2000), where on the one hand I strived attempted to participate and gain the players’ trust, while on the other hand needed to keep a professional distance to the field.¹⁹

A second, and analytically more important aspect of having a personal interest in computer gaming relates to the ethnomethodological principle of acquiring practical competence in the domain under study (a principle most commonly associated with ethnomethodological “studies of work”, see Garfinkel, 1986; Lynch, 1993). To anyone unfamiliar with the ways complex multiplayer games are played as a situated activity, the on-screen actions and the ways in which players simultaneously talk about these actions makes little sense. The discourse is filled with unfamiliar words, and the observer will have but vague ideas of why actions are being taken, what they mean and their consequences. In order to analyze these actions, the analyst must become familiar with how the games are played, and how it is talked about. For the analyst, this means gaining some level of competence in gaming practices that are the object of study, becoming a “vulgarly competent” practitioner (Francis & Hester, 2004; Garfinkel, 1996). The idea is that in order for the researcher to be able to make sense of actions and activities in a similar fashion as the participants themselves do, the analyst has to use the same sense-making practices (the *ethnomethods*) as the member themselves do. This methodological principle is variously called *the unique adequacy requirement of methods* (Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992), *acquired immersion* (Francis & Hester, 2004) or *vulgar competence* (e.g. Crabtree, 2001).

This is explained by Sharrock and Anderson (1986, pp. 95-96) in a discussion about Lynch's (1985) studies of laboratory work.

The capacity to see connections between the activities comprising a discipline in *inseparable* from a competence in that discipline. In the final analysis, what happens in laboratories is for those who really knows the business to say, and one cannot intelligible and accurately talk about what goes on in this or that lab without being able to talk shop talk, without being able to talk in the ways that comprise being capable of practice in this discipline and this means that a prominent feature of ethnomethodology's inquiry must be into what it is that comprises disciplinary competence

This is not to say that practitioners (the players in my case) always understand each other. Rather, demonstrating adequate understanding of specific events is a way for players to show that they are *competent* players. There are, then, several ways in which players may fail to demonstrate adequate understanding of events. To be "vulgarly competent" is something that needs to be continuously upheld and shown, but where the local circumstances define what sort of competence is called for. It "[...] is not a transcendent analytic skill but an occasioned requirement; one that must be satisfied on each and every occasion of work-study." (Crabtree, 2001, p. 24). For the analyst, a lack of competence on how to produce-and-understand the phenomena under study might lead to "ironic" or theory-driven accounts of the practices (cf. Watson, 1998), misconstruing the members' own practical understanding of their activities. Still, the degree of competence required of the analyst is debatable (ten Have, 2004) and, I argue, ultimately an empirical matter.

Francis and Hester refer to the methodological recommendation of fulfilling the unique adequacy requirement of methods as "acquired immersion" (Francis & Hester, 2004). They claim that "the point of such immersion is to acquire a working knowledge of the activities under study, such that the ethnomethodologist knows what the participants know, can see what they see, recognize the problems that they recognize and understand the implications of events in the ways they do (Francis & Hester, 2004, p. 178). Learning the reasoning practices of a specific activity is inseparable from learning that practice in itself (Livingston, 2006). Immersion in this case denotes a practical knowledge of the how members achieve their activities, and of learning how to participate in

the “language games” (Wittgenstein, 1953) of particular domains under study (see also Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). It does not mean that one has to be categorized as “teenager” or “gamer” or whatever category fits the participants in a specific study. It means being able to tell, from the practitioners’ point of view, what it is that they are doing. In game studies, especially, becoming a competent player as a requirement for analysis is a topic under some debate (see for example Aarseth, 2003; Crawford, 2011; Taylor, 2008), where some argue that gaming competence is not necessary for the analysis of gamer culture (Crawford, 2011), and may indeed hinder the development of critical analysis (Taylor, 2008). Still, for the detailed analyses of multimodal interaction in game play, it was a basic practical requirement: before having learnt how to play the games myself, it was simply impossible for me to understand what the players were doing.

As a practical requirement for analysis, gaining at least some of the skills and competencies that the participants exhibited took up considerable time and effort, which is not to say that learning how to play games is an unpleasant matter. I took up playing World of Warcraft as my premiere pastime, sometimes at the cafés, but more often at home. Games (pen-and-paper role playing games as well as computer games) had been a hobby of mine ever since I had learnt how to read, but with the onset of my research it became a much more substantial part of my life. Online role-playing games were the only type that was commonly played at the cafés that I was previously unacquainted with. Picking up the practical skills of this game was a matter of learning *how* to do it, rather than learning *of* how to do it. That is, I learnt how to play the game just as any other player ordinarily would. This included taking my first “baby steps” as a WoW-player during my first period of fieldwork, being socialized into new ways of seeing and acting by a helpful player-cum-teacher in a manner reminiscent of the instructive episode detailed in study II. Another requirement for being able to understand the players’ practices was learning the “shop talk” of the internet cafés, the special argot of the gaming practices (cf. Stoddart, 1974). This meant learning gaming terminology, updating my outdated register of “youthful slang” and familiarizing myself with leetspeak (Blashki & Nichol, 2005), elements of which were frequent in the players’ conversations.

SUMMARIES OF STUDIES

STUDY I: GAMING AS A SITUATED COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Björn Sjöblom (2008). *Human IT*, 9(3). 128-165

The games played at internet cafés are, almost invariably, games that are possible to play over the internet in “pure” online gaming, and indeed most players at the cafés claim to have the games available at home. Yet, players gather at Internet cafés in order to play them, places that, like other co-located gaming, are distinguished by how gaming is organized as a multimodal phenomenon. In co-located gaming, collaborative action is organized not only in the ways that players behave in the game (as avatar movement, position and actions, or through built-in text-chat) but also in the ways that players interact in “physical” space, through the use of talk, gesture and posture. Analyses are presented of how, first, collaborative action is organized in and through the use of this multitude of semiotic resources, and second, how this sort of gaming is accountable as collaborative action in the first place. This first study examines game playing as a situated and embodied phenomenon (Dourish, 2001; Suchman, 2007). Game playing is, in this perspective, much more than the perception of on-screen events: rather, players are participants in an ongoing collaborative and multimodal activity, in which the on-screen action is but one component.

The multi-facetted interactional nature of co-located gaming can be understood as the moment-by-moment assemblage of relevant semiotic fields in

contextual configurations (Goodwin, 2000). This enables the analysis to capture the fluid aspect of gaming interaction, where different communicative resources are dynamically invoked in communicative projects. This view of communicative interaction allows the players' local constructions of the gaming situation to be understood in their in-situ assemblage of semiotic fields.

Several semiotic resources, specific to co-located gaming, used for engaging in collaborative action, are highlighted in the article. Posture is one resource, as is looking at a co-player's screen, as well as pointing to it. Posture can be used as a way of demonstrating engagement in someone else's game play. This can be done by, for example, an expert player in instructing a novice, but it also enables a player in a team to cooperate with a team seated some distance away. Monitoring of co-players' screens is a ubiquitous phenomenon in these locales, enabled by the placement screens next to one another. The spatial configuration of machinery enables players not only to see other players' actions, but also to orient to them in them in various ways, for example through issuing instructions. On these grounds, the distinction between actions in "real" and "virtual" space can be questioned: rather, on-screen and off-screen actions are assembled in order to engage in specific interactional projects. Players are neither "inside" nor "outside" the game, but engaged in an embodied collaborative activity, of which on-screen actions are a crucial part.

The co-locatedness of multiplayer computer gaming thus enables players to mutually monitor each other, but also to remedy trouble found through this monitoring. Finding that a player needs to reconfigure his point of view on the game world (through for example scrolling of the screen) in order to find a specific in-game locating recurrently happens when two players directly see the screen. Co-location is a precondition for certain types of collaborative action in computer gaming. Engaging in this sort of interaction, where players can rely on semiotic resources available to them by virtue of being co-located, is possibly one of the allures of gaming at internet cafés. The mutual visibility and accountability of action creates a specific sort of gaming space that allows interaction impossible in "pure" online gaming. This sort of space enables the public display of gaming competence, of ways for players to show to co-players and onlookers that they are well-versed in the practices of playing. This includes such actions as criticizing co-players for faulty tactics or strategy, or by a player showing that he can foresee upcoming trouble.

STUDY II: PROFESSIONAL VISION IN CO-LOCATED COMPUTER GAMING

Björn Sjöblom. Submitted for publication

Computer games are, with few exceptions, visually mediated, and are normally played in and through actions on screens. While hearing certainly plays a role, vision is the *sine qua non* of gaming. This does not mean, however, that the visual features of computer games are understandable by anyone looking at the screen. Rather, learning what to see on the game-screen, and how to see it, is a competence specific to players of these games. Even though games may be designed for being easily learnable (cf. Gee, 2003), for a player to be competent means that he has to be socialized into “conventional” ways of seeing the game-screen. The perceptual skills required of the competent player is thereby not part of some “private” sphere of cognitive processing of visual stimuli, but rather available to other players in various ways: perception can be understood as fundamentally shared and public.

This is in line with Goodwin’s (1994) concept of *professional vision*. This concept has, for the most part, been used in discussions of skills and perception in different sorts of worksites, ranging from, archaeologists and policemen, to cattle-breeding, photography and engineering. The idea of professional vision entails the public instructability and accountability of perception in specific arenas of professional action (but is more seldom used in discussions of informal leisure activities such as gaming). Perceptual skills are parts of what constitutes specific professions, and membership in a professional category (as archaeologist, policeman etc.) rests on being able to make professionally adequate and relevant discriminations in a perceptual field, discriminations that differ from “lay” or “untrained” perception (Goodwin, 1994). This also means that an actor’s perception is subject to public scrutiny, that perception is *disciplined* (Stevens & Hall, 1998). Perceptual expertise can be discussed both in terms of *learning* how and what to see (socialization) as well as the public display, discussion and negotiation of these skills.

Two cases of computer gaming were analyzed in relation to these two aspects of professional vision. The first involves an experienced player attempting to instruct a first time player (of the game *Dota*) on what to see on the screen, in relation to the current state of the game and how to best progress in it. The second involves two experienced players, where one shows the other the correct ways of seeing the game after acting in a way that jeopardizes the success of the

team. Both of these examples involve the players' explicit topicalization of the visual elements of the game. In effect, they are not just showing each other what to do, but do so in relation to instructions on specific ways of perceiving the game. This is done both through *highlighting* specific parts of the screen (e.g. pointing to an on-screen icon) and through *coding* those parts (i.e. explicating the relevance that this icon has for the current events in the game). The two cases differ in important respects. In the expert-novice dyad, the novice accepted being instructed on how to perceive the game. In the expert-expert constellation, however, being instructed was understood as a much more controversial conversational exchange: to be corrected and instructed is considered the opposite of demonstrating expertise, which in this sort of computer gaming is largely about being able to act competently without external help.

In relation to the concept of professional vision, the article extends the prior use of the idea of vision as a public and accountable aspect of concerted action to include activities in highly "informal" contexts. Computer gaming is a leisure activity for the adolescents at these internet cafés, but perception and actions are accountable in much the same ways as they would be in a professional setting. Tight time-frames, fine-grained visual information, high stakes and the possibility of mutual monitoring of each other's actions make demonstrating skill and expertise paramount. At the same time, this accountability of action shows the way in which computer gaming is a decidedly moral enterprise. Players are constantly on the lookout for faults in their co-players' actions, making "noticings" of signs of failed perception and failed action. Indeed, part of the gamer's professional vision is that of being vigilant of co-players actions, correcting them and making sure that they act in "appropriate" ways.

Vision in gaming, far from being the application of cognitive schemata to visual "input" is part of the moral order of co-located gaming. It is moral and correct action, and it is in demonstrating the abilities to make the correct visual discriminations, that the player can *show* that he is a competent player. This is done first and foremost in doing the correct thing, but also, and importantly, of being able to point out when team mates are not doing so.

Secondly, this article shows how vision, as a taken-for-granted aspect of competent action is explicitly topicalized when players have run into trouble. Ideally, vision should not become topicalized *at all*—noticing another players' visual skills is done in reference to things that have gone wrong in his gaming. A good player may be praised for an expert performance, but it will be his actions that are highlighted, rather than the way that he has *seen* things on the screen.

Seeing things in the prescribed, taken-for-granted and conventional manner is, for a group of experts, vision *should* be “ordinary” and “at a glance”—it should not have to be explicated and topicalized in the first place.

STUDY III: PARTICIPANT CATEGORIZATIONS OF GAMING COMPETENCE: NOOB AND IMBA AS LEARNER IDENTITIES.

Björn Sjöblom & Karin Aronsson. Forthcoming in J. Sefton-Green & O. Eerstad (Eds.). *Learning Lives*. Cambridge University Press.

The third study of this thesis revolves around the ways in which players explicitly and implicitly categorize each other as competent and incompetent players. This distinction is one of clear importance to players, as much of their verbal interaction can be understood to involve work to position themselves as skillful practitioners. Expertise is shown not only in how the players behave in the games, but also in how they talk about their game play, either as formulations of ongoing game play, or as talk *about* their gaming activities. Competence can also be shown *in* the ways that players speak, through for example using specific terminology or slang associated with particular games or gaming culture in general (such as the use of leetspeak). In game talk, a player's identity as a competent player can be demonstrated in the peer group.

Gamers at internet cafés can be seen as constituting a local community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Congregations of players and such affinity spaces constitute one locus for the dissemination and distribution of knowledge of specific games and of gaming culture (Gee, 2005). However, this is not done without contestation, and players are constantly being evaluated and criticized by their peers. Claiming expertise is therefore not done without considerable contestation and resistance. Simultaneously, learning is critical for all players. Especially in team based games, failing to understand how to act (and to learn from mistakes) can be most detrimental, both for the individual player his team mates. In contrast to much learning in schools, learning is of immediate importance for the task at hand. In the analyses, Sacks' (1974) notion of membership categorization is used to show how players demonstrate expertise to one another, while avoiding to be chastised as incompetent players. Players categorize behavior on a scale ranging from incompetent (*noob*) to expert

(*imba*). The categories that players make use of in assessments of action therefore also invoke a moral and hierarchical order.

Players show verbal skills in the ways that they strive to position themselves as *imba* while positioning others as noobs. This can be done as a public correction of observably faulty behavior. By publicly drawing attention to another player's mistake, a player can simultaneously position himself as a knowledgeable player, through verbally commenting on how some actions *should* have been taken, in contrast to the way that they were done. A position as a competent player is thereby strived for through contrasting participants' skills to each other, and the categories of noob and *imba* can thereby be understood as a *relative* grading of players' performance.

A player can also be directly boastful of his own actions, categorizing them as *imba*, even though being part of a whole team's performance. Here, a player may try to differentiate his part of the team's performance through excluding his co-player from formulations of expert handling of the game. The local hierarchies that the players orient to and thereby reflexively constitute are visible not only in criticism, but also in collaborative activities. In a more indirect way, players can display their competence through the use of in-game metrics (such as "level" for the players' characters). This practice clearly demonstrates how players' identities as "competent players" are achieved not solely through displaying in-game expertise, but also through being able to procure tokens of such expertise at other times. The in-game measures for progress in the game are thus put to use in the identity-work of the players.

Players are constantly ranking and grading each other, both through the "objective" measures provided by the game, and through the ways in which they formulate their own and co-player's actions. Far from constantly striving towards consensual agreement, part of the knowledge and skill required for participation in these game-centered communities of practice is the competence to engage in evaluation, assessment and criticism. While these may be cultural practices that place harsh requirements of expertise on the participants, the participation in, and risk of, ridicule and mockery may be one of the reasons for participating in co-located gaming in the first place. Players risk more than losing the game, they risk losing face in being categorized as incompetent players. Hierarchies play a large part in this sort of informal and participatory learning, and local stratification are important aspects of communities of practice where this takes place.

STUDY IV: YOU SUCK! PLAYING THE BLAME-GAME IN CO-LOCATED COMPUTER GAMING

Björn Sjöblom. Submitted for publication

In the conversations that accompany, and indeed formulate, game playing, players will frequently blame each other for various sorts of troubles in their game play. In team-based gaming, players rely on each other's skilled performance, and the failure of one player to take certain actions can lead to the demise of the whole team. Players are apt at discovering such troublesome events, and at attributing responsibility for it. In the study of blame in computer gaming, the social accountability of actions can be discerned, that is, the players' orientation to the morality of their activity.

Several episodes in which players attribute responsibility for a troublesome event to another player (as opposed to accounting for it in some other way) are analyzed. In these analyses, both the sequential structure and contextual function of blame is examined. Blame accounts are understood as fundamentally *interactional* phenomena: while it is certainly true that it is a single player who initiates the blame sequence, doing so depends on the other players' actions, both prior to and following the blame

In order to blame a co-player, his prior actions must be found to be *blameable*, that is, there must be some locally adequate ground for attributing responsibility for the event to that player. Blame sequences are therefore centered on accounts of specific events and the construal of these events as containing some action or capacity of one of the players that can be deemed as "incompetent play." In contrast to much of the literature in conversation analysis on blame (e.g. Pomerantz, 1978) the attribution of responsibility is done in direct adjacency to the discovery of a troublesome and blameable action.

Finding a blameable event and attributing responsibility for it establishes the blamer as having *epistemic authority* (Heritage & Raymond, 2005) on the matter: the blamed player is accountable for answering this accusation on the terms that the blamer provides in the initial account of the troublesome event. However, blaming also confers certain risks for the blamer. By establishing some event as blameable (i.e. not being due to some other circumstance) the blamer runs the risk of having his accusation backfire on him and be *counter-blamed*. The categorical positions of blamer and blamed are thereby in constant flux, in

concurrence with findings on the sequential structure of other antagonistic arguments (Dersley & Wootton, 2000).

Blame is understood to fulfill two functions in co-located computer gaming, and thereby to be a double-sided affair. First of all is the way in which blame is part-and-parcel of the players' *character contests* (Goffman, 1967). These are disputes used for establishing dominance and rank, where the participants' identities are at stake. Such contests constitute a special sort of moral game, in which participants attempt to show themselves as being able to face various sorts of challenges and difficulties. This is done in competition against someone else, and "each individual is engaged in providing evidence to establish the definition of himself at the expense of what can remain for the other" (Goffman, 1967, p. 241). In these "blame games" players are able to enact an identity of "competent player", through highlighting a team-mate's performance as sub-par.

The second function of blame is that of being part of the players' post-hoc discussion of game play, what I call *game exegesis*. In these sorts of discussions, the players attempt to analyze the various "factors" that have led up to a specific troublesome event, that is, of finding locally adequate explanations for that which has happened in the game. Blame can constitute an antecedent part in these discussions, as an attempt to attribute responsibility to a certain player (which in itself constitutes an analysis of the game play in itself). Since blame in most cases leads to accused players attempting to exonerate themselves (through various sorts of rebuttals), blame can be understood as opening up "explanations slots" (Antaki, 1996; Buttny, 1993), where the player being blamed is accountable for the actions under scrutiny by the blamer, and therefore has to provide an explanation for them. The "causes" highlighted in these accounts can then be used as pointers in order to improve the team's or an individual's performance.

In conversations in game playing, blame thus paradoxically serve constructive functions, despite permeating internet café gaming with disputes and antagonistic argumentation. It also seems that blame is part of what makes this sort of gaming an enjoyable experience. It both provides players an interactional venue for the exposition of themselves as competent, and at the same time opens up ways for multiplayer gaming to be an analytical and intellectual activity.

DISCUSSION

SHOWING COMPETENCE

Competence, as it discussed in the studies, can be considered a two-sided concept. The first aspect is that of the practical skills of in-game actions, the sort of expertise needed, for example, for navigating the on-screen terrain of the game, for using and adapting tactics to specific situations, and for being able to project upcoming events (see for example Bennerstedt & Ivarsson, 2010; Reeves et al., 2009). There are undoubtedly certain skills to be learned in order to be able to play the games with any success. Developing such practical skills is done both by playing the game and in explicit instructions by other players. Indeed, the games are designed so that they expose the ways in which they should be played to the players (Gee, 2003), and a lot of creative effort goes into fine-tuning the level of difficulty of a given game, letting novices learn from playing it, while still retaining challenges for the experienced player. Part of this expertise also involves the ability to work in close collaboration with team members in order to succeed.

But, in another way, players *show* their competence to their peers, either as opponents, as co-players or as onlookers. Here, different skills become important, namely those of being able to actively *display* gaming competence to co-players in the game setting. In co-located gaming, this presentation of competence, skill and expertise rests on how the physical environment is structured, namely that it (1) allows for mutual monitoring of on-screen actions, and (2) makes verbal conversations possible.

At the cafés, a player's practical skills are not just available to his peers as in-game movements and avatar actions (as they would be in a purely online setting),

but also in the way in which he is seen to execute these actions in the public space. A crucial element of gaming interaction at internet cafés is therefore the way in which it is a public *performance* of skilled action. Mutual monitoring of on- and off-screen actions are a regular and practical requirement of many computer mediated workplaces (Heath & Luff, 2000). An aspect of this that the present studies disclose is how that monitoring is used not only for solving matters of finely tuned collaborative tasks, but also as a method for finding out about and discriminating between players of different skill-levels. A player is accountable for *how* actions are executed, rather than just for their in-game effects. This structure of the visibility, and thereby the accountability, of action is radically different from multiplayer gaming in pure online settings. This is dealt with particularly in Studies I and II. For example, in Study I, a player attempting to find his way around the virtual game-world can be instructed and corrected by a co-player on how to change his on-screen perspective of the game world (the in-game “camera”). To be able to do this, the players have to be co-located in order for these actions to be mutually visible. Such an instruction would have to be structured radically different had the game been played in a setting where the players could not see the same screen.

Apart from the mutual visibility of action that the internet café makes possible, it also allows the players to engage in verbal communication, (coupled with the use of other sorts of multimodal semiotic resources). Through such face-to-face verbal exchanges, the players formulate the ongoing gameplay. Talk can, in these circumstances, be used for the coordination of action. Players learn to engage in the language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) of computer gaming, in simple paired actions like “verbal command” followed by “on-screen action” (such as in study I and II). Such verbal actions can be used to make co-players weary of expected dangers, or draw their attention to daring moves with expert execution (Study III).

What is of importance here is that these accounts of the on-screen events are not “neutral” with respect to the status, position and identity of the player in the local group of game-players. An account is always produced in a specific interactional context: it is not external to the actions that it formulates (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). In the gaming sessions studied, talking about what is happening on the screen was taken both as saying something about the person talking, as well as something about the event itself. Furthermore, to formulate game-play in specific ways means putting yourself at some risk—a player blaming someone for a perceived misjudgment would, for example, run the risk of being counter-

blamed (Study IV). The verbal exchanges that the players engage in therefore require *interactional competence*. This means not only the competence necessary for regular face-to-face interaction, but also the interactional skills that are used to a high degree computer gaming. Even though these language games, such as blaming, can be part of any activity (and indeed are rather common in adolescents' interaction, see Goodwin, 2006) developing an expertise in these sorts of exchanges facilitates a players display of gaming competence. Demonstrating expertise in multiplayer gaming is not just about the embodied skills necessary, but of how these skills are, so to speak, verbally "packaged." A comparison can be made with students in classrooms, where students are required not only to *have* knowledge, but also to be able to publicly display it. In computer gaming, where players' gaming actions are constantly being assessed (and often openly criticized), an important part of such interactional competence is being able to assess others (co-players, opponents or other entities in the game) without being negatively assessed yourself. Study II, III and IV exemplify how players are able to point out others' mistakes while attempting to minimize critical inquiry into their own actions.

Skilled players therefore have to assert themselves *as* competent players, which is done, to a large extent, through talk. A relevant comparison here is to how, in places of practical, embodied work, practitioners nevertheless use talk to demonstrate their competence. In such places, the practitioners' "verbal performance is the medium of their social competition" (Orr, 1996, p. 147). Much like in children's playground play practices, skill is shown not just through the embodied performance of in-game action, but in how these actions are described, contested and justified. Conversations and competencies are thereby intimately entwined. Presenting an event in a way that is favorable to the teller reflects on his displayed competence, and thereby of his identity as a competent player. This is not to say that players explicitly assess their peers' *interactional* competence. Rather, conversation is the means by which players make accountable the ongoing game-play, in which they make it into a mutual focus for interaction.

IDENTITY AND HIERARCHY

The players' constant monitoring of their co-players' actions, where any distinguishable failed actions can be the cause of blame and ridicule, and the ways in which this is formulated, are of importance when understanding what

sort of culture game-playing at an internet café is. A careful examination of how language is part of the practical action that the participants are engaged in (that is, how language is part of the specialized language-games of this particular domain) allows a finer appreciation of how practical action and language are constitutive of the specific gamer culture that is present at the cafés. Considered as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), computer gamers at internet cafés engage in the sorts of dissemination of knowledge in informal learning that would be expected of such a group. Players undoubtedly pick up the necessary practical skills at other venues as well (online forums for example, or playing the games at home), but internet cafés remain places where players can be introduced to new games, discuss skills and strategies, or be given concrete instructions on how to act, and what to see on the screen. However, given the players' monitoring of each others' actions, and of how those actions are being assessed, a much harsher disciplinary scheme is also in place. The players' assessments of each others' actions serve to place individual players on a scale of competence, ranging from "noob" to "imba" (see Study III). "

This demonstrates the double-sided nature of co-located gaming. While the settings allow players to engage in friendly instruction and assistance to novices, they are also places for exclusion and scapegoating. In learning to understand both gaming culture in general, and the specific variant of gaming in internet cafés, this duality must be taken into account. When studying communities of computer gamers, it is easy to fall into simplified descriptions of the inherent social and cooperative nature of gaming, where affinity groups function as arenas for building and distributing the knowledge that is required of the competent practitioner (Gee, 2003, 2005). To some extent, this is true also of gaming in internet cafés, and helpful instructions and pedagogical practices are part of the sociability of multiplayer gaming at these sites. However, the studies in this thesis also redraws this picture through showing how co-located computer gaming becomes an arena for exclusion, defamation and even bullying. It may be that the ways in which games are played at internet cafés, including the conversational order and monitoring of competence that goes with it, exclude players that, while enjoying the same games in other settings, find internet cafés an oppressive milieu. That it is a homogenous group (in terms of sex and age at least) of players that dominate the cafés certainly point in this direction.

Henry Jenkins (1999) discusses the emerging digital arenas in computer games in relation to increasingly supervised physical play-spaces. Where there was once room for a free-roaming "boyhood culture," unrestrained by the adult

world, children now withdraw to virtual worlds to find this “freedom of movement.” As Jenkins points out, this freedom is essentially a freedom from adults, but it does not necessarily mean individual freedom. Rather, these activities often entail setting up an internal pecking order in relation to their expertise and performances on distinct playing field (be they climbing real-world tree or beating a virtual monster). The internet café constitutes a place for the enactment of such local hierarchical orders; an aspect of computer gaming that is often overlooked. Through verbal interaction, players are engaged in trying to “configure” (cf. Woolgar, 1991) and discipline each others’ actions so that they adhere to the routine, accepted and “normal” ways of playing the game. This is not to say that this happens without resistance: Studies II and IV contain examples of players attempting to resist having other players tell them how the game should be played. Still, even a harshly confrontational action such as trying to place blame on a co-player may serve pedagogical and instructive functions. The games do put up constraints for action that are hard to overcome, in that the rules of the game to some extent dictate what actions can give the desired results of winning. Even though pointing out a co-player’s mistake invokes social positioning and hierarchies, it also involves analysis of the game in order to do so. Internet cafés may be seen as hostile, Darwinian places, but even in the most overtly hostile disputes and criticism (see study IV) there can be a cooperative aspect. In game exegesis, in which blame can be a first move, the players attempt to lay bare the causal structures of failure. Ultimately, this is a way of improving team performance. It is a profoundly analytical enterprise, and the details of in-game actions are an issue that players are keen to discuss. That the only two players who asked to review my recordings did so in order to examine and analyze their in-game performance, is a case in point. Engaging in game exegesis may invoke social hierarchies of competence, where players can be singled out as the cause of a team’s defeat, but may also be a more collaborative and social affair.

The interactional competence that players rely on for the constitution of a local categorical and hierarchical order is used, to a high degree, for the players’ identity work (Goffman, 1961). The categories are not formally defined or predetermined in other ways. For instance, a position as “competent player” has to be achieved in the course of interaction, and players use their interactional competence to this end. Positions are, to a large extent, relative to one another, and players can achieve such positions through either highlighting their own expertise, or pointing out how someone else is lacking in some crucial respect. Crucially, such attempts by a player to gain a favorable position will often be met

with various forms of resistance. This categorical order is managed and upheld by the players that are part of it. In his discussion of the dual and opposed categories of “hotrodder” and “teenage driver”, Sacks said that “[hotrodders] will recognize whether somebody is a member of one of another category, and what that membership takes, and *they* can do the sanctioning” (Sacks, 1979, p. 11). On the same note, it is the players themselves that decide, in interaction, who belongs to what category. In contrast to Sacks’ example, such positions may vary quickly. A player can, given the right circumstances in the game, as well as the right circumstances in the interactional space in front of the screens, claim incumbency in categories of “competent” or “imba,” but be instantly demoted as soon as a flaw in his actions or perception has been detected (see Study III).

At the same time, it is partly this way of managing identities in interaction that make co-located gaming interesting for the players. The ways in which talk is used in gaming interaction thus adds an element of personal *risk* to the game, which in itself may be an enjoyable aspect of it. Even though the cafés function as “third places” (Oldenburg, 1991) in which to socialize and meet friends, the way that competence is a very public and accountable aspect of the activity means that the players can engage various contestations of this competence, such as *character contests* and other intricate social play (Goffman, 1967). A possible interpretation of these play engagements is that they add an enjoyable dimension to gaming, where the rapid formulation of on-going gameplay allows players to assess and challenge each other. Displaying themselves as competent gamers is an ongoing concern for the players, but also part of the allure of co-located gaming in internet cafés, where activities are largely organized around the monitoring, display and contestation of skill.

Gaming in internet cafés thus seems inherently competitive. Even when playing on the same team, players will often be harshly critical of each other’s performance: explicit and implicit rankings and hierarchies are part and parcel of what gaming in internet cafés is about. By highlighting the sorts of interactional skills that players take advantage of in these contexts, we may perhaps extrapolate critical issues for the use of games for other purposes, such as educational. Examining this sort of gaming “in the wild” may give insights on how to organize gaming in other settings. Especially, given that multiplayer computer gaming is said to be able to provide players with a wide variety of social skills, we might examine the sorts of social competencies that are exercised in this context. To be able to single out someone as incompetent by pointing out his mistakes and thereby making him the object of public ridicule; to be able to

deny responsibility for your part in the team's failure; or taking the credit for success yourself, despite the team's collaborative effort, are examples of the sorts of competencies that are put to good use by the players in co-located gaming. Indeed, this social play is part of what makes co-located gaming interesting and enjoyable. However, we might question whether the interactional competencies that are rewarded in gaming are the sorts of skills that we find desirable in other parts of society.

To conclude, the title of this dissertation is deliberately ambiguous. The primary meaning, that of analyzing the organization of the multimodal interaction which is the substrate on which the players demonstrate and negotiate their identity as more or less competent practitioners, should be clear enough. The second meaning is somewhat veiled, namely that which is rooted in the notion of "gaming" something, such as "gaming the system," in the sense that someone learns to use the rules of a particular system to his own ends. In the context of game playing, this would be used for anyone who took the time to research the intricacies of the rules, finding its loopholes and blind spots and taking advantage of these in winning the game. The way that it is used in this title connotes a similar phenomenon, namely that of a player who, using his skills as a competent conversationalist, learns to take advantage of this system of interaction, playing it rather than letting himself be played by it. To be able to "game" interaction, in this somewhat idiosyncratic use of the phrase, is to know how and when to blame a co-player, knowing when to stay silent for fear of being counter-blamed, knowing how to point out a mistake someone else has made and how to hide your own, knowing when to brag and when to offer praise, all of which will serve the end of demonstrating your own competence, claiming a position as a competent, expert player.

NOTES

¹In this thesis I have opted to use the term “computer game” throughout, given that the studies deal with PC gaming, rather than consoles or handheld devices (in which case the term “video game” would have been more appropriate).

²In the thesis, I have opted to use male pronouns throughout, the reason being that all of the players in the analyzed data are male.

³Other ways of describing this include *technoscapes* (Wakeford, 2003) and *landscapes of computing* (Wakeford, 1999).

⁴*Spacewar!*, one of the very first computer games (from 1962), was a two player game played on a single screen (Wolf, 2008).

⁵The “all” in this quote should be understood somewhat loosely. Some practices are common knowledge and some require extensive training. However, for cases of routine, everyday methods for engaging in mundane tasks (such as walking down a crowded street) we do indeed require of almost everyone to have a practical, working knowledge of how to do this.

⁶The policy of explicating rather than explaining should be seen in the light of another of ethnomethodology’s heuristics, namely that of respecifying themes from the human and social sciences. These themes, such as theorizing, logic, language and culture are, through the explication of members’ work, respecified as locally accountable orders. Ethnomethodological respecification is, somewhat strangely, described as “[...] a respecification of action and order – order in-and-as-of-the-workings-of-ordinary-society.” (Button, 1991, p. 7)

⁷This goes for any account of society, i.e. also those provided by professional sociology, going back to the idea that ethnomethodology is not “ironic” of sociological understanding of society, but wholeheartedly indifferent (Garfinkel, 2002)

⁸During *night gibbs* players rent computers for the whole night, playing from dusk until dawn.

⁹In three early recordings, four players under 15 years of age participated. They were given consent-forms and my contact information so that parents could contact me with any questions and arrange for the return of the consent form. When this never came to pass, these sessions were deleted from the data. My interpretation of this is that the players simply forgot to tell their parents of this occasion, rather than that the parents not approving of the recordings.

¹⁰In the video data, only one girl is present playing a computer game (*WoW*). She does this only for a short while, trying out the game in the presence of what I assumed was her boyfriend. This does not mean that there are no girls whatsoever playing at the cafés, but that the contingencies of video recording in these settings prevented me from capture more data involving girl gamers. On those few occasions that I did witness girls playing games, they were either badly seated (i.e. in a location where I could not fit a camera without obstructing operations at the café) or I was occupied recording another game session.

¹¹When I could use video-capture software, I approached players as they entered the café, and as the software was only installed on a few select computers this meant that I had to relocate players to these machines. These computers were prepaid by me, which provided an incentive for participating in these cases (there were no other rewards from participation in the recordings).

¹²Leetspeak is frequent in computer gaming discourse, both written and verbal. For explications of how leetspeak and other game slang and terminology is used, see for example Steinkeuhler (2006), and Blashki and Nichol (2005).

¹³For Study I, 12 sessions were originally recorded but three, containing four players less than 15 years old, were subsequently deleted from the data and have not been used for any analyses.

¹⁴A secondary camera was sometimes set up so that gaming could be recorded from an additional angle. At the first café this was used extensively, using secondary cameras to record wider angles (i.e. including more of the room where the players were seated) or focusing each camera symmetrically on each player and his screen. In the second café, secondary cameras were used only when recording player that were seated far from one another, like five players in a row. Using only one camera in those situations would decrease the level of detail visible on the screens. In the second café setting, cameras were used more dynamically. Instead of using static camera setups, the cameras were used for panning and zooming, trying to “follow” the participants’ current focus of attention. This meant both narrow-angle zoom-ins of particular features on the screens, as well as removing the camera from the tripod and physically following a player over to someone else’s computer where something of particular interest was happening. Being attentive of the players’ interactions as they were happening also meant that the reflexive relationship between the activity and recorder is made visible in the recordings (Mondada, 2006b).

¹⁵At times, players would also physically remove a co-player’s headphones in order to facilitate communication and interaction between co-present players. This is, in itself, and

interesting phenomenon, where players display preference for co-located interaction rather than the utility, ambience and immersion that game-sound brings.

¹⁶ A clear example: the games played at the internet café can be played (albeit differently) only through the interactional resources that can be mediated via the internet, such as chat and in-game actions. They cannot be played only through the embodied resources available at the café (talking, gesturing, gaze, body position etc).

¹⁷ Bjelic and Lynch (1992) discuss this issue as a difference between CA and ethnomethodological studies of work. Rather than taking talk as fundamental to the organization of activity, they treat talk-in-interaction (at most) as “a conventional indexical surface for addressing the situated organization of practical actions” (Bjelic & Lynch, 1992, p. 55). They claim that because of the opacity of specialized competencies to social scientists, it is more convenient to treat for example a doctor/patient consultation as an interview (organized conversational practice) rather than as the organization of diagnosis (Bejlic & Lynch, p. 76).

¹⁸ This was not the only time that the connection between filming young boys and paedophilia was made. During one session, where I paid for the rent of the computers, one of the players got a phone call, and answered that he was at the internet café and that he could play for free. His co-player casually added that they were being recorded “in the lavatories”, which the first player summarized as “we’re getting filmed in the restroom so we’ll get to play for free.” Both the players found these references to paedophilia and prostitution highly amusing.

¹⁹ As can be seen, my work at the cafés was characterized by several ethnographic stances, shifting in terms of my degree of participation with the people present (see de Laine, 2000, pp. 94-109). These could perhaps be ordered on a continuum, from a “full” participant in gaming activities, to a bystander and observer, to a camera operator (cf. Adler & Adler, 1994). There is no definite division between the “I” as researcher and “them” as informants (Hodkinson, 2005), and instead of an insider/outsider dichotomy, degrees of participation can be seen determined on a case-by-case basis through the ways that I engaged in specific activities. Just as I hesitate to describe myself as completely outside or alien to the setting, the idea of an “insider’s perspective” can be criticized: “Like most social science terminology, the notion of ‘insider research’ reduces complexities to generalities” (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 134). The identity as an insider or an outsider to a setting is something that is situationally determined by the participants (Butler, 2008).

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PART II

THE STUDIES

The papers associated with this thesis have been removed for copyright reasons. For more details about these see:

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THIS THESIS analyzes co-located gaming practices. Computer games are often played online, without co-players being physically present. In internet cafés, however, young, mostly male, game players gather in order to play multiplayer games together. These are settings within which players can talk to one another and observe each others' actions directly, something that creates unique circumstances for game playing. The aim of this thesis is to analyze how this sort of co-located interaction structures gaming activities. Four empirical studies detail a range of situated gaming practices, exploring interactional aspects of embodiment, vision, categorization and blame from ethnomethodological and conversation analytical perspectives.

Demonstrating proficiency in gaming is found to be an ongoing concern for the players, and internet cafés are shown to be rich settings for both the display and the contestation of gaming competence and expertise. This is accomplished not only by acting skillfully in the games, but also through other means, such as instructing novice players, engaging in self-praise or blaming teammates. Even though many games require fine-tuned cooperation between players, disputes and conflicts are also core components of gaming interaction. Engagement in identity work and the establishment of local hierarchies of gaming competence is shown to be an important and enjoyable aspect of gaming culture, but also one that both conditions and limits participation in gaming activities.

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