

Modes of Play

A Frame Analytic Account of Video Game Play

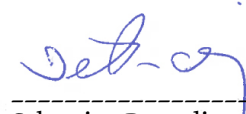
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Sebastian Deterding
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Erstgutachter: Prof. Dr. Uwe Hasebrink
Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Rolf Nohr

Eidestattliche Erklärung

Hiermit versichere ich an Eides statt, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation selbst verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe, namentlich die Transkription von 18 aufgezeichneten Interviews durch studentische Hilfskräfte. Ich versichere des Weiteren, dass die Arbeit nicht schon einmal in einem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder als ungenügend beurteilt worden ist.



Sebastian Deterding

Acknowledgements

Is there any thing whereof it may be said, see, this is new?
It has been already of old time, which was before us.
There is no remembrance of former things;
neither shall there be any remembrance of things
that are to come with those that shall come after.
Ecclesiastes 1:10-11

Few texts in the canon of game studies are as under-appreciated as Steven Sniderman's essay 'Unwritten Rules' (1999). If there is anything in the following pages whereof it may be said, 'see, this is new', it is but an extended footnote that borrows from Goffman the words to express what Sniderman so presciently pointed at but ultimately found 'unstatable': 'what we must know and do to play the simplest game in our culture'. But maybe our task was never to say something new to begin with. Maybe it is just to restate in a language that speaks to the present what has been forgotten and will be forgotten again. One must imagine Ecclesiastes happy.

Over the course of a life, we reassemble our lost family of choice, across continents, centuries, disciplines, and if we are lucky, meet them in the living years. We *are* them: the intersection of the people with whom we connect. I thank all who helped to shape the ideas in this book in discussions with me in the past years, and made me feel at home in this invisible college of ours: Espen Aarseth, Kars Alfrink, Kristine Ask, Pippin Barr, Robert M. Biddle, Staffan Björk, Maaïke deJong, Bernie deKoven, Dan Dixon, Stephan Dreyer, Dan Hunter, Rilla Khaled, Julian Kücklich, Jonas Linderöth, Dan Lockton, Thomas Malaby, Markus Montola, Bonnie Nardi, Markus Oermann, Christian Pentzold, Valentina Rao, Leonard Reinecke, Jan-Hinrik Schmidt, Miguel Sicart, Jaakko Stenros, Jan-Noel Thon, Roger Travis, Steffen P. Walz, and many more. I thank William Uricchio, Joost Raessens, and Paul Kirshner for teaching me kindness. I thank my supervisors Uwe Hasebrink and Rolf Nohr and my mentor Sabine Trepte for giving me all the autonomy and support I could ever ask for. I thank my colleagues and friends at the Hans Bredow Institute and the Graduate School for Media and Communication at Hamburg University for being true colleagues and friends. I thank my interview participants for graciously sharing their experience. I thank Steffen P. Walz for shouldering our crazy little book while I was busy finishing this one, and for overlooking my random bouts of interference. I thank Mathias Crawford for lending a critical eye when one was needed, and quickly. I thank Liz Lawley for too many things to say, but among them for finally making me write the damn thing, showing me that you can spend a wonderful month in a medieval city overlooking the Adriatic while doing so, and for bringing to my attention Tricia Wang's email hack of the century that made writing possible to begin with. I thank Peter Goßens who over ten years never lost faith that if there is one person who could do this, it's me. I thank my godson for

reminding me that playing is less about having fun than seeking something that is fun together. And I thank my friends for reminding me to live.

Like all scholars working today, I am also deeply indebted to the Open Access movement. Who can find and access what research how easily is maybe the central issue of the means of academic production today. Ten years ago, when I was writing my master's thesis, I became deeply aware of the privilege entailed in visiting an Ivy League university library with access to digital journal repositories like JSTOR, which would not become available at my home university for another five years. I could not have written what I wrote back then without that privilege. Today, I could not have written what I wrote without the continued political push, everyday practice, and occasional civil disobedience of countless academics that make their research openly accessible online. I especially wish to thank the Internet Archive: searching and reading Durkheim or Cooley or Mead in original full text without ever once having to leave my desk and writing flow has been nothing if not transformative. I hope to return my share.

A popular saying has it that the most important person is always the person in front of you, but that, unfortunately, is not always true. Sometimes the absent outweigh the present infinitely, and the person (or page) in front of you is really only a conduit to try and continue, futile as it may be, a conversation that was interrupted long ago. For J.

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1 Introduction

‘Electronic media have created new situations and destroyed old ones.’
Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (1985: 7)

‘Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations.’
Erving Goffman, *Fun in Games* (1972: 32)

Game studies are a mess. Emerging in the twenty-first century from media, film, and literary studies, their initial impulse was the formal description of that thing in front of them: the game. Early game studies were, quite literally, *thinking inside the box* – whether it was the rectangular screen or the cardboard box and its entrails, that was what a game was, or better yet, the *ideal* box one could abstract from all of these empirical boxes: the uniqueness, the specificity, the defining criteria, the essential features, the ‘heart of gameness’ (Juul 2003), that incommensurable *something* that would legitimise studying it as a field in its own right – like ‘social facts’ did for sociology, or *langue* for linguistics.

Where early game studies did not think inside the box – where scholars arrived from communication research or media psychology, not the humanities –, it was *thinking inside the head*. Games were doing something with people (or people were doing something with games), but whatever *that* something was, it surely transpired in people’s heads, not in the box.

Yet as games evolved, so game studies gradually extended its neat picture of boxes and heads (and what happens between them) towards an increasingly complex, messy assemblage. The Nintendo Wii arrived – and suddenly it was plain to see that playing a game involved *bodies*. Online multiplayer games appeared, and it became apparent that gaming often involves *other people*. Pervasive games took games to the street, and scholars took notice that games happen in *spaces*. And in building their own games, researchers realised what nasty, recalcitrant *things* games were.

All of this is of course an ideal typical image. Researchers in comparative media studies, education, and cultural studies noted early on that those boxes and heads were embedded in a larger ‘ecology of gaming’ (Salen 2008). The specifics of the intellectual history are less relevant

here than the general trend line of the discourse about ‘what games are’ and therefore, ‘what game studies should study.’ Like the humanities and behavioural sciences writ large, game studies have in the last decade become increasingly *processual*, *material*, and *sociological*. Evolutionary psychology, distributed cognition, and embodied cognitive neuroscience reminded psychologists that heads are part of a body, and that bodies with heads live in an environment of other people and tools. Take any one of these away, and you cannot account for what happens inside the head, nor how or why. Situated action, the practice and a more recent material turn in social theory have highlighted that action and meaning-making always transpire in a situation and sequence, stabilised in the self-organising chains of practices over time, in the traces they leave in our bodies, and in the form they give to the things that our life world is made of. To understand ‘the box’ means to unpack all the highly heterogeneous entities inside, and all the relations they entertain with all the other things and people outside of it. This makes sociology, understood broadly as the tracing of relations across heterogeneous entities – bodies and tools, people and spaces, actions and cognitions –, an attractive option for sorting this mess out (Latour 2005). Thus, several game scholars have taken on the task of unpacking the mangles (Steinkuehler 2006), the assemblages (Taylor 2009), the actor-networks (Chen 2010), the situated action (Hung 2011), the situated collaborative practices (Sjöblom 2008) or hybrids (Leino 2012) of gaming. In short, it’s not just that ‘video games are a mess’ (Bogost 2009) but that game studies themselves have become increasingly messy in response; that is, interested in studying games as ‘a mess’ – and not a minute too soon.

The Double Troubles of Digital Game Convergence

For apart from general theoretical shifts, *empirically*, we live in a time where the category ‘video games’ has become increasingly messy. If there is one catchword for the current moment in the history of media, it is *convergence*: digital media, computing, and networking are decoupling the entities formerly known as ‘the media’ into their requisite components – content genres and storage media, distribution networks and end devices, producing and consuming roles, production and usage practices, spatial settings – and recombining them into ever-new and unexpected, fleeting, unstable formations (Jenkins 2006, Storsul & Fagerjord 2008, Dwyer 2010). In the second half of the twentieth century, traditional mass media presented scholars with relatively stabilised dispositives to describe and presuppose – like the ‘dispositive television’ (Hickethier 1995). Media convergence explodes and thereby foregrounds the contingency of their coupling of settings, devices, functionalities, genres, roles, and practices. This troubles general theoretical notions in media studies and communication research in regard to what ‘a medium’ is, and hence, the medium ‘video games’ (Deterding 2013).

Turning to game studies, the digital convergence of games is challenging its theoretical conceptions of ‘games’ in a no less profound way. First, utilising the possibilities of ubiquitous

networked computing, the genre of pervasive games extends gameplay spatially, temporally, and socially beyond the confines of leisure times and living rooms (Montola 2009). Second, numerous scholars have observed a ‘ludification of culture’ (Raessens 2006, 2012, Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007): From 8-bit music to pixel art, thematic, visual, auditory, and interactive tropes of digital games pervade our media culture, and a presumed ‘gamer generation’ (Beck & Wade 2006) is bringing ludic media practices, expectations, and identities from an upbringing with digital games to the world at large. In parallel, we see what might be called ‘the cultivation of *ludus*’ (Deterding in print): as games move from the periphery of playgrounds, living rooms, and arcade halls towards the centres of our cultural, social, and economic life, so cultural, social, and economic actors become interested in shaping and harnessing them for their purposes. Games, game technologies, game practices, and game design are increasingly enrolled in and informed by other realms of social life. We see this in phenomena like the professionalisation of digital gaming in e-sports (Taylor 2012); the economisation of gaming in goldfarming, real-money trading, virtual item sales, or game play as user-generated marketing (Kücklich 2005, Malaby 2007, Dibbell 2008, Hamari & Järvinen 2011); the rationalisation of gaming, when gaming itself takes on more and more work-like features, prototypically in ‘grinding’ in massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs, see Yee 2006, Taylor 2006, Nardi 2009, Grimes & Feenberg 2009); and in serious games (Ritterfeld, Cody & Vorderer 2009) and gamification (Deterding et al. 2011): Games and design elements from games are increasingly instrumentalised within non-game contexts to improve everything from productivity to marketing, learning, user experience, entertainment, health, happiness, creativity, civic engagement, and governance.

Just like convergence messes with traditional notions of ‘media’ as stable dispositives, these new convergent gaming phenomena mess with traditional, modernist theories of games and play as necessarily fun, voluntary, unproductive, without consequence, and separate from the rest of life (e.g. Huizinga 1955, Caillois 2001, Suits 2005). Specifically, they call into question the already-troubled concept of a ‘magic circle’; that is, the presumed boundary between gaming and wider social life (Salen & Zimmerman 2004). How can games be ‘separate’ if persistent games like *FarmVille* intersperse gameplay throughout the day, and pervasive games move gameplay into public spaces? How are they ‘fun’ if MMORPGs or social network games force players through highly scheduled, highly repetitive tasks for hours on end? How are they ‘unproductive’ and ‘without consequence’ when virtual items are worth real money, and game-play constitutes waged work? How are they ‘voluntary’ if a serious game becomes mandatory homework, or gamification laces game elements into a time-tracking application at your workplace, whose use certainly is not optional?

Frame Analysis: A Solution?

One chief response to convergence in communication research and media studies has been to turn attention towards the *usage situation* of media. As digital devices become increasingly mobile and ubiquitous, media engagement is decoupled from previously stable socio-spatial contexts and thrown into new situations with different environmental affordances and social norms that might strongly inform uses and effects (Zhang 2010, Deterding 2013). As digital devices become increasingly multifunctional, what a user does in a given situation – the expectations, norms, knowledges, and practices she enacts with a specific piece of ‘content’ through a specific application on a specific device – is a contingent, non-trivial question that ultimately defines ‘what it is that’s going on here.’ As part of this growing interest in the situation of media usage, several scholars have turned to Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1986) to theorise situational media usage (e.g. Livingstone 1996, Willems 2000, Höfllich 1996, 1999, 2003).

Likewise, faced with the convergence and instrumentalisation of games, game studies has expanded its focus from formalist definitions and analyses of ‘games’ towards theorising and studying them as social practices (Malaby 2007). Especially with regard to the ‘magic circle,’ a plethora of researchers has argued that current conceptual troubles can be overcome if ‘the magic circle’ is modelled as a social construct rather than a solid spatiotemporal boundary (e.g. Taylor 2006: 151-5, Malaby 2007, Castronova 2005: 147-60, Lammes 2008, Copier 2005, 2007, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, Consalvo 2007, 2009). Yet as Juul (2008) aptly observed, many of these arguments have erected a straw man strong boundary hypothesis of the magic circle only to then tear it down. He suggests we should think of the magic circle as ‘the boundary that players negotiate’; instead of fighting false binaries, ‘[g]ame scholarship should be about analyzing the conventions of this boundary, and how and when this boundary is created and negotiated’ (Juul 2008: 62). Where researchers followed Juul’s lead, they again by-and-large pointed to Goffman’s frame analysis as a promising approach to understanding just this social construction (e.g. Aarsand 2007a, Benford et al. 2006, Calleja 2012, Consalvo 2009, Copier 2005, 2007, Crawford 2012, Deterding 2009a, 2009b, Glas et al. 2011, Harviainen 2012a, Herbrink 2011, Linderöth 2012, Mäyrä & Lankoski 2009, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008).

Grounded in Durkheim’s analysis of ritual and the first Chicago school of sociology, Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* argues that human action and experience is organised by *frames*, institutionalised types of situations like ‘waiting at the bus stop,’ ‘family dinner,’ ‘university lecture,’ or ‘wedding,’ and secondary frames or *keyings* that modulate these primary frames, like ‘irony’ or ‘rehearsal.’ In any given situation, participants gear themselves into, metacommunicate, and enact a specific framing of the situation as a situation of type X, which in turn organises their attention, perception, understanding, experience, motivation, emotion, action, and communication. *Frame Analysis* is a classic in the micro-sociological study of situated action (Willems 1997), and in contemporary social theory, frames remain the main conceptual bed-

rock for modelling the social definition of situations (Esser 2006, Schulz-Schaeffer 2008). Both in *Frame Analysis* and in writings leading up to it – like *Strategic Interaction* (Goffman 1969) or ‘Fun in Games’ (Goffman 1972) –, games featured as a central inspiration, example, and object of analysis. Thus, frame analysis appears indeed quite well positioned to conceptualise the usage situation of video gaming – and solve the troubles the convergence and instrumentalisation of games present to communication research and game studies today.

Yet in both fields, the application of frame analysis to video gaming so far falls short in several regards: media frames (Höflich 2003) and other theorisations of frames in media and communication research have remained on a very abstract level, and there have been no applications to video games. In game studies, we find mostly short position pieces that merely point towards the promise of frame analysis, as well as a plethora of divergent understandings just what frames are and what aspect of video game engagement they refer to. In addition, uses of frame analysis have by-and-large not appreciated frame analysis in full, nor in the context of Goffman’s writings more generally. Where the concept was adopted, it happened mostly through the filter of Gary Alan Fine’s book *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983). This has led to misreadings of frames as socially shared cognitive schemata for situational layers of meaning – an understandable yet regrettable under-appreciation of the actual theoretical scope of frame analysis. Existing empirical studies have so far focused on special audiences (children), special genres (roleplaying games), and the processes of framing. We are dearly missing frame analytic empirical studies of adult video gaming across genres, of the actual recurring norms and forms of video gaming (not the processes of their reproduction), and of just those instrumentalised forms of video gaming that partially stoked the theoretical interest in frame analysis to begin with (see chapter 2).

If one is to construct a frame analytic account of video gaming, one also has to engage with the two main objections that have been levied against Goffman and the Symbolic Interactionist tradition in which he is usually situated. First, especially *vis-à-vis* the ‘practice turn’ in contemporary social theory, Goffman has been criticised as a ‘micro-structuralist’ and ‘cognitivist’ who is oblivious to the sequentiality and openness of situated action as well as processes of macro-social change (Gonos 1977, Denzin & Keller 1981, Collins 1988, Chriss 2003, Warfield Rawls 2003). Yet following Anthony Giddens (1984) and Herbert Willems (1997), frame analysis is fully compatible with an acknowledgement of non-cognitive practices and processes both situational and *longue durée* – it is simply *incomplete* in that Goffman never fleshed them out in writing. Second, Symbolic Interactionism has been criticised for *over-emphasising* subjective meaning and agency, ignoring the obduracy of material objects and larger socio-material institutions in which situated action and meaning-making take place (chiefly *vis-à-vis* the ‘material turn’ in contemporary social theory; e.g. Fine 1991, Giddens 1988). This shortcoming becomes especially pronounced in single-player and networked multiplayer video gaming: common

sense tells us that the constitution and reproduction of these types of situations cannot be ascribed solely to the face-to-face interaction of human actors. Yet as Trevor Pinch and others have demonstrated, Goffman's writings *do* appeal to – though again, fail to systematically flesh out – the role of materiality in the ordering of situated action (Pinch 2010, Linderöth, Björk & Olsson 2012). Indeed, the concept of frames has been applied in science and technology studies (STS, Bijker 1987, 1995) and informatics (Orlikowski & Gash 1994) to make sense of processes of socio-technical change, technology adoption, and usage.

Research Objectives

In summary, to test the promise of frame analysis, to see whether it may provide a useful handle on video gaming amidst the troubles of media convergence and instrumentalised gaming, two things are lacking in the current literature: (a) theoretically, a systematically integrated and explicated frame analytic account of video gaming that is complemented in the aspects of materiality (as Bijker or Orlikowski offer) and process (as Giddens and Warfield Rawls do provide), and (b) empirically, an outlining of just what the frames of everyday video gaming entail. Therefore, the goal of the present study is to provide a systematic frame analytic account of adult leisurely and instrumentalised video gaming. This broad goal translates into five specific research objectives. Theoretically, the study aims to

1. theorise video gaming as frames and framing, and in so doing
2. systematically integrate and explicate situational processes of individual action and historical processes of societal change, and
3. systematically integrate and explicate the role of materiality.

On the empirical side, the study aims to

4. empirically describe the frames of adult leisurely video gaming, thereby applying and refining the theoretical model and
5. establish whether instrumentalised adult video gaming differs from leisurely video gaming and if so, how.

As noted, despite a growing number of publications in game studies that appeal to frame analysis, we have no systematic frame analytic account of video gaming, let alone one that integrates the diversity of the existing literature itself. Providing such an account is the main contribution of this study. Hence, the dominant purpose of the empirical part is to differentiate and refine the theoretical account in a process of 'double-fitting' (Baldamus 1972). A secondary purpose – and second contribution of the study – is to document the substantive conventions that comprise leisurely and instrumentalised frames of video gaming. Emulating Goffman's own method of comparative contrasting (Goffman 1986: 564), the study turns the challenge of instrumentalised video gaming into a source of empirical insight: by transposing video games into non-gaming situations (like work), instrumentalised forms of video gaming

provide almost ready-made natural experiments for studying the interaction of game objects, settings, and actors' framing of the situation. To mine this data source, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who have substantial experience with video games across settings and genres, including both leisurely and instrumentalised forms of video gaming. Comparing and contrasting their own experiences foregrounds otherwise 'taken-for-granted' expectations, norms, and conventions both in their invariance and specifics across different situations.

Outline of the Book

Following the two main contributions, the text is organised into a theoretical and empirical section, comprising seven chapters. Since the term 'frame' has been used with widely differing meanings in the behavioural sciences and humanities, the next chapter will start by surveying the main traditions that have invoked 'frames' in order to enable readers to situate Goffman's frame analysis with regard to their own disciplinary background. The chapter also summarises the state of frame analytic research in media and communication research and game studies.

To counteract the above-mentioned partial and decontextualised reception of frame analysis, chapter three will situate Goffman's *Frame Analysis* both in the intellectual context of his time and the overarching project of his work. Sketching the theoretical influences of Mead, Cooley, and Thomas and Thomas helps to unpack the notions of symbolic action and normativity underlying frame analysis. Taking Goffman's wider theory of the interaction order into view 'fills in' frame analytic concepts like ritualisation, embarrassment, or involvement that are highly fruitful for understanding video gaming, but have so far received little attention. Thus equipped, the chapter outlines Goffman's conception of frames as both epistemic *and* normative orderings of covert experience *and* overt actions, settings, objects, and events. This duality is central to his theory of frames, yet has been often overlooked. Another misreading to be corrected is that there is *one* ultimate 'everyday reality' – whereas Goffman argued that 'everyday reality' is but a patchwork of strips of differently framed activity.

Moving on to the question of processuality and change, the chapter compares frame analysis with post-Wittgensteinian philosophy, practice theories, and situated action accounts. It argues that the chief shortcoming of frame analysis is to remain in a taxonomic cataloguing of the regularities of types of situations. This invites a reifying reading of frames as ontologically independent and causally determining structures. The chapter draws on ethnomethodology, structuration theory, and Bijker's theory of technological frames to flesh out the situational process of framing, and the macro-processes of the institutionalisation, reproduction, and change of frames over time.

Ecological psychologist J. J. Gibson's concept of affordances then serves as a starting point for modelling the role of materiality in frames. As the chapter argues, affordances are indeed

presaged in G. H. Mead's (1938) concept of an animal-environment relationality, which underlies Goffman's conception of symbolic action. Mead and frame analysis in turn provide systematic answers to the sociality, situatedness, and scope of affordances that have long troubled ecological psychologists.

Chapter four applies the resulting processualised and materialised frame analysis to gaming. Contrasting Goffman's conception of animal and childhood play and adult playfulness with Thomas Malaby's recent influential 'new approach to games' (2007), it demonstrates that Goffman's account is not only more coherent with contemporary research, but also that playfulness can and ought to be theorised as a recognisable form of both covert experience *and* overt activity. A discussion of Goffman's analyses of game-like interactions and games highlights his keen awareness of the interaction of material game equipment and social action in achieving the purpose of gaming, *safe action*: a combination of deep involvement and bodily and symbolic safety from irreversible consequence. The chapter then specifies frame analytic answers to three main theoretical questions in game studies: the relation of games and rules, the relation of games and fiction, and the constitution of 'the magic circle.' The formalist conception of rules and rule-following predominant in game studies is shown to replicate the theoretical problems of structuralism and functionalism in social theory, and to falsely assume a necessary conjunction of game objects and gaming as a situationally enacted framing, which causes today's conceptual troubles when faced with instrumentalised uses of game objects in non-game contexts. Fiction is theorised as an instance of the keying of make-believe, a social convention and practical accomplishment of muted consequentiality and heightened involvement in imaginations cued by representational props. Whether and how 'fictional' or 'gamy' any given phenomenon in a gaming encounter is is not an (onto)logical question, but one of the concrete situational framings afforded by the relation of the game's material features and the player's dispositions. The 'magic circle,' finally, is argued to be an instance of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness – reifying an abstract description into a real entity. On close analysis, all observable regularities denoted by 'the magic circle' can be explained as accomplished in the process of framing, no different from framing processes in other types of situations, without recourse to a separate 'boundary' entity doing this framing work.

Chapter five leads over into the empirical section, describing its methodology. The 'hidden method' of Goffman's own work is shown to be akin to the qualitative research paradigm of grounded theory. Building on the qualitative content analysis of Gläser and Laudel (2010), the chapter develops a research strategy that combines the openness of grounded theory with frames as a guiding conceptual framework.

Chapters six and seven document the empirical findings of the study. The sheer heterogeneity of reported experiences, practices, and norms indicates that one cannot sensibly speak of *one* video gaming frame. However, once one switches to a finer level of granularity, relatively

stable, coherent, and socially shared forms emerge. There is no one video gaming frame, but there are discernible forms of video gaming. These forms themselves fall into two broad groups: leisurely modes and instrumental keyings. Leisurely modes share basic conventions of a non-consequential gearing into the world and an autotelic focus on some form of enjoyment. They differ based on the main type of enjoyment sought, the 'ethos' of the mode – relaxation, relatedness, engrossment, competence, or achievement –, and the social contexture: whether gaming is solitary or shared, and if shared, how socially close the participants are. Together, these two aspects organise conventions regarding attentive involvement, action, emotion display, and the balancing of gameworthiness (caring to win) with harmony (caring for the enjoyment of others) and playworthiness (divestment of self from the game outcome). The different modes are characterised by a signature contour of arousal and attentive involvement, matching assumptions of mood management theory. The chapter also reports how the materiality of games – the choice and configuration of spatial settings, devices, and game genres – factors into and takes part in organising and sustaining modes.

Chapter seven then turns attention to instrumental keyings of video gaming. In contrast to leisurely modes, they are characterised by a consequential gearing into the world and an exotelic focus on the completion of some task outside the gaming activity. In instances like journalistic review gaming, an activity that is already framed as leisurely video gaming becomes keyed as review work; this significantly changes the experience and understanding of the activity, while its actual performance changes only little. To an uninitiated observer, the activity still 'looks like' video gaming, but to the participants themselves, 'what it is that's going on here' is indeed something very different. The chapter then turns to the question of how 'work' and 'play' are constituted in instrumental and leisurely gaming, arguing that the psychological construct of autonomy can usefully clear their blurring, while also providing an explanation of Goffman's concepts of *euphoria* and *dysphoria*. In instrumentalised keyings, the individual's present needs, the material arrangement of the situation, and the normative demands of the current keying are often in *misalignment*, creating a *dysphoric* experience of tension or controlled, non-autonomous motivation. This leads the individual to describe the experience as 'not play.' Leisurely modes of video gaming in contrast are practically organised and socially normed to maximise alignment and thus *euphoric*, unself-conscious ease or autonomous motivation, although in multiplayer gaming, dysphoric tension also occurs.

The final chapter summarises results and situates the concept of modes and keys of video gaming in the field of previous accounts in game studies that model different forms of gaming, such as gamer mentalities, aesthetic agendas, or video game values. It outlines major ramifications of its findings on media convergence, video game enjoyment, and controlled motivation. It also articulates the main limitations and open questions of the present study, as well as potentials for future research.

2 What We Talk About When We Talk About Frames

In academic discourse, the word ‘frame’ is hopelessly overdetermined. Researchers in communication, political sciences, STS, and other fields have all adopted and adapted frame analysis for their own needs. As Koenig (2004: 2) notes: ‘Probably the single most important factor for the success of Goffman’s frame analysis is . . . its unorthodox application. Frame analysis is no longer Goffman’s frame analysis’. To make matters even more complex, a second tradition of frame theories originating in Artificial Intelligence (AI) developed in parallel to that of Goffman (and Gregory Bateson); later works often appealed to both traditions. Hence, readers from the humanities and social and behavioural sciences will likely approach the present book with any number of preconceptions regarding ‘frames’. To provide a shared ground, the following sections will survey the various conceptions of frames across disciplines, followed by a review on the uses of frame analysis in media and communication research and game studies. The final section will position Goffmanian frame analysis in contrast to other traditions, and pinpoint promising developments as well as shortcomings in the current utilisation of frame analysis when it comes to situated video game engagement.

2.1 Cognitive Science: The Minsky Line

In the same year *Frame Analysis* was published, Marvin Minsky (1974) introduced the concept of ‘frame’ to AI. Minsky felt that the psychology and AI of his time were operating with constructs of knowledge that were too granular, fragmented, and unstructured to productively model cognition. Minsky therefore developed the construct of ‘frames’ as ‘a data structure for representing a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of living room, or going to a child’s birthday party’ (Minsky 1974: 1). He conceptualised frames as networks of fixed knowledge ‘nodes’ considered always true, and open ‘slots’ detailing what further elements to expect, pre-filled with default values, but open to be matched and replaced with the concrete sensory

data values of the situation at hand. Frames are linked into larger frame systems: in case a frame does not match the situation – the necessary elements for its slots do not appear –, the frame is switched with a more fitting one from the system.

Minsky's paper has been foundational for modern AI and cognitive science work on *schemata* – abstracted, generalised structures that constitute central components of cognition (Brewer 1999, Nebel 1999). In parallel with and building on Minsky and others, Schank and Abelson (1977) developed a first comprehensive theory of schemata-based human cognition that specified goals, plans, and scripts as essential types of schemata. Their concept of 'scripts' shares many similarities with frames – scripts are more or less a procedural version of frames, describing 'conceptual representations of stereotyped event sequences' like 'going to the restaurant' (Abelson 1981: 715).

Schank and Abelson found a reception far beyond the cognitive sciences, deeply informing schema theories in communication research (Matthes 2004). Here, *news framing* – initially grounded in both the Goffmanian and Minskyan tradition – has become an important integrative schema-theoretical approach to the production, representational structure, and effects of news media (Dahinden 2006, de Vreese 2005). Roughly, 'news frames' describe the specific ways media actors and texts represent or 'spin' a given issue (like global warming or the European Union), which then affects the attitudes and beliefs of audiences. To quote the most commonly deployed definition of news frames, 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman 1993: 54, cf. Matthes 2009). Very similarly, in behavioural economics, 'framing effects' describe how slight differences in the (verbal) presentation of choices strongly affect decision-making (Kahneman 2003; Levin, Schneider & Gaeth 1998).

In cognitive linguistics, *frame semantics* builds on Minsky, Schank and Abelson to address the problem that everyday language is fundamentally underdetermined. Take the sentence 'Mary was invited to Jack's party. She wondered if he would like a kite' (Fillmore & Baker 2010: 316). We have little problem knowing that this sentence is about a girl wondering what gift to bring to a children's birthday – and yet, nowhere did the sentence specify that the 'party' is a birthday party, that 'Mary' and 'Jack' are children, and that the 'kite' is to be a birthday present. Frame semantics argues that like in this example, to make sense of any word or sentence, we rely on semantic background frames that are evoked by words and then specify and fill in their meanings. Semantic frames are learned cognitive schemata for types of events, relations, or entities, comprising several frame elements similar to Minsky's slots (Fillmore & Baker 2010).

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff has popularised frame semantics as an approach to political communication, on the way merging it with his own conceptual metaphor theory

(Lakoff 1996, 2004). According to Lakoff, political convictions fundamentally consist of networks of semantic frames and conceptual metaphors, which are always value laden and emotion laden. Thus, they subconsciously shape how a political group conceptually approaches and morally evaluates any given issue. The upshot for political communicators is that every time a person uses words that belong to a frame, *even to negate it*, she evokes and thus strengthens the frame in question. Thus Lakoff recommends political groups ‘frame the debate’ by constructing and consistently using their own moral language rather than deconstructing (and thereby inadvertently strengthening) the frame of the opposing camp (Lakoff 2004: 3).

Lakoff’s blend of frame semantics and conceptual metaphor theory was recently imported to game studies by Ian Bogost (2007: 99-120). Games and software, he argues, feature unique ‘procedural rhetorics’: They can make claims about real-life systems by providing users a procedural model of it. This procedural rhetoric is able to reinforce, contest, or implicate ‘ideological frames’, as Bogost calls them. When the persuasive video game *Tax Invaders* re-skins classic *Space Invaders*, replacing the approaching aliens with presumed tax increases and the defending space ship with the face of a Republican president, it procedurally models, evokes, and thus reinforces the conceptual frame of Republican politics that ‘taxation is theft’, an intruder that has to be fended off – or so Bogost argues.

2.2 Social and Cultural Approaches to Frames

News framing, Lakoff’s frame semantics, and Bogost’s ideological frames echo cultural studies analyses of media building on Stuart Hall’s early influential paper ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’ (1993/1973), which holds that producers encode and audiences decode messages based, among other things, on their respective ‘frameworks of knowledge’. Hall radically diverges from the implicit determinism of Lakoff or Entman in emphasising the agency of the audience. Recipients may well understand the intended dominant, hegemonic meaning of text against the background codes it draws on, but still reframe it in a contrarian fashion: ‘[I]t is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference’ (Ibid.: 103).

In sociology itself, Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1986) has found a mixed reception. Despite its undisputed status as a classic, it has remained a somewhat ‘unknown known’ (Willems 1997: 18). Whereas Goffman’s writings on self-presentation currently are experiencing a renaissance in Internet Studies (see Baym 2010: 105-21, boyd 2008, Ellison, Heino & Gibbs 2006, Hogan 2010, Marwick & boyd 2010, 2011, Marwick 2010), there has been no similar strong, steady stream of empirical work employing frame analysis in the social sciences or humanities. This may be due to a number of reasons: the sheer volume of the book, the fact that it doesn’t pre-

sent one easily condensed theoretical model nor a methodology for 'doing frame analysis', or the fact that like Goffman himself, it sat somewhat uneasily between the ideological chairs of the sociology of its time: a study of 'micro-interactions', but much too 'structuralist' for the taste of micro-sociologists of its time (Denzin & Keller 1981). On the theoretical side, however, the central problem *Frame Analysis* identified – the underdetermination of situated action – and the solution of frames as socially shared 'definitions of the situation' have become well-integrated into both rational choice and praxeological sociological theories, in both cases with direct reference to Goffman (e.g. Esser 2006, Schulz-Schaeffer 2008, 2009, 2010).

In the political sciences, grounded more in a Symbolic Interactionist than cognitivist paradigm, frame analysis has been used to study how political conflicts are fought around and social movements are held together by dominant framings of an issue (Chong & Druckman 2007). Here, the concept of 'collective action frames' has been developed to describe the 'action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization' (Benford & Snow 2000: 640).

2.3 Frames and Technology: STS and HCI

Shifting gears from communication to technology, in science and technology studies (STS), Bijker (1987, 1995) introduced the concept of *technological frames* to describe how new technologies are socially stabilised and then act as stabilising forces themselves. Similar to Kuhnian paradigms, a technological frame initially emerges as a promising new 'standard operating procedure' among groups of engineers who try to solve a problem – including shared understanding of what it is they are trying to achieve in the first place, what the main problems are in their way, and how one ought to try to solve these problems. More formally, technological frames comprise 'goals, key problems, problem-solving strategies (heuristics), requirements to be met by problem solutions, current theories, tacit knowledge, testing procedures, and design methods and criteria' (Bijker 1995: 123). Technological frames reduce the 'interpretive flexibility' of objects within one social group – but may diverge across groups. Thus, they explain why different groups approach a problem differently, and how technological innovation can come about through individuals crossing groups and frames.

However, technological frames go beyond engineering 'paradigms': writ large, they are the overall socio-material ordering that stabilises interpretation and action around a new technology, emerging from the continued interaction of *all* emergent relevant social groups (engineers, but also regulators and customers) around an emergent exemplary artefact (like a new kind of plastic). As Bijker writes, '[a] technological frame comprises all elements that influence the interactions within relevant social groups and lead to the attribution of meanings to technical artefacts – and thus to constituting technology' (Bijker 1995: 123). Once different social groups achieve a certain level of closure about how to produce, understand, and use a new

technology – that is, once a certain technological frame is established as consensus –, the technology then becomes stabilised. Now, the technological frame that once was a social specification of the indeterminacy of material objects flips into a stable semiotic expression and ordering force that the material technology exerts on the understandings and uses of different social groups.

In Computer-Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) and human-computer interaction (HCI) more broadly, Orlikowski and Gash (1994) adapted Bijker's technological frames to offer a social-cognitive approach to the way technological systems are developed, used, and changed in organisations. They understand such *organisational frames* to be 'shared cognitive structures' (Orlikowski and Gash 1994: 176); that is, the family resemblance-like overlapping of taken-for-granted assumptions of members of an organisation that guides their understanding and action. They are produced in professional training and socialisation, and reproduced in day-to-day cooperation. Technological frames refer to 'that subset of members' organizational frames that concern the assumptions, expectations, and knowledge they use to understand technology in organizations' (Orlikowski and Gash 1994: 178).

In an empirical study of the adoption of Lotus Notes in an organisation, Orlikowski and Gash observed that technological frames comprise ideas regarding (a) the nature of a technology (what it is and how it works), (b) the technology strategy (why the organisation installed the technology), and (c) technology use (how it is to be used in day-to-day practice). Different groups within an organisation – such as technologists, managers, and end users – can have different frames around a technology, and this lacking 'frame congruence' can lead to internal tensions as well as the 'unsuccessful' (in the eyes of management or technologists) adoption of a new system. Subsequent studies have looked at the impact of organisation-internal communication and power processes on the sharing and dominance of various frames, and how the successful adoption of new systems might be furthered through increasing the congruence of frames among groups (Davidson 2002, Lin & Silva 2005, Bjørn, Scupola & Fitzgerald 2006, Menold 2009, le Roux & le Roux 2010).

Exploring the practical possibilities and ramifications of ubiquitous computing (Weiser 1991), researchers in HCI have faced the issue that ubiquitous computing not only links previously non-linked sites into one mediated joint situation, but also moves 'computation "off the desktop" and into the world' (Dourish & Bell 2007: 414). In both instances, participants (and researchers) are forced to deal with the technological disruption of standing social expectations, norms, and orderings of situated action, and the development of new orderings for these new situations. The study of these new, technologically mediated, augmented, and overlapping 'shared encounters' (Willis et al. 2010) and 'media spaces' (Harrison 2009) has both sparked and been informed by the theoretical shift of 'third wave' HCI towards situated and embodied interaction (Dourish 2001, Harrison, Tatar & Sengers 2007, Suchman 2007). And

here, Goffman's (1959, 1953) analyses of self-presentation and behaviour in public places have been variously drawn upon to think through the social ordering of physical, mediated settings (e.g. Dourish 2001: 91-2, Willis et al. 2010).

2.4 Situational Frames in Media and Communication Research

In theory, communication research included a situational view of media used at least since the early 1970s, when Katz, Blumer, McQuail and others developed the uses and gratifications approach (UGA) that conceptualised media usage as need-driven and thus dependent on the *situational needs* of users and the *situationally available means* of satisfying them.¹ In practice, however, UGA research predominantly studied general, situation-spanning usage motives and corresponding media properties (Schweiger 2007: 66-7). In conscious distinction to this 'media centrality', the usage approach ('Nutzenansatz') of Teichert and Renckstorf (1989) construed media usage in Symbolic Interactionist terms as a special instance of social action in general (Krotz 2008), and declared peoples' definitions of their situation as the necessary starting point of media analyses. Yet the usage approach never lent itself as easily to producing clear quantitative results using simple questionnaires as the UGA paradigm did, and therefore did not develop a lasting footprint. Thus, there is still little work in communication research that theoretically models and empirically studies situations of media usage as a systematically important analytic unit of its own (Zhang 2010).

Situational Approaches to Frames in Media Studies

Joshua Meyrowitz's epoch-making study *No Sense of Place* (1985) was an explicit attempt to unite Marshall McLuhan's medium theory and Goffman's analysis of social situations in the argument that electronic media dissolve previously stable physical/spatial boundaries of social situations and in their stead, create new, mediated situations. In an early evaluation of audience research, Sonia Livingstone (1996: 169-171) pointed to frames as a promising theoretical resource to connect stable content genres on the part of the medium with stable forms of interaction on the part of the audience. In a similar fashion, Winter (1992) conceptualised 'genre frames' as schemata guiding media reception. Willems (2000) took this notion further: genre frames, he holds, offer a 'grammar' of schemata guiding understanding and action that bind production, medium, and reception together and at the same time, afford creative variation. A similar approach has been developed by Pietraß (2003, 2004, 2006, see Deterding 2011) in media literacy studies. Her central notion is 'framing literacy', understood as the competency to identify the factually and morally 'appropriate' genre frame of a media text, to then interpret the text and regulate one's own emotional engagement in it accordingly.

¹ Section 2.4 is amended and translated from Deterding 2013.

The most systematic application of frame analysis to communication research is Höfllich's theory of 'media frames' (Höfllich 1996, 2003). Its starting assumption is that a medium is 'not simply a technical, but a social (socially constructed) artefact whose meaning is based on a socially established (standardised, institutionalised) use' (Höfllich 1999: 44). Media frames describe such usage patterns stabilised around specific uses and gratifications derived from specific communication technologies:

A media frame circumscribes specifications of meaning as well as media-specific limited possibilities of action and/or communication. It also implies communicative arrangements and socially consented strategies in dealing with the specific circumstances of the medium....The media frame is subjectively perceived, although it is technologically preformed through the communication possibilities of the specific communication technology. But it is also constituted through communication with others and in that way, receives an intersubjective grounding. (Höfllich 2003: 39)

In consequence, a communication technology may be the basis for more than one media frame, and users may situationally switch between different media frames. For instance, Höfllich derives three different 'computer frames' from his empirical fieldwork on people's usage of the 'hybrid medium computer': computers are a medium of information retrieval, a medium of contact and discussion, and a medium of technologically mediated interpersonal communication (Höfllich 2003: 80). Höfllich and others have subsequently applied and refined this model in several papers on emergent interaction orders around mobile communication (Höfllich & Hartmann 2006; Höfllich 2010; Wirth, von Pape & Karnowski 2008).

Finally, Schmidt (2006, 2009) picked up Höfllich's thread to interweave it with practice theoretical approaches to new media use. His analytic unit is the 'usage practice', which he considers 'framed by three structural dimensions: rules, relations, and code' (Schmidt 2009: 47). 'Rules' capture the social expectations and routines that Höfllich describes as media frames. In parallel with Höfllich, Schmidt distinguishes 'rules of adequacy' for media selection (which medium is 'appropriate' to use for which ends under which circumstances) and 'procedural rules' of actual media usage. 'Relations' describe the technical and social connections of actors and information, whereas 'code' means the possibilities of action afforded and constrained by the software as the technological basis of everything.

Parallels to Frame Analysis in Media and Communication Research

As noted, frame analysis has not remained the only approach used in media and communication research to tackle situations of media use. Next to the above-mentioned usage approach, Ayaß (2004) and Keppler (2006) have imported the concept of 'communicative genres' – institutionalised types of communicative action for solving socially recurring problems – from the sociology of knowledge to the study of both media offerings and the communicative processes in which they are produced and used. Types are also the central notion of the constructivist theory of media genres (Rusch 1993, Schmidt 1994). Media genres are construed as cognitive schemata for media offerings developed during socialisation, whose main function consists in

the reduction of complexity and mutual coordination of expectations. These schemata organise all social arenas of media activity (production, distribution, reception, appropriation), and comprise material, sensual, semiotic, and reception conventions. A similar concept focusing cognitive schemata is 'reception modes'. With this construct, Monika Suckfüll (2004) captures cognitive-affective heuristics for the selection and processing of media offerings that are stable personality preferences, like 'play', 'presence', or 'production'. To manage their own mood, Suckfüll argues, users may intentionally switch modes.

Closely related to reception modes is the concept of 'communication modes' developed by Uwe Hasebrink (Hölig 2011, Hasebrink 2004). As a 'specific pattern of expectations and forms of action that users employ to achieve specific communicative functions' (Hasebrink 2004: 73, translation SD), a communication *mode* is the complement to the specific communicative *functions* offered by a communication *service*. This notion is highly similar to that of situational frames, one main point of distinction being that situational frames describe socially normed and reproduced orderings of understanding and doing in a situation, not subjectively developed and chosen cognitive schemata. This social aspect also features prominently in Zhang's (2010) 'situational theory of new media behaviors'. Media use is here understood as resulting from the interaction of psychological needs and the constraints of the current location, 'location' entailing three factors: present media technology, physical space, and social norms and relations connected to that space. Based on the constraints set out by the location, users decide which needs they want to satisfy how and with what offerings.

Finally, true to the 'radical contextualism' (Ang 2006) of cultural studies, domestication theory has studied the long-term, multi-dimensional process of the 'adoption and appropriation of media as content as well as media as objects' (Hartmann 2009: 306). Like communicative genres or media frames, domestication theory thus teases out social conventions, but it uniquely focuses their stabilisation process on the 'meso level' of households and social groups.

2.5 Frames in Game Studies

Over the past decades, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, and performance theorists have appealed to 'frames' as a useful concept for theorising play and games, though often grounded more in Bateson than Goffman (e.g. Handelman 1977, 1998, 2001a, 2001b, Jerolmack 2009, LeBlanc 1998, Lindquist 2001, Paglieri 2003, 2009, Schechner 2003, 2009). Yet their work has to date found no real reception in game studies (Schechner being a modest exception). Thus, it is fair to say that frame analysis was introduced to game studies at large through Fine's (1983) seminal ethnography of pen-and-paper roleplaying gamers, *Shared Fantasy*. The book deployed frame analysis to understand engrossment, identification, the 'layering' of meanings in play, and the embedding of enacted fictional realities in everyday life.

Role-Playing Games

Fine gave roleplaying ‘aca/fans’² a theoretical handle on their hobby/object of study, and most of today’s frame analytic game scholarship in turn builds on this sizeable body of role-playing games (RPG) literature – mostly ethnographic studies on frames and framing processes in RPGs in general (Mason 2003, Copier 2007, Montola 2012), but also specifically in pen-and-paper RPGs (PnPRPG, see Herbrink 2011, Mackay 2001, Mason 2003, Montola 2008), live action RPGs (LARPs, see Brenne 2005, Copier 2005, Harviainen 2012b, Rohl & Herbrink 2008, Stenros & Montola 2011), online RPGs (Isabella 2007, Wanenchak 2010) and massively multiplayer online RPGs (MMORPGs, see Chen & Duh 2007, Copier 2007, Glas et al. 2011, Linderöth 2012). Two strongly intertwined themes in this literature are the ‘lamination’ of meanings in gaming encounters (Brenne 2005, Copier 2007, Herbrink 2011, Järvinen 2007, Juul 2008, Lancaster 2001, Linderöth 2004, 2005, Mackay 2001, Waskul & Lust 2004) and the relation of players, their characters, and their avatars, since each of these is usually ‘located’ within a specific shared layer of meaning (Bennerstedt 2007, Fron et al. 2007, Choy 2003, Isabella 2007, Kafai, Fields & Cook 2009, Linderöth 2005, Mackay 2001, Waskul & Lust 2004). Further emergent themes in this literature are a performative, dramaturgical view of game play (e.g. Saunders 1986, Choy 2003, Mackay 2001), and theorising game play as *ritual*, drawing on Goffman’s (1967) concept of ‘interaction ritual’ in combination with Collins’ (2004) interaction ritual chain theory and Schechner’s (2003) performance theory (see especially Bergström 2012, Copier 2005, Harviainen 2012a, 2012b, Harviainen & Lieberöth 2011, Wanenchak 2010, Xu et al. 2011).

‘The Magic Circle’

Next to RPGs, the subject game scholars most frequently approached with frame analysis has been the game/non-game distinction or ‘magic circle’ (Aarsand 2007a, Benford et al. 2006, Calleja 2012, Consalvo 2009, Copier 2005, 2007, Crawford 2012, Deterding 2009a, 2009b, Glas et al. 2011, Harviainen 2012a, Herbrink 2011, Linderöth 2012, Lindquist 2001, Mäyrä & Lankoski 2009, Montola 2005, 2012, Moore 2011, Neitzel 2008, Nieuworp 2005, Paglieri 2009, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, Stenros 2012, Waern 2012, Woods 2009). As already noted, a major issue with a large portion of this literature is that it first erects ‘the magic circle’ as a straw man strong physical boundary, only to then tear it down and end on the point that the ‘magic circle’ is ‘really’ a social construction, a ‘permeable membrane’³ upheld by metacommunication more than a clear physical boundary, and that Goffman’s ‘frames’ might be a useful way of conceptualising this social membrane (e.g. Consalvo 2009, Copier 2005, Crawford 2012, Moore 2011, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008). This is not only a forced misreading of both Huizinga (1955) and

² ‘Academic fan’ or ‘fan academic’, an academic studying an area of pop culture who also self-identifies as a fan of it; the term was popularised by Henry Jenkins (see Deterding 2009c).

³ A metaphor taken from ‘Fun in Games’ (Goffman 1972); see e.g. Nieuworp 2005, Aarsand 2007a, Linderöth, Björk & Olsson 2012.

Salen and Zimmerman (2004), as Zimmerman (2012) points out; it also stops short of theoretically and empirically fleshing out how framing works and what the frame(s) of video game play entail (Juul 2008). Such theoretical and empirical work has so far usually happened only with regard to framing *processes* among special audiences (children) and in special game genres (RPGs and pervasive games mostly).

Blurry Boundaries and/in Pervasive Games

One of the most interesting empirical fields for studying the maintenance of frames in interaction is pervasive games; that is, games ‘that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, or socially’ (Montola 2009: 12). Because they trouble, blur, or decouple the institutionalised conjunction of spatial, temporal, and social boundaries of game play, pervasive games offer ready-made Garfinkelian ‘breaching’ experiments that bring to the fore participants’ previously taken-for-granted expectations and methods of re-producing ‘the magic circle’ in interaction. The two most studied and relevant sub-genres in this regard are *spatial* (mobile, public, urban, location-based ...) pervasive games that take gaming from the physical confines of designated play spaces (living rooms, arcades, sports courts) into public spaces, and *alternate reality games* whose dominant aesthetic strategy it is to keep participants uncertain whether they are a game or not, and what does or does not belong to the game (Szulborski 2005). Apart from theoretical definitions of pervasive games and their relation to everyday life (Montola 2005, Stenros, Montola & Mayr  2007) and analyses of the methodological challenges of capturing player experiences and framings in pervasive games (Stenros, Waern & Montola 2011), studies in this area have mostly looked into player experiences of ‘blurred boundaries’ and how to best design for them (Benford et al. 2006, Dansey, Stevens & Eglin 2009, Dena 2008, McGonigal 2003, M yr  & Lankoski 2009, Stenros et al. 2011, Taylor & Kolko 2003).

Children’s Play, Media Effects, and Framing Literacy

Educational researchers interested in the uses and effects of video games for children constitute a further subfield that has taken to the concept of frames. The area is essentially split in half between a more ethnographic, socio-historic Scandinavian school and a more theoretical, constructivist German one.

In Scandinavia, P l Andr  Aarsand and colleagues have conducted a number of ethnographic studies on the place of video gaming in the lives and family interactions of children (Aarsand 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010; Aarsand & Aronsson 2009a, 2009b). Their studies question the presumed material ‘givenness’ of distinctions like game/reality, online/offline, real/virtual, private/public, and subject/object. They unpack how these distinctions get negotiated, accomplished, and crossed in social interaction. In a similar fashion, Linder th (2004) draws on video interaction analysis of children video gaming to question the ‘interactive illu-

sion' that digital media would provide a 'realism' and 'immediacy' that is conducive to learning. Linderoth demonstrates that children in playing video games construct meaning by framing events in terms of three frames (rules, theme, aesthetics), and by negotiating gaming-internal relations of frames (e.g. illogical gaps between rules and theme) and the enrolment of 'external' events in the gaming encounter. In a follow-up article, Linderoth (2005) analyses how players treat their avatars differently based on their framing – as either enacted roles, tools for winning the game, or props for self-presentation. Along these lines, Peterson (2011) conducted a video interaction analysis of children playing *The Sims*, finding that in such open-ended games, players negotiate shared goals, plans, and framings during 'pre-play' for the main play activity, and that the play frame offers a crucial resource for creating role distance between themselves and the characters they created.

A different approach to young people's framing of video game play that hasn't found much reception beyond Germany is Jürgen Fritz's (1997, 2003, 2012) constructivist, schema-theoretical theory of video game usage, which appropriates the radical constructivism of S.J. Schmidt (1994) to counter strong media effects claims. Humans, Fritz argues, are closed cognitive systems that construct cognitive schemata viable for interacting with their environment. In this, they differentiate their lived reality into multiple 'spaces' or 'worlds',⁴ a term Fritz takes from Alfred Schütz but theorises as schema clusters. Fritz (2012: 90-1) lists real world, mental world, dream world, media world, play world, and virtual world as the minimum number of life worlds members of contemporary Western cultures have to differentiate. As an educational researcher, Fritz is especially interested in *transfers* (Fritz 2012: 93-117) – when schemata for certain instances get generalised to further instances of the same life world ('intramondial transfer'), or when schemata of one life world get applied to another ('intermondial transfer'). Following this logic, video games never *directly* affect players. Instead, in interaction with games, players construct cognitive schemata, and both positive and negative 'effects' of video games (learning, media-induced aggression) describe instances of schema transfers from the play world to the real world.

Fritz (2012: 137) integrates *frames* into his theory as the 'overarching organisational structures' that hold multiple schemata together and give them coherency – but the concept ultimately remains fuzzy: Mostly, 'frames' refer to distinguishing the play world from the real world, but sometimes also to various experiential stances towards video games (onlookers vs. players), discursive news frames (children vs. concerned parents, politicians vs. journalists), or the 'dispositif video games' that serves as the 'outermost frame fringe' that holds 'video games' together (ibid.: 140-152). Finally, Fritz argues that individuals require 'framing literacies' to manage their video game engagement (ibid.: 153-165).⁵

⁴ All quotes from Fritz translated from German by SD.

⁵ A similar view of framing as a general literacy in engaging with (fictional) media has been put forward by Manuela Pietraß (2003, 2004, 2006, see above).

Fritz's model has been applied in a number of qualitative studies on children and teenagers playing video games (Witting 2007, Kyas 2007). These find that players report frequent transfers of multiple forms; yet players also strongly appeal to their personal framing literacy enabling them to distinguish play world and real world, and to moderate inappropriate transfers (Witting 2007: 236-7). Some issues with Fritz's model are (a) the aforementioned fuzziness of the frame concept, (b) the essentialist assumption that there is *one* unifying video game frame, (c) the stark individualist cognitivism that leaves little room for socio-material processes of constituting, negotiating, or changing frames, (d) the fact that it does not integrate any non-German research, and (e) a superficial and occasionally faulty reception of Goffman (see, for example, Fritz 2012: 144 on keyings).

Wider Questions

In recent years, the application of frame analysis has diversified and expanded from RPGs, pervasive games, and children. Thus, Simon (2007) analytically differentiates four 'social contexts' of gaming grounded in Goffman: playing alone, next to, with, and online with others. Lin and Sun (2011) analyse the role of onlookers in arcade gaming. Linderoth, Björk and Olsson (2012) study how players negotiate the boundary between in-game and social identity in *Left 4 Dead 2*. Jørgensen (2012) uses frame analysis to explain why players do not feel disturbed in their game engagement by the presence of user interface elements, despite the incoherencies they create for the fictional world. And Tobin (2012) looks at how mobile gaming platforms like the Nintendo DS allow a temporary transformation of otherwise 'empty' waiting or transit moments. There are theoretical studies deploying Goffman to understand presence and immersion (Rettie 2004, Calleja 2007), to explain players' perceptual focus on game objects in terms of game rules (Linderoth & Bennerstedt 2007), to connect stable inter-individual 'gamer mentality' differences to the negotiation of specific framings of gaming encounters (Kallio, Mäyrä & Kaipainen 2010), to tackle self-reference in video games (Bopp 2005, Neitzel 2008), to tease out interaction norms in *The Sims Online* (Martey & Stromer-Galley 2007) or *Second Life* (Grant 2009), or to study educational or therapeutic uses of games and role-play (Gastao Salies & Starosky 2008, Saunders 1986, Schick 2008).

Parallels in Game Studies

Goffman has been by far the most frequently invoked theorist when it comes to social conventions and experiential stances surrounding game play. Still, over the years there have been some deployments of analogous concepts. One important early text in this regard – like so many others introduced to the game studies canon via Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 573-4) – is Sniderman's (1999) essay on 'Unwritten Rules' in games. Sniderman's lead has been taken up by a small number of game scholars likewise interested in the social, negotiated quality of rules in

games (see Taylor 2012: 47-62, for a useful discussion). Ivan Mosca (2011a, 2011b) and others (e.g. Montola 2012) recently pointed out the similarities between Bateson's frames and John Searle's social ontology that attempts to reconstruct in analytic terms the social reality of money or roles through 'constitutive rules' that specify social meanings or 'status functions' with regard to specific 'contexts' (we will return to this later). Kendall Walton's (1990) philosophical reading of the representational arts as descendants of children's make-believe play with props presents another attempt in analytic philosophy to come to terms with non-literal actions and communications. Walton introduces the concept of 'principles of generation' that socially determine how props cue imaginations – similar to Searle's constitutive rules or Goffman's frame 'premises'. Several game scholars have since used Walton to explicate imagination and fiction in video games (Deterding 2009b), most systematically Bateman (2011).

Moving from social rules and forms to experiential modes, we find Bernard Suits's (2005: 52) 'lusory attitude' as a subjective stance that enables and holds together gameplay. Following Caillois (2001), Pippin Barr (2007: iii), in a case study research of video game play, teased out *paidia* and *ludus* as two predominant 'video game values' or 'sustained beliefs about preferable conduct during play'. In an ethnomethodological study of children playing video games, Hung (2011: 131-76) identified training and duelling as two distinct forms of play. Finally, we have to address psychologist Michael Apter's (2006) reversal theory of human motivation. It assumes that with regard to a set of basic motivations, humans are always in one of two 'metamotivational states' or 'modes'; switches between these modes radically *reverse* experience and motivational direction. One central metamotivational couplet is *telic/paratelic*, signifying a focus on either goals and ends or on activities and means. Apter himself associates the paratelic mode with play, and notes that it usually takes place in psychological 'safety frames' of personal confidence, physical protection, and emotional detachment (Apter 1991, 2006: 34-53). HCI and game scholars interested in play and playfulness as a subjective state have recently taken to Apter as a promising explanatory model (see already Järvinen 2007 and later Arrasvuori et al. 2011, Costello 2009, Holopainen 2012, Mäyrä & Lankoski 2009, Stenros 2010, Waern 2012). Some have in fact *combined* Goffman and Apter to account for game play as both a subjective mental state (explained via Apter) and a social context or agreement, explained via Goffman (Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007, 2009).

2.6 Summary and Conclusions

Surveying the field from afar, one may summarise the shared background of the various conceptions of 'frames' as follows: Frames are (1) *socially shared*, (2) usually *unconscious or taken-for-granted* (3) *cognitive schemata* consisting of (4) a *typified* set of entities and their relations that are (5) *evoked by perceived events* and in response, (6) *specify* the events' *meaning and evaluation*,

and thus, (7) *affect decisions and actions*. By and large, this account is congruent with Goffman's conceptualisation of frames. The main points of distinction are (3) and (4).

As to (3), although Goffman clearly thought of frames as *entailing* some sort of cognitive schemata on the part of the individual, he explicitly contradicted an *exclusive* reliance on cognitive schemata. As will be shown in chapter three, frames also have to be understood as embodied, emotive, empractical, and materialised. They necessarily involve the routine methods through which actions, communications, and objects are rendered orderly and intelligible as belonging to a frame. And this process enrolls material objects that offload and stabilise parts of the continued reproduction of a local interaction order.

As to (4), the various frame theories surveyed here specify frames as phenomena of widely divergent domains and degrees of granularity: from cognition and language comprehension in general (Minsky, Fillmore, Lakoff); to 'spins' put on and schemata evoked by semiotic presentation – of economic choices (Kahnemann), political issues in news (Entmann), video games (Bogost), or communication in general (Lakoff); to the shared meanings of social movements (Benford and Snow); to the shared understandings and uses of a new technology among different social groups in society (Bijker); to the shared understandings and uses of a new technological system of individual groups within an organisation (Orlikowski and Gash); to formal media genres (Winter, Willems, Pietraß); to new media practices (Höflich, Schmidt). Even within game studies, understandings markedly differ: frames are variously seen as the game/non-game boundary (Crawford and others), as social contextures (Simon), as the internal lamination of a gaming encounter (Fine and others), as different forms of game play (Linderoth), or as a specific life world domain (Fritz).

In comparison, Goffmanian frame analysis focuses *types of situations* ordering experience, meaning, action, and materiality. Technological frames as used by Bijker, Orlikowski and Gash offer an interesting extension of Goffman's original conception towards technology, one that will be of use when we try to explicate the role of materiality in frames and processes of their institutionalisation. One main difference here is that Goffmanian frame analysis anchors frames intensionally on types of situations, not types of technologies.

In communication and media research, the study of such situational frames was repeatedly introduced (starting with Renckstorf), however never with the same success as the news framing paradigm interested in cognitive and textual types of 'spinning' issues. Such theorising of situational frames has unilaterally focused on *either* content genres *or* usage practices of new media and communication technologies. On the one hand, this 'double articulation' (Hartmann 2009) of media as both types of artefacts *and* genres of content is an important insight moving forward: it indicates that institutionalised differences in video gaming frames are just as likely to be found along the lines of settings and devices as along the lines of game genres. On the other hand, it points to the desideratum of a general account that would take

Livingstone's and Willems's intuition seriously and bridge content forms *and* practices, and do so for *all* media (not just new communication technologies).

Moving on to game studies, as demonstrated previously, the concept of 'frames' has quite a footprint in the field. As of writing these pages, about 80 publications in game studies-related venues appeal to either Goffman or frames, of which a full 50 percent have been published since 2009. Thus, Glas et al.'s (2011: 142) are right when they state that 'frame' has become 'a buzzword... at game research conferences'. This observation is doubly apt because despite the sheer amount of publications, there is a clear lack of *systematic, integrative work*:

- Theoretical work on frame analysis has for the most part remained at the stage of pointers or selective appropriations of single concepts.
- The reception of Goffman's work remains eclectic and filtered through Fine (1983) – almost all publications draw on the essay 'Fun in Games' (Goffman 1972) and portions of *Frame Analysis*; at most and much more infrequent, one finds references to *Interaction Ritual* (Goffman 1967) or *Forms of Talk* (Goffman 1981). An integrative appreciation of all of Goffman's writings concerning the interaction order is missing.
- Most Goffman-related empirical work in game studies is wedded to special genres and audiences – RPGs, pervasive games, and children –, and focused on framing processes. There is little if any work on video gaming in general, or on the 'contents', the conventions and typifications that constitute video gaming frames.
- There is significant divergence as to what aspect of video gaming 'frames' actually refer.
- Parallel approaches – most notably Apter's concepts of metamotivational states and protective frames – have been suggested as an alternative to or complementation of Goffmanian frame analysis. Yet as will be seen, the strength of Goffman's conception of frames is that it does fully account for both a subjective and social perspective, and includes questions of motivation.

More generally, because of an eclectic and filtered reception, misreadings of Goffman abound: Consalvo (2009: 414) and Pargman and Jakobsson (2008: 237) adopt a misreading of Fine (1983), arguing that frame analysis believes there to be *one* primary framework of everyday reality (whereas 'everyday reality' for Goffman is a patchwork of many frames on equal footing, gaming being one of them). Stenros (2010) and colleagues argue that frames really only capture a 'social side', not the subjective experience of video game engagement (when for Goffman – and Symbolic Interactionism more general – the two are inseparable sides of the same coin). Waern (2012) argues that Goffman's notion of frames fails to include a change of meaning through metacommunication, as understood by Bateson (when indeed Goffman discusses metacommunication *in extenso*, with direct reference to Bateson). And Copier (2005, 2007) describes frames as purely cognitive (when for Goffman they comprise experience and action).

In summary, then, a frame analysis of video game engagement is tasked with construing a systematic, genre-spanning account that integrates the existing literature, restores Goffman's original conception within the larger context of his work to redress misreadings and explicate whether and how shortcomings foregrounded in the literature are in fact accounted for, but also where they indeed require amendment. For the latter part, valuable cues are given by Bijker's technological frames and by communication researchers calling attention to the importance of media genres. But before such amendments of frame analysis and its eventual application to video games can be made, we need to get a solid grasp of frame analysis itself.

3 Theory: Frame Analysis

3.1 Historical Contexts

Goffman is frequently cited as a central figure of Symbolic Interactionism (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2006). Even though he himself always resisted that (and any other) label, and although his work is indebted more than anything to Durkheim (Burns 1992: 22-3), Goffman's conception of symbolic action, self, and morality is indeed deeply informed by Mead and the 'first Chicago School' of social theorists that in turn informed Symbolic Interactionism. Furthermore, Mead and Symbolic Interactionism provide an important context to Bateson's work, on which Goffman's *Frame Analysis* draws so heavily. And, as will be seen in the section on materiality, Mead's relational *Philosophy of the Act* (1938) not only inspired Gibson's relational theory of affordances, but will also allow us to systematically integrate it into frame analysis. More than enough reason for some prologue, the main actors being Mead and Blumer. After sketching this historical context, the next section will outline the basic tenets of Goffman's overall research program. The third section presents frame analysis itself: its grounding in the work of Bateson and Thomas and Thomas, the distinction between primary frames and transformations, the different aspects of a frame, and the specific conception of social reality entailed in frame analysis. Section four will then approach the first major critique sported against frame analysis – its neglect of situational and historic processes. It will summarise Goffman's conceptions of rule and rule-following to contrast them with the state of research in contemporary social theory, and outline how the situational process of framing takes place, as well as historical processes of change. The fifth section will then materialise frame analysis, drawing on the works of Gibson and Mead.

So to set the scene, some words on the historical context: Symbolic Interactionism can be understood as a counter-movement in American sociology and social psychology to the intellectual dominance of behaviourism and Parsons's structural functionalism in the first half of the 20th century. Both behaviourism and structural functionalism understood individuals' behaviour to be determined by their environment, with consciousness and meaning playing an

epiphenomenal role at most. For behaviourists like Watson (1913) and B. F. Skinner (1953), the past consequences of behaviours predictably determined the probability of future behaviour in response to environmental stimuli – what happened *between* stimulus and behaviour was considered either fully neurologically traceable, or a black box called ‘consciousness’ whose empirical inaccessibility forbade any ‘mentalising’ speculation. For structural functionalists like Parsons, the social system instrumentalised individuals to maintain its own ‘moving equilibrium’. Social norms – crystallised in need dispositions, role expectations, and value orientations; inculcated during socialisation; and guarded by social sanctions – fully organised the individuals’ motives and actions. Individuals freely choose goals and acts to attain them, but in so doing operate *within* the social norms structuring possible goals and courses of action (Parsons & Shills 1962). As Garfinkel (1967: 68) put it, structural functionalism treated individuals as ‘judgmental dopes’ unable to consciously, reflectively, and strategically relate to or deviate from those norms. (At least that’s how critics like Garfinkel portrayed it.)

In contrast, Symbolic Interactionists reasserted the importance of individual consciousness and meaning *mediating* between environment and behaviour: Social order itself is grounded in conscious, meaningful action, which arises from social interaction, always open to deviation and creative change. Symbolic Interactionists found the basis for this alternative account of social life in pragmatist George Herbert Mead (Blumer 1969, Sandstorm, Martin & Fine 2006, Stryker 2008).

Meadian Foundations

Mead agreed with the basic project of behaviourism to explain human conduct in terms of observable behaviour: certainly, the bulk of our everyday action is habitual routine – learned reflex responses to environmental stimuli. Unlike Watson, however, Mead (1934) held that we cannot negate the existence of conscious experience. Quite the contrary, his goal was to *explain in terms of empirically observable behaviour* how the human capacity to interact meaningfully and reflexively self-conscious emerges. He argued that from social interaction, meaning, consciousness (mind), and the self necessarily co-evolve.

Like animals, Mead argued, humans interact not just directly, but *communicatively* in ‘gestures’, coordinated behavioural reflex responses that are directly preparatory for some other action and serve as stimuli to the other organism’s matching reflex response. To use Mead’s example, a dog’s barking is an automatic reflex action that directly precedes actual biting and thus serves as gestural stimulus to another dog’s reflex response to bark back, for example, which then serves as gestural stimulus to a reflex response in the first dog (to bark again, run away), and so on. In this communication, there are only stimulus-response reflexes. The dog does not understand and act on the meaning its actions have to the other dog – it is not mindfully aware of the responses its action will elicit in the other, and thus cannot strategically

adapt its actions based on such awareness. If a gesture is to have *meaning* (or ‘symbolic significance’ in Mead’s words), and is to be enacted *mindfully*, its originator must somehow internalise the recipient’s responses: ‘Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in the individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals’ (Mead 1934: 47). Although in a pragmatist sense the observable *behavioural* response of the other is crucial – will the other dog bite or flee? –, this is not enough to give rise to consciousness and meaning. The originator must internalise the actual *perception* or ‘attitude’ of the recipient. This brings us to Mead’s theory of perception.

A good pragmatist and process philosopher, Mead (1938) did not start from the presupposition of a primary observer-independent material world that ‘stimulates’ the senses of a reality-dependent observer. Nor did he assume a primary reality-independent transcendental ego that ‘projects’ an observer-dependent world. Rather, in a quasi-phenomenological analysis, Mead derives a thoroughly relational understanding of organisms and environments that only later loops in biology and the other natural sciences. ‘Material reality’ as spoken of in the natural sciences is a secondary, abstracted entity, a solution made of and in lived experience for problems of and in lived experience.⁶

Along these lines, Mead understood perception as embodied action, an ongoing process between organism and environment as relational poles (Mead 1938: 3-25). In the process of perception-action, organisms get selected and adapted as ‘fitting’ to environmental niches, and the environment gets selectively articulated for the organism as entities relative to its ‘sensitivities’. The ‘attitude’ or experiential content a thus-articulated object elicits in perception is simply the readying of all learned possibly useful actions the organism could take relative to it: ‘If we try to find in a central nervous system something that answers to our word ‘chair’, what we should find would be presumably simply an organization of a whole group of possible reactions.... The chair is primarily what one sits down in’ (Mead 1934: 70).⁷ When in the process of perception-action organism and environment become misaligned, that is, when the object form of a resisting *problem* relative to the organism arises, the organism proceeds to selectively perceive and probe the organism-environment relation in terms of potential actions towards resolving that problem (Mead 1938: 6-8).⁸

Now all of this could still be described as automatic reflex chains. Gestures become conscious and meaningful when the elicited attitudes become *reflexive* in that they serve as internal stimuli to further internal responses: ‘If ... the attitude which he [the individual, SD] calls out in himself can become a stimulus to him for another act, we have meaningful conduct’

⁶ This is very similar to Heidegger’s In-der-Welt-sein (Being-in-the-world).

⁷ Later Symbolic Interactionists would expand this exclusively empractical focus towards *emotional* attitudes (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2006).

⁸ This notion of the ‘problematic’ – also found in the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, Schütz etc. – has since been re-articulated by Symbolic Interactionists as the switching point between unconscious, non-symbolic, taken-for-granted routine and conscious, symbolic, opening-to-change action (e.g. Stryker & Vryan 2006).

(Mead 1934: 73). This reflexivity, Mead argued, only evolves in social interaction through *internalising* the *others'* attitude to one's actions: 'We are calling out in the other person something we are calling out in ourselves, so that unconsciously we take over these attitudes. We are unconsciously putting ourselves in the place of others and acting as others act' (Mead 1934: 68-9). Once the originator of a gesture (or action) is able to experientially anticipate the attitudes it will arouse in others, and selects a gesture *based on* that anticipation, that gesture becomes a symbolically significant and conscious *social act* – and so for the recipient of the gesture if her response is *based on* the anticipation that the gesture was initiated based on the anticipation of the recipient's own attitude to it.

Another way of putting this is that meaning and consciousness arise from the reflexivity of internalised mutually anticipated attitudes, the old 'I think that you think that I think that you think ...' – but not as a temporal series of increasingly abstract thoughts that *already pre-suppose* a conscious, thinking 'I'; rather, as an immediate apprehending attitude grounded in the experiences that were made with others in previous interaction. My own actions and my own 'I' become available to me as something to reflexively act towards only *as a result* of internalising how others relate to them.

So how does this internalisation come about? Mead identifies two central routes. The first is spoken language or 'vocal gestures' (Mead 1934: 69-75). Because we hear what we speak *at the same time*, we can experience our own inner attitude responses to our vocal gestures, and over time learn to associate them with the observed others' behavioural responses. The spoken word as a stimulus stably joins both. For Mead, thinking is thus literally an 'inner monologue', a subvocalised speaking to oneself as an other that *follows* from the development of one's ability to speak to others: 'That is the general mechanism of what we term 'thought', for in order that thought may exist there must be symbols, vocal gestures generally, which arouse in the individual himself the response which he is calling out in the other' (Mead 1934: 73).

The second route of internalisation is *roles*, stably organised, mutually related packages of action within the larger 'organism' of a social group. Roles for Mead are sets of behaviours related to sets of behaviours of others that become institutionalised (and thus learnable) in social groups pursuing joint, recurring actions: the roles of doctor and patient, for instance, interlock as sequences of spectrums of expectable actions and responses in the joint overarching and recurring action of 'treating an ailment'. Acting 'in role' based on an *understanding* of that role again is to act anticipating the attitude of the other acting in her role relating to one's own role, and vice versa. This raises the question how the attitudes of the various roles become available to individuals in a social group: the doctor may anticipate the attitude of the patient because she likely has also experienced being a patient herself in the past, but most patients arguably never experience acting in the role of a doctor. Yet this is what (following Mead) is necessary to competently act in the role of the patient – to view oneself as a doctor would.

Mead (and others after him) found the answer to this quandary in *play and games* (Mead 1934: 149-164; Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2006: 62-4). Children's (role) play and games are the central means by which individuals learn the various roles of their social group, and in so doing develop a stable notion of self. In play and games, 'children enact the attitudes of parents and babies, of thieves and police officers, of patients and doctors, of students and teachers, of hunters and the hunted and so on, building up the stock of attitudes that comprise society' (Gillespie 2005: 28). Free imitative *play* provides experiential access to the inner attitudes of the behaviours of various roles. But because such play is free, it does not easily allow for reflexive meaning and consciousness to arise. Playing with a ball, children switch attitudes from moment to moment, as the moment demands. What is required is some *reliable falling together* of one's own and the others' attitudes towards the same act, just as it happens in vocal gestures.

This institutionalised reoccurrence of two or more 'complementary yet incommensurable attitudes' (Gillespie 2005: 29) is what *games* provide. To properly play a game even as simple as hide-and-seek, one has to anticipate the attitudes of all the other players towards oneself. One can learn to do so because (a) the roles are stable, (b) roles are switched frequently ('Tag: You're it!'), and because (c) rules articulate the general and role-specific allowed and expectable responses for all players in a learnable simple, precise, clear form. As Mead writes, 'If we contrast play with the situation in an organized game, we note the essential difference that the child who plays in a game must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in that game, and that these different rôles must have a definite relationship to each other. ... This organization is put in the form of the rules of the game' (Mead 1934: 151-2).

In the course of playing, and playing games, children develop and become available to themselves as a stable self. For Mead, the self is an internalised abstraction of the many individual dyadic relations with and roles and attitudes of others into a more stable 'generalized other'. Becoming a self means learning one's role or position vis-à-vis one's whole community: 'The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called "the generalized other." The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters – as an organized process or social activity – into the experience of any one of the individual members of it' (Mead 1934: 154). This self is only ever available as a reflective, retrospective 'Me'. In any present moment, we act as an 'I' experiencing ourselves and our environment, producing a spontaneous response to it. Only after the (f)act do we then become disclosed to ourselves as an *object* of perception and deliberation, the 'Me' that we *were* in the moment past. In the present moment, the 'Me' enters conscious experience without a clear demarcating boundary as an internal stream of evaluations constituting the anticipations of the others' attitudes (Aboulafia 2012).

To summarise, for Mead (as for Wittgenstein), the notion of ‘private meanings’ is nonsensical (Mead 1934: 146-7). Humans live in a world of always already social actions, objects, and selves in three respects. First, we learn to articulate the entities in our environment in terms of possibly useful actions by observing, imitating, and being guided by others. Second, in order to act meaningfully, mindfully, and symbolically, we not just outwardly observe others, but internalise their attitudes – we take their view. This applies to objects and actions as well as to our selves. Third, we engage in the joint solving of problems as a social group, understood as a larger organism. Through the process of social interaction, shared understandings of the meanings and relevancies of a then-joint act are established, as are the meanings and relevancies of the objects of this act. And all these processes are greatly facilitated once we are in command of symbolically significant communication like spoken language (Cronk 2005, Gillespie 2005).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism ‘proper’ began in the late 1930s when a group of sociologists at the University of Chicago picked up the threads of the ‘first Chicago School’ of Mead and others to weave an alternative to the Parsonian sociology of their time. A formative voice was Herbert Blumer, who coined the term ‘Symbolic Interactionism’ in 1937 (Blumer 1969: 1), and articulated three basic ‘premises’ that have become a canonical form of introducing SI (see also Snow 2001). According to Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism holds that (1) ‘human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’, (2) ‘the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with one’s fellows’, (3) ‘these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’ (Blumer 1969: 2). This interpretive process is social and open: social because it is a communication with others internalised into a communication with oneself; open because meanings are selected, used, and transformed by the actor in light of the situation at hand (Blumer 1969: 5).

Just like for Garfinkel, these theoretical considerations resulted for Blumer in a critique of the quantitative, questionnaire-based methodology at the core of Parsonian structural functionalism: to abstract and quantify ‘variables’ (like gender or socio-economic status) from social life neglects the meanings actors give to the ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variable, and the processes of meaningful action that mediates the two. Also, the situatedness and openness of meaning-making pose a challenge to predictive modelling (Blumer 1969: 127-139). This led Blumer and others to favour ethnographies that retrospectively reconstruct the specific meanings and meaning-making processes of specific actors in specific local sites. But as Symbolic Interactionism matured, so did its theoretical and methodological ground shift and broaden. For instance, the ‘Iowa School’ of Symbolic Interactionism around Sheldon Stryker and others

considers regularities of social action as stable enough, and factors other than the individuals' reflexivity as important enough, that they warrant generalising theory-making and hypothesis-testing (Stryker & Vryan 2006). A good picture of the current state of Symbolic Interactionism is provided by Snow (2001) in the form of four 'orienting principles':

1. 'Interactive Determination' (Snow 2001: 369): No entity of analysis – including self and society – exists independently by virtue of some 'intrinsic' qualities. Every entity emerges from and is constituted by the 'webs of relationships' it entertains.

2. 'Symbolization' (Snow 2001: 371): Entities of any kind 'take on particular meanings, becoming objects of orientation that elicit specifiable feelings and actions'. As Snow notes, Goffman's *Frame Analysis* has been an important antidote to a 'strong' Blumerian stance that meaning always and necessarily is 'constructed or negotiated *de novo*' (ibid.). The interesting question for contemporary SI is *how* meanings *become* stabilised, taken-for-granted, problematised, replaced.

3. 'Emergence' (Snow 2001: 372): SI highlights and has paid close empirical attention to the processes through which new forms of action, meaning, emotion, orderings arise.

4. 'Human Agency' (Snow 2001: 373): Human beings are not determined by their natural or social environment, biological or psychological makeup. Rather, these constitute 'predispositions or constraints on action' that can be reflexively acted upon.

As any cursory survey will reveal, these orienting principles do not stand in stark contrast to other contemporary social theories of, for example, Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, or Margaret Archer. Constructing Symbolic Interactionism as the opposition to some 'standard' positivist-functionalist sociology has become increasingly unhelpful and incorrect (Maines 2003). What characterises Symbolic Interactionism today are more particular theoretical sensitivities and connected bodies of knowledge (Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2006).

3.2 Erving Goffman: Charting the Interaction Order

'The aim of the research was to isolate and record recurrent practices of what is usually called face-to-face interaction....The project was concerned with a[n] elementary question, namely, the kinds of types of practices which occurred.'

Erving Goffman, *Communication Conduct in an Island Community* (1953: 1)

Where Symbolic Interactionists like Blumer took issue with the structural functionalist *mode of explanation* dominating the sociology of their time, Goffman disagreed with the *scale* of what constituted 'proper' objects of study. Some have held that Goffman's writings amount to eloquent if cynical portraits of middle-class life in the United States in the 1950s, but not a grand unified theory (Burns 1992: 8-9). Others disagree, arguing that his work constitutes 'a systemic approach' (Giddens 1988: 250, cf. Manning 1992) to the social ordering of response-present interaction, with *frame analysis* at its heart (Willems 1997). Indeed, as Goffman wrote in so many words in so many introductions of so many of his books, his prevailing concern – from his dissertation to his last writings – was 'the neglected situation' (Goffman 1964)⁹ He urged sociology to step down into the seemingly 'lowly' and 'trivial' domain of everyday interaction: For there one would find an inherent social order (and intricate machinations producing it) that were of their own kind – not derivative from or expressive of 'large' social structures or functions. In short, Goffman's goal was to demonstrate and trace the contours of an 'interaction order *sui generis*' (Warfield Rawls 1987).¹⁰

Symbolic Action as Ritual and Ritualisation

Although Goffman studied under Everett C. Hughes at the University of Chicago during the heydays of SI (receiving his MA and PhD in sociology in 1949 and 1953, respectively), and although he has since been treated as one of its major proponents (e.g. Sandstrom, Martin & Fine 2006), Goffman explicitly distanced himself from Symbolic Interactionism (Burns 1992: 22-23; Manning 1992: 19). As Burns (1992: 25) observes, even more than Mead's symbolic action, Goffman's main intellectual guideposts were Durkheim's social facts, 'every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations' (Durkheim 1964/1885: 13). In Goffman's own words: 'Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men' (1967: 3). And the social facts Goffman charted were indeed that: *moments*, the 'kinds of types' (Goffman 1953: 1) of encounters, of gatherings, of situations. His 'sociology of occasions' (Goffman 1967: 2) essentially translated Thomas and Thomas's claim that the moral order of any group consists

⁹ See Goffman 1983: 2; 1959: 1-2; 1963: 3-4; 1967: 1-3; 1971: ix-x; 1972: 7-8; 1981: 1-2; cf. Manning 1992: 17.

¹⁰ Goffman alluded to this continuity by re-using the title of the concluding chapter of his PhD thesis, 'The Interaction Order' (Goffman 1953: 343), as the title of his summative ASA presidential address (Goffman 1983).

of its 'general types of situations' (Thomas 1923: 42) into the empirical research program of cataloguing just this cultural lexicon, and the general contingencies and regularities that obtain in any such situation. Next to Mead's symbolic action, Dorothy Swayne Thomas and her husband William I. Thomas laid another important foundation for Symbolic Interactionism, especially in their eponymous 'Thomas Theorem' and the closely associated 'definition of the situation'. The theorem states: 'If men define situations are real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas & Thomas 1928: 571-2).¹¹ Formulated in a study of the origins of deviant behaviour in children, Thomas and Thomas used 'situation' first and foremost to appeal to a *behaviourist* mode of explanation – against biologist accounts. Because human behaviour is biologically unspecified and therefore largely socially learned, the best way to tease out explanatory factors for deviance is to observe the 'total situation' in which a child grows up or acts. Unlike behaviourists, however, Thomas and Thomas viewed subjective accounts as an essential source of observational data, because behaviour is explainable not in terms of the objective situation alone, but only in terms of the situation *and how its participants perceive it* (Thomas & Thomas 1928: 553-576). ~~This is what the 'Thomas Theorem' refers to.~~

However, it would be incomplete to paint the 'definition of the situation' as mere subjective perception. W.I. Thomas grounded this subjectivity in a deeper sociality. Humans, he held, have developed the unique capacity to *internally regulate* how they react to outer stimuli: 'Preliminary to any self-determined act of behaviour there is always a stage of examination and deliberation which we may call *the definition of the situation*. And actually not only concrete acts ..., but gradually a whole life-policy and the personality of the individual himself follow from a series of such definitions' (Thomas 1923: 42). These definitions are the means by which an individual gets socialised into the rules and norms of their family and community: 'the child is always born into a group of people among whom all the general types of situations which may arise have already been defined and corresponding rules of conduct developed, and where he has not the slightest chance of making his definitions and following his wishes without interference' (ibid.). To regulate conflicts of interest and ensure common survival, social groups define what wishes can be properly enacted how and by whom in what types of situations, and the child learns to inhibit its behaviour accordingly from its family, playmates, school, and finally community: 'It is in this connection that a moral code arises, which is a set of rules or behavior norms, regulating the expression of the wishes, and which is built up by successive definitions of the situation' (Thomas 1923: 43). Thus, the 'definition of the situation' broadly understood appeals to an individual's usually taken-for-granted, incorporated norms, what conduct is socially 'proper' in the situation in which she finds herself (Bakker 2011). This joining up of an epistemic *and* normative functioning of 'defining the situation' is how Goffman

¹¹ As Merton (1995) highlighted, the Thomas Theorem is unfortunately gendered in that it is nowadays usually ascribed to William I. Thomas alone.

would come to conceptualise the functioning of *frames* as the different types of situations of a culture, which formed part of the *interaction order* as the general features, dynamics, and ordering of any interaction happening in response-presence. Together, they form Goffman's take on Durkheim's (1893: 91) 'mechanical solidarity' – the moral and symbolic order of the collective that produces the basic trust that undergirds and enables the rational exchanges between individuals in modern societies.

Still, just as much as Goffman's work was grounded in Durkheim and Thomas and Thomas, it also thoroughly incorporated Mead. It revolved around the socially meaningful interaction between humans, it understood self and society as deeply intertwined, and it took an ethological view of behaviour as signal exchange between organisms, paying close attention to the differences between materially consequential actions and signalling gestures, and between reflex-like, non-intentional signalling and deliberately produced, intentional symbolic action. Again and again, at beginning of each study Goffman separated material from symbolic harm, material from symbolic restitution of harm, material from symbolic order, information involuntarily given off of the body from information strategically signalled, etc. – only to then declare that he was primarily interested in the symbolic (Goffman 1963: 13-7, 22-4; 1967: 63-4; 1971: 116; 1983: 4).

Goffman's main conceptual lenses for the workings of this symbolic order of interaction were strategic games and theatric performances, but more than anything *rituals*. In his notion of *Interaction Ritual* (Goffman 1967), he joined Durkheim's (1915) analyses of ritual with the ethological concept of *ritualisation*. Briefly, ritualisation describes 'the evolutionary change of nondisplay behavior into display behavior' (Immelmann & Beer 1989: 255), i.e. when a behaviour loses its primary function for survival and instead becomes stylised (formulaic, stereotyped, repetitive, exaggerated, etc.) to serve an informational function – just think of the peacock's tail. Ritualisation is Goffman's take on the origin of symbolic action. Not gestures foreshadowing action, but 'empty' gestures, so to speak: 'a central process yet to be systematically studied – social ritualization – that is, the standardization of bodily and vocal behavior through socialization, affording such behavior – such gestures, if you will – a specialized communicative function' (Goffman 1983: 3). It is socially shared *conventionalisation* – learnable, expectable, formulaic performance of something with diminished immediate function, as we find it in ritual – that makes a behaviour intelligible and reproducible as communicative. But as Mead noted, one furthermore requires *reflexive apprehension* of the expectations and responses of others to make gestures fully symbolic.

Such mutually reflexive expectations – 'shared cognitive presuppositions' – interlock into 'systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provisions of

a traffic code, or the rules of syntax of a language' (Goffman 1983: 5; see Goffman 1983a).¹² They articulate situations as a 'syntax' (Goffman 1971: 367) with expected 'slots' (ibid.: 135, 149, 160-1, 167), and fashion all the signals a body can give off into 'idioms'¹³ – and here we see Goffman directly invoking Mead: 'In every society these communication possibilities are institutionalized. ... There is, then, a bodily symbolism, an idiom of individual appearances *that tends to call forth in the actor what it calls forth in the others*' (Goffman 1963: 33, emphasis SD). The moment everyone knows what ritual gestures, postures, facial expressions, tones of voice, pieces of clothing one can expect from what actor in what situation, and what information one usually reads from them based on such expectations, any previously spontaneously emitted bodily signal becomes material for a potentially conscious, intentional, symbolic performance.¹⁴

The Challenge of Strategic Interaction

Where Mead was primarily interested in the cooperation symbolic interaction enabled, Goffman worked out a central internal contradiction entailed in it: Once an organism acts mindful of what bodily displays will convey what information to monitoring others, it has both the opportunity and incentive to learn to control its displays to elicit the most beneficial responses in others: to put on a show (Goffman 1959, Manning 1992: 56-71). That is, just as symbolic interaction enables us to interact and communicate consciously, it enables us to do so *strategically*. Symbolic interaction generates the very possibility and utility of deception (Goffman 1969). Or as Umberto Eco (1979: 59) put it, a sign is anything one can lie with.

Many have considered Goffman's depiction of social life as constant impression management to reflect cynicism (e.g. Manning 1992: 36), but it seems more appropriate to view it as the systematic working through of this fundamental internal tension of social life: Why doesn't society collapse as one big house of lies? As any reader of Goffman's writings will know, this was a clear and present issue for him, documented in the sheer amount of pages dedicated to con men, spies, and how we in everyday life continuously contain each other in 'Designs and Fabrications' (Goffman 1974: 83-122). Once *Strategic Interaction* (Goffman 1969) becomes a systemic possibility, society has to find equally systemic ways to assure the morality and trustworthiness of its members (Goffman 1953: 244). Certainly, a newborn child's life depends on its ability to communicate its needs, and the better it is able to discern and communicate intentions, the better off it will be. But if that were the sole motive, why would anyone who has ac-

¹² This bears significant similarities to how radical constructivism models viable communication and co-orientation between cognitively autonomous agents as 'expectation-expectations' and 'imputation-imputations' (Schmidt 1994).

¹³ Namely 'body idiom' (Goffman 1963: 33-5), 'involvement idiom' (1963: 46-8, 206, 224, 233), 'ceremonial idiom' (1967: 56, 89, 93), 'idiom of regard' (1967: 92), 'idiom of respect' (1967: 147), 'ritual idiom' (1963: 232, 1979: 84; 1971: 54-5, 56, 92, 118, 225, 236-7).

¹⁴ With regard to bodily gestures, Goffman directly contradicts 'G.H. Mead's distinction between significant and non-significant gestures': they form 'a conventionalized discourse' that 'tends to evoke the same meaning for the actor as for the witness, and tends to be employed by the actor because of its meaning for the witness', this strategic deployment carrying the additional nicety that 'an impression must be maintained that a margin of spontaneous involvement has been retained' (Goffman 1963: 34-5).

quired the necessary *conscious knowledge* of the rules to read others and communicate her interests then continue to actively *conform* to the rules (Goffman 1983: 5-6)?

Rational self-interest, which Goffman articulated in game-theoretic terms, can provide at best a partial answer for people's trustworthiness (Goffman 1983: 5-6; 1971: xi-xii, 17-8).¹⁵ Symbolic communication allows the coordination of future action, and the standing-in of symbols for deeds or things. This radically expands our capabilities. But the less trustworthy one is because of past deeds, the costlier the signals one has to produce – the more skin one has to put in the game – for others to be willing to trust one; and that binds valuable resources. In espionage, where deceit is both par for the course and connected with the highest possible stakes, the question whether and when to deceive; that is, when to 'cash in' on earned trust for maximum pay-off, thus becomes a strategic, calculated gamble (Goffman 1969). In everyday life, we might appeal to the collective good to be realised by mutual trust, but we often cannot fashion trustworthy signals of our willingness to abide by this enlightened self-interest in the moment. For the very benefit liars realise hinges on their and our continued assumption that the norms they broke did obtain, and will continue to. In engaging in our frequent everyday lies and transgressions of social norms, we have an interest do so in a fashion that still acknowledges and thus reproduces the collective fiction that each of our frequent and utterly predictable transgressions is an extraordinary, one-time offence. Rule accord by convention only works in pure coordination games with fully aligned motives (Goffman 1971: xi-xii; 1983: 5-6, see also Manning 1992: 33-7).

Embarrassment and the Self

If rational self-interest is not enough to fully ensure social trust and coordination – if it in fact steers us towards exploiting it – social order must rely on some other societal 'glues'. These Goffman found again prefigured in Durkheim: the sacred self and collective involvement. Durkheim (1915) argued that in traditional societies, rituals are performances through which individuals publicly affirm their commitment to the primacy of the 'sacred' – an embodiment of the group's social order, its ultimate moral value. In modern societies, Goffman argued, the self has replaced the gods as the object of ultimate regard: 'I use the term *ritual* because I am dealing with acts through whose symbolic component the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it. ... One's face, then, is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one' (Goffman 1967: 19). For Goffman, today's etiquette is a descendant of premodern ritual; we bring ritual offerings to the selves present in any face-to-face encounter. Because every interaction signals something to others (and thus, to oneself) about oneself – and vice versa –, it presents a potential symbolic

¹⁵ This line of reasoning is today being explicated by signaling theory in biology and economics. See Bliege Bird & Smith 2005 for an anthropological application to symbolic interaction, and Donath 2007, Donath forthcoming for an instructive application to social media.

threat to one's self. Goodwill is usually presupposed and sufficiently reassured in the very uneventfulness of routine conduct. But the contingencies of social life will also inevitably put us in situations where hostile intentions can be legitimately read from our actions (Goffman 1971: 105-8). Therefore, the majority of everyday interaction ritual revolves not around 'positive ritual' of praise and affirmation, but the 'negative ritual' of 'remedial interchanges' by all participants: explaining, apologising, repairing the symbolic damages incurred (ibid.: 62-187). Otherwise, things would *embarrass* the persons involved. In his conceptualisation of self and its embarrassment, Goffman combined Durkheim with Mead, but even more importantly Charles Horton Cooley's notion of the 'Looking Glass Self' (cf. Mead 1930).¹⁶ Mead conceived of the self as a reflexive incorporation of the others' attitudes; Cooley went beyond that in adding 'self-feeling', specifically *shame* and *pride*, as the social emotions that motivate our conduct:

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it.

A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. (Cooley 1902: 152, see also Scheff 2005)

For Goffman, embarrassment is the main stake in any interaction ritual for adults, because these interactions actualise and heighten in full bodily co-presence the mutual monitoring from which our sense of self arose in the first place, and in which everything we give off and perceive makes us 'vulnerable ... to the penetration of our psychic preserves' (Goffman 1983: 4). Goffman (1972: 71; 1967: 217-28) also mentioned pride-seeking in people's display of skill and moral character; but this was clearly much less relevant to him than embarrassment.

One finds the most explicit formulation of the central role of embarrassment for social order in 'On Face-Work'. The essay introduces the concept of 'face', 'an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes' (Goffman 1967: 5). Any positive or negative deviation from a person's self-image is charged with emotion: 'A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allows him' (Goffman 1967: 6). Notably, there is 'an involvement in the face of others that is as immediate and spontaneous as the involvement he has in his own face' (ibid.). We feel the shame of others and try to avoid it just as we try to avoid it for ourselves. Every social act implicates both sides: an apology repairs potential harm to the self of the victim, but also restores the self of the perpetrator by splitting it in two: there the morally reproachable self of seconds past, here the newborn self of now whose open acknowledgement of the wrongness of the past self's doings reaffirms its status as a morally decent character (Goffman 1971: 113-4). Face, the care for our symbolic self-worth, fuels our conduct in the presence of others: 'the person tends to conduct himself during an

¹⁶ See also Burns (1992: 42). Scheff (1988, 2000) has worked out this implicit main theme of Goffman into a social theory of shame, linking it up with Simmel, Elias, Freud, and Sennett.

encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants' (Goffman 1967: 11). Indeed, through reflexive self-esteem, it organises our conduct even when others are not present: 'in order to generate within himself other persons' view of him, the individual may maintain presentability even when alone' (Goffman 1963: 41).

The need to save face is universal, Goffman holds, not because it is natural, but because it is the central conduit through which all societies ensure the functioning orderliness of conduct. The final paragraphs of 'On Face-Work' are worth quoting in full:

If persons have a universal human nature, they themselves are not to be looked to for an explanation of it. One must look rather to the fact that societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters. One way of mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual; he is taught to be perceptive, to have feelings attached to self and a self expressed through face, to have pride, honor, and dignity, to have considerateness, to have tact and a certain amount of poise. ...

Universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without. These rules, when followed, determine the evaluation he will make of himself and of his fellow-participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings, and the kinds of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory kind of ritual equilibrium. The general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transforms him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters. (Goffman 1967: 44-5)

Embarrassment of self is not just a central organising principle of our interaction rituals. It drives our *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959); it motivates our handling of *Stigma* (Goffman 1963a) and 'Role Distance' (Goffman 1972); it energises our 'face work', our 'deference and demeanor', indeed how we control the bodily display of embarrassment itself, and convey 'proper' involvement in a situation (Goffman 1967); it underlies our *Behavior in Public Places* (Goffman 1963) – how we monitor or display 'civil inattention', how we enter, comport ourselves in, and leave the various kinds of encounters; it explains our careful observance of the proxemic 'territories of the self' when engaging in *Relations in Public* (Goffman 1971); our conscious seeking-out of risky, fateful 'action' in extreme sports or gambling to show that we have 'character' ('Where the Action Is', Goffman 1967); our *Forms of Talk* (Goffman 1981), immediately repairing gaffes on the radio and elsewhere, studiously 'framing' and 'footing' every strip of talk to adjust its implication of our self; our 'display' of poses and objects, their form and meaning articulated in *Gender Advertisements* (Goffman 1979); and finally, our relentless upkeep of 'normal appearances' (Goffman 1971), presenting ourselves as a conscious moral actor alive to the situation at hand, lest we become subject to the ultimate damage of self: being stripped of the status of having a conscious, adult self to begin with – being declared 'insane' (Goffman 1983a). And oh, how in those *Asylums* (Goffman 1961), the inmates fight to recoup a semblance of the self that was taken from them. Even *Frame Analysis*, in its final lines and somewhat out of the blue, returns to the self, marking it as an utterly social construct entailed in the constitutive rules that make up a frame: 'Self, then, is not an entity half concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them' (Goffman 1986: 573).

The Interaction Order

Self and embarrassment are the first societal glue that keep strategic action in check. To understand the second glue – involvement –, it helps to first take a look at the contingencies and characteristics of the interaction order itself, which Goffman worked out most systematically in *Behavior in Public Places* (1963) and 'The Interaction Order' (1983). The term for the central feature giving rise to this domain varied across his writings: 'behavior in public' (Goffman 1963: 2), 'immediate interaction' (1963: 16), 'face-to-face interaction' (1967: 1), 'co-presence' (ibid.), 'public life', 'co-mingling' (1971: ix). 'The Interaction Order' gives us the last and most differentiated formulation, 'response presence' (Goffman 1983: 2):

Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence. (Presumably, the telephone and the mails provide reduced versions of the primordial real thing.)

This states the first and most important of the interlocked contingencies that together characterise socially situated interaction, namely:

1. *Response presence*: two or more conspecifics can mutually perceive and react to each other. Thus, they become fully 'evidential' (Goffman 1983: 3) to each other; that is, bodily 'readable', including a readability of their attentive and perceptive focus, emotional responses, and gestures indicating courses of action. This evidentiality is mutual, giving rise to an instantaneous reflexivity – I perceive you, I perceive you perceiving me, I perceive you perceiving that I perceive you, and so on, and vice versa (Goffman 1963: 15-7; 1983: 3). This leads to:

2. *Mutually reflexive perception and action*; that is, what 'was much considered by Adam Smith, Charles Cooley, and G. H. Mead; namely, the special mutuality of immediate social interaction' (Goffman 1963: 16).

3. *Spatiotemporal boundedness and immediacy* (Goffman 1983: 3): Our exigencies of perception and attention demand that actors and actions transpire within one monitorable space and in close temporal proximity – otherwise, the built-up mutual ground of interaction falls apart.

4. *Joint attention*. Such bounded, immediate mutual interaction both enables 'a joint focus of attention' and triggers a bodily disposition or readiness for spontaneous 'engrossment and involvement' in it (ibid.).

5. *Embodiment*. 'Emotion, mood, cognition, bodily orientation, and muscular effort are intrinsically involved, introducing an inevitable psychobiological element' (ibid.).

6. *Self-involvement*. Just as the body is necessarily involved, so is the participants' sense of self, embodied among other things in a proxemic personal territory (ibid.: 3-4). Participants immediately get 'identified' in categorical (class, role, ...) and individual terms (ibid.).

7. *Physical and symbolic vulnerability*. As a logical consequence, response presence exposes participants to potential bodily harm and symbolic loss of face (ibid.: 4).

Together, this complex of material, biological, and social contingencies is so specific and interlocked that '[t]he persons present to one another are thus transformed from a mere aggregate into a little society', their interactions into 'a little social system', their shared experience into 'a social reality in its own right' (Goffman 1963: 243, 196), 'a somewhat closed, self-compensating, self-terminating circuit of interdependent actions – what might be called a situated activity system' (Goffman 1972: 96). Such a social reality of its own right in turn necessitates 'techniques of social management' (Goffman 1983: 4) that are similarly sufficiently specific to be treated independently of other forms of social order. This 'special set of rules, which have here been called situational proprieties' (Goffman 1963: 243) is *the interaction order* (Warfield Rawls 1987). The contingencies that give rise to it are sufficiently basic and regular to assume that its ordering will be similar across cultures, although Goffman acknowledged that as any social phenomenon, it will vary across time and cultures (Goffman (1983: 4, 1963: 243-8). 'Socially situated' or 'situational' denote matters that are necessarily subject to the contingencies of response-present interaction and regulated by the interaction order. In contrast, 'merely situated' things just incidentally happen to transpire in a strip of response-present interaction (Goffman 1983: 9; 1963: 21-2). Getting money from a bank clerk is merely situated in this sense, but the greeting and farewell rituals involved are situational. Unlike ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel 1967, Suchman 2007, Mondada 2011), Goffman's understanding thus did not (at least initially) put great import on the sequentiality and indexicality of situated action – a somewhat problematic neglect, as we will see.

Because socially situated interaction revolves predominantly around the monitoring and signalling of information (importantly *reflexive* information about what information is jointly understood to be attentively monitored and intentionally signalled), and because this signalling is more than anything symbolic, and symbolically tied to self, the main aspects to be socially coordinated in any situation are *regard of self*, *attentive involvement*, and *meaning*. The interaction order spells out a *general ordering* of social gatherings regarding attentive involvement, symbolic regard to self and others, and meanings. Frames *specify* this ordering by defining a type of situation. Goffman identifies three analytic dimensions of socially situated interaction (Goffman 1963: 18-22, 1967: 144-5):

1. *The physical environment*, 'situation at large', or 'setting' refers to 'the full spatial environment anywhere within which an entering person becomes a member of the gathering' (Goffman 1963: 18). Such settings comprise one or more 'bounded region(s)' (Goffman 1983: 7) – think of the environment of a party structured into 'the dance floor', 'at the bar', 'the toilet', and so on. Social settings, like social objects, are the product of collective actions and thus expectably organised for specific activities (Heft 2003: 175; Wicker 1979: 6-19).
2. *The 'social gathering'* refers to 'the full set of persons mutually present to one another during any one continuous period of time' (1963: 243, cf. 18) – simply put, the participants in-

volved. Gatherings are usually structured into ‘ambulatory units’ or ‘participation units’ – individuals, pairs, or groups that move and interact more or less as one (ibid.: 6, see Goffman 1971: 5-27 for a more detailed treatment). Between them, we see a constant flow of ‘contacts’ (Goffman 1983: 6); that is, instances of perception and/or interaction under mutually acknowledged response presence. Gatherings can be classified as

- ‘Unfocused gathering’ – e.g. people merely passing each other on the street;
- ‘Focused gathering’ – people jointly ‘sustain a single focus of attention’ (Goffman 1963: 24).

The latter can be further differentiated as

- ‘Fully-focused gathering’ when all participants shared the same focus of attention, usually through bodily organisation into a circle;
- ‘Partially-focused gathering’ when there are some participants not legitimately partaking in the shared focus of attention (‘bystanders’);
- ‘Multi-focused gatherings’ where there are multiple joint foci, such as multiple circles of conversation forming at a party (Goffman 1963: 91).

Some specific types of fully focused gatherings – also called ‘face engagements’ (Goffman 1963: 89) – are ‘encounters’ (face engagements with roughly equal rights among participants), ‘formal meetings’ where a central authority manages the proceedings, ‘platforms’ where participants are separated into ‘performers’ and ‘audience’ of some kind, and finally, ‘celebrations’, which are often the most ritualised gatherings (Goffman 1983: 7)

3. ‘*Social occasion*’ finally refers to ‘the frame of reference in terms of which engagements occur’ (ibid.: 243) – the shared *context of understanding and social norms*. This is Goffman’s early term for ‘frames’. Such occasions can be ‘diffuse’ or strongly and clearly structured and typified, like a wedding, where entrances and exits, different functional roles, order of proceedings, and so on, will likely be formalised. They can be ‘unserious’ or ‘serious’, meaning autotelic ‘ends in themselves’, or exotelic ‘means to other ends’. And they can be ‘one-shot[s]’, or a known, recurring series of events (Goffman 1963: 19).

Involvement and Interaction Tension

Given the importance of response presence, it is no wonder that apart from symbolic regard to self, the interaction order predominantly organises the ‘*structure of involvement in the situation*’ (Goffman 1963: 193, emphasis in original): who may or may not legitimately join the shared focus of attention, what side or hidden involvements may be maintained, how much attention one may visibly spend on matters outside the gathering, how ‘alive to the situation’ one has to appear (Goffman 1963: 193-7; Goffman 1967: 114-7). If embarrassment of self is the negative ‘glue’ that holds society together in interaction rituals, *involvement* is its positive counterpart – a concept he developed in his PhD thesis and consistently used from then on (Goffman 1953: 243-289; 1963: 33-81, 166-197; 1967: 113-136; 1972: 34-44; 1986: 346-7). Few if any other social theorists

have emphasised the role of a joint focus of attention for the functioning of social interaction as Goffman. In this, he prefigured a whole field of philosophers, evolutionary anthropologists, developmental psychologists, AI, robotics, and HCI researchers which has recently come to study *joint attention* as a central precondition, mechanism, achievement, and characteristic of social cognition, language, cooperation, and theory of mind.¹⁷

But a focus of attention is only one part of involvement for Goffman: It also comprises *deep attentive absorption* in that focus, and a state of *heightened arousal or excitement* with regard to it – both of which are again amplified if socially shared. This conception of involvement presumably takes up Durkheim's (1915: 226) concept of 'collective effervescence' in positive ritual – the energising experience of commitment to and participation in the sacred moral order of the community. 'Joint spontaneous involvement is a *unio mystico*, a socialized trance' (Goffman 1967: 113). Collins recently picked up on this thread in his evolution of Goffman, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004). Collins argues that the attunement of attention, action, and emotion achieved in interaction rituals is the central emotional source of social cohesion: Partaking in an interaction ritual gives rise to collective experiences of *communitas* (Turner 1982) – solidarity, emotional energy, and indignation towards those who violate the collective symbols that come to represent the ritual and its group (just think of soccer fans attending a match).¹⁸

Returning to Goffman, involvement was for him intimately tied to what he called 'interaction tension' (Goffman 1953: 243-57, 1972: 38-41). Whenever we have an interaction with others, Goffman held, it tends to feel either 'good' and 'flowing smoothly', or 'awkward' and 'dragging'. This impression arises from the degree to which participants manage to create and sustain a flow of interaction that effortlessly arouses joint interest and binds joint attention (Goffman 1953: 243-4). Our *usual* state in social interaction is one of slightly effortful, slightly unpleasant self-monitoring and self-control: we retain a certain 'affective' and 'cognitive reserve' (Goffman 1986: 378) so as to consciously fit our actions and communications into the normative demands of the situation at hand and prevent accidentally committing a *faux pas*. In the case that we find our spontaneous needs, wants, emotions, interests and involvement aligned with the proprieties of the situation, we can allow ourselves to 'let go', to get *engrossed*. 'Engrossment' for Goffman denotes a degree of unselfconscious involvement so deep that one stops reflexively monitoring what one attends to, feels, and does (Goffman 1986: 378). When spontaneous inner involvement and official proprieties of the situation align, our experience becomes 'euphoric' or 'at ease' – we can let ourselves be engrossed. In case they misalign, we experience 'dysphoric' tension, and this is often socially contagious: we spiral ourselves and others out of

¹⁷ See Eilan 2005, Kaplan & Hafner 2006, Seemann 2011 for useful overviews. In an almost expectable twist, several scholars consider play and games to be phylogenetic and ontogenetic ratchets for the full development of jointly attended activity (e.g. Tomasello 2000, Murray 2006).

¹⁸ In today's psychological parlance, interaction rituals can provide strong satisfactions of relatedness, 'close emotional bonds and attachments' (Reeve 2009: 163), and the social presence of others (Gajadhar 2012) can amplify emotion.

joint involvement by becoming self-conscious and mutually aware of our and the other's lack of involvement (Goffman 1953: 243-4, 1967: 113-136; 1972: 38-44).

Goffman hypothesised that there must be a 'psychobiological' process that underlies this propensity to become spontaneously involved in joint activity (Goffman 1972: 35; 1986: 346; 1983: 3). Furthermore, he argued that involvement entailed a double moral obligation: We ought to be involved to a degree 'proper' to the situation at hand, and we ought to involve each other properly, to synchronise towards a joint degree of involvement. This creates the paradox that we *ought* to be *spontaneously* involved, but that involvement is recalcitrant to conscious forcing and engrossment anathema to conscious self-awareness; in fact, the very effort of feigning involvement visibly betrays its lack (Goffman 1953: 243-289; 1963: 33-82, 166-178). Involvement is morally charged because apart from energising the attention necessary for cooperation (and forging *communitas*), it binds otherwise strategic actors to collective morality. Since we cannot detach ourselves completely from our spontaneous involvement in a situation, we become invested with our self in it: 'By expressing himself spontaneously, the sender becomes intimately a part of the situation, instead of merely a rational manipulator of it. In a manner of speaking, the character of the sender becomes lodged in and infused into his communicative act, giving these acts a weight and reality of their own right' (Goffman 1953: 244). A person who would be able to *fully* detach itself from any spontaneous involvement of self in an interaction would be a patently dangerous actor for the community: a psychopath.

Trust, Intelligibility, Insanity

Looking back on his own work, Goffman gave three reasons for the centrality and specificity of response-present, jointly involved interaction: (a) its evolutionary adaptive value for social species, (b) its ontogenetic role in the survival and socialisation of children, (c) its continued practical import for groups and societies, which require cooperation around 'fixed specialized equipment' at one place and time (Goffman 1983: 3). As we saw, the ritualised orderliness of such jointly attended action transforms it into a resource for symbolic communication – all the while creating the endemic issue of strategic interaction. This issue can only be partially accommodated for by the actors' rational self-interest in functioning communication (that is, in continued opportunities for deception). As Durkheim put it, the organic solidarity of modern society is not self-sustaining; it depends on the trust and moral accord that only remainders of the mechanical solidarity of community offers – what Giddens (1984: 24) called the 'social integration' underlying modern 'system integration'. Goffman saw this solidarity realised in the interaction rituals of response-present interaction. They are the primary site where moral regard for and embarrassment of the self are acquired and occur, and where spontaneous involvement inescapably invests actors in that process (Goffman 1967: 5-112). Based in his research on mental institutions, Goffman (1961) wove a final thread into this argument: Acting

in visible acknowledgement of the interaction order signals one's *trustworthiness* as an aware, reliable, predictable, moral actor to others (Goffman 1963: 197). As Goffman (1971: 238-333) fashions in stark Darwinian terms in 'Normal Appearance', modern public life necessarily exposes us to potential physical threats from a myriad of unknown others, with little trust-inducing bonds from repeated interaction. So why aren't we in a state of constant alert? Here as elsewhere, the interaction order functions not so much as rules for behaving well, but as a symbolic resource that enables the intelligible signalling of 'respect and regard' (Goffman 1963: 196), or strategically deployed disregard to likewise signal one's disapproval – though this usually results in embarrassment (Goffman 1963: 247-8). Yet even such embarrassing disregard *must* happen *intelligible as (well-)intended disregard of the otherwise acknowledged order*. Otherwise, the others have no choice to maintain the interaction order and its normal appearances but to classify the disregard as either temporary incapacity (e.g. drunkenness), or plain insanity (Goffman 1963: 216-248). Whatever we do or say, we *must* satisfy 'the felicity condition behind all other felicity conditions, namely, *Felicity's Condition*: to wit, any arrangement which leads us to judge an individual's verbal acts to be not a manifestation of strangeness. Behind *Felicity's Condition* is our sense of what it is to be sane' (Goffman 1983a: 27). Whatever its cause, psychotic behaviour is first 'a failure to abide by the rules established for the conduct of face-to-face interaction' (Goffman 1961: 141). Stealing may break a social norm, but if the stolen object is 'worth the risk' and the thief demonstrates an understanding (ideally, a guilt-ridden one) that one *ought* not steal, this norm break in so doing reaffirms the norm. Had the thief risked his life to steal a paper clip, or would he demonstrate no understanding that stealing is inappropriate behaviour, that would render him completely inexplicable, therefore unpredictable, therefore ontologically dangerous.

This observation reveals a deep parallel between the projects of Goffman's interaction order and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology: as Garfinkel notes, the fundamental issue of sociology is that man is an 'animal symbolicum' (Garfinkel 2006: 107), and that '*any sign can signify anything*' (Garfinkel 2006: 106, emphasis in original), wherefore the fundamental task of any symbolic animal is to perform an act *in such a way that* it becomes mutually intelligible as an act of a certain kind, that its meaning is specified. The necessary and sufficient motivation for orderly conduct is that whatever else, symbolic animals need to make themselves *intelligible* (Warfield Rawls 2006: 20-1). Breaching the orderliness of conduct such that no understanding at all can be generated betrays the most fundamental moral norm of trust (Garfinkel 1967: 50). We find the same argument in a different language in Goffman: to maintain trust that one is a sane actor who will inflict no physical or symbolic harm, we must continually produce ritualised (intelligibly rendered-as-symbolically expressive) action that 'makes sense' against the rules of everyday action and politeness. It is precisely this problem of making sense that Goffman set out to solve in *Frame Analysis*.

3.3 Frame Analysis

Garfinkel's (2006: 107) observation that '*any sign can signify anything*' nicely captures the second endemic challenge of symbolic action that needed a sociological answer for Goffman. Once ritualised; that is, decoupled from a sole immediate function and effect, *one gesture* (a nodding of the head, say) can have very many *different meanings*, fulfil very many different functions in very many different interaction rituals: a transient greeting, the confirmation of a request, and so on. Conversely, *one meaning* or ritual function (a 'greeting', say), can be realised by very many *different gestures*: Nodding, raising the hand, saying 'hello', grunting, etc. (Goffman 1963: 8, 36; 1986: 269). In short, symbolic action is *underspecified*.

Worse still, once symbolic action makes us mindful of others as mindful, the multitude of their and our possible *intentions* multiplies possible meanings even further: In a page-long footnote, Goffman illustrates how a man driving through a red light with his car allows at least 24 different answers to the question 'What is he doing?', depending on circumstance and intention (Goffman 1971: 102-3). To aggravate our misery, symbolic action has the tendency to fold back onto itself in multiple *layerings*: One time, a greeting nod might be conducted and intended 'literally'; another time, it might be just theatrically played at, or rehearsed, and ironically so, and then one might retell another person how one ironically rehearsed the theatrical performance of a greeting nod (Goffman 1986: 40-82). To make our misfortune complete, the other might mistake one's irony for sincerity, or one's telling could be a lie, and while the other thinks one is telling a lie, one would think that the other thinks that one is telling the truth (Goffman 1986: 83-122).

Underspecification, intentionality, layering, deception, misunderstanding—and yet, sense is being made, meaning is being understood, and often apparently jointly so, but how? This is the question Goffman set out for *Frame Analysis*:

I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: 'What is it that's going on here?' Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand. ... My aim is to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events. ... I start with the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth. (Goffman 1986: 8, 10)

The problem, in short, is the *context-dependency of meaning*, and the solution Goffman deployed for it, *frames*. Both problem and solution he took from Gregory Bateson.

Gregory Bateson and 'The Message "This Is Play"'

On October 9, 1955, when Bateson opened the second Macy Conference on 'Group Processes' and invited its participants to ponder 'The Message "This Is Play"' (Bateson 1956), he tackled a quintessentially Meadian question: How is symbolic communication possible? How does it

evolve from animal behaviour? Where Mead saw the problem and solution in the *reflexivity* of social action, Bateson saw them in its *contextuality*. But like Mead, Bateson understood play to be the primary exemplar and origin of symbolic action and reasoning.¹⁹

Observing young apes and otters play in a San Francisco zoo, Bateson wondered: How is it that one more or less uniform stimulus can be jointly understood by both organisms in radically different ways: once as a direct attack (the bite), the other time as an invitation to play (the nip)? (Bateson 1956: 148; 2000/1955: 177-8) At some point in evolution, organisms must have gained the ability to not just automatically emit and react to 'mood signs' – Bateson's term for gestures –, but to intentionally produce and interpret them as intentionally produced (and therefore possibly deceitful) 'signals': 'an extraordinary step in the evolution of communication where organisms discovered ... that a message or meaningful act could be emitted as a message to influence another organism' (Bateson 1956: 157, cf. Bateson 2000/1955: 178). Symbolic action means to be able to ascribe an action to a specific 'logical type' – namely, that of signals in contrast to that of automatic reflexes. These types or categories Bateson called 'psychological frames', and linked them with the 'context' of the message (Bateson 2000/1955: 185; Bateson 1979: 3-4).²⁰ Both in phylogeny and ontogeny, play is the first frame or context, in which the handling of frames in general is learned:

By play an individual learns that there are sorts and categories of behavior....I am not interested in the fact that he [the child, SD] learns how to be an archbishop from playing the role; but that he learns that there is such a thing as a role. He learns or acquires a new view, partly flexible and partly rigid, ... that behavior can, in a sense, be set to a logical type or to a style ... that the choice of style or role is related to the frame and context of behavior. And play itself is a category of behavior, classified by context in some way. (Bateson 1956: 148-149)

This makes play the evolutionary origin of symbolic communication: 'We therefore meet in play with an instance of signals standing for other events, and it appears, therefore, that the evolution of play may have been an important step in the evolution of communication' (Bateson 2000/1955: 181). Bluffing, threats, dramatic exaggeration, mimicry, deceit, ritual, play, gambling, spectatorship – all of them 'form together a single total complex of phenomena' of the *symbolic* (ibid.). As we will see, Goffman's *Frame Analysis* directly took and generalised this concept of frames to cover all 'definitions of the situation' one finds in a social group.

What enables the framing of messages as mood-signs or signals is the emergence of a third type of message, 'meta-communications' with which organisms signify and distinguish types or frames (Bateson 2000/1955: 189, Bateson 1956: 167-8). Because they *enable* the human, symbolic, conscious, verbal communication in different types, Bateson concludes that they themselves must be pre-human, non-symbolic, unconscious, preverbal, and of a 'higher' logical type than mood-signs or signals (Bateson 1956; Bateson 2000/1955: 180, 185). The first instance

¹⁹ See Nachmanovitch (2009) for a thorough reflection of Bateson's writings on play.

²⁰ In this, frames expand on the notion of 'deutero-learning' Bateson first developed during his anthropological field work in Bali: next to simple, behaviourist reinforcement learning, he argued that in social interaction animals are also capable of learning to recognise the *Gestalt* or 'context' of stretches of multiple behaviours (Visser 2003, Bateson 2000b/1942).

of such meta-communication is ‘the message, “This is play” ... [It] is a message defining context in a way, or defining a frame’ (Bateson 1956: 163; 2000/1955: 179). Again, Goffman directly imported the concept of meta-communicative messages to explain the process of framing.

Defining frames further, a ‘psychological frame ... is (or delimits) a class or set of messages (or meaningful actions)’ (Bateson 2000/1955: 186). A frame excludes and includes certain messages, in a figure-ground fashion articulating what is to be attended to. It establishes a ‘premise system’ for interpretation and evaluation. It is ‘metacommunicative’ in that it is about messages, wherefore ‘every metacommunicative message is or defines a psychological frame’. Finally, it demands a background of the same ‘logical type’: one type of animal is separated from other types of animals, one type of ceremonial action is separated from other types of ceremonial action. ‘Jumping’ types by distinguishing a type of ceremonial action from a type of animals ‘feels wrong’ (cf. Bateson 2000/1955: 187-9) – like Comte de Lautreamont’s chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table. Apart from the last point, Goffman concurred with all of these features.

Bateson thought that play creates such a ‘paradoxical frame’ (Bateson 2000/1955: 184, see 186) because mood-signs and signals are different logical types. A non-paradoxical frame would distinguish one type of mood-sign from another, or one type of signal from another, not mood-signs from signals.²¹ Again and again Bateson emphasised the shared paradoxical nature of play, ritual, and symbols in that ‘the relationship between symbol and referent tends to be multiple’ (Bateson 1956: 148). A symbolic, play, or ritual act blends *multiple* incongruent levels or types of phenomena at once: real kangaroo meat and the virtual ancestors for which it stands, the real sound ‘c-a-t’ and the idea of a cat for which the sound stands, which refers to a real cat that is presently absent: ‘Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional’ (Bateson 2000/1955: 182). The play act physically transforms another act (biting becomes nipping) to signal that it is not the other act itself, only a stand-in for it – and a non-literal, non-serious one at that (like a threatening nip). Yet by virtue of that transformation, the original bite itself becomes absent.

²¹ Three critical comments are in place here: first, that played actions are always paradoxical (because they necessarily denote what their non-play counterpart would denote) is only true if the counterpart itself is a ‘mood-sign’ or ‘gesture’ that actually does denote some other primary action. Arguably, a bite (at least among animals) *can be* just that: a bite, with no further signaling. True, once organisms are able to understand gestures as symbolically significant, even primary actions *can* be read as *also* intended symbolically. (Like we sometimes have a hard time believing that what a person did to us was ‘accidental’, i.e. not also intentional, significant). Second, it is unclear how Bateson’s claim that play is paradoxical in the sense of distinguishing (unintentionally indexical) gestures and (intentionally symbolic) signals does not also obtain for *any* intentionally indexical sign like an arm and hand stretched out rapidly towards another person to signal ‘stop!’ It is not the actual pushing or stopping the other’s body (the bite), and yet it denotes it, and denotes what would be denoted by the pushing. Third, as Goffman demonstrated *in extenso*, play not only applies to primary actions or mood-signs: We can also play at symbolic signals, play at playing at symbolic signals, and so on – ironically enacting a bad comedian’s ironic enactment of a politician giving a speech, for instance. So ‘This is play’ cannot be, or at least for adult humans no longer be, just about establishing the border between mood-signs and signals. It is this layering that distinguishes Goffman most sharply from Bateson.

Returning to Goffman, his *Frame Analysis* essentially merges Bateson's theory of frames and metacommunication with Thomas and Thomas's definition of the situation to answer the problem of underspecification (Goffman 1986: 7, 10, 40-5, 210, 254, 260-1). Incidentally, it is the same problem Clifford Geertz articulated as the task of ethnography: accomplishing 'thick description' that 'sorts winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones' (Geertz 1973: 16). But while Geertz saw the hermeneutic power of ethnographic accounts in 'their complex specificness, their circumstantiality' (Geertz 1973: 23), Goffman's interest was as always systematic, taxonomic, typological: he agreed with W.I. Thomas that individuals relied on a cultural stock of 'general types of situations' (Thomas 1923: 42) to specify meanings, and that these types themselves could be systematically treated; that is, their main contingencies and complications charted, their main characteristics and components outlined, their main forms and types catalogued.

In this, *Frame Analysis* marks an extension of Goffman's previous focus on response-present interaction. It generalises the earlier concept of 'occasion' towards the *individual's* typified organisation of attentive involvement in and understanding of *any* event it is attending to. *Frame Analysis* is 'situational, meaning here a concern for what one individual can be alive to at a particular moment, this often involving a few other particular individuals and not necessarily restricted to the mutually monitored arena of a face-to-face gathering' (Goffman 1986: 8). And to the question how and why members of society act morally, it adds the question of how – even in deceit – they do so *intelligibly*.

Defining the 'Definition of the Situation'

'Frames', then, denote the *types* of situations that constitute a central part of a social group's culture, its 'principal classes of schemata' (Goffman 1986: 27) that are acquired by its members during socialisation (Goffman 1986: 33). Frames differ across cultures and groups and change over time (Goffman 1986: 54, 131-2, 259). Goffman's initial statements suggest a reading of frames as purely subjective, cognitive 'schemata of interpretation' (Goffman 1986: 21). But the matter is more complex: 'I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them' (Goffman 1986: 10-11). He explains, 'Bateson identified framing as a psychological process; I see it inhering in the organization of events and cognition' (Goffman 1981a: 64). And elsewhere: 'A correspondence or isomorphism is thus claimed between perception and the organisation of what is perceived' (Goffman 1986: 26). Goffman remained frustratingly silent about the actual process by which this 'isomorphism' between practical, material ordering *and* subjective experience occurs. The most instructive passage comes from the chapter that discusses the 'anchoring' of frames in the larger social and material world:

frameworks are not merely a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of the activity itself is organized – especially activity directly involving social agents. Organi-

zational premises are involved, and these are something cognition somehow arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates. Given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of the activity. (Goffman 1986: 247)

In ‘The Interaction Order’, these ‘premises’ are later specified as ‘shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints’, operating as ‘systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules of a game, the provisions of a traffic code, or the rules of syntax of a language’ (Goffman 1983: 5). The question *how* these premises operate will be dealt with in the next chapter.

So to summarise again, ‘frame’ describes *a set of conventions for a type of situation that organises both subjective experience and meaning, and material doings, sayings, and events, and does so both cognitively and normatively*. In contrast, ‘framing’ describes *the process through which a frame is situationally realised and sustained* (Willems 1997: 46-9). A framing is ‘sustained both in the mind and in activity’ (Goffman 1986: 247) by participants jointly ‘fitting’ their understanding and action to the frame of the situation they believe to find themselves in – or wish to instantiate. Following Goffman, the word ‘define’ can be used to describe *what a frame specifies as a convention*. Thus, when an event is *framed* as ‘a lecture’, the *frame* ‘lecture’ *defines* for instance the degree of attention one ‘ought’ to pay as an audience member, and the typical forms of displaying such attention.

Primary Frames and Transformations

Goffman distinguishes two levels of frames: the first provide basic categories for events; Goffman (1986: 21) calls them ‘primary frameworks’ because without them, the world would be unintelligible, and because they do not depend on or transform other frames. Primary frameworks broadly fall into the classes of ‘natural events’ and ‘social’ frameworks, this distinction capturing *intentionality*: Social frames ‘provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence’, and are therefore subject to normative social regulation and moral evaluation (Goffman 1986: 22).²² Still, they are always understood to ‘gear into the ongoing natural world’ and its constraints; evaluation therefore always has to take into account the constraint and potential thwarting of intent by matter, and social frames differ to the extent to which the material is to be an instrumental focus of action, or a to-be-disattended ‘mere’ semiotic carrier (Goffman 1986: 23).

The second level of frames are ‘transformations’ (Goffman 1986: 156), instances where a strip of experience that is organised and intelligible in terms of a primary framework is transformed – modelled on the primary one but altered systematically in terms of the ‘second’ frame

²² For events that do not easily fit our expectations of natural events versus intentional doings, we have special frames like ‘stunts’, ‘muffings’, and ‘fortuitousness’ (i.e. accidents and happy accidents), or the ‘astounding’ for anything we cannot yet fully explain in either terms (Goffman 1986: 28-35).

(Goffman 1986: 40-1). Again, two broad classes of transformations are distinguished. One is 'fabrications' – where one or more participants of a situation organise it so that other participants 'will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on' (Goffman 1986: 83). The other is 'keys' – where 'the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else' (Goffman 1986: 43-4). One could also say that keys are *intentionally equilibrated transformations* – all participants are at least *supposed* to be jointly aware of and upholding the transformation –, whereas fabrications are *intentionally disequilibrating* ones.²³ Fabrications provide a systematic place for the whole domain of strategic interaction: lies, deceit, and intentional maintenance of different information states between participants. Keys in turn cover the layering of meaning in theatrical performances, irony, play, and so on. Goffman lists five defining features of keys (Goffman 1986: 45):

- 'a systematic transformation is involved across materials already meaningful in accordance with a schema of interpretation' (i.e. keys are an instance of transformation);
- participants ought to mutually know and acknowledge the key (this distinguishes keys from fabrication);
- 'cues' or 'brackets' establish the spatiotemporal extent of keys;
- anything can be keyed;
- 'the systematic transformation ... may alter only slightly the activity thus transformed, but it utterly changes what it is a participant would say was going on'.

The key, not the frame it transforms, dominates understanding, experience, and performance. In a certain sense, keys or transformations are ritualisations of a whole meaningful unit of activity (Goffman 1981: 153-4). Bateson suggested play, ritual, and theatre as examples for keys. For Goffman, among the most common keys in our society are forms of 'make-believe' like playfulness, day-dreaming, fictional media, or contests; 'ceremonials' or social rituals like marriages or funerals; 'technical redos' like practicing and simulation, rehearsals, planning, demonstrations, documentation, transformative, therapeutic role-playing, or experiments; and 'regroundings', like doing something for charity, or as punishment, recreation, or medical treatment, instead of for its usual reasons (Goffman 1986: 48-74).

Once an activity has been transformed, it can be subjected to an almost infinite number of 'retransformations' (Goffman 1986: 156), often creating a veritable layer cake: think only of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where we witness the murder of a person called Gonzago (primary framework), but this murder is in fact a play staged by a troupe of actors (dramatic scripting),

²³ 'Assessment games' (Goffman 1986: 456) like poker (traditional, 19th century) present an interesting mixed case: Participants are to be jointly aware and acknowledging that differential information states will be maintained, and participants will explicitly attempt to contain each other in fabrications. By means of explicit social accord, what would be immoral in any other situation becomes a moral mandate. The explicit cheating rule in the card game *Illuminati* (Steve Jackson Games, 1982) is an even more extreme example. Cf. http://www.sjgames.com/illuminati/img/illuminati_rules.pdf, last accessed March 5, 2013.

and this staging itself was secretly arranged by Prince Hamlet not for mere entertainment, but to trigger telling emotional reactions from his uncle (fabrication). And all this is happening within the fictional play *Hamlet* itself (dramatic scripting), something you, dear reader, now learn about in an academic description of it (technical redoing) – so that what you are reading is in fact the keying of a keying of a fabricated, keyed murder. Such ‘laminations’ (Goffman 1986: 156) constitute a central dimension of the structure of a framing, with the operative, last transformation being its ‘rim’ (Goffman 1986: 158). Participants may accidentally ‘upkey’ or ‘downkey’ (Goffman 1986: 314) an event – e.g. take a seriously intended statement as a joke, or not notice that a person is re-enacting another person, not speaking literally²⁴

In any situation, multiple framings can be going on at the same time, and a single individual can partake in multiple framings (Goffman 1986: 25). Frames can be switched quite rapidly (Fine 1983). Beyond intentional fabrications, people can be mistaken about the shared framing of the other participants in a situation. In addition, it may be ambiguous which of several possible frames applies in a given situation, and people can get into disputes about this (Goffman 1986: 302-44). This ‘negative experience’ of ambiguous frames, unclear frames, or individuals breaking out of frame conventions is actively produced as an involving experience in the trance of rock concerts or the metalepses of postmodern fiction (Goffman 1986: 378-438).

Characteristics of Frames

Frame Analysis itself does not draw up a succinct description of the core characteristics of a frame, but from his PhD thesis to *Forms of Talk*, Goffman repeatedly (indeed, repetitively) worked through the same aspects organised by a frame, such that one may easily summarise the dimensions organised by a frame (building on Deterding 2009, 2011, 2013). If Goffman speaks of frames as schemata of interpretation, or rules of propriety (Goffman 1986: 21-7, 45; 1972: 25), this articulates not so much further sets of conventions than the two basic dimensions any such convention has: by defining expectations, a ‘syntax’ for a specific type of situation (regarding motivation, conduct, emotion, attention, etc.), frames specify the *meaning* of what situationally transpires. At the same time, these expectations are *normative*: We expect actors to act in a manner that is intelligible as consciously and morally relating to them.

1. Motivational Relevancies

Frames define what the ‘motivational relevancies’ (Goffman 1986: 8), the main reasons, outcomes, or goals of activities in a situation ought to be. A crucial distinction here is between *exotelic*²⁵ (‘serious’) framings of an activity as a ‘means to other ends’ outside of them, and *auto-*

²⁴ Upkeying and downkeying has been used in the game studies literature to refer to intentionally re-keying a situation, but Goffman was specific to reserve these terms for accidental re-keyings not in tune with the jointly ratified one.

²⁵ I am taking this terminology from Csikszentmihalyi (1990); equally appropriate terms would be ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ (Ryan & Deci 2000) or ‘telic’ and ‘paratelic’ (Apter 2006) – all point to the same basic distinction.

telic ('unserious', 'recreational') frames that define activities to be an enjoyable 'ends in themselves' (Goffman 1963: 19; 1953: 128-30). Note that motivational relevancies can drastically differ for the various 'participation roles' in a situation. For example, a night out at the bar is expected to be autotelic for the partygoer, and exotelic for the barkeeper: it is appreciated if the barkeeper visibly enjoys doing what she does (as long as she 'gets the job done'), but it is acceptable if she doesn't (as long as she doesn't show this so much that it is seen to impinge on the partygoer's enjoyment, which is her defined 'official' main motivational relevancy). Also, participants may *for themselves* pursue and experience an activity autotelically in a situation that is socially defined for their participation role as exotelic, or vice versa. Goffman gives the example of a businessman who joins a billiard game to network and experiences it as such. Contrarily, a situation might engross a participant such that she becomes autotelically involved, although her inner stance was and/or her participation role is defined as exotelic; or the participant becomes alienated from the unfolding events such that the defined-as-autotelic involvement becomes difficult to uphold (Goffman 1967: 113-136). The connection of autotelic motivational relevancies and game play is obvious, as Goffman explicitly acknowledged.

2. Rules and Scripts of Action and Communication

Frames define what actions and communications can be expected and are appropriate to be performed in a situation, and what their situation-specific meaning is (Goffman 1986: 24; 1963: 18-9; 1983: 7; 1983a: 28). In the case of frames for more institutionalised kinds of situations (like a wedding or court trial), these often are tightly scripted, pre-arranged 'proceedings' with specialised director roles ensuring the proper flow of events.

3. Objects, Settings, and Events

Frames define not only actions and communications, but also the expectable and proper spatiotemporal setting, objects, and events – and configuration thereof – of a situation (Goffman 1963: 18; 1972: 24-7; 1983: 4). Settings and objects have 'a social history of [their] own in the wider society and a wide consensus of understanding regarding the meanings that are to be generated from [them]' (Goffman 1972: 26); thus, they symbolically indicate and cue the kind of framing in which one presumably finds oneself. And whatever norms, expectations, or understandings come with a frame, the actors in the present situation have to 'make do' with what is materially present. Thus, the present arrangement of setting, objects, and events may stabilise and facilitate a framing, or resist it. We will turn to this point in more detail in section 3.5.

4. Actors and Their Footing

Frames define expectable and proper social actors in a situation in the form of a 'frame space' (Goffman 1981: 230) of possible 'footings'; that is, stances, alignments, roles people can take

vis-à-vis the situation (Goffman 1986: 129-31, 224-30, 269-87, 506-539).²⁶ These can be further differentiated into (a) 'appearance formula' with regard to the situation's roles and their gearing into the world, (b) 'participation roles' in the situation's 'participation framework' (Goffman 1981: 137), and (c) 'production format' (ibid.: 145) with regard to the specific stances the actor of a current turn of interaction can take in (Goffman 1981: 153).

(a) *Appearance formulas* define the various functional 'roles' people can take up in a frame, which Goffman distinguishes from 'person' for 'the subject of a biography', the presumed continuity of a human actor across situations, and 'character' in the case the situation involves an internal keying. In situations that involve the splitting of participants into performers and receiving audience (Goffman calls them 'platforms'), one can distinguish the prototypical roles of 'actors' and 'onlookers' (Goffman 1986: 129-30). In the 'visit to the doctor's office' frame, these functional roles are 'doctor' 'nurse', and 'patient', for example.

(b) *Participation roles* specify a person's legitimate stance and attentive access to the main foci of attention and action in a situation, which belong to either individuals or gatherings. In general, one may be a 'ratified participant' of a focus, or a 'bystander' (Goffman 1963: 91). People can engage in 'byplay' (among ratified participants), 'crossplay' (between participants and bystanders), or 'sideplay' (among bystanders) (Goffman 1981: 134). If three persons have a little chat in the waiting room of a doctor's office, for instance, they are all ratified participants of that chat, and one person is the current main addresser. If the nurse walks in and overhears the chat, the three persons occupy the situational role or appearance formula 'patients', and she enacts the appearance formula 'nurse', but she is still a bystander relative to the chat who is not allowed (without consent of the participants) to listen in on it or partake in the chat, though her situational role gives her the right to interrupt the chat. Similarly, the nurse may not walk in and listen in on the consultation between doctor and patient unless the two ratify her participation.

(c) *Production format* differentiates the stances the current actor or official addresser of the current interaction turn can take vis-à-vis her actions and communications: she may be the mere 'animator', the material body, 'mouthpiece', or 'executer' of a doing or saying. She may be the 'author' or actual person who chose and decided the action and communication. Or she can be the 'principal', the legal, symbolic entity 'in whose name' the doing or saying happens (Goffman 1981: 144-5). In everyday acting and communicating, people regularly *key* their doings and sayings, and each such keying implies a specific position of producers and recipients. For instance, in the little chat, one of the patients might have just returned from the doctor and re-enacts the doctor revealing her diagnosis to her. She keys her words as such a re-enactment, in so doing becomes the animator of words presumably authored by the doctor,

²⁶ 'A situated role, then, is a bundle of activities visibly performed before a set of others and visibly meshed into the activity these others perform' (Goffman 1972: 96).

but she does this re-enactment as her own principal: she doesn't officially 'speak in the name of the doctor', as the nurse might if she walked in to announce the diagnosis.

5. Internal Organisation

Frames define the internal organisation of the situation in four dimensions, the first three of which we have already encountered (Goffman 1986: 156-7, 313-4):

- The *spatial* organisation of a *setting* into bounded regions.
- The *social* organisation of *participants* into *gatherings*.
- The *framing* organisation of *transformations* into *laminations*.
- The organisation of *attention and action* into *tracks*.

'Main' and 'subordinate' 'tracks' (Goffman 1986: 202, 202-242) describe organised separate flows of (dis)attended-to action, communication, and information. Frames define what main and subordinate tracks there are, how many, and who may (witnessably) engage in them when and how. Tracks commonly found in frames are the 'disattend track' (what participants might perceive and/or interact with, but ought to disregard), 'directional cues' (a stream of metacommunication that organises the tracks and the participants' alignment), 'overlay channels' that are allowed to run in parallel, and the 'concealment tracks' of information that are variously inaccessible to the different participants (Goffman 1986: 210-8).

The footing of actors and the internal organisation of a situation inter-entail each other: It is relative to gatherings and tracks, often spatially supported by bounded regions, that one holds a participation role as ratified participant or bystander. It is relative to the framing and level of lamination that one occupies a specific appearance formula and foots one's actions and communications. If a professor during a lecture strikes a pompous tone reading a quotation, she positions herself as an actor enacting the role of the person whose quote she is reading, and positions the students as a theatric audience to what is now framed as a (hopefully brief) theatric performance. If a doctor addresses a befriended patient with 'Thanks again for the spectacular dinner last night', she opens of a brief 'personal exchange among friends' framing within the doctor's visit frame, in which the two take on the footings of equal friends. Had she started the conversation with the words, 'So what do we have here?', she would have enacted the 'doctor's visit' frame in which she would take the footing of doctor and her friend the footing of patient.

6. Attentive Access, Focus, and Involvement

Articulated in the organisation of a situation into lamination and tracks with connected footings, frames define what a participant in a situation ought to (witnessably) attend and disattend to, and have information about (Goffman 1986: 201-223, 345; 1963: 151-165, 193-5; 1972: 18-27). For every participant, frames define (witnessable) 'information states' (Goffman 1986: 133).

Whereas access and focus define the ‘what’ of attention, involvement defines the ‘how’, its degree and tone, potentially a whole ‘involvement contour’ or dramaturgy. The organisation of attention – grounded in the ‘ecological huddle’ (Goffman 1963: 95) created by the gaze and bodily orientations of participants, the materially bounded regions, and metacommunicative cues and brackets – is what predominantly demarcates the ‘bounds’ of the joint reality of a frame (Goffman 1972: 31).

7. Emotion and Emotion Display

Frames define an ‘ethos’, ‘a spirit, an emotional structure’ (Goffman 1963: 19) that is like involvement firstly a joint phenomenon, a ‘group atmosphere’ (Goffman 1963: 96-7). Goffman also took this term from Bateson, who defined ethos as ‘a standardised system of emotional attitudes’ (qtd. in Goffman 1963: 96-7). On the part of the individual, this entails an ‘affective discipline’: what emotional states are appropriate and how they are appropriately displayed in a situation (Goffman 1972: 23, 21-4; 1963: 69, 77). To not be able to keep one’s emotional expression in check is to ‘flood out’ (Goffman 1986: 350-8).

8. Framing Signals: Metacommunication and Transformation Rules

Frames define the means by which they are situationally signalled. On the one hand, these are specific metacommunicative ‘cues’ and ‘brackets’ (Goffman 1986: 11, 45, 210-5, 251-2, 255-269, 388-393, 466-7; 1963: 99; 1967: 38, 145) that support the organisation of the situation in terms of the frame. ‘Brackets’ (Goffman 1986: 45) delineate the spatiotemporal beginnings and endings of a frame: the switching of light, opening and closing of curtains, applause, and height difference between stage and auditorium are cases in point for a theatre performance. ‘Directional cues’ (Goffman 1986: 210) internally organise the meaning, bounds, and ordering of actions, communications, and events: anything from punctuation marks to the gestures of a movie director. Finally, ‘transformation rules’ (Goffman 1986: 41) describe the observably orderly way in which actions and communications are enacted so as to become intelligible as belonging to the frame.

9. Frame Limits and Gearing Into the World

Frames define what events, objects, actors, actions, and communications can be expectably and ‘permissibly’ framed in a certain way. These ‘frame limits’ (Goffman 1986: 56, 49-52) make up an important part of the moral discourses of a society: ‘Is that a bomb ticking in my suitcase?’ is a joke that is today deemed utterly inappropriate at an airport. Debates about the limits of pornography or *romans à clef* are other obvious examples.

Furthermore, if response-present interaction creates a ‘little social reality in its own right’, then a *systematic* question becomes how it is ‘geared into the world’ (Goffman 1986: 248; cf. 1983:

7-11). Apart from the material anchoring of activity, frames define which phenomena of the wider world will come to have what bearing inside the situation, and vice versa. This Goffman variously called ‘*transformation rules*, in the geometrical sense of that term, ... that tell us what modification in shape will occur when an external pattern of properties is given expression inside the encounter’ (Goffman 1972: 31). Goffman took this ‘geometrical’ (Goffman 1986: 41) notion of transformation from Sir D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s *On Growth and Form* (1945), a book that among other things demonstrates how the bodily shapes of related animal species could be derived from each other through simple geometrical formula (Goffman 1981a: 62). It is in this sense that he defines keys and fabrications as *transformations*. *Frame Analysis*, for instance, derives the transformation rules of theatre by analysing how theatre systematically differs from face-to-face interaction (Goffman 1986: 138-44).²⁷ Understood this way, ‘transformation rules’ add nothing to other conventions outlined above: They are merely a summative description of how to interpret, enact, (dis)attend, regulate emotion, metacommunicate, etc., a transformed *compared to* an untransformed version of the same activity. In fact, when Goffman took a first swing at formalising the concept of ‘frame’ in ‘Fun in Games’, he first split out three types of rules (rules of irrelevance, realised resources, transformation rules), only to collapse all three at the end into transformation rules (Goffman 1972: 18-31).

One useful and analytically distinct understanding of transformation rules implied in *Frame Analysis* is *frame-specific ritualisations*: the observably orderly way in which an action is performed so as to render it intelligible as being framed: how participants ‘alter only slightly the activity thus transformed’ to indicate its different meaning (Goffman 1986: 45). For instance, one shifts one’s intonation of a sentence to signal that it is meant ironically. Transformation rules in this sense are that subset of rules for doings and sayings that ensures the performative indication of a frame.

We can find yet another sense of transformation rules in Goffman’s writings: they select which properties and patterns of the world at large are relevant in the situation. The one property Goffman repeatedly calls out here is social structure, like the status relations of manager and employers, or men and women (Goffman 1972: 27-30; 1983: 10-3). Against the frame convention that status *ought* not to play a role in who gets to play *SingStar* at a company Christmas party, status can be *expressed* in the situation by a player nevertheless deferring her place in the queue to her superior, all the while paying overt regard to the ‘everyone’s equal’ convention with a statement like ‘I wanted to get another drink anyhow’ (cf. Goffman 1983: 11).²⁸ Indeed, given that *Frame Analysis* argues that whatever we do is always already framed, ‘social struc-

²⁷ Note that this is first off a *structuralist, descriptive* enterprise: what steps *would* one have to take to get from a street conversation to one understood to be a theatrical performance thereof. That the actors themselves actually *do* take just these steps, follow just these rules, is merely imputed by Goffman, never empirically demonstrated.

²⁸ Note again the normative-epistemic duality: Frame conventions articulate how one *ought* to behave, and therein also make any (non)compliance with this norm *significant*, expressive of some intent (or neglect).

tures' like gender could be negatively defined as those institutions that observably maintain a strong stability across the many different local orders of framed situations.

It should be added that the relations framed situations entertain with the wider world go both ways: not only are we supposed to discount the actor's everyday identity during a theatric performance, and to treat whatever is happening during it as fictional; we also (and maybe even more importantly) are supposed to treat the theatric event as fictional *after* the performance in *other* situations when we *refer to it*. A contract drawn up and signed within a live action role-playing session is understood to be void once the session ends – not so a contract drawn up and signed in a lawyer's office as part of a consultation.

To summarise, *transformation rules* will here be used to denote narrowly those frame conventions that define the observably orderly way in which doings and sayings *within* a framed situation are rendered intelligible as belonging to it – thus constituting metacommunication, whereas *gearing into the world* will denote those frame conventions that define how one intelligibly and appropriately relates to entities currently *outside* of the framed situation, and conversely, how entities from within a given framed situation can be intelligibly and appropriately related to from other framed situations.

The Reality of Frame Analysis

The word 'reality' is, if anything, even more hopelessly overdetermined than 'frame'. Most intellectual disputes around it seem to originate and end in 'scandalous play on the word "world" (or "reality")' (Goffman 1986: 3). If media convergence de- and re-couples the components of media, discourses around virtual reality, hyperreality, the reality of mass media, etc., have done the same with the many meanings of the word 'real', informed by the socio-material de- and re-coupling of aspects of 'realness' in digital media (cf. Chayko 1993).

To illustrate: With regard to actions, actors and objects, when we invoke the term 'real' or 'reality' we might minimally speak of (1) the physical world as described by the natural sciences (as in 'That wall is real'); (2) the emotional, personal significance of an event ('That really hurt'; '\$500 may be nothing for you, but for me, that's real money'); (3) the experiential involvement in an activity ('When he's playing with his Legos, he's in his own little reality'). With regard to communication and media, we might speak of (4) their sensorial iconicity or fidelity ('ultra-realistic 3D graphics', hyperrealism in the visual arts) – which may create (5) a sense of bodily 'presence' in a virtual environment (feeling 'really' present in a virtual reality); (6) the perceived likelihood of events, their patterning on our expectations of what kind of things are how likely to happen (what realism in the 19th century arts aimed at); (7) the to-be-taken-literally or not-to-be-taken-literally meaning of representations (allegorical, metaphoric, ironic, etc., versus 'plain' language); (8) the truth value of statements (what's 'really true'); (9) factuality (versus fictionality), a social genre convention guiding our expectations regarding how a media offer-

ing is geared into the world, and finally (10) specific stylistic conventions that are associated with and evoke factual genres (e.g. 'reality TV' formats) (see also Zipfel 2001).

To give one example, Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlett* is (1) a real physical book that had (2) a real impact on me as a young reader when I completely 'dove into' the (3) 'world' of Sherlock Holmes. Its printed pages are far less (4) iconic representations than the most recent Sherlock Holmes virtual reality theatre, where I had the (5) real sense of being bodily present in the virtual Baker Street. Still, Doyle's descriptions struck me as (6) highly realistic portraits of Victorian London. Despite its (7) plain, non-allegorical language stylistically reminiscent of (10) the literary realism of its time, I was of course aware that Holmes is, strictly speaking, (8) a fictitious entity, though many other statements in Doyle's novel (like the height of the London Tower) are factually true. This awareness is supported by my knowledge that *A Study in Scarlett* is (9) a work of fiction; that is, unlike with newspaper articles or travel guides about London, I cannot expect it to be written with the explicit intent and normative expectation of being a reliable representation of reality, or following some 'strategic ritual' of producing objectivity (Tuchman 1972); and people would certainly consider me silly if I tried to sue its publisher for fraud or criminal neglect after I relied on it as a travel guide and suffered from that – whereas that would be a perfectly sensible thing to do for travel guides and newspaper articles (wherefore travel guides usually come with some legal paratexts at the end abdicating any responsibility for the factuality of their contents).

This little excursion is not meant as a taxonomy. It only serves to situate the notion of 'reality' as discussed in *Frame Analysis*, given that the book is usually treated (and labelled in its introduction) as 'another analysis of social reality' (Goffman 1986: 2). This labelling has been somewhat misleading, however, since the questions that drive frame analysis stem less from William James or Alfred Schütz – as most commentators have painted it – than from Goffman's Durkheimian and Meadian interest in the interaction order. It is to counter-steer this tendency why we turn to the matter of 'reality' only now, at the end rather than the beginning of discussing frame analysis.

Frame Analysis starts with James's questioning of the conditions under which 'our sense of its [reality's] realness' (Goffman 1986: 2) emerges. It notes that James already highlighted 'selective attention, intimate involvement' as crucial factors, and further stated that there are 'different "worlds" that our attention and interest can make real for us' (Goffman 1986: 2). To not fall for a radical relativism, James in the end 'allowed that the world of the senses had a special status' (Goffman 1986: 3). Schütz looked more closely at the qualities of meaning exhibited by such 'finite provinces of meaning' or 'cognitive styles', again giving everyday reality a central status. Garfinkel took most strongly to James's emphasis on *conditions*, asking for the 'rules which, when followed, allow us to generate a 'world' of a given kind'. Could one reduce the multiplicity of phenomena in a 'world' into a set of generative rules, like those of chess? 'If the

meaningfulness of everyday activity is similarly dependent on a closed, finite set of rules, then explication of them would give one powerful means of analyzing social life' (Goffman 1986: 5) – and this is what Garfinkel's ethnomethodology attempted (at least in Goffman's reading of it).

Goffman was sceptical about all these takes; he did not see a principled way of specifying how many different 'worlds' there are, nor how many and which 'constitutive rules of everyday activity', as they open into infinite presuppositions (Goffman 1986: 6). To assume that there is *one* central, overarching, immediate 'everyday life' reality is an 'operating fiction' (Goffman 1986: 26): Schütz and James did not realise this because they never really closely studied the *multiplicity* of primary frameworks and the accomplishment of 'everyday reality'.

Therefore, Goffman argued, '[t]he first object of social analysis ought, I think, to be ordinary, actual behavior – its structure and its organization. However, the student, as well as his subjects, tends to take the framework of everyday life for granted; he remains unaware of what guides him and them' (Goffman 1986: 564). Because of this invisibility of the everyday, *Frame Analysis* first studies the 'special cases' of transformations, to then double this analysis back on 'everyday life' and bring its structure and contingency into view. On such closer analysis, any strip of 'everyday reality' falls apart into a series of activities already framed in terms of primary frameworks with specific conventions. In Burns's (1992: 372) formulation: 'What we end up with is a very large, but finite, multiplicity of *local* social orders'. This crucial point Goffman already (but more tentatively) made in 'Fun in Games' (1972): whatever 'specialness' or 'boundedness' gaming encounters have stems not from the fact that they are *gaming* encounters, but from the fact that they are *encounters*. In gaming *as in any other activity*, framing takes place, a little situated activity system is accomplished – and a 'sense of realness' produced for the participants. This accomplished realness entails two dimensions we are by now already familiar with: involvement, and intelligibility.

Something in which the individual can become unself-consciously engrossed is something which can become real to him. ... *Joint* engrossment in something with others reinforces the reality carved out by the individual's attention, even while subjecting this entrancement to the destructive distractions that the others are now in a position to cause. The process of mutually sustaining a definition of the situation in face-to-face interaction is socially organized through ... rules for the management of engrossment [who] appear to be an insubstantial element of social life, a matter of courtesy, manners, and etiquette. But it is to these flimsy rules, and not the unshaking character of the external world, that we owe our unshaking sense of realities. To be at ease in a situation is to be properly subject to these rules, entranced by the meanings they generate and stabilize; to be ill at ease means that one is ungrasped by immediate reality and that one loosens the grasp others have of it. To be awkward, or unkempt, to talk or move wrongly, is to be a dangerous giant, a destroyer of worlds. As every psychotic and comic ought to know, any accurately improper move can poke through the thin sleeve of immediate reality. (Goffman 1972: 72)

'Real' or 'reality' is what we are attentively absorbed and emotionally involved in: 'what it is [an individual] can get caught up in, engrossed in, carried away by' (Goffman 1972: 6). From *joint* attentive involvement we derive our 'firm sense of reality': When 'spontaneous involvement is threatened, then reality is threatened. Unless the disturbance is checked ... the illusion of reality will be shattered, the minute social system that is brought into being with each encounter

will be disorganized' (Goffman 1967: 135). 'A reader's involvement in an episode in a novel is in the relevant sense the same as his involvement in a strip of 'actual' experience. When James and Schutz spoke of something being "real after its fashion" and of "multiple realities", it was potential for inducing engrossment that they really had in mind' (Goffman 1986: 347).

Next to involvement, intelligibility is the second component of the experience of reality. When activities or events become unintelligible, when one 'finds that no particular frame is immediately applicable', then experience 'meant to settle into a form even while it is beginning, finds no form and therefore no experience. Reality anomically flutters' (Goffman 1986: 379). Such 'negative experience' doesn't mean that we stop perceiving things: only that we are no longer certain what exactly it is that's going on here. This uncertainty, which manifests usually as a consequence of other people's actions and communications (Goffman 1986: 380), is so disruptive that we put those who regularly produce it into mental asylums (Goffman 1963: 247-6). At the same time, it is so existentially fascinating that it generates deep involvement. Hence, we actively seek it out in the safely couched pockets of fictional media and performances, like the theatre of the absurd, postmodern novels and movies, or Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* (Goffman 1986: 38, 388-418). The problem is that once frame breaks are employed for such aesthetic effects in a medium, they become expectable and conventionalised (ibid.: 420). Once people have heard of *War of the Worlds*, the next radio mockumentary will be more easily recognised as 'a mockumentary'.²⁹

In summary, 'social reality' in Goffman's understanding is what individuals get situationally involved in and are able to frame. Our sense of 'realness' derives from the degree of spontaneous involvement and certainty of framing. 'Everyday reality' on close analysis is a quilt woven from myriad strips of more or less stably framed, more or less deeply involving experience, not a solid, plane background against framed activity. In everyday talk, when we refer to 'everyday reality', what we usually mean is an *unkeyed, untransformed* strip of experience: the 'real' wedding, not the rehearsed one, the show of 'real' appreciation, not its ironic counterpart. Applied to the 'reality' of video games, we can immediately conclude two things. First, gaming encounters are part of, not set apart from, the total patchwork of 'everyday reality'. Second, to the extent that they create 'a little reality of [their] own right', this refers to their capacity to convey a clear (joint) framing and attentively involve us – what Calleja (2011: 5) calls 'immersion as absorption'. We will return to this in the context of the 'magic circle'.

²⁹ Incidentally, this intentional 'Manufacture of Negative Experience' (ibid.) – and its necessary conventionalisation – offers an intriguing approach to Alternate Reality Games and the reason for their experiential intensity occasionally achieved by their 'This is Not a Game' aesthetic (Szulborski 2006). Alternate Reality Games arguably attempt a *fabrication* of whole gaming encounters. Like mockumentaries, they are framed by their producers as fictional, but designed to induce players to downkey them as 'real life', or have the negative experience of being not fully certain whether to frame them as fictional or not, or what element of one's situation to frame as belonging to the game (Benford et al. 2006, Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007, 2009). Then again, like mockumentaries they face the issue that their very institutionalisation as a recognisable genre among an informed audience makes the continued production of uncertainty as to their framing more and more unlikely, blunting the aesthetic effect they are aiming for.

Summary and Conclusions

Frame Analysis presents us with Goffman's answer to the underspecification or context-dependency of symbolic action, a solution that blends Bateson's theory of frames with Thomas's definition of the situation. Members of a social group are socialised into shared *frames*, recurring types of situations, and in any situation, they produce and gear themselves into a shared framing of it. There is no unframed, unorganised, foundational 'everyday reality' underneath: social life is one patchwork of strips of framed activities on equal footing, differing only in the specifics of those framings. *Primary frameworks* are the basic types of situations available in a culture (like 'wedding' or 'shopping'), and can be distinguished into *natural* and *social* ones. The latter involve the agency and intentionality of actors and are therefore objects of moral evaluation, requiring interpretation of the actors' intentions and situations. Multiple strips of differently framed events can be going on at the same time.

Any framed strip can be further framed with a *transformation* (or 'secondary' frame), any transformed strip can be transformed again. Transformations fall into two classes: *keys*, intended to be equally joined in by all participants (like a rehearsal), and *fabrications*, where participants intentionally create unequal understandings of 'what it is that's going on here', like a practical joke before its resolution. Transformations usually change the actual organisation of the already-framed 'source' events only little, but their meaning and perception very markedly.

No matter if primary framework or transformation, a frame comprises conventions for a type of situation that organise both subjective, covert perception and meaning, and overt, material doings, sayings, objects, settings, and events. Specifically, a frame defines

- motivational relevancies: what goals and outcomes to expect and pursue;
- rules: what to do and communicate, including transformation rules how to perform actions and communications intelligibly as belonging to the frame;
- objects, settings, events: what configurations and events are expectable and proper;
- attentive access, focus, and involvement: what to pay attention to, and how deeply;
- emotion: typical emotions, emotional self-control, and displays;
- an internal organisation of the situation into physical bounded regions, gatherings of persons, tracks of attention and events, and laminations of meaning;
- actors and their footing: who can take what stances and roles;
- metacommunicative cues, brackets, and transformation rules: what implicitly and reflexively guides the flow of events and indicates its framing;
- a gearing into the world: what activities and events can be made subject of the frame, and what relations can be established between entities inside and outside the situation.

All these conventions are epistemic and normative: they are guiding expectations and a symbolic idiom of what to expect and how to understand it, but also constitute expectations of 'proper' conduct.

3.4 Where the Action Is: Processualising Frames

One major recurring critique of frame analysis has been that it represents a ‘micro-structuralism’ or ‘micro-functionalism’ (e.g. Gonos 1977, Collins 1988, Chriss 2003, Willems 1997: 273-4).³⁰ The staunchest case in point is Denzin and Keller’s (1981) review of *Frame Analysis* as a stand-in for ‘the structural tradition that Goffman’s work represents’, a tradition that is ‘antithetical’, they argue, to ‘the James-Mead-Schutz-Bateson interpretive tradition’ (Denzin & Keller 1981: 53, 57). They hold that Goffman conceptualises frames as structures determining actors; there are no processes, no history, no ambiguity and multiplicity in interpretation, no interaction, no selves and relations, no everyday routines in this portrait. Part of this critique makes demands that are addressed in other writings of Goffman. But to a larger extent, it is a direct consequence of Goffman’s main epistemic interest and style. In a manner very similar to early Michel Foucault, Goffman was above all a *taxonomist*, describing, naming, and classifying regularities of conduct and experience (Burns 1992: 358, Manning 1992: 4, 131, 151). Like Foucault, he identified and described patterns through analogous comparison of seemingly disparate phenomena – and this gets quickly reified (by authors or readers) into phenomena-independent entities with causal reign over them. Goffman is a structuralist to the extent that he shared Durkheim’s notion of ‘social facts’ that have a strong stability vis-à-vis individual actors and acts (e.g. Goffman 1981a). But as Garfinkel (of all) demonstrated, acknowledging social facts invites, not precludes, asking how their stability is practically achieved.³¹ Goffman always emphasised that any social ordering is subject to processes of situational and historical change (Goffman 1981a: 63): He just wrote almost nothing about them.³² Furthermore, as integrations of Goffman into structuration theory (Giddens 1984), with Bourdieu’s habitus (Willems 1997) or with Garfinkel and Sacks (Warfield Rawls 1989, 2003) demonstrate, his account of the interaction order is fully compatible with processual social theories. What is required is not so much correction as complementing and clarification.

Clarification-wise, we need to specify frames and framing *vis-à-vis* the insights of practice theory and research on human action and understanding as an ‘embodied, situated, and sequential achievement in interaction’ (Mondada 2011). The most helpful lens here – especially in the context of games and play – are *rules and rule-following*. If frames define ‘conventions’, ‘norms’, and ‘rules’ in a situation, just what are these, and just how does one ‘follow’ them?

³⁰ It is unclear whether Paul Dourish’s *Where the Action Is* (2001) is an allusion to Goffman’s ‘Where the Action Is’ (1967: 149-270). This chapter obviously alludes to both.

³¹ Hence the subtitle of *Ethnomethodology’s Program: ‘Working Out Durkheim’s Aphorism’* (Garfinkel 2002). Indeed, as Anne Warfield Rawls (1987, 2003, 2013) continually argues, both Goffman and Garfinkel *recovered* Durkheim from a functionalist *misreading* institutionalised by Parsons, only to be – in Goffman’s case – misread as structuralism in turn.

³² ‘The Interaction Order’ for instance notes that interaction is orderly based on shared presuppositions, followed by the note: ‘How a given set of such understandings comes into being historically, spreads and contracts in geographical distribution over time, and how at any one place and time individuals acquire these understandings are good questions, but not ones I can address.’ (Goffman 1983: 5). The text then spends pages on outlining various types of ‘interaction entities’, followed by one sentence stating: ‘A parallel treatment could be provided of interaction processes or mechanisms’, only to not do so because ‘it is difficult to identify basic ones’ (Goffman 1983: 7).

Second, for a fuller sociological account of frame analysis, we need to complement a description of its *processes*: How is framing situationally accomplished, how does it shift? How are frames stabilised over time, how do they change or perish in the course? Clarification and complementation are two sides of the same coin. The embodied, situated, and sequential accomplishment of an action *as* intelligibly ‘following the rule of the frame’ is the process through which a framing is situationally established or shifted – or at least, that is the argument developed here.

The following sections will first clarify Goffman’s own understanding of rules and rule-following, to extend from there into the contemporary sociological discussion of the issue. This will lead over into the processes in which framing is accomplished, including the role of metacommunication, and finally the question of how frames become institutionalised, diffused, and changed over larger extents of time and space, making use of Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory, which Giddens himself portrayed as a necessary complement to Goffman.

Goffman’s Ground Rules

Several commentators observed that rules are a fundamental concept through which to grasp Goffman’s understanding of social order (Manning 1992: 156-65; Burns 1992: 44-5, 361-2) – as well as the major shortcoming of his theory (Warfield Rawls 2003, Schegloff 1988). What complicates matters is that Goffman’s own understanding of rules and norms significantly shifted over time. His dissertation presents a functionalist view of rules as moral constraints that ensure orderly conduct, held in place by social sanctions (Goffman 1953: 32-41). Thirty years later, ‘Felicity’s Condition’ presents us with actors constructing local working contexts of presuppositions that enable understanding, suffused with moral concerns (Goffman 1983a). *Relations in Public* (1971: x-xiii, 95-105, 236-7) provides his most coherent statement on the matter of rules and thus serves as a good entry point:

The dealings that any set of actors routinely have with one another and with specified classes of objects seem universally to become subject to ground rules of a restrictive and enabling kind. When persons engage in regulated dealings with each other, they come to employ social routines or practices, namely patterned adaptations to the rules – including conformances, by-passings, secret deviations, excusable infractions, flagrant violations and the like. These variously motivated and variously functioning patterns of actual behaviour, these routines associated with ground rules, together constitute what might be called a ‘social order.’ (Goffman 1971: x)

Social ground rules, Goffman notes, always come with expectable spectra and forms of deviation. People in everyday life do not so much plainly execute rules than *relate* to them, which routinely includes deviation. The ultimate epistemic and moral constraint that remains is that the existence of the rule be mutually acknowledged in the course (Goffman 1971: xi-xii).

Rule-following for Goffman is a demonstrable competence and social ascription more than the execution of a conscious content: ‘This [fact that rules are general, SD] is not to say that the individual can formulate the general terms upon request; ordinarily an act of deviance

or an act of notable conformance is required before he can demonstrate a competency to make judgments as if geared by a rule' (Goffman 1971: 97).

Analytically, one may distinguish *substantive* rules that govern matters of 'direct' import (bodily harm, property) from *ritual* rules that specify behaviours in such a way as to make them symbolically expressive. Yet every substantive punch in the face also carries symbolic significance, and every symbolic act is a bodily movement constrained by and geared into the physical world (Goffman 1971: 95-7, Goffman 1986: 248-9). And just as any social rule is substantive-material and expressive, so are the rules comprising frames and the interaction order *normative and epistemic*. These two dimensions of rules – 'shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints' (Goffman 1983: 5) – are intertwined in 'systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provisions of a traffic code or the rules of syntax of a language' (Goffman 1983: 5). Any moral rule provides an idiom for symbolic expression (by breaking etiquette, I signal something), any symbolic expression is always lodged in moral concerns: greeting another person is ordered not just by grammar and turn-taking, but also moral rules who may under what circumstances with what forms of ironic self-diminishment strike up a conversation with whom (Goffman 1983a).

As to the epistemic dimension, the ritualisation of actions and communications, and the ground rules of the interaction order together provide a 'ritual idiom' and 'syntax' (situationally specified in frames) that an actor can use to express herself. In fact, an actor cannot escape the others reading her actions and communications as symbolically significant against this syntax, these shared 'social presuppositions' (Goffman 1983a) what motivations to pursue, what to do, what to dis(attend), what emotions to express, etc., in a given situation.

Take the rule of 'civil inattention' people on streets and public spaces in Western societies conform with: 'one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen them), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design' (Goffman 1963: 84). It is the presupposition of that rule in daily conduct that makes both any visible conforming and any visible deviation from it *significant* and thus, a cause for possible further interpretation – as a threat, an erotic advance, the recognition of a familiar face, etc. (Goffman 1971: 61). Note again that such presupposition does emphatically *not* mean rote execution of an instruction. We constantly 'sneak a peak', stare longer than appropriate if we believe we are not being noticed, and the like. What's important is that once any such deviation from the rule happens and is not interpretable as flowing from a socially appropriate intention, we engage in repair work to make sense of our behaviour as indeed having happened in acknowledgement of the rule: We abruptly turn our head away when caught, in the hopes that we appear as if we just accidentally, unintentionally rested our eyes on a person. Or we continue staring with a now unfocused gaze, trying to make it appear

as if we are daydreaming, not really looking anywhere specific. Or if approached, we apologise that we mistook the person for someone we thought we knew. The fact that we feel we need to and do engage in this repair work acknowledges to ourselves and others *that* the rule of civil inattention is in effect, and in doing so, we reproduce the rule. Really *breaching* the rule in Garfinkel's sense would mean to continue to stare at the other person unfazed, displaying no reaction at all or honest confusion if she were to approach us demanding an explanation. Actors *must* for reasons of practical necessity remain intelligible to others as consciously relating to the rule (Goffman 1971: 237).

However, this essentially functionalist argument doesn't explain why individuals act in acknowledgment of rules, especially once they have become conscious of them. The rules of the interaction order and frames are also *moral norms* of proper conduct, they provide an idiom with which moral (dis)regard for self and others is expressed, and they are acknowledged because they impinge on our moral regard of self, in which we get situationally invested through spontaneous joint involvement. Because it relates to self, any moral (self-)evaluation of an act necessarily involves the actor's situation and intentions (Goffman 1971: 98-9), though more as a mutual ascription than experienced reality: 'Personal will or volition may be seen ... as a function which must be inserted into agents to make the dual role of preserves [of one's own self and the other, SD] work' (Goffman 1971: 61).

In everyday response-present interaction, moral regard is just effectively assumed in the smooth flow of proceedings, wherefore *post hoc* 'remedial interchanges' – ritualised repair work like 'Oops, sorry, didn't mean to!' – is again the main everyday practice of relating to moral rules (Goffman 1971: 108-9). Again, an actor *can* relate in all kinds of ways towards the moral dimension of a rule – even break it with visible malign intent and without apology. 'But at least he must be at pains to portray an advocable relationship to the negative judgment of him which results' (Goffman 1971: 186). To not render one's actions alive to the others and intelligible in relation to the rules would not just make oneself practically unintelligible: It would disrupt the ontological trust actors have in a shared reality, and result in the ultimate damage of self, being considered insane.

How to Follow a Rule, 21st Century Style

With this sketch of Goffman's conception of rules in hand, let's turn to the criticism it has received. Warfield Rawls (2003) holds that *Frame Analysis* got caught up in a purely individualist, cognitivist notion of rules. Schegloff (1988: 99) seconds that Goffman's conception of rules is limited by his structuralist understanding of grammar, which ignores how language in practice works, and neglects the 'constitution and recognition of courses of action per se' as the first and fundamental form of social ordering. In this critique, the two bring to bear the wider arguments on rules and rule-following articulated in post-Wittgensteinian philosophy (Rawls

1955, Winch 1990, Stern 2002, Stueber 2005, Wright 2007), the practice turn of social theory (Stern 2003, Reckwitz 2002, Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001) and ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies of situated understanding and action (Mondada 2011, Suchman 2007, see also Giddens 1984: 17-21). To get a systematic handle on these arguments, we will walk through an aggregated list of the main points recurring across the literatures, to compare them with Goffman's stance.

1. Social order in the first extent comprises constitutive rules for intelligible action

This is Schegloff's point: to be able to recognise a specific (symbolic or non-symbolic) action to be *that* specific action, and to mean *that* specific thing (and not another) already requires performing the action in such a way – with such a mutually recognisable orderliness – that it becomes mutually intelligible as such. This orderliness, and the methods with which it is produced, are variously called 'constitutive rules' (Rawls 1955) or 'constitutive orders' (Warfield Rawls 2009, 2011). The usual main target of this argument are Parsonian and other sociological accounts that depict social order as the aggregate result of individual selections of actions (achieved through norms constraining what actions individuals take, a social contract, statistical distribution of self-interested action, etc.) – they overlook that the actions from which individuals choose are already the result of social ordering. Contrary to Schegloff, I would hold that Goffman does account for this constitutive ordering in his concepts of ritualisation (conventionalisation that renders activities symbolically significant), transformation rules (frame-specific ritualisations), and rule-following (as 'practices' or 'patterned adaptations to the rules', Goffman 1971: x).

2. Rule-following is a practical accomplishment relative to a group

As Rawls (1955) and others after him argue, we should not confuse the rule representations we as observers summatively model from a set of previous instances of action with the rules that actually produced it: For we can in all likelihood come up with very many different rules that would all account for the regularities. More importantly, for any future action deviating from any rule we just summarised, we would be able to make up a new rule that would again account for all past actions plus the last one, showing that the actor might indeed have all along followed this rather than our previously assumed rule (this is known as Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox, see Stern 2002, Wright 2007). Practice theorists conclude from this that the question 'Does one follow a rule?' in everyday life is not grounded in an individual's ability to offer a summative formula or reasoning. Rather, it is determined by her practical competence as evaluated by other members of the social group that share the rule. We *mutually demonstrate* rule understanding (Mondada 2011) by producing acts that align with the others' expectations and we acquire the capacity to do so through our socialisation into the group. Like meaning,

rules and rule-following are actor-transcending properties of a *Lebensform* (Wittgenstein) or social organism (Mead). Again, Goffman holds up well in this regard: frames and the interaction order are something the individual actors gear themselves into, and rule-following is a demonstrated proficiency and social ascription.

3. The individual's 'knowledge' of constitutive rules is a complex of non-conscious dispositions, not a conscious mental representation of a formula

The rule 'knowledge' that enables an actor to produce and understand intelligible action is itself not a conscious mental representation of a formula the actor then deliberately puts into action. Language offers the most immediate example: Native speakers are expert producers of their language, yet they only explicitly learn the rules that describe the grammar of their language *after* they have already developed such practical proficiency, and they would often be hard-pressed to explicate the rules they just followed in producing a sentence. Language communities exist and work without formulated grammars (Stueber 2005: 309). This point is mostly targeted at those rational choice and phenomenological traditions that see the actor's conscious deliberation and intention as an 'obligatory passage point' of all action, either as an immediate apprehension, or as something that once was a conscious intention but got 'sedimented' into routine. For practice theorists and ethnomethodologists, conscious rule representations are not necessary for producing orderly, intelligible action. It is more appropriate to think of the 'rule knowledge' involved as a complex set of embodied, tacit, nonrepresentational *dispositions* that, coming together with the situational arrangements in the present moment, produce from the individual's perspective 'practical intelligibility' (Schatzki 2002: 74-5) – an immediate sense of 'what would make sense to do next.'³³

This is not to say that actors in principle never can or do have a mental representation of an explicitly formulated rule that they then put into action – they do it all the time. The point is that (a) conscious representations are not *necessary* for orderly conduct, (b) constitutive rules do not work that way, (c) the 'putting into action' of conscious representations is itself *again* a situated, practical accomplishment that necessarily draws upon the total network of individual dispositions and situational arrangements (see below). Giddens's distinction between constitutive rules as 'generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices' and 'formulated rules' as codified, verbalised expressions of rules is useful here (Giddens 1984: 21-3). People in everyday life do continuously reflexively monitor themselves and others and build a running understanding (rationalisation) from this, which they can but need not express explicitly towards others. Boundaries are fluid and shifting: reflexive mental or materialised representations of rules might be enrolled in one's actions until rule-following

³³ I take the term 'disposition' from Stueber (2005): unlike 'knowledge' or 'interpretive schemata' or 'cognitive schemata' or even Giddens's 'memory traces', it is fully neutral as to its precise form and location in the individual.

becomes habituated and routine; conversely, what is habituated and routine can be made the object of attention and reflexive deliberation (Giddens 1984: 3-8, 41-63). But this doesn't ultimately change the fact that 'putting into action' necessarily draws on non-conscious dispositions.

As we have seen, for Goffman, conscious awareness of a formulated rule is likewise not necessary for successfully following it. There is reflexive awareness of others and self, and subsequent strategic impression management, but both can be modelled as a 'practical intelligibility' of what to look out for and how to react, which is different from the conscious having and following of explicit rules in monitoring and adjustment.

4. Because action and understanding are always situated and indexical, constitutive rules are dispositional resources, not executable programs

This point is more targeted at computational models of human cognition and action, commonly referred to as 'the frame problem' (Stueber 2005: 312-3), or the situatedness and indexicality of human action (Suchman 2007, Winch 1990, Stern 2002, Mondada 2011). Computational models necessarily pre-specify abstract, context-independent entities, rules, plans, and so on that they then execute to the letter based on given inputs. This is possible only because the environment in which they operate is extraordinarily stabilised and formalised to 'pre-fit' the pre-specified models. Once we put a robot from the factory floor for which it was programmed into a different environment, it will produce either nothing, or chaos. Human action and understanding, in contrast, is able to fluidly adapt to highly ambiguous, heterogeneous, shifting environments.³⁴ We easily identify a set of sounds to be something we should pay attention to (rather than disattend), something that constitutes the intentionally uttered word 'pen' (and not a non-human sound or the word 'pun'), a word that in this instance means 'something to write with' (and not 'playground'). All of this we do based on the *specific* setting and objects and actors and events we find ourselves among, and based on our understanding of what total situation they belong to, which is mutually reflexive: the understanding of the situation is based on which one coheres best with all the elements present, and our foregrounding, identification, and understanding of the elements is based in turn on what best coheres with the total situation. In short, action and understanding (and therefore, rule-following) are always *situated*.

Second, any explicit formulation of a rule never fully specifies how the rule is to be applied in the given situation, and always implicates a vast network of further presuppositions. Take the social norm 'Though shalt not lie'. Beyond the fact that it already relies on an understand-

³⁴ I see this as an empirical shortcoming of current AI, not an ontological, insurmountable *a priori* difference of human beings and AI. Empirical reality will tell if future AI can construct complex learning systems that generate emergent behaviour functionally equivalent to human (inter)action. Whether such systems will then also have a conscious experience is another, metaphysical, question.

ing of what ‘a lie’ is, in reality, we deviate regularly from it – and yet in doing so hold that the rule is in force and guides our actions. One might counter that ‘Though shalt not lie’ is just an insufficiently specified formulation of the rule that *actually* guides our actions. A more specified version might read: ‘Though shalt not lie, unless when a white lie would not be consequential, but prevent someone’s feelings being hurt.’ Yet this more specified rule just opens up *even more* unspecified presuppositions: What is a ‘white lie’? What is ‘consequential’? What is ‘being hurt’? Who is the ‘someone’ in question? And it still says nothing about what precisely we should do in a concrete circumstance, nor how: When is ‘not consequential’ inconsequential enough? When is ‘hurt’ hurt enough? How exactly do we phrase our white lie? No matter how much further we would specify the rule, we would just open up more unspecified presuppositions. In short, action and understanding are always *indexical*.³⁵ Any individual’s action necessarily involves the total situation at hand, any single element of which rests on a vast network of further presuppositions and remains ambiguous on its own. We perform an assessment in the *total situation* on the spot (to the largest part routinised, habituated, unconscious), and based on that, one or more sensible courses of action present themselves to us. This means that rules in the actual production of intelligible action cannot function without a specific given situation, and that any singling out or abstraction of a rule as an executable program that generates a specific regularity observed in a specific situation is a map not to be confused with the territory. Even if our isolated rule would reliably predict people’s actions in the specific area given specific inputs, this does not prove that the rule is actually instantiated in this very form. As Stueber (2005: 313-4) puts it: ‘Even if we can describe [cycling] according to a complicated mathematical formula, it is bad science to suggest that each cyclist is tacitly an ingenious mathematician’. ‘Rules’ as the observable orderliness of action *result from* the total nexus of internal dispositions and external arrangements in their situational interaction. ‘Rules’ as what *produces* this observable orderliness on the part of the individual are just those complexes of internal dispositions, which can but need not involve mental representations, experiences, contents. ‘Resources’ is a term commonly used to point out that the involved dispositions are neither determining nor (necessarily) homomorphic with the observed regularities.

The connection to Goffman is obvious: ‘frames’ describe just those nexuses of dispositions (and situational arrangements) that allow us to jointly recognise and produce a type of situation. If practice theories hold that the specification of doings and sayings as actions of type X relies on the context of a practice (Schatzki 2002: 78), frame analysis holds that the specification of actions, communications, objects, and so on as actions, communications, and objects of type Y relies on the context of a frame.

³⁵ Wittgenstein’s analysis of rule-following makes the analogous point that rule-following cannot be conceptual or reasoned, because any concept or reasoning unfolds unto further presuppositions – it *logically* has to be a ‘blind’ practice (Wright 2007, Stern 2002).

5. Social rules are constitutive and reflexive, practical and normative

Constitutive practices alone do not exhaust social rules and rule-following, especially in their *reflexivity* and *normativity*. Rules are not just dispositions that enable us to bicycle. We also do regularly reflexively evaluate and correct each other both in practical ('Let me show you how to do this') and normative terms ('That was rude! Look out next time!'), even if we do not (and often cannot) verbally explicate a 'rule' to which we thereby appeal. As Wittgenstein observed, an actor having a mental representation or tacit practice of a rule does not suffice to explain why the actor would *also* consider it as a normative standard for the reflexive evaluation of conduct (Stueber 2005: 311-2). What is required at minimum is some form of 'charging' of rule-following with desires, emotions, and reflexive moral sentiment of the appropriateness of those desires and emotions themselves, together with some second-order dispositions for the reflexive monitoring, addressing, and adjustment of one's actions in such a way that it is mutually intelligible as acknowledging the moral sentiment. Normativity and reflexivity therefore usually come in 'second', when the routine is somehow interrupted (Stueber 2005: 318-20). This double duality of rules (constitutive and reflexive, practical and normative) is widely, if in varying terms, acknowledged: it is Searle's (1995) constitutive versus regulative types of rules, Giddens's (1984: 18-21) meaning and normative sanctioning as aspects (rather than types) of rules, Schatzki's (2002: 77-81) tacit practical understandings versus teleoaffective structures (emotion, norms, plans) on the one hand and explicit rules on the other, Garfinkel's ethnomethods for the production of intelligible action versus contexts of accountability as their external constraint. Whatever we do, we must be ready and able to retrospectively appeal to the 'vocabularies of motives' (Mills 1940) that institutions and other contexts of accountability offer to justify, make sense of, and legitimise what we did (Warfield Rawls 2003a: 150).

We can summarise these points in that rules and rule-following already on the level of constitutive orders involve dispositions to reflexively relate to them, and to do so normatively, charged with reflexive moral sentiment. Against such implicit rules or dispositions, we can distinguish explicated (and usually more formalised) mental or material representations of rules that are therefore never direct 'mirrors' of the implicit rules (since these are dispositions), but are often enrolled in the instruction, practical and moral evaluation of and accounting for action. Mapping this to Goffman's account again, we see a strong alignment with the 'enabling' 'cognitive' constitution of symbolic intelligibility, and the 'restraining', 'normative' connection to the moral regard of self. Like Giddens, Goffman understood these to be inter-entailing dimensions. Just as Garfinkel, Warfield Rawls, and others articulated constitutive orders of intelligibility, Goffman complementarily formulated constitutive normativities: The situational production of intelligible action hinges on (a) a field of joint involved attention in which intelligible action can be performed and perceived, and the willingness and desire to (b) make oneself understood in the first place, and (c) once one becomes mindful, to not deceive in

the course. Spontaneous attentive involvement and reflexive embarrassment fuel these prerequisites of the achievement of intelligibility; with them, Goffman fleshes out the basic pre-reflexive and reflexive moral sentiments involved in everyday interaction.

6. Rules are self-ordering particulars; they do not exist separate from particulars

The final point leads us into the fundamental issue of the ontological relation of phenomena, rules, and scientific accounts thereof. Most formalist sociology, the argument goes, falls for an empirical version of what Whitehead (1925: 64, 72) called the 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness': taking an abstraction to be a real thing. In terms of the well-known philosophical problem of universals, this means falling for a Platonic realism that considers universals (like 'red' or 'human') to exist, and to do so *independent of* particulars, when in fact universals only exist as instantiated in particulars (Aristotelian realism), or are nothing but human conceptual abstractions of particulars (nominalism). The strongest articulations of this critique can be found in Garfinkel's questioning of 'scientific theorizing' (Garfinkel 1967: 262-83; 2006; Warfield Rawls 2003: 221-5) and Bruno Latour's irreductionism (Latour 2005; Harman 2009: 11-32), but it is also entailed in the 'radical empiricism' of pragmatists like William James (Heft 2001): When we observe a regularity in phenomena, the inclination is always there to *reify* this regularity into a quasi-Platonic 'type' somehow existing independent of those phenomena, and then *re-project* the type in a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy as the underlying cause of the observed regularity in the phenomena: social facts (Durkheim), rules (Goffman), norms (Parsons), structures (Levi-Strauss), epistemes (Foucault), and so on.³⁶ Doing so immediately raises two questions: Just where, on which ontological plane, and made of what stuff, do these types exist? And just how, through which means, are they able to *cause* the empirical phenomena from which we just severed them? *That* a regularity is caused by a unitary and ontologically separate rule, norm, schema, structure – and not, say, an emergent dynamic of heterogeneous entities or repeated chance – is not proven by demonstrating the regularity itself.

A weaker version of this fallacy is to accept the necessary material grounding of a type, but to *localise* it and its causal power in *one* particularity, rendering all other particulars epiphenomenal: biological predispositions or cognitive schemata in the actor's head, the mode of production or discourse in the world 'in the last analysis' produce and determine the observable regularity. However, such localisations fail to see that an actor's head without her body and environment and the other actors among which she was socialised is a convenient but empirically impossible fiction (similarly so for discourses and modes of production). Also, they claim the existence and knowledge of the precise forms of instantiation of the type and the causative paths through which it produces the observed regularities. Yet in the overwhelm-

³⁶ One the other hand, following embodied cognition, our propensity to treat abstractions of observed regularities as quasi-material objects of their own is the foundation of conceptual reasoning. To abstract is to reify.

ing majority of cases, these forms and causative paths are either merely hypothesised, or glossed over. Until a full materialisation into and tracing of the involved particulars is provided, usually, somewhere down the line of the explanatory model, a Platonic reification lurks.

The remedy recommended by, for example, Foucault's dispositives or Latour's actor-networks is an ontological 'flattening' of the social (Latour 2005: 159-72). Whatever regularity or ordering we observe in particulars, it is generated as, in, and through the totality of particulars themselves in their relating and interacting with each other. Scientific observations and accounts are just *more* particulars (mental representations in the body of a scientist, material representations in the book on the shelf or the PowerPoint projection on the wall), which again interrelate with all the other particulars. The scientific endeavour becomes producing accounts that trace *how* these particulars generate their stable regularity across time and space, how scientists (and others) generate accounts of regularities, and how, reflexively, such accounts of regularities (statistical, narrative, visual representations of 'the nation state', say) feed back into the other particulars as one crucial means of constituting the very regularities they observe. Heterogeneous localisations of relative power versus relative epiphenomenality are perfectly possible; but again, they need to be demonstrated, not claimed.³⁷

To my mind, this presents the central shortcoming of *Frame Analysis* and Goffman's writings more generally. His frequent appeals to frames as 'schemata of interpretation' and individuals drawing on information to identify the current frame compel the reading that frames are 'in the last analysis' cognitive schemata – hence Warfield Rawls's (2003) critique. Only that Goffman then insists that frames are organising principles for both experience *and* events, that the principles 'are something cognition somehow arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates' (Goffman 1986: 247), and that there is an 'isomorphism' of the organisation of experience and events (Goffman 1986: 26). But *where* are frames in this picture? *How* does cognition 'arrive' at them, *how* does this 'isomorphism' come about? Goffman remains in a happy positivism (to use Foucault's phrase) that just records frames as regularities without ever making a theoretical commitment where and how they are instantiated. If we want to transcend this positivism towards explanation, yet maintain Goffman's emphasis on the material *and* cognitive nature of frames, we should think of the 'organising principles' as generated in, as, and through the dispositions and experiences of actors *as well as* situational material arrangements in their interrelations. The important thing is to never *abstract* frames from their embodied, enacted, materialised instantiations, and to not too quickly *reduce and localise* frames into *just* cognitive schemata that regulate all the other (now merely epiphenomenal) entities.

³⁷ To give an example: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is *constituted* by, made of academics writing cross-referenced treatises that get used by federal bureaus that send out emails to collect emails with attachments representing numbers that they calculate and write in reports that get broadcast in the news and watched by industry men (some of whom sent the emails with the numbers to the bureau) and so on. And so for all the entities just listed in this account. And so for the accounts we can make for them. And so on. The GDP in this sense is a 'social construct' through and through (what else could it be?), but this makes the GDP 'unreal' only if one's standard is Platonic realism.

The Process of Framing

To summarise, rules and rule-following are individual-transcending characteristics pertaining to a social group – a demonstrated proficiency to practically go on that is mutually acknowledged and ascribed as aligning with the rule. Constitutive orders describe the most fundamental form of social rules by which actions are produced and rendered mutually intelligible as actions of their kind – what Goffman calls ritualisation, the ground rules of the interaction order, and the practices of relating to them. The ‘rule knowledge’ that enables individuals to produce and understand constitutive orders, and to follow rules more generally, is a complex set of dispositions that also involves reflexive capacities to monitor, relate to, and adjust oneself, as well as a charging with moral sentiment – which Goffman makes out as involvement and embarrassment tied to the regard for self. These ‘basic’ and reflexive dispositions for rule-following are to be distinguished from explicated (mental or material) *rule representations*, although such representations get enrolled in the processes in which constitutive orders are produced – often when actors retrospectively account for their actions (Goffman’s remedial interchanges). The actual performance and understanding of rule-following is necessarily *situated* – which is the systematic place of frame analysis in social theory: frames denote just those nexuses of individual dispositions and situational arrangements that are involved in producing a recurring *type* of situation, in analogy to Giddens’s (1984: 17) phrasing of practices, ‘the properties which make it possible for discernably similar social’ *situations* ‘to exist across varying spans of time and space’. In this, frames are not to be located as ontologically separate from these properties (the dispositions and arrangements), nor just in certain properties – the latter being a recurring critique of Giddens’s ‘narrow’ location of the origin of social order in specific cognitive dispositions (Schatzki 1997).

Frames Between Found and Made

So with this picture of *frames* in hand: How is a specific *framing* of a situation established (and switched) in the present moment? How is a situation performed, and performed in such a way as to be intelligible as a situation of a certain type? The puzzling non-answer Goffman gives is that frames are usually somehow always already ‘there’, people just need to identify them: ‘Presumably, a ‘definition of the situation’ is almost always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not create this definition, even though their society often can be said to do so; ordinarily, all they do is to assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and then act accordingly’ (Goffman 1986: 1-2). This matches our everyday experience in one regard: Waking up, doing our morning toiletry, waking to the bakery, having breakfast, taking a bus to work, arriving at the office, going to lunch, etc., we do not (to our mind) ‘create anew’ all the situations we pass through in the course. We recognise them and find our place in them, without much effort (ibid.: 441, 301-5; Goffman 1971: 106).

Then again, everyday reality is just as full of situations we (to our mind) actively create: a board gaming session we set up, a private flirt we pocket away within some official meeting, a practical joke we play on each other, the casual conversation we decide to flip into an impromptu job interview. It is true that we do not invent anew the *type* of situation ‘job interview’. But without our active doing, this specific instantiation of it would not commence. Second, as Goffman (1986: 496-559; 1981) himself studiously documented in his frame analyses of talk, any ordinary strip of everyday conversation already reveals a constant stream of misunderstandings, changing interpretations of each other’s motives, rapid switches between various keys of ironising, speaking in the role of another person, and so on – the conversation that we reframe into a job interview, for example. Third, even if we usually just act in accordance with the frame we tacitly assume the current situation to belong to, without our doing so this framing would cease to exist. A coffee break ends when the people involved stop taking it. If on our regular morning bus route, the bus driver were to leave the bus mid-course, that would be something, but certainly not our regular public transport trip anymore. Framings get started and interrupted and switched and ended all the time, and they require in a non-epiphenomenal way continual upkeep from participants. Goffman *acknowledges* this in passing: ‘realms are built up through the maintenance of these [framing, SD] conventions, realms can be attacked by declining to sustain these conventions’ (Goffman 1986.: 246); ‘what people understand to be the organization of their experience, they buttress, and perforce, self-fulfillingly’ (Goffman 1986: 563) – but he doesn’t unpack these processes further.

Framing as a Continual, Reflexive, Sequential, Open, Collective Achievement

For such an unpacking, we have to turn to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, which have since Goffman’s days charted in detail the *collective achievement* of situated action and understanding as an *open, reflexive, sequential* process (Mondada 2011).

Sequentiality is Garfinkel’s answer to the underspecification of symbolic action (Garfinkel 2006: 178-84; 1967: 76-103; Warfield Rawls 2006: 29-34): A sees B’s prior actions and *imputes* an orderliness in those actions *explained by* a certain meaning – orderliness and meaning mutually support and highlight each other. A then reacts to this as if her imputed meaning was indeed the meaning B intended and expressed through the orderliness of her actions. B then in turn imputes an orderliness and meaning in A’s action – an orderliness and meaning that ‘makes sense’ in the context of A’s action directly following as a response to B’s actions. In a word, the specification of meaning is achieved in and through the specific *temporal sequence* of mutual, publicly visible actions (another reason why action and understanding is necessarily situated). To give but the simplest example: the utterance ‘Yes’ is completely ambiguous until we know the utterance that preceded it. This sequential process is *reflexive* in that the sequence of actions builds on and reflects back on itself: the understanding of each action is specified

through the context of the preceding sequence of actions, but at the same time, any new action might retrospectively suggest a new and different meaning and orderliness of the previous actions: we ‘see things in a different light.’ Reflexivity in turn entails that meaning remains in principle always *open for change*. Another consequence is that meaning is a *joint accomplishment* of all participants involved in the sequence of turns: A’s response may change the meaning of B’s actions, a change that then can be affirmed, contested, modulated, or flagged as requiring further explanation, and so on in B’s response (‘Sorry, you’re right, that was rude’). Although spoken conversation has been the central material for most work in this area, research has since demonstrated the breadth of situational elements beyond talk that get enrolled in this process: the material environment, bodily posture, gesture, gaze, and so on (Mondada 2011).

This explanation is actually imputed in *Frame Analysis* when Goffman writes: “What is it that’s going on here?’ ... [T]he question is put and the answer to it is presumed *by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand*” (Goffman 1986: 8, emphasis SD). In ‘Felicity’s Condition’ (Goffman 1983a), we see Goffman taking such a stance more explicitly. He studies the role of ‘social presuppositions’ that guide understanding and action, and how a shared ground of presuppositions is built up between the participants of a situation. As we can now expect of Goffman, his main focus is *attention*: presuppositions are what is imputed to be either currently alive to the participants’ joint attention, or readied so as to be easily (re)called to it, flowing from (a) the sequence of previous actions and communications in the situation, (b) the mutually perceptively accessible physical situation, together with our understanding of the ‘encounter taken as a substantive whole’ (Goffman 1983a: 15), (c) the memories of past shared interactions as well as expectable general cultural knowledge. Together, ‘these three basic cognitive resources can provide frames of reference’ (Goffman 1983a: 21) – but they are also automatically subject to moral restraint, as he hastens to add.

Metacommunication

Now it is not entirely true that Goffman did not speak about how framing is achieved. As with the concept of frames itself, Goffman here turned to Bateson: we start and end framings with ‘metacommunication’ (Goffman 1963: 99; 1986: 210, 251-69), which Goffman distinguished into *directional cues* that internally organise the flow of a framed activity, and *brackets*:

Activity framed in a particular way – especially collectively organized social activity – is often marked off from the ongoing flow of surrounding events by a special set of boundary markers or brackets of a conventionalized kind. These occur before and after the activity in time and may be circumscriptive in space; in brief, there are temporal and spatial brackets. These markers, like the wooden frame of a picture, are presumably neither part of the content of the activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity but rather both inside and outside, a paradoxical condition (Goffman 1986: 252)

In an ordinary face-to-face encounter, mutually acknowledged eye contact usually suffices as the initiating metacommunication (Goffman 1963: 91-9), but the more important the activity

(or its demarcation), the more effort will be put into extended and unambiguous bracketing. If an activity is laminated or interrupted, we find a structure of inner and outer brackets. As the above extended quote makes clear, often brackets are materialised as spatiotemporal boundaries of the framed situation: 'From Bateson I learned that ... we seem to like to employ some sort of physical externalization of our frames, at least the spatial domain over which their interpretive rules apply, and that this arrangement is itself part of the frame which employs it' (Goffman 1981a: 64). From the perspective of distributed cognition, we can make easy sense of this propensity as the *material offloading* of the information what is or is not to be framed in a certain manner (Hutchins 1994; Holland, Hutchins & Kirsh 2000). Just as we might do a calculation by off-loading parts of it into written numbers on a sheet of paper we then process with brain, body, paper, and pen, or coordinate joint attention and information through a map placed in front of a group everyone can point to and write on, so clear, materialised temporal and spatial bounds take off some of the load of concurrently monitoring and assigning which perceived entities belong to which frame. In video game play, for instance, the very clear material bounds of the screen (or when playing on a desktop PC in windowed mode, the displayed pixel bounds around the windows) can be seen as doing just such work with and for us. Note, though, that materialised spatiotemporal bounds remain subject to situational definition work: one can discuss whether a ball was 'really' in or out, or situationally decide to return a ball no matter where it came down, or spontaneously define that a car that was previously disattended and not-part of a live action role-playing game now becomes included and re-interpreted as a 'ground dragon'. Note further that framing does not *require* materialised spatiotemporal brackets: one can in a perfectly dry tone make a minute-long declaration that for its content in the given situation alone is perfectly understood by all participants to be a mock speech.

There is no doubt that metacommunication plays an important role in framing. Several authors in game studies have emphasised that metacommunication provides a useful handle for how 'the magic circle' is construed (Waern 2011, Neitzel 2008). However, already during the Macy Conference where Bateson discussed the concept, serious critique was raised whether his strong distinction between different logical levels of communication was sensible, necessary, and empirically correct (Bateson 1956: 160-180). Indeed, in light of the empirical research on situated action and understanding referenced above, metacommunication understood as a specific subset of signs can only provide a partial and in and of itself nonfunctional answer to situational framing.

First, if the status of *any* sign depended on *another* status-indicating sign, and if metacommunication is a sign of a different logical status, that would create an infinite regress of signs indicated by metacommunicative signs that would have to be indicated by meta-metacommunicative signs, etc. Second, the notion of constitutive orders or ritualisation high-

lights that actions are rendered intelligible as actions of a certain type through the very form in which they are performed. 'Transformation rules' were defined as just these specific, observably orderly ways in which the performance of a 'source' activity is transformed into a keyed version of it. Exaggeration, repetition, unfulfilled consequence, reordering of performance, and role switching are some of the transformation rules Goffman (1986: 41-2) suggests for play.

However – third –, framing like any other action or understanding is sequential and situated: meanings are specified by the totality of the situation. To know whether frequent repetition or reordering or unfulfilled consequence occur, we need to have seen the previous sequence of actions, and see the sequence through 'to the end'. Role switching requires contextual knowledge of what roles people usually take up. The same holds for any metacommunication: Whether a clapping signals the end of a round or just one person trying to make itself noticed is not decidable without taking into account the larger situation. If one would find a television screen that displays the words 'Start game' hanging on eye height in an otherwise empty white room, one would likely come to understand it not as a metacommunication that indicates the beginning of a gaming session, but as an art piece installed in a gallery.

Fourth, this situatedness means that *all* entities and events in their spatial arrangement and temporal sequence already and continually confirm or challenge our ongoing framing of the situation: In play, that may be people laughing, running, or otherwise behaving in a situationally inappropriate-yet-unthreatening manner. For gaming, that might be the presence of a board game unpacked on a table; or people sitting relaxed on the living room couch, gaming controllers in their hand. If my avatar in a martial arts video game receives a fatal blow from the avatar of my co-player, the fact that I let out a scream of frustration is intelligible against the shared frame that we are currently engaged in a gaming match, in which the most recent event has been my defeat. Conversely, although a guttural scream is neither a specific metacommunicative signal for 'gaming', nor performed in a 'gamy' manner, nor even a typical situational indicator of game play (like the presence of a game console), my scream still reaffirms to my co-player that what we are doing is engaging in this match, and that I am still attentively and emotionally invested in it. This framing in turn guides her interpretation of my scream as a scream of frustration over losing, and not me having a sudden stroke.

Fifth, doings, sayings, and objects not only symbolically indicate a frame: they materially co-constitute and co-instantiate it. The Xbox glowing in the living room not only tells me that a game session might be ongoing. Without it, there would be no gaming session. This includes metacommunication: a referee doing a drop ball in soccer to restart the match not only signals that the match restarts – he makes a constitutive move of the match (for otherwise he would still hold the ball in his hands and the players could materially not kick it from the grass). So there are at least some metacommunications that are not only metacommunicative – against Bateson's claim of strongly distinct logical layers.

Again, all of this is not to say that metacommunicative brackets and directional cues do not play an important role in reflexively indicating the framing of actions and events. Conversation analysis has identified a panoply of signals that serve specialised functions in talking: continuers, repair initiators, and so on. The point is that given the situatedness of understanding and action, (a) *all other components of the situation also* partake in informing our understanding ‘what it is that’s going on here’, and (b) the understanding of metacommunicative signals themselves is only fully specified in and through the situation in which they occur. Metacommunication, like everything else, is indexical.

Institutionalising Frames Across Time and Space

A central accomplishment of Symbolic Interactionism, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and other interactionist accounts was to demonstrate that the orderliness of everyday social life is not a ‘given’, but an ongoing accomplishment of and in interaction. This in turn sparked the expectable critique that interactionists put *too much* emphasis on such situational work; not all ordering is continually produced fully anew on the spot.³⁸ Surely, it is not a *creatio ex nihilo*: ordering has to be built *of* something. In reaction, Symbolic Interactionists like Fine (1991) tried to extend the concerns of interactionism to structure, materiality, time, space, tradition, and institutions, taking their cue from Goffman (Snow 2001). For as Goffman himself sharply replied to Denzin and Keller (1981):

the individuals I know don’t invent the world of chess when they sit down to play, or the stock market when they buy some shares, or the pedestrian traffic system when they maneuver through the streets. Whatever the idiosyncracies of their own motives and interpretations, they must gear their participation into what is available by way of standard doings and standard reasons for doing these doings. (Goffman 1981: 63)

Goffman very much agreed that everyday life displays a patterned orderliness on the basest level (‘standard doings’). He just insisted, as we have seen, that this orderliness is to a large extent already ‘found’ in the situation, obstinately requiring actors to ‘gear into it’. The question then becomes: beyond the work through which actors initiate and sustain this orderliness – how is it carried into and made present in the situation?

The standard sociological answer has been to appeal to ‘structures’ as somehow ‘larger’ and ‘more stable’ social entities (institutions, states, classes, systems) that somehow ‘exert influence’ on somehow ‘smaller’, ‘more fluid’ situated action (or agency).³⁹ Thus, Crawford (2012: 30) observes that *Frame Analysis* does not suffice as a ‘fully social theory’ of video gaming because it does not account for such ‘larger’ contexts. Giddens (1988) similarly remarks that the central shortcoming of Goffman was not to detail the linkages between situated action and

³⁸ Which is different from saying that ordering would continue unfazed *without* the actors’ continued work.

³⁹ Note, though, that it is only the theoretical abstraction and separating of ‘structures’ and ‘agency’ that generates a need for a theory that ‘bridges the gap’ one just created. Irreductionist accounts that see order as instantiated in the particulars themselves would still be interested in *how* regularity over time is achieved, but shy away from first creating abstract categories to do so.

social institutions. Specifying this linkage, in turn, is what Giddens explicitly presents as the subject of his *theory of structuration* (1984: 36-7, xxiv-xxvi).

Structuration theory distinguishes between rules as (a) the observable ‘patterning’ of ‘surface manifestations’ of action, and rules as (b) the virtual (because not directly observable) ‘underlying codes’ that produce this patterning (Giddens 1984: 16). *Structure* refers to the latter underlying codes, those ‘properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and place’ (Giddens 1984: 17): what makes A’s ‘playing a video game’ here today recognisably similar to B’s ‘playing a video game’ a year ago and two continents away. Structures are *practices*, ‘recursively organized sets of rules and resources’; that is, cognitive schemata, social norms, and practical capacities that enable and regulate action. As such, a structure is never materially present, ‘save in its instantiation and co-ordination as memory traces’ (Giddens 1984: 25).⁴⁰ Structures or practices with great time-space extension are ‘institutions’ (Giddens 1984: 17), hence *institutionalisation* refers to the processes by which the observable regularity of a practice or structure gets extended over time (stability) and space (pervasiveness).

If structures denote covert embodied practices, *systems* describes the actually observable ‘situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space’ (Giddens 1984: 25). Systems *display* to observers the orderliness of structures, or ‘structural properties’. Systems can be more or less *systemic*, coherent, integrated, as they involve more or less reproducing feedback loops between actions, and more or less reflexive self-regulation employed by actors in action to sustain or change this orderliness (Giddens 1984: 27-8). These terms are well-aligned with the ones we have developed above: frame dispositions captures what Giddens refers to as ‘structure’, while the situational process of framing comprises those doings and sayings Giddens subsumes under ‘system’, their mutually observable orderliness maps onto Giddens’s ‘structural properties’ of the system.

The linkage between situated action and structure (missing in Goffman) is the ‘duality of structure’: ‘the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize’ (Giddens 1984: 25). ‘In reproducing structural properties ..., agents also reproduce the conditions that make such action possible’ (Giddens 1984: 26). Take language (Giddens 1984: 24): Speaking a sentence, person A draws on a memory trace of the grammar of her language (a set of rules that form a virtual structure). The sentence produced by A (an element of the ‘system’ of materially present situated actions) thereby shows a recognisable orderliness. Person B understands A’s sentence as meaning X by virtue of B’s own memory trace of the grammar. In doing so, together, A and B reproduce-and-change both structure and system: A’s conviction that the grammar (the structure) she employed is ‘correct’

⁴⁰ Giddens’s talk of structures as ‘virtual’ would qualify as yet another fallacy of misplaced concreteness, were it not for the fact that he in the end does materialise them as bodily ‘memory traces’.

gets confirmed (or challenged and thus slightly altered) by B's reaction. If B is a young child, B would form her own memory trace of the rules of grammar (the structure) based on A's sentence. At the same time, one more spoken sentence in the chains of spoken sentences across time and space (system) now exists that conforms with grammar: the 'structural properties' of the system got reproduced – or slightly altered if A came up with a funky new way of using the past tense. These chains of sentences (the system) in turn enable and reinforce-and-alter the memory traces of grammar (the structure): Without a community actually continually producing sentences in a language, nobody could learn the language. Where actors are guided in one situation how to practically produce frame-according action, we can call this process *instruction* (here following Garfinkel 2002: 197-218). Where actors build up over several situations the basic interaction structures of a community, we can call this process *socialisation* (Giddens 1984: 170). In each case, the community who co-ordinates its dispositions, who regularly engages in the practice in question, and thus 'carries' it, thus reproduces and maybe even grows itself across space and time. Reflexive, discursive formalisation and formulation of the practice's rules are further means of institutionalisation (Giddens 1984: 319-326).

Applied to an as-of-yet hypothetical 'video gaming frame', this would look something like the following: A and B play a session of *StarCraft*, bringing to bear their internal dispositions (structure) that enable them to produce and reflexively indicate activities that become intelligible to both of them as 'video gaming' (the system of interactions takes on structural properties). Insofar as things 'go smoothly', A's and B's dispositions are mutually viable, the chain of interactions they produce (the system) at each turn enables the continuance of the 'gaming' encounter, and affirms and reinforces their dispositions. But no reproduction without change. For instance, A might (based on her dispositions) experience in the flow of interactions (the orderliness of the system) that B's play is 'not cool', and reprimand B for that, supported by the reflexive, discursive account that A 'knows better' how to 'play right' because A regularly plays with 'the pros', i.e. a group of e-sports veterans. A might even draw on a blog post (formalised formulation) with 'official rules and guidelines' by the local e-sports league on how to play *StarCraft*. B's dispositions (her structure) will then perhaps be altered by this chain of interactions (the system's structural properties). In the future, when B games with C, the interactions B produces will exhibit an orderliness more viable with the dispositions of A.

Let us extend this example to institutionalisation: B and A, by coincidence also being avid poker players, might find that a certain tournament form of poker play would with slight alterations produce an interesting form of *StarCraft* play. They try it out and find it delightful. To the extent that they in future gaming sessions make this part of their routine, and to the extent that other gamers in gaming with them or talking with them about gaming pick this form up and make it part of their gaming routine, the change gets *institutionalised*. It might even tie into further situated encounters with people that also partake in other practices: a user re-

searcher hired by the marketing department of the game company might discover in interviewing and observing gamers this new form of tournament play. This observation might be exchanged in another situated encounter with the marketing executive, and over a chain of further situated encounters, lead to the game company blogging about this new tournament form. Thus, a large mass of gamers who have not learned of this way of gaming through direct encounters with gamers learn of it: the new form of playing *StarCraft* gets institutionalised across a very large extent of space. It might even get included as a 'standard mode' in a software extension pack that the game company releases. Bijker's (1987, 1995) model of socio-technical change revolving around technological frames offers a useful complement here: the frames of a social group involved in a technology specify how that technology is understood and used, and what therefore the current limits and problems of technological progress are. Non-incremental innovation occurs chiefly when outsiders bring different frames (and involved technologies) to the problems and technologies of the standing group, disclosing novel uses and understandings that are then manifested in novel technologies, which in turn distribute, standardise, and stabilise the new understandings and uses. Novelty constantly emerges from novel problems, novel technologies, and novel uses and understandings arising from this mangle. Following William Gibson's aphorism 'the street finds its own uses for things', one should add that *users* also matter in these processes (Gitelman 2006, Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003). The hypothetical example provided above is just such a case of 'user-led' innovation that then gets technologically institutionalised: borrowing from the frame of poker, A and B alter their own *StarCraft* frame, which is picked up and incorporated by game developers into the software itself, whose mass distribution creates a quick, wide, and temporally stable institutionalisation of this form of gaming, a materialisation in interaction with which players form co-oriented frame dispositions. Whether today's 'produsage' (Bruns 2008) and 'maker culture' (Gauntlett 2011) *fully* equalise and converge producer and user roles is another matter (see Taylor 2006: 125-50 for a solid analysis regarding online games).

Summary and Conclusions

We have seen that the conventions or rules that comprise a frame ought not to be narrowly construed as cognitive schemata localised in the heads of individual actors. Rather, they are individual-transcending characteristics pertaining to a social group – a proficiency to practically go on that is demonstrated by the individual and mutually acknowledged by the group as following the rule. Still, on the part of the individual, frames consist of 'frame knowledge' in the form of *frame dispositions*: complex sets of embodied, tacit, nonrepresentational dispositions, that – together with reflexive capacities to monitor, relate to, and adjust oneself – enable individuals to recognise specific types of situations, and to organise and reflexively indicate their actions, communications, bodily displays, and the wider situation in such an observably

orderly manner that they become mutually intelligible as constituting a specific frame. *Frame understanding* in this sense can refer to either 'practical intelligibility' (Schatzki) – an immediate apprehension 'what it would make sense to do next' given the framing of the current situation –, or a reflexive, discursive (thought, spoken, written, etc.) representation of the framing the individual then can relate to as a social object: 'Ah, this is a *wedding* – *that's* why everyone is dressed in such fancy suits!' The individual's frame dispositions and understandings are important constituent components of a frame and framing processes, but they are not everything that 'frame' refers to, nor do they singularly determine the framing of a situation.

The *situational process of framing* can be described as the continual reflexive, sequential, open, and collective achievement of a joint frame,⁴¹ in which participants organise and bring to joint attention resources including actions, communications, bodily displays of all sorts, the arrangement of the material situation-at-large, memories of the preceding interaction sequence, and presupposed shared personal and general understandings. One important resource in this regard is *metacommunication*, conventionalised signals that reflexively indicate what elements of a situation belong to what frame, often but not necessarily by materially demarcating spatiotemporal bounds.

Giddens's structuration theory and Bijker's concept of sociotechnical frames help explicate how the relative stability of frames across situations in time and space is accomplished (and historical change occurs); that is, how the *process of frame institutionalisation and change* operates: in every situated enactment of a frame, the actors' frame dispositions (and the situational arrangements) get reinforced-and-altered. Actors not yet *socialised* into a frame build up dispositions in encounters with other actors who are able to directly enact the frame and *instruct* the novice actors, forming a larger and larger community with co-ordinated dispositions that make up part of the frame. The frame dispositions of actors guide how they use and understand frame arrangements, and other frames might be drawn upon as inspiration for novel uses and understandings of the arrangements. Material objects and settings in turn can incorporate these novel uses and understandings in their make-up and by virtue of their mass production and material stability, institutionalise it across time and space.

Frame analysis (like practice theories) thus offers a middle ground between a strong structuralist and a strong situationist stance. As Collins (1988: 61) put it: 'Goffman rejects the more extreme implications of indexicality and reflexivity. Contexts are not merely an inexplicable taken-for-granted; they can be spelled out, by specifying the surrounding frames'. Indeed, one could say that whereas practice theories specify *types of activities*, frame analysis specifies *types of situations*, although the two are (especially on the level of primary frameworks) often so

⁴¹ 'Joint frames' can be disequilibriumal fabrications, of course; for example, one or more participants successfully simulate for other participants the frame 'fair card game', whereas they frame the situation to themselves as 'stacked card game which the others believe is a fair one'. Joint frames also include the possibility that multiple frames are going on at the same time in the same situation-at-large, and that the same individuals are partaking in multiple frames in parallel (e.g. texting while talking with someone else).

closely intertwined as to be effectively indistinguishable: what goes on in a gaming situation is usually an instance of the practice of gaming. What sets frame analysis most strongly apart is the concept of transformations, keys, and fabrications, which have no ready parallel in practice theory.

3.5 Mediating Affordances: Frames and Materiality

Careful readers will have noticed that the hypothetical *StarCraft* example at the end of the last section off-handedly ‘snuck in’ technologies, which is indeed not so small a matter at all. For all his symmetrical relating of actions and structures, Giddens reproduces another strong theoretical asymmetry: His *Constitution of Society* (1984) is made up entirely of people, their dispositions and actions. If actors for the most part just ‘find’ the frame of a situation present in the situation and ‘gear themselves into it’, if frames get somehow stabilised, brought into, and instantiated in situations across time and space, certainly this happens through actors who travel across time and space, schlepping their bodily dispositions with them. But equally obviously, one would think, it is *matter*, man-made artefacts specifically that is in an utterly real sense *found* in the situation. ‘Technology is society made durable’ (Latour 1991), or as Goffman put it:

We cannot say the worlds [of face-to-face interaction] are generated on the spot, because, whether we refer to a game of cards or to teamwork during surgery, use is usually made of traditional equipment having a social history of its own in the wider society and a wide consensus of understanding regarding the meanings that are to be generated from it (Goffman 1972: 26).

While social theorists have long paid lip service to materiality as a constitutive element of social life, it was only in the past decades that material anthropology and science and technology studies started to unpack in detail how materiality takes part in social ordering (Pinch 2008). A central characteristic of this ‘material’ turn in social theory is that it charts a middle course – this time not between situational openness and temporal stability, but technological determinism and social constructivism (Kallinikos, Leonardi & Nardi 2012: 5). Neither does materiality determine social actors, what they do and think, nor do actors *ad libitum* think and talk things in and out of existence. Indeed, *separating* the two into distinct opposing entities is already overlooking their co-constitutive quality as ‘socio-material’ or ‘socio-technical systems’ (Leonardi 2012). Human practices have always been intertwined with their material environment and artefacts. Today’s postindustrial societies foreground this as human-to-human interaction is increasingly technologically augmented, mediated, and transposed into a virtual space (Chayko 1993, Knorr Cetina 2009, Jordan 2009, Buscher et al. 2010).

In video gaming, this fact literally stares one in the face in the shape of a screen. Without the gaming hardware and software, video gaming would be plainly impossible. Indeed, a common (and problematic) argument in game scholarship has it that the very uniqueness of video gaming consists in the fact that its rules are fully enforced by the computer (Taylor 2012:

47-87). Every little software bug, every graphic glitch and network timeout brings to our attention that the gaming hardware and software materially enable and affect the way we interact with co-present, mediated, or computationally generated others. For these reasons, materiality is becoming increasingly acknowledged in game studies as an essential component of games and gaming (e.g. Steinkuehler 2006; Satwicz, Hall & Stevens 2007; Chen, Duh & Renyi 2008; Malaby 2009; Taylor 2009, 2012; Chen 2010; Nardi & Kallinikos 2010; Toivonen & Sotamaa 2011; Linderoth 2011; Leino 2012; Witkowski 2012). For these reasons, frame analysis, especially a frame analysis of video gaming, must likewise take materiality systematically into account.

Several studies have already brought Goffman to bear on the 'synthetic situations' generated by digital technologies – in each case highlighting how technical artefacts partake in their 'new interaction order' (Knorr Cetina 2009, Preda 2009, Buscher et al. 2010, Williams & Weninger 2013). Appeals to materiality are not completely alien to Goffman himself. In a close reading of his early writings, Trevor Pinch (2010: 410) goes so far as to call Goffman a 'sociologist of technology'. Goffman's analyses of games and play are indeed rich in observations on the role of materiality, as will be seen. Yet he never *systematically* articulated the matter of matter. We only find small remarks strewn across his writings:

1. Every framed activity 'is located in a physical, biological, and social world' and must accord with that, while also being made possible by a vast network of 'institutionalized provisioning' (Goffman 1974: 249-50) that seldom becomes visible. We usually don't notice it, but a video gaming session requires electricity; shelter from direct sunlight, harsh wind, sounds, and the views of uninvited others; a sewage system for creature breaks; increasingly an internet connection, etc. Materiality, we can say, enables certain kinds of situated activity to begin with, and situated activity must do with what is materially there.

2. Pinch (2010), Linderoth, Björk, and Olsson (2012: 4-5) point to Goffman's analysis of a Merry-Go-Round as a material arrangement that structures the situated activity system at hand into turns or rounds (Goffman 1972: 97). More generally, one may say that materiality can take part in the framing of a situation.

3. Goffman agrees with Mead that the meaning of objects is constituted and stabilised in their use in a community, but he adds in frame analytic logic that it is *specified* by the framing of the situation. When a woman uses an antique mirror that is on display during an auction to check her makeup, she engages in a *situationally improper understanding and use*:

I do not mean to imply that no stable meaning is built socially into artifacts, merely that circumstances can enforce an additional meaning. I argue that the meaning of an object (or act) is a product of social definition and that this definition emerges from the object's role in society at large, which role then becomes for smaller circles a given, something that can be modified but not totally recreated. The meaning of an object, no doubt, is generated through its use, as pragmatists say, but ordinarily not by particular users. In brief, all things used for hammering in nails are not hammers. (Goffman 1986: 39)

4. In turn, one can say for material objects and settings alike that '[t]heir mere presence produces signs and marks' (Goffman 1969: 10). Whereas human communication is always sus-

pect to be strategically managed, we consider objects to be free of that. The human production and arrangement of objects may be expressive of intent and fabrication, but the objects themselves don't intentionally fabricate (ibid.). *Disneyland* may be a lie, but the trashcan made of fibre-reinforced plastic in the shape of an ice cream cone does not intentionally hide that it is a trashcan made of fibre-reinforced plastic in the shape of an ice cream cone. The meaning of *individual* objects is again specified by their wider material setting, their *situation*: where and how some gravel comes to lie tells us whether it is accidental droppings or the product of someone's digging, for example.

Objects are thought to structure the environment immediately around themselves ...; they impress a part picture of themselves, a portrait that is unintended and not dependent on being attended, yet of course, informing nonetheless to whomsoever is properly placed, trained, and inclined. Presumably this indicating is done in a malleable surround of some kind – a field for indications – the actual perturbations in which is the sign. Presumably one deals here with 'natural indexical signs,' something having 'iconic' features. ...Thus we take sign production to be situationally phrased but not situationally determined. (Goffman 1979: 6)

Part of what material settings and 'specialised equipment' thus signify is what frame the current situation belongs to, and what kinds of framings are even possible and proper in the given setting (Goffman 1972: 26).

Illuminating as these remarks are, they do not systematically work materiality into frame analysis. If the goal of the preceding chapter was to trace the temporal processes in, as, and through which framing is continually accomplished, the goal of this chapter, then, is to trace how matter matters in framing. The concept of *affordances* as coined by J. J. Gibson (1986) will be used as the starting point. Partially due to its popularisation in Donald Norman's book *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (1988, later re-released as *The Design of Everyday Things*), the concept of affordances has been widely adopted and appropriated in HCI and design as a theoretical handle on the relation of actors and their material environment – though Norman's initial phrasing of the concept (he being a cognitive psychologist) has supported interpretations that went against Gibson's non-representational, embodied theory of perception (Norman 1999; O'Neill 2008 provides a good historical overview of the use of affordances in HCI and design). Beyond HCI, affordances have also found adoption in sociology and science and technology studies as one promising 'third way' between technological determinism and social constructivism (e.g. Hutchby 2001, Bloomfield, Latham & Vurdubakis 2010).

Gibson's concept of affordances is chosen not because it offers a 'better' theoretical lens on the sociomateriality of gaming than, for example, mangles (Steinkuehler 2006), assemblages (Taylor 2009), activity theory (Barr 2007, Nardi 2009), actor-networks (Chen 2010), or similar. It is because Gibson shares with Goffman the same Meadian roots. The concept of affordances *recovers* Mead's original strong notion of an organism-environment relationality, which was skewed by Symbolic Interactionists towards the organism as they positioned themselves in opposition to 'environmentalist' structural functionalism and behaviourism. (Later imports of Schützian phenomenology didn't help in that regard.) Affordances, through their pragmatist

ties to Mead, give a systematic handle to recalibrate this historical skewing, and thus, systematically introduce materiality into Symbolic Interactionism and frame analysis. Doing so at the same time *socialises* affordances. Asking for the materiality of symbolic action is the precise mirror image of asking for the symbolicity of material affordances: It casts the spotlight on the issue of ‘canonical affordances’ (Costall 2012), ‘complex affordances’ (Turner 2005), ‘intentional affordances’ (Tomasello 2000: 84), or more generally, the role of intentionality and sociocultural meanings in affordances (Noble 1979, Heft 1989, Costall 1995). And again, because Gibson’s relational theory of affordances is so closely aligned with Mead’s relational *Philosophy of the Act* (1938), we have a systematic handle for doing so.

Rambusch and Susi (2008) have rightfully questioned the prudence of over-extending the concept of affordances beyond recognition: why not leave the term as Gibson specified it for his purposes? The liberal appropriation of the term across STS, HCI, and other disciplines has been very productive both in terms of publications and confusion (leading, in turn, to more publications). The sentiment is well taken, yet our present goal is not a philologically correct reconstruction of what Gibson said or meant, but a systematic materialisation of frame analysis that holds up to contemporary theoretical and empirical scrutiny.

Affordances and the Ecological Approach to Perception

The central move of Gibson’s *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1986) is to turn the dualistic, atomistic experimental psychology of his time on its head. Psychology separates the world into physical space (as described by physics and geometry) and an independent observer. But animals on earth do not live in abstract physical space, Gibson argues: they live in an ‘environment’ that is evolutionarily complementary to them (Gibson 1986: 8), namely that surrounding that relates to the animal’s body scale, life span, and opportunities and dangers for survival. So perception can only be properly understood as a system that is already pre-organised for the survival of a specific animal in its specific environment – not for *first* perceiving an abstract, objective, material world that *then* gets interpretatively organised into environmental entities equipped with meaning and values in a secondary process. Likewise, perception is not a representation, either projected from a retina image or constructed bottom-up from independent receptor stimulations, performed by a static eye and brain divorced from their body and surrounding environment. Psychologists only believe so because they mistake their artificial laboratory experiments to be the normal, ecological form of perception. What’s more, traditional theories of perception do not even *explain* perception. Either they assume a phenomenological conscious ‘I’ inside the head somehow ‘viewing’ an image, which leads into the familiar infinite regress of homunculi. Or they use metaphors of ‘information’ that effectively again carry ‘the lurking implication of a little man in the brain’ (Gibson

1986: 61) who ‘understands’ what the information ‘means’, instead of explaining how information is materially instantiated and processed.⁴²

Gibson suggests instead a Gestalt psychological, embodied, evolutionary theory of ‘information pickup’. Information is not a set of disjointed bits or jolts of energy stimulating receptors. It is the ‘invariant structure’, the temporally sustained *patterning* or *Gestalt* of the (optic, auditory, haptic, ...) environment that has relevance to the animal. It is in this sense that ‘information obviously is in light’ (Gibson 1986: 47): As sunlight is scattered and reflected by the environment, it takes on a structure in its direction, intensity, colour, etc. Light is not a communicating medium that ‘carries’ individual ‘bits of data’ *from* an object to an animal: light is the medium in which the animal moves and lives, and the animal perceives the patterning of the medium it moves through. Perceiving is the ongoing process of ‘invariant-extraction from a flux’ (Gibson 1986: 304) of structured sensory media. The whole ‘invariant structure’ of an object is revealed *as eye, head, and body move relative to it*. This flux of invariant-and-changing patterning of light and proprioception in turn allows the animal to specify its own position, boundaries, and motion relative to it (Gibson 1986: 52-75). In the flux of change and invariance, environment and animal become mutually specified. Perceiving is thus a continual feedback loop between the environment and a moving, acting, adjusting ‘perceptual system’: the interlinkage of an organism’s individual perceptual systems and whole body in learning feedback loops. Just like animal and environment, acting and perceiving are one process, as are knowing, learning, and perceiving. To know means to have learned to detect ever-finer invariants and ever more complex ‘compound invariant[s]’ (Gibson 1986: 141) of multiple, multi-sensorial invariants in the flux, and to do so more and more independent of the flux.

Knowing, recognising, and distinguishing things is not to compare a ‘memory image’ with the sense perception, for that would again insert a homunculus who does the comparing. Learning means that the perceptual system is reorganised such that perceiving picks up an invariant it did not before. Again, this differentiation happens not *first* in terms of abstract physical properties that *then* get equipped with value and meaning by some phenomenological ‘I’. The invariants that get picked up (like the texture and layout of surfaces) *are* exactly, only, and all those invariants that relate to the organism’s survival. ‘Information ... refers to specification of the observer’s environment, not to specification of the observer’s receptors or sense organs’ (Gibson 1986: 242). In short, the information the organism picks up is *affordances*:

The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. ...I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment’. (Gibson 1986: 127) *[T]he affordance of anything is a specific combination of the properties of its substance and its surfaces taken with reference to an animal.* (Gibson 1982: 67)

⁴² This is essentially Gibson’s formulation of the ‘symbol grounding problem’ in AI (Harnad 1990) – and a version of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (see also Gibson 1986: 252-3).

To give some examples: The invariant of a wider-than-hip-sized cliff immediately affords potentially harmful *falling-off-from* to me. The 30-degree angled, ruggedly textured slope affords potentially useful *walking-up* to me. The smoothly textured, fist-sized substance affords *throwing* or *biting-into* to me. In fact, to the animal, objects *are* affordance compounds: the organism does not first perceive a cliff and then conclude that the cliff comes ‘with’ the affordance that it might fall off of it. As Gibson writes, ‘To see these things is to perceive what they afford’ (1986: 240). ‘Places, attached objects, objects, and substances are what are mainly perceived, together with events, which are changes of these things’ (ibid.), because these are (with regard to vision) the affordances, the basest compounds of optical invariants that are reliably relevant to survival, and the perceptual system is therefore evolutionarily organised to register exactly and only and directly those basic invariants (and invariant compounds) of the media it moves through. When the environment is perceived, what is perceived are immediately relevant *Gestalts* like ‘Fall-off-from-able’, a specific invariant compound that is essential for survival. Finer specification of different kinds of ‘Fall-off-fromables’ into ‘cliffs’ and ‘towers’ of various ‘heights’ come later. The concept of affordances thus comprises two unorthodox theoretical moves at once (Costall 2012): (1) it replaces traditional dichotomies with a relationality, and (2) it speaks against perception as cognitive representations or phenomenal experiences.

Affordances as animal-environment relations

First, affordances replace a subject/object dichotomy with a *relationality*: ‘an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like’ (Gibson 1986: 129). Affordances describe *relations* between specific animals and their environment: To a healthy adult, a chair affords sitting-on. To a baby that has neither the body height to directly sit down nor the skills to climb up, it affords climbing-under. The ultraviolet, blossom-shaped invariant that affords collecting-pollen-from to a bee is not even part of our human environment.

Later critics of Gibson have pointed out that for a true relationality, formulating affordances as ‘what the environment offers the animal’ is insufficiently symmetrical (Noble 1979, Heft 1989, Chemero 2003). It paints a unidirectional relation from the environment to the animal, and locates the affordance in the environment, not in the relation. Just as it only makes sense to call an element of the environment ‘graspable’ if there are animals who want to and can ‘grasp’, to say an animal has ‘the ability to grasp’ only makes sense if there are any ‘graspables’ in the environment whose ‘grasping’ is in any way relevant to the animal. As Mead (1934: 124) already put it:

Certain objects come to exist for us because of the character of the organism. Take the case of food. If an animal that can digest grass, such as an ox, comes into the world, then grass becomes food. That object did not exist before, that is, grass as food. The advent of the ox brings in a new object. In that sense, organisms are responsible for the appearance of whole sets of objects that did not exist before.

There is no principled logical reason why we as observers should carve out any kind of delineated environmental entity or bodily movement (rather than any other) from existence without reference to the relevancies of some organism – why we should identify ‘grasping’ as a type of movement, say, but not ‘moving your little finger upwards by 20 degrees over the course of ten minutes’, and call that ‘fupdegreeing’, or why we should identify ‘apple’ as a type of object, but not ‘that rectangular patch of oxygen molecules there plus some molecules of that adjacent lump of carbon’ and call it ‘carbox’.

From a materialist standpoint, one can say that objects (and organisms) have all kinds of properties that are not directly valued by some organism such as volume, mass, and so on. But firstly, we as humans have differentiated these invariances and descriptors of invariances in physics from our own lived experience *because* they impinge on *our* relevancies, because they are picked up by our perceptual systems tuned to what is relevant to our survival – and volumes, masses, or the tool-mediated perception of atoms all are relevant to our survival, which is why we are tuned to perceive them, or build raster microscopes to do so. Secondly, whenever we speak *ecology*, not physics, our language regarding organismic abilities and needs and environmental features has this necessary mutuality.

This basic logical argument also applies empirically. In the processes of phylogeny (and ontogeny), species (and individual animals) develop the capacity of perceiving survival-relevant features in the environment in lockstep with the capacity to initiate relevant (re)actions to those features. To give an everyday example: Perceiving different brush-holding postures enables finer brush motor control, finer brush motor control enables perceptively discerning a wider range of brush postures.

To summarise, both *dispositions* of an animal and *features* of an environment are mutually specified by an *action*, an animal-initiated change of the relation that becomes possible in their relation, and is relevant to the animal (Noble 1979, Heft 1989). Current ecological psychology therefore uses the word ‘affordances’ to denote not features of an object referring to animals, but ‘relations between the abilities of animals and features of the environment’ (Chemero 2003: 181; cf. Stoffregen 2003). Affordances in this sense are *real current states* and *virtual future actions* – actually possible changes in the state of the animal-environment relations that are relevant to and initiated by the animal. *Events* in contrast are changes in the animal-environment relation initiated by the environment (Chemero, Klein & Cordeiro 2003). Affordances do not *cause* behaviour – because they are part of a larger setting, and because animal and environment are in a continual reciprocal loop. Rather, as a current state of affairs, they *enable* and *constrain* certain the range of environmentally initiated events and animal-initiated actions (Heft 1989: 10).

Affordances as directly perceived

The second unorthodox move of Gibson is to theorise the perception of affordances as involving neither phenomenal experiences nor cognitive representations. They *are* direct perceptions of structural invariants in the environmental media (Gibson 1986: 137). Gibson stressed this concept of non-representational, non-phenomenal perception against Gestalt psychologists like Koffka and Lewin who were otherwise a central inspiration for affordances: they already stated that we perceive the world as immediate *wholes*, including their meaning and value, their 'demand character' (Gibson 1986: 138). Yet, unfortunately, Gibson notes, they linked value and meaning to a phenomenological 'I': 'For Koffka it was the *phenomenal* postbox that invited letter-mailing, not the *physical* postbox. But this duality is pernicious' (Gibson 1986: 139).

Direct perception has become the most contentious (and inspiring) part of Gibson's theory in the cognitive sciences. And it *seems* at first sight as if it would directly contradict the basic assumptions of Goffman, Symbolic Interactionism, or Mead, because they are all about meaning constituted through internalising the attitude of the (generalised) other. Nowhere in the directly perceivable visual patterning of a \$20 bill is entailed that it 'affords buying fuel', it seems. We need to learn this symbolic meaning and use during socialisation. Nowhere in the black-on-white markings of a letter, we would say, is it specified in a directly perceivable way whether its sentences were meant as a threat or a joke or were just careless phrasing. We need to draw upon our background knowledge of previous interactions with that person, of her command of the written language, of irony, and so on. And we do, and we come to a conclusion, and we act accordingly. And all of this, we think, involves a lot of 'indirect', 'non-perceptual', 'representational', 'higher order' processes.

This seeming contradiction can be resolved by disentangling three common misunderstandings of 'direct perception'. First, Gibson did not explicitly state that *all* perception and cognition is *completely* 'direct'. Several passages suggest that he for instance did explicitly distinguish between the 'extraction' of invariant information and the 'abstraction' of invariants across senses and moments (Gibson 1986: 249, 258), calling these abstracted entities 'higher-order affordances' himself (Gibson 1986: 141). He only claimed that the *basic* process of perception – that part that is pre-organised to directly pick up basic affordances like surfaces and substances that are evolutionarily advantageous to pick up directly – is 'direct', is 'in the light'. Second, Gibson explicitly acknowledged that the most complex forms of *learning* take place, identifying all kinds of compound invariants. So 'direct' doesn't mean 'what's visibly there without involvement of further knowledge'. The important bit is again that 'the basic affordances of the environment are perceivable and are usually perceived directly, without an excessive amount of learning' (Gibson 1986: 143), and that the involvement of 'knowledge' ought not to be thought of as linking or comparing two representations, two little 'images in the head' (Gibson 1986: 258). Gibson – thirdly – argued so strongly against the involvement of 'rep-

resentation' because based on the psychology and philosophy of perception of his time, he thought involving any such concept would *necessarily* lead to a 'man in the head' regress that glossed over rather than explained perception.

In summary, Gibson argued not so much *against* representation, learning, meaning, and knowledge than *for a different way of conceptualising them*, one that distributed and embodied them from 'images present to a little man in the head' into 'what the total perceptual system does'. Precisely this is the lead that today's radically embodied, enactive cognitive sciences have taken: to provide theoretical explanations and empirical studies in tune with the current state of neurosciences that *fully unpack* perception, action, cognition into processes arising from and fully distributed in the brain-body-environment relation (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, Johnson 2007, Barsalou 2008, Chemero 2009, Wilson & Golonka 2013). Even presumably 'indirect' processes like classification *can* be modelled and explained as learning 'direct perception' systems – even though they require a probabilistic reinterpretation of Gibson's notion of 'invariants' (Withagen & Chemero 2012).

The Mead Connection

Gibson's theory of direct perception, as we can now see, did not deny the existence of learned meaning: it only pushed hard for a conceptualisation of basic perception that would be able to demonstrate that and how it could work without a little man in the head implying a mind-body duality (Heft 2001). This in turn led to his emphasis on biologically, evolutionarily pre-specified affordances, relegating the matter of socially specified meanings and uses, intentionality, lying, fact and fiction – the bread and butter of Symbolic Interactionism and Goffman – as a type of learning that is 'very difficult' (Gibson 1986: 142), that 'brings in complicated questions' (Gibson 1986: 262), without unpacking said questions further. Ironically, Gibson could have found (and to a certain extent, explicitly pointed to) such a naturalised, non-mentalist unpacking of learned meaning in the philosophy of his time – namely, in the pragmatism of Dewey, James, and Mead (Noble 1979: 71). Gibson's concept of affordances as animal-environment relations bears more than a striking resemblance to Mead's *Philosophy of the Act* (1938). The following quote is essentially Mead pre-formulating affordances:

The perceptual object is primarily the organization of the immediate environment with reference to the organism. Perception here has no other significance than that of the sense apparatus in its adjustment to the environment, in its function in selection of the stimulation needed for the reaction of the organism through its relation to the central nervous system, and in its calling-out of the appropriate response. The 'what' of the object is, then, the expression of the whole of which both environment and organism are essential parts. (Mead 1938: 16)

Mead stressed that the perceived relationality is grounded in the needs of the organism, but an objective fact: 'Any object is thus always an expression of a peculiar relation between itself and the individual, but it is an objective relation. The character of the individual selects out of the object as it exists what answers to the nature of the individual' (Mead 1938: 7). The 'attitude'

that perception 'calls out' is what one can do with it: 'simply an organization of a whole group of possible reactions. ... The chair is primarily what one sits down in' (Mead 1934: 70). Mead highlighted that perception is an ongoing process of perception-action, involving the interaction of seeing, eye, head, and body movement:

The process of sensing is itself an activity. In the case of vision this is most evidently the case. Here the movement of the eyes, the focusing of the lens, and the adjustment of the lines of vision of the two eyes require a complicated activity which is further complicated by the movements of the eyes which will bring the rays of light coming from all parts of the object upon the center of clearest vision ... Furthermore, the adjustment of the organism to the stimulation, as well as the movement of the body and its sense organs so that the process of stimulation may continue to the best advantage, involves an analysis of the stimulation. (Mead 1938: 3-4)

In this process of sensing, object and subject get mutually specified: 'in the experience of the object by the individual, what is not object must be individual' (Mead 1938: 8). Objects get specified and learned by teasing out invariants over time: 'we abstract from characters which inhere in particular objects and their situations and fasten our attention upon what is uniform in all objects and in all processes of perception. This enables us to identify the object of perception in its relation to the whole field and to account for the illusions of sense perception, such as reflected and refracted objects' (Mead 1938: 10).

Zooming out from such direct conceptual similarities, we also find a deep structural parallel between Mead and Gibson. Both constructed a *relational, pragmatist* account of action and perception: perception arises from the process of organism and environment relating, and what is perceived are action opportunities. Both saw themselves as behaviourists (Mead 1934; see Heft 2001: 106 on Gibson calling himself a behaviourist) who wanted to *naturalise consciousness, action, and perception*: Gibson attempted to demonstrate that we can and must fully account for perception without bringing an inner Cartesian observer in; Mead tried to explain how consciousness arises *from* stimulus-response relations as the internalised social reflexivity of attitudes. Both critiqued the natural sciences for begging the question by presupposing the scientific description of the world in explaining how perception works, whereas the world is first given to us as lived experience, in and from which we *then* build a scientific description.

Harry Heft (2001: 105-7) has traced a historical line from Gibson's ideas via his mentor E. B. Holt back to William James's radical empiricism, further arguing that pragmatism was very much 'in the air' during Gibson's student years – so the connection between Gibson and Mead (a pragmatist colleague of James) is not implausible. This connection (or parallel) allows us to make the principled point that already baked into the Meadian theory of action and perception is a strong, symmetrical notion of organism-environment relationality, a systematic place for affordances and thus, materiality. Even if Goffman or Symbolic Interactionists in general did not appreciate this fact, their Meadian conception of symbolic action comes with materiality already entailed in the 'action' part: Symbolic meaning and consciousness arise in phylogeny and ontogeny *from and made of* actions as organism-environment relationalities. Affordances thus provide one intuitive answer to frames as organising principles of experience and events:

Their 'isomorphism' is a *relationality* flowing from a (phylogenetic, ontogenetic, historical, biographic, situational) process in which experience and events become mutually specified in a mutually 'fitting' manner (see Heft 1989: 8, Heft 2007).⁴³ The world that is given to human beings in perception is an environment relating to their sensitivities, one humans can perceive in its basic affordances without cultural knowledge (Gibson 1986: 130, 134), but one that humans also reshaped and as socialised adults also perceive in 'the affordances of things for other observers' (Gibson 1986: 141).

Social, Situated, Extended Affordances: Mediating Gibson

Meads theoretical delineation how meaning, mind, and self are secondary developments of organism-environment relationalities also helps us – now switching sides – to systematically address three central complications the theory of affordances has faced in its application to humans and their cultural artefacts (like video games), all of them more or less tied to the 'muddle of the mailbox', to use Noble's (1979: 71) nice phrasing. In contrasting his view with Koffka, Gibson wrote that Gestalt psychologists could only understand the meaning and value of objects as a momentary, shifting, phenomenal quality separate from the physical object, whereas affordances are real relations between a subject's dispositions and an object's features, giving a postbox as an example:

I prefer to say that the real postbox (the *only* one) affords letter-mailing to a letter-writing human in a community with a postal system. This fact is perceived when the postbox is identified as such, and it is apprehended whether the postbox is in or out of sight. ... Everyone above the age of six knows what it is for and where the nearest one is. The perception of its affordance should therefore not be confused with the temporary special attraction it might have. (Gibson 1986: 139)

This little observation contains three highly consequential and problematic implications regarding the *sociality* of affordances, the *situatedness* of affordances, and the *scope* of affordances. Let's address them in turn, to then look at the question of phenomenal experience.

1. Socialising affordances

As a vast range of researchers in ecological psychology, HCI, and sociology has pointed out, human beings live in an environment full of symbols, meanings, intentions, and lies, full of ever-new objects with ever-new meanings and uses and effects that are not directly betrayed by its surface, but have to be learned (Almquist & Lupton 2010, Heft 1989, 2003, 2007, Costall 1995, 2012, Noble 1979, Norman 1999, O'Neill 2008, Oshlyansky, Thimbleby & Cairns 2004, Turner 2005, Valenti & Gold 1991, Vyas et al. 2006).

⁴³ This notion is again reminiscent of 'structural coupling' or 'co-orientation' in radical constructivism (Schmidt 1994), with the twist that the perspective is not biased towards the 'cognitive system' that can only be 'irritated' by its environment. If the environment wasn't there in just the way it is, the internal structure of the cognitive system wouldn't be just as it is. In the process of shaping internal structures, the environment gets shaped as well. And the fact that the cognitive system is a body, a full body beyond the brain, plays a non-epiphenomenal role in this.

To borrow the conceit of the 1980s comedy *The Gods Must Be Crazy*: imagine our postbox was dropped from an airplane over a desert where people with no contact to technological civilisation live. To them, the postbox would be an *alien*, undisclosed object. Sure, it will afford *putting-sand-into* to them, but they would neither be able to perceive letter-mail-ability, nor would this affordance *actually exist* to them. First, the postbox is reliant on its linkage into a vast network of other people and objects – institutionalised provisioning in Goffman’s terms. A postbox without a running postal system will be inert for its intended uses, or rapidly break down (Noble 1979: 72-3, Costall 2012: 91). Second, even if the postbox was ‘functional’, i.e. if a plane would regularly land to collect the mail, without people having a *practice* of letter-mailing that is both *useful* and *intelligible* to them – which implies a vast network of further practices (writing, reading, sedentary living ...) and objects (paper, envelopes, ink, houses, an address system ...) –, the letter-mailing affordance cannot be said to objectively exist for them. So not only do objects and action capacities *logically* constitute each other (without grass-eaters, no edible grass, without game-players, no games): Humans continually create new actions that create new affordances of objects, new objects in turn enable the development of new actions, and people cultivate and socialise their bodies to fit them. Humans and their artefactual environment form a developing system shaping bodies, actions, objects, settings, where you cannot take away one without changing what their current relation affords (Ingold 1996, Heft 2007). People must have created ‘letter-writing’ as an *action* itself, and a *relevant* one, in relation to which the letter-mailability affordance comes into being. This requires vast meshes of joint action and infrastructure whose upkeep sustains the action and with it, the affordance (postmen stuffing letters into mail sacks that they drive in automobiles to sorting halls etc.).

Third, while it is reasonable to assume that the human perceptual system has evolved to immediately pick up ‘graspability’, ‘fall-off-ability’, and so on – or bump-into-ability for the postbox –, to claim the same for ‘letter-mail-ability’ would be hardly plausible. Furthermore, if a friend of mine tells me that the post is on strike, I will know that the postbox currently does not afford letter-mailing – that the invisible-to-me workings of the institutional provisioning have ceased (Noble 1979). Now the affordance is *objectively not there*, and *I do not perceive it* as a consequence of a pretty staggering ‘compound invariant’ that involves my friend’s and my language and our practical understanding of the postal system. Individuals must have *learned* the action(s) of letter-mailing, its relevance, the role of a postbox in it, and how to sensibly and properly use the postbox (as Gibson implies in ‘everyone above the age of six’ – to which one should add: everyone in a society where a postbox is ‘a thing’ that gets regularly used). Also, people must be able to draw upon some joint practical understanding of the postal system that they can communicatively refer to, and draw conclusions from it pertaining to the actual postbox in front of them.

To all these issues, Mead's symbolic action gives us a ready argument how they work out: postboxes get established as social objects through their enrolment in people's joint actions oriented towards them. The 'meaning' of postboxes is the 'attitude', the set of possible useful actions evoked when perceiving them. This use is learned in social interaction with others: By observing and imitating and being instructed how to use a postbox – an utterly practical process involving the development of the requisite bodily skills –, by listening to people reflexively indicating and talking about it. It becomes reflexive, symbolic meaning if one starts to take on and generalise the attitudes (the possible uses) of the others towards the same object. And this seems to be indeed the view Gibson himself took, in a Meadian parlance:

The child begins, no doubt, by perceiving the affordances of things for her, for her own personal behavior. ... But she must learn to perceive the affordances of things for other observers as well as for herself. ... These are the invariants that enable two children to perceive the common affordance of the solid shape despite the different perspectives, the affordance of a toy, for instance. Only when each child perceives the value of things for others as well as for herself does she begin to be socialized. (Gibson 1986: 141)

As we know, for Mead and Symbolic Interactionists after him, language is a great facilitator for such reflexivity and meaning, because words (saying and listening) anchor one's own and the other's attitude in the same perceptual object (the vocal gesture). Thinking is thus internalised, silent verbalisation. We find the same account again in Gibson:

In the course of development the young child first hears talk about what she is perceiving. Then she begins herself to talk about what she perceives. Then she begins to talk to herself about what she knows – when she is alone in her crib, for example. And finally, her verbal system probably begins to verbalize silently, in much the same way the visual system begins to visualize, without the constraints of stimulation or muscular action but within the limits of the invariants to which the system is attuned. (Gibson 1986: 260-1)

Another way Mead identifies for taking the attitude of the other is roles and the learning of roles in reciprocally taking on one and the other side of a role in play. Gibson on the affordances of 'other persons and animals':

what the infant affords the mother is reciprocal to what the mother affords the infant ... what the buyer affords the seller cannot be separated from what the seller affords the buyer, and so on. The perceiving of these mutual affordances is enormously complex, but it is nonetheless lawful. ... The other person, the generalized *other*, the *alter* as opposed to the *ego*, is an ecological object with a skin, even if clothed. (Gibson 1986: 135)

All of this learning and evoking of attitudes is a fully material, embodied process that involves both actor and object. There is no phenomenological subjective 'I' that in a flight of fancy conjures an imagination of 'mailbox' into being, or if faced with a mailbox, decides it rather wants to see that mailbox as a green otter with a sunflower in its snout. To be able to imagine a mailbox (including the attitudes it calls forth) means to have learned through social experience to identify and understand mailboxes – to have one's bodily and neural dispositions rearranged in this specific manner. And based on this arrangement of one's bodily dispositions, picking up certain invariances in the light around one will reliably evoke certain perceptions and meanings. As the joke goes, just try to read the word 'elephant' and then *not* think of one.

2. Situating affordances

The second muddle of the mailbox is that even if objects afford very many different actions (Gibson 1986: 134), in everyday life, we only ever realise a relatively predictable and small subset of those. The postbox affords throwing one's trash (or many other things) inside, but adult humans usually only insert mail. It wouldn't 'make sense' nor 'seem appropriate' to do something else with it. We only attend to and realise specific 'canonical' affordances (Costall 2012). One might ascribe this phenomenon to a secondary process of normative constraint, not a primary one of perception. Yet the psychological research on functional fixedness suggests that once we have been socialised into the canonical affordances of objects in our society, we have a hard time literally *seeing* other affordances.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as the case of the postal strike shows, what is practically possible, epistemically intelligible, and normatively appropriate to do with a postbox *varies* based on circumstances.

In short, we have to account for the *situatedness* of affordances (Costall & Leudar 1996, Heft 2003), and here, frames and framing provide ready answers. Social groups constitute and sustain different types of situations – *frames* –, and their members learn to recognise and produce instantiations of them. In the case of fact and fiction, Gibson in effect acknowledges this, but gives no further explanation: 'the difference between the factual and the fictional depends on the social system of communication and brings in complicated questions' (Gibson 1986: 261-2). Frames specify what objects, settings, and events to expect as part of a situation and to attend to, and what their situationally practical, sensible, and proper meaning and use is. Perceived objects, settings, and events in turn inform the actor's understanding what frame this situation belongs to and how to act accordingly, in so doing reproducing a *framing* of the situation.

Turning to our mailbox: were a healthy human adult to find a slightly bruised mailbox sitting amidst a heap of other rugged-looking metal objects, she would conclude that this is likely no longer a functional mailbox, but rather a piece of former-mailbox-now-metal-rubbish – whereas a child that just learned the functioning of mailboxes might, after some consideration, proudly entrust its letter to it, creating a source of great humour for adults telling the tale: 'Of course' this mailbox was out of use! How funny! How cute! But in that 'of course' lies all the hard-own competence of knowing the different frames of 'in use' and 'out of use', and of developing an according frame understanding. Had it been a pristine mailbox screwed at the 'correct' height to a pristine metal pole standing upright 'as it should be', but still on top a heap of metal scraps, things wouldn't align quite as nicely. The adults would likely be even more puzzled by this frame ambiguity than the child. Anxiously, they'd try to cross-check possible frames in which this configuration of 'proper' mailbox and 'improper'

⁴⁴ Interestingly, research suggests that functional fixedness is a cultural universal that developmentally sets in after the age of five (German & Defeyter 2000, German & Barrett 2005). In other words, young children still do perceive (and enjoy acting on) the general putting-stuff-in-ability of mailboxes.

metal heap made sense: A piece of public art? Some accidental spillage of a scrap metal truck? Goffman here appeals to the notion of *context*:

[U]sually the context, as we say, rules out wrong interpretations and rules in the right one. (Indeed, context can be defined as immediately available events which are compatible with one frame understanding and incompatible with others.) And when the context might not suffice, participants take care to act out requisite evidence (Goffman 1986: 441; see Goffman 1986: 301-5; 1971: 106).

Taken as such, this statement might lead into an infinite regress: Certainly, every object and event in our environment 'lends itself' to certain frames relative to our frame dispositions, but that is precisely the *problem* frames are supposed to solve: The symbolic severing of event and meaning gives rise to a *multitude* of possible meanings, *specified* by frames. What's more, frames specify what objects to attend to as part of a framing. So without already presupposing a frame, we have no guidance in regard to what objects and events even to attend to as the context that is required to establish which frames to presuppose. Without specific frames, no context; without context, no specification of frames.

The solution is again to switch to a diachronic view of the sequential, reflexive, indexical, open *process* of framing, now between an actor and an object in their total situation. On its own, any object, setting, or event remains indexically underspecified. But we always encounter them in a total situational sequence involving other objects and events, and a starting assumption about what it is that's going on here, even if that is 'It's unclear whether this mailbox is functional, broken, or an art piece – I should find out.' Whether we come to understand the mailbox as part of a functioning mailbox arrangement (albeit surrounded by trash) or as part of an art installation, our *initial* framing of our situation as 'walking through the city in search of a mailbox', and the *initially* perceived, attended-to other features of the environment are the starting points, the always already given situational horizon-at-a-time in the process of acting on, attending-to, perceiving, and understanding parts of the situation, and of establishing, sustaining, changing its framing in the course – seeking out further cues because 'something doesn't fit', or going on in a way that to others enacts in an observably orderly way a framing of the situation: if you put a letter in, I'm inclined to do so, too. And if a postal worker notices, that mailbox previously enacted by the postal workers as 'out of order' might be emptied by her, reflexively constituting the mailbox as 'in use'. The framing of the mailbox is established in the *sequence* of interactions involving it, at each turn reaffirmed or changed.

A frame analytic understanding of context thus sits squarely against both nomothetic, deductive, quantitative approaches on the one hand and ethnomethodology on the other: for the first, 'context' is basically a residual container for 'all the variance that is not explained by the main variable we looked at in the present study.' For ethnomethodologists and Symbolic Interactionism in the Blumerian line, 'context' appeals to the indexicality and idiosyncrasy of human action: It always transpires in a *specific* sequence at a *specific* time in a *specific* place with *specific* participants and objects sharing a *specific* prehistory. Human action only becomes in-

telligible to the involved participants against the *total* background of these specifics coming together just so, right then and there. Ethnomethodology acknowledges that 'context' is what gives order and meaning to events, but it negates that 'context' could be usefully generalised, abstracted, or even differentiated from that which is to be explained. To 'situate' or 'contextualise' in this sense means to emphasise the irreducibility of local events to any generalising, abstracting account. In contrast to both, for Goffman, Bateson, and Symbolic Interactionism in the Thomas and Thomas line, context is 'the definition of the situation', a *gestalt*-like whole or 'organizing principle' that holds together, that gives orderliness and meaning to all events that transpire within it. The particulars of a situation are neither random noise (relative to one's current research question) nor irreducible specifics: they constitute reoccurring types of situations, and partake and are enrolled in the reproduction of that type of situation over time.

Now in any given situation, for sure, not *all* particular elements partake in constituting it (or resist its constitution as) a certain type of situation. In a video gaming session, whether there is a bookshelf next to the television set or not arguably has little import in framing the situation as 'video gaming' (unless the shelf collapses on the TV). In contrast, the presence (or absence) and functioning (or breakdown) of a gaming console is essential in this framing. For the set of elements that thus co-constitute a context (or, in our case, a framing), Schatzki (2002: 65) offers the useful term 'site': 'a context is a site when ... the entities that occur in it are inherently components of it. That is to say, for something to be or to occur in a site context is for it to be or to occur *as* a constituent part of its context'. This concept of a site is essentially a static and materially expanded rendition of Goffman's (1972: 84-5) notion of an ongoing framing of a situation as a 'situated activity system': 'a somewhat closed, self-compensating, self-terminating circuit of interdependent actions'.

Speaking of the situatedness of affordances, we finally have to turn to the *malleability* of objects and settings. Affordances are nothing that is statically 'fixed' and then merely perceived and acted on. They are 'static' only in the sense that at any snapshot moment in time, given the current relation of object features and actor dispositions (embedded in a current framing and wider situation), certain actions and events are more or less likely to occur, more or less easy to pull off, more or less sensible and appropriate to do. In the actual process of situated action, these states of object-actor relations naturally change and shift as 'situated, and indeed ongoing, accomplishments' between objects and actors in the wider situation (Bloomfield, Latham & Vurdubakis 2010: 422). Bloomfield, Latham and Vurdubakis (2010) illustrate this point in a nice case study on a disabled individual in a wheelchair and a group of scientists visiting him at home, who try to get a computer connection set up. Together with the available tools and people in the room, they find all kinds of fixes and workarounds to make things work: exchanging the power plug of the computer that initially did not fit the electrical

sockets in the home, propping up the keyboard against some foam with duct tape so that it became accessible from a wheelchair, and so on.

The first important point that Bloomfield, Latham and Vurdubakis (2010: 420) make is that what an object affords to an actor depends not on their solitary relation with each other alone, but on the wider situation of other actors, objects, and settings in which they are embedded: a socket, a game DVD, or a game console on their own are more or less useless objects (if you don't want to use them for electrocution, doorstopping, or as a beer mat). Only from their being put to work together does the affordance of playing a video game arise. Just as the meaning of one object is specified by the context of other objects (among other things), so is its practical use. (And as Goffman pointed out, these are in turn often linked into invisibilised vast networks of 'institutional provisioning' like electricity.) The same holds for actors: a cupboard that is just inert to one actor might afford being moved to three of them.

Second, Bloomfield, Latham and Vurdubakis (2010) point out that actors in a given situation regularly (*re-*)*configure* the material objects and settings such that new, desired affordances emerge. Articulated in frame analytic terms, this holds both in terms of practical feasibility and frame-related intelligibility and appropriateness. It is surely the case that an operating room filled with surgical instruments, relative to our socialisation, affords being used for surgery not birthday parties; but doctors and nurses could move the surgical equipment out and the decorations in – *they just have to go through the requisite moves* of getting one group of items out and the other in, of getting approval from the hospital administration, and then getting over their own felt embarrassment of repurposing the operating room in such a manner. Any situation is sociomaterially *configurable* in its affordances and framing, but how and in what ways is conditioned on the relative ease or effort of bringing these configurations about, given the current dispositions and features of actors and objects. Hommel (2005) and others have suggested the term *obduracy* to capture this contextual, sociomaterial (im)malleability of objects and settings. Material objects are malleable, can be used and understood in different ways, but not 'at a whim.' A sheet of paper used as a contract *can* be re-used as a paper plane. But it requires *specific efforts*: you have to fold it in a special way and you need to exert energy, time, skill, and knowledge of paper planes, and possibly, additional material. That paper plane won't fold itself. And these efforts are not arbitrary. There is not an arbitrary number of possible steps that will get you from a contract to a paper plane. In addition, the reconfiguration of a contract into a paper plane requires less work than reconfiguring it into a rifle. You can, *in principle*, shred and compress the paper so that it becomes part of the shaft of a makeshift rifle. But doing so will require much more work and energy and material and skill than folding the paper into a paper plane.

We encounter such malleability (or obduracy) not just in the material dimension of framings: even on the 'social' dimension of meanings, understandings, and usages, reconfiguring

requires very specific and concrete, more or less effortful, actions and communications. Try folding the contract with which somebody just bought a house from you into a paper plane and send it flying: you will immediately run into your own cognitive dissonances (i.e. your dispositions resisting). You will imagine (and provoke) severe reactions by the notary and the person who bought the house from you. They understand – together with you – that this piece of paper is a contract, that it is valuable, to be treated with care, and not to be configured into a paper plane. You would have to go to a tremendous amount of explanation and appeasement and trust-building to get them to *maybe* agree: ‘It’s for the sake of a scientific argument, you see, I will make sure not to make it illegible or let it drop anywhere it could get damaged, and will return it to you safely. If you want, I’ll sign another copy in advance.’

This ‘social’ obduracy is itself intertwined with the concrete materiality of the contract. A lifetime of upbringing of all involved parties in a world where contracts are treated as sacred objects, combined with the material likeness of that sheet of paper with those past experiences of contracts, and the specific preceding interaction sequence of signing the contract in a lawyer’s office, together evoke those strong attitudes. It is not just any piece of paper, but one where very specific meaningful patterns of ink were applied to, one that was signed by you and the other parties in each other’s response presence, as confirmed by the signature of the present notary at that point in time and space. As an individual, you may be at liberty to *imagine* that sheet of paper becoming a paper plane, not a contract. But even in yourself, a robust, obdurate lifetime of socialisation of your dispositions makes doing so effortful work, and effortful work that has to acknowledge, to gear into, to work with the concrete, specific form of the currently given dispositions of actors and features of objects.

3. Extending affordances

The third pragmatist clarification of affordances is their scope. Video gaming for instance often produces audiovisual representations, including spoken and written language, that evoke a broad range of emotional and motivational responses, including complex phenomena like presence or enjoyment. Are these to be construed as affordances?

There have been broadly two opposing stances towards this issue. One has been to narrowly construe affordances as the *actions* an environment affords an animal (e.g. Gaver 1991, Norman 1988, McGrenere & Ho 2000). The other camp also speaks of emotional, cognitive, perceptual, motivational etc., affordances (e.g. Hartson 2003, Morie et al. 2005, Zhang 2008). Michaels (2003: 137-9) has warned of broadening affordances in this way because that would just bring representational or phenomenal perception and meaning in again through the back door. And indeed, where affordances have been extended, by and large, they were also reinterpreted in standard representational cognitive science terms.

However, there is no necessary link between mode of explanation and conceptual scope of affordances. Gibson himself was clear that affordances specified any kind of change in the animal-environment relation that is *relevant* to the animal: falling off a cliff or being poisoned were examples for affordances he gave (Gibson 1986: 127, 137). A pragmatist, ecological notion of relevancy allows for a wide range of affordances (including emotion, motivation, meaning) that is still naturalised, non-mentalistic, and action-related. First, the perceptual system of any animal is already pre-organised to pick up what is relevant to its survival and therefore relevant to react to. Second, that perception happens first in *already relevant wholes*; emotion and motivation can be seen as the *valence* or value-dimension of what is perceived (Gibson 1986: 137-40). Finer specifications like colour, height, etc., or the differentiation between object, emotion-for-me, and emotion-for-others *are* learned to be perceived, but only *later* as such differentiation itself becomes *relevant* (Gibson 1986: 134-5). They are all still *attitudes* in Mead's (1934) sense that they ready the animal to take action in response. Third, imagination and meaning are not so much to be abandoned as reconceptualised as non-mentalistic affordances – something Gibson demonstrated in his analysis of pictures and movies (Gibson 1986: 261-2, 267-302; 1982). Perceiving pictures or moving images and spoken words of movies, he argued, we *visualise* – that is, our perceptual system perceives the depicted affordances based on radically less rich and more compounded invariants. As adults, however, we also *in parallel* perceive the representing object in its direct basic affordances. We perceive a painting as the object it depicts, and as a flat surface with uneven spots of colour. 'Mistaking' representational media as the objects they represent is therefore impossible. For Gibson (1982: 279; 1986: 282), this paradoxical duality is the central characteristic of perceiving representations. More importantly, it demonstrates that he explicitly framed the perception of pictures (and also written language) in terms of affordances. Gibson says considerably less about the perception of the non-iconic meaning of spoken, let alone written language, but here again Mead (1934) and pragmatist embodied, naturalised accounts of meaning and aesthetics fill the gap (e.g. Johnson 2007). In short, an extended notion of affordances as comprising symbolic meaning, imagination, emotion, and motivation is not only sensible, but congruent with a pragmatist explication of animal-environment relations.

4. The Place of Experience

Having thus socialised, situated, and scoped affordances, a final matter requires resolution: What of phenomenal experience? Gibson's relation to experience is complicated to say the least: On the one hand, he strongly argued against bringing any mentalist or phenomenological element into the explanation of perception. On the other, his own descriptions of the perceived environment are phenomenologically attentive and presuppose (in him as the author and us as readers) an experience of the things he describes. The *Gestalt* psychologists he ap-

appropriates always spoke of *Gestalts* in experience, not physical reality. Heft (2001, esp. 126-132) suggests that Gibson's main goal was to construct an account that avoided a mind-world dualism. Gibson's concept of affordances therefore picked up William James's radical empiricism that metaphysically starts with pure experience or percepts that have a later differentiated duality of subject and object as qualities. Read this way, affordances and experiences are essentially the same. Mead (1938: 63) similarly speaks of consciousness and experience as 'the world that is there', 'simply the environment of the human individual' (Mead 1934: 112), 'the unfractured relation between impulses and the objects which give them expression' (Mead 1934: 350) that only later is differentiated into subject and object in perception. Whether phenomenal experience is the stuff of existence, a dimension of it, or an element in it; and whether it is epiphenomenal or causally linked are ultimately metaphysical questions that need not concern us. The important thing is that the radical empiricist standpoint of Mead or James is epistemologically sound and logically coherent with the concept of affordances as fully naturalised animal-environment relations. Using Mead's philosophy of action, we can construct a social, situated, extended account of affordances that encompasses symbolic meaning and situational framing without at any point of the explanation relying on a phenomenological 'I'.

Summary and Conclusions

So from a Meadian-cum-Gibsonian standpoint, how might we systemise the role of materiality in frames and framing? First, we have seen that already 'baked into' the notion of symbolic action that Goffman took from Mead there is a conception of action as an animal-environment relation or affordance: a perception of the current relation of environmental features and bodily dispositions that readies possible future actions that hold relevance to the animal. Second, we have seen that Meadian pragmatism allows to account for three central issues of the affordance concept *vis-à-vis* human beings acting in a social world:

- The affordances of most objects and settings in our modern lifeworld are *social*. They (i) relate to socially specified practices, frames, actions, and meanings that individual members of a society are socialised into, and (ii) they practically depend on their embedding into vast networks of social actions.
- Affordances are *situated*. (i) Based on the actors' current frame understanding (into which the objects themselves factor as contextual cues), actors only attend to and perceive a small range of framing-related sensible and appropriate meanings and possible actions with regard to objects and settings. (ii) What one object or setting affords to one actor at a given time and place is based on the total situational configuration of objects, settings, and actors (including linked-up wider networks of institutionalised provisioning). (iii) Actors in acting can and do continually reconfigure this total situational arrangement:

based on the current relation of actor and environment, this requires specific efforts of a smaller or greater amount.

- Affordances do not just comprise possible future actions (or events), but as part of their current perception, also *extend* to aspects such as emotion, motivation, symbolic meaning, or even imagination.

This social, situated, and extended understanding of affordances allows for basic affordances to be ‘directly perceived’ in Gibson’s sense, and maintains his naturalising, non-mentalising impetus. Because it offers (or at least aims at) an explanatory model that nowhere depends on phenomenal experience, it allows acknowledgement of its existence (and leaves its precise role up to the metaphysical predilections of the individual reader).

How does this widened understanding of affordances play out in materialising frame analysis? First, where Giddens (1984) saw social structures and systems constituted entirely by actors, actions, and memory traces, a materialised frame analysis extends the notion of frames and framing into animal-environment relations: frames are the totality of actors and their dispositions, communications, and actions, as well as objects, settings, and their features and events, that *together* in their relating reproduce-and-change their reoccurrence as types of situations across time and space. A framing, in contrast, is a site or situated activity system: it is a situational sequential, more or less coherent and self-referential process of co-present actors, actions, communications, objects, settings, and events that *together* organise themselves in a recognisably orderly manner as belonging to a frame.

Second, perception, understanding, and with them frame perception and understanding cannot be localised narrowly ‘in the actors’ heads.’ If affordances are current actor-environment relations and future possible actions and events that are perceived, understood, and experienced by the actor (which includes aspects of emotion, motivation, and symbolic meaning), then perception and understanding are themselves *relational*. A frame perception (an actor’s immediate apprehension ‘what it would make sense to do next’) and a frame understanding (an actor’s reflexive mental representation of ‘what it is that’s going on here’) are just two specific affordances and just two specific parts of the overall framing of the situation. What is special about actors is that they, unlike objects, *can* reflexively relate to the ongoing framing process through developing such a reflexive frame understanding and based on that, pursue courses of action and communication to intentionally clarify, continue, or change the current framing.

Let’s see how this plays out as a process: When an actor enters a situation, she does so with a certain current configuration of dispositions, including frame dispositions and a frame perception and understanding. As she moves into the situation, based on her dispositions, she attends to certain features of the present objects and settings, and from the resulting flux, certain perceptions, understandings, and experiences emerge, including perceptions that align or

misalign with the actor's current frame perception and understanding. Part of what is perceived might be metacommunicative cues reflexively indicating the current framing (such as the word 'novel' imprinted on a book cover). The actor's perception and understanding (including a reinforced or amended frame perception and understanding) ready a spectrum or one or more situationally feasible, intelligible, and appropriate actions and communications. These can include actions and communications that align with the current framing of the situation; actions and communications intended to get a clearer frame understanding; or actions and communications intended to actively reframe the situation. Acting on objects and settings possibly reconfigures them, a process that is more or less effortful and more or less likely to succeed based on the relation of environmental features and the actor's dispositions. A setting and objects purpose-designed and configured to support actions that belong to a certain frame make framing and understanding the situation as belonging to that frame relatively easy, and they make actions in accordance with that framing relatively easy – as long as the actor possesses the requisite frame dispositions. In sum, frames and materiality relate as follows:

- Material objects and settings *ground* frames. Frames are always necessarily embodied in actors and materialised in objects and settings, their configuration, features, and events. There is no 'playing hopscotch' in the universe beyond people and what they do with the material world around them.
- Frames *disclose* material objects and settings to adult human actors. Biologically, we live in an environment relative to our sensitivities. Similarly, as socialised actors, we are hermeneutically 'always already' in a social environment. By virtue of being my body here and now standing on this pavement, I cannot have an experience of those chalk marks doodled on it completely independent of my socialised brain and body, whose socialisation includes the acquisition of frame dispositions relating to 'public streets' as well as 'playing hopscotch'. The pavement and chalk marks are part of a world shaped by other socialised human beings since millennia; without their actions being organised by frames, neither the pavement nor the chalk marks would exist in their current form before me.
- Material objects, settings, and events *co-constitute and reflexively indicate* framings. By lifting one leg and hopping with the other into a chalk-marked field on the ground, I play hopscotch, and visibly so for other passers-by. Without the chalk marks, my hopping would be hardly intelligible to others as 'playing hopscotch', and likely hard for myself to sustain as 'playing hopscotch' for long. Chalk marks and hopping together constitute and indicate 'playing hopscotch'.
- Frame dispositions, perceptions, and understandings *specify* intelligible and appropriate actions, motivations, attentive involvement, self-implications, and emotions of objects and settings. Seeing the chalk marks on the ground, I understand them to be 'a hopscotch field.' This perception immediately gives rise to experiences I understand to be the desire

to ‘play’, and ‘play hopscotch’, but also the ‘wariness of embarrassing myself in a public street as an adult playing a children’s game.’ If I were socialised differently, or if I managed to unshackle myself temporarily from the functional fixedness of my frame dispositions, the chalk marks might offer very different perceptions, meanings, and actions to me: I could want to draw them out into the portrait of a city skyline, or understand them to be illegible markings made by some construction workers, for instance.

- Frame dispositions, perceptions, and understandings guide actors’ *configuring* of material objects and settings into frame-aligned forms. The person who left the chalk marks on the pavement did so oriented by her understanding of ‘hopscotch’ and ‘public street’, which likely made the person draw the markings in a space that would not unduly disturb the pedestrian traffic.

As Mead and many others after him pointed out, actors and environments always find themselves in a moving equilibrium of relative alignment or misalignment. On the one hand, framing is a process continually open to contestation and change, including actors’ active reconfiguration of objects and settings to suit a (re)framing. On the other, settings and objects partake in the institutionalisation of frames, and specific settings and objects suggest, support, resist specific framings. This points to relations of facilitation versus obdurate resistance, and more generally, stability and change.

- Objects and settings aligned with a frame *resist* misaligned actions, communications, perceptions, understandings, and experiences. One can juggle with running chainsaws *as if* it were child’s play, but the situation will likely trigger mental images that cause stress reactions that make it hard to keep up a playful attitude, and one needs significant skills to do so without the chainsaws at a certain point enforcing their non-play-aligned materiality on the juggler’s body.
- Frame dispositions, perceptions, and understandings *resist* misaligned objects and settings. We often literally do not see potential uses an object affords to us that are situationally nonsensical or inappropriate. Or we see a swing in the garden and realise its potential to afford some joyful swinging, but refrain from realising it because it would be inappropriate in the occasion (it’s a funeral lunch, and you’re the pastor).
- Objects and settings *stabilise and facilitate* frame-aligned perceptions, understandings, experiences, and actions. Were I to switch from my chainsaws to juggling balls, I would find that their weight, surface texture, and softness is optimally designed to support juggling, and juggling of a certain kind. For other forms of juggling, I might need other, ‘special’ balls. They come in colours and patterns that others and I have learned to associate with playfulness, and books and videos and websites all depict similar balls in an act they name ‘juggling’. Using these balls to juggle, it would be relatively easy for me to have experiences of successful juggling (versus trying to juggle with chainsaws). If I see someone

with three of these balls in their hands, I will immediately assume that she will use them for juggling.

- Frame dispositions, perceptions, and understandings *stabilise and facilitate* the frame-aligned configuration of objects and settings. Based on their deep understanding and continued engagement with jugglers, whole industries organise materiality into the self-same shape of ‘juggling balls’. I in turn will not cut open my juggling balls to use the cover or innards for other purposes, nor place them somewhere where they would lose their colour from continued harsh sunlight.
- Objects and settings can *destabilise* frame-aligned perceptions, understandings, and actions. Looking at a little grain of filling that accidentally escaped my juggling ball, I find that it would make excellent sand for the model beach of my model train. The ‘juggling ball’ suddenly becomes a ‘sand container’ for me.
- Frame dispositions, perceptions, and understandings can *destabilise* the frame-aligned configuration of objects and settings. Based on my insight, I indeed cut up my juggling ball to use its filling for my model train project.

Grounding, disclosing, constituting, indicating, specifying, configuring, resisting, facilitating, stabilising, destabilising: all these are relational between the total situational features of the environment and the total situational dispositions of the actor. All establish relative effort or ease of realising actions or events. It is possible to use a plastic Coca-Cola bottle as a fork, but relative to the actors mood, familiarity with and skills in tinkering, and the environmental availability of, for example, a fret saw, it will require more or less effort to realise this potential.

3.6 Summation I: Frame Analysis

Before we move on to a frame analysis of video gaming, it seems useful to restate, in condensed form, the basic tenets of the processualised, materialised frame analysis developed here.

For life on earth, animals and environments co-constitute each other as an *animal-environment relation*. An *environment* is a world of *objects* (including other animals) and *settings* as it relates to the animal's relevancies of survival. An *animal* is a living *body* fitting into the environment in which it can survive. Animals and their environment co-evolve in mutual change and adaptation.

Over the course of an animal's life, animal and environment are in a constant flux of interactions, of stability-and-change in their relation. A (animal-environment) *relationality* describes the current snapshot state of animal dispositions and environmental features with reference to the enabling and constraining of a *specific* potential future action or event. *Actions* are changes in the animal-environment relation relevant to the animal that are initiated by the animal; *events* are such changes initiated by the environment. An *actor* is the snapshot state of a living human being in its current dispositions. A *disposition*⁴⁵ is a part of a snapshot state of an animal in relation to its environment that is relevant to the animal. A *feature* is a part of a snapshot state of an object or setting in an environment that has relevance to an animal. Dispositions, features, and their relationalities can only be sensibly spoken of as part of the *total* animal-environment relation in which they are situated. A muscle fibre divorced from a living body in a specific environmental setting cannot be said to manifest a disposition, nor can a ball manifest a feature without reference to a specific setting and living animal within it.

Animals can perceive what they have developed sensitivities (perceptual systems) for. They develop sensitivities to what is relevant to their survival that they can act on. They develop action capacities for what is relevant to their survival that they are sensitive to: sensitivities and action capacities co-evolve. *Perceiving* is the process of the animal becoming aware of the animal-environment relation and its changes; that is, is a reorganising of the animal's perceptual systems (as a subset of its total dispositions) that enables it to act on the current state and changes of the animal-environment relation. In other words, perceiving calls out *attitudes*: it readies possible actions the animal can take in response to the perceived change in the animal-environment relation.

Gestures are those changes of an animal perceivable to its conspecifics that directly precede another action of it, establishing a rote form of *communication*, as animals can now act on their preceding gestures rather than the fulfilled actions – an exchange of gestural rather than fulfilled actions. *Ritualisation* describes the process by which gestures or perceivable features of

⁴⁵ Dispositions are an intentionally broad term ranging from relatively stable traits to relatively short-lived states, from relatively low to relatively high orders of organisation and granularity. Bone structure, muscle structure, neural connections, hormonal excretions, posture, memory instantiations and activations, emotional and motivational states can all be dispositions.

an animal get typified, exaggerated, and conventionalised such that this communicative function becomes predominant or even fully replaces any immediate function.

As animals, human beings directly perceive their environment in this manner, and are bodily bound to their environment. As *symbolic* animals, however, human beings learn in the course of their socialisation to *reflexively* connect attitudes to further attitudes, and through observation, imitation, and being instructed, to *internalise* the attitudes something they perceive calls out in other human beings. This learning happens through and is facilitated by spoken language and role-taking in pretend and rule play. Over the course of time, the internalised attitudes of others get generalised into stable attitudes of a Generalised Other – *symbolic meanings*. Together, reflexivity and internalisation thus constitute *symbolic* or *social objects, actions, and communications* – objects, actions, and communications with generalised meanings that can be reflexively related to, communications and actions that can be intentionally taken or not. *Self* refers to a human being becoming a social object to itself.

Not all human perceiving and acting is symbolic or social in the narrow sense of reflexively relating to generalised attitudes, but all of it is social in the broad sense that it is inescapably informed by the existence and consequences of symbolically acting human beings having existed and shaped their environment over millennia.

Any human perception is emotionally and motivationally charged; this instantiates the relevance of perceived objects, events, etc. to a human being. *Understanding* refers to a human being's reflexive, symbolic perception of meaning. *Experience* refers to a human being's phenomenal experience of perceptions.⁴⁶ When it comes to the self, the emotional and motivational charging of perception centrally involves the social emotions of *embarrassment* and *pride*, the internalised apprehended devaluing or valuing, rejecting or approving attitudes of others. These social emotions are a central hinge of human coexistence: as we internalise and in our action reflexively relate to the relevancies of others (including their attitudes towards our self), our actions, communications, and environment become *normative*. Meaning is thus always epistemic and normative at the same time.

The human ability to internalise and reflexively relate to the others' attitudes at the same time creates the perpetual *problem of underspecification* and *task of constitutive ordering*: we must discern what the others' (generalised) attitudes towards objects, actions and communications are in the current moment, and act in such a way that our action becomes intelligible as relating to specific, mutually intelligible attitudes. This double challenge is exacerbated by the fact that reflexive human actors also have the ability and incentive to *strategically manage* their actions and communications. We need to identify whether the other's action was either without

⁴⁶ Whether experience is specific to human beings or not, whether it is a dimension of or a separate entity within the animal-environment relation or existence in general, whether it is epiphenomenal or an independent node of causes and effects – these are ultimately metaphysical questions of no central importance to the overall argument here and therefore left open. Experience is explicitly introduced as the phenomenal complement to perception and symbolic meaning to allow for a fully naturalised reading that doesn't tie meaning to a phenomenological 'I'.

reflection or intent (spontaneous or accidental), or whether it was intentional, and if so, what attitudes the other intended to express (and what other attitudes might have led the other to express those intentions). Second, we need to act and communicate in an observably orderly way that is mutually intelligible as an action or communication of a certain kind, with a certain meaning and intention. We need to *ritualise* our symbolic action and communication for it to become reliably, stably meaning one thing rather than something else.

A central aspect of the problem of underspecification is *situatedness* or *context-dependency*: one and the same action can mean different things in different contexts, different actions can mean the same thing in one given context. One important solution to this is the institutionalisation of types of contexts. As human beings coexist, perceivably similar courses of action and perceivably similar situations (conjunctions of actors, actions, settings, objects, and events) reoccur and become – as a matter of course or intentionally to organise cooperation – institutionalised into *types of activities* and *types of situations* – *practices* and *frames*. Practices and frames are often interrelated: a practice often involves co-constitutive types of situations, a situation is often focally organised around or even co-constituted by specific practices. Practices and frames are not to be understood as Platonic archetypes existing in parallel to the material world, nor narrowly localised as cognitive schemata: They *are* the total meshes of actors, objects, settings, actions, communications, events, and experiences that reproduce-and-change in a moving equilibrium their perceivably similar appearance across space and time.

Frames, then, are the total meshes of actors and their dispositions, objects, settings, and their features, actions, communication, events, and experiences that reproduce-and-change their perceivably similar co-occurrence as types of situations across space and time. Individuals learn to recognise and produce the practices and frames of their community – they acquire practice and frame dispositions – in the course of their socialisation.

Practices and frames and their elements mutually specify each other: objects, actions, and communication become perceivable and intelligible as belonging to a practice or frame (having a specified meaning in their context); practices and frames become perceivable and intelligible as contexts in which just those objects, actions, and gestures occur with just those meanings. Contexts are also always normative: we learn not only to recognise and recognisably produce objects, actions and communications that specify and fit their context, but also what (pursued, experienced, expressed) motivations and emotions, what actions and communications, are ‘proper’ to a given context, take into account the others’ attitudes, signal valuing or devaluing attitudes towards their selves, and justify valuing or devaluing attitudes towards one’s own self.

Humans could become and benefitted from becoming symbolic animals because they are social animals: our survival and wellbeing depends on and is greatly facilitated by our relating to other humans. One central accomplishment and requirement of human coexistence is

response-present interaction: the production and sustaining of joint attentional scenes where we can perceive and act on the same environment and each other, enabling mutual awareness of what the others and oneself are aware of, do, and intend to do. Such response-present interaction allows complex forms of coordinated, collective action and communication. It is the precondition for observing and internalising the attitudes of others, and thus, symbolic action. Response-present interaction, like a sole actor's interaction with the environment, produces a *situated activity system*: a temporary self-organising set of actors, actions, communications, objects, settings, events and experiences being attended to, perceived and enacted as partaking in the actors' focal activities and belonging to a specific frame – in short, a *framing*.

Because of the importance of response-present interaction and joint attention specifically, all human groups develop an epistemic and normative *interaction order* that copes with its recurring challenges, specified by frames as recurring types of situations. The interaction order – and therefore, frames – centrally organise what to attend to, and how deep to get *involved* in it: how attentively absorbed and aroused over the perceived relevance of the attended scene one should be. *Joint* spontaneous involvement, where attention, arousal, and emotion are attuned, generates strong community-bonding experiences of relatedness. Perceived joint involvement of others can amplify one's own involvement. Perceived defection of others can be similarly 'contagious'. Despite our biological propensity for joint involvement (and its enjoyment), an individual's needs and relevancies might lead the individual to want to be involved in phenomena other than what the current interaction order specifies as the official focus of involvement. Under these circumstances, individuals experience *dysphoric tension*: they have to exert effort to self-monitor and self-regulate their involvement to fit the interaction order, and experience embarrassing moral self-consciousness if they fail to do so. Conversely, if individuals' spontaneous involvement aligns with the official focus, individuals experience *euphoric ease* and become *engrossed*: They can 'let go' of self-monitoring and self-regulation.

A further central challenge of response-present interaction is that it exposes us to the danger of others causing physical harm to our body and symbolical harm to our self. Functioning response-present interaction requires *trust* ensured by the continual production of *normal appearances*: to perceivably and convincingly signal that one is a well-intended actor capable of cooperation, communication, and self-regulation, whose actions and reactions are meaningful, and therefore predictable; who pays active attention to the situation at hand and is able and willing to adjust actions accordingly; whose actions therefore make sense as attentively aware, meaningful, and well-intended towards others. An essential part of maintaining such normal appearances is to align oneself with the frame (and practices) the current situation is recognised and enacted by its participants as belonging to. Yet since contingencies continually arise where meanings are not readily perceived and malign intentions can be made out in ac-

tions and communications, response-present interaction is full of ritualised *remedial interchanges* in which we reassure each other of our status as trustworthy interaction partners.

Whatever situation actors find themselves in, then, they face the question: ‘What is it that’s going on here?’; that is, what *type* of situation is this, what *frame* does it belong to? Situations usually feature one or more (frame) *configurations*, organisations of objects and settings belonging to specific frames. They also often feature other actors interacting with the environment and each other, and in this course, specifying their interaction as belonging to certain frames. Actors are able to perceive and recognise configurations and interactions thanks to their *frame dispositions* (or frame ‘knowledge’), those dispositions involved the perceiving and enacting of situations as belonging to specific frames. Entering actors as part of their situated action automatically partake in the *framing* of the situation – that dimension of the reflexive, sequential, open process of situated action in which the situation becomes recognised and organised as belonging to a specific frame, a type of situation. In the flow of actions, communications, and events, framing aligns the bodily dispositions and environmental features with the frame, which centrally involves the organisation of attentive involvement and the specification of the meaning and experience; framing thus enables and constrains practically possible, epistemically sensible, and normatively appropriate future actions, communications, and events.⁴⁷ *Frame perception* refers to an individual actor’s perception of what frames the current situation belongs to; *frame understanding* refers to the individual actor’s reflexive, discursive apprehension of this; and *frame experience* refers to the phenomenal experience of that. Frame perception, understanding, and experience can be ambiguous. They can also be mistaken, this being a reflexive ascription by the actor herself or some other observing actor. Actors, actions, communications, objects, settings, and events situationally constitute and indicate, facilitate and resist, stabilise and destabilise specific framings. Based on their reflexive frame understanding, actors can intentionally choose courses of action and communication to continue, clarify, or change the current framing of a situation. They can also actively *reconfigure* objects and settings to enable certain courses of action or signify certain meanings, a process that requires a smaller or larger degree of specific sociomaterial effort depending on the actors’ dispositions and the features of the surrounding objects.

Turning to frames more generally, they define the perceivable reoccurrence (and therefore, epistemic and normative expectations) of motivational relevancies; rules for actions and communications; objects, settings, and events; attentive access, focus, and involvement; emotional self-control and expression; actors and their footing; an internal organisation of the situation into physical bounded regions, gatherings of persons, tracks of attention and events,

⁴⁷ Even if framing is ‘just’ one actor’s internal reorganising of dispositions, this still manifests an action – a material, bodily change in the current animal-environment relation that enables and constrains future actions.

and laminations of meaning; metacommunicative cues and brackets; frame limits and a gearing into the world.

Primary frameworks are the basic types of situations of a group, differentiated into natural (without intentionality) and social (with intentionality). *Transformations* are types of reframings of already framed situations that usually change the actual organisation of actors, actions, communications, objects, settings and events only slightly, but their meaning and perception very markedly. They fall into two classes: *keys*, intended as equilibrally perceived; and *fabrications*, intended as disequilibrally perceived.

Frames become institutionalised through their stabilisation in the co-oriented dispositions of actors as group members, specialised objects and settings, and formalised representations. Words and other symbolic communications are fashioned to reflexively refer to and communicate about a frame and its elements, standard operating procedures and rules get formulated, and groups of actors get designated as authoritative custodians and instructors.

Vis-à-vis fully symmetrical social theories like actor-network-theory (Latour 2005), frame analysis retains a threefold 'residual humanism': (1) As human beings, we cannot but perceive and experience an environment that is always already articulated in terms of our human bodily, socially informed sensitivities and relevancies. Whatever X there might be independent of us, we can only know of it as a secondary construct we fashion in and from our lived experience – or at least that is what we conclude in and from our lived experience. (2) In our own lived experience and society, we as humans *immediately perceive* and *performatively make* a strong distinction between aware, reflexive initiation of a change in animal-environment relations (intentional action), and effects caused by inanimate objects or animals we deem unaware (unintentional events). Given our reflexive capacities, we might come to question this distinction – for instance, develop accounts of animal consciousness, non-human actors, or object-oriented ontologies. But the distinction still effectively organises our experience, understanding, communication, and action, and is formalised and reproduced in all kinds of human institutions, from our grammars to our legal systems. It may be that metaphysically, there is 'something it is like to be a thing'. But sociologically, empirically, the difference between intentional and non-intentional beings, social and natural frames is a difference that makes a difference to *people* – and that is all we are interested in here. (3) As perceiving and reflexive living beings, humans are able to perceive, reflexively recognise and signify, actively and intentionally enact certain framings, which – to us – cannot be said of inanimate objects. An Xbox may be part of the video gaming frame and the framing of a situation as belonging to that frame, but it does not actively, intentionally, reflexively partake in this process.

4 The Frame Analysis of Games

To apply a frame-analytic approach to playing and gaming is a somewhat loopy enterprise. Several commentators (Drew & Wootton 1988: 8, Manning 1992: 56-70, 143) noted that games were one of the principle metaphors Goffman used in his writing to defamiliarise social life and thus tease out unexpected structural parallels. This observation is both true and false. It is false in that Goffman extensively used mathematic game theory, especially Schelling's (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*, to articulate people's everyday strategic information management in social encounters – but this can hardly be called metaphorical (e.g. Goffman 1969, 1971: 17-8, 293, 1967: 149-61). It is true in that he likened the interaction order and its conventions repeatedly to 'the ground rules of a game' (Goffman 1983: 5). Second, games were an object of extended study for Goffman, in his essay 'Fun in Games' (Goffman 1972: 15-72), but also (and less well-known) in *Strategic Interaction*, 'Where the Action Is' (1967: 149-270), and heavily throughout the 576 pages of *Frame Analysis*. This extensive referencing suggests a third, more hypothetical role: games and play appear to have been the *primary exemplars* from which Goffman developed his general theory of frames: 'Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations' (Goffman 1972: 32). After all, Goffman took the very concept 'frames' from Bateson's 'A Theory of Play and Phantasy'. The analysis of animal and human play provides Goffman with the material to specify how transformations operate (Goffman 1974: 40-9), and many an observation in 'Fun in Games' is a 'logical precursor to *Frame Analysis*', as Fine (1983: 182) put it. 'Double fitting' (Baldamus 1972) therefore may best describe the relation of games and frame analysis in Goffman's work. In an inductive cycling between data and theory, between analysing games and theorising frames, both became more and more refined. This is what makes a frame analytic account of game play loopy, but maybe also only (double-)fitting.

Dissecting the Heart of Gameness

Besides being a loopy enterprise, a frame analytic account of video gaming presents a *social* view of gameplay – social understood broadly as tracing the shifting stabilities of sociomate-

rial nexuses, not narrowly as ‘what humans do (intentionally) (with each other) (face-to-face) (when they take other humans into account) (etc.)’. As Juul (2008) observes, many authors have appealed to games being ‘a social construct’, with much handwaving and little explaining what that exactly entails. Before we go into specifics, it therefore seems helpful to outline the general approach a frame analytic account of gaming takes in contrast to the strong-going formalist and cognitivist discourses in game studies – to specify in what sense frame analysis understands gameplay as ‘a social construct’. For this, let us turn to motivational relevancies as one aspect of a situation organised by frames. Goffman notes that activities can be framed as a ‘serious’ ‘means to other ends’, or as ‘unserious’, ‘recreational’ activities that are enjoyable ‘ends in themselves’ (Goffman 1963: 19; cf. Goffman 1953: 128–30). He makes a direct link from this distinction to games, and in game studies, gaming and playing are likewise frequently defined as fun, enjoyable, autotelic, etc. – which is then (a little less frequently) countered with instances of playing and gaming that are evidently *not* fun, very serious, very instrumental, and so on, throwing any definition of ‘games’ as ‘fun’ into question (Schechner 1988, Malaby 2007). This ‘problem’ readily allows us to demonstrate the specific perspective of frame analysis. To say that a situation *framed* as ‘gaming’ comes with the convention that the main activity (for those participating in the roles of ‘players’) is autonomous does in no way entail that the activity is *necessarily performed and experienced* as autonomous (although that will be very often the case). As Goffman put it in ‘Fun in Games’:

Games can be fun to play, and fun alone is the approved reason for playing them. The individual ... claims a right to complain about a game that does not pay its way in immediate pleasure ... Of course, those who are tactful, ambitious, or lonely participate in recreation that is not fun for them, but their later private remarks testify that it should have been. (Goffman 1972: 17)

The subtlety is easily lost in a quick reading, but essential: games *can* be fun to play, but the important thing is that ‘fun’ is ‘the approved reason for playing them’, ‘a right’, something that ‘should have been’: the ‘fun in games’ is a shared normative and epistemic expectation that guides actions, communications, understanding, and experience – not an essential quality.

First, frames do not speak to a presumed universal *biological nature* of gaming (or playing): frames vary across time, place, and culture, hence claims are only made empirically and with regard to one particular social group at one point in history. Even if the ‘gaming’ frame of Shetland Island inhabitants in the 1950s (which Goffman studied) or of video game players in Germany in 2013 may define the main activity as ‘autonomous’, comparable frames of other people at other points in time and space may not. There is evidence that *animal play* is indeed a trans-species phenomenon, that *childhood play* appears in similar forms across all studied cultures, and that animal and childhood play have formal resemblances with the ‘playing’ and ‘gaming’ frames of adult German video gamers and Shetland Islanders. But if that is the case, it is because these forms have been reproduced (instead of counteracted) by society, not because ‘nature had its way’. Every child today grows up and plays within a society whose practices impact

they way it plays, and as evolutionary anthropology teaches us, human evolution has been nature-cultural for a long time. The bodies of actors are obviously a necessary part of any gaming encounter, and if they come with biological predispositions, these will out; but they will do so enrolled in the total ongoing ordering of the situation, not determining it.

Second, frame analysis does not attempt a *semantic* definition of 'gaming' for the purposes of academic discourse (made of necessary and sufficient conditions, clusters, family resemblances, or else), or as an instance of ordinary language philosophy that wishes to clarify potential incoherencies entailed in people's everyday usage of the word 'gaming'. Nor does it attempt a coherent logical reconstruction of 'gaming' in terms of propositional contents and logical relations, as Searle's (1995) social ontology or Walton's (1990) theory of representational arts do.⁴⁸ The situational and historical reproduction of a 'gaming' frame certainly enrolls the linguistic label 'gaming' that enables actors to point to, metacommunicate about, and co-orient actions, communications, and objects framed as 'gaming', in the course reifying this continual process of social reproduction into the entity 'gaming', which is presumed to exist independently of this process. This reification facilitated by language will in all likelihood further stabilise the 'gaming' frame.⁴⁹ To provide a semantic or logical definition of the word 'gaming' is not to get at its 'essence', but to participate in just this social construction process (as do reflexive remarks on this construction process, like the present one: *any* reflexivity, academic or not, is part of the total mesh of social interaction).

Therefore – third –, frame analysis makes no *essentialist* claims about 'gaming' or 'playing' as quasi-Platonic archetypes somehow existing next to, outside of, or beyond people, their

⁴⁸ Mosca (2011a, 2011b) and Montola (2012) have recently appealed to Searle's social ontology as an attractive model for understanding the social reality of games, which has large commonalities with the notion of constitutive practices and frames. Searle argues that institutional facts (as a subclass of social facts) like 'this piece of paper is a dollar bill worth \$20' arise from context-specified status functions built of collective intentionality, often indicated by 'status indicators', and often organised through 'constitutive rules' that articulate a system of institutional facts. In a simplified fashion, such status functions take the form of 'X counts as Y in context C': 'this piece of paper counts as a US\$ 20 bill in international currency exchange', 'this moving of a wooden piece over another wooden piece counts as a legal knight move in a game of chess', and so on.

On first sight, this sounds like a concise presentation of practice theory and frame analysis, but it has to be rejected from a practice theoretical perspective for three reasons:

(1) Searle's 'constitutive rules' again already presuppose the social accomplishment of rendering one action or object intelligible as action or object X. Appealing to a status indicator just shifts that problem into the infinite regress of rendering the status indicator intelligible as status indicator, and so on.

(2) Searle sees language (broadly construed) as necessary for the ascription of status functions, because only language can symbolise or represent status functions, whereas Wittgensteinian, practice theoretical, and even Meadian accounts acknowledge non-linguistic, non-representational forms of meaning and intelligibility.

(3) Searle sees human attitudes, intentions, and status functions as consisting of logical relations and propositional contents: 'Human societies have a logical structure, because human attitudes are constitutive of the social reality in question and those attitudes have propositional contents with logical relations' (Searle 2006: 15). Granted, these relations and propositional contents are grounded in what he calls 'the Background' as a rough equivalent to what has here been called dispositions and situational arrangements. However, if dispositions and arrangements (the Background) are necessary and sufficient for understanding to happen, it is unclear why they should take on a logical and propositional form. This is (a) either an unnecessary ontological doubling of particulars and structure or (b) a strong, empirically unfounded claim as to the actual form these particulars.

In short, as an analytical philosopher, Searle provides a reconstruction of social reality that puts logical coherency and the foregone conclusion that reality is made of logically related propositions above the empirical realities of people and what they do in practice.

⁴⁹ See Giddens (1984: 22-3, 25-6) for a general point about the relation of discourse and practice.

actions, communications, and objects. Any formalist definition of ‘playing’ and ‘gaming’ – for purposes of descriptive taxonomy or formal analysis – is highly susceptible to this fallacy of misplaced concreteness, of ontologically reifying the mental or material representation of an observed regularity in the empirical world as a regularity existing beyond that embodied, material representation in the empirical world to which it belongs and relates. Neither the ‘gaming’ frame nor ‘autonomy’ exist beyond the actions and communications and experiences, the actors and objects that instantiate them. This is not to deny that formalist accounts of ‘gaming’ can be immensely *useful* for designers designing games, politicians regulating games, academics studying games, journalists reporting on games, and so on. But in so doing, again they participate in the very process of social reproduction (and change) of the ‘gaming’ frame. Once an academic definition gets incorporated into how people build or regulate or study or otherwise engage in ‘gaming’, it becomes partially a self-fulfilling prophecy. Any reflexivity is part of the total mesh of social interaction to which it refers.

Fourth, frame analysis does not speak only and primarily about *psychological* processes or *phenomenological* experiences, as do psychological theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2002), autotelic and exotelic activities (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), or telic and paratelic metamotivational states (Apter 2006). Returning to our example, frame analysis is concerned with the ‘autonomy’ of ‘gaming’ being *an epistemic and normative socio-material ordering*, which entails psychological dispositions and processes as *one* potentially co-constitutive part. As Goffman reports on a person whose participant role during a night in a billiard hall was to be the caretaker, not a player, that person still could not help but repeatedly push a ball:

In joining the play, the caretaker found it necessary to give constant assurance that he was merely filling in until others came or that he didn’t really want to play at all. This effort on the part of the caretaker to stay within his role, and his inability to do so, became a standing joke with the steady players (Goffman 1953: 129-30).

The point is that above and beyond the actual experience of the caretaker (which was apparently autonomous, fun, etc.), he also *understood* that he was *obliged* all the while to visibly acknowledge the convention that he *ought* not play or have fun in his role; this norm made his visible efforts *intelligible* to the other participants; their keying of his inability as a benign, humorous creature folly (rather than a malign disregard) was itself a socially conventionalised resource to relieve the ‘frame tension’ (Goffman 1985: 35) that occurs when participants fail to act in alignment with frame conventions – and so on.

Likewise, if someone says to me ‘This isn’t fun! I thought you said this was a game!’, given that we belong to the same social group presupposing a shared ‘gaming’ frame, her statement is perfectly *intelligible* to me as relating to the shared convention that ‘gaming’ is *expected and ought to be* ‘fun’ (even if the current instance apparently was not), including an understanding how ‘fun’ in ‘gaming’ usually does and ought to feel. It evokes the moral sentiment in me that she is now legitimately entitled to an apology or rectification from me (unless I have become a

hopelessly intellectualising game scholar). This doesn't mean that people blindly 'execute' game rules or 'keep within' moral norms, let alone that gaming must be 'functional' for individuals or societies in the short or long run. Game players try to 'get away with' all kinds of things, hoping to produce an account that is accepted by their co-players as to why this was still 'within the rules'. Dark play (Schechner 1988), bullies and griefers, broken knees and humiliated selves are an everyday reality. But the fact *that* we call out 'bullies' and 'griefers' and their 'hazing' and 'grief play' in just those devaluing terms shows that as well as how playing and gaming are normatively organised frames.

Fifth and finally, frame analysis includes but does not delimit itself to *material objects* and *overt behaviours*. The 'gaming' frame (like any frame) organises events *and* experience. Overtly demonstrated acknowledgement and covertly experienced stance are deeply intertwined: frames define conventions for internal states (involvement, emotion) that are notoriously hard to fabricate. Frames that define norms of deep engrossment for participants (celebrations, theatre, games, etc.) at the same time guide the socio-material organisation of the actual events such that engrossment is indeed strongly afforded. Our caretaker presumably *did feel* autonomous when he played billiards, maybe less so than the others who were there in the role of players, maybe more so because he experienced it as an act of defiance against what he felt to be the demand of an oppressive role. The important thing is that this feeling was enabled and co-constituted by the situation, and vice versa: the caretaker's understanding and skill regarding billiards; the physical presence and design of the billiard table and ball and queues that in interaction with billiard rules and human abilities give rise to interesting challenges; the billiard hall patrons who all in the course of their actions and communications framed the situation as a leisurely night out where it is 'proper' to get attentively engrossed in a billiard game, joke with others about the results, and give a caretaker some slack -- all of this conspired to enable his experience. Equally, the organisation of the situation itself wouldn't make sense if there wasn't an experience of 'autonomy' that people had repeatedly experienced, found relevant, reflexively indicated to themselves, and organised social practices and material arrangements in order for this deemed-desirable experience to emerge more reliably. Without a material billiard hall and table and queue and so on, the caretaker could have desired and known how to play billiard all he wanted: 'Billiard gaming' – and the 'fun' and 'feeling of autonomy' it might afford – would not have transpired that night. The caretaker and others could not have learned what 'billiard gaming' is and how to do it if there hadn't been billiard tables and balls and queues (and media depictions of them) aplenty in the world.

Conversely, the hall and the table and the queues and so on did not determine that what would transpire that night in that hall would be 'billiard gaming'. The patrons could have used the tables to lay out a building blueprint weighed down with the billiard balls to plan a bank robbery. A shared close friend might have died that day, leading to the joint understanding

that ‘today is not a day to play billiards’. And if you emptied the whole universe of all human existence past, present, and future, it would be nonsensical to speak of that physical mass there in the midst of the hall as a ‘billiard table’ affording ‘billiard gaming’ to begin with. This is why ‘gaming’ can neither be fully located in and determined by game artefacts in their formal features (as formalist media studies imply) nor in cognitive processes in people’s heads (as cognitivist approaches in media psychology would have it). Nor in discourses and power relations, nor in social actions and symbolic meanings, nor in experiences alone. One has to look at how the whole lot hangs together.

This co-organisation, this co-constitution of experience and events is what ‘frames’ are about: organised nexuses of actor’s dispositions and material features that situationally come together to interact in streams of actions, communications, events, and experiences, in changes in their dispositions and features in a recognisably orderly manner as a situated activity system, a ‘little social reality in its own right’, a *framing*. In this very process it is reproduced-and-changed across numerous situations in time and space, constituting a *frame*. This process *involves* bodies and their biological makeup, language and its use, cognitive processes and phenomenal experiences, material objects and bodily actions, but it is not causally located in any single one of them. Frames describe their self-reproducing, self-changing organisation as a totality over time. So to answer Juul’s demand for clarification, it is in *this* sense that ‘gaming’ is ‘a social construct’. And while ‘construct’ in this sense does appeal to a virtual contingency (it could have been otherwise), it equally appeals to an empirical obduracy: given *that* all these things *are* organised *as they are*, and in such a co-organised manner, it is *very difficult and unlikely* for them not to come together the next time in a very similar way, and to reproduce the conditions under which they will come together again and again after that.

Such a social conception of gaming and playing normalises them as one social construct among others. Early game studies were characterised by a discipline-forming, immanent focus on the formal characteristics of games. As a result, they constructed a strong *exceptionalism* of games vis-à-vis everyday life, software, or fictional media (Malaby 2007, Deterding 2009a, Stenros in print), and paid less attention to the *continuities* between gaming and other fundamental forms of human life like play, arts, sports, theatre, and ritual (Handelman 1977, 1998, 2001; Schechner 2003, Schultz & Lavenda 2005, Turner 1982). One enduring strength of frame analysis is that it thoroughly *deflates* the exceptionality of gaming, and *embeds* it within a wider anthropological picture (cf. Montola 2012: 59): Due to his Durkheimian interest in ritual and ritualisation in ethology, Goffman saw very clearly the linkages between games and other human and pre-human phenomena.

The Many 'Frames' of Game Studies

One more preface is required: In game studies, there have been quite varied understandings of just what analytic unit 'frame' refers to when it comes to games – some of which strongly diverge from Goffman's own conception. 'Frame' has been used to denote:

- games in general as an independent 'realm' of our lifeworld (Fritz 2012), or the gaming activities of people as networks of situations, mindsets, contexts woven into everyday life (Copier 2005, Isabella 2007);
- 'gaming' as an enduring frame, mindset, or context for a type of situation (Deterding 2009b; Stenros 2010, in print; Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007, 2009);
- a single situation being framed as 'gaming' – what is otherwise called the 'magic circle' or game/non-game boundary (Aarsand 2007a, 2009, Benford et al. 2006, Brenne 2005, Crawford 2012, Calleja 2012, Consalvo 2009, Deterding 2009b, Fine 1983, Herbrink 2011, Lindquist 2001, Mäyrä & Lankoski 2009, Montola 2005, 2012, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008);
- the inner laminations of such a gaming encounter – usually distinguished following Fine (1983) into 'real-world' encounter, (rule-based) game contexts, and (fictional) gaming world (Aarsand 2007a, 2009b, Brenne 2005, Copier 2007, Crawford 2012, Linderöth 2004, 2005, Calleja 2012, Fine 1983, Herbrink 2011, Järvinen 2007, Lancaster 2001, Mackay 2001, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, Stenros 2008, 2010, Wanenchak 2010, Waskul & Lust 2004);
- a momentary motivational, experiential, attentive and discursive focus of participants (Jorgensen 2012, Linderöth 2004, Glas et al. 2012, Juul 2011, Stenros 2010).

This list calls out many relevant phenomena, but the indiscriminate use of the word 'frame' to refer to all of them equally muddies the picture. Surveying the literature and matching it to the explication of frame analysis above, one may differentiate three groups of terms:

- The situational process of *framing* of a given situation as 'gaming'; that is, as belonging to the institutionalised *frame* 'gaming'. This framing involves game configurations and gaming practices. A situational framing instantiates-and-therein-changes the cross-situational frame.
- The internal organisation of a gaming situation into spatially bounded *regions*, *gatherings* of actors, *laminations* of transformations, and *tracks* of information, attention, actions, and events. Brenne (2005) describes instances where 'within' the innermost lamination of LARPing encounters, players temporarily add further laminations. For instance, they might enact a character who in the gaming world lies, pretends not to know something, plays a practical joke on another character, or enacts a little theatrical play within the gaming world (similar to the play within a play in *Hamlet*). Video game narratives similarly often contain plots involving mutual deception.
- The momentary *focus* of a single perception, understanding, experience, action, or communication. At any given moment, a certain aspect, meaning, or motivational relevancy

may be at the forefront of an actor's perception, action, or communication, for example thematising the rules, the fictional world, or the aesthetics of a game (Linderoth 2004), or attending to one's desire to win, to have an interesting game, or a harmonious social situation (Juul 2010).

As we will see in the empirical section, this list requires expansion to include *modes* and *keyings* of gaming. But for now, a clear terminological distinction of (1) frame and framing, (2) the internal organisation of a framing into regions, gatherings, laminations, and tracks, and (3) the focus of a single perception, etc., shall suffice.

Outlook

The next sections will first discuss animal play as the evolutionary ground of human play and symbolic action more generally, followed by a discussion of playfulness as play's remainder in adult life. Contrary to Malaby, Sicart, and Stenros, it will be argued that playfulness ought to be conceived of as an attitude-activity nexus – a keying. Attention will then be directed to playing and gaming as social institutionalisations of playfulness and contests into primary frames. Like any institutionalisation, playing and gaming become stabilised through special settings and equipment which, once established, allow the re-appropriation of said settings and equipment in differently framed activity. This in turn necessitates an analytical distinction between the material configuration and the framing process of playing and gaming – between toys and playing, games and gaming. Based on this basic portrayal, we will delineate the specific perspective frame analysis brings to central issues in game studies: rules, fiction, and the relation of games and the wider world – that is, the 'magic circle'. The final section will lead over into the empirical part by summarising the main tenets of a frame analytic account of gaming, and the specifics and open questions *video* games pose related to it.

4.1 Play and Playfulness

Animal and Childhood Play

For Goffman (following Bateson), play is a pre-human, trans-species phenomenon. It constitutes an important form of ritualisation and the evolutionarily first instance of *keying* – a transformation or *re-framing*, ‘the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else’ (Goffman 1986: 43-4). Drawing on the ethological literature of his time, Goffman identified basic transformation rules that constitute an activity in the animal kingdom as play: the function of the original action is not fulfilled; instead, we find self-handicapping, exaggeration, repetition, and a re-shuffling of behaviour sequences and roles. Participants engage and disengage voluntarily, and are free of other currently pressing needs. Metacommunication signals beginning and end of play (Goffman 1986: 41-3). Certain objects – ‘playthings’ like bouncing balls – ‘are prone to be selected for play or prone to evoke play’ (Goffman 1986: 43), while certain other events or behaviours can become too painful or threatening for a play framing to be sustained (Goffman 1986: 49). Relative to the animal’s disposition for object play, we might say, the environmental features of objects and behaviours enable and constrain playing.

This portrayal of animal play holds up surprisingly well against the current literature. In his magisterial summation of animal play research, Burghardt (2005: 81, 70-82) derives five criteria of animal play that match Goffman’s catalogue:

- limited immediate function: the behaviour is performed in a manner not fully functional for survival;
- endogenous component: the behaviour is spontaneous, voluntary, autotelic;
- structural or temporal difference: the behaviour is incomplete, exaggerated, has a modified form, sequence, or target;
- repeated performance: there is varied repetition;
- relaxed field: there should be no inner or outer stressors present.

One important differentiation of ethology and developmental psychology missing in Goffman (or Bateson) is that of different ontogenetic stages of play (Burghardt 2005: 118-121, 179; Konner 2010: 84-88, 500-11). *Primary and secondary process play*, namely locomotor-rotational play (exercising your body) and object play (exploring and manipulating objects), is already present in fish and lizard behaviour. These presumably emerged more or less spontaneously in evolution as surplus energy exhaustion or skill rehearsal with little adaptive value. *Tertiary process play*, in contrast, has been both strongly facilitated by longer and longer stretches of parental care in mammals, and in turn acquired a bigger and bigger developmental and adaptive value – a ratchet effect. It comprises rough-and-tumble play and social play directed at conspecifics or animals of other species, such as dogs playing with humans.

In general, play intensity and sophistication across species correlate with brain size and duration of postnatal brain development. Higher primates are the most playful mammals, showing object play, social play, and even basic forms of pretend play. Characteristics of animal social play are role reversals, self-handicapping, and play signals or metacommunication (play bows in canines, play faces in mammals), again broadly supporting Bateson's and Goffman's accounts (Konner 2010: 89-93). Behavioural and cognitive flexibility is seen as a major adaptive value of play for a species as a whole; for individuals, deferred functions include brain, motor, and skill development; immediate benefits include emotional self-regulation and satisfaction of innate needs like social bonding (Pellegrini 2009: 38-52, 68-86; Konner 2010: 500-9; Burghardt 2005: 111-132).

Humans are among the most playful species, and show two unique forms of play: strong *symbolic, sociodramatic, or pretend play* (which is otherwise present in only basic forms in other higher primates), and *rule play* involving predefined and not spontaneously re-negotiable rules, with no counterpart in other species. Despite cultural variation, object play, social play, and symbolic/pretend play were found in early childhood across all cultures that have been studied so far (Konner 2010: 507, see Burghardt 2005: 97-106, Pellegrini 2009: 184-97).

Following Pellegrini's overview of the literature, human childhood play aligns with the defining features of animal play: structurally we find exaggerated movements, variable and incomplete sequences, and play smiles as play signals. Functionally, play is defined by focusing on means over ends, and by resembling a functional behaviour, but not realising its functional consequence. Causally, play requires a relaxed state and voluntary participation, and it is easily interrupted by serious concerns (Pellegrini 2009: 12-20).

In sum, the current ethological and developmental psychology literature support Goffman's portrayal of play, bar one important qualification: Following Bateson (1956, 2000/1955), Goffman (1986: 48) collapsed *all* play – and playfulness as its human adult remnant – into pretend play. Even animal play, he notes, 'is closely patterned after something that already has a meaning in its own terms' (Goffman 1986: 40). Yet as we saw, by far not all animal and human childhood play is pretend play that *transforms* a source activity in the frame analytic sense: early locomotor and object play (which are individual behaviours that do not require a socially co-ordinated framing) as well as social play (like peek-a-boo or rough-and-tumble play) are 'primary' activities unto themselves. It is only for socialised human adults who have acquired primary frames and social meanings for all situations and objects of their everyday life that engaging playfully with any non-toy object or non-playing situation (like juggling pencils in a meeting) is a spontaneous keying of those primary meanings and framings. To say that a young kitten is *pretend*-hunting a woollen cloth would only make sense if that kitten already could and would hunt mice 'for real' – and ethology tells us that this is not the case. At the Macy Conference, this was already raised as a major issue of Bateson's play theory (Bateson

1956: 184). Pretend play is a developmentally late achievement – both in the phylogeny of species and the ontogeny of individuals. Following Mead, Piaget, Tomasello (2000) and others, early childhood play is where individuals *develop* the very capacity to frame, and *then* to re-frame. Pretend and rule play is where we acquire and practice the ability to constitute shared social meanings for objects and actions, to keep a shared situated activity system running, and where we learn the primary frameworks and roles of society. This is a strong reason to keep childhood play analytically separate from adult play. It is also an essential qualification of all play theories that link play to a shift in meaning alone.

The Play Element of Culture

While Bateson's and Goffman's conceptions of play require amendment with regard to primary process play, the fact that pretend play is universally found among human children and appears to be a *unique* developmental achievement of higher primates (humans in specific) aligns with Bateson's hypothesis that pretend play is a likely origin of arts, ritual, games, and symbolic meaning-making in general. For a contemporary vetting of this idea, we can turn to evolutionary cognitive anthropology and evolutionary aesthetics. They attempt to understand empirically how in the evolution of humans, cognition, symbolic communication, and cultural transmission interlocked into ratchets or feedback loops that propelled their sudden developmental jump around 200,000 years ago (Tomasello 2000, Sterelny 2012). As a subfield, evolutionary aesthetics is interested in the developmental prerequisites for and adaptive functions of the production and appreciation of art, fiction, and narrative (Alland 1977, Dutton 2009, Boyd 2009, Ohler & Nieding 2006, Murray 2006). Summarising in broad strokes, all of the referenced researchers understand pattern recognition, the organisation of joint attention and emotional attunement, theory of mind, symbolic representation, and the creative exploration of novel combinations of behaviours and meanings to be strongly adaptive and strongly facilitated by play, making play a likely candidate for the origin of aesthetic practices ('adaptive variability' *sensu* Sutton-Smith [1997: 221]). These arguments corroborate if not the specifics, then at least the general direction of Mead's (1934) theory of mind, self, and society, and Goffman's relentless emphasis on organising joint attention as the central feature of response-present interaction. Tomasello (2000: 56-133), for instance, argues that learning joint attention is the prerequisite for understanding others as intentional beings, and that 'taking the role of the other' – understanding intentionality and social affordances – happens exemplarily in the ruled orderliness of role-reversals in games. Murray (2006) similarly argues that animals and humans enjoy play because it facilitates joint attention, and that games are cultural ratchets reinforcing that. Aligning with Mead's notion of symbolic meaning as attitudes reflexively relating to further attitudes, Ohler and Nieding (2006) suggest that play is a cognitive module that recombines standing behaviour patterns; in hominid brains, it starts to do the same re-

combination with ‘primary representations’ of sensory input. One representation can become connected to another, instead of being hard-coupled to immediate sensory input only. Played-on representations thus can trigger and refer to *other* representations: imaginations, associations, and double meanings; in short, ‘secondary representations’ or symbols and symbolic reasoning become possible. We find comparable arguments on the foundational role of play for symbolic communication and reasoning in Piaget (Pellegrini 2009: 22-3), and more recent studies in developmental psychology support that mother-child attunement play and later forms of social play could be the foundation for emotional self-regulation, bonding, joint attention, and thus, enculturation (Kotter 2010: 505-6).

Evolutionary anthropology and aesthetics thus provide a suggestive explanatory framework for the deep formal resemblances of different cultural forms like play, arts, sports, ritual, and games, highlighted by Bateson (1956, 2000/1955), Schechner (2003: 7-25), and others: all are acts framed as ‘apart from everyday life’ (Schechner 2003: 11). All involve ‘making special’ (Disanayake 1999); that is, not a ‘natural’ ‘separateness’ from the fabric of everyday life, but the *practical accomplishment* of joint framing that gives a part of everyday life a specific experiential quality (emotional charging, attentive engrossment, perceived spatial and temporal bounds), specific symbolic meaning, and specific consequentiality. The various forms of making special differ mostly in the strictness of their proceedings and their gearing into the world: where ritual features the most proscribed scripts and official meanings that assert what is or should be, and is geared highly consequentially into the standing social order (e.g. rites of passage conveying a social status with new norms and obligations), playfulness is the opposite: loose and fragile, asserting that it is an inconsequential ‘as-if’, but in that allowing for critical commentary on the social order (Handelman 1977, 1998, Turner 1982, Schechner 2006: 34-5, 70).

Huizinga, doyen of game studies, effectively made the same argument: Play is the cradle of human culture because already in animal behaviour, play affords the transcendence of mere reflexes towards creativity and meaning (Huizinga 1955: 1). Not all art is grounded in play, but the ‘musical arts’ (including literature and drama) and ‘the manner in which [all arts] are received in the social milieu’ are play through and through (Huizinga 1955: 169). Play features a peculiar combination of repetition and variation; it stimulates the imagination and captivates attention (Huizinga 1955: 2, 4, 10). Its difference to the rest of everyday life is a practical accomplishment, ‘marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course’ (Huizinga 1955: 10; see Juul 2008). Play is intertwined with ritual to the point of being almost indistinguishable. And as play is the origin of ritual, so from play and ritual, art, science, and social order flow (Huizinga 1955: 5). To quote the now-canonical passage:

All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’ cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed,

within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart. (Huizinga 1955: 10).

Following Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 95), game studies have taken this quote as a forceful articulation of a figure-ground relation with 'game' being the figure and 'everything else' the ground. However, even a superficial reading reveals that the figure Huizinga intended to contour was the larger formal unity of the 'act[s] apart' he enlisted as belonging to *play* against the ground of the 'ordinary world': 'The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds' (Huizinga 1955: 10). 'There is no formal difference between play and ritual' (Huizinga 1955: 10), and again, a few pages later: 'The turf, the tennis-court, the chess-board and pavement-hopsotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or magic circle' (Huizinga 1955: 20, emphasis added). It is true that Huizinga's overall portrayal of play is deeply romantic, charged with ethnocentric claims that essentialise Western modernist play rhetorics (Sutton-Smith 1997, Malaby 2007). The specifics of his portraiture of play cannot be upheld. But the basic line of reasoning – that play is foundational for aesthetic practices, indeed for culture in the sense of symbolic action – chimes with evolutionary anthropology and aesthetics, developmental psychology, performance studies, and the anthropology of ritual and play.

These together with Huizinga in turn lend support to Goffman's notion of keying as a fundamental human capacity first encountered – more precisely, *developed* – in animal and childhood play. To Goffman (1986: 40-82), arts, fictional media, gaming, playing, contests, ceremonies, and rituals are all culturally institutionalised keyings – transformative organisations of experiences and events, practical accomplishments of 'a little social reality in its own right'. Goffman generalises this to social life writ large: Going to the baker, getting a haircut, reading a newspaper, partying, making a conversation – *every* response-present interaction generates a little reality, is a little interaction ritual, is framed (Goffman 1972: 63, 72). There is no 'basic', unordered, unsituated, unframed everyday life against which rituals or gaming 'stand out' just by virtue of being framed. Everyday life is the patchwork of one little local ordering after the other, woven into each other. Whatever makes rituals or gaming encounters 'stand out' is not the fact that they are framed, but the *specifics* of their framing: the *making* special that involves this making as a shared expectation and practical accomplishment.

Now the question how symbolic action came about in evolution and comes about in childhood development is one of the biggest puzzles of the human sciences, and far from being solved; any evolutionary account must by its very nature remain speculative. Evolutionary aesthetics are at their very beginning, and it might well be that their search after general explanations for such culturally variegated phenomena as aesthetic practices is ultimately misplaced. But the literature does show three things. One, the linkage between play, joint attention, and symbolic action suggested by Mead, Bateson, and Goffman is in tune with current research across disciplines. Two, the literature aligns with Goffman's rendering of arts, fic-

tional media, gaming, playing, etc., as special forms of the basic social process of framing. Three, it corroborates that play is a phenomenon found universally among primates and children in all studied human cultures, comprising a shared set of *behavioural, psychological, and contextual features*, to wit: Behavioural repetition with variation, recombination, and exaggeration; nonfunctional performance; autotelic focus; voluntariness; absence of perceived outer or inner threats; metacommunication. This aligns well with *frames* as the relationality of inner dispositions and outer social and material circumstances, and with *framing* as the situational accomplishment of an ongoing inner organisation of experience *and* an outer organisation of events. Play is *afforded* by the presence of play objects and the absence of perceived threats relative to the individual's dispositions, but it is not *determined* by them: It requires more effort to frame a situation as play if one finds oneself in states of duress and without ready-to-play things, but it is *possible* – Brown (2010) reports an instance during an arctic expedition where a famished ice bear engaged in cross-species play with a dog over several days. The framing of an activity as play involves an inner stance – voluntariness, autotelic focus, re-framing of communications, actions, and events –, but *also* a behavioural performance *mutually intelligible* as 'play': metacommunication, exaggerated, repetitive, recombined performance that doesn't 'make good' on a function that could otherwise be achieved – the nip that is not a bite, the crumpled paper that is not thrown directly into the wastepaper basket, but in multiple varied repetitions involving an escalating number of rail bounces against office walls and chairs. This brings us to playfulness.

Playfulness

We can understand playfulness as the direct descendant of animal and childhood play in adults, involving their remnant dispositions. Goffman sees playfulness as one of the most common and fundamental forms of *spontaneous* keying in day-to-day life. It retains the transformation conventions of animal play, and forms the basis for the institutionalised frames of gaming and playing (Goffman 1986: 48-52, 56-7).⁵⁰ This conception of playfulness at once resonates with and contradicts a series of recent interventions in games studies that all argue for theorising play(fulness) as an *attitude* distinct from games and game play (Sicart forthcoming, Stenros forthcoming, Stenros 2010). Arguably the most influential and comprehensive foray in this regard has been Malaby's article 'Beyond Play' (2007). He argues that we should replace the notion of games as a subcategory of an anthropological universal 'play' with the conception of games as 'a semibounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that gener-

⁵⁰ Goffman loosely subsumes playfulness in a larger group of keyings he calls 'make-believe': the imitation of another activity that happens in the shared knowledge that the activity ought to be nonfunctional, autotelic, under absence of pressing outer needs, and deeply engrossing (ibid.: 48). 'Dramatic scriptings' – fictional media – is another institutionalised form of the make-believe keying. As we have seen, this is broadly correct as a retrospective reconstruction of *adult* playfulness for which any situation, activity, and object are socially functionalised. 'Pure' object and motor play in children cannot be subsumed as 'make-believe'.

ates interpretable outcomes' (Malaby 2007: 96). Malaby provides two lines of reasoning for this: today's play theories *essentialise* modernist rhetorics into universals, and they *conflate* play as an activity with play as an attitude.

Essentialism and Ethnocentrism in Modern Play Rhetorics

Malaby notes that the presumed universal defining features of 'play' – being separable from the rest of life, opposite to work, safe, free from consequence, and positively valued as fun – are really cultural constructs 'historically and culturally specific to Western modernity' (Malaby 2007: 96). The work/leisure dichotomy for instance is not found across cultures. Gambling, real-money trading, and the symbolic charging of games with individual or societal meanings show that games are deeply woven into social life, and quite consequential. Finally, there are many instances where gaming is not fun or pleasurable – 'engaging' would be a more apt term (Malaby 2007: 99).

First off, Malaby's practice-theoretical and anthropological uncovering of the essentialism and ethnocentrism implicit especially in Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (2001) is only to be applauded. In Sutton-Smith's (1997) terms, Huizinga and Caillois fully operate within the modernist play rhetorics of frivolity and the self. But we should be careful not to over-generalise the valid critique of such specific rhetorics towards an outright dismissal of 'play'. None of the defining features of play marked by Huizinga and Caillois that are questioned by Malaby are entailed in the defining features of play ethology, developmental psychology, or Goffman for that matter. So until anthropological evidence can be mustered that debunks the play definitions of these *contemporary* literatures as ethnocentric, they do present evidence for a certain universality of the experiences and forms of play.

One might argue that 'safety' and 'fun' as called out by Malaby match 'unfulfilled function', 'absence of threat', 'autonomy', and 'autotelic focus' respectively in contemporary play definitions. However, unfulfilled function does not mean that an activity has *no* consequence; it only means that the 'original' source activity either has no immediate adaptive value, or that its adaptive, functional consequence is framed as being not the main reason for engaging in it.⁵¹ We don't flip a coin to realise any benefit flipping a coin has beyond potentially enjoying doing so – there is none.

Second, absence of threat captures a contextual feature facilitating or constraining a play framing, not a necessary criterion: you'd be hard-pressed to find an animal or child able to continue playing when they feel the fresh pain of having broken their leg, or perceive the threatening shouts or other alarm signals of an adult conspecific. It is psychologically difficult to sustain a playful framing when you know the roof is on fire. But that is a far cry from saying

⁵¹ One might even argue that the initial blunting of material and symbolic consequentiality is a practical accomplishment that *enables* the 'interpretable outcomes' Malaby suggests as a better descriptor of games.

an activity framed as play *must by definition be safe*. The ‘semibounded’ quality Malaby suggests instead is perfectly captured as the general features of *any* keying. Note also that absence of threat refers to *spontaneous* play in animals and children, and spontaneous playful keying in adults. Once we get to playing and gaming as institutionalised frames, it is perfectly possible (and a different matter) that they are reorganised into forms with highly consequential stakes (e.g. Russian roulette) while remaining intelligible as ‘gaming’, or keyed as activities patterned on gaming but understood to be something quite else (e.g. goldfarming being ‘working on gaming’, not ‘gaming’).

As for ‘fun’, autotelic focus (perceiving that one does something for its own sake) and autonomy (perceiving volition, willingness, and congruence with one’s values, needs, and identity) are psychological and phenomenological states different from sensual, hedonic pleasure (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, Ryan & Deci 2002, Tamborini et al. 2011). This has been admittedly a very muddled matter in game studies, but it’s an important distinction. ‘Engaging’, which Malaby (2007: 99) suggests as the better descriptor, is exactly what Goffman articulates when he speaks about involvement being a general aspect of any social situation, and the ‘engrossing’ features of games, gaming, and playing in particular.

Fourth, to say that ‘playing’ in modern Western societies is *framed* as ‘fun’ (‘autotelic’, ‘under absence of threat’, etc.) is different from saying that the activity universally across all cultures and instances must and will be *experienced* as fun. This re-articulates Malaby’s critique into an empirical observation: *in modern Western societies*, people share the epistemic and normative expectation *that* ‘playing’ *ought to be* ‘fun’, which allows them to recognise, recognisably produce, and reflexively evaluate situations framed as ‘playing’. Huizinga’s and Caillois’s rhetorics are *part* of the modern culture that a frame analysis of ‘playing’ describes. A frame analysis of ‘playing’ fully acknowledges that ‘playing’ might be locally conceived, valued, and enacted very differently in other cultures or points in time. It explicitly provides an empirical account of our contemporary, Western, local cultivation of ‘playing’.

A final point: arguing that early childhood play, adult playfulness, playing, and gaming all *exhibit* features of animal play does not mean that biological predispositions march through as ‘brute facts’, as Stenros (forthcoming) puts it. It just offers an evolutionary, cultural-historical explanation of why we find childhood play and adult playfulness across cultures, and why ‘playing’ and ‘gaming’ have some of the specific forms they have. However childhood play or adult playfulness are enacted, understood, and evaluated is necessarily informed by the culture in which they exist (e.g. one that heavily devalues childhood play like the Baining, cf. Fajans 1997). This is indeed the main argument why play(fulness) can never be *only* a subjective attitudinal stance – which leads us to the second line of Malaby’s argument.

Play(fulness) as Attitude, not Activity

Malaby (2007: 100) holds that an even more fundamental error of modernist play theories was to treat play as a *type of activity* to begin with. Here, he picks up a thread from the 1970s discourse among *The Society for the Study of Play*. In his late writings, Bateson insisted on the distinction of individual actions, types of actions, and organising contexts or frames of actions: 'In ordinary parlance, "play" is not the name of an act or action; it is the name of a *frame* for action' (Bateson 1979: 138). 'Exploration, play, crime ... are not categories of behavior, they are *categories of contextual organization of behavior*' (Bateson 1979: 134, emphasis in original). What Bateson meant is that exploration, crime, or play 'do not define the actions which are their content' (ibid.). They are *inherently* contextual or 'meta' categories. One can specify an act that is 'drinking a glass of water' – it is a concrete, describable, learnable movement of the body. Likewise, one can specify 'drinking' – a broader set of movements, all somehow involving opening the mouth to consume a liquid. But one cannot similarly specify one concrete, describable set of observable behaviours that is 'playing'. One always plays *with something*, and that something one plays with specifies the concrete behaviours one displays: playing with words, playing at being a doctor, or playing with a stone share no concrete, describable bodily movement in common (or so Bateson argued). He and Philip Stephens therefore dismissed Huizinga's definition of play, because Huizinga *did* conceptualise play as an activity rather than a frame (Stephens & Bateson 1979: 3; Stephens 1978). During the same time, Csikszentmihalyi (1975: 185-6), in his studies of flow and play experiences, observed that factory workers could experience flow at work, and treat their work playfully. From this he concluded that flow or playfulness are not determined by the specific activity in which one is involved (though the structuring of the activity affects it): they are psychological *stances or states* that should be clearly distinguished from structured environments (like work or games) that support or impede such stances. In this vein, Malaby (2007: 100) notes that if we treat play(fulness) as 'a state or mode of human experience (something like Csikszentmihalyi's [1990] 'flow') – a way of engaging the world whatever one is doing – then we cannot simultaneously use it reliably as a label for a kind or form of distinct human activity'. 'Play' for Malaby should be delimited to designating this 'mode of experience' (Malaby 2007: 102).

As noted, Malaby is not alone in proposing to distinguish a playful attitude or mode of experience from the activity of engaging with a game. Sicart (forthcoming) observes that playing a game is different from people's playful interaction with things other than games. For these phenomena, Sicart (forthcoming) suggests the term 'playfulness': 'The main difference between play and playfulness is that play is an activity, while playfulness is an attitude. The difference is simple: while an activity is a coherent and finite set of actions performed for certain purposes, an attitude is a stance towards an activity, a psychological, physical and emotional perspective we take on activities, people, and objects'. Similarly, Stenros (forthcoming)

notes one should ‘separate the playful mindset from the socially shared act of playing’. Playing, he argues contrary to Malaby, is a socially framed *type* of activity. Stenros does not expand on this claim further, but we can substantiate it using Bateson’s argument. There are specific, describable, concrete types of activities involved in ‘playing a video game’ or ‘playing a board game’: shoving little pieces on a cardboard placed on a table, picking up and placing cards on the table, handling a game controller while intently monitoring a screen, etc. But playfulness as a spontaneous biological ‘impetus’ and ‘brute fact’ is separate from this, Stenros continues: it refers to an inner subjective state, not to the outer observable action. This argument reiterates an earlier distinction by Stenros and colleagues between *mindsets* and *contexts* (Stenros 2010, Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007, 2009). Drawing directly on Goffman, they argue that there are differently *framed* social contexts, but that individuals can still take different subjective stances *within* these contexts, which may or may not be shared among participants. They suggest modelling this subjective stance or mindset using Apter’s (2006) telic and paratelic metamotivational states, because it is presumably not addressed by Goffman: ‘Frames explain the social context in which playing takes place. They do not address the motivation and mindset of an individual taking part in a game. Indeed, this is a limitation of frame analysis’ (Stenros 2010).

Autotelic Experience and Playful Form: Playfulness is (a) Key

The phenomena Malaby, Sicart, and Stenros point out are all core to the present book – taking a playful stance towards an activity framed as work, or treating video gaming as work. But their neat separation into overt activity and covert attitude, or shared context and individual mindset does not appreciate the very sociality of meaning, self, and emotion worked out in Symbolic Interactionism, nor that frames for Goffman organise outer events *and* inner experience. Like any other frame, the playfulness key defines not only proper overt behaviour, but also motivational relevancy, emotional ethos, attentive involvement, and so on – ‘inner’ subjective states, *including* motivation. When Goffman (1963: 19; 1953: 128-30) notes that treating activities as ‘ends in themselves’ is one of the two main forms of motivational relevancy, he captures precisely Apter’s paratelic metamotivational state, and also what Malaby (2007: 100) alludes to when he notes that Csikszentmihalyi’s flow resembles the play mode of experience – after all, ‘the autotelic experience’ is the defining feature of flow: ‘The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 67). Furthermore, for a playful keying to be *shared* by participants, it *has* to be enacted in an observably orderly way that is mutually intelligible *as* playful. Co-present others needn’t even join us in our playful frolicking, but by danger of disrupting their trust and being considered insane (or at least a

little strange), we *must* enact what we do in a way intelligible to them as ‘being playful’.⁵² The playfulness of playfully engaging with coffee cups in an office kitchen is not a specifiable *type* of activity like drinking is – this we have to grant Bateson –, but it is a specifiable *form of transformation* of a source activity; it displays a set of *transformation rules*, namely exaggeration, varied repetition, nonfunctional performance, a play smile, etc.⁵³ If I start stapling coffee cups in the office far beyond a height that would be functional (or safe), and give you a collusive wink when you pass by, from this *exaggerated form* and *play smile* you understand that I do this as a playful interlude, not because I have lost my wits and do not realise that this is not a proper way to staple coffee cups. If prompted, I will be able to discursively indicate to you and myself that what I am doing is ‘playing around’. A playful keying, then, involves an inner (autotelic, voluntary) attitude *and* an outer observably-orderly-and-intelligible-as-playful type of *transformation* of activity (and not type of activity). As Sutton-Smith (1997: 219) so aptly put it: ‘[P]lay is not just an attitude or an experience; it is always characterized by its own distinct performances and stylizations.’

Such playful keying of *another* activity or object has to be differentiated from playing (board games, video games, etc.) as indeed an institutionalised *type* of activity on its own, as Stenros (forthcoming) and Sicart (forthcoming) observe. We directly understand and enact ‘video gaming’ as ‘video gaming’ – though a playful keying of a gaming object or activity is again perfectly possible and intelligible, for example playfully juggling an Xbox controller otherwise used for gaming.

One possible case not yet covered is people engaging in something playfully *alone*, or in the response presence of others, but *wanting* them to not realise that oneself is right now playfully engaging with a part of the situation – Stenros (2010) calls this ‘personal paratelic’. For instance, to ease the boredom of a business meeting she is in, for every PowerPoint slide title she reads, a person might try to come up in her head with a rhyme somehow involving cows. Yet this constellation poses no problem to frame analysis: people can and often are partaking in multiple framings at the same time, and Goffman (1986: 52) explicitly lists solitary ‘daydreaming’ as one common everyday keying. More importantly, our playful PowerPoint daydreamer would *frame to herself* what she is doing as ‘daydreaming’, and based on her frame knowledge of business meetings and daydreaming (one ought to pay attention to the main proceedings, and one ought not overtly display playfulness in ‘inappropriate’ contexts), keep her daydreaming unnoticeable to the response-present others. Although covert to the observation of others, her playful daydreaming carries the organisational signature of playfulness: autotelic, nonfunctional performance of a varied repetition and recombination of language. So

⁵² And even if we don’t want to, we can’t help but being made sense of by them with their frame knowledge about how ‘playfulness’ ought to look like.

⁵³ As noted earlier, given the indexicality of all situated action, neither metacommunication nor transformed performance viewed on their own would suffice to fully specify the activity as ‘playful’ – they do so in and against the total context of the situation.

again, she would organise her inner understanding, experience, and action as well as her outer bearing in terms of the multiple framings in which she is involved.

As we have already seen, Goffman actually provides a higher-level sociological analysis of the relation between one's own spontaneous focus of involvement and desired framing, and the frame one acknowledges as the official one governing the situation (Goffman 1953: 243-58; 1972: 38-58). We experience *euphoric ease* when spontaneous needs and wants and official framing match, and we experience *dysphoric tension* when they mismatch: we remain somewhat self-conscious, we cannot fully engross and 'let go' of ourselves, because then we might accidentally produce a frame break that leads to embarrassment – for example, inexplicably (to the others) bursting into laughter during that business meeting over an unexpectedly delicious bovine rhyme. Having to secretly distract yourself with a rhyming game during a meeting while keeping up proper appearances is quite dysphoric; if all the meeting participants were to openly join in the fun, that would be more euphoric (if it then still is your spontaneously desired framing and you're not the eternal contrarian). Even if we are fully alone, we still make sense of what we are doing *to ourselves* using the frames of our culture, and we still normatively evaluate and regulate our actions based on the views of the 'Generalised Other' we have internalised (Goffman 1963: 41). As Cooley (1902: 152) noted, we can feel embarrassed or proud alone with ourselves and a mirror, though maybe less emotionally intense than under the judging looks of response-present others. A strongly socialised individual would likely avoid playfulness in 'improper' contexts even in solitude.

Summary and Conclusions

Animal and childhood play might appear as a somewhat strange entry point into a theoretical account of video gaming, but it is the entry point Goffman chose for frame analysis in general, and it is through this conduit that we are able to situate video gaming as an inherent part of (not exception from) social reality. Furthermore, it allows us to understand the interplay of nature and culture in a frame analytic account of playing and gaming, and to get an appraisal of the robustness of Goffman's account in light of contemporary research (and it holds up well). Animal play is the evolutionary ground of human playing and playfulness, which in turn presumably ground symbolic and aesthetic activity writ large, such as ritual, the arts, fictional media, sports, or playing and gaming. Childhood play – especially pretend and rule play in contrast to the earlier forms of locomotor, object, and social play – is a universal phenomenon in which humans develop the very capacity to frame, to constitute symbolic meaning and action, and then to transform, to key and fabricate layers of symbolic meaning. For this reason, one needs to theoretically distinguish childhood play as a primary frame and/or developmental process from adult playfulness as temporary keying operating upon established social actions, objects, and meanings.

In adult playfulness, we see the dynamics of situated animal-environment relations in action: Environmentally, it is afforded (not determined) by a specific arrangement of objects, settings, and events, ‘playthings’ that in their material features invite playing-with for animals with the requisite dispositions, and the absence of perceived imminent threats in the environment. On the part of the human actor (or animal), playful keying involves both the active process of organising inner dispositions (understandings and experiences) and outer actions and communications. In terms of inner dispositions, it is characterised by a perception, understanding, and experience of the situation as autonomous and autotelically (or paratelically) focused on the ongoing activity and its means rather than the goal-oriented pursuit of its outcome or end, combined with attentive involvement in the activity. In terms of observable actions and communications, adult playfulness is characterised by certain transformation rules: exaggeration, varied repetition, explorative recombination, nonfunctional performance, and metacommunication such as a play smile. In instances where a playful keying is spontaneously jointly agreed on among response-present others as the official ongoing framing of the situation at hand, engrossment and an experience of euphoric ease are usually found. Where playing or playfulness misaligns with the currently officially ratified framing of the situation, and playing or playfully keying participants do not wish to challenge that official framing, they *covertly* engage in their playing or playful keying them so as to gear their overt actions and communications into the main proceedings of the situation, something that comes with dysphoric tension.

4.2 Gamelike Interactions and Games: Material Orders of Safe Action

Ever since Eric Berne’s pop-psychology book *Games People Play* (1964), a recurring *topos* of public discourse has been that ‘all the (social) world’s a game’. From a frame analytic perspective, four meanings can be made of this evocative but ultimately loose way of talking.

Most of everyday life certainly is not framed as ‘gaming’. But bearing frame limits, many aspects of life can be *made the subject of a material game*. For instance, we might design a video game around brushing teeth (*Tooth Protectors*, Johnson & Johnson 1983).

Second, we may *gamefully key* an activity – in the same way that playfulness is a spontaneous, temporary keying of a source activity as ‘playing’. For instance, we might key the nightly tooth brushing with our kids as gaming, by setting up the rule that whoever brushes her or his teeth the longest wins and gets to choose which bedtime story is read.

A third legitimate way of reading ‘all the world’s a game’ is that we can conceive of and describe strips of everyday life *in the terms of games*. That is, we can use games as a *conceptual metaphor* (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 2003). And again, if we do so with an activity we are currently involved in, this might lead us to gamefully key it in the course; that is, as we terminologically reframe the events around us in the language of games, this might afford also taking

up the motivational stance, the emotional self-regulation, the attentive focus, the rules of conduct, etc., characteristic for 'gaming'. Just as in a playful keying, we might expect that the overt ordering of objects and actions will still be strongly patterned on the source activity: what changes is mostly understanding and experience. If this is a purely solitary keying, the same conditions apply as in daydreaming. The actor maintains a solitary framing (the day-dream, the gameful keying), all the while gearing her public performance into the acknowledged joint framing of the others: while a manager might key a salary negotiation as gaming, she is aware that the employee sitting across the table very much does not do so, and would very much object to it (among other things because this would be a serious symbolic damage to her self, being diminished into the object of entertainment). So the manager displays attention and tone of voice and words and emotional expressions of face that are in keeping with the proceedings being framed as a serious negotiation, all the while keying it to herself as a fun little game. The moment the manager lets the employee in on her little spiel, *and the employee joins in*, they would now jointly key the negotiation in a gameful manner.

Gamelike Interactions and Gameful Keyings

This little fictional example is not just a thought experiment. During his casino fieldwork, Goffman found that professional gamblers had a propensity to switch into a private 'gambling' key towards other situations in their life. Even non-gamblers sometimes did so as an entertaining diversion, for instance by attaching probabilities or little bets to things like 'how many minutes until we get served at this restaurant'). He also noted that individuals faced with highly dangerous situations (soldiers, criminals, or speculators) sometimes keyed them as gambling for the opposite reason: because it helped them to distance otherwise overwhelming emotions (Goffman 1967: 171, 179, 200). Goffman mused that the formalised explication and abstraction of games in mathematic game theory in the 1950s, combined with its mass media popularisation in the Cold War era (think Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*), might have provided the semiotic material that made it easier for people in everyday life to conceptually metaphorise and subjectively key everyday situations as gaming (Goffman 1967: 171-2).

A fourth understanding of 'all the world's a game' are 'gamelike interactions' (Goffman 1969: 113). Many everyday situations are not framed as gaming, but their material configuration has *gamelike features*, namely *fatefulness* and *strategic interaction*. 'Fatefulness' (Goffman 1967: 164) means that situations are *problematic*: they have a contingent outcome; that is, one that is not fully decidable in advance, and not fully controllable by the actors – they have to give up at least some control by submitting themselves to the situation (Goffman 1967: 149-50). Second, fateful situations are irreversibly *consequential*, meaning 'the capacity of a payoff to flow beyond the bounds of the occasion in which it is delivered and to influence objectively the later life of the bettor' (Goffman 1967: 159-60). Russian roulette is both problematic and consequen-

tial, whereas Russian roulette with blank cartridges is only problematic, and execution by shooting is only consequential (well, 'only').

'Strategic interaction' (Goffman 1969: 100) refers to encounters where (a) the dominant motive of all involved actors is to maximise some goal ('rational decision-making', Goffman 1969: 86), (b) the outcomes of the actions of each actor are affected by the actions of the others, wherefore (c) knowing what the others know and intend (and hiding what oneself knows and intends) improves one's chances to choose an action and elicit actions from the others that will maximise one's goal, and (d) actors are in response presence, creating 'mutually assessed mutual assessment' (Goffman 1969: 101). Under these circumstances, 'expression games' (Goffman 1969: 10) occur: A will try to make moves that elicit reactions from B that allow A to read what B knows and intends, and A will try to hide or fabricate her own expressions so as to give B no or a false idea what A knows and intends (and vice versa) – all in the service of rationally maximising one's goal.

For Goffman, fatefulness is a basic feature of life, and strategic interaction is a basic feature of *social* life that logically follows from symbolic action and the interaction order: Once actors become mindful and action becomes symbolic, they have the capacity and incentive to strategically manage their expressions. Roulette, craps, or any other game of chance, as well as poker, chess, or any other game involving asymmetric information just pronounce what is already there in social life.⁵⁴

The Institutionalisation of Games

More precisely, games and sports are cultural institutions that intentionally amplify, and in the course civilise, gamelike interactions. Originally, Goffman argues, games (and sports) were keyings of real-life *contests*: 'The literal model seems to be fighting (or hunting or fleeing from) of some kind, and the rules of the sport supply restrictions of degree and mode of aggression' (Goffman 1986: 56). Yet as games and sports have become institutionalised, they have turned into primary frames unto themselves with often no discernible source activity: 'In developed adult games ... no great value seems to remain to uncovering possible mythic or historic roots in specific life activity; one deals, in effect, with primary frameworks' (Goffman 1986: 57). This institutionalisation sets *gaming* as a primary frame apart from *playfulness* as a spontaneous keying – and, we might add, from a spontaneous gameful keying as well:

There seems to be a continuum between playfulness, whereby some utilitarian act is caught up and employed in a transformed way for fun, and both sports and games. In any case, whereas in playfulness the playful reconstitution of some object or individual into a 'plaything' is quite temporary, never fully established, in organized games and sports this reconstitution is institutionalized – stabilized, as it were – just as the arena of action is fixed by the formal rules of the activity. (That presumably is what we mean by 'organized.') And as the formalization progresses, the content of play

⁵⁴ This would provide an evolutionary rationale for why humans developed these cultural practices and artifacts and why it is adaptive to enjoy engaging in them: they exercise a skill fundamental for survival in a social group.

seems to become further and further removed from any particular replication of day-to-day activity and more and more a primary framework unto itself. (Goffman 1986: 57)

A second difference between playfulness and games is their different delineation from play: Where playfulness directly descended from animal play as part of the class of ‘make-believe’ keyings (Goffman 1986: 48), games delineate from contests. One further difference is that gaming (and gameful keyings) as contests or strategic interaction are inherently *goal-oriented*: they involve a purposive striving towards some desired outcome, whereas play and playfulness are focused more on the open exploration of recombining meanings, actions, and objects. Caillois (2001: 26-30) articulated this as the difference between *paidia* and *ludus* as two poles of human play, *paidia* being the more basic, spontaneous, open-ended, explorative, free-form play focused on the enjoyable qualities inherent in the sheer exercise of an activity, and *ludus* the refined, rule-based, goal-focused, strategic, formalised goal pursuit. This portrayal of gaming is broadly congruent with current definitions of games (e.g. Juul 2005: 36, Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 80; Suits 2005: 54-5). More importantly, Goffman’s different delineations of playfulness and gaming reiterates an important observation variously made in game studies literature. Huizinga (1955: 13) already noted that play is either ‘a contest for something or a representation of something’. (Again, note how direct object and locomotor play are left by the wayside.) Distinctions to the same extent have been made by Makedon (1984) and DeKoven (2010), echoed by Juul (2005: 28-9), and match Salen and Zimmerman’s (2004: 303) conception of ‘games as a subset of play’, distinguishing between ‘game play’ as play involving a game, and ‘ludic activity’ and ‘being playful’ as subsequently less formalised, more open and transient forms of playful behaviour. Recent empirical work has lent further support towards treating playing and gaming as two different forms. In interviews and video analyses of video gamers, Pippin Barr observed that *paidia* and *ludus* are two basic ‘video game values’, defined as ‘sustained belief(s) that one mode of conduct is preferable to other potential modes of conduct during play’ (2007: 66) reoccurring in players’ conduct during video gaming:

PAIDIA is the sustained belief that creative and exploratory conduct for its own sake in a video game is preferable to other forms of conduct during play.

LUDUS is the sustained belief that following rules and conventions in order to achieve defined goals in a video game is preferable to other forms of conduct during play. (Barr 2007: 69)

Mapping this onto developmental psychology, we see a parallel between *paidia* and motor, object, social, and pretend play, and *ludus* and rule play. Caillois’s observation that *ludus* is the culturally secondary, refined version of *paidia* parallels the fact that rule play is the phylogenetically and ontogenetically latest form of play. Among adults in Western industrialised nations, *paidia* and *ludus* are, again, ideal typical poles more than empirically clear-cut entities onto themselves. Activity can move on a spectrum between them, sometimes quickly so within one gaming encounter, as Barr (2007) documents. Notably, the goal pursuit inherent in *ludus* does not mean that gaming is framed as a means towards an end, as Caillois (2001: 9) himself insists. Goffman (1963: 19; 1953: 128-30; 1972: 17) is similarly very clear that the goal pur-

suit of gaming is *itself* an ‘end in itself’. Both playing and gaming are framed as autonomous, autotelic activities. Gaming is characterised by an interesting ‘folded’ telicity. In Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) and Apter’s (1991) terms, playfulness is *fully* autotelic or paratelic, focused on means for their own sake, whereas gaming is autotelically or paratelically telic, focused on means towards an end for its own sake. As Frank Lantz (2011) recently put it, gaming combines the seeming opposition of disinterested appeal and instrumental reasoning by approaching instrumental reasoning *with* disinterested appeal. Gaming is ‘about’ instrumental reasoning (or goal pursuit) in the same way that painting is ‘about’ vision.

In relation to gamelike interactions as an incidental situational configuration that affords a gameful keying, games *articulate* and *compress* them into the spatiotemporal bounds of one encounter, one ‘highly structured, nicely bounded setting’ (Goffman 1969: 91). In everyday life, actions, effects, and their relations are often minute, diffuse, and delayed. Reading or not reading a news item in the morning newspaper is a routine action with little discernible consequence, only in very hypothetical, vague, and protracted chains (posting an online comment on it might put you in contact with someone who five years down the line might introduce you to your future spouse, say). Through their ‘equipment’ (Goffman 1969: 120-1), rules, and spatial layout, games ensure that people can readily identify actions and their effects – that they have ‘structured choices’ (Goffman 1969: 141)⁵⁵ –, and in the case of multiplayer games, that they can easily monitor each other’s actions.

Second, games like dramas work with a ‘closed resource’ (Goffman 1986: 558). They economically abstract only those elements, those action-effect links out of a source activity that connect to the ultimate outcome, and attempt to maximise the interdependency of actions and effects within the encounter: ‘Tales, like plays, demonstrate a full interdependence of human action and fate – a meaningfulness – that is characteristic of games of strategy but not necessarily characteristic of life’ (Goffman 1986: 559).

Third, games ensure that actions and effects take place in immediate succession; things are begun and resolved within the span and place of one encounter: ‘The distinctive property of games and contests is that once the bet has been made, *outcome is determined and payoff awarded all in the same breath of experience*. A single sharp focus of awareness is sustained at high pitch during the full span of the play’ (Goffman 1967: 156). Casino games and tables, for instance, are designed to allow one to immediately find a table to place a bet; in addition, bets are resolved quickly, and can be made with minimum physical effort (Goffman 1967: 201-3).⁵⁶

Fourth and finally, games contour the problematicness or ‘chanciness’ of an activity (Goffman 1967: 152-6): in everyday life, outcomes are usually unproblematic, or if they are not, we have no clear grasp of the odds. Games – especially games of chance – ensure that the out-

⁵⁵ Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 69) would say ‘choice molecules’ or ‘action-outcome units’.

⁵⁶ Similarly, the ‘gamelike character’ of theatrical performances or movies (Goffman 1986: 558) lies in their parallel compression of the whole fate of a person or country into a time strip consumable in one sitting.

come is problematic and that we have a clearer idea of the odds, such that we can strategically adapt our actions in relation to them. In sportive contests or other games of skill, ‘balancing’ through handicapping, tournament structures, etc., ensure that the outcome likewise remains undecided until the end (Goffman 1972: 60).

Why Games?

Games thus present us with a puzzling fact of human life: people without pressing need *voluntarily* submit themselves to fateful situations (see also Malaby 2007). Engaging in extreme sports or going out for the night in a ‘rough neighbourhood’, people seek out ‘*action*’: ‘activities that are consequential, problematic, and undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake’ (Goffman 1967: 185). But why? One obvious reason is that action provides arousal, excitement, joint engrossment, and suspense (Goffman 1967: 185; 1986: 556). More importantly (to Goffman at least), fateful situations allow us to publicly display aspects of our selves positively regarded in our society – bodily and mental skills as well as *character*; that is, courage, gameness, integrity, dignity, composure in the face of fate (Goffman 1967: 217-28). In fact, Goffman sees the two intertwined: It is socially inappropriate to openly brag about one’s character and skill, but within the bounds of a game that on its surface is about the suspense of the open outcome not the display of skill and character, we may openly perform them: ‘A successful game would then be one which, first, had a problematic outcome and then, within these limits, allowed for maximum possible display of externally relevant attributes. ... As long as his [the players] efforts are called forth in the heat of close competition, they are called forth by the interaction itself and not merely for show’ (Goffman 1972: 61-2).⁵⁷

Goffman reasons that character is socially lauded as a quality of a moral self – especially for males – because the upkeep of society requires members to not shy away from fateful situations in its service. At the same time, modern rationalised societies have largely managed fatefulness out of our life. In fact, they *cannot* allow us to continually duel each other for life or behave in other highly fateful ways, for that would make society unplannable. Hence, deprived from our sources of engrossment and moral self-regard, we seek out artificial, socially legitimised fatefulness – action – to engross us and symbolically assure our character (Goffman 1972: 259-60). Amusement parks, casinos, and games all provide ‘commercialized action, wherein the appearance of fatefulness is generated in a controlled fashion in an area of life calculated to insulate its consequences from the rest of living’ (Goffman 1972: 262).

⁵⁷ In modern psychological parlance, games provide mood management (regulating arousal, absorbing attention otherwise involved in ruminating on negative thoughts) and hook into the social need for achievement (Whitaker, Velez & Knobloch Westerwick 2012; Reeve 2009: 175-191). Yet the empirical data of the present study suggests (in congruence with current literature, e.g. Rigby & Ryan 2011) that while Goffman’s portrayal does capture important motives of game engagement, the satisfaction of intrinsic needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness also drive gaming.

This brings us to the civilising aspect of games: Just as they *amplify* problematicness, they *mute* consequentiality. They turn highly fateful contests into ‘very slightly consequential’ (Goffman 1972: 269) ones, such that we can realise their emotional and symbolic benefits without incurring their bodily costs. Amusement parks provide thrill and vertigo (*ilinx*) without real danger (Goffman 1967: 196). Children’s playgrounds and sports like skiing introduce just enough physical danger to be exciting, but not too much to be overwhelming (Goffman 1972: 63). Gambling allows us to place just that level of bets that is consequential enough, but not too consequential (Goffman 1967: 203). Action novels and action movies allow us to vicariously experience and identify with other people who are heroically braving fateful situations in our stead (Goffman 1967: 262-3). In games and sports without material consequence, at least a bit of self-regard for our skill must be at stake (Goffman 1967: 154, 216). As Juul (2005: 41) puts it, the ‘officially sanctioned non-optional consequences’ of games today are that they can ‘hurt or boost [the players] pride’.

This matches nicely Apter’s (1991) statement that play is the paratelic pursuit of an activity that brings about a positively valued state of heightened arousal, enabled by a sense of safety deriving from one of three ‘protective frames’ (Apter 1991: 15): ‘confidence’ in one’s skill and the given equipment fending off danger, a ‘safety zone’ where harm is unlikely to begin with, or a full ‘detachment’ where one is only a vicarious observer of someone else’s engagement with danger. It parallels Malaby’s (2007: 106) conception of games as ‘a semibounded and socially legitimate domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes’. Both highlight the *contrived* (that is, intentionally sought out, designed) ‘contingency’ (Malaby) or ‘problematicness’ (Goffman) of outcomes as an ideal typical feature of games. Both note that games in this mirror the essentially ‘fatefulness’ (Goffman) or ‘uncertainties’ (Malaby 2007: 98) of life, and that the intentional creation of contingency is what sets games apart from almost all other contexts of modern life that try to eliminate contingency. Furthermore, both highlight the *contrived consequentiality* of games (‘interpretable outcomes’ in Malaby’s terms). What Goffman adds is strategic information management: gaming invites and facilitates the kind of bluffing and deceiving that would be anathema in polite social discourse.

Finally, Goffman’s analysis also offers a (speculative) cultural historical *explanation* for the typical features of games. To wit, Juul’s (2005: 36) often-cited definition of games makes out rules, a variable outcome, a valorisation of outcome, player effort, player attachment to outcome, and negotiable consequences as the features of games. However, as a definition, this provides no rationale *why* we humans have institutionalised just such a state of affairs. Why is it *these* features that have been bundled into stable form and given a place in our social life, and

not these features *sans* negotiable consequence, or *sans* a variable outcome, for instance?⁵⁸ The frame analytic explanation is that we *institutionalised* their incidental co-occurrence in game-like interactions into games to be able to reliably reproduce them, only now with much more chanciness, clarity about choices and odds (rules, variable outcome), less consequence (negotiable consequence), no fillers (compression into a ‘closed resource’), optimised for maximum engrossment and pride in the space of a smartphone screen and the stretch of a minute on your subway route to work. In short, *gaming is institutionalised safe action*. People want and need the joint collective engrossment to satisfy their need for relatedness and manage their mood, and they want symbolic self-regard for their character. But they also want and must tone down the consequentiality of those activities that provide it.

The Achievement of Negotiable Consequence

This leads us to an interesting question: how are those ‘negotiable consequences’ (Juul), ‘interpretable outcomes’ (Malaby), or ‘protective frames’ (Apter) *achieved*? After all, everyday action, contests, and gamelike interactions usually *are* consequential. Muted consequentiality is not a natural given. As Goffman notes, in a gamelike interaction like a duel, we find an *enforcement system* of rules and consequences ‘ensured by the natural world in conjunction with Harry’s [the players] unalterable human equipment’ (Goffman 1969: 115), consisting of ‘the constraint to play’ (once you start, everything is part of the duel – the other duellist won’t allow premature quitting), ‘structuring of choices’ (at every moment you clearly see what you can do, and what your opponent might do as a consequence), automatic ‘commitment to moves made’ by making them (you can’t ‘undo’ a sword strike), and ‘intrinsic payoff’ – the consequences beyond the situation are immediately tied to the actions and outcomes of the situation (if you’re dead, you’re dead, not much negotiation or interpretation there) (Goffman 1969: 114).

Games socio-materially introduce a distinction between the situation’s *outcome* (the effects of the actions within the situation) and final *payoff* (the situation-external consequences). What the outcome ‘is’ and who will therefore get what payoff is decided upon and enforced by a social group: ‘enforcement power is taken from mother nature and invested in a social office specialized for this purpose’ (Goffman 1969: 115).

When Harry, the gladiator, is obliged to hold up delivering the *coup de grâce* to his fallen opponent so that some designated portion of the audience can decide whether death or mercy is to be adminis-

⁵⁸ As the concept of ‘gamelike interactions’ highlights, all these features can and do *incidentally* co-occur in many social encounters. Flirting with somebody in a hotel lounge is ruled (by the norms of polite conduct and the shared knowledge of the practice of flirting), and despite one receiving the room number of the other (the valued outcome), the other might in the end decide not to let the other in, voiding the consequence. But one may still try to negotiate one’s way in. Still, we wouldn’t automatically think of this situation as ‘gaming’ because it was not intentionally jointly framed by the participants as such. As academics, we would agree that it retrospectively ‘fits the bill’, but this again only serves to highlight the difference of a situation *having features of* gaming encounters to an outside observer, and a situation *being jointly framed*, that is, made mutually intelligible and collectively enacted by the participants *as* ‘gaming’. Frame analytically WC (and practically, in everyday experience), this marks a tremendous difference.

tered, Harry has had his fight transformed into a contest – one that could equally well be carried out over a Ping-Pong table. (Goffman 1969: 115)

Who wins the world cup and therefore gets the FIFA World Cup trophy is decided by the referee (and the FIFA association and the people in the stadium), not by the material fact of which soccer team manages to physically lounge forward, grab the trophy, and make away with it. This however necessitates that the outcomes themselves are *inconsequential enough* that they do not present ‘intrinsic’ or ‘natural’ payoffs that outweigh the social ones (the stabbed duellist). This is precisely how games and sports transform naturally occurring gamelike interactions or consequences. People are made to use certain specialised game equipment and act in certain ways (according to the rules), not just to maximise chanciness and clarity, but also such that no irreversible bodily and material consequentiality comes of it:

In the modern version [of sword fights] of wired players and electrical foils, the successful lunge ceases to be an intrinsic part of the injury that is administered and becomes merely a means of racking up the flashing lights of a score. And this point score can be paid in the form of reprieve from a death penalty that was to have been exacted at another time and place, or the hand of the fair princess in marriage, or a silver trophy cup, or green stamps. (Goffman 1969: 116)

The same is true of board, card, and video games: usually, they do not just decouple the payoff from the outcome, but also socially and materially transform the moves themselves into harmless *symbolic actions* – button mashing. ‘It’s just a game’ not by virtue of it being a game, but because the games we design all involve objects and actions – pushing little plastic pieces over a cardboard board, say – that are unlikely to produce irreversible consequences for the participants (unless accidentally swallowed by children under the age of 18 months – again, it’s all a matter of animal-environment relations). The normality of this arrangement is foregrounded by art games that breach it, like the *PainStation* (Morawe & Reiff 2001) where losing a match of *Pong* is punished with increasing amounts of real bodily pain to one’s hand. Imagine, similarly, a first-person shooter where the displayed image would be intrinsically linked to live footage of a war zone, and the controller intrinsically linked to a drone with a machine gun. It wouldn’t be ‘just a game’ anymore.⁵⁹ Then again, there is also a manifest shift in experience, meaning, and response if a real physical punch is keyed as sportive contest. But unlike a virtual punch, such keying does require heavy emotional self-regulation work, and there are frame limits to it, as Goffman highlights with news stories of boxers who ‘flooded out’ and could not take the game as a game anymore, switching into a real fist fight (Goffman 1986: 360; 1972: 62).

This marks an interesting difference between board and card games on the one hand and sports and video games on the other: in board and card games, payoff *and* moves are mostly symbolic, socially conventionalised. Board games materially involve arms and hands and tokens and cardboard, yet these are predominantly symbolically functionalised: playing a card *representationally* stands in for the game move of kicking a ball in *Ajax: The Game* (Jumbo 1996).

⁵⁹ The experiential ‘safety zone’ necessarily owes to the decoupling of bodily consequences and situated full-body experience. Note, for instance, how military drone pilots engage in constant boundary work towards themselves and others reminding them that their job is not a video game because of its consequentiality (e.g. Blackhurst 2012, Bumiller 2012).

The involved skill is calculative and strategic, not bodily, which makes games like *Tipp-Kick* (Carl Mayer 1921) an interesting in-between. In sports, the moves are bodily moves: kicking the ball does not symbolically stand in for kicking the ball; but the evaluation of their ‘legality’ in bringing about a certain outcome remains socially constituted: whether a kick was ‘offside’. Here, moves often still have intrinsically linked consequences, like a foul actually breaking the bone of another player. We have implicit social norms (like fair play enforced by social shaming) and explicated sports legislation that both reduce the practical likelihood of such intrinsically linked consequences, and contain their social consequences in the sports frame to prevent its breakage – that is, we have sports courts that keep the hurt party from seeking legal recourse and compensation at a regular court, outside the world of sports.

In video games, moves are again natural, bodily, and linked up intrinsically to outcomes by the ‘second nature’ of the computer. We cannot argue with the computer about the correct interpretation of our move – it just *registers* it as a quasi-natural event. We might have intended one move and *accidentally* made another, but the computer is as ‘merciless’ as nature when you accidentally slip upon making a lunge in a sword fight. However, this is only true for the main proceedings of the game play, which themselves in their legitimacy remain socially negotiated. The game hardware and software might declare A the winner over B in a game of *Tekken* (Namco 1994), and yet A and B agree that that last turn ‘doesn’t count’ because B was ‘distracted’. Like board and card games (and unlike sports), video gaming is still safely decoupled from irreversible consequence beyond the gaming encounter by its social and material framing: a PlayStation thumb is a minor consequence compared to a broken soccer angle.

The Symbolic Troubles of Negotiable Consequence

As seen in this hypothetical *Tekken* example, once we replace direct with *symbolic* action and consequence, we run into the problem of underspecification (Goffman 1969: 115). Statements and gestures become ‘tokens’ that symbolically stand in for moves, such that (a) ‘frame issues’ have to be clarified whether the move was *intended* as a move, rehearsal, irony, fumbling, etc., (b) *clarity* must be ensured (does the roulette chip really lie on *this* field?), (c) ‘cheating’ becomes possible, and (d) players may contest a result (Goffman 1969: 116-8).

To reiterate: Because we want ‘safe action’, in games, we decouple actions and outcomes from consequences beyond the situation. We do this by using materials and limiting courses of action (via rules) that contain excessive consequentiality (boxing gloves and rules) or have little consequentiality to begin with (marbles, coin-tossing). Or we devise materials and actions that representationally stand in for bodily ones (as in most board and video games). But once we do so, we have all the problems of symbolic action at our hands: We have to ensure that participants fashion actions and communications in an observably orderly manner such that they become intelligible as actions and communications – game moves – of a certain kind

in relation to the gaming encounter and its specific game rules; we have to ensure that deception is minimised; and we have to ensure that participants 'stand by' their deed. Says Goffman:

Now the central question can be put: what system of enforcement is employed to ensure that the game will be played in the right 'spirit,' that is, that once the player makes a move, he will abide by his action and not, for example, change his mind in mid-play or withdraw his bet or refuse to let go of it, or claim he is not 'really' playing, or tip the table over? (Goffman 1969: 121)

The answer he gives to this 'central question' is mostly a material one: our standard "equipment games" such as checkers, bridge, craps, and the like' offer 'game resources' materially designed in such a way that they minimise these issues as much as possible (Goffman 1969: 120). Mutually observable and intelligible objects and actions co-constitute and reaffirm the frame-specific meaning and use:

In casinos the table layout is such that how much is bet, what outcome the bet is committed to, and what the outcome actually is, are all crystal clear and easily witnessed. The layouts of the various games also ensure that the player will have physically let go of, and ecologically separated himself from, the money or chips he bets. At the same time, dealer behavior is designed to affirm that bets have denominational, not monetary, value – mere counters differing from one another only in terms of the number of counters the casino must match up against them. (Goffman 1969: 122-3)

In fact, the symbolic meanings of game moves cannot exist but in materialised form, as embodied acts or material objects – unless the game is played as an internalised simulation by one sole actor inside her head. The moment gaming involves actual interaction with an object, or another actor with whom shared meaning must be communicatively accomplished, some objects and/or bodily movements are required, and actors have to deal with the given affordances of their environment relative to their own dispositions to get the gaming going and communicate its meanings:

Even when to persons play checkers by keeping the board in their heads, they will still have to convey information concerning moves, this exchange requiring physical competent, willful use of the voice in speech or the hand in writing. ... Thus each play in checkers involves two radically different bases for guidance: one pertains to quite physical matters – to the physical management of the vehicle, not the sign; the other pertains to the very social world of opposing positions that the play has generated, wherein a move can equally well be made by voice, gesture, or the mails, or by physically shifting a checker by the fist, any combination of fingers, or the right elbow. (Goffman 1986: 23-4)

Yet the material game equipment on its own neither constitutes its meaning and use, nor suffices to enforce rule-abiding action. Take casino chips, which have at least *two* frame-specified meanings: one within a gaming instance of, say, roulette, indicating what bets a player makes, and another within the casino framing at large, namely, a monetary exchange value. In their very design, the chips facilitate and stabilise these framings: to make a bet, a player can and has to physically let go of a chip in a highly mutually visible way; chips are produced in a fashion that makes them hard to fabricate, and their different game and monetary values are easy to read for 'normal' (expectably healthy and socialised) individuals. Yet they become intelligible and usable as game resources (or stores of monetary value) only through the actors' constitutive framing in the situation. Participants have to actively frame the chips in a mutually intelligible manner as 'being placed as a game token during an ongoing game of roulette' (rather than 'putting them out of your hands to take out a handkerchief'). Place the very same chips

into the hands of some children in a culture that knows nothing of casinos or roulette, and they will be constituted as something very different. Similarly, the casino chips have to be framed in a mutually intelligible manner as 'exchangeable into cash'. This happens, for example, through cashiers at the casino entrance who verbally assure us when we hand in bank notes and receive chips that they will do the reverse later. It happens through the cashiers' pointing to some papers hanging on the wall behind them, stating the casino's terms of service and probably, the respective state law 'ensuring' the exchangeability of chips and money. It happens through our trust that we would have heard from others or the media if the casino cashiers had not upheld that promise. And it happens through our trust that it is in the economic interest of the casino to uphold that trust. In private gambling, we have to trust and signal trustworthiness as morally self-regarding actors socialised into 'the standards of sportsmanship and fair play' (Goffman 1969: 123), held in check by our fear over a loss of reputation, but more importantly, avoiding the embarrassment and shame of acting in a fashion we ourselves consider morally disreputable. In this, games reflect the basic fact of the interaction order that it is not upheld by individuals out of rational self-interest maximisation, but by the 'organizational necessity' (Goffman 1969: 130) that for interaction to function, we *must* trust each other to be benign, aware, morally self-regarding actors.

The decoupling of game outcomes from irreversible consequence brings about a second endemic challenge: if gaming feels *too* safe, it can lose the sought-after attentive absorption, emotional arousal, and relevancy for self-regard that is naturally brought about by fateful action with intrinsically linked consequence. In order to actually engross and signal character, the central challenge of gaming encounters – and the central norm accommodating for that challenge – is that participants *must and ought to* treat the outcome as relevant for themselves, even if it is in fact rendered symbolically and materially inconsequential: 'In games for fun the parties must start with the shared sentiment that winning within the rules is desirable and significant... The real problem of enforcement in fun-only games is not that of a commitment to a particular move made, but rather that of involvement in the world of the game; once this involvement is ensured, then the serious taking of moves follows' (Goffman 1969: 143-4). To function, a gaming encounter not only requires 'playing by the rules' and constituting the symbolic meanings of game moves and game entities, but also visibly caring for the outcome.

The third and final issue is *gameworthiness*. In many everyday interactions, as assumed by economics and mathematic game theory, people engage in 'rational decision-making' (Goffman 1969: 86). That is, they strategically calculate how to maximise their gains in the situation. However, in such gamelike interactions, there are 'normative limitations on pure gaming – limitations which ideal games themselves help to point out' (Goffman 1969: 113). In almost all social encounters, hiding your own goals and intentions, bluffing and backstabbing, remaining cool and detached in the face of another's frustration or anger, not giving 'a second chance'

are morally devalued. Economists view strategic interaction as the ‘normal case’ of human action, with social norms creating ‘weird’ deviances. For the sociologist, strategic action is the weird deviation from the norm of normed social action. To provide us with the desired experience of safe action, gaming encounters require the *special* social license that the self-interest driven scheming that is reproachable almost anywhere else is actively endorsed and valued as positive and appropriate. This license Goffman called ‘gameworthiness’,

the intellectual proclivity to assess all possible courses of action and their consequences, and to do this from the point of view of all the contesting parties; the practice of setting aside all personal feelings and all impulsive inclinations in assembling the situation and in following a course of action; the ability to think and act under pressure without becoming either flustered or transparent; the capacity to refrain from indulging in current displays of wit and character at the expense of long-term interests; and, of course, the ability and willingness to dissemble about anything, even one’s own capacities as a gamesman. (Goffman 1969: 96-7)

Acting rationally is a special condition, a special situation with special social norms. The general social norm is to abide by the special norms of the given situation. As Goffman (1983a: 29-30) notes with regard to the norms of rational speech: ‘More specifically, if the participants can assume that their purpose is solely to use talk in the rational, efficient, instrumental pursuance of some joint enterprise – and presumably this happens occasionally – then something like the Gricean conversational maxims (or rather, admonishments) will apply, establishing normative, not merely cognitive, standards for the exchange of relevant information. What we find in these cases is that cognitive requirements for sustaining staccato, machine-readable communication are underwritten as part of the considerateness the participants owe one another in the circumstances’. Similarly, participants in a gaming encounter owe to each other to be rational self-interest maximisers when it comes to the game goal. To *not* do so would be a moral and cognitive affront, expressed in the ill-hidden contempt of ‘power gamers’ for the ‘casual gamer’ who is primarily there for the occasion to socialise.

It is an open question how and why certain social situations (like business negotiations) but not others entail norms of pure strategic interaction or ‘gameworthiness’, and what happens when conceptual languages, semiotic materials, and design features of games get applied to other, non-game contexts, as in the case of ‘gamification’ (Deterding et al. 2011). Sport ethicists Shields and Bredemeier (2008) conjecture that applying metaphors of competitive sport to another domain (like politics) invites adopting the ‘moral latitude’ or the ‘game reasoning’ entailed in sports. The everyday phrase for taking a ‘gameworthy’ stance towards an activity that is socially deemed to be couched in wider moral concerns is ‘gaming the system’: instances where individuals take a strategic, goal-oriented, gameful attitude. There is some evidence that gaming the system usually occurs in circumstances with clear formalised rules, metrics, and goals, in short, in (incidentally) gamelike interactions like testing and grading in education, public service regulation through metrics and targets, organisational key performance indicators, or financial speculation (see e.g. Campbell 1979, Rieley 2001, Bevan & Hood 2006, Baker 2011, Bay, Sjödn & McGoun 2011), as well as in gamified systems that intentionally struc-

ture interactions in a gameful manner (e.g. Werbach & Hunter 2012: 117-119). In short, there are interesting pointers towards an interaction between the material configuration of interactions in a gamelike manner and their keying (in epistemic and normative terms) as a gaming encounter involving the norms of gameworthiness. However, this matter is far beyond the scope of the present study. The one thing we have to add to Goffman's articulation of gameworthiness as *the* normative signature of gaming is sportsmanship as its counterpart or wider umbrella (Shields & Bredemeier 1995). As we will see in the empirical part, leisurely (video) gaming is characterised not so much by pure gameworthiness as a particular balancing of self-regarding, game-invested norms of gameworthiness and other-regarding, game-detached norms of shared enjoyment.

Summary and Conclusions

Games can be understood as the socio-material institutionalisation of naturally occurring gamelike (fateful and problematic) interactions into the civilised frame of gaming, providing a voluntary safe action. This institutionalisation involves three interlocking aspects: (1) organising interaction into a reliable, repeatable source of action, (2) ensuring its safety, and (3) accommodating for the resulting problems of symbolic action.

1. Games and gaming arrange interactions into a form that optimally supports getting engrossed and demonstrating skill and character in facing fate. For this, (a) interaction is articulated into a 'closed resource', one single web of maximally interdependent actions and effects all channeled into one final, singular outcome; (b) actions and effects are compressed into the spatiotemporal bounds of one single encounter; (c) actions and effects are made mutually visible and clear for all participants; (d) the problematicness or contingency of the outcome is amplified by both excluding any effect on the outcome beyond skill and desired randomness, and balancing the skills and random events to ensure suspenseful uncertainty of the outcome ideally until the last moment.

2. Games and gaming minimise the irreversible bodily and symbolic consequences of gamelike interactions into still-engrossing 'slight' consequences by (a) decoupling the material outcome of the interaction from the socially decided-upon payoff, (b) allowing only actions and objects with little risk of serious consequences, often by (c) replacing them with ritualised, symbolic, representational stand-ins.

3. This symbolic decoupling results in the familiar issues of the underspecification of symbolic action, which is resolved by (a) material game equipment that maximises mutually accountable visibility of game moves, (b) socialisation into and situational enactment of the requisite norms to 'play by the rules', including (c) the normative demand to be accountably involved in and care for the game outcome despite its 'slight' consequence, and (d) the norma-

tive license and demand to be gameworthy – to act in a strategic, self-interest maximising manner with regard to the game outcome.

In his analysis of this three-pronged institutionalisation of games, Goffman sports a surprisingly sharp eye for the role of material objects and settings – of electrical foils and casino tables. Yet in the same sweep, he is unsurprisingly blind to processuality: how those norms of playing by the rules, caring for outcomes, and acting gameworthy are socially institutionalised and situationally enacted, how the symbolic meaning of actions, communications, and game objects as ‘tokens’ is established in the moment. Although ‘Fun in Games’ (Goffman 1972) and *Frame Analysis* (1986) have a lot to say about *what* the written and unwritten rules of games are by which ‘a field for fateful dramatic action, a plane of being, an engine of meaning’ (Goffman 1972: 25) is constituted, they remain silent about the very process. This blind spot, as it turns out, is something Goffman shares with the current formalist study of games. To fill it in, the following section will first outline and critique the currently predominant understanding of rules in game studies, to then present an account of the enactment and institutionalisation of the ground rules of games from informal childhood games to today’s algorithmic implementation in video games.

4.3 Games and Rules: From Formal Objects to Situational Processes

If there is one certainty in game studies, it is that games involve rules. Many think the formal orderliness resulting from rules is what sets games apart from (or makes them a subset of) playing or playfulness (Caillois 2001: 27-35, Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 73). Some go so far as to equate games and rules: ‘Every game is its rules, for they are what define it’ (Parlett 2005). But in classic and contemporary definitions of games, rules are a defining criterion (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 73-80; Juul 2005: 29-43).

Sociologically, however, rules is what makes games so much *a part of* – and not set apart from – everyday life. From parliaments to bedtime, we organise our lives with rules. The very social reality around us, its institutions and meanings and practices, result from our constant reproduction of ‘constitutive orders’ (Warfield Rawls 2011) or ‘constitutive rules’ (Rawls 1955). This latter concept for any game scholar immediately resonates with Salen and Zimmerman’s (2004: 130) distinction of three levels of game rules⁶⁰: *constitutive rules*, the logical and mathematical ‘underlying formal structures’ of a game; *operational rules*, the written-out rules that guide players in gaming; and *implicit rules*, the ‘unwritten rules’ of ‘etiquette, good sportsmanship, and other implied rules of proper game behavior’. Constitutive rules describe ‘sets of logical relationships that are not necessarily embodied in a material form or in a set of behavioral guidelines for the player’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 132). Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 135) argue that together with the operational rules that proscribe ‘the material way the

⁶⁰ See Järvinen 2003, Parlett 2005 for alternative game rule typologies.

players experience that logic', constitutive rules define the 'unique formal identity' of a game. In computer games, the constitutive rules are often 'contained directly in the code in some fashion' (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 149).

Despite the phonetic similarity, sociology's constitutive orders and Salen and Zimmerman's constitutive rules are polar opposites: their three levels of rules provide an almost exact mirror image of the conception of rules and rule-following in structuralism, structural functionalism, and cognitivism (which is not surprising, given their background in semiotics and systems theory). Like Claude Lévi-Strauss or Noam Chomsky, the idea is that beneath the various 'surface structures' (operational rules) of cultures and grammars (games), a 'deep structure' (constitutive rules) can be made out. We never get to see this deep structure as it is always translated for us in production (playing) of the concrete surface structure (operative rules, interface), but scholars (designers) can reconstruct it. As in Parsonian structural functionalism, the actions individuals take – which are constituted by the 'grammar' of the game – are then constrained by normative rules of ethical conduct (implicit rules). It also turns out – as early cognitive science would have it – that computers are uniquely suited to model, implement, and automate rule execution (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 88-9). What Salen and Zimmerman do with 'rules', then, is to replicate structuralist and cognitivist notions of rule-following since questioned by ethnomethodology, practice theory, embodied cognitive sciences, and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy. They create a representational abstraction (their mental and written or diagrammed representations of 'constitutive rules', in mathematical or other notation), to then reify and re-project this representation as the underlying 'formal identity' being somehow 'expressed' or 'translated' in the 'operational rules' (again a written representation), which somehow 'guide' player behaviour.

To their credit, Salen and Zimmerman (2004) continually stress that their formalist approach is driven more than anything by their interest in *designing* games. *Rules of Play* presents three 'schemata' – rules, play, and culture – as various disciplinary lenses for looking at games, readily accepting that there are more possible approaches (cf. Zimmerman 2012). Useful as the formalist conception of rules and rule-following is for *designing* games, it is fundamentally misleading when it comes to *sociologically understanding* how human beings make, use, and follow rules in gaming games. To quickly reiterate the main points of Chapter Two connected to Salen and Zimmerman's model:

1. The notion of 'implicit rules' of etiquette guiding the choice and performance of actions in games ignores that actions first have to be constituted as actions of a certain kind in a mutually intelligible form. Apart from following the specific rules of the game, first we have to constitute that what we are doing is 'playing a game'. These 'unwritten rules' are not a secondary additive – they are foundational for gaming.

2. 'Interpreting', 'understanding', 'following' an operational rule is the practical know-how to 'go on', what possible next moves one can make that is evaluated by the group as 'following the rule': the meaning of a rule is its use; it does not 'guide' it.

3. The individual 'knowledge' of operative rules is a complex of dispositions, not a representation of a formula. Having a mental or materialised representation of a rule is neither necessary nor sufficient for following it. Conceiving of 'rule understanding' as 'having a rule representation' that doesn't at a certain point disperse into 'what the embodied, situated system of dispositions does' leads to an infinite regress of little homunculi in which the 'understanding power' is magically localised instead of explained.

4. Because action and understanding are always situated and indexical, rules are dispositional resources, not executable programs. The fact that we can program game rules as algorithms always implies that there is a human programmer understanding and writing this program, a human operator stabilising the material environment around the computer such that the input-output environment will pre-fit the algorithmic model, and a human user making sense of the outputs. In working with software and in video gaming, we humans do the symbol grounding work for the computers.

5. Rules are constitutive and reflexive, practical and normative. To separate out 'explicit operational rules' from 'implicit etiquette rules' ignores that following the operational rules is itself already a normative demand of 'gaming a game.' Both explicit and implicit game rules are embodied practical understandings and things that can be made subject to reflexive awareness and discursive indication. We can argue about not playing nicely and not playing by the rules.

6. Rules are self-ordering particulars; they do not exist separate from particulars. There are no 'constitutive rules', 'operational rules', or 'implicit rules' existing separate from what embodied players do with material game equipment. Speaking of a 'formal identity' of a game independent of its material instantiations is an instance of misplaced concreteness.

So if we want to get a sociological, frame analytic understanding of rules and rule-following in games, we cannot start from the formalist understanding of game rules, nor from rules as implemented in computer programs as our conceptual model. Rather, we have to work our way from the constitutive orders of situated action 'upwards' towards formalised rule representations and their computational implementation, to see how rule-following in gaming is impacted by formalisation and computerisation. We have to start at the beginning – with the informal games of children.

Informal Games

In everyday life, in the course of our socialisation, we must learn how to constitute and recognise actions like 'greeting', 'apologising', 'bicycling', and so on in a mutually intelligible manner. This is non-optional and for the most part happens unaware. In gaming, this constitutive

social ordering gets *doubled*, only in an intentional, voluntary, contrived manner. If in a LARP we declare a fly flap is a 'sceptre', we repeat what we previously did with a lump of plastic when we declared it a 'fly flap'. If in *Settlers of Catan* we declare that this piece of cardboard is 'worth 1 wool resource', we repeat what we have learned to do with a piece of printed paper we collectively consider to be 'worth \$20'. This fascinated social theorists from Mead to Rawls, from Garfinkel to Goffman to Searle about games, and made them use games as petri dishes, analogies, or even developmental explanations for this basic social process of constitutive ordering.

What people do when they make up 'games', then, is that they intentionally craft an interlocking system of *secondary* constitutive rules, transforming existing behaviours and materials into a new interlocking system of mutually intelligible and normatively charged *entities*, their *states*, and *actions* that can change the states of entities.⁶¹ In the game of Tag, touching somebody becomes 'tagging somebody', but only if 'you're it'; that is, if you were chronologically the last person to be thus 'tagged'. Being 'tagged' and being 'it' are mutually constituted as 'bad', undesirable events and states, so your sole purpose is to avoid 'being tagged' when you're not 'it', and to 'tag' somebody else when you are. You *must* put visible effort into avoiding being 'tagged' and trying to 'tag', because otherwise your actions stop being intelligible as belonging to this new situated activity system. You constitute it with the others in acting in an observably orderly manner that is mutually intelligible as intended to constitute just these new actions and entities and states in their relevancies. If the person who is 'it' sat down and started watching the clouds, she would be reprimanded by the others that she is 'not playing right'. Sitting down to watch clouds makes no sense against the constitutive order of the game of Tag, but it also practically interrupts the flow of activities that constitutes the activity system. The constitutive rules of such 'informal games' of children are usually – like the constitutive orders of everyday life – instructed, learned by doing, carried less by mental representations of 'the rules' than an embodied understanding of 'what to do' when you're 'it' (or not). At most, participants say 'you're not doing it right, *let me show you how to do it*.' Because of their informal nature, constitutive rules are constantly shifting, decided by the participants present on the ground. They are not decided by interpreting the written formulation of a rule, but directly by the others judging whether what one did one could legitimately do. Rules are built up as shared understandings of permissible and desirable actions that everyone observed someone else doing.⁶² We all learned early games like Tag or Tic-Tac-Toe without written instructions or somebody explaining abstract entities and relations. We are *shown how to do it*. Abstract repre-

⁶¹ I am drawing here on Juul (2005: 59-61); an analogy to Searle (2006) is intended, though 'entities', 'states', and 'actions' should not be understood as abstract logical propositions or state machines strictly speaking. It is merely a useful analogy for describing what constitutive ordering (Warfield Rawls 2011) does.

⁶² I am drawing here on Goodwin's (2006) conversation analytic studies of young girls constituting games of Hopscotch and skip rope. See Hughes 1999, 2005 for detailed analyses of the practical accomplishment and implied skills in Foursquare. See Davidson 2010 on young children's practical accomplishment of 'video gaming', and Hung 2011 and Stevens, Satwicz & McCarthy 2008 on learning 'video gaming'.

sentations of rules and relations, or reflexive reasoning about them (e.g. understanding the principle strategy of winning Tic-Tac-Toe) come secondary.

The Unwritten Rules of 'Playing a Game'

In the course of learning how to play our first informal (and later formal) games, we presumably also learn an essential set of further constitutive rules, namely *how to recognise and act in an observably orderly manner that is mutually intelligible and normatively appropriate as 'playing a game'*. Following Mead, it is likely that these general constitutive rules are secondary generalisations from learning how to play multiple specific games. We learn, for instance, that we ought to make sure we don't seriously hurt each other. We learn that we ought to make sure everyone is 'having a good time' – because our parents scold us when we don't, and for the selfish reason that our play partners sulking or running away practically ends the activity we just enjoyed.⁶³ As a consequence, we learn that it is legitimate to complain that a game is not enjoyable, but that one should then suggest something else that is 'fun' to not just interrupt the flow of things, because then the others don't like you and call you a 'spoilsport'. We learn that we should not 'cheat', because then the gaming becomes boringly easy for you and boringly unwinnable for the others, and because then winning or losing doesn't really say something about your skills. We learn that we should give the game our full attention. We learn that we should be a 'good loser'; that is, regulate our (displayed) emotions after losing, because otherwise 'the other kids/mum and dad/I will not want to play with you again'. And so on.⁶⁴ This is what Sniderman (1999) has called the 'Unwritten Rules of Games'. As noted, these unwritten rules (and Sniderman's essay) have often been reduced to a social 'additive' of etiquette, sportsmanship, and fair play that explains not how to play, but how to play *nicely*. Their constitutive ordering gets overlooked. This is a pity because Sniderman's essay is deeply aware of these issues, noting that the rules that enable us to play games are 'unstatable' (he doesn't say 'tacit' or 'embodied', but that is what his explanations amounts to). His list of 'what we must know and do to play the simplest game in our culture' (Sniderman 1999: 3) is worth quoting in full. We must, he writes,

1. 'intuitively understand what is meant by *play* in our culture, recognize how it differs from other activities, and be able to tell when someone is involved in the behaviors associated with play in general and games in particular;
2. intuitively understand what *game/sport* is being played, which behaviors constitute part of that activity and which do not, when the activity is underway, when it is in suspension, and when it is concluded;
3. consciously understand and pursue the *object(s)* of the game (i.e., what we must accomplish to be 'successful');

⁶³ We cannot get an enjoyable game going without the others willingly participating and enjoying themselves, at least not for very long – as Goffman (1972) notes, that requires others who are either very lonely, very ambitious, or very polite, and that degree of self-controlled forfeiture of immediate joy for a strategic secondary intention you usually only find in adults.

⁶⁴ See Pellegrini 2009, Konner 2010, Berg, Mann & Ogan 2006 on pretend and rule play developing and requiring self-regulation, theory of mind, etc.

4. consciously understand and follow all (or at least a large majority of) the defining *prescriptions* and *proscriptions* of the game, the ‘written’, statable rules—i.e., what we must and must not do in the course of pursuing the object or objects;
5. consciously understand and follow the *etiquette* of the game—i.e., the unwritten but sometimes stated traditions associated with the game that do not necessarily affect the play itself (e.g., appropriateness of talking, gloating, taunting, celebrating, stalling, replaying a point, giving advice to your opponent or teammates, letting players take back moves, etc.);
6. intuitively understand and follow the *ethos* of that particular game—i.e., the unwritten and rarely expressed assumptions about how to interpret and enforce the ‘written’ rules (e.g., palming in basketball; the strike zone in American and National Leagues; the footfault in tennis);
7. intuitively understand and follow the *conventions* of playing any game according to the culture of the participants—i.e., the unwritten and generally unstatable customs related to playing, competing, winning/losing, etc. (e.g., taking the game with the appropriate seriousness, knowing what takes priority over winning and over playing, not faking injury or personal obligation to avoid losing; playing ‘hard’ regardless of the score; not claiming that previous points didn’t ‘count’);
8. intuitively understand and respond to the ‘real-life’ *context* in which the game is being played—i.e. the social, cultural, economic, political, and moral consequences of the result (e.g., whether someone’s livelihood or self-esteem depends on the outcome).

The last item – the relation of game and context – has also been called the ‘gaming rules’ of games (Hughes 1999), or ‘external dynamics’ (Linderoth 2004: 260) – what we specified as the *gearing into the world*. There is little left to add to this list. One minor issue is that it unnecessarily duplicates things: understanding ‘what play is’ and how to recognise it (#1) is having the practical capacity to produce and recognise its ‘conventions’ (#7), as well as all the other points. Like any constitutive rule^T, these are normative and epistemic; acting in relation to them not only allows one to give symbolic regards that one is a ‘good sportsman’ (or ignore them and be labeled ‘unsportsmanlike’). They make our actions intelligible *as* ‘playing a game’. To use Sniderman’s (1999: 2) example: if A continued waiting an ‘unduly’ time after the move of B in a game of Tic-Tac-Toe, B might first (against the constitutive rules of ‘playing a game’) interpret this as focused concentration. If A would not fixate her gaze on the Tic-Tac-Toe board (another constitutive rule of ‘playing a game’), B might interpret that as distraction. If A didn’t respond to B’s words ‘Hey, are you dreaming?’ and continued waiting, after a certain time B would run out of viable interpretations that explained A’s inaction as part of ‘playing the game’. *These constitutive rules of ‘playing a game in general’, we can say, are the frame knowledge, the central dispositional component of the ‘playing’ and ‘gaming’ frames of a social group.* Learning to play games, like learning to pretend play, means learning how to *intentionally* constitute new kinds of social actions and entities in the world. Game play is a *reflexive, duplicated* form of meaning-making (Mead), ritualisation (Goffman), or constitutive ordering (Garfinkel). To ‘play a game’ means to both (a) act in a way intelligible as following the constitutive rules of the specific game in question, and (b) act in a way intelligible as ‘playing a game’ more generally.

To give an example: For my actions to be considered intelligible and appropriate as ‘playing chess’, I need to move the figures in a way that instantiates the constitutive rules of chess. I must not, for instance, arrange all chess pieces in a military parade marching diagonally across the board (that would be intelligible as ‘playing *with* chess’, but not ‘playing *a game of* chess’). I must not move a bishop like a knight, or indeed I could, as long as I render my devia-

tion intelligible as accidental-but-fully-acknowledging-the-rules (e.g. retracting the bishop with the words ‘Sorry, I don’t know what I was thinking, I’m pretty stressed at work right now’). But the moment I move the bishop like a knight and remain unfazed if challenged, proclaiming ‘I don’t know what you want, this is how I learned to play Bingo’, I not only break the rules of chess, I *breach* them: I no longer intelligibly play chess. Beyond these specific constitutive rules of chess, I also have to act intelligible as ‘playing a game’. If I would sit in front of the chessboard texting on my smartphone, not paying attention to the fact that my opponent had made her move, that would not only be considered rude, but also allow the legitimate question: ‘Are you even playing chess with me anymore?’ Doing the same bodily movements with the smartphone but verbally pre-announcing one’s actions as looking up a special chess rule would be perfectly intelligible and appropriate as part of our playing chess, even if I was just as distracted for just as long.

Formal Games: Institutionalising Rule Representations

The example of chess brings us to the next matter, namely the specific features of *formal games* (Parlett 1999: 3) like chess, poker, or *Monopoly* (Parker Brothers 1935). Formal games *stabilise* the constitutive rules made up and sustained on the go in an informal game in a *formalised rule representation*, for example a written-out rulebook. However, once you abstract constitutive rules learned on the ground as ‘how to go on in practice’ into a rule *representation*, the under-specification of symbolic meaning becomes an issue. You *necessarily* will get into debates ‘how to understand this rule’, ‘what this rule means in this circumstance’ because again, ultimately, the meaning of *any* rule is the practical capacity to ‘go on’ that is mutually intelligible within a community as ‘following the rule’. Building up this mutual intelligibility is what we observe in action in informal games: it is all there is, and it is enough. For this reason, no formalised representation of game rules *can in principle* fully specify how to be put into practice – how to follow it; its meaning is the enacted attitudes (what it makes sense to do next) it calls forth in us as confirmed by the others when we act. As Sniderman (1999: 6) puts this general Wittgensteinian point, you cannot appeal to written meta-rules to solve disputes over written rules, because that just generates an infinite regress.

Yet in the same breath that formalised rule representations create the problem of rule interpretation, they also stabilise the constitutive rules by creating ‘immutable mobiles’ (Latour 2005: 223), objects with inscriptions that can travel across time and space to figure in different situations and organise them, to the extent that all participants mutually acknowledge it as the ‘last resort’ in any dispute how to go on: it’s not A’s word versus B’s; it’s what the rules written on this piece of paper ‘say’. *In effect*, the participant’s shared agreement how to go on is *always* the final resort, because that is all any interpretation of the inscriptions can generate as meaning, and because the inscriptions in and of themselves cannot exert any material force on

the players (see also Taylor 2012: 57). This gets practically foregrounded if the participants can't make sense of the written rule, or have no written version handy, and two persons have diverging memories 'what the rules say'. This agreement process may happen up front (as I remember from innumerable billiard matches where players quickly discuss how to treat sinking the white ball, etc., *given so many divergent practices across players with whom I came in contact*), or mid-course: During one billiard game mid-game, a player who played the white ball sunk one of 'his' half balls, but did so without directly touching a half ball with his white ball first, which according to my rule understanding was not permitted, but as he demonstrated to me in going on readying himself to play the next ball, he tacitly assumed that this was perfectly permissible play. Spoken language is now usually involved: When a problematic situation occurs, adults *discuss* the rules, either their own mental representations or written representations. Still, *having* a formal representation of the rules (mental or materialised) does not mean *understanding* the rules. People can and do start playing formal games without knowing all the rules (Taylor 2012: 56) – usually if there is at least one person in the group who practically understands 'how to play'. In board games, people say they have 'understood' the rules if they practically know what next actions they now can take, and this understanding then gets verbally affirmed by the others when they make a move that for the others constitutes 'following the rules'. Similarly, players get reprimanded by the others that they 'have not understood the rule' if they take an action that the others consider as not 'following the rules', or more broadly, if they see an action that is permissible but nonsensical or disadvantageous for the player given the rules.

The fact that formal games can be and often are played without a rulebook highlights that formal games are stabilised not only in written rule representations, but also in the *game equipment* and the *community of people* who have learned how to play the game (who carry the requisite dispositions). I learned how to play chess without ever consulting a rulebook in the course, and so did many others. Conversely, learning chess from a rulebook, but without any chessboard or chess pieces (or any visual representation of them in the rulebook) or any person knowing how to play chess would be a daring undertaking. The rule representations get specified and grounded in the sensually accessible game equipment to which they refer. Similarly, the game equipment provides ready-made, optimised material anchors for the constituted actions and states and entities of a running game session. If we had to mutually constitute a gaming of *Settlers of Catan* (Kosmos 1995) just in our heads, mentally representing all the entities and their current states, this would be a practically impossible feat.⁶⁵ We could try to assemble it from materials lying around, constituting 'land tiles' from paper napkins of various

⁶⁵ You could counter that claim by referencing Stefan Zweig's *Chess Novella*, but that only goes to show that too much un-offloaded mental representations will drive you mad. Also, *Settlers of Catan* has asymmetric information states between players, which would force you to mentally 'un-know' what resource cards your opponents have in their hands, or trust that they would not mentally conjure and change cards as fits their course of action.

colours, ‘roads’ from pens, ‘settlements’ from coins and so on, but this would likewise unquestionably create constant problems (‘What was this ... candleholder supposed to represent again?’). The expectably similar form of game equipment allows us to learn to associate equipment pieces and constituted game entities. This is ideally supported by the game equipment iconically mimicking the constituted entities they instantiate (a ‘wool resource’ in *Settlers of Catan* is represented by a card with the drawing of a sheep – what Juul (2005: 176) calls ‘Fiction Cueing Rules’). Thus, game equipment can enable and stabilise the constitution of games with much greater complexity than informal games. It interacts with our dispositions to facilitate the practical understanding what to do next. In this, board and card games are all instances of highly distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995, Holland, Hutchins & Kirsh 2000) – or distributed constitution, if you will.

Institutionalisation happens when the many little social clusters and chains of players of a game connect over time and space (via conventions or media), creating co-orientation across groups about ‘how to play’ (cf. Sniderman 1999: 7, Parlett 2005). From this process, certain people and rule representations can become mutually acknowledged and practically drawn upon as the *authoritative* arbiters of last resort about ‘how to go on’, perhaps growing from the interest to organise space and time-spanning tournaments and competitions whose satisfactory flow requires that all participants from the diversity of playing groups have a co-oriented understanding how to play. Enter ‘bibles’, official rules, societies, associations, and the like. Together, stabilisation in materialised inscriptions and game equipment, and institutionalisation in interlinked, co-ordinated communities *produce* the *repeatability* that is considered a defining feature of formal games (e.g. Juul 2005: 45, Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 139).

One upshot is that we should never mistake the *formalised representation* of a game’s rules for ‘the game’ as a whole, or believe that the rules ‘in and of themselves’ could exist or would specify what they ‘mean’. This would again be an instance of misplaced concreteness. An experienced gamer, game scholar, or game designer may find it easy and useful to interact with formalised rule representations, but invisible to her, this always already implies herself as the human counterpart of the relation giving the perceived representations relevance, specifying their meaning.⁶⁶ ‘Games’, like any other social entity, are human-environment relations. The formalised rules of chess do not exist beyond their material instantiations, and they mean nothing without humans who can read them and relate what they read to their general understanding what ‘playing a game’ is and to a material chess set (or imagined/perceived visual representation thereof). But within the bundle of people and chess pieces and rule books, formal-

⁶⁶ Juul (2005: 45) notes more subtly that games are ‘in actuality’ always ‘upheld’ materially or by people, but then also (Juul 2005: 11) suggests one could ‘look exclusively at the games “themselves,” while ignoring the fact that they are played by people’. I do not want to construct a strong straw man opposition here. I just wish to emphasize that formalist descriptions of games – useful as they are, and despite the fact that I engage in them just as often – naturalize the reification of games as existing separate from material and processual reality, and the backgrounding of their inescapable human-environment relationality.

ised rule representations do significant, essential *constitutive work*. It is unlikely that chess would be played in a recognisably similar manner across the world without millions of co-organised, co-organising written representations of chess rules.

Furthermore, to the extent we can say there is *one* chess, it is because of the historical, practical achievement of institutionalising a co-orientation of the different player communities' practical understandings 'how to play chess', and the different material chessboards and pieces, through formalised rule representations and people socially established as delivering their authoritative exegesis, and standards and blueprints and specifications and mass productions of chess sets. If a fundamental rift in the chess world were to occur over a rule, leading to a split of the Fédération internationale des échecs into two competing bodies with two differing rulings, the question 'which ruling is the true chess?' would be nonsensical. There would now simply be *two* vast actor-object bundles of chess who do standardising, stabilising, institutionalising work across the *innumerable* particular practical understandings of how to play it, and the *innumerable* particular chess sets out there.

Distinguishing Game Objects and Situational Framing

Once specific game objects and settings become institutionalised, the systematic possibility emerges that actors situationally engage with them in other than the institutionally intended ways – actors may enrol game objects and settings in other framings than gaming.

This seemingly straightforward observation brings us to another conceptual issue of current formalist game definitions, namely that the abstraction of 'games' into quasi-Platonic entities fails to distinguish between games as stable objects versus gaming as a specific situational process, framing, or activity. Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 73-80) survey eight definitions of 'games' (including Huizinga and Suits who are explicitly talking about 'play' or 'playing a game', not 'games'), four of which explicitly define playing or games as an *activity*, not an object. Huizinga (1955: 7): 'First and foremost then, all play is a voluntary activity'. Caillois (2001: 9): 'the preceding analysis permits play to be defined as an activity'. Abt (1970: 6): 'Reduced to its formal essence, a game is an *activity*' (emphasis in original). Suits (2005: 34): 'To play a game is to engage in activity'.

In contrast, Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 80) state: 'A *game* is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome'. This flips the anchor point of the definition from an activity into the (abstract) object 'system', to then add on activity: 'in which players engage'. Juul's (2005: 36) definition repeats the same pattern. First he defines games as systems, then he sneaks player activity back in: 'A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotia-

ble'. Assigning values, exerting effort, feeling attached, negotiating consequence: All these are activities or temporal states of actors, not stable properties of the game as an object.

To be sure, Juul later readily acknowledges that "game" can mean two things: A static object or artifact or an activity or event that players perform' (Juul 2005: 43):

the game *as an object* is a list of rules with the property that a computer or a group of players can implement unambiguously: the rules must – if implemented – produce variable and quantifiable outcomes and describe how the player(s) can exert effort. The game must provide a description of which outcomes are positive and which are negative. The game must explicitly or by convention signal to players that it is an activity with an outcome to which they *should* feel emotionally attached. Finally, the activity that the game describes must have consequences that are negotiable. As an *activity*, a game is a system that changes state according to a set of rules that are implemented by humans, computers, or natural laws. (Juul 2005: 44-5)

In this passage, all that is or involves the activity of a human actor gets pushed into the environment side of the actor-environment relation: 'Unambiguous implementation' becomes a mere 'property' of 'a list of rules' that apparently exist independently. Yet we have seen that 'rules' do not exist beyond bodily dispositions and material features, and that rule-following – the 'unambiguous implementation' – is always a practical accomplishment and collective ascription of a group of actors. In a game of Tag, the 'list of rules' is a secondary formalised representation; it is not the stuff that *constitutes* that game of Tag. Juul states that 'the rules' 'describe how the player[s] can exert effort'. But what if they don't understand that description, or decide not to exert effort? What about the players' bodies and the game equipment – does their relation not articulate what is more or less effortful to begin with? 'The game must provide a description of which outcomes are positive and negative'. But what if the players again are not able to make sense of the description, or decide to set themselves another goal, or to play in a paidic fashion not caring about the valued outcomes inscribed in the game artifact? 'The game must ... signal to players that it is an activity with an outcome to which they *should* feel emotionally attached'. But how can an object evoke a 'should' without taking recourse to moral norms and values of human actors? And how can it ensure that this happens, and the players don't choose otherwise? 'Finally, the activity that the game describes must have consequences that are negotiable'. But what if the players decide to play for life and death?

Similarly, note Juul's abstract conceptualisation of 'activity' as mere state changes of a rule-based system. For an activity to be 'a game', it is apparently not necessary that the participating human actors frame, perceive, understand, experience it as such; it does not even *require* the involvement of human actors at all: for such state changes can be 'implemented by humans, computers, or natural laws'. Where this description works, it works because it secretly sneaks in human actors – namely Juul, the author, and us, the readers – who do the framing, perceiving, understanding, experiencing, and the symbol grounding work in that passage of text. We as readers *understand* Juul's description of goal-oriented, rule-according state changes to be 'gaming' *because* we have been socialised into the frame 'gaming' that allows us to recognise this text passage as a description of the type of situation we call 'gaming'.

In short, any statement of Juul that describes ‘a game’ as an abstract entity or material object without recourse to human practical accomplishments of meaning silently presupposes them. This is not to say that Juul’s description is ‘wrong’. It is incisive and tremendously useful, if only we reconceptualise it from a quasi-ontological description of an object that is, that *constitutes* ‘a game’ *as such* (no human framing required) into the description of an object whose specific configuration results from a frame involving human activity and meaning-making; affords being framed, perceived, understood as ‘a game’; affords being enrolled in a process of gaming by human actors – but also in principle *could* be framed otherwise in any given situation. Likewise, even in Juul’s formalist description of gaming activity as state changes, there is an active process of framing it as ‘gaming’ by human actors: it is going on in our minds as readers.

Thus, both Salen and Zimmerman and Juul define *games* as abstract systems or objects in a way that *backgrounds but still necessarily implies gaming* as a specific situational framing. This presupposed necessary coming-together of the two is fine and unproblematic as long as we deal with ‘canonical’ instances (people gaming a game), but it leaves us in a conceptual pickle the moment the two *don’t* coincide. Yet we can do very many things with game objects besides gaming: We can buy, sell, store, build, or test them. We can use billiard balls as paperweights and soccer stadiums as concert halls. In short, we can enrol game objects and settings in non-game framings. Likewise, we can game with many things besides game objects: sticks and stones, our hands, passing cars on a highway. This is what we usually call ‘informal games’, and in frame analytic terms, gameful keyings. Most importantly, though, *the signature of today’s media convergence and instrumentalisation of games is that this decoupling of game objects and gaming framings becomes empirically more frequent*: Goldfarming enrolls game objects in working, serious games and gamification enrol game objects and features in learning and work and marketing and so on. This observation is not entirely new or genuine to frame analysis. As Bernie deKoven had already noted in 1978: ‘Playing a game is a special condition of both play and games’ (DeKoven 2010/1978, see Makedon 1984 for a similar argument). However, frame analysis does provide principled theoretical grounds for making and studying such a distinction between game objects and settings and the framing of a situation as gaming.

To distinguish the two is not to deny their relationality, nor to localise all activity and meaning-making on the ‘human’ side. Both are part of the overall gaming *frame* that lends game objects a relatively stable meaning in relation to an actor socialised into that frame. *Framing* as an active process is not just face-to-face interaction between human actors (as a dematerialised Symbolic Interactionism would have it): it is grounded in and facilitated and impeded by objects and settings that get enrolled in that total process of framing. Video games would not have come into existence and would not be intelligible as ‘video games’ without the frame of video gaming (and the community carrying it). Conversely, *video gaming* as a framing

is so centrally organised around game hardware and software that it would be hardly possible without it. Also, since video gaming hardware and software are purpose-built for video gaming, they should strongly afford being framed as video gaming (in a suiting situation at large, and to people bringing the requisite dispositions). But they do not *determine* it. When usability testers test a video game, they sit in front of a game device and run game software. In the course, they might repeat the same little section in a game over and over, each time taking screenshots, which is an activity hard to make sense of as ‘video gaming’ (‘Where’s the fun in that?!’, observers might puzzle), but easily intelligible as ‘usability testing’. As will also be seen in the empirical section, interview participants engaged in instrumentalised forms of video game engagement themselves draw a distinction between games as objects and playing as one of multiple possible ways of framing one’s engagement with them. Video game devices and software indeed can afford gaming so strongly that video game journalists unwillingly *downkey* (Goffman 1986: 359) their reviewing activity into ‘primary’ video gaming. But they also recognise that they *ought* not let that happen, which would not be the case if they were ‘just’, ‘directly’ engaged in unkeyed video gaming.

Digital Games: Algorithmic Rule Implementations

To summarise, formal games are socio-material stabilisations and institutionalisations involving player communities, game equipment, and formalised representations of the constitutive rules of a game. Playing any formalised game means to align oneself in a mutually intelligible manner both with the specific constitutive rules of the game and the general constitutive rules of ‘playing a game’. They continue to be reproduced-and-changed as people continue to bring together people, inscriptions, and game equipment in framing encounters as ‘playing game X’.

Now what about video games? A common understanding in game design and game studies is that their very uniqueness consists in the fact that a computer executes all the rules (e.g. Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 88-9, 141; Juul 2005: 48-9, 61-5; Liebe 2008; Calleja 2012; see Taylor 2012: 47-53). The constitutive rules of the game are instantiated fully in the game’s code. T. L. Taylor highlighted an instructive passage in this regard in Adams’s and Rollings’s *Fundamentals of Game Design* (2007: 18, qtd. in Taylor 2012: 49):

Unlike conventional games, video games do not require written rules. The game still *has* rules, but the machine implements and enforces them for the players. The players do not need to even know exactly what the rules are, although they do need instruction about how to play. In most video games, the computer sets the boundaries of the magic circle because player actions are meaningful in the game only if the machine can detect them with its input devices. The computer also determines when the player reaches the goal. It adjudicates victory and defeat if those concepts are programmed into the game.

This passage articulates central features that do set video game play apart from formal and informal non-computerised games, all the while also highlighting how the human side in this relationality gets backgrounded. So what is new about rules in computerised games? In short,

computer games *implement* formalised rule representations of the constitutive rules in an algorithmic form that *materially produces* rule-following outputs in response to rule-following inputs. Algorithmic rules implemented as a computer program are no longer representations that *mean* something: They are material arrangements that *do* something.

1. If we start a chess computer, we human players do not have to remember the rules and be vigilant in enforcing them against our opponent. Moving a piece in a manner not permitted by the constitutive rules of chess programmed into the computer is simply *practically impossible*. Maybe the interface just wouldn't accept an 'illegal' input, maybe one could make the move, and the interface would feed back an error message and undo the illegal move just made. In Lessig's (2006) words: code is law. Unlike merely written-down formalised rule representations, the architecture of software materially enforces rule-conforming action, just as the architecture of a prison materially enforces inmates not leaving it (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 141, Juul 2005: 57-9). The player's *relation* to the game is thus brought back to the state of informal games (or more precisely, toys) where one just gains a practical understanding 'how to go on' by doing and seeing 'what works'. Only now one gets feedback from a computer, not physics or the player community. Whereas feedback of a player community is always contestable ('Blam! You're dead!' 'No, I'm not!'), the computer is (on first sight) as incontestable as physics. As Björk and Holopainen (2005: 15) write: 'Computer games can paradoxically be perceived as less rule-governed, because players do not need to explicitly be taught rules in computer games, they can try numerous actions and activities and learn by experience how the rules in the game work'. This is what Liebe (2008) and Calleja (2012) mean when they say that digital games do not require a 'lusory attitude' (Suits 2005) of willingly accepting the rules of the game, because we cannot choose to accept them or not. This offloading of the 'bookkeeping' work allows computer games to have more complex rules than other formal games.

2. Because the constitutive rules are implemented in the way the algorithms run by the computer relate inputs to outputs, they are often (in comparison to formal board and card games) *blackboxed* (Dunnigan 2000: 74, 345; cf. Deterding 2009d: 34-5). Players who *want* to gain a reflexive, discursive, representational understanding of the computerised game (and not just a practical one) often have to retro-engineer a mental (and/or materialised) model from the input-output relations. Video games usually come with FAQs, help sections, or encyclopaedias built in that offer such rule representations for those interested in gaining a reflexive, discursive understanding – and where they do not, we see the common gamer practice of rule retro-engineering and 'Theorycrafting' (Paul 2011).

3. A computerised game internally generates a state machine that records and processes *all* relevant entities, states, and actions. It is like a game of chess-by-mail, where the two players each have their own material equipment whose organisation instantiates the game entities and their current states (where the figures are on the chessboards), and each move (communicated

by letter) must be translated into a change of game states on both boards. In this image, the computer is one player that generates its own internal, second chessboard. This *duplication* happens because computers do not (until now) produce situated understanding and action. In informal games like Tag, bodies and actions *are* the transformed game entities, enrolled in a process of distributed cognition/constitution. In formal games with one joint focus of attention, the material tokens or props are what is thus enrolled/constituted by players into game entities. Because AI (up until now) does not perceive bodies in space or material tokens on a table, makes sense of the situation, realises it is an instance of ‘playing a game’, realises what this means in terms of a practical understanding of how to constitute the perceived tokens or bodies into game entities – or at least, because this would be a supremely inefficient way of implementing a computer opponent in a game –, an algorithmic model of the game is constructed, with an interface that only accepts inputs that are possible game actions (linked to hardware interfaces that registers players’ bodily actions and translates them into these computational inputs), a data structure that manifests the game’s current state, algorithms that change the data structure based on the inputs, algorithms that compute the reaction of modelled game environments or opponents (which change the internal game state), and algorithms that translate this into an output (linked to hardware interfaces that feed back an output perceivable and intelligible to the human players). Thus, algorithmically implemented rules can *produce* quasi-behavioural outputs (and even emulate strategic decision-making of an opponent) that to the human developers and users ‘follow the rules’ without the computer actually *understanding* and *following* the rules, in the way that human beings have a situated, practical understanding of them (see Juul 2005: 61-4 for an excellent analysis).

4. Because the computer internally duplicates the game state into an algorithmic model, whatever the material, embodied world already offered as a ‘given’ in human players constituting a game, the computerised game must and can internally generate anew. If gravity is an important ‘given’ of playing soccer, computerised soccer must *simulate* gravity: Developers must program a set of inputs, algorithms, data structures, and outputs for it. This enables digital games to alter unchangeable givens, e.g. produce a gravity-less ‘Space Soccer’.

5. Because computers are not embodied actors performing bodily actions or handling material tokens constituted into game actions and entities, the input and output interfaces have to be perceivable, usable, and intelligible material interfaces for the players’ bodily engagement. The output interfaces *can* be – and today with almost no exception are – sensory *representations* of actors, objects, actions, and events that then *also but not exclusively* are constituted game entities. This separability of producing *representations* (next to algorithmically producing rule-following outputs) was more readily visible in early video war games: because the software and hardware was not yet able to generate a visual presentation of a game board, the players had to still lay out a board and keep track of the game state themselves with cardboard

counters. They entered numerical commands into the computer, which the computer would process, change its own game state, and put out numerical commands that the player then had to translate into a rearrangement of counters on her physical game board (Deterding 2009: 30). Today's screen-based digital games, on the other hand, usually produce audiovisual representations that are highly iconic, and include many representations that are not also game entities, states, or actions (Aarseth 2007). They may be highly 'abstract' (as in e.g. *Dwarf Fortress*), but *some* material grounding (pixels lighting up on a screen or similar) has to be generated that then can be co-constituted by the perceiving players as game entities. The bodies running on grass between trees that are *just there* for children to be re-constituted into 'tags' and 'being it' now have to be generated. As Juul (2005) aptly describes, the generated representations and the constituted game entities and actions clash, diverge, converge, and interact in all kinds of interesting ways. We will return to this point again when looking at the various laminations of a gaming encounter (4.5) and the place of fiction in video games (4.6).

The Human Side of Digital Gaming

To summarise, (1.) video games return our relation towards game rules to that of informal games where we practically learn by doing what game actions are possible and what effects these actions have, only that the computer acts as a natural object, not a social actor where actions and effects are contestable. (2.) This means that in comparison with formal games, to gain a reflexive, discursive understanding of the game rules, we often have to reconstruct it from our practical engagement with them. (3.) Instead of one embodied, material situated activity system as we find it in humans playing, computers *duplicate* an abstracted, internal algorithmic model of the game state within the situated activity system player and computer entertain, only accepting pre-specified inputs. (4.) Because of this disembodiment, computers have to algorithmically model everything that is already implicitly given in embodied gaming for it to be part of the computerised gaming. The given 'laws of physics' become explicit (and malleable) 'game physics'. (5.) There must be some material interface between the computer's algorithmic model and the human players. The output interface is today usually a highly iconic audiovisual representation of actors, objects, settings, doings, and events—only some of which are also constituted as game entities.

All of these are highly important and interesting features of digital games. We readily see that the computer does enormous and essential work in a video gaming encounter. Still, this does not at all mean that all game rules are executed by the computer, nor that the computer running the game rules in and of itself suffices to constitute 'gaming'.

First, it is true that we need not enforce rule-following on our co-players in digital games, or learn the rules ahead of playing. Yet for something to be framed in our society as 'playing chess', even in the case of computerised chess, requires a player's practical understanding of

‘how to go on.’ If a child did not know how to play chess, nor what the goal of chess is, and was handed a chess computer without further explanation, it could likely trigger through the interface moves and computer counter-moves which by algorithmic necessity were following the rules of chess. But we would be hard-pressed to frame this activity as ‘playing chess’. We would likely frame it as ‘bashing keys on a chess computer’, and so would the kid. A basic understanding of the player of how to play chess would be required for the activity to constitute chess playing: what the goal is, what moves one can make, how they in general relate to the goal. One can learn these things by doing, by interacting with the chess computer (though it would be very tedious to retro-engineer the goal of chess without any discursive instruction just by trying out). But then we wouldn’t frame this activity as ‘playing chess’ either. We would frame it as ‘figuring out how chess works’. And even that would require that the person doing the figuring out already had a practical understanding what ‘playing a game’ is. Else we could not sensibly frame that person’s attempts as ‘trying to learn how to play this game’. Now in most contemporary video games, learning (e.g. working through the tutorial) is a *socially expected* part of video gaming, and therefore we can intelligibly frame it to each other as ‘video gaming’. Still, for the activity to constitute ‘video gaming’, and for the object enrolled to constitute ‘a video game’, you need a human actor with a minimum practical understanding of video gaming as such. Video games are video games, game rules are game rules only relative to an organism to which these entities even make sense, and are relevant.

Second, on closer inspection, even in computer games, players do enormous work in constituting and enforcing game rules. Players constitute what counts as unallowable ‘cheating’, even if it is technically possible right out of the bat (in-built cheat codes) or after some software tinkering. In *CounterStrike* tournament play, players define what maps are played on, what weapons can be used, what tactics are permissible – even though many more maps and weapons and tactics are technically possible, they are socially defined as illegal non-gaming moves. Players define what illegal moves in front of the gaming device are, like physically elbowing your opponent when she is at a difficult point in the game, or blocking her view on the screen. Conversely, not every move that is registered by the interface is then decided by the players to be a gaming move: they might agree that the last move did not count because the joystick had a glitch, or because one player was not ready yet, etc.

Thirdly and finally, interacting with a computer that runs a game software does not constitute ‘gaming’ unless human players engage in the constitutive work of rendering what they do intelligible to themselves and others *as gaming*. If a cat walks over the keyboard, or a usability tester checks the transition animations of our computerised chess, they interact with the machine, but their activity is not ‘gaming’. The computer cannot follow the ‘unwritten rules of games’ that make engaging with the computer ‘gaming a video game’.

Summary and Conclusions

The formalist study of game rules has given designers useful ‘things to think with’ (McGarry 2005, Roepstorff 2008). For researchers wanting to understand how game rules work in the interaction of humans and computers engaged in a gaming encounter, however, formalist models are ultimately misleading: in describing and explaining game rules, they presuppose what they want to explain, namely, how activity is constituted as ‘rule-following’, how we come to understand what formal rule representations mean, and how we put them into action. In this, formalist game studies provide a striking parallel to mid-20th century structuralism and structural functionalism in sociology, anthropology, and linguistics. Frame analytically, and for researchers interested in situated action more general, gaming is not the execution of abstract rules, and ‘a game’ is not held together by a formal unity as its ‘core’. Rather, gaming presents us with the intentional and voluntarily *doubling* of the basic constitutive ordering of social life. Constituting an action as ‘gaming’ involves two kinds of constitutive orders: the general ‘unwritten rules’ of making one’s action intelligible as ‘gaming *a* game’, and the specific constitutive rules of the game that render specific actors, doings, sayings, objects, events into the specific game entities, states, and actions (‘gaming *this* game’). Both these orders are epistemic and normative: they make one’s actions intelligible, and they articulate normative expectations. Formal games demonstrate how game equipment, formalised rule representations, and player communities can stabilise and institutionalise the identity of a game across time and space. Digital games are specific in that computers execute algorithmic instantiations of the constitutive rules of the game, which has a number of consequences. A digital game in and of itself cannot constitute ‘gaming a video game’: we still need a human actor having a practical understanding of at least some game rules, actively enforcing these constitutive rules, and most of all, acting in accordance with all the constitutive rules (playing *a* game and playing *this* game).

4.4 The Game Frame: The Unwritten Rules of Gaming

We ended the previous section on the observation that any instance of gaming involves the enactment of two interlocking constitutive orders – the specific rules of the game one is gaming, and the general rules of ‘gaming *a* game’. Drawing on Sniderman and others, we evoked some of those latter ‘Unwritten Rules’ (Sniderman 1999) more in passing. Specifying and explicating them is the purpose of the present section. To organise these defining features of the ‘gaming’ frame, we will use the conceptual model of frames developed in the previous chapter (3.3), distinguishing motivational relevancies, rules, resources and events, actors and their footing, and so on. As for substance, the section draws chiefly on Goffman’s own writings on games, specifically *Strategic Interaction* (1969), ‘Fun in Games’ (1972), and *Frame Analysis* (1986). These will be supplemented by the existing empirical literature on the unwritten rules of gam-

ing – of which there is surprisingly little. Existing studies concern themselves predominantly with playground games (Hughes 1999, 2005, Goodwin 2006), board and card games (Woods 2009, Bergström 2010), or RPGs (Montola 2008, Herbrink 2011). In fact, beyond Consalvo's (2007) study of cheating, Mikael Jakobsson's (2007) short paper on a console game club, and Pippin Barr's (2007) analysis of 'video game values', there seems to be no empirical study that explicitly focuses the 'unwritten rules' of *video* gaming. The only area that has received some empirical attention is the establishment and inner organisation of video gaming as 'layers of meaning' (Aarsand 2007a, 2008, Aarsand & Aronsson 2009b, Herbrink 2011, Linderöth 2004, 2005, 2012, Linderöth, Björk & Olsson 2012, Wanenchak 2010). Hence, the following section chiefly sets up a background against which we then can compare and contrast the results of the empirical section on video gaming across genres.

Motivational Relevancies

The first characteristic of gaming is that it is a situation where there is a specific shared 'understanding of the governing purpose', a shared motivational relevancy actors are expected and supposed to pursue – unlike, say, motorway traffic, in which people might engage for all kinds of reasons (Goffman 1986: 24). Instances of gaming *ought* to be autotelic 'ends in themselves' (1963: 19), 'undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake' (1967: 185); 'fun alone is the approved reason for playing them' (1972: 17). This 'fun in games' Goffman further unpacks as involvement, achievement, and euphoric ease: The suspense generated by the uncertain outcome of games and its covert connection to one's character and skill *ideally* generates spontaneous involvement; that is, absorbed attention and positive arousal, as well as the possibility of showing off without doing so overtly. Because such absorbed attention and positive arousal (and secret display of character and skill) are jointly acknowledged as the 'approved reason' for gaming, if we spontaneously experience it, we can let ourselves fully fall into it: we need not self-monitor nor self-control. We can let ourselves be *engrossed*, and as a consequence, we 'will feel *at ease* or natural, in short, ... the interaction will be *euphoric*' (Goffman 1972: 38). Since gaming encounters are optimally designed for spontaneous engrossment in a chancy skill contest *and* socially norm such engrossment as appropriate, 'euphoric interaction is relatively often achieved: gaming is often fun' (Goffman 1972: 39).

Part of this motivational relevancy of gaming is 'the shared sentiment that winning within the rules is desirable and significant' (Goffman 1969: 143). One *ought* to care about the outcome, to have at least some of one's self invested in it, and to 'rationally ... press a single type of interest or pay-off' (Goffman 1972: 32). Breaching this norm, not overtly caring to win, means to become a 'spoilsport' (Huizinga 1955: 11; Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 274). This goes hand in hand with the license and norm of 'gameworthiness': strategically and coolly 'setting aside all personal feelings and all impulsive inclinations' to rationally maximise one's own attainment

of the game goals (Goffman 1972: 96). The ‘euphoria function’ (Goffman 1972: 40) of gaming hangs in a tension between opposing motivational demands: we *ought* to spontaneously care about a game’s outcome, to get a little involved despite ourselves. But we *also* ought to retain the cool, distanced poise of a gamesperson (Goffman 1972: 35). We *ought* to have *some* external stake in the game (of self-regard, cash, etc.) such that it becomes involving. But this should not tip into unpleasant anxiety or overt caring about its game-external consequence for one’s bodily and economic wellbeing or symbolic self-regard. We need to strike a delicate balance between ‘taking a game too seriously or not seriously enough’ (Goffman 1972: 62).

Recent literature adds another balancing. It supports that gaming ought to be an activity engaged in for its own sake (Barr 2007: 78), where participants ought to try to achieve the game goal (Bergström 2010: 88, Woods 2009: 209). However, the *individual’s* enjoyment of gaming and focus on winning ought to be balanced with *collective* enjoyment: social harmony is voiced by board and card gamers as ultimately more valued than winning – striving to win is what should *enable* the enjoyable shared activity to come about, but not dominate it. This balancing sits at the heart of what is usually called sportspersonship (Shields & Bredemeier 1995; cf. de Koven 2010; Woods 2009: 210–4). For instance, one ought not to actively try to win against newcomers or children (Woods 2009: 212). Players should neither play ‘too aggressively’, nor more cooperatively than specified and intended by the rules (Bergström 2010: 89–90).

A second qualification is that there is a difference in the intensity of goal focus: Barr (2007: 69, 79) observed a difference between *ludus* (trying to achieve goals) and *paidia* (exploring the game) as two possible foci of gaming. Jakobsson (2007: 390) documented that different gamer communities treated gaming either as sport (devoted to perfecting one title), or as leisure (with an interest in exploring and trying out many new and different titles). As we will see in the empirical section, these two qualifications interact in video gaming: different modes of video gaming each strike their own balance between self and others, investment in and divestment from the game outcome.

Attentive Access, Focus, and Involvement

All types of social situations articulate what participants ought to (observably) have information about and focus their attention on, as well as how deep to get involved in it. Make-believe and contest situations – fictional media, theatre, sports, and gaming – are purpose-built to hook into our propensities for spontaneous involvement (Goffman 1972: 246). They are organised around central ‘*engrossables* – engrossing materials which observers can get carried away with, materials which generate a realm of being’ (Goffman 1986: 57). *Joint* spontaneous engrossment amplifies the engrossment of all involved, whereas individual defection from it can quickly lift the others out of their engrossment as well (Goffman 1986: 46, 346; 1972: 34, 37, 72).

Little wonder, then, that spontaneous engrossment is not only the main satisfaction sought out in gaming, but also the most important social norm of gaming: 'Order pertains largely to what is attended and disattended' (Goffman 1972: 19). In gaming, players ought to disattend parallel activities, onlookers, bodily demands (Goffman 1986: 204-8), and 'the esthetic, sentimental, or monetary value of the equipment deployed' (Goffman 1972: 19). (Though Goffman [1972: 66] later adds that overt acknowledgement of this norm provides a 'shield' that allows players to covertly take an interest in these elements and their wider social meanings.) The ratified focus of attention is the game state itself; that is, the current placement of game equipment and the proceeding of game moves:

formal board games such as checkers in which very little by way of discipline is required of performers and diversionary interruptions are easily dissociated from the play in progress. The performer ... is obliged to be mindful of the state of the game and to manage ... to get his piece to the intended square at the right time; but outside of that, he as a person will be allowed a wide range of side and subordinate activities. (Goffman 1986: 205)

Finally, gaming shows a peculiar ordering of 'information states' (Goffman 1986: 133). In card and board games, not only is the game equipment organised such that each player has easy access only to certain information. There is also a social norm that players ought to voluntarily self-restrain access to hidden information. This is to ensure that desired kinds of skill not mere information access decides the game outcome, and to provide a further source of suspense in the gradual revealing of information (Goffman 1986: 136, 218). So-called 'assessment games' like poker are centrally organised around keeping one's own knowledge and strategy hidden while actively allowing for and approving fabricating moves to generate false impressions: 'Assessment games are to be seen, then, as arrangements for instituting and embodying the specific vulnerabilities of framing' (Goffman 1986: 456). Bergström (2010: 91) and Woods (2009: 215-6) largely corroborate these observations: board gamers think that one ought to be focused on and involved in the game, only have the information one is allowed to have, that bluffing is allowable, and that one should not talk too much, because it is both distracting and potentially un-gameworthy in giving away too much information.

Emotion

When it comes to emotional self-control and display, in gaming as in any other situation, a 'participant's visible emotional state ... will have to be in tune and tempo with the melody sustained in the interaction' (Goffman 1972: 50). Beyond this general principle, we find again an interesting tension in gaming: on the one hand, gaming is supposed to create engrossment, heightened collective emotion, and a 'circular flow of feeling' (Goffman 1972: 18). In sports, games, and other contests arranged as performances for spectators, 'a more expansive display of emotion, especially chagrin, is allowed than in the sportsman's everyday life' (Goffman 1986: 570). On the other hand, gameworthiness demands an 'affective neutrality' (Goffman 1972: 22): feelings should not get in the way of making the strategically best possible move. Not keeping

one's joy, sorrow, or anxiety in check, letting one's self be *visibly* emotionally moved by the game beyond a certain point constitutes inappropriate 'flooding out' (Goffman 1972: 62). As Bergström (2010: 90) observes, players ought not 'whine' too much when they experience a sequence of bad card draws. But generally, in board and card games, flooding out is far less frequent than in gambling with high stakes or 'contact sports' like boxing, where the 'gaming' or 'sportive contest' frame can be downkeyed into a direct fistfight (Goffman 1986: 375-6).

Rules for Action and Communication

The overarching rule of conduct in gaming is that there is an explicit set of rules governing what one can and cannot do as 'legal' gaming moves, and that one ought to enact gaming moves according to these rules (Goffman 1986: 24; 1972: 32-33). So essential and deeply normalised is this rule that (beyond novices who are still learning the game) 'rule-calling' or reminding other players of the rules shouldn't even be necessary (Hughes 2005: 514). However, rules may be changed before or mid-course in a game if all players explicitly agree to the change (Bergström 2010: 91).

Second, players ought to act not to just by the letter, but also the 'spirit of the rules' (Hughes 2005: 509; Bergström 2010: 89). This purposefully vague and therefore flexible concept implies that a game and its rules are presumed to be designed to support a certain kind of enjoyment and test a certain kind of skill. Players ought to refrain from making game moves that could still be construed as in accordance with the rules, but would go against this intended enjoyment and skill test. This includes gaming 'in theme and mood' of the game's design (Bergström 2010: 89). In a horror board game, for instance, it may be considered inappropriate to consistently interrupt atmospheric remarks of other players with jokes and ironic remarks.

Third, playing by the rules entails that players ought not to cheat; that is, players should not intentionally and covertly act in violation of a rule to create an 'unfair advantage' for themselves (Consalvo 2007: 87, 87-93; cf. Woods 2009: 218, Hughes 2005: 509). A cheater 'destroys the reality-generating power of the game' (Goffman 1972: 61) because she turns gaming into an interaction that isn't engrossingly problematic nor tied exclusively to the intended skill test anymore. Consalvo (2007: 186) and Stevens, Satwicz and McCarthy (2008: 53-4) have found some interesting modulations around the general non-cheating norm: in single player or collaborative multiplayer video gaming, cheating is considered acceptable if one reaches an absolute impasse. Between players, acceptable levels of cheating (in a tit-for-tat form) might be negotiated. Considered separate from cheating are unintentional 'honest mistakes', for which there seem to be no general norms: participants in a gaming encounter tend to negotiate a specific solution on the spot (Bergström 2010: 89).

A further, softer norm is balancing (Goffman 1972: 60; Hughes 2005: 509). Given that enjoyable engrossment is the main purpose of gaming, and given that a maximally problematic

outcome maximises the potential for engrossment, players should start the game ideally with equal chances of winning, and a 'good game' maintains a balancing of undecided, roughly equal odds to the end. Thus, Heide-Smith (2006: 215-7) reports self-handicapping and giving other players hints to balance a game throughout its gaming. Yet this arguably requires some subtlety: too much or too overt self-handicapping, and either the enjoyment of the self-handicapper or the self-regard of the supported player might be damaged.

Finally, Bergström (2010: 89) observes a number of norms pertaining to the 'smooth flow' of proceedings. Players ought not to take back moves indiscriminately, not leave the game before it's over, and not make a game end too early. We will turn to these participation norms – that regulate who is allowed to participate in a gaming encounter (Goffman 1972: 28) – extensively in the empirical section.

Objects, Settings, and Events

A central topic of 'Fun in Games' later generalised in frame analysis were 'realized resources' (Goffman 1972: 24), a term that originally went beyond just objects, settings, and events to include frame-specified actions and communications. Essentially, it covers the constitutive ordering through which game entities, states, and actions in their frame-specified meanings are established: 'A matrix of possible events and a cast of roles through whose enactment the events occur constitute together a field for fateful dramatic action, a plane of being, an engine of meaning'. (Goffman 1972: 25) Materially, card and board games are co-constituted by expectable 'traditional equipment having a social history of its own in the wider society and a wide consensus of understanding regarding the meanings that are to be generated from it' (Goffman 1972: 66). As Herbrink (2011: 126-137) describes, in pen-and-paper RPGs, game equipment like character sheets, notes, or maps and figures offload memory, allow joint spatial location in an imagined space, and provide resources in disputes: where two figures come to stand on a map is enrolled as a piece of jointly accessible evidence in discussing whether an in-game character can or cannot see another character, for instance.

Typically, the objects and settings of gaming are arranged such that all material required to engage in a game is present from the outset, allocated between players according to explicit game rules, and arranged into a central focus of joint attention and action easily accessible to all players (Goffman 1972: 27, 33-4, 41, 66, cf. Herbrink 2011: 138-44). Herbrink (*ibid.*) observes that in pen-and-paper RPGs, usually, settings are sought out or actively created to minimise outer distraction sources and access for bystanders. Within, a joint focus of attention is organised with the central, well-lit table where maps, dice, and character sheets are laid out, and participants are seated to optimally catch each others' gaze. Information access is also spatially managed, as the game master usually arranges a zone with notes, dice, and so on that is materially hidden from the others' gazes. Board, card, and pen-and-paper RPG gaming usually occurs in

one spatiotemporally ‘nicely bounded setting’ (Goffman 1969: 91). However, phenomena like chess by mail demonstrate that spatially and temporally dispersed ‘multi-situated games’ are also possible, though usually not as engrossing as they do not bring with them the kind of socioemotional dynamics that face-to-face co-presence engenders (Goffman 1972: 37; 1986: 46-7). Essential for interaction is a material arrangement that enables *response presence*, not necessarily bodily co-presence.

Internal Organisation, Actors, and Their Footing

Frames, as noted previously, are internally organised into (a) bounded regions of space, (b) gatherings of participants, (c) tracks of information, communication, and action, and (d) laminations of framings and keyings. These four dimensions are only analytically separate: at a restaurant, for instance, a gathering of friends might choose the bounded region of a table placed into a niche carved into the restaurant wall in order to shield their track of talking from the noise and potential eavesdropping of other restaurant guests, and two of the friends might choose to take their little chat from the main table conversations outside for a cigarette break.

These four dimensions are interwoven with the different kinds of roles actors may take on in a situation: their different (a) appearance formulas or functional roles, e.g. as actor or onlooker, (b) their participation role as *bystander* or *ratified participant*, and among ratified participants, as the *addressor* or *addressee* of the current interaction turn, and (c) how addressers position themselves and others to their own action and communication, including the possibility that they key their action; this *footing* always involves a *production format* – a specific configuration of the *principal* (in whose name is acted), *author* (who devised actions and communications), and *animator* of an action (who ‘lends her mouth’).

For board and card gaming, Goffman articulated a two-fold inner organisation: They are a focused gathering framed as a ‘gaming encounter’ in which ratified participants take on the appearance formula of ‘participants’ (Goffman 1972: 33). Couched within the gaming encounter is the framing ‘play of a game’ (Goffman 1972: 33). This picks up Kenneth Pike’s distinction of any performance into “game” and “spectacle”, that is, between a dramatic play or contest or wedding or trial and the social occasion or affair in which these proceedings are encased’ (Goffman 1986: 261). The surrounding spectacle may go on in parallel to the central game, but usually manifests itself most explicitly in ‘preproceedings’ and ‘postproceedings’ (Goffman 1986: 264). If three friends come together to play poker, they may have a little chat and drink first, crack open a pack of cards, take a quick leave to the bathroom, etc. They jointly understand that these pre-proceedings are part of their poker *night* (the gaming encounter), although no actual poker *gameplay* (play of a game) has started yet. Even during the play of a game, they may discuss non-game related matters. If in the course of that conversation A says to B, ‘I’m sorry for you’, it is understood that this sentence refers not to the bad hand B has been

dealt, but to the string of parallel conversation the two are just having, which belongs to the overall gaming encounter, not the play of the game.

In such a gaming encounter, ratified participants take on the appearance formulas of *players* (partaking in the play of a game) or *onlookers* (Goffman 1972: 33-4). Other appearance formulas are thinkable, like the umpire or referee. All appearance formulas come with specific situational rights and obligations: in a pen-and-paper RPG for instance, the 'game master' is often positioned as the ultimate decision authority on gameplay matters (Montola 2008). Also, participation roles and appearance formulas come with their own expectations and norms regarding motivational relevancies, attention, emotion, action, and so on: 'what is play for the golfer is work for the caddy' (Goffman 1986: 8). This explains why and how 'opposing rooters at a football game do not experience the "same" game' (Goffman 1986: 9). Goffman reasons that the situational separation of the player and onlooker roles from the biographical self of a person social-psychologically facilitates our engrossment in gaming, our relative, temporal letting go of certain inhibitions of emotional expression or strategic action:

Just as a gamesman has a right to stand outside his sporting deeds, sustaining all manner of side involvements at such times, just as he has a right to deeply involve himself and show rather open affect, so spectators may have a right to stare or applaud or cheer or boo wildly, for these attentions are to a self-dissociated realm of the sport, something that the player himself has a duty as well as a right to dissociate from his serious self. (Goffman 1986: 225)

Then again, being seen gaming a certain game might be felt to already 'taint' one's biographical self or identity, in which case, if situational proprieties nevertheless demand participation, one will perceive high dysphoric tension and be sure to enact a maximum of role distance, 'actions which effectively convey some disdainful detachment of the performer from a role he is performing' (Goffman 1972: 110). Goffman provides a beautiful observation of children riding a merry-go-round where, at a certain age, boys have to demonstrate through ostentatious boredom, stunts, ironic mocking, etc., that they certainly are 'above' such a 'childish' thing.

Within the play of a game lamination, there can be further game-specific appearance formulas or 'game-generated roles' (Goffman 1972: 25) such as the card dealer. Different games vary in the extent to which they foresee or allow there to be onlookers, but in general, onlookers are 'an integral part of the social-psychological reality of the gaming encounter' (Goffman 1972: 34). For instance, Lin and Sun (2011) observed that in Japanese arcade gaming, onlookers are ratified participants who strongly affect (and engage in the upkeep of) the framing of the play of a game as either 'practice', 'performance', or 'recreation'. Where gaming encounters are intentionally and consciously designed and enacted by their participants as 'spectator sports', 'this openness transforms tasks and games into performances' (Goffman 1986: 225), and there is indeed a moral norm for the players to take care of the engrossment of the onlookers (Goffman 1986: 388). The main expectable motivational relevancy is to win the game; players *may* but are not required to concern themselves with the experience of the audience – they may put

on a show, but only if their actual skill has something to show for, and this does not interfere with their overarching concern and ability to win the game.

Because frame analysis has been largely received in game studies via Fine's *Shared Fantasy* (1983), little of the above observations have found their way into the literature; instead, following Fine, the inner organisation of framings and footings has been mostly reduced to the single matter of lamination. In his ethnography of pen-and-paper RPGs, Fine noted that gaming is organised into 'three levels of meaning' (Fine 1983: 186, 194) – in the terminology of the present study, three *laminations*:

- the 'primary framework' of the 'real world', where participants are 'people';
- the 'game context' of 'world of game rules' where participants act as 'players' 'in light of the conventions of the game';
- the 'gaming world' or 'fantasy world' where participants enact 'characters'.

Fine (1983: 187-96) then analysed how their lamination generates endemic interaction issues that in turn call for specific ways of managing them. For one, 'information states' (Goffman 1986: 133) need to be kept separate (Fine prefers Glaser's and Strauss's term 'awareness contexts'): What is factually known by a person as player must often be pretend-unknown when the person enacts her character. For instance, when listening in on the ongoing conversation between the game master and another player, she knows that a certain event will occur in the future in the enacted fictional world, but her character, lacking the ability to divine the future, cannot. Second, there are issues of lamination interpretation and switching (Fine 1983: 196-203). If a person speaks the words 'Not for me!', that sentence could be framed as direct animated speech of the character she enacts, addressed towards a non-player character facing her in the fictional game world. Or it could be addressed to another participant who asks into the round of participants whether everyone wants an extra soft drink with their pizza order. As Fine observes, confusions in lamination are frequent and often actively sought out as a source of humour. People in fact rapidly switch laminations from one utterance or gesture to the other, often enough without problem.

Many scholars have since adopted and adapted Fine's three-layer model of gaming. Yet useful as it is, it entails some problematic issues. Firstly, it reduces frames to 'layers of meaning'. Because Fine takes as his entry point into Goffman Alfred Schütz's notion of 'finite worlds of meanings' (Fine 1983: 181) and essentially equates frames with them, he focuses almost exclusively on meaning – a misfortunate reduction of frames, as we have seen.

The second issue is Fine's depiction of the 'primary framework' as 'the commonsense understandings that *people* have of the real world. This is action without laminations. It is a framework that does not depend on other frameworks but on the ultimate reality of events' (Fine 1983: 186). As we have seen in the previous chapter, a central argument *Frame Analysis* makes is that there is no *one* primary framework, no *one* unframed 'ultimate reality of events'.

Goffman (1986: 564) noted that our folk understanding of ‘everyday reality’ is one of *unkeyed*, *untransformed* activity, but not *unframed* activity. This fits Fine’s ‘action without lamination’, but diverges from it in that this everyday reality on closer inspection is not one frame but a patchwork of one framed strip of experience next to the other. This misreading blinds Fine to the very distinction Goffman himself makes between the gaming encounter *as* the primary frame of the situation, and the play of a game as its inner lamination (what Fine calls ‘game context’). What Fine considers the ‘real world’ of ‘people’ for Goffman is the gaming encounter of participants as either players or onlookers. The gaming encounter already comes with specific appearance formula, practices, understandings, norms, etc. This does not mean that we need to *add* a further lamination – gaming encounter versus ‘everyday reality’ –, because the gaming encounter is part of the patchwork of situations that makes up everyday reality. Rather, we need to replace Fine’s ‘ultimate reality’ with that of the gaming encounter, in which actors aren’t simply ‘people’, but already inhabit the specific appearance formula of participants (participant-players, participant-onlookers, participant-referees, etc.). True, Goffman distinguishes the biographical person from the situation-specific appearance formulas, but this biographical person to him is a secondary construction from these formula happening in and belonging to framed situations. ‘Self, then, is not an entity half-concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them’ (Goffman 1986: 573). In addition, gaming encounters are often lodged within a wider situation that itself colours the gaming encounter: it makes a difference, for instance, if a chess game takes place at someone’s home (where onlookers would be materially and normatively limited to guests and family members) or in a public park (where materially and in terms of situational proprieties, every other park visitor may become an onlooker) (see Brenne 2005).

The third issue is that Fine conceives of the ‘fantasy world’ as a *keying* of the ‘game context’ (Goffman’s ‘play of the game’). If we follow strict frame analytic logic, this would mean that the actions players perform are *first* transformed/keyed as game actions, and then these actions that already have a meaning and order as gaming moves become transformed *once again* to constitute imagined/enacted make-believe entities. This is frame analytically incoherent and empirically untrue. It is incoherent in that if somebody rolls some dice to see how a certain problematic situation resolves, this constitutes a gaming move: In the attempt to reach an uncertain outcome, a player chooses a gaming move (‘I’ll attack this monster!’), and then based on the current game state (the ‘stats’ of the game ‘character’ and ‘monster’), a certain probability distribution of possible outcomes is given and materially decided. Keying this game move in Goffman’s terms would mean to *ironically*, or *rehearsingly*, or *pretend* make that game move. What happens instead is that the outcome of that game move (a certain die roll being constituted as a certain change of the game state) can *simultaneously, in parallel* be constituted as an event in the imagined fictional world.

Empirically, pen-and-paper RPGs feature many actions, communications, and events which are *directly* keyed as make-believe entities without first being constituted as game entities. To turn to Fine's (1983: 198) own empirical material, if a player states that in the fictional world, her character walks into a butcher shop, and the referee enacts the butcher, scowling 'Get out of my shop', nowhere in this process have the participants evoked, made reference to, constituted their actions in terms of game rules: it was a direct strip of pretend play, of pretending to be that make-believe character and butcher. These pretend actions *do* belong to the 'play of the game' rather than the gaming encounter, as Goffman would put it. It comprises two possible parallel and interacting keyings: rule-based gameplay and game fiction. In RPG theory, RPG players have developed the notion that players can situationally agree on some 'aesthetic agenda' that, for example, focuses 'dramatist' enactment or 'gamist' rule-based play (e.g. Edwards 2001). In heavily dramatist playing, players might spend a whole evening just enacting and telling each other how the make-believe events unfold without ever making use of game rules to resolve problematic situations. Fine's idea that the 'fantasy world' is *always* secondary might be an artefact of the gaming groups (and their playing styles) he studied.

So much for Fine. What about the authors that have taken and amended his model: Do they make good on Fine's issues? The short answer is: not fully. Montola (2008), for instance, outlines exogenous ('unwritten' social rules), endogenous (game rules), and diegetic (fiction) layers of RPGs. He explicitly agrees with Fine that the diegetic is the 'tertiary' (Montola 2008: 23) frame. Yet by describing RPGs as 'formal make-believe' and locating the decision-making power over what events do or don't happen in the make-believe world only in the third instance in game rules (Montola 2008: 24), he effectively implies that the diegetic is the main keying of activity in RPGs. Still, in the end, he equates, like Fine, exogenous rules and total social reality. Brenne (2005: 34) splits out micro, meso, and macro analytical levels of gaming frames that acknowledge that chess might take place in a park sitting in a city, and that both park and city come with their own cultural conventions. Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 454) graft Fine's 'three-fold framing of player consciousness' directly onto digital games, just claiming that '[i]n digital games, the same multi-layered phenomena occur'. Maybe the most incisive adoption of Fine comes from Linderoth (2004, 2005). He rightfully points out that Salen and Zimmerman's generalisation from RPGs to digital games lacks empirical support. From video interaction analysis of children video gaming, Linderoth (2004: 260-2) identifies three frames in how players appeal to a video game: the rules (by far the predominant frame), the theme (comprising socio-dramatic play and little stories), and the aesthetics. Furthermore, he notes that players appeal to the relation of events on these three frames with the larger social situation, for example, negotiating who gets to start. Rules, Linderoth continues, can be mapped to Fine's game context, socio-dramatic and narrative appeals to theme to Fine's gaming or fantasy world, and aesthetics and frame-world negotiations to the 'social setting' (Linderoth 2005). But

importantly, for Linderoth, these are possible *parallel* ‘interaction patterns’ (Linderoth 2004: 260), ways of focusing on, referring to, interacting with, and making sense of the strip of events and actions at hand—not nested, laminated levels, as Fine argued. In any single turn-at-interaction, they might *focus* on rules, theme, or aesthetics, or their interaction, or their relating with the wider world. In a closer analysis of players’ usage of the pronoun ‘I’ and the way they reference their avatars, Linderoth (2005) maps three forms of player-avatar relations to the three main interaction patterns:

- the avatar as a fictive character or ‘role’ one inhabits in the fictional gaming world;
- the avatar as a ‘tool which extends the player’s agency in the game activity’ with regard to the game rules;
- the avatar as ‘props which can be used as a part of the player’s presentation of self’ with regard to the social setting (the gaming encounter).

In a study of pen-and-paper RPGs combining Fine with Schechner (2003: 17, 66-111), Mackay (2001: 54-6) suggests that the make-believe ‘gaming world’ frame itself actually contains *three* frames: the ‘performative’ where a player acts out and speaks in first person singular as if she were the ‘character’; the ‘constative’ where game masters or players plainly describe events or actions to each other in second person singular as ‘addressers’, and the ‘narrative’ frame where they take the role of a ‘raconteur’ or storyteller telling the events to the other players as an uninvolved audience. Again, one should be cautious to generalise from pen-and-paper RPGs to (video) gaming, but Mackay’s distinction is borne out by data from Linderoth (2004) and Aarsand (2007a, 2008, Aarsand & Aronsson 2009) on video gaming. Linderoth (2004) notes that the ‘theme frame’ is used to (a) draw hypotheses on rules, or to (b) engage in either ‘socio-dramatic play’ of enacting one’s characters, or short ‘narrative’ strips of telling stories about characters. These two match the ‘performative character’ and ‘narrative raconteur’ of Mackay. Aarsand (2009) in his observations of children video gaming found ‘animation’ and ‘active noising’: players make response cries (‘Ouch!’) and speak in the role of their avatars, or speak to their avatars ‘as if they were co-present in the room’ (Aarsand 2009: 5). Response cries and speaking as their avatars nicely fits Mackay’s ‘performative’. Speaking to avatars *as independent agents* however is described neither by Linderoth nor by Mackay, although almost all computer users are familiar with instances of shouting at the device in front of them: ‘Why don’t you print that page?!’, etc.

The amendments provided by Linderoth and Mackay are immensely useful, but require some amendment themselves. First, they copy Fine’s oversight of the gaming encounter as such. Second, what Mackay is referring to are again *not* additional laminations. That would only be the case if the characters of the fictional gaming world would lie, speak ironically, perform a theatre piece, play a game-within-the-game like the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, etc. (Such ‘second-order keyings’ [Brenne 2005: 59] or ‘staged games’ [Juul 2005: 131-3] are actually

not uncommon.) In frame analytic language, Mackay is teasing out different *footings* of the current addresser of an interactional turn: different ways in which the addresser positions herself, her avatar/character, and her audience relative to what is being said or done. Third, Mackay's 'constative' footing of realising-through-describing has not been documented in video gaming encounters, which makes sense: In pen-and-paper RPGs, the shared fictional world is realised and materially anchored mainly *in and through constative talking*: What is stated is what exists if agreed to by the other players and game master (Montola 2008, Herbrink 2011). In video game play, realisation and materialisation are co-constituted by the game software and hardware as (primarily audiovisual) outputs. This material co-constitution is sensitive *only* to the pre-specified inputs the game accepts. In pen-and-paper RPGs, saying 'my character saddles a horse' makes it so, but not in *World of Warcraft*. The game either technically supports horse saddling as a game action, or not; and you either possess the skills to create the inputs through the game controller that will trigger the 'horse saddling' action, or not. Instead, video gaming features 'explanation talk' that smooths over and gives sense to the inevitable incoherencies between the fictional world and rules (Juul 2005), between player intentions and game outputs, like an avatar repeatedly bouncing into a wall because the player has trouble with the controller. When players treat their own avatar as quasi-independent agents (as Aarsand [2009] documents), they account for the fact that it acts differently than intended by them. This in turn explains why Mackay did not observe the animating talk Aarsand found: in pen-and-paper RPGs, characters do not obdurately resist the verbalised intentions of the players because they are constituted by these verbalisations.

A final caveat is that the data of all reported studies on video gaming (Linderoth 2004: 98, Aarsand 2009) only covers games with strongly afforded fictional worlds. Abstract games (like checkers or *Drop7*) have not been studied. Fine (1983: 187) himself cautioned that the gaming world lamination is unique to fantasy games that represent a fictional world. In keeping with an animal-environment relationality perspective, this doesn't mean that players of abstract games will *in no case* engage in dramatic or narrative 'animation' of the game props – see only the classic study by Heider and Simmel (1944) that found that people ascribe agency, intention, and emotions to abstract geometric shapes in animated movies. Abstract games merely afford less performative or narrative animation than games with strong audiovisual thematisation and/or explicit avatar representations. It is likewise plausible (and empirically open) that under specific circumstances, there might be frame norms *against* animating the game props. Imagine a chess grand master in a tournament who in response to her opponent's move suddenly picks up and shakes her king and mock-speaks in its stead: 'Oh, I'm sooooo afraid!' Or a professional *CounterStrike* player in an e-sports tournament spending time and attention on re-narrating a funny strip of game events that just occurred while the game continues and she should focus on winning. Support for this hypothesis comes from Linderoth's (2012) ethnog-

raphy of a *World of Warcraft* guild that emphasised role-play intensive play, a specific sub-form that maximises immersion, identification, and dramatic ‘acting in character’. To do so, the group explicated and upheld social norms and spent considerable effort working against the technical affordances *and* prevailing playing norms of *World of Warcraft*. This suggests that frames for different gaming encounters regulate appropriate forms of appeal to the various keyings of the play of the game, as well as appropriate footings a person might take. In the case of the guild studied by Linderoth, only appeals to the gaming world from a dramatic, in-character footing would be appropriate.

So how, then, are video gaming encounters internally organised? Let’s take the following example: on a weekend day, two sisters are sitting in the living room of their family home in front of the television and a PlayStation 3 playing *Tekken 6*, while their father happens to work in parallel on his laptop on the dining table in another corner of the living room. Within the spatial *setting* of the living room, we find a multi-focused *gathering*, spatially and socially organised into the two *bounded regions* and interaction foci of (a) the father with his laptop at the dinner table and (b) the television set and gaming console and sisters. The sisters are *ratified participants* of their *gaming encounter*, to which the father is a *bystander*, whereas the sisters are bystanders to his ‘work’ occasion, in which he is the sole ratified participant. In the *Tekken 6* encounter, playing the game is the *main track*, and players are expected to fully focus their attention and action on it, disattending their father sitting at the table, getting some *directional cues* by the game audio-visually signalling ‘Fight!’ when a new round starts, perhaps having some music running in the background (*overlay track*), concealing from each other what button combinations they are currently pressing (*concealment track*). If the father would sit on the couch behind them and comment on the game (and the sisters would allow that), he would become a ratified participant in an *onlooker* appearance formula. As such, he may engage in certain *side tracks* like eating, drinking, or cheering, as long as these do not impinge on the players’ concentration and enjoyment, or display open disregard for the main activity.

Presumably, we can find *three laminations*: During a family weekend at home (the surrounding situation) where the sisters are the *children*, they engage in a *gaming encounter* (primary frame), in which they take on the appearance formula of *players*. While involved in active *gameplay* (inner lamination), they may focus on the *game rules* and control the game pieces of their avatars (inner lamination, rule-focused), and/or focus on the *game fiction* (inner lamination, fiction-focused) including their *characters*, for example, ‘Eddy Gordo’ or ‘Nina Williams.’ (If there would be a game-within-a-game in *Tekken 6*, or gameplay that would allow the characters to dissimulate, deceive, pretend, etc., then there could be further internal laminations. Conversely, the sisters might *key* gameplay by e.g. impersonating how the other looks like when playing.) In their regular gameplay turns at interaction, the sisters can enact different framings and footings: a *performative* (or animating) one where they speak and act *as* the char-

acter; a *personalising* one where they directly address the character as a real person; a *narrative* one where they talk *about* the character, as a figure in the fictional world or story; and a *tooling* one where they talk about the character in terms of its game functionality. Each of these footings comes with a specific arrangement of the *production format*: If one of the sisters performatively speaks ‘in character’ as Eddy Gordo, ‘Ouch, that hurt me!’, Eddie Gordo is the *principal* of the words, but the girl *authored* them and *animated* Eddie Gordo with them.

Lamination		Participation role, appearance formula, footing
<i>Further inner laminations</i>		e.g. Character playing a character
<i>Gameplay</i>	Game fiction focus - if realised	Character (footed performatively, personalising, narratively)
	Game rules focus - if realised	Player, umpire, ...; avatar footed as tool
<i>Gaming encounter</i>		Ratified participants: Player, onlooker, referee, ...
<i>Keyings</i>		e.g. Impersonator
<i>Surrounding situation</i>		Bystanders (relative to gaming encounter); surrounding situation roles

Table 1: *Laminations and roles of gaming encounters*

As Goffman argues, the differentiation of roles and footings not only puts normative obligations on actors, but also provides them with a resource to manage the moral implication (and possible embarrassment) of their self in what they do and say. If sister A makes her character Eddie Gordo kick Nina Simon, the character of sister B, screaming in delight ‘Take that!’, the framing of the situation enables both sisters to understand how this does or does not reflect on their relation as sisters. Presumably, there exists a convention that character-to-character violence in a video game is usually not to be understood as a direct expression of personal disdain. This convention provides a resource through which the sisters can subtly express their personal relations. For instance, repeated kicking of the other sister’s character lying defeated on the ground would after a certain duration threaten to become readable as an expression of animosity rather than, for example, enjoyment of the visual effects. Even if both sisters explicitly state that the visual effect is cool, the beaten sister would likely find it hard to exclusively maintain that understanding, and regulate her emotional response accordingly.

Metacommunication and Framing

This brings us to the next aspect of the gaming frame: the metacommunicative brackets and cues that signal the beginnings and endings of a framing, reflexively guide the flow of actions,

communications, and events, and signal their belonging to internal laminations. Goffman distinguished external brackets setting off an occasion as one prolonged strip in time from internal brackets creating temporary ‘time-out-of-frame’ pauses, which he noted are frequent in games (Goffman 1986: 259-60). Otherwise, he said little about metacommunication in gaming – which is unsurprising given that all empirical studies on the matter note the very implicitness of the process. As Aarsand (2007a: 18) put it: ‘if the participants orient to the activity as gaming, then it is gaming’. For instance, participation roles of bystander and ratified participant get situationally accomplished and reproduced in every interaction turn simply in whether and how response-present persons are addressed (or excluded) in talk, gazes, and gestures (Aarsand 2007a: 26-7; 2008). If somebody looks over the shoulder of a player and makes a comment about the in-game events, through the very fact that the player responds to that comment, the commenter is established as a ratified onlooker. And as for actors, so for objects, communications, actions, and events across ‘in-game’ and ‘in-room’ (Stevens, Satwicz & McCarthy 2008). Players shouting out, singing along, voicing, or speaking to their avatars all extend the ‘virtual’ game fiction and gameplay into the ‘real’ space of the living room. What is framed as being part of gameplay, gaming encounter, or the wider situation is a question of *enactment*, depending not just on what is materially present on the screen versus materially present in the living room, nor just on what is currently attentively accessible to the gaze angles of involved participants: it also depends on what by virtue of being acted out or upon or towards is constituted to belong to a framing (Aarsand 2007a: 61). Similarly, Fine (1983: 200-1) observes that in pen-and-paper RPGs, statements usually switch reference to different laminations from one sentence to the other without any explicit marker like ‘I am now saying as my character’. In congruence with Garfinkel’s notion of the sequential achievement of intelligibility, participants just assume which lamination a statement belongs to based on what makes sense, and as long as the next turn and the turn after that affirm that one’s response to the other’s statement as belonging to lamination X is sensible, all flows smoothly. Corrective accounts like ‘Did you mean you or your character?’ only come in when problems emerge.

In video interaction analyses of pen-and-paper RPGs, Herbrink (2011: 94-5) has fleshed out these observations: the metacommunicative signposts or presuppositions implicitly drawn upon to establish the framing of the gaming encounter and game fiction are:

- the setting itself (participants know what activity they met for and thus, what kind of actions and communications to expect);
- the literary genres drawn upon and the reported events (the mentioning of dragons or orcs, the description of a person ‘throwing a fireball’ in and of themselves already imply that the utterance is a fictional description not a factual report);

- the gaming equipment and its use (the placement of an RPG rulebook on the table indicates an RPG gaming encounter is taking place, rolling dice indicates that one's parallel talk is referring to the dice results);
- pre-proceeding acts like putting up food, reducing possible distractions, and arranging the equipment themselves demonstrate the transition towards the main gameplay (Herbrik 2011: 143-4, 151);
- changes in tonality, gesturing, and standard verbal starting signals (like clearing one's throat) usually suffice to intelligibly signal to the participants that gameplay is beginning (Herbrik 2011: 151-3). Just saying something that makes sense only in terms of the game fiction suffices to indicate that gameplay has begun.

Wanenchak (2010) gives some further examples for material metacommunicative cues in her study of text-based online RPGs on the Livejournal blogging platform: gameplay takes place as actors start a fictional narrative by writing an initial posting at their blog. Other players can then continue the narrative thread by adding their postings to the blog. The sheer material organising of the branching narrative of the overall game fiction into different blogs and their chronological entries already organises interaction sequences as well as understanding of the different tracks of plot. In addition, players use differences in font, brackets, or conventionalised acronyms like 'OOC' (out of character) to indicate whether a certain written passage is narratively footed game fiction or player-to-player metacommunication.

In an ethnographic study of one Norwegian LARP community, Brenne (2005) observed thatLARPs ('*laiv*' in Norwegian) as longer and more involved encounters have formalised little ceremonies that 'officially' mark beginning and end, including explicit statements like 'Now the laiv is finished!' (Brenne 2005: 46). Internal bracketing of character and player is achieved through mutually known stop words and gestures, like saying 'cut', or making a scissors gesture. Yet again, simply acting or speaking in a way that is intelligible in terms of one lamination yet unintelligible in terms of the other is the strongest and most frequently used form of framing (Brenne 2005: 49). In terms of materiality, wearing costumes not only signalled to participants that one was participating in the game fiction: the experience of wearing the costume, the feel of its texture, different from usual everyday clothing, afforded involvement in the game fiction (Brenne 2005: 69-77). The spatial region that 'belonged' to the game was not materially marked, but simply verbally described. Material objects also served as metacommunicative signs in their mutual context: the fact that some game props (a tent, a campfire, shields) were arranged in one place with no 'inappropriate' objects mixed in (e.g. a newspaper) implied that this arrangement belonged to the game fiction.

Taken together, the most noteworthy thing about the framing of gaming encounters is its very mundanity and invisibility. Explicit metacommunication is the exception. Gaming and its lamination involves the very same reflexive, sequential, open, collective process of achieving

order and intelligibility, and the very same standard means that ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have described for any kind of situated action.

Frame Limits and Gearing into the World

The final group of orderings pertaining to gaming is its relation to the wider world. One part of this are 'frame limits' (Goffman 1986: 56, 49-52) regarding what events, actions, and communications are expectable and appropriate to be framed as gaming. One obvious candidate here are the ongoing debates around the depiction of sex and violence, where one side appeals to their 'real' impacts and meanings, whereas the other emphasises the non-serious keying ('It's just a game'). Another likely field for study are attempts to e.g. justify video game violence by declaring them as art, which has traditionally wider frame limits – in response to which other actors emphasise the frame limits of art ('Games cannot be art because...'). An interesting border case is 'extreme role-playing', 'bleed', or 'brink play' that uses the explicitly pre-negotiated and consensual framing of gaming to *enable* the temporary performance of activity that would otherwise be out of bounds of one's daily life, as in the game *Gang Rape* (Montola 2010). Intended as critical social commentary on the difficulty of pressing gang rape convictions at court, the rules of the game ask players to inhabit the roles of victim and rapists who verbally describe their actions while holding eye contact with the victim. Although interviewed participants voiced the experience to be highly emotionally distressing, they also did not consider the game to overstep frame limits. Rather, they articulated it as an artistic and educational intervention – something Montola (2010) partially ascribes to the fact that interview participants belonged to the Nordic LARP subculture where artistic uses of games with 'serious' topics are positively valued. This reiterates Goffman's point that frames (and with them, frame limits) are culturally, historically, and socially located.

Besides frame limits, every situation comes with a specific *gearing into the world* (Goffman 1986: 248): defining which phenomena of the wider world will come to have what bearing inside the situation, and vice versa. The general norm of any situation is that 'every activity will occur in an environment of closely occurring other events that are to be taken as unconnected and unrelated to the event in question' (Goffman 1986: 292): framings ought to be closed. Gaming for Goffman is a type of situation where this is especially pronounced: gameplay is organised into a maximally 'closed resource'. We make sure that the wind or passers-by do not unintentionally move our chess pieces. Beyond that, gaming *ought* to have minimised irreversible bodily and symbolic consequences: a 'slight' consequentiality, either economically (in gambling) or bodily (in sports) is permissible, but only to the extent that it facilitates engrossment and doesn't become 'serious' (Goffman 1986: 154, 216). This minimising of consequence is sociomaterially achieved by norms forbidding overly aggressive bodily 'rough play' (Goffman 1986: 56, Hughes 2005: 509), using only actions and objects with little risk of bodily harm, of-

ten replacing them with ritualised, symbolic stand-in communicative acts and objects, on top of which the material outcome of interaction is evaluated according to shared rules to decide whether it translates into a final payoff (of winning the game, taking home money, etc.). Still, all gaming action and communication is causally and materially made from and thus linked with the wider world: 'Whatever goes on within an interpreted and organized stream of activity draws on material that comes from the world and in some traceable continuation of substance must go back to the world. Chess pieces must be taken from their box at the start of the game and returned thereto when the game is over' (Goffman 1986: 287).

Whereas Goffman predominantly spoke of material consequence, Bergström (2010: 90) found a number of social norms pertaining to symbolic and emotional consequence. In board and card gaming, players ought to disconnect their selves, social relations, and emotions in other situations from the gaming encounter. Getting emotionally involved, having a bit of self-worth at stake *during* the gaming encounter is appropriate, but emotional states and personal relations prior to the gaming encounter should not factor into it. Likewise, the game outcome should not impinge on them afterwards; players ought not to favour friends or relatives during gameplay, not be revengeful from one gaming instance to the other, not bring out-of-game consequences into the game as a threat (*à la* 'You can sleep on the couch tonight!'), and not gloat too much about a victory nor sulk too much after a loss.

Summary and Conclusions

This section articulated some of the main 'unwritten rules' (Sniderman 1999) of gaming as articulated by Goffman and later empirical work. Gaming is characterised firstly by an autotelic focus on enjoyment, which Goffman specified as the experience of euphoric ease and engrossment. Players are expected to visibly care about the game outcome and expected and allowed to act 'gameworthy', to strategically maximise their chances of achieving their designated game outcome. Following contemporary research, this gameworthiness is balanced with a care for the other players' enjoyment, and with a widening of possible stances from intensely goal-oriented to open and explorative. Players are expected to be attentively focused on the game state and disattend other phenomena. They also should not access 'hidden information', especially when guessing hidden information based on overt information is part of the central game challenge. Players are expected to remain emotionally calm enough to not let their emotion affect their gameworthiness. Yet where gaming is a public performance, they are allowed to more overtly display emotion to provide a source of involvement for the audience. In terms of rules, gaming is characterised by the existence of specified rules to which players are expected to adhere. Players ought not to 'cheat' (take advantageous actions not permitted by the rules), but also to follow the 'spirit of the game'; that is, not take advantageous actions permissible by the rules but deviating from the central skill tested in the game. A balancing of player

skills to maximise the suspenseful problematicness of the game outcome is considered desirable. Materially, gaming is characterised by expectable ‘traditional equipment’, which is organised to produce a nicely bounded joint focus of action and attention. Gaming encounters are internally organised into two main parts: The first is the gaming encounter itself, where actors become ratified participants as players or onlookers, for example, which involves pre- and post-proceedings and intermissions. The second is gameplay, which involves the two possible foci of game rules and game fiction, in which ratified players may engage with different footings: performatively enacting, narratively describing, or personalisingly referring to their character, or engaging with game entities as tools. Gameplay itself may contain further internal laminations like a game within a game, or an enacted character telling a lie. Finally, when it comes to gaming’s gearing into the world, we found little on frame limits – what kind of activity may become subject to gaming –, but noted that gaming is characterised by ‘slight’ consequentiality: gaming is allowed to have some material or symbolic consequence, as long as this increases spontaneous involvement and doesn’t produce unpleasant anxiety.

4.5 Games and Fiction (as Play)

The topic of fiction in games has sometimes been equated with the so-called ‘ludology/narratology’ debate.⁶⁷ Indeed, expressions like ‘interactive fiction’, ‘interactive narrative’, or ‘virtual theatre’ point to the notion that *video* games are basically traditional fictional media like literature or film, just with something ‘added’ – that something being ‘interactivity’, ‘simulation’, ‘procedurality’, ‘ergodicity’, or some such. Critical re-readings of the ludology/narratology debate however show that this ‘extensionist’ notion of video games is really more a folk theory and forced misreading of certain authors than a position seriously proposed by any scholar (Frasca 2003, Copier 2003). It also fails to see the transmedia quality of games as social phenomena reaching back in human history just as far as stories. Second, if anything, the ludology/narratology debate was an argument revolving around the *narrativity* of video games – whether they are structured like a narration (or not), and whether the ‘thematisation’ or embedding of game rules in a narrative is a necessary component for their experience, analysis, or definition. From the outset, fiction was never really part of this debate (see already Aarseth 1997: 84-5), and it bears repeating that although both have sometimes been equated, ‘fiction’ and ‘narration’ are two very separate concepts (Ryan 2008, Tavinor 2012: 186). Put plainly, ‘narration’ is about ‘telling a story’. It relates to

- a certain syntactical, formal quality of communications, ‘narrativity’ (being organised and presented in a way we would recognise as ‘typical’ for stories),
- a certain semantic type of statement (a temporal sequence of events), and

⁶⁷ This section incorporates text passages from Deterding 2009a.

- a certain pragmatic, explicit or implied communicative situation (consisting of a narrator relating a story to a narratee).

‘Fiction’, on the other hand, is about the peculiar status of certain actions and communications – often, though not necessarily, related in a narration. Narrative journalism for instance is a non-fiction genre with a narrative form. Again, we might differentiate:

- a syntactical dimension, ‘fictionality’—formal features that allow us to tell apart, say, a fiction film from a documentary,
- a semantic dimension, usually called ‘fictiveness’ (the logical or ontological status of the propositions expressed in a piece of fiction), and
- a pragmatic, situational grounding that enables fictional discourse in everyday life, and guides our engagement with it (Zipfel 2001).

The question how ‘fiction’ and ‘games’ relate exactly is still far from settled. Interestingly, in this debate, we find the same prevalence for fallacies of misplaced concreteness as in the case of rules. This time, the main reason is not theoretical inspiration from semiotics or systems theory, nor the fact that formal board games and digital video games served as the empirical material from which theories of ‘game fiction’ were developed. Rather, it is because game studies scholars have predominantly either attempted to construct formalist, (onto)logical accounts of fiction and games (e.g. Aarseth 2007), or drawn on the study of fiction in analytic philosophy, especially the theory of possible worlds (e.g. Juul 2005, cf. Ryan 2013). That is, they have considered fiction mostly either in *syntactical* terms as a set of certain formal features, or in *semantic* terms as a specific logical type (of proposition or ontological entity) – or at least derived their conceptual apparatus from possible worlds theory to then theorise fiction as imagination (as Juul did). As in the case of rules, such formalist or (onto)logical accounts lend themselves to reifications of the theorised phenomena (‘fiction’, ‘simulation’, ‘propositions’) as quasi-Platonic entities existing next to and independent of the empirical phenomena they denote. Precisely because syntactic and semantic theories of fiction ultimately ran into conceptual troubles or begged the question *how* the specific ‘logical status of fictional discourse’ (Searle 1975) is practically *achieved*, fiction theory in the 20th century shifted from (1) initial claims of an ontological difference between fiction and non-fiction grounded in syntactic surface properties to (2) analytic accounts that sought out a semantic rather than ontological difference to (3) today’s pragmatic accounts of fiction as a social convention that frees it from the demands of truth, consequence, liability, and economic value (Nickel-Bacon, Groeben & Schreier 2000).

Here is not the place to engage in philosophical debates about the virtues of flavours of pragmatism or social constructionism versus flavours of analytic philosophy (like logical realism or logical atomism); nor to engage in debates about the general advantages of pragmatist versus formalist or logical accounts of fiction. I direct interested readers to useful summative

accounts (Zipfel 2001), and to studies reconstructing the history and cultural specificity of ‘fiction’ as we understand it today, which complicates atemporal, universalist theories (Rösler 1980, Schlaffer 1990). The present section merely intends to flesh out what specific perspective frame analysis brings to the relation of fiction and games.

Fiction as Make-Believe

So what is the perspective that frame analysis brings to fiction in games? First, it is one concerned with the *pragmatics* of fiction – the peculiar kinds of activities and experiences fiction brings with it, the peculiar status deemed-fictional entities have in the social world, and how such activities, experiences, and statuses come about. Elsewhere (Deterding 2009a), I have argued that frame analysis belongs to family of theories that can be called ‘games and fiction as play’: Goffman, Huizinga, Bateson, Walton, Schechner, and evolutionary aesthetics all conceptualise fictional media and practices (*as well as games*) as evolutionary and cultural descendants of animal and childhood play. Contemporary accounts of fiction in video games often first construct a strong separation of ‘fiction’ and ‘games’, to *then* ponder how the two are brought together again in video games. From a ‘games and fiction as play’ perspective, this fails to see that whenever we are dealing with ‘either’ fiction ‘or’ gaming ‘in’ video games, we are dealing with merely specific cultivations of play, which centrally involve the joint production of a secondary, intentional constitutive ordering: a ‘pretend king’ in pretend play, a ‘game king’ in rule play. The underlying social process of constitutive ordering is one and the same: like a ‘pretend dragon’ is first and foremost defined by what actions it can and cannot be described, gestured, or enacted to take in the flow of pretend play, and how they affect the ‘pretend princess’ and ‘pretend prince’, so ‘being it’ in a game of Tic-tac-toe is first and foremost defined by what actions ‘it’ can take, and how they affect those ‘not being it’. A game of cops and robbers lives just as much from the pretend-imagination of being a cop or a robber as it lives from the contest of the hunt. In early childhood, direct enacted pretend play, storytelling, and rule play are one. It is only in later development that they become more refined and stabilised as different forms (Boyd 2009: 177-8). Metaphorically speaking, to ask how games and fiction relate is like asking how sliced bread and bread rolls relate: whether the category of ‘bread rolls’ contains ‘sliced bread’ (or vice versa), whether the two are (necessarily) separate, or whether they (necessarily) overlap in ‘sandwiches’. Yes, a sandwich can have a slice of bread in the bottom or middle and half of a bread roll on top, but both bread rolls and sliced bread are *bread* first and foremost.

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman subsumes playfulness, daydreaming, and fictional media as one kind of keyings he calls ‘make-believe’: ‘activity that participants treat as an avowed, ostensible imitation or running through of less transformed activity, this being done with the knowledge that nothing practical will come of the doing’, with the official reason for engaging

in it being ‘immediate satisfaction’ (Goffman 1986: 48). Make-believe activities require ‘engrossment of the participants in ... the innermost plane of being’, and to support that, they are organised around central ‘engrossables’ (a theatre stage, a book, a movie screen, etc.) (Goffman 1986: 48, 46), materials and activities designed to maximally involve onlookers in the imitated activity, at least partially making them forget *that* it is a mimicking keying: ‘The process at the beginning of a play whereby the spontaneous involvement of the onlooker is induced and he finds himself dissolving into a make-believe world is much like the downkeyings properly so named, except the onlooker doesn’t lose himself completely, and this balance is precisely what the arrangement between stage actors and audience calls for’ (Goffman 1986: 365). Goffman’s term for fictional media is ‘dramatic scriptings’, ‘all strips of depicted personal experience made available for vicarious participation to an audience or readership, especially ... through the medium of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and the legitimate (live) stage’ (Goffman 1986: 53). He readily acknowledges that different fictional media come with different institutionalised forms in how they represent and transform the imitated source activity (Goffman 1986: 149). When it comes to the question of the ‘reality’ of fiction, we are again faced with the semantic overdetermination of ‘real’. Frame analytically, we have to keep apart:

- the materiality of fictional actions and objects: pretend play and theatre feature ‘imitating’, transformed activity, but most fictional media present us with symbolic communications or representing objects that are often highly non-iconic: a verbal description or visual depiction of cops chasing robbers is different from enacting cops and robbers;
- the (shared) depth of involvement in what is presented: in fictional media, we are afforded, allowed, and supposed to get deeply engrossed in the transformed activity, and we feel we have the right to complain if this doesn’t happen; and
- the framing of the involved artefacts or activities as ‘fiction’ or ‘make-believe’, namely ‘that nothing practical will come of the doing’.

Fictional media, following this argument, not so much achieve ‘temporary suspension of disbelief’. Rather, they institutionalise presumed-autotelic involvement in transformed activity, a transformation often involving symbolic communication or representation instead of direct enactment, and the institutionalisation of *not* taking what you get involved in ‘seriously’. This leads us to the question *how* this peculiar ‘reality’ of fictional media is achieved.

The Accomplishment of Inconsequentiality

In terms of inconsequentiality, we can return to our previous analysis of games: fictional media replace objects and actions with others that are far less likely to incur any real bodily harm. Take theatre as the presumed most immediate descendant of pretend play: theatric actions and objects are *gestural*, *ritualised* ones with minimised bodily consequence – theatre daggers drawing theatre blood. Most of today’s fictional media, like games, go even further and use (materi-

alised) symbolic communications that are even less dangerous. The picture of a lion is physically unable to eat you. However, as with games, ritualisation and symbolic communication can only be part of the answer. For there are innumerable instances of symbolic communication in everyday life that we deem and treat consequentially: that is what the distinction of fact versus fiction demarcates. A death threat shouted on a theatre stage is understood to be an inconsequential fictional insult;⁶⁸ the same words shouted on the street might get you arrested. Just like the ‘real’ value of a \$20 bill – its proper social meaning and use – has to be constituted, so has the ‘unreal’ meaning of a fictional (or ironic, or artistic...) death threat as proper for eliciting emotion, attentive involvement, and aesthetic reflection, but nothing more. In short, taking-as-inconsequential is part of the frame of fiction we are socialised into and enact when we frame communications and actions as fictional. This notion of ‘fiction’ as frame and framing resonates with contemporary pragmatic fiction theories. In literary studies, Lejeune (1989) and Eco (1994) have called this the ‘fictional pact’. Constructivist media scholar S. J. Schmidt speaks of the ‘aesthetics convention’ (‘Ä-Konvention’) and sees it in effect in all art (Schmidt 1980: 86ff., 148ff.). And already in the 1970s, John Searle (1975: 326) wrote (laying the ground for his later theory of social reality): ‘Now what makes fiction possible, I suggest, is a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world’ (see Tavinor [2012: 192-3] for pointers towards similar pragmatist accounts of fiction in analytic philosophy).

One important side effect of fictional *media* like film or books is that they establish a ‘dilated’ situation (Zipfel 2001: 39): the producer of the symbolic communications entailed in a fictional media offering is usually not response-present when we engage with it. How do we know ‘what it is that’s really going on here?’ when the producer is not response-present to correct possible misframings in the sequence of interaction? A written sentence like ‘It will rain tomorrow’ on its own nowhere holds any indication whether it is to be understood as part of a fictional story or a factual weather forecast. The answer is *media genres* or ‘genre frames’ (Winter 1992, Willems 2000, Pietraß 2003, 2004, 2006). In social life, we do not encounter or learn fiction ‘as such’, ‘in the abstract’. Rather, we get socialised into multiple kinds of ‘communicative genres’ (Günther & Knoblauch 1994) with their own specific meanings and uses. ‘Fiction’ is a useful secondary abstraction to describe a set of observable properties shared by media offerings belonging to several different media genres. ‘Bedtime story’, ‘newspaper’, and other genre frames we encounter in the course of our upbringing come first. Genre frames, like any other frame, organise expected and appropriate motivational relevancies, actions and communications, footings, internal organisation, emotions, attentive focus and involvement, etc. Notably, they do so *across* the different domains and roles of media production, media distribution,

⁶⁸ Hence the common joke of the stand-up comedian who is unable to convince the laughing audience that ‘the theatre is on fire, please leave the room’ is meant seriously.

media reception, and media appropriation, although people usually only get socialised into specific roles. Still, genre frames connect the different domains: from director to producer to cinema owner to movie-goer to journalist, everyone knows what to expect from 'a Western', how to recognise and label and describe and interact with it, including the fact that 'a Western' is – if not explicitly flagged otherwise – fictional. As part of our media socialisation, we acquire the frame dispositions to correctly frame media offerings as belonging to specific genres. 'Fictionality' describes a central aspect of their gearing into the world (Schmidt 1994: 164ff.). It involves normative expectations of how to respond to fictional media as an onlooker: watching a movie, we are allowed to be deeply emotionally touched while watching it, but we ought not to remain distraught for too long after having left the cinema, nor base any future actions on the presumed truth of depictions in the movie. 'Fictionality' also involves normative (and in fact, often legally enforceable) expectations regarding the intention and material actions involved in the production of media offerings – how it is geared into the world by its producers. Goffman illustrates this point with photographs. 'Unlike what is required in drawing, painting, or fiction, but like the theater, a photograph requires material guides' (Goffman 1979: 13). Yet this is not enough for a photograph to be 'factual'. Photographs are framed as factual, documentary, or 'candid' if the photographed scene was not intentionally pre-arranged for the photographing. They are framed as fabrications if the scene was intentionally covertly pre-arranged, and framed as fictional keyings if they have been overtly arranged, as in e.g. advertising photography (Goffman 1979: 13-15). Similarly, the genre frame of journalistic media involves the normative expectation that journalists do go through the 'strategic ritual' of objectivity in their production (Tuchman 1972). In contrast, producers and audiences expect fictional media to be *not* methodically, reliably geared into objects, actors, actions and events beyond the actual production situation. They *can* incidentally represent an unstaged historical event existing independently of and prior to the act of producing that representation, but they can just as well include representations of events that exist in no other form but in that of representations (the image of a dragon, say). This, by the way, also characterises games.

When producing media offerings, producers follow the genre-specific *transformation rules* how to transform-represent the source activity, and the specific conventions of how to *meta-communicate* their genre. This enables socialised recipients to 'co-intentionally' (Zipfel 2001: 227) frame the media offering. Such implicit and explicit 'signposts of fictionality' (Cohn 1990) commonly include (Zipfel 2001: 229-232, Nickel-Bacon, Groeben & Schreier 2000):

- indications of *fictiveness*, meaning the actual truth or occurrence of the depicted event (e.g. events that according to the socially shared worldview are impossible or extremely unlikely, like aliens landing on Earth);
- indications of *fictionality*, meaning the specific aesthetic conventions of presentation associated with fictional media ('mockumentaries' for instance follow the aesthetic conven-

tions of documentary films to create the impression – to induce the misframing – that they are actually factual not fictional);

- *brackets* in the form of ‘paratexts’ (Genette 1997) that explicitly indicate the genre status of the media offering (e.g. the word ‘advert’ printed atop a piece of text in a magazine that otherwise follows the aesthetic conventions of a regular journalistic article).

The total situation in which we encounter a media offering also takes part in our framing: if we find two persons having an argument in the ‘institutionalised setting’ of a theatre stage (Willems 1997: 142), that will factor into its framing as a theatric performance. The same is true if we encounter them on a street and see other people standing around, laughing and applauding. We would take as an implicit indication that their argument is a fictional performance, because we have learned that openly observing, laughing about, and applauding is highly inappropriate for people having a real argument, but appropriate if it is a performed argument. Finally, in the way we interact with media offerings, in the way we interactively frame them as belonging to a (fictional) genre, we *co-constitute* their fictionality and genre-belonging – we partake in the reproduction-and-change of the (fiction) genre frame as well as the specific social meanings of the specific media offering.

The Accomplishment of Imagination and Involvement

Now turn to the second and third aspect of the ‘reality’ of fictional media: how are they made *representational* and *involving*? After all, more often than not, what they amount to is a pretty dull-looking heap of paper with strewn black markings on them (or a celluloid, or a screen). We can take useful cues from Gibson’s (1986: 261-2, 267-302; 1982) affordance-theoretical analysis of picture and word perception. Perceiving pictures, moving images, or written or spoken words, we *visualise* or *imagine* the depicted entities and events *as an immediate part of our direct perception*: based on the radically less rich and more compounded invariants provided by a word or a sketched face, our perceptual system ‘fills in’, generates a perception of the represented entity. Yet *in parallel* we perceive the representing object in its direct basic affordances – we perceive-imagine a picture as the object it depicts, but we *also* perceive it as a flat surface with spots of colour (Gibson 1982: 279; 1986: 282). We can intentionally focus our perception on the imagined entity (the ‘meaning’ of the word, the imaginations and readied future actions it gives rise to), or on the material object (e.g. the typographic beauty of black markings on paper). Going back to Mead: in truly symbolic, conventionalised media like language, we see how attitudes are connected to further attitudes, how the sense perceptions and bodily movements we had and enacted or observed others doing when hearing/speaking a word get evoked when we hear or read that word again (see Johnson [2007] for an excellent embodied, pragmatist unpacking of this process, and Ohler & Nieding [2006] on how this capacity is ontogenetically and phylogenetically first developed and trained in pretend play). Still, as Gibson argued, even the most ‘iconic’ or ‘immersive’ medium comes with affordances relative to our bodily disposi-

tions that are different from the entity we imagine-perceive. A first immediate corollary is that based on the object's features and the actor's dispositions, such imagining-perception ought to be afforded more or less strongly, realised more or less easily. Second, this perception involves specific, and likely socially learned dispositions from the actor (an 'acquired interpretive competence', as Goffman [1979: 12] called it). We can readily extend this argument to involvement: just as different representational media differently afford imagining-perception to different actors, so they differently afford involvement. Fictional media are purpose-designed to afford a maximum of imagining-perception *and* engrossment: in a cinema, we find the darkening of the light and the soft seat (and the social norms of keeping silence) that shut out all outer distractions, a screen that fills the viewing-angle, a frame rate of projected images that generates the perception of fluid movement, etc.

Yet, frame analytically, this is not enough to explain why people tend to realise just these affordances. Specific material objects might strongly afford a direct imagining-perception of represented entities and deep attentive and emotional involvement. But this specific realisation of those affordances has to be socially learned and situationally *framed* as expectable and appropriate. If we visualise a scenic description from a novel and forget the time over it, nobody would consider us strange. A poem might be extremely hermetic on first reading, but by virtue of being framed as poetry, it is expectable and appropriate that we spend a long time reading it, and to let our associations fly while doing so – not so if we did the same thing with a machine-written postcard notifying us that we can pick up a parcel at the post office. Hence the humour entailed in ironically keyed readings of everyday use texts like recipes or shopping lists as poetry, or Yelp online reviews as theatric performances of dramatic texts.

This frame analytic account of fictional media involving the explicit license and expectation of involved imagining-perception holds deep parallels to Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). Walton suggests to subsume fictional literature, movies, theatre plays, and paintings under the category of 'representational art', which he holds to be fully fictional (Walton 1990: 2). Walton summarises his core tenet as follows:

The activities in which representational works of art are embedded ... are best seen as continuous with children's games of make-believe. Indeed, I advocate regarding these activities as games of make-believe themselves, and I shall argue that representational works function as props in those games, as dolls and teddy bears serve as props in children's games. (Walton 1990: 11)

The function of such 'props' is to prompt, anchor, focus and coordinate individual and shared imagination (Walton 1990: 19-21). This imaginative faculty of props goes back to what Walton calls 'principles of generation': 'rules about what is to be imagined in what circumstances', based on a given prop in a given game of make-believe (Walton 1990: 40). Principles of generation are part of a larger shared 'convention, understanding, agreement in the game of make-believe' (Walton 1990: 38). Yet in the final analysis, make-believe games remain situation-dependent: 'what principles of generation there are depends on which ones people accept in

various contexts. The principles that are in force are those that are understood, at least implicitly, to be in force' (Walton 1990: 38). The difference between fictional and non-fictional media therefore resides with their contextually acknowledged 'social function of serving as props in games of make-believe' (Walton 1990: 69).

The only real difference between Walton's 'principles of generation' and frames is Walton's philosophical grounding in analytic philosophy. *Mimesis as Make-Believe* attempts to reincorporate fiction into the neat realm of logical propositions by lending fictional propositions an ontological existence independent of human actors by anchoring them in props and principles of generation: 'Props generate fictional truths independently of what anyone does or does not imagine' (Walton 1990: 38).⁶⁹ Frame analytically, one can readily agree with the first point – affording imaginations –, but has to disagree with the second. There are no Platonic propositions or fictional truths existing independently from their material instantiations as words thought or spoken or written and human actors to whom they are 'propositions' and 'fictional truths' and so on. The imaginations they cue – the attitudes they call forth – *are* their meaning. They exist because we as a language community in interaction reproduce that the word 'cow' evokes bovine imaginations, and reproduce that one can relate to the word 'cow' printed in a 'novel' differently from if it were printed in a 'newspaper.'

Framing 'Fiction' in Video Gaming

So what, then, is the status of 'fiction' in video gaming? The first thing to notice is again the wide common ground of gaming and fiction: both are institutionalised (sets of) frames that culturally descend from play – fiction from pretend play, gaming from rule play, presumably. Both are organised around 'engrossables', objects and activities designed to elicit and focus joint attention and involvement. Both comprise voluntary, autotelic involvement and an inconsequential gearing into the world that is sociomaterially accomplished through transformations (theatre daggers, Bateson's nip that is not a bite) and symbolic representations (depicted, described daggers and bites), as well as through shared understandings, expectations, and norms. Actions, events, and objects that are framed as fictional (or as gaming) are made to be 'unserious': 'It's just a story', 'it's just a game.' Even if the newest *Assassin's Creed* game or Dan Brown novel would faithfully depict Florence, we wouldn't rely on either of them as a travel guide: not because they 'contain fictive propositions', but because 'fictiveness' is the institutionalised and enacted social order of not relying on them.

⁶⁹ Aarseth (2007: 36) distinguishes his understanding of fiction in games from Walton by claiming the exact same imagination-generating and actor-independent quality Walton also holds: 'Fictions do not have to be logical or consistent, as long as they make us project mental images, happenings and notions. Nor are (literary) fictions the same as "games of make-believe," since they rely on words and texts independent of the reader, unlike children playing games of pure make-believe, where the player is in control, and can change the world and its conditions at will.'

The only difference that remains is that fictional media are framed to elicit strong imagining perception of pretend entities, usually in narratively coherent form, in which we as recipients are to take on the role of passive onlookers, whereas games are framed to elicit taking actions to achieve a problematic outcome. As Walton (1990: 225) observes, we usually feel uneasy comparing children's pretend play with adults watching a painting because the latter are thrown back into the more restrictive role of 'appreciators' rather than 'participants'. The main quality of *video* games is that they often afford to actors with the respective dispositions to frame game features and events as *both* rule-based entities to act on *and* 'props' to imagine-perceive pretend entities (Juul 2005). Going back to Linderoth (2004, 2005), 'gameplay' and 'game fiction' are two possible and frequent *foci* enacted in the course of gaming. 'Game fiction' in turn contains at least two possible *footings*: Players can relate to the placement of a figure on a board game *performatively* as enacting a pretend character, or *narratively* as an onlooker witnessing (and in games, *affecting*) an event happening to the character. In comparison to fictional media that more or less only afford the role of an *onlooker* (Walton's 'appreciator'), games afford much more strongly the protean multiplicity of foci and footings present in pretend play, including embodying and performing the character in the sequence of pretend events.

The shift in theoretical perspective here is twofold. Not only is the player's situational enactment co-constitutive for 'what it is that's going on here' – a strip of appreciated narrative, a strategic game move, a performative enactment of a character. Discerning *what* categorical 'bucket' any given game, game element, or strip of gaming experience 'belongs in' and ensuring *that* it only belongs in one bucket is a concern only of scholars, not people actually playing and gaming: 'For children, direction, narration, and enactment flow readily and naturally into one another. So long as the play-story [sic] continues, consistency of medium or mode does not matter' (Boyd 2009: 177). Following Gibson's (1986) perception theory, in our phenomenal experience of video gameplay, the various aspects presumably fall into one *gestalt*: in *Pong*, we see a moving ball and try to rebound it with our paddle – we don't see a pixel 'representing a moving object', a line of pixels 'representing a solid, movable plane' and the screen bounds 'representing a void' that we then further constitute into the 'ball' you ought to 'avoid missing' to 'get a high score'. Whether we perceive and enact all these possible foci *simultaneously*, *sub-junctively*, or whether at any given point in time we focus on and enact one of them, is an interesting open question that requires close empirical attention: at the most base, both 'game fiction' and 'gameplay' are secondary constitutive orderings. In both we transform or organise our interaction with, perception, understanding, and experience of a material piece of wood we physically place on a painted area of wood. We can just look at a wooden chess piece (the knight) and constitute, frame it as a prop to imagine-perceive a blend of remembered movie scenes of knights on horses dashing forth. We can move that wooden piece on a chessboard in an ongoing chess game to put the other player's king in check. If it is 'our turn' and if we keep

to the rules of chess in physically lifting that piece and placing it onto another area of the chessboard, we constitute, we frame that physical relocation of that chunk of wood as a legitimate move in the game of chess. When in our action, perception, understanding, and experience, we realise the constitutive orders of both game and fiction, then arguably, we realise both framings at the same time: we place the king in check *and* we imagine-perceive a wave of knights in shining armour on their war horses storming up the hill of a battle field, circling the king, whom we perhaps imagine-perceive as a blend of a movie king and the face of the friend sitting across the table.

Both frames have demands of sequential consistency, however. If we have trouble imagining-perceiving a continuing stream of practically coherent actions and events leading into each other, the 'reality' of fiction 'anomically flutters' (Goffman 1986: 302) – it becomes hard to keep up that framing and keep ourselves engrossed in the generation of imagining-perceptions. Incoherent stories, untrustworthy narrators, logically impossible loops, and breaks of the 'fourth wall' all generate such 'negative experience' (Goffman 1986: 378). Similarly, the constitutive order of gameplay impresses its demands upon sequential consistency: you are only allowed to change the current game state according to the rules of the game.

If players want to and try to achieve it, a stream of actions, communications, and events can be thus *simultaneously* constituted as a coherent fiction framing and coherent gameplay framing. But in all likelihood, the two orders will often conflict with each other. The question then becomes which order the players enact as taking precedence. For instance, in pen-and-paper RPGs, players may agree on and enact a 'dramatist' or 'narrativist' 'aesthetic agenda' (Edwards 2001): they agree that they first and foremost wish to performatively enact characters or tell a good, satisfying story; or they may agree on the 'gamist' aesthetic agenda that they want to win and progress in a game. Which frame or constitutive order is 'primary' here is a matter of situational agreement and accomplishment that is reproduced or challenged at every turn of interaction. Still, incoherencies are nothing new and are par for the course (as in childhood play), and indeed a source of humorous enjoyment (Fine 1983: 200-3), just like any frame shifting can be and often is exploited for the humour it engenders (Ritchie 2005).

Juul (2005: 1) has articulated this 'dual quality' most forcefully: 'a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world'. This coming-together of rules and fiction is nothing accidental to video games, he holds, but an important productive dynamic: 'Fiction cues the player into understanding the rules, and rules can cue the player into imagining a fictional world' (Juul 2005: 197). The fictional worlds of video games tend to be 'incoherent' (Juul 2005: 123) because the rules demand elements or events not easily integrated into the fictional world. He claims that this 'half-real' game-and-fiction quality sets video games apart from other games: 'In having fictional worlds, video games deviate from traditional non-electronic games that are mostly abstract, and this is part of the newness of video games' (Juul 2005: 1).

In an influential paper, Aarseth (2007) has similarly attempted to disentangle the relation of game and fiction in video games by introducing another category, the ‘simulated’. Simulations, he claims, are new and specific to video games and ‘ontologically different’ from real or fictional entities: ‘we respond to them differently, they are constructed differently, and the social exchanges they are part of are different from the social uses of fiction’ (Aarseth 2007: 36). ‘Fiction’, in Aarseth’s terms, amounts to signs representing fictive entities, and games often contain many of them. ‘Simulation’ relates to an element that is ‘made of signs *and* a dynamic model, that will specify its behaviour and respond to our input’ (Aarseth 2007: 37). His examples are a door that a player character can manipulate (simulation), and a door that is merely part of background textures (fiction). For each element in a video game, we can tell whether it belongs in the ‘simulation’ or ‘fiction’ bucket. That is, we can neatly separate out the ‘simulation’ and the ‘fictional’ in any video game. This allows for a video game as a whole to hold both simulational and fictional elements at the same time.

In broad terms, these notions are congruent with the above frame analytic account: as regards Juul, the main point of difference is that the ‘half-real’ and ‘incoherent’ quality is nothing new or specific to video games. We already find it in childhood play and any kind of game. It is true, however, that most of today’s video games feature extended, highly iconic audiovisual representations that are often also narratively sequenced and/or interactive, especially in so-called ‘story shooters’ or ‘action adventures’. Still, whether and how that incoherency is perceived and resolved is a matter of how players frame any strip of experience in question: Whether they frame it as predominantly fiction (and find that certain algorithmically enforced sequential consistency demands of the game framing ‘get in the way’ of imagining-perceiving the fictional world), or predominantly as game (and are happy to re-organise their perceptual *Gestalten* from imagining-perceiving towards *Gestalten* relating to game states and rules), or do both, or switch between both.

As regards Aarseth, he points to an important difference between game entities that afford being engaged with only fictional terms, and those that afford being engaged with both fictional and game terms. The main difference here is between his semantic or (onto)logical account of necessary and sufficient defining criteria of concepts, and our pragmatic, empirical account of socio-material affordances and constitutive ordering. From a frame analytic perspective, it is simply nonsensical (or uninteresting) to make reifying claims that video games ‘as such’ or one specific video game ‘is’ or ‘isn’t’ ‘fiction’ (or ‘narrative’), ‘contains’ or ‘doesn’t contain’ ‘elements of fiction’ (or ‘narration’). Whether something ‘is’ a game entity or a fictional one (or something else) depends on what framing, focus, footing is individually or jointly enacted in the moment. In the words of David Parlett (1999: 6): ‘How representational a game is depends on the level at which it is being played and the extent of the player’s imagination’. Of course, given one’s dispositions, any specific game object will more or less strongly afford be-

ing situationally framed or focused on as a prop for imagining-perceiving a fictional world, and/or as a game entity to be acted on. So-called abstract games afford less readily the imagining-perception of a fictional world – but it remains possible. Anybody who has observed young children playing board games knows how easy it is for them to take, for example, the props from *Monopoly* and turn the game board into a racetrack with two playing pieces chasing each other around the curves. It is presumably our socialisation as adults that makes us feel doing so inappropriate. Even an abstract skill game of ‘who hits the floating bark on the river with a stone’ can suddenly flip into kamikaze fighters attacking an aircraft carrier. Any adult board gamer will readily recall instances where game events afforded small individual or shared imaginings, role-plays, micro-narrations.

In an instructive ethnographic account, Lancaster (2001: xxviii) has reconstructed how board, card, and pen-and-paper RPGs of the *Babylon 5* science fiction franchise ‘create immersion through performance in the minds of their players’. The rules and objects of the games – the cardboard boards, the playing pieces, the character sheets and playing cards imprinted with stock images taken from the TV show – are not ‘just’ there to organise an entertaining gaming experience: a significant portion of the entertainment stems from the games’ ability to involve the players in imagining-perceiving the fictional world of *Babylon 5*, only this time with the players performing rather than distantly watching. Objects and rules afford this performative imagining-perceiving by (a) consistently referring to, representing, and evoking memories of events in the TV series, and (b) making it likely that gameplay situations emerge similar to those of the TV series. In the series, a prominent moment of space combat drama is when a space ship’s ‘interceptors’ protecting its ‘hull’ are destroyed. The rules of the space combat board game *Babylon 5 Wars* are structured such that destroying an enemy ship’s ‘interceptors’ makes it vulnerable for a potentially lethal attack. Planning attacks to maximise the opportunity for this to occur becomes a recurring part of players’ strategic calculations, and the rule book reinforces the direct connection of this rule to the scene in the TV series (Lancaster 2001: 69-70). Playing the collectible card game, each card links an in-game action or resource to a comparable scene or entity from the TV series. The card game effectively allows the reshuffling of bits of scenes into a new narrative order, a story of one’s own, while inviting the players to take all kinds of footings (Lancaster 2001: 92-111). Crucially, all this work of imagining-perceiving *would not work without the players bringing in their deep background knowledge of the Babylon 5 franchise*. ‘The designers...have prepared potentials for performance within them. ... The interface is a concrete material object that helps open the door to another’s imaginary universe’ (Lancaster 2001: 32). For these affordances to emerge, however, ‘people are required to bring a different kind of sensibility to them’ (ibid.). They need have the requisite memories of consuming other fictional media that *grounds* all the visual and textual representations and all the abstract entities and relations of the game rules, that fills in their blanks,

that makes them intelligible and meaningful (Lancaster 2001: 52-3). As Goldman (1998) observed in a field study of childrens' play among the Huli in Papua New Guinea, pretend play requires basic shared cultural typifications of the roles, events, and objects that get re-enacted.

Hence, one and the same game ought to afford different foci relative to the players' experiential familiarity with the 'semiotic domain' (Gee 2004: 13-50) the game appeals to: if I play a game about 'swashbuckling pirates in the Caribbean', but know next to nothing about piracy, nor am particularly excited by it, there are no fictional worlds I know or care about that I could imagine-perceive while playing the game. Conversely, a fan of JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* will likely experience a game set in Middle Earth as rich with evocative material and possibilities to take on roles, imagine-perceive alternate versions of the world, and recreate little stories. (Her experience will also likely be paralleled and disrupted by constant questionings of the 'authenticity' and 'canonicity' of the games' representations.) On the other hand, player activity can significantly configure the present game objects. Hacks can turn unpassable 'mere background textures' into passable open spaces. In a field study of an MMORPG guild engaged in 'role-play intensive' gaming, Linderoth (2012) retraces how players appropriate game objects that are designed to afford strongly rule-focused gaming to enact pretend roles and imagine a shared fictional world.

Summary and Conclusions

This section presented a frame analytic perspective on 'fiction' in video gaming. It argued that gaming and fictional media both originate in (rule and pretend) play as differentially refined institutionalizations of the same basic process of secondary constitutive ordering: one for suspenseful action with a problematic outcome, the other for passive imagining-perceiving engrossment in a make-believe world. 'Fiction', we further argued, is a secondary scholarly label for a set of institutionalised 'make-believe' keyings (or *genres*) that we acquire during socialisation: theatre, bedtime stories, and the like. They share an inconsequential gearing into the world, both in the expectations and sociomaterial orderings relating to their production, and in the consequences that may legitimately flow from actors' engagement in their reception. This inconsequentiality is achieved epistemically and normatively, but most of all materially: make-believe activity involves symbolic, representational gestures or objects. Where fictional media are such symbolic objects, their producer often cannot interact with recipients to establish their 'correct' framing; explicit metacommunicative signals and formal conventions therefore serve to indicate how the object ought to be framed. Make-believe objects and performances achieve attentive imagining-perception of the represented make-believe world through organising settings that shut out distraction, objects that strongly afford imagining-perception (including ensuring the internal coherency of the make-believe world) and attentive absorption, but also through their epistemic and normative expectations that one can,

may, and ought to imagine-perceive and let oneself be engrossed. This naturally relies on the dispositions of actors enabling them to pick up known invariants (such as known fictional characters) in perceiving the make-believe objects and performances.

Video games as objects often afford a parallel, simultaneous framing of their inputs and outputs as make-believe *and* gaming. Games and game genres differ in how strongly they afford one, the other, or both foci. Whether an actor perceives any moment of gameplay as game rules, game fiction, or both depends on the situational framing of the actor(s). Because both gaming and make-believe framings involve demands for internal consistency, this possible dual framing can often produce an internal tension that breaks players' spontaneous involvement in those framings.

4.6 The Magic Circle

'The Magic Circle', like 'ludology/narratology', has all the signs of becoming yet another game studies 'debate that never took place' (Frasca 2003): a straw man opposition constructed from a forced misreading that in spite or because of that gave game studies a shared identity: something everybody could disagree on. Drawing on Huizinga (1955) and Salen and Zimmerman (2004), the magic circle is first identified as 'the difference between play and non-play' (Stenros 2012) or 'the spatial, temporal and psychological boundary between games and the real world' (Calleja 2012: 78), only to then voice scepticism that one can 'really' find such a strong and easy boundary between games and life (Taylor 2006: 151-5, Malaby 2007, Castronova 2005: 147-60, Lammes 2008, Copier 2005, 2007, Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, Consalvo 2007: 89-91, 188-90, 2009). Instead, the argument goes, it should really be seen as a social construct. As Juul aptly put it: 'This has been a common thread in criticisms of the magic circle: like Copier, several other theorists also claim to counter Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman by stressing the exact social nature of the magic circle that Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman also stress' (Juul 2008: 59). As Zimmerman (2012) wrote in a recent invective: 'there is no magic circle jerk' – meaning, no radical formalist game scholar claiming a strong boundary between games and life.

Indeed, the most remarkable feature of the 'magic circle' is that it is exclusively talked about in the negative: We only learn what it is *not* (a strong boundary). This is no small issue. 'The magic circle' is first and foremost that: a series of three words – evocative ones – repeatedly used in academic discourse, but seldom if ever followed up by a specification of *what observable phenomena* it refers to. What we get instead is metaphorical talk like 'something genuinely magical' (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 94) or 'worlds within the ordinary world' (Huizinga 1955: 10). These metaphors usually appeal to both the features that 'set games apart' *and* the entity that causes this 'apartness.' Thus, every author gets to read into 'the magic circle' what phenomena she *thinks* it refers to, to then dismantle them as ludicrous. To exacerbate the matter, almost all authors note the 'metaphorical' character of the magic circle (Calleja 2012, Sten-

ros 2012, Copier 2005, Linderöth, Björk & Olsson 2012), only to suggest (after having done their dismantling duties) that one should use *another* metaphor instead, like ‘magic node’ (Lammes 2008), ‘membrane’ (Castronova 2005: 147, Nieuwdorp 2005), ‘puzzle piece’ (Juul 2008), ‘net’ (Schechner 1988: 16, Copier 2005), or ‘network’ (Copier 2007) – or to use Goffmanian frames instead (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008, Consalvo 2009, Calleja 2012).

However, swapping one metaphor for the other, appealing to rather than unpacking ‘frames’ (which, not unpacked, remains yet another metaphor) merely reiterates the basic fallacy of ‘the magic circle’: it abstracts and reifies a game/non-game ‘boundary’ from the process of situated action as some *entity* existing *next to* or as an analytically separable *part of* this process. Even Juul (2008: 60) falls for this ontological doubling when he writes:

Apparently, playing a game not only means following or observing the rules of that game, but there are also special social conventions about how one can act towards other people when playing games. The concept of the magic circle is useful to describe the boundary at which these rules and norms of game-playing are activated.

Suddenly, the ‘boundary’ becomes something existing *in addition to* following the rules and norms of gaming, no matter if ‘negotiated’ (Juul 2008: 62) or not.

This reification, this fallacy of misplaced concreteness, is the fundamental conceptual flaw of ‘the magic circle’. To give a parallel: a wink is not being framed as ironic by first drawing a little circle around our eyes with a metacommunicative post-it attached to it saying: ‘Attention: Ironic – Normal Rules Don’t Apply!’ There is no irony ‘node’, ‘membrane’, ‘network’, or ‘puzzle piece’. The way an ironic wink is enacted and reacted to in an observably orderly way that is mutually intelligible as ironic is the generation of meanings and the following of rules and norms. That process often (though not necessarily) does involve metacommunicative paratexts and brackets (the book cover reading ‘a novel’), but they are part of this situational framing, they do not on their own constitute it.

To demonstrate this point, the next section will first reiterate in a close reading how Salen and Zimmerman (2004), as the self-admitted (Zimmerman 2012) originators of the concept of a ‘magic circle’ in game studies, introduced this reification. The following section will put flesh to bones by teasing out the actual empirical phenomena called out by Salen and Zimmerman and the Huizinga passages they quote, in each case showing (a) that they in and of themselves are insufficient to constitute an instance of ‘gaming’, and (b) that a frame analytic account explains them without remainder or referral to a separate boundary entity. In due course, arguments by Calleja (2012) and Liebe (2008) towards the specificity of digital games will be probed, again showing that digital game objects in and of themselves do not constitute ‘gaming’.

Talking ‘The Magic Circle’ Into Being

Maybe the deepest irony about game scholars recommending ‘frames’ over ‘the magic circle’ is that the chapter in which Salen and Zimmerman introduce the concept *begins* with frames. It

starts with an extensive quote of Sniderman's 'Unwritten Rules' about how human players decide whether what it is that's going on here is a game. Players, he writes, are 'constantly noticing if the conditions for playing the game are still being met, continuously monitoring the "frame", the circumstances surrounding play, to determine that the game is still in progress, always aware (if only unconsciously) that the other participants are acting as if the game is "on"' (Sniderman 1999: 2, qtd. in Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 94). Indeed, from a frame analytic perspective, it could have ended here. There is really nothing more to be said.

Only that Salen and Zimmerman don't end there. They continue: 'the frame of the game is what communicates that those contained within it are 'playing' and that the space of play is separate in some way from that of the real world' (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 94). They go on to quote Apter on the 'protective frame' one experiences in a play state: 'Although this frame is psychological, interestingly it often has a perceptible physical representation ... But such a frame may also be abstract, such as the rules governing the game being played' (Apter 1991: 15, qtd. Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 94). Summarising Sniderman and Apter, Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 94) write: 'We call this frame the *magic circle*, a concept inspired by Johann Huizinga's work on play'. Again, they could have stopped there. But no:

With a toy, it may be difficult to say exactly when the play begins and ends. But with a game, the activity is richly formalized. The game has a beginning, a middle, and a quantifiable outcome. The game takes place in a precisely defined physical and temporal space of play. Either the children are playing Tic-Tac-Toe or they are not. There is no ambiguity concerning their action: they are clearly playing a game ... As a player steps in and out of a game, he or she is crossing that boundary – or frame – that defines the game in time and space. As noted above, we call the boundary of a game the *magic circle*. ... the term is here used as a short-hand for the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game. The fact that the magic circle is just that – a magic circle – is an important feature of this concept. As a closed circle, the space it circumscribes is enclosed and separate from the real world. As a marker of time, the magic circle is like a clock...To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins. The magic circle of a game may have a physical component ... But many games have no physical boundaries (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 95)

This passage (and the remainder of the chapter) does three things. First, when it states 'There is no ambiguity concerning their action: they are clearly playing a game', it takes for granted the constitutive ordering (the *making* 'richly formalized') the boys had to do for there to be 'no ambiguity', and that even then the result is 'clearly playing a game' only to Salen and Zimmerman as authors and us as readers, meaning, human beings socialised into 'gaming' in general and *Tic-Tac-Toe* in particular. The description mutes the human side in the human-environment relationship. Second, it reifies this ongoing process and activity into a seemingly static thing, 'the game'. Thirdly, it divorces these reified entities 'game', 'frame', or 'magic circle' as existing apart from embodied actors and the process in which they interact with objects, reprojecting them as the underlying cause:⁷⁰

⁷⁰ This is only a logical extension of their systematic separation of games as systems versus play as movement within those systems (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 304). Stenros and Waern (2010) have called this one-sided reduction of games into either structures or activities the 'digital fallacy' of game studies.

1. *'the frame of the game is what communicates that those contained within it are 'playing''* (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 94) – Where, what is that 'frame' in the situation? How does it communicate? Sniderman notes that the players are constantly signalling that and monitoring if the others are still signalling that a game is 'on' – it's embodied players doing signalling and monitoring work, based on their dispositions. To say 'the frame communicates' is a glossing, abstracting way of saying the same thing.

2. *'The game has a beginning, a middle, and a quantifiable outcome'* (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 95) – How come? If a backgammon set lies on a table, or a basketball on a court, do they have a beginning, middle, and quantifiable outcome? Again, 'the game' glosses and animates what actors do with objects into a thing unto itself.

3. *'The game takes place in a precisely defined physical and temporal space of play'* (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 95) – As many analyses of pervasive games and LARPs have demonstrated (and as Salen and Zimmerman themselves admit when they state that not all games have physical boundaries), the spaces and times of games are often not clearly defined or given; they are claimed for the activity in the course of players gaming.

4. *'As a player steps in and out of a game, he or she is crossing that boundary – or frame – that defines the game in time and space'* (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 95) – Does a tennis player cross a pre-existing line when she calls 'five-minute break'? If anything, by making that utterance, she creates a temporal bracketing, if accepted by her opponent.

5. *'They are suddenly playing a game, a game that guides and directs their actions'* (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 98). This statement refers to a group of boys playing marbles. But where is the 'game' that guides and directs their actions? There is a pavement, maybe with some chalk marks. There are marbles. There are boys having a practical understanding of how to play marbles. But in each turn of action, in the observably orderly, mutually intelligible way they take it, they constitute to each other that this was 'a move' in the game of marbles, and not 'testing the bounciness of your marble', 'slipping a ball', 'not wanting to play anymore', and so on. 'The game' is a glossing way of speaking about this situated activity system.

In short, all these statements speak of the 'game' or 'frame' as if they were things existing unto themselves, even acting on players. Sniderman says a frame is the circumstances people signal and monitor to establish a game is 'on'. Salen and Zimmerman reify that into 'the frame communicates'. Apter says the frame is psychological. Salen and Zimmerman reify that into the players needing to take a psychological attitude when they 'want to enter the game'.⁷¹

⁷¹ To be fair, their text also contains statements to the opposite: 'set boundaries established by the act of play', 'To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins', 'The game simply begins when one or more players decide to play.' (ibid.: 94-5, emphasis SD) But these statements are in the clear minority.

A Talking Cure

Let's look at the actual phenomena Huizinga and Salen and Zimmerman refer to when they invoke the term 'the magic circle', to show how each is explained by a frame analytic account without requiring a separate boundary entity as an explanatory construct.

1. A Bounded Space

The magic circle of a game 'is the space within which a game takes places' (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 99); 'a specially demarcated ... space', 'that boundary – or frame – that defines the game in ... space'; and 'a special place in ... space created by a game' (Salen and Zimmermann 2004: 95). It is a 'limitation in space', 'a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course', 'proper boundaries of ... space', 'marking out a space' (Huizinga 1955: 10, 13, 20).

All situated action, by necessity of human beings having a body, takes place in *some* setting. All interaction (human-to-human or human-machine), by virtue of being interaction, involves some shared focus of attention and action, which is most easily organised by people co-orienting bodies and gaze into an 'ecological huddle'. The surrounding surfaces and objects often help us establish the proper framing: if I find myself in a supermarket, I have a clue that what the people around me are doing is probably 'shopping', and that sitting down to read a book and eat a sandwich would probably be inappropriate. Often, the setting is even co-constitutive of our framing: it would be hard to get a swimming contest off without some extended body of water around. Having a piece of clothing in your hand inside a shop in the role of a customer without having paid is 'shopping'. The same thing outside the shop is 'shoplifting'. Multiple framings can go on in the same setting, of course, and to reduce cognitive and communicative load, we often enrol physically bounded settings or create metacommunicative spatial brackets to keep track of how to frame actors, objects, actions, communications, or events around us. Schools are organised into classrooms so that individual classes do not overlap or interfere and teachers can keep track of students. Once security personnel draws a line on the floor of an airport, overstepping it before you are asked to constitutes a 'rule violation'. People *enrol* space in the process of framing. Framing might involve a co-constitutive spatial arrangement. Spaces make different framings harder or easier to pull off. But space in and of itself doesn't determine or produce framings: without the airport security enforcing it, that line on the ground is a meaningless one. If school is out, the classroom alone doesn't make a lecture happen, yet it could be used for a party, whereas giving a math lecture in a swimming pool would be a tough bet.

It is the same with games: a soccer field on its own doesn't make a soccer game come off. Players usually play soccer matches with soccer balls on soccer fields. The field is useful, but neither necessary nor sufficient for a soccer match. Also, it is never 'just there' independent of

the participants. A 'strike zone' in baseball or 'being out' in a game of hopscotch is practically accomplished by umpires and co-players (Taylor 2012: 56, Goodwin 2006: 36-64). The little poker room in the cellar facilitates monitoring the environment to ensure no one is overlooking your illegal match. Sitting around the circular table enables mutual monitoring and a joint focus of attention on the table plate with cards and chips in front of every player. If everyone at the current moment jointly frames this as gaming, shoving chips into the centre of the table signifies raising your bet; to prevent confusion, a clearly visible line may be printed on the green table and agreed to by the participants to separate a chip pool area from a betting area. That setting doesn't make a poker game happen (but it aids it). When the game is paused, or over, or when you argue that you did not place your chip but accidentally slid it over the betting line, the spatial line alone does not constitute the chip's placement as 'raising' (but the line eases the process).

Some have argued that 'the magic circle' is either very clear or redundant in digital games. Because the game hardware and software generate a simulated space that is fully represented within the bounds of the physical screen, there is little need to draw a 'magic circle' (Juul 2005: 164-5). Calleja (2012) echoes so far as to state that 'The role of the magic circle as spatial marker is thus redundant when applied to digital games'. On the one hand, it is true that a monitor screen is a nicely bounded physical area that immensely facilitates experientially and socially binding and separating it. Due to the organisation of the human perceptual system that 'picks up' (Gibson 1986) those boundaries, we easily perceive that screens are flat surfaces and what transpires on them is a projection, not a three-dimensional substance like the other things we perceive around the screen. But this clear (to humans) spatial boundary of the screen on its own does not constitute 'gaming'. Leaving aside projects like 'Illumiroom'⁷² (which projects gameplay onto room walls around the screen), to assume that the screen alone constitutes 'gaming' or the 'gaming space' overlooks that player action in front of the screen is subject to negotiation (not blocking the view of the gaming player onto the screen, for instance – then her last moves usually 'doesn't count'). It overlooks Alternate Reality Games that are often puzzles strewn across web pages: even though all gameplay takes place on a screen (in a browser window), the screen alone doesn't suffice to constitute *which* browsed web pages are part of the game and which are not. It overlooks cheating that involves all kinds of tinkering with software or hardware that is not the screen, and is or isn't considered 'gaming' (Consalvo 2007). But most importantly, it overlooks the basic relationality of framing: A game *object* is not an instance of *gaming* as a framed situation involving actors. If a usability tester is usability testing a game, we would not call this playing a game.

Conversely, understanding gaming as framing explains all kinds of digital games phenomena that are hard to explain if you bind 'being a game' to a physical boundary. Take digital

⁷² See <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/projects/illumiroom/> (last accessed March 26, 2013)

pervasive games and augmented reality games that take place in public space (Montola, Stenros & Waern 2009). Here, the lack of spatial clarity about what is or is not to be framed as part of the game becomes a constant challenge and core part of the aesthetic experience. The game might even involve *building* the game space as constitutive moves, for instance tagging certain GPS coordinates as ‘safe havens’. Undoing the usual spatial organising of a gaming encounter, pervasive games bring to the fore the substantial work put into and done by spatial bounding in organising gaming, and how this framing process happens in action (Benford et al. 2006, Mäyrä & Lankoski 2009).

Or take online multiplayer games. Technologically mediated through networks and their screens, players are in each others’ response presence: B sees A’s move, A sees B’s reaction, both orient to representations (the screens) coordinated through their past interaction chain – Goffman (1986: 46-7) described this using chess by mail. At each move each player makes, they frame that move as being part of the game of chess, and the letter they receive from the other is intelligible to them as representing the next move (if their chessboards, which are used to keep track of game states, do align), although the ‘play of the game’ is a spatially distributed and asynchronous process.

2. A Bounded Time

The ‘magic circle’ is a ‘limitation in time’, is ‘temporary’, and has its ‘own proper boundaries of time’ (Huizinga 1955: 10, 13). It refers to ‘that boundary – or frame – that defines the game in time’; ‘a specially demarcated time’; and ‘a special place in time’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 95)

All framed situations come with epistemic and normative expectations regarding their place and duration in the flow of time, and all are temporally organised in some way. In every conversation, we signal beginnings and ends, always subject to contestation. Brackets in time are never ‘just there’ – people accomplish them. Time can be co-constitutive of a situation: ‘night swimming’ wouldn’t be night swimming during the day, submitting a paper after the deadline constitutes an ‘invalid’ submission. So again: people *enrol* time in the process of framing, framing might involve a co-constitutive temporal arrangement, times make different framings harder or easier to pull off, but time in and of itself doesn’t determine or produce framings. Gaming encounters are events *typically* but not necessarily organised in time to provide dramaturgically satisfying closures and minimise distraction or split attention.

Common complications of a ‘bounded time’ concept of gaming are intermissions, persistent games, and continually ongoing pervasive games (Pargman & Jakobsson 2008). All are easily explained from a gaming-as-framing view without evoking a boundary entity. Interruptions, intermissions, and pauses are all everyday phenomena that involve the interactive work of opening and ending them, often with metacommunicative brackets, but just as often as a matter of course: you picking up the phone constitutes that our current in-person conversa-

tion is on hold until you put it down again, look me in the eye, and apologise for the interruption. That persistent games run on without us is no more mysterious than nurses slipping into and out of their private and working roles upon leaving and entering the hospital, even though the hospital itself continues running 24/7. If pervasive games like *Assassins* run continuously as a parallel framing of our life (i.e. there could always be somebody ‘assassinating’ me), that’s like being a headhunted person. Again it shows framing in action – how people continually assess whether any person approaching them belongs to the situation they find themselves in, or to the assassination plot.

3. A Ruled Ordering of Activity

The ‘magic circle’ is ‘within which special rules obtain’, a ‘peculiar order’, ‘creates order, is order’, where things happen ‘in an orderly manner’, ‘dedicated to an act apart’ (Huizinga 1955: 10, 13). ‘To decide to play a game is to create – out of thin air – an arbitrary authority that serves to guide and direct the play of the game’ (Salen & Zimmermann 2004: 98). Here, players move the pieces ‘according to the rules’ (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 96).

Every framed situation has epistemic and normative expectations regarding the ‘proper’ course of doings, sayings, and events. Many frames come with strict procedural rules that co-constitute certain actions: a ‘motion’ or ‘objection’ in court, a ‘vote’ in parliament. Yet as seen in the chapter on rules, rules on their own do not constitute a situation as gaming, or as any other framing for that matter.

Many framed situations are dedicated to an act apart: parties, weddings, commencement speeches, business meetings, controlling a nuclear reactor. There are some physical settings that are relatively unspecified as to what is to happen there (public streets), and many frames comprise multiple different possible activities, but many are very monofocal. As Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) observe, people’s homes are setting to a wide variety of leisure-time activities that may well overlap – eating, watching TV, gaming a game. But that doesn’t impinge on people framing one doing or saying as belonging to one activity (‘Could you pass me the butter?’) and another to another (‘Strike! Haha, you’re out!’) in the course of one minute.

4. A Lusory Attitude

To be able to be in ‘the magic circle’, to accept ordering one’s activity according to the rules, one has to adopt the ‘lusory attitude’, voluntarily trying to overcome unnecessary obstacles, accepting the rules that prevent one from taking more efficient means to reach one’s self-devised goals (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 97).

As we have seen in the discussion of playfulness, gaming cannot be narrowly located just in an attitude. A certain attitude can be co-constitutive of a certain framing, but it does not suffice on its own to constitute it, nor does it exhaust everything that a framing organises.

Turning to digital games once more, Calleja (2012) claims that the lusory attitude cannot be a defining feature of them because 'I cannot decide to not adhere to the game rules in *World of Warcraft* ... and have my character run at twice the speed'. Liebe (2008) makes the same argument that digital games have no 'magic circle' because rules enable rather than constrain player action. This overlooks the players' willing acceptance to not cheat (avoiding using technically possible advantages). It overlooks that players define and devalue 'cheating', 'ganking', 'grief play', 'real-money trading', and so on as 'not really playing' (Consalvo 2007). It overlooks that the same can be said for physical soccer: you cannot run twice the speed because gravity does not let you. Calleja and Liebe conflate the simulation of a world (including what courses of action are physically or technically possible) with what actions are constituted by players as allowable moves within 'gaming'. This is exemplified by players of *World of Warcraft* who creatively counterplay and level up their character without killing any monsters or taking any quests, or by players who use *World of Warcraft* as a virtual environment in which then to stage races, or even pen-and-paper roleplaying games: the game rules they constitute (do not kill, try to outrun) are enacted 'on top' of the simulated physics. Finally, Calleja and Liebe ignore the fact that installing *World of Warcraft* on a computer to play it is already voluntarily choosing to reach goals by inefficient means, in the same way picking up a golf club to play golf is.

5. A Resignification of Events

'Within the magic circles, the game's rules create a special set of meanings for the players of a game. These meanings guide the play of the game' (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 99). The 'magic circle' 'frames a distinct space of meaning that is separate from, but still references, the real world' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 97). 'Special meanings accrue and cluster around objects and behaviors' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 96).

This is what Zimmerman (2012) in his correction to the debate urges people to understand the 'magic circle' as: 'The magic circle, as put forward in *Rules of Play*, is the relatively simple idea that when a game is being played, new meanings are generated'. This is the central tenet of frame analysis: drawing on individual dispositions and situational arrangements, the meaning of doings, sayings, events, actors, and objects gets specified in the process of framing. The important thing here is again not to narrowly localise the causation of this in static circumstances or markings, which is what Zimmerman (2012) falls back into: 'In fact, there's no need to think about the magic circle (a context for meaning creation) as something exclusive to games. Could one think of almost any physical or social space as a magic circle in this way? Probably – if that's your cup of tea, go for it'. Giving contextual circumstances that *get enrolled* in meaning-making a special name would be fine, but again it runs the danger of reifying and localising 'meaning-making power' in that one aspect of the total process. Any context element (or set of elements) in and of itself is indexical, underspecified, and without relation to

some organism, meaningless. Against the totality of the situation, the participants jointly achieve a shared definition of each activity as ‘part of the game’ or not, and therefore its specific meaning. This specification of meanings is the basic process of any framing or keying; it is not unique to gaming. Unique to gaming are the *specific* meanings that a gaming move or piece receives *as a result of* gaming – meanings on their own do not constitute gaming.

6. Attentive Absorption

The ‘magic circle’ is ‘absorbing the player intensely and utterly’ (Huizinga 1955: 13); in it, ‘attention is intensely focused on the game’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 95).

Every frame comprises epistemic and normative expectations of what (not) to attend to and how deeply (not) to get engrossed in the situation. Organising joint attentive involvement is a principal aspect of any framing. Gaming encounters are materially and socially organised to ease maximum engrossment. This animal-environment relationality – dispositions including expectations of how to self-regulate attention and involvement and material arrangements fitting into these dispositions – suffices to explain why it is so easy for us to become attentively engrossed in gaming. Yet on its own, attentive absorption does not constitute ‘gaming’ – we can get engrossed in many other things.

7. Metacommunication

The ‘magic circle’ is ‘what communicates that those contained within it are ‘playing’’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 94).

Metacommunication is part of framing in all kinds of situations, not just gaming. Also, any metacommunication on its own remains underspecified outside of the total situation in which it is enrolled, and any other element in that total situation also helps specify and is specified by the other elements as to ‘what it is that’s going on here’. Finally, just because a computer screen says ‘Start game!’ doesn’t make gaming start – if a baby sits in front of it, if the players are still arguing about something else, if they decide to fetch something to drink, etc., the game does not start on its own. Metacommunication on its own does not cause or constitute gaming.

8. A Somehow ‘Separate World’

The ‘magic circle’ creates ‘worlds within the ordinary world’; it is ‘standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life’ (Huizinga 1955: 10, 13). It is ‘separate in some way from that of the real world’, ‘connected to the question of the ‘reality’ of a game, of the relationship between the artificial world of the game and the ‘real life’ contexts that it intersects’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 94), ‘separate from the real world’ (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 95). ‘In fact, a new reality

is created, defined by the rules of the game and inhabited by the players' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 96).

These statements have been both most drawn upon and critiqued. They are also the most metaphorical, never specifying *what exactly* is meant by 'a new reality' or 'being separate'. If it just means 'giving activities and objects new meanings', as Zimmerman (2012) suggests it ought to, or to 'metacommunicate' where these new meanings apply, then it adds nothing to the two previous points, and we can just scrap it.

If it is about the 'relationship between ... the game and the 'real life' contexts it intersects', then frame analysis provides us a ready answer: a part of any framing is its *gearing into the world*; that is, how events currently not present in the situation can be drawn upon and referred to in the situation, how non-present events are supposed to be linked into the situation, and how in turn events in the situation are supposed to impinge on events outside of it. These are epistemic and normative expectations, embodied dispositions and materialised arrangements that interact in organising this gearing. We understand that gaming *ought* to be 'just a game'; that is, have no irreversible social and material consequence. In Western modern societies, where games are used as sources of safe action, we have designed our gaming equipment and rules and social norms *such that* consequences are minimised.

This, again, holds for any framed situation: court trials are organised in order to be consequentially geared into the world, newspaper production is organised to be factually geared into the events it reports on, rehearsals are organised to not have the same social consequentiality the 'real thing' they rehearse would have. Contrived consequentiality is a general feature of social life. Does this mean that gaming must have 'no' consequences? Of course not. Everything we do is part of the material world, irreversible in time (as far as we know). It means that in Western nations, today, we enact, understand, and evaluate something as 'proper' gaming in terms of minimising material and symbolic consequentiality. It means that we enact and understand a difference (discursively, legally, materially, etc.) between 'gaming' and 'gambling'. This does not preclude us from symbolically charging world soccer championships with political meanings. It only means that if someone says, 'I don't see the fuss you're making, it's just a game' about the FIFA world cup, that statement appears *prima facie intelligible* and *appropriate* to us. Also, it does not preclude people from appropriating game artefacts or keying gaming activity in consequential forms (e.g. in goldfarming). Nor does it speak against people over time changing the 'proper' consequentiality of 'gaming' in their community, nor other cultures and communities having other understandings and norms and practices of proper gaming consequentiality.

Finally, when it comes to the fact that only certain doings, sayings, objects, and events get enrolled into and understood as belonging to a gaming encounter, and others not, this is again a basic fact of any encounter: actors in response presence in their bodily orienting and gazing

and pointing and acting and communicating and material organising build up and sustain a joint focus of attention, a joint chain of interactions, a situated activity system that is just this totality. At any point, pointing to another object might enrol it in the encounter, turning the collective gaze away from it might drop it from focus, but retain it as quickly recallable. Physical boundaries might get enrolled in this process (like a chalk circle drawn around people), but on their own they do not cause or constitute the focus and components of the activity system. If there is a 'boundary' here, it is a description by an outside observer as to what elements at any given point in time seem to be collectively attended to and engaged with.

Summary and Conclusions

This section argued that 'the magic circle' is a fallacy of misplaced concreteness. It reifies an observed regularity of phenomena ('gaming') into an entity somehow existing apart from those phenomena, causing the observed regularity. To say that a 'magic circle' exists and causes 'gaming' to have special meanings, or be separate from the rest of life, is in form and logic identical to saying that 'archetypes' exist that cause individual horses to take on a 'horse form'. Paying close empirical attention to the situational process in which actors, objects, actions, communications, events, and experiences sequentially and reflexively organise themselves to become intelligible and accountable as 'gaming' effectively *dissolves* the need for a separate 'magic circle' entity doing this work. Their empirical detail is what 'the magic circle' refers to, and the empirical detail is *enough* to reconstruct how these details in their ongoing relations reproduce themselves in an apparent, intelligible, accountable regularity. Similarly, the constitution of the organised-organising situated activity system cannot be localised primarily in one empirical detail above the others. Whether an action, communication, object, event belongs to 'gaming' or not, and how it is therefore to be understood, experienced, and interacted with, is not decided by a bounded space, an attitude, a rule, or some other particular on its own. It depends on whether and how it is being enrolled in this total self-ordering process. Yet all particulars can and often do play a co-constitutive role. When Stenros (2012) speaks of gaming involving social contracts, mental bubbles, and material arenas, he comes close to this understanding, although he still reifies the three into separate entities. Copier's (2007: 141) 'network perspective' constructs a similar argument, although she paints frames narrowly as 'cognitive frames'. Linderöth, Björk, and Olsson's position effectively parallels the one suggested here when they write: 'the activity will be constituted by both game mechanics and social mechanics' (2012: 4).

Regrettably, in 'Fun in Games', Goffman (1972: 58, 59) himself engaged in reifying talk, speaking of an 'interaction membrane' as an 'organic metaphor' for the organising of attentive involvement, meaning, and consequence in a situated activity system like gaming. It is deeply ironic that some scholars picked up this presumably 'less bordery' border metaphor as an *im-*

provement to the 'circle' metaphor, because it repeats rather than resolves the fundamental issue of reification. *Frame Analysis* luckily evaded this issue, which is why Schechner's (1988: 16) and Copier's (2005, 2007) critique of 'frames' as evoking too strong a boundary concept ultimately does not hold: they *posit* a metaphorical reading of 'frames' that creates the very reification they argue against, whereas frames (as understood by Goffman and explicated here) is a scientific *construct*. Its value lies not in the associations it evokes, but the usefulness of its 'nomological network' – that is, the constructs and their relations it suggests to model the analytical unit of inquiry (Cronbach & Meehl 1955), fully aware that this account is merely one more empirical particular in the totality of empirical particulars with which it is interwoven. One may argue with Lakoff and Johnson (1999) that all human conceptualising is by necessity metaphorical, including scientific theorising (Brown 2003). But from a pragmatist standpoint, this in no way contradicts that the practical work of explication and formalisation of such conceptual metaphors into nomological networks adds a utility (of precision, reliability, and validity) that is core to the scientific endeavour. For this, it does not make a difference whether we label our primary construct 'circle', 'frame', or 'odradek'. What makes a difference is the set of observable phenomena we subsume under the different constructs of our theory, what relations we propose between those constructs, and how viable that construct is in accounting for data and guiding action. Following Bachelard (1991/1934), as long as game studies still engages in metaphoric imaginaries instead of constructs describing relations, it hasn't even begun to reason scientifically. As this chapter demonstrated, none of the empirical phenomena ascribed to as constituting or being caused by 'the magic circle' – a bounded space, a bounded time, ruled ordering, an attitude, resignification, attentive absorption, metacommunication, a gearing into the world – require a separate 'boundary' entity to explain how they come about, nor do they on their own suffice to constitute an instance of 'gaming'. All find an easy explanation as part of the framing of a situation. If there is anything 'magical' about gaming, it is the general capacity of human beings to produce shared attention, order, and meaning in *any* situation. This is the formal unity of cultural phenomena originating in play and ritual that Huizinga (1955: 10) called out when he listed 'the magic circle' as one of many 'play-grounds': sports arenas, stages, screens, card-tables, magic circles, temples, tennis courts, court halls. Explicating what this unity entails is the task Bateson, Schechner, and more than anyone else, Goffman, have taken up since: 'Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations.' (Goffman 1972: 32)

4.5 Summation II: A Frame Analytic Account of Gaming

It is now possible and useful to restate a basic frame analytic account of gaming. To avoid confusion, this account describes a culturally and historically located state of affairs (Western industrialised nations in the early 21st century), open to empirical revision and fully expecting historical change and cultural diversity. We will start with summarising the grounds of animal and childhood play, to then chart in condensed form a typological model of the various concepts in this chapter, using four basic analytic distinctions: *paidia* versus *ludus*; spontaneous keyings versus institutionalised frames; frames, frame configurations, and framing; and incidental versus intentional configurations. These distinctions are to be understood as ideal types in the Weberian sense. We will then turn to the characteristics of the gaming frame, its ground rules, the role of rules and fiction in gaming, and the magic circle. The section closes with a summary of the specifics, conceptual challenges, and open questions regarding *video* gaming, which sets the stage for the following empirical part.

The Basic Model

As suggested by Huizinga (1955), animal and childhood play form a likely basis of culture, understood as symbolic and aesthetic activities such as ritual, the arts, fictional media, sports, playing, and gaming. In pretend and rule play, human children acquire the frames of their culture, as well as the very capacity to frame: to jointly constitute a shared focus of attention and action, a situated activity system involving (secondary) orders of social action and meaning. In a stretch of children playing, frames of make-believe (the imagining-perceiving imitating enactment of a source activity) and rule-based gaming can flow into each other as two shades of constitutive ordering. Childhood play is characterised by the repeated variation, recombination, and exaggeration of actions, objects, and meanings; nonfunctional performance; an autotelic focus; voluntariness; absence of perceived outer or inner threats; and metacommunication. Childhood play does not necessarily transform an already-framed activity, as evidenced by locomotor and object play. When socialised adults engage in play activity, in contrast, they operate upon learned social actions, objects, and frames. Children learn the social world in playing. Adults play *with* the social world they have learned.

Paidia versus Ludus

Already in childhood play, we find the discernible difference between more open-ended, explorative locomotor, object and pretend play, and more organised and goal-oriented rule play. In adult society, these poles of *paidia* and *ludus* are refined and institutionalised. On the one side, there is *playfulness*, a paidic autotelic keying of explorative recombination and make-believe. On the other, there is *gaming*, a ludic autotelic contest framing where participants act in accordance with specified rules to attempt to tip a contingent outcome in their favour.

Spontaneous Keyings versus Institutionalised Frames

Whereas the *ludus/paidia* distinction is relatively common sense in game studies, the distinction between primary, institutionalised frames and spontaneous keyings marks a specific contribution of frame analysis. Primary frames are basic types of situations. Keyings, in contrast, are transformations of something already organised and meaningful in terms of a primary frame. They usually change the actual performance and organisation only a little, but the meaning and experience very much. The ordering and meaning of the source activity formally and experientially ‘shines through’: a rehearsal is always a rehearsal of something. If a keying is being *institutionalised*, it may over time become an ‘immediately’ meaningful frame unto its own. A handshake might have once been the ritualisation of another immediately practical activity, but to us today, it is a thing unto its own.

This marks another difference between playfulness, which for adults is always a *keying* of a discernible basic frame or social meaning, and gaming, which has become a primary *frame* of its own. Put differently, whereas gaming is a recognisable, institutionalised type of situation, playfulness is a recognisable type of *transformation* of a situation. We recognise ‘playing chess’ as a specifiable set of actions and communications involving specifiable objects and settings, and we also recognise ‘playing *with* chess’ as a specifiable transformation of that. Like any kind of framing, playfulness always transforms both covert perception, understanding, and experience, and overt action and communication. Although it tends to most markedly transform the covert part, and although we cannot pinpoint specific actions as ‘playfulness’, it still comes with a signature of observable transformations (exaggeration, varied repetition) and meta-communications (play smile), as people engaged in a playful keying have to make their activity intelligible to response-present others.

The fact that gaming is a primary frame does not mean that gaming encounters never feature a transformed source activity: a boxing video game is still a keying of physical boxing (which presumably is the once-spontaneous, now-institutionalised sportive keying of direct fistfights). It only means that whatever the *specific* game, and whatever the *specific* source activity transformed, the basic framing will be intelligible as such to participants and observers. As Goffman (1986: 248) put it, people know how to recognise and do ‘board gaming’ without having to know the *specific* board game that is being gamed, whereas playfulness is grounded first in the specific activity or objects at hand that then get transformed in a playful manner.

If playfulness is a paidic keying and gaming a ludic frame, a simple act of combination suggests that there are also ludic keyings and paidic frames. The former we encountered as *gameful keyings* – spontaneous transformations of a given activity into an autotelic contest –, the latter as *playing* – a type of activity socialised adults usually only engage in with children.

Configurations versus Situational Framing versus Frames

Existing formalist definitions of games conflate and require the necessary coinciding of 'games' as specific objects and settings, and 'gaming' as a specific situational framing. Yet the material configuration of objects and settings can only *afford* (not determine) how those objects will be framed in situated activity. Also, the situational framing or keying of objects and settings as part of other than their 'normal' frame is an everyday reality. Today's media convergence and instrumentalisation of games makes this decoupling of game objects and settings and situational framing as gaming more frequent. Still, grounded in our socialisation into a given frame, we will identify the objects and settings belonging to that frame as such. That is, even if a soccer ball gets situationally appropriated as a door stopper, we will likely still recognise it as a soccer ball originally intended for playing soccer. To acknowledge these possibilities, one should distinguish between (a) *play configurations* of objects and settings – toys and playgrounds – and *playing* as a framing, and between *game configurations* of objects and settings (games and gaming grounds like arcade halls) and *gaming* as a framing. Game objects and gaming (as well as play objects and playing) of course are necessarily related in that both take the form they do and become intelligible as what they are only as part of the total frame they belong to: the *game frame* and the *play frame*, respectively.

Is there an equivalent configuration for spontaneous playful and gameful keyings? Given the relationality of actor and environment, we should expect that certain environmental circumstances are more or less inviting to keying. Yet since playful and gameful keyings transform some *other* source activities and objects, we should also expect that these are not *intentionally* designed for them. What one might still find, however, is the incidental coming-together of material (and social) circumstances that serendipitously afford a playful or gameful keying. In the case of gaming, Goffman (1969: 113) has called such instances '*gamelike interactions*', so in analogy, we can call configurations that support playful keyings without designed intent '*playlike interactions*'.

Incidental versus Intentional Configurations

Beyond such incidental configurations, HCI researchers and user experience designers have in the last decade become increasingly interested in *intentionally designing* non-gaming and non-playing systems to exhibit gamelike or playlike features. On the playing side, we find playful experiences, ludic engagement, or playful design (e.g. Gaver 2002, Gaver et al. 2004, Blythe et al. 2004, Morrison, Mitchell & Brereton 2007, Korhonen, Montola & Arrasvuori 2009, Arrasvuori et al. 2011, Fernaeus et al. 2012). On the gaming side, we find gamification, defined as 'the use of game design elements in non-game contexts' (Deterding et al. 2011: 9). Following McGonigal (2011), colleagues and I have suggested the term 'gamefulness' as a less politically and semantically charged term than gamification. We suggested '*gameful interactions*' and '*playful*

interactions’ as useful terms for systems *intentionally* designed to afford a gameful or playful keying (Deterding et al. 2011: 10).

Are there incidental configurations for institutionalised frames like gaming and playing? This doesn’t appear sensible, as their very institutionalisation partially consists in institutionalised objects and settings. Using a chance configuration of pens on a table to make up a new game by definition is a gameful keying, because the collectively acknowledged primary social meaning and use of these pens is to write. The moment one would set aside and maybe specially mark those pens to be re-used expressly for that new makeshift game, their collectively acknowledged primary meaning and use becomes that of game equipment.

Putting It Together

Combining these distinctions, we arrive at a matrix of twelve ideal typical concepts:

		paidia	ludus
Frame		Play frame	Game frame
Primary framing	<i>Designed configurations</i>	Toys and playgrounds	Games and gaming grounds
	<i>Framing</i>	Playing	Gaming
Transforming keying	<i>Incidental configurations</i>	Playlike interactions	Gamelike interactions
	<i>Designed configurations</i>	Playful interactions	Gameful interactions
	<i>Keying</i>	Playful keying	Gameful keying

Table 2: A typology of framing and gaming-related phenomena

The *game frame* is the total mesh of actors (and their dispositions,) objects, settings (and their features), actions, communications, events, and experiences that reproduces-and-changes their perceivably similar co-occurrence as situations of gaming or gameful keying across space and time. The *play frame* is that total mesh with regard to playing and playful keying. *Playlike interactions* are configurations that incidentally facilitate a playful keying: a flexible tree that affords a bout of locomotor play whipping, graphic tiles in a social game that unbeknownst to its designers afford being repurposed for making pixel art, as seen in the case of *FarmVille* art (Kirman 2010). *Playful interactions* are configurations intentionally designed to facilitate a playful keying. *Playful keying* is the process in which actors with their environment frame a situation as playful (what Sicart and Stenros call ‘playfulness’): a spontaneous episode of voluntary, autotelic, explorative recombination of behaviours, objects, and meanings with an already-given, less keyed situational framing; this playful keying is overtly recognisable in exaggerated performance, varied repetition, play smiles, and the like. *Gamelike interactions* are configurations that incidentally facilitate a gameful keying of them; *gameful interaction* is their intentionally designed counterpart. A *gameful keying* is the process of enrolling and transforming a situation with a given, less keyed framing into a spontaneous instance of gaming: a voluntary,

autotelic, rule-bound contest focused on achieving a contingent but decidable outcome. The gamelike configuration of pavement plates with just the right diameter (relative to one's leg length) might afford a spontaneous gameful keying of one's walk home into 'jumping from plate to plate without hitting the cracks in-between'. 'Hypermiling' (Ann 2008) – driving to maximise the fuel-efficiency of your car – is another common everyday example of a gameful keying, increasingly supported by car manufacturers with the gameful interaction of 'eco dashboards' that provide goal-setting and nuanced feedback on one's driving style (Inbar et al. 2011, Froehlich in print). As workplace studies by Roy (1960) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) demonstrate, people do not *require* a fitting configuration to playfully or gamefully key the situation they are in – but it helps. Similarly, playful or gameful interactions do not *guarantee* a playful or gameful keying, especially when the wider social occasion into which they are lodged is not conducive (the business meeting conflicting with playful rhyming). Depending on the wider occasion and its norms, people might refrain from enacting a felt-inappropriate, embarrassment-inducing playful or gameful keying, or covertly enact it while experiencing dysphoric tension. This is arguably an oversight of many current playful and gameful interactions (Deterding 2012, Gershon 2005).

Characteristic for playful and gameful keyings is that they take place in settings and occasions not dedicated to playing and gaming, and that the transformed 'source' is still formally and experientially present – an 'experiential "flicker" between gameful, playful, and other modes of experience and engagement' (Deterding et al. 2011: 13). For these reasons, playful and gameful keyings presumably tend to be more short-lived, less intense, and more vulnerable to breakdowns than their institutionalised counterparts.

There, first we find *toys and playgrounds* as objects and settings intentionally designed for being engaged with as *playing* – a primary frame or type of activity characterised by the same qualities as playful keyings, only more stable and not necessarily transformative of a given frame or social meaning and use. Interestingly, in contemporary Western industrialised nations, playing appears to be legitimate mostly for children. At a certain age, adolescents begin enacting a strong role distance during playing so as not to spoil their aspirational claims towards an adult self (Goffman 1972: 108-10, see Peterson 2011: 145-170 for a wonderful analysis of adolescent boys enacting role distance in gaming *The Sims*). Instead, adolescents and adults seek out 'adult', more formalised, institutionalised, and culturally valued forms: theatre and RPGs instead of direct pretend play; board, card, and video gaming instead of informal rule play; sports instead of locomotor play; arts, crafts, and model building instead of object play, etc. There seems to be only one legitimate way for adults to engage in sheer playing, namely, playing *with* young children as a form of childcare, education, or one's profession – a *regrounding* key in Goffman's terms. (It would be interesting to study how the Adult Fans of Lego community manages to legitimise their adult playing.)

Finally, we find *games and gaming grounds* (arcades, casinos, gaming areas in speciality stores, gaming corners in living rooms or bedrooms) as objects and settings intentionally designed for the primary frame of *gaming*, an institutionalised form of gameful keyings. Games themselves can be designed for and engaged with in a manner that is more paidic or ludic (Barr 2007). Playing and gaming are characterised and often co-constituted by recognisable equipment as their attentive and interactive focus – though there are games that only require the participants' bodies and actions as the focal 'engrossable', like *Ninja*⁷³

The currently socially canonical forms are playing with toys, gaming games, playfully engaging with playlike interactions, and gamefully engaging with gamelike interactions. Yet many transformations are possible: people might be gaming toys – immortalised in H. G. Wells's (1913) *Little Wars* – or playing *with* games: using *Monopoly* houses and figures for pretend play, for instance. Playful and gameful interactions present an interesting and novel case as they attempt to institutionalise what have so far been spontaneous keyings. They create many empirically and historically open issues: we might see similarly stabilised and intelligible frames emerge. We might see increasing social legitimisation of playful and gameful activity for adults across social arenas, as Raessens (2006, 2012) argues. We might see gaming subcultures moving towards more exclusive, 'hardcore' arenas and signifiers of 'true' belonging and gamer identity in response to the massive influx or 'Eternal September' (Grossman 1998) of other actors into the cultural sphere of gaming. What we *are* seeing today is strong boundary work by game designers and scholars (Robertson 2010, Bogost 2011).

Unpacking 'Gaming'

Gaming is sociomaterially framed (that is, materially organised to afford and socially expected, understood, normed, enacted, and communicated as) the autotelic enjoyment of euphoric ease, spontaneous engrossment, and demonstration of skill in the pursuit of a problematic outcome with slight consequentiality – in a word, voluntary safe action.

To facilitate *euphoric ease*, gaming is allowed and expected to be engaged in for the sake of the enjoyment it brings.

To facilitate *engrossment*, gaming is framed to attentively focus and involve participants in gameplay, and to collectively share and amplify emotion. Rules and game equipment filter and organise possible actions into one single, maximally interdependent web towards the game outcome. Game equipment and settings are organised such that all participants have easy attentive access to them, and that actions and events transpire in one continued succession and space. Players' skills are balanced to ensure suspenseful uncertainty of the outcome for as long as possible, both by arranging player matching and by norming when and how help or self-handicapping actions are allowed. Players are expected and allowed to visibly care about the

⁷³ See <http://ludocity.org/wiki/Ninja>, last accessed March 24, 2013.

game outcome, to invest at least a small stake (of self-worth) into it – but not so much that it would induce anxiety counteracting the desired engrossment and euphoric ease. Players are allowed and expected to focus their attention on the game events, and to act out emotional reactions to them, especially if gaming is organised as a performance with ratified onlookers in order to signal the player's involvement and presumably collectively amplify emotion.

To facilitate *demonstration of skill*, information access that would provide a non-skill related advantage is materially prevented and normatively disapproved. Rules are set up and enforced that prevent actions that would provide non-skill related advantages (cheating). In addition, players should not intentionally seek out taking actions that could be construed as being in accordance with the stated rules but still negatively impact the desired engrossment and skill test ('spirit' of the game). Players are expected to act *gameworthy*; that is, to strategically choose the best possible course of action to bring about an advantageous game outcome (including bluffing and dissimulating), and *not* to let factors like personal relations, emotion, or politeness keep them from taking the strategically best possible move.

To facilitate *inconsequentiality*, actions, objects, and events are materially organised such that they are unlikely to produce irreversible material consequences. In addition, there are expectations and norms that only certain source activities should become subject of a game; that participants ought to take actions and choose stakes such that 'serious' material consequence is unlikely to transpire for them; that participants' actions, emotions, selves before the gaming encounter should not factor into it, and that the outcome of the game should not factor into participants' actions, emotions, and selves once the gaming encounter has ended.

Bringing an instance of 'gaming' about involves two kinds of constitutive orders: the general 'unwritten rules' of making one's action intelligible and appropriate in terms of 'gaming a game', and the specific constitutive rules of the game at hand that renders specific actors, actions, communications, objects, events into the game entities, states, and moves of that game ('gaming *this* game'). Both 'unwritten' and 'written' rules are in the end grounded in material features and bodily dispositions that in their relation afford the practical capacity of the participants to 'go on', to produce a sequence of actions, communications and events that is practically intelligible and mutually acknowledged as rule-following. Formal games demonstrate how game equipment, formalised rule representations, and player communities can stabilise and institutionalise such rule-following across time and space into an identity that can be reflexively, discursively indicated.

Gaming is internally organised into first, the *gaming encounter*, comprising chiefly pre- and post-proceedings and intermissions, including the 'spectacle' of audiences. In the gaming encounter, ratified participants can partake in the role of players or onlookers (or referees, etc.). Second, within the gaming encounter we find the inner lamination of *gameplay* – the framing of actions in terms of *game rules* as game moves, game entities, and game states. In

gameplay, players can take on roles such as player, card dealer, umpire, or similar. Players can *in parallel* frame actions, communications, events, and objects as *game fiction*, as props to imagine-perceive pretend entities, which are often configured to form a narrative sequence. Players can and do take several possible footings towards this make-believe world and its actors. They may foot them performatively as characters they themselves embody and enact. They may foot them narratively as characters and worlds they observe as onlookers, but whose actions and events they can affect. And they may foot them in a personalising manner as entities with a certain will and recalcitrance of their own. This potential for pretence is something inherent in the play origins of gaming, not something new added to gaming by the mergence of fictional media and games in video gaming. However, RPGs and video games with rich audio-visual representations do strongly *afford* – to players with the requisite dispositions regarding the represented semiotic domains – to be framed as game fiction and thus used to imagine-perceive pretend entities, whereas ‘abstract games’ afford this less readily. Gameplay may contain further inner laminations such as games-within-a-game, or pretend characters lying.

A gaming encounter is framed by the participants using the routine forms of framing and metacommunication found in any kind of situated activity. Similarly, the aspects of a gaming encounter are aspects of any strip of framed activity: any framing involves a range of motivational relevancies; a regulation of action, involvement, and emotion; a specification of meanings; an organisation of the contingency, consequentiality, temporal, and spatial extents of the situation; a gearing into the wider world; and an inner organisation of roles, tracks, gatherings, regions, and laminations. What is specific or ‘magic’ about gaming is not *that* it constitutes a situated activity system, but *how* this activity system is organised. And this ‘how’ shares deep similarities to arts, ritual, sports, fictional media, and other frames of human life – similarities that originate in the shared ground of play.

The Specifics and Complications of Video Gaming

To segue over to the empirical part, let us summarise what specifics video gaming presents in contrast to the above account, and what open empirical questions one can derive from that. The most obvious and most frequently highlighted difference of video games is the game equipment. Instead of one embodied, material situated activity system as we find it in humans playing, computers *duplicate* an abstracted, internal algorithmic model of the game rules and game state *within* the situated activity system of players and computer. Hence, they require some material interface between the computer’s algorithmic model and the human players, an interface that only accepts pre-specified inputs and will only produce pre-specified outputs. Computers do not understand the meaning of rules and enact them based on that understanding. Rather, they are objects that materially produce outputs from inputs that human actors then understand as rule-according. Therefore, computers cannot flexibly adapt their quasi-

behaviour to match the 'spirit' of the rules; they cannot parse or react to the intention rather than the actual physical inputs of a human player; nor can they have or express intention; finally, they cannot spontaneously and flexibly manage unforeseen exceptions.

Because computers execute the rules of a video game in this manner, some have suggested that video gaming no longer requires gamers to know the rules nor to take on a 'lusory attitude' – to intentionally bind their action to the rules of the game. Closer analysis showed this not to be the case: For gamers to actually be *gaming* the video game, they still require basic dispositions (knowledge) regarding what constitutes 'gaming', what goal they are supposed to pursue in a given game, and what actions they can take in order to move closer to that goal; they still need to enact the 'unwritten rules' of constituting their activity *as* gaming; and in the course of gaming, they still have to negotiate and intentionally bind themselves to rules regarding cheating, disturbing other players' moves in front of the gaming device, etc.

Still, the algorithmic rule implementations of video games do afford a very different relation of gamers to the explicit game rules: as in informal games, players practically learn by doing what game actions are possible and what effects they have; the gaming device acts as a quasi-natural object that merely reacts to actions without the possibility of negotiation or contestation. Players therefore usually do not begin the game by being given (and having to learn how to put into practice) a discursive representation of the game rules, as in board or card games. Often, they do not even have the possibility of accessing such formal rule representations. Rather, players reconstruct them from their interaction with the game device. This material offloading and 'blackboxing' of rules and rule management lets video games have rules whose complexity surpasses what any human actor could practically monitor and enact.

Turning to game fiction, some authors have suggested that video games (like software more generally) present us with an entirely new ontological category of entities, namely simulations. Indeed, the interface of video games today often provides highly iconic audiovisual representations of actors, objects, settings, actions, and events, some of which are 'merely' representations, some of which are also linked to either the algorithmic rule implementation that relates to the game goal, or to the algorithmic simulation of phenomena (like physics) that may factor into the difficulty of reaching the game goal. However, to assume that software running on hardware generating audiovisual outputs suffices to constitute an ontological category different from 'fiction' (like assuming that props and principles of generation suffice to constitute 'fictional propositions') effectively engages in some form of logical idealism or mere descriptive taxonomy. This is not to say it is wrong, but that it is simply epistemically and ontologically incompatible with the present pragmatist frame analytic account.

Others suggested that video games uniquely combine goal-oriented, rule-based gaming and the cueing of fictional worlds. However, the parallel constitution of an event as a rule-based, goal-oriented game entity *and* fictional pretend entity is nothing new to video games,

nor constituted and determined by the game object alone. In childhood play, rule play and pretend play flow into each other, and any object affords more or less readily being taken as a game entity and/or as a make-believe prop. The institutionalisation of fictional media genre frames and game frames materially configures objects and stabilises social expectations, understandings, practices, and norms to more strongly and exclusively afford absorption in fiction here and gaming of a game there. The *relative* newness of video games is that many video games blend the material features of fictional media and games to *again* afford the plethora of possible (and often incoherent) foci and footings already found in childhood play.

Regarding the ground rules of video games, we are left mostly with a blank page. Goffman never wrote about them, and empirical studies since have been predominantly concerned with board games, LARPs, and pen-and-paper RPGs. If we follow the general logic of the institutionalisation of frames, we may hypothesise that the ground rules of video gaming will be largely similar to those of board and card gaming because they are historical descendants: The first video game designers and players presumably approached video games with their existing socialisation into board and card games and RPGs, just like the first e-mail creators and users approached e-mail based with their socialisation in letter-writing. But we should also assume that the specific affordances of video game devices and software and several decades of cultural development have led to idiosyncratic video gaming ground rules, patterned on but different from board and card gaming (just like writing e-mail nowadays is patterned on but distinct from letter writing). It is an empirically open question *how* the ground rules of video gaming deviate (or not) from those of board and card gaming.

What of video games' gearing into the world (the 'magic circle')? Some authors have suggested that in video games, game entities are mostly visual representations clearly physically distinct from the surrounding environment (pixels on a screen), and clearly physically encircled by the bounds of the screen. Therefore, human actors no longer have to engage in framing activity: the game device materially determines what does and does not belong to a game. Such statements make a category error of confusing the spatial, physical boundaries that delineate a *game object* with the *framing* – the situational process – of constituting the situational interaction of actors, actions, events, and that object as 'gaming'. It is true that in an informal game of tag or a LARP, what object or action or stretch of space is to be understood and enacted as part of gaming often is a very contested and negotiation-heavy issue. It is also true that human actors regularly enrol material boundaries in managing these issues (like drawing white lines around soccer fields). And it is true that screen-based digital games materially strongly facilitate this framing process. But on its own, a game *object* cannot constitute a situation as gaming (instead of usability testing, for example). Whether a specific bodily move in front of the screen or a pixel constellation on the screen counts as (valid) gaming or not is not decidable by the screen or gaming device alone.

When it comes to this framing process itself, luckily, there is considerable literature to draw upon. The basic finding is that the ethnomethods, transformation rules, or metacommunication employed in video gaming do not differ from the routine means by which actors frame any kind of situated action.

From a more general sociological perspective, video gaming presents us with two further deviations from the 'canonical' instances of board and card gaming that formed the basis of Goffman's analysis, namely single-player gaming and synchronous networked gaming (see also Crawford 1981, Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 85-91).

In video games, players can play with or against 'computer opponents' (Crawford 1981), whereas the kind of gaming Goffman studied was always encounters co-constituted by multiple response-present actors. Thus, one interesting question is whether the absence of response-present human actors changes the dynamics of the situation. Specifically, we have seen that other actors are principally involved in amplifying involvement, but also in enacting and enforcing the situational norms of propriety. Response-present others might also make moral feelings of embarrassment more immediately salient. We have also seen that keeping up 'normal appearances', making one's own actions intelligible as expectable, appropriate, and benign, is required of actors in the response presence of others. All this suggests the (empirically open) hypothesis that in single-player gaming, gamers might perceive and enact less regard for the situational proprieties of gaming, and feel less embarrassed if they break them.

A connected open question is whether and how the gaming equipment *in lieu of* the missing human actors enforces (or affords) the situational framing of gaming, especially given that video game equipment is *interactive*. How does the gaming device partake in structuring the gaming encounter, compared to the casino tables and electric foils Goffman looked at?

Moving on, today's networked multiplayer games allow gamers to game the same game in one synchronous, interruption-less stream of interactions across vast spatial distances, without forming one bodily co-present 'ecological huddle' on a soccer field or around a poker table. In light of such online gaming – and today's 'synthetic situations' (Knorr Cetina 2009) and 'virtual realities' (Chayko 1993) more generally –, it is of great advantage that Goffman's concept of response presence *explicitly* extended beyond bodily face-to-face interaction. Frame analysis has no principled theoretical issue with *mediated* interaction. Empirical studies demonstrate that interaction orders do obtain in virtual environments and online games as well (Martey & Stromer-Galley 2007, Grant 2009). Still, Goffman assumed that immediate face-to-face interaction had certain embodied, emotional dynamics – notably bodily and psychological vulnerability – that made mediated interaction 'reduced versions' (Goffman 1983: 2) of bodily response presence. The open empirical question here is whether this assumption holds: Does the mediatedness of online multiplayer gaming lead to different social and experiential dynamics than those found in board and card games?

Lastly, we have to turn our attention beyond ‘typical’ video game genres to those novel genres and gaming phenomena that have challenged traditional conceptions of gaming and video gaming – which at least partially prompted game studies’ turn to frame analysis to begin with (Yee 2006, Taylor 2006, Malaby 2007, Dibbell 2008, Grimes & Feenberg 2009, Montola, Stenros & Waern 2009).

First on the list are *mobile games* that take gaming out of the expected settings of private homes. Frame analytically, this poses no problem – people can take theatre performances outside theatres –, but it brings up the open question how the spatial setting and social occasion into which the ‘ecological huddle’ of player and gaming device is moved will impinge on gaming. We turn here to questions of *Behavior in Public Places* (Goffman 1963) – how, for example, an individual jogger or newspaper reader or mobile gamer gears her actions into the proprieties of the wider situation of a bus ride or pedestrian traffic. For instance, gamers regularly complain that the ‘blow control’ of the *Nintendo DS* (singing or blowing into the built-in microphone of the mobile console as an input mechanism) is extremely embarrassing in public.⁷⁴

Second are *pervasive games* that extend and disperse gameplay across public places. Presumably, because they do not form spatiotemporally clustered activity systems, they (a) produce framing ambiguity for both participants and onlookers that will foreground and make more readily observable the process of framing in action, and (b) because of their more rarefied occurrence and more intense interaction with the wider non-gaming situation, are prone to produce more embarrassment-inducing puzzled or aversive reactions from bystanders. Fortunately, here we can already draw on a series of empirical studies that have looked into these issues (e.g. Benford et al. 2006, Densey, Stevens & Eglin 2009).

Third are *persistent games* like *Animal Crossing* that extend and disperse gameplay across time. Like pervasive games, they do not pose new or challenging questions: they are in principle no different from any ongoing human activity in which individual actors can temporally engage, disengage, and reengage (e.g. working at a hospital).

Fourth are games that involve ‘serious’ consequence, like virtual item sales and real-money trading in social network games and MMORPGs. Frame analytically, these are not entirely new phenomena: as we have seen, gaming usually involves ‘slight’ consequentiality. Whether and how much payout can be ‘properly’ attached to a game’s outcome for it to still be gaming not gambling varies historically (Goffman [1967] observes the now-gone historic practice of small cash prizes in bowling halls) and is actively varied by participants so as not to become too consequential (a gambler limiting his bets, for instance). Still, these are interesting phenomena in that they empirically deviate from *current* gaming forms. It is an open question how players as

⁷⁴ See e.g. <http://www.joystiq.com/2007/04/11/blowing-on-the-ds-sucks-or-the-huff-and-puff-games/>, <http://www.gamespot.com/forums/topic/25865504/blowing-into-the-microphone-must-be-banned> (last accessed March 23, 2013)

members of our culture react to these phenomena: whether they consider this a breach of situational proprieties of gaming or not, and how their understandings and practices adapt.

Fifth and final are phenomena of *work-like, instrumental gaming* like goldfarming; work-like grinding in MMORPGs, or serious games where video gaming apparently is not pursued for nor designed to give rise to experiences of autotelic enjoyment. These do not pose a conceptual problem because ‘autotelic enjoyment’ is an enacted expectation and norm of gaming, not a defining criterion. But again, it flips into the open empirical question *what people make of these phenomena*: whether they perceive, understand, experience, or enact them as gaming or not; whether they discursively and normatively evaluate them as ‘proper’ for gaming or not.

In summary, video gaming poses no conceptual challenges to frame analysis, but opens a series of empirically open questions:

- What are the ‘unwritten rules’ of *video gaming* (in contrast to board and card gaming)?
- How do game objects and settings factor in the organisation of a gaming encounter?
- Whether and how do single-player gaming, online multiplayer gaming, and bodily co-present multiplayer gaming differ?
- How do wider spatial settings and social occasions factor into the gaming encounter coached into them, as in the case of mobile gaming in public spaces?
- How do gamers perceive, understand, experience, and frame ‘serious’ consequence such as virtual item sales in video gaming?
- How do gamers perceive, understand, experience, and frame work-like and instrumentalised instances of video gaming?

This list equips us with the main questions that require answering if we wish to test whether the above theoretical account of video gaming is empirically productive, whether and where it needs amendment in light of empirical data, and whether and how it is able to better accommodate for contemporary convergent and instrumentalised forms of gaming than existing theories of video games. Answering these questions is the goal of the following chapters.

5 Methodology

What methodological approach suits frame analysis? In *Frame Analysis*, one reads:

the student, as well as his subjects, tends to take the framework of everyday life for granted; he remains unaware of what guides him and them. Comparative analysis of realms of being provides one way to disrupt this unselfconsciousness. (Goffman 1986: 564)

In short, Goffman suggests that comparative contrasting of presumably different forms a type of situation will foreground both their invariances and specifics. If we follow this clue, the ‘trouble’ of ‘atypical’ occasions, contextures, or instrumentalised gaming forms actually provides a productive data source that can help foreground the otherwise taken-for-granted and therefore invisible.

5.1 Goffman’s ‘Hidden Method’

Despite the above remark, *Frame Analysis* is somewhat of a misnomer: the book offers a ‘done’ theoretical framework, illustrated by an evocative collage of newspaper clippings, movie and drama scripts, novels, observations from other researchers, and presumably personal field observations of uncertain origin. But no method of data gathering or analysis becomes apparent – as the book’s title would suggest. The same holds true for most of Goffman’s writings: he remained notoriously ‘secretive about his methods’ (Manning 1992: 142, cf. Willems 1997: 22), sharing his thoughts on the matter only verbally with students and colleagues. A posthumous transcript of a tape-recorded seminar on fieldwork remains his only longer explicit statement on research methods (Goffman 1989). Most Goffmanian scholars argue that his method was more than anything *textual* (Manning 1992: 141-155; Willems 1997: 337-354; Williams 1988). His main epistemological interest was the inductive generation of theoretical accounts that would make apparent the inherent orderings of face-to-face conduct: uncovering ‘concepts ... that reorder our view of social activity’; ‘[f]rameworks ... into which a continuously larger number of facts can be placed’ (Goffman 1971: xvi). As Manning (1992: 154) put it, Goffman transformed ‘ethnographies of *places* into ethnographies of *concepts*’.

This led him to two connected textual strategies. The first was *metaphorical re-description*: game theory, theatre, or extreme cases (like asylums or con men) are the source domains for a metaphorical terminology that could tease out structurally similar phenomena across seemingly disparate situations – and thereby cast the taken-for-granted visible (Drew & Wootton 1988: 8, Manning 1992: 56-70, 143; Willems 1997: 339-342, Willems 2009). Goffman invited us to see the structural similarity between double spies and dinner conversations. Second, his texts reveal an *inductive cycle of 'double-fitting'* (Baldamus 1972, see Williams 1988). Switching between conceptual framework and description of empirical material again and again, the two become mutually refined and differentiated. Manning (1992: 150-152) sees this at work in the circular structure of Goffman's books themselves: they begin with the initial definition of some framework, to then classify and categorise empirical examples, work through examples that trouble the initial concepts, accommodate the concepts accordingly, and so on.

In a similar fashion, the goal of the following empirical analysis is to start with the conceptual framework developed in the previous chapters, to see where concepts fit and where they are troubled by empirical data, in order to produce both a refined and differentiated empirical description *and* a refined conceptual model of video game engagement. Glaser and Strauss (2010/1967) essentially formalised this circular form of theory generation in the late 1960s as grounded theory – although Goffman never appealed to that term. Little wonder, then, that the most explicit precedent for a frame analytic *method* comes from P. M. Strong (1988: 238-9; 1979: 226-235), who combined grounded theory with analytic induction to tease out the social ground rules operative in hospitals and doctor's visits.

In short, grounded theory is a method for inductively generating theory from empirical data. Its central pillar is 'joint theoretical collection, coding and analysis' (Glaser & Strauss 2010/1967: 71), combining 'the constant comparative method' with 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser & Strauss 2010/1967: 45-78, 101-116). From the first data point on, the researcher begins to analyse and theorise. Through the constant comparison of each new case or data point with the previous ones, she teases out regularities and differences. The regularities become the ground for *concepts* and their *properties*, the differences flesh out the boundaries and range of these concepts – the *dimensions* of properties. Such theorising always grows from analysing or *coding* the data: every concept is initially developed from and linked to some originating data. Data sections then get indexed as belonging to that concept, which breaks up data to enable comparison within and across concepts and filters out data irrelevant for the research question, while at the same time highlighting what is still unaccounted for (Corbin & Strauss 2008). At each step of analysis and theorising, the inductively developed concepts inform what data to sample next: they indicate relevant unknowns to explore, and promising *contrasting*

cases that can ‘stress-test’ the model.⁷⁵ Such theoretical sampling is done until ‘theoretical saturation’ (Glaser & Strauss 2010/1967: 263) is reached: all concepts and relations are properly fleshed out, and new data can be fully accounted for in terms of them, maybe adding variation to dimensions, but requiring no structural amendment. This highlights the specific role of data (and outliers) in grounded theory: Statistical hypothesis-testing aims at representative samples, and is satisfied with explaining just some (statistically significant) variation in that sample, discarding the rest as random or circumstantial ‘noise’. In grounded theory, each datum is sampled to maximise theory enrichment, and each data point counts in that the theory must be able to explain it, or be amended until it can.

To summarise, grounded theory is not only analogous to Goffman’s own methods. It has already been used in creating substantive accounts of frames (Strong 1988); its ontological assumptions closely match the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm that undergirds the present study (Charmaz 2011: 188; Corbin & Strauss 2008: 5-8); and its main process is to tease out in a methodically controlled manner *regularities* across instances: precisely what ‘frames’ describe. Grounded theory therefore provides a good starting point for the present purposes – just a starting point because qualitative research in general and grounded theory in specific have made significant advances since Strong (Flick 2010, Strübing 2008, Corbin & Strauss 2008, Clarke 2003, Charmaz 2011). Secondly, the standard form of grounded theory requires some amendment to fit the present research objectives of descriptively reconstructing the frames of leisurely video game engagement, and in the course, questioning and refining a general frame analytic model.

5.2 Research Strategy

Between the ideal types of deductive theory-testing and inductive theory-generation, a frame analytic approach to video game engagement sits uncomfortably in the middle: on the one hand, there is still little substantive theory of video game engagement that is really empirically grounded. That is the motivation of the present study – and indicates a qualitative, inductive, grounded theory approach (Creswell 2009: loc. 536, Corbin & Strauss 2008: 25). On the other hand, we *are* presented with an existing theoretical framework (frame analysis), used by some empirical literature, and the goal is to critically contribute to that framework as well as to a substantive account articulated in its terms. Yet the textbook recommendation of grounded theory is to ‘bracket’ existing theory and data in order to remain open for the field (Glaser & Strauss 2010/1967: 37, 45-46; cf. Meinefeld 2009).

⁷⁵ This is a reason why grounded theory also suggests seeking out extreme cases, something that points to a shared origin with Goffman in his mentor and PhD advisor, Everett C. Hughes. Hughes recommended the contrasting of extreme cases as a means to tease out structural regularities in society, e.g. ‘How is a priest like a prostitute?’ (quoted in Strübing 2008: 23, cf. Strübing 2008: 18, Burnes 1992: 11).

This is a general issue: there are few social arenas left that have never been subject to empirical study, and qualitative researchers almost without exception are deeply informed by some theoretical framework (Flick 2010: 72-73). To suggest that researchers *could* 'bracket' their preconceptions goes against basic tenets of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, or constructivism (underwriting most qualitative research) that perception is inescapably theory-laden (Meinefeld 2009, Strübing 2011)⁷⁶ One further misfortunate consequence of the insistence on bracketing has been that qualitative research often generates one disjointed thick description or substantive theory next to the other, with little integration towards a growing systematic body of knowledge (Strauss 1995). Or – in an almost tragicomic reversal of Blumer's and others' critique of deductive 'grand theory' sociology – qualitative studies use theoretical concepts *post hoc* to describe their data, proving little more than that yet another strip of recorded human experience could be articulated in the terms of a given theoretical vocabulary.

For these and other reasons, the strict insistence on bracketing has been largely abandoned as a dogmatic self-stereotyping that bears little resemblance to traditional texts or current practice (Meinefeld 2009, Snow 2001, Creswell 2009: loc. 1443). As Glaser and Strauss already wrote in 1967 (2010/1967: 36-7): 'categories can be borrowed from existing theory, provided that the data are continually studied to make certain that the categories fit'. One has to appreciate the 'sensitivity' the researcher brings to the field as that which 'enables them to respond to what is in the data' (Corbin & Strauss 2008: 33) in the first place.

A common form of 'sensitising' qualitative research in this manner is to draw up a set of 'sensitising concepts' interlinked as a 'conceptual framework' based on the existing literature: presumed relevant entities and their relations (Maxwell 2004: 33-64, Maxwell 2008, Jabareen 2009). Such a framework serves multiple purposes: (1) It integrates previous empirical research and theory, as well as personal experience as 'contextual knowledge' (Flick 2010: 74) that informs the sensitivity of the researcher; (2) it thus explicates the researcher's sensitivity, opening it for critical self-reflection, and making it more methodologically controlled; (3) it justifies and guides the choice of *initial* research questions, data types, recording methods, and sampling strategies; (4) it offers *initial* analytical tools for analysis (Maxwell 2004: 33-64, Corbin & Strauss 2008: 39-41; Gläser & Laudel 2010: 197-206, Gläser & Laudel 2011: 21).

This appears a promising approach to combine 'frames' as a given theoretical framework with grounded theory. However, there is (to my knowledge) no real precedent. Corbin and Strauss (2008: 40) acknowledge that 'a previously identified theoretical framework can provide

⁷⁶ This also highlights the later fault line between Glaser and Strauss: whereas Strauss, originating from the pragmatist 'Chicago school' of sociology, in later years developed a nuanced pragmatist framing of the necessary relationality of subject and object and the necessary 'theory-ladenness' of perception, Strauss's insistence on the possibility and necessity of a pure 'emergence' of categories 'unforced' by the researcher reveals his post-positivist, 'Cambridge school' notion of an empirical world existing and describable independent from any observer. Glaser self-contradicts this insistence by urging researchers to use his 'coding families' for theoretical coding, which essentially articulate pre-conceived, linguistic concepts (Strübing 2011, Kelle 2011).

insight, direction, and a useful list of initial concepts', but offer no real methodology of just how to do so. Then again, both Corbin and Strauss's 'Conditional/Consequential Matrix' and 'Process' model (2008: 87-106) and Glaser's (1978) 'coding families' essentially offer conceptual frameworks as well.⁷⁷ Most evolutions of grounded theory (beyond epistemological reframings, for example Charmaz 2011) have revolved around exchanging them for *other* analytic tools: Clarke for instance suggests to draw up an initial 'situational map' including 'all analytically pertinent human and nonhuman, material and symbolic/discursive elements of a particular situation' (2003: 561) to allow a complex heterogeneity of actors and relations into observation and analysis. Still, even Clarke does not allow methodically introducing *other* conceptual frameworks (other than situational maps, that is).

For this, one can take inspiration from a common qualitative research approach that relies explicitly on a conceptual framework: directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005), specifically the qualitative content analysis developed by Gläser and Laudel (2010). Evolving Mayring's (2000) qualitative content analysis, Gläser and Laudel (2010) suggest starting qualitative research by integrating existing contextual knowledge into a preliminary model of presumed causal relations between presumed relevant variables. This model guides the research design in identifying research questions and appropriate data samples, and serves as the initial 'search grid' for extracting relevant statements from the textual 'raw data' into separate, structured tables that are then used for interpretation as well as quantitative analyses. Crucially, in the process of working through the raw data, the framework is open for revising indicators, dimensions, and relations of variables, and new variables can be introduced. The advantage of such a method (compared to grounded theory) is that it is systematically guided by existing theory and research, and (through early extraction) allows the processing of very large amounts of data. What it does not offer are good strategies for identifying entirely new concepts. It also removes the researcher from the actual data very soon (Gläser & Laudel 2011: 34-37). Furthermore, it demands a pre-conceived *causal* model of the *substantive* domain one intends to study. What we are looking for is a way to bring in a *formal* model (frame analysis) to *reconstruct* the conventions ordering our substantive domain (video game engagement), thereby amending the formal model as needed. Extracting analytic descriptions of the data into separate tables would hamper more than help such reconstruction (as Gläser and Laudel [2011: 36-7] openly acknowledge). The present study therefore combined Gläser and Laudel's qualitative content analysis as the overarching strategy with grounded theory as the main means of data analysis:

⁷⁷ And problematic ones at that. First, they are of uncertain epistemological status: are we to take them merely as heuristics of commonly used forms of theorising in sociology, or are they theoretical claims about how all social processes work (Strübing 2011)? Second, they also force certain relations and background others. As Clarke (2003) rightfully observes, the human action 'root metaphor' of Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin tends to blend out material, *non-human* actors, collective actors, discourses, and the situatedness of action.

1. From the theoretical work in the previous chapters, a conceptual framework for ‘frames’ is derived that informs initial data collection. Just like Clarke’s (2003) ‘situational maps’, one major purpose of this framework is to *broaden* the scope of aspects to be attended to, and to highlight possible silences in the participants’ reports.

2. In data analysis, data is coded and constantly compared, following grounded theory, but again, one starts by *initially* coding the data following sensitising concepts. Since grounded theory continually constructs, compares and revises theory in parallel to data collection and analysis, there is no inherent methodological contradiction to *start* this continuous circle with theory – as long as the initial concepts are nothing but the starting point, always open to be discarded, amended or supplemented, having to ‘earn their right’ in critical comparison with and substantiation by data (see already Glaser & Strauss 2010/1967: 36-7, 45-9).

3. During theoretical integration, beyond the substantive account of frames of video game engagement, one can then potentially see new components of frames emerging that were not entailed in the conceptual framework, and presumed components disappearing that turned up ‘empty’ during data analysis.

Articulating and refining such a conceptual framework can also be seen as a first step towards *operationalising* frames as ‘clusters of frame elements’ (Matthes & Kohring 2008: 263). Such operationalisation has allowed news frames analysis to mature into ‘normal science’ in communication research, but is simply missing for situational frames right now (König 2005). This makes it hard to compare different studies of (presumably) the same frame, to develop aggregate descriptions of the frame of a given social group at a given time, and to establish cultural, historical, social, and other differences.

Beyond quantitative analyses, operationalisation is a necessary precondition for the generalisation of multiple qualitative accounts towards substantive theories of empirical fields (like video gaming encounters), or even formal theories of, say, the factors that govern emotion regulation in social encounters of all kinds (Strauss 1995). With all due respect for the situatedness and indexicality of human action (including research), it bears repeating that Goffman himself did aim towards such formal social theorisation; that Glaser and Strauss (2010/1967: 2-6) at least initially framed grounded theory as the groundwork for the verification of predictive and explanatory theories; that even Blumer (1969: 127-181; see Snow 2001) was not against formal theories outright; and that a whole strand of symbolic interactionist research does engage in their development and testing (Stryker 1987, 2008). As long as one understands generalisation as a local, material, practical accomplishment itself (Latour 2005: 174-190, 221-241), there is no contradiction between a pragmatist, interactionist, constructivist, or even ethnomethodologist stance, and the practice of generalising.

5.3 Research Design

Equipped with this overall research strategy, we can now flesh out the components of our research design, namely (1) the conceptual framework, (2) data types and collection methods, (3) sampling and recruitment strategies, and (4) data analysis.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical and empirical work synthesised in the previous chapters, a conceptual framework of aspects and possible variations of frames was drawn up. The initial aspects of frames are taken from the earlier theoretical integration (see chapter two): motivational relevancies; objects, settings, and events; rules for actions and communications; attentive access, focus, and involvement; emotion and emotion display; actors and their footing; an internal organisation of the situation into regions, gatherings, tracks, and laminations; metacommunication and framing; frame limits and gearing into the world.

These concepts were then crossed with relevant entities in and possible ‘deviations’ from video gaming pointed out in the open empirical questions restated above, loosely organised into Goffman’s (1963) distinction of material settings, actor gatherings, and social occasions or frames (see Deterding 2013 for a more detailed delineation).

1. First, in terms of game *objects and settings*, it seemed useful to distinguish (spatial) *settings*, (hardware) *devices*, and (software) *genres*. This makes good on the observation of communication research that *content genres* are a central institutionalisation and differentiation of frames when it comes to media (e.g. Winter 1992, Livingstone 1996, Willems 2000). Barr (2007) likewise observed that different video game genres cater differently to ludic or paidic engagement (e.g. shooters vs. sandbox simulations).

Whether a similar crystallisation of frames around gaming *devices* can be found is an empirically open question, but somewhat less expectable given that they are typically multi-purpose, running different game software (genres), and usually featuring a plethora of non-gaming functionalities. Their features certainly afford particular forms of gaming (genres) better or worse – a multi-hour session of a complex strategy simulation is hard to pull off on a small touchscreen. But within the spectrum of activity afforded by the current hardware and software configuration, it is the situational framing of the users enrolling a running software that specifies ‘what it is that’s going on here right now’ when they are using a gaming console or smartphone (see Hölig 2012 for a similar argument).

In purpose-designed *settings* (gaming grounds like arcade halls, casinos, specialty stores, LAN parties, gaming conventions), one can expect that the setting usually carries a specific social occasion as the widest framing (the LAN party), and hosts specific expectable occasions one might not find in homes or public spaces: at a LAN party, one may expect small gaming encounters, tournament gaming, maybe the award ceremony for tournament winners, etc.

(Tepe 2005). In arcades, specific public performance forms of gaming with their own frame conventions have developed (Lin & Sun 2011). Especially with mobile devices, as noted, gaming can be transposed into unusual public settings and occasions, prone to dysphoric tensions.

2. In terms of different kinds of *gatherings of actors*, the most relevant suggestion comes from Simon (2007), who delineates four ‘social contextures’ of video gaming: playing with others, playing next to others, playing with others online, and playing alone.

3. In terms of presumed deviations, the literature provided little systemisations to draw on. Instead, the recurring themes across the literature were aggregated, i.e. virtual item sales, work-like grinding, and instrumentalisation of gaming.

Together, the aspects of frames and the possible variations constituted the initial set of sensitising concepts. As with Clarke (2003), one major purpose of these terms was to *broaden* the scope of aspects attended to, and highlight possible silences and absences in collected data.

Data Collection

Since frames are organising principles for both behaviour *and* experience, reconstructing a frame necessarily ought to include both third-person behavioural data and subjective first-person data. Depending on the aspect of frames one is interested in, different data types are required: for individuals’ *subjective memories* regarding frames, retrospective verbal reports suffice (Flick 2010: 193-278). To trace the *practical accomplishment of framing*, involving the *socio-material interactions* of human and non-human actors, overt behaviour needs to be recorded, e.g. with ethnographies (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor 2012). For more fine-grained accounts, interaction analyses (Jordan & Anderson 1995) of video recordings (Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff 2011) are the most logical route. Usually both ‘in-room’ player interaction and the main ‘in-game’ screen are captured and then joined as one video recording for analysis (e.g. Stevens, Satwicz & McCarthy 2008, Hung 2011, Peterson 2011, Woods & Dempster 2011).

To capture the *interaction of overt behaviour and lived experience*, introspective methods are one possible but seldom-taken route (Sudnow 1983 and deKoven 2010 provide two examples, cf. Deterding 2008). Ethnographic combinations of participant observation and video analysis seem to be the preferred method in game studies (Giddings 2007, 2009, Giddings & Kennedy 2008). Their main methodological issue is the retrospective reconstruction of experience – aggravated by the typically high cognitive load of video game engagement (Ang, Zaphiris & Mahmood 2007): players can report general moods and ‘highlights’, but are hard-pressed to accurately recount longer strips of gaming experience in great detail. Concurrent methods like loud-thinking face the same issue: gaming often leaves little cognitive resources to verbalise one’s experience at the same time, and the task of concurrent verbal self-report might significantly alter the gaming experience (Hoonhout 2008). One route around this are video-

mediated recall interviews, which have proven to be quite effective (Guan, Lee, Cuddihy et al. 2006, Ribbens & Poels 2009).

Given that the present study was interested in the exploratory reconstruction of frames across a large variety of contexts, semi-structured episodic interviews were chosen as the main data collection form (Flick 2010: 238-242). A reconstruction of frames across multiple contexts through video recording or ethnography would have required potentially vast amounts of video material and/or the deep familiarisation with multiple fields. In contrast, episodic interviewing allows a very economic access to rich data on multiple contexts: the main method is to repeatedly prompt the interview participant to narrate personally experienced episodes relevant to the research question, combined with follow-up questions on subjective definitions or imaginative variations of concepts mentioned in those biographic strips (Flick 2010: 240-1). Interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire that was tested in two initial interviews, and in keeping with theoretical sampling, subsequently amended as new questions emerged from data analysis. Interview guidelines (see appendix) followed a two-fold strategy:

(a) To elicit participants' own subjective constructs of different frames of video game engagement, they were first prompted to report the last time they engaged with a video game. Next, they were asked whether this instance was 'typical' or not, and in what ways. They were then invited to report whether they also engaged with video games in other forms than the one they reported, and how these various forms differed from each other. The elements of the conceptual framework were used to prompt elaboration beyond spontaneous responses – i.e. asking the participants whether engaging with a game in a different setting or with a different device made a difference to them, and if so, how.

(b) Since norm breaches are one of the main ways in which social conventions become consciously available to participants as 'background expectations' (Garfinkel 1967: 35-75), the main interview strategy was to prompt participants to report instances from their biographical experience where norms or expectations were breached during a video gaming encounter. Again, the elements of the conceptual model were used to prompt and systematically broaden further recollection once the participants had exhausted their spontaneous memory. For each reported breach, participants were asked (i) why the event constituted a breach, (ii) whether there would be instances where it would not constitute a breach, and (iii) whether the participants could formulate an 'ought' for the aspect in question. Finally, (iv) for each reported breach or 'ought', participants were prompted to compare whether and why it would also constitute a breach and/or 'ought' in the other forms of video game engagement they had listed previously. In a sense, the participants were instructed to engage in constant comparison with the varieties of their own remembered video gaming experiences.

On average, an interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.⁷⁸ In addition, participants were prompted to draw pictures of the spatial settings of the various forms of video game engagement they outlined. They were then prompted to point out (and if necessary, fill in) all elements of the situation they themselves considered to 'somehow belong to' the video game engagement, to label the elements, and explain their significance. This generated data on the material environment (in its social significance) without requiring direct access to sites. To the extent possible, before or after each interview a video game engagement of the interview participant was observed, keeping rough jottings on site that were written out into field notes as soon as the interview site was left (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011: 29-41). Finally, field notes of other relevant personal and/or observed gaming encounters throughout the course of the research were kept.

Recruitment and Sampling

Interview participants were recruited through a mix of personal contacts, contacting professional bodies like the Electronic Sports League, and open calls published at various game-related online boards and news sites. In keeping with the grounded theory principle of maximum variation, recruitment started with a purposive sampling (Flick 2010: 165-167) aiming at a maximum variety of gaming experience. For that, two strategies were followed:

First, participants were sought out who had significant experience with both 'leisurely' game engagement and forms of game engagement that presumably differed markedly from it: professional online gambling, e-sports, game testing, game reviewing, scientifically studying games, serious gaming, gamified applications, 'goldfarming' – the rationale being that the taken-for-granted conventions of 'leisurely' game engagement would become more readily visible in contrast to them.

Second, participants with experience in presumably different forms of 'leisurely' game engagement were recruited, aiming for maximum variation by drawing up an initial list of presumed relevant dimensions, starting with the dimensions of variation assumed in the conceptual model (differing settings, devices, and genres, as well as differing social contextures), and expanding them with further expectably relevant dimensions, namely age, gender, and intensity of gaming (see also the dimensions used in Fritz et al. 2012). To cross-check sampling dimensions with actual demographics, participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire self-locating them in the various dimensions. As data collection and analysis progressed, sampling shifted with emergent new questions.

All participants were adults of German citizenship, some were second- or third-generation immigrants. With one exception, all participants lived in large metropolitan areas of Germany. Educational background and socio-economic status were relatively diverse, ranging from ap-

⁷⁸ See appendices for transcription rules.

prentices with a general school degree (Lehrling mit Hauptschulabschluss) to marketing managers with a university degree to retirees. Overall, 19 individuals were interviewed. The following table provides a summative overview of participants.

Item	Sum	Item	Sum
Age		Gender	
19-29	11	Male	15
30-39	6	Female	4
40-49	1	Devices played on	
50+	1	Desktop	18
Gaming intensity		Browser	12
low (0-2 hours/week)	2	Console	4
medium (3-6 hours/week)	5	Mobile console	12
high (>6-10 hours/week)	5	Smartphone, tablet	9
intense (>10 hours/week)	7	Genres played	
Social constellations played in		Casual, Puzzle	11
F2F Single player	16	Sport, Racing	7
F2F Multiplayer	12	Simulation, Strategy	10
LAN	4	Jump&Run, Action Adventure	7
Online Multiplayer synchronous	12	Action/Shooter	12
Online Multiplayer asynchronous	4	Adventure/RPG	11
Player kinds		MMORPG	5
Leisurely players	7	Social Game	5
Game journalists, designers, researchers	5	Music, party game	5
E-Sports	4		
User of gamified application	2		

Table 3: Distribution of interview participants

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, scanned participant drawings, and field notes were uploaded into MAXQDA 10, a software package for computer-aided qualitative data analysis (Kuckartz 2010). In an initial step, all individual documents were given variables following the presumed relevant dimensions, and all material was coded using the initial sensitising concepts. Constant comparison was used to tease out properties and dimensions of concepts. In parallel, the material was openly coded for new concepts. The early and strong emergence of central categories like ‘autonomy’ and ‘frame bleeding’ (see below) indicates that the chosen procedure did not delimit the developing account to the pre-conceived conceptual framework. At a later stage, to identify ‘clusters’ across aspects of framing, code relations matrices crossing specific ‘values’

of identified dimensions with in vivo codes of forms of video game engagement were generated to see whether these formed coherent and parsimonious clusters that were also sensible in terms of the participants' statements.

Research Ethics

Research was pursued in keeping with the German Research Foundation's and Hamburg University's guidelines for safeguarding good scientific practice⁷⁹ as well as the ethics declaration of the German Society for Communication Research.⁸⁰ All participants received a consent and privacy form that was explained to and signed by them prior to interviewing (see appendices). When keeping field notes, I assured to get prior or posterior consent from participants, informing them of the use of my field data. To the best of my knowledge, all participants were mentally and physically healthy adults at the time of research. All recordings are being kept secure and separate from the consent forms and can only be cross-referenced via a shared code (e.g. 'TN4'), and all audio files will be deleted at most five years after completion of the dissertation. Field notes, scans, and the written transcript of the audio recordings were anonymised, replacing the names of persons, places, and organisations with pseudonyms.

Limitations and Biases

Relying primarily on interview data obviously comes with drawbacks (see only Bernard et al. 1984 and Briggs 2007). Leaving larger political and epistemological issues aside, what people do and say are often two very different things. At best, interviews provide access to the individuals' own narratives, mental models, and memories – at worst, they are strategic self-presentation, or the interviewer talking to herself through the conduit of the interviewee. I noticed this strongly in interviews with e-sports players: During the first ten-or-so minutes, they produced clearly well-rehearsed stories and analogies presumably intended to convince journalists (or researchers) that e-sports was indeed a serious athletic activity. Only after my responses displayed sufficient depth of gamer expertise were they visibly engaging in unrehearsed, active deliberation of my questions. I tried to alleviate these shortcomings at least somewhat by (a) repeatedly prompting participants to report actual experienced episodes rather than general evaluations, (b) carefully distinguishing between the events they reported and the reasons they gave for them, and (c) cross-examining reports with my own field notes and other studies' descriptions of observable behaviour whenever possible. Still, the present study cannot – and does not attempt to – make claims about the actual situational, socio-material accomplishment of framing. For this I have to refer to existing literature (e.g. Aarsand

⁷⁹ See http://www.dfg.de/foerderung/rechtliche_rahmenbedingungen/gwp/index.html, <http://www.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/service/gute-wissenschaftliche-praxis.pdf>, last accessed March 30, 2013.

⁸⁰ See <http://www.dgpuk.de/uber-die-dgpuk/ethikerklarung/>, last accessed March 30, 2013.

2008, Aarsand & Aronsson 2009, Linderöth 2012) and planned follow-up research. Participants have made statements on these matters that will be reported in the following pages, but these should be taken with due caution.

Second, the small and relatively homogeneous sample of the present study cannot and did not attempt to make comparative statements about regional, socio-economic, let alone cultural differences in video gaming frames. It is also by no means an exhaustive mapping of the 'repertoire' of frames present within the interviewed groups, nor a series of richly differentiated portraits of the individual frames discovered. All it can offer is a first contouring of the differences between 'leisurely' and 'instrumental' forms of video game engagement.

During the process of sampling, interviewing, observation, and analysis, I have tried to reflect to the best of my abilities the potential biases in my own sensitivities: I am a middle-aged, white, male, middle-class, native German researcher and designer with a high degree of formal education. My personal gaming biography is predominantly pen-and-paper and live action roleplaying games, and desktop PC single-player adventure, RPG, and strategy games. My research interest is uncovering regularities in game engagement that originate in social conventions. This means that I have had little experiential access and ought to give special attention to the experience of gamers that are female, teen, or senior; of non-German background; with low socio-economic status or little formal education. I should seek out and pay attention to participants preferring multiplayer, console, and/or mobile gaming devices, and game genres different from those I prefer. Finally, given my research interest, I will be prone to make out a stable regularity (and ascribe it to a social convention) where there might just be an accidental coming-together, or where reasons other than social convention gave rise to that regularity. I should therefore make sure to follow up any tentative regularity in a non-leading way to see whether not adhering to it would indeed constitute a breach of norms or expectations within the respective group.

6 Leisurely Modes

What, then, are the unwritten rules of video gaming? On first sight, the data revealed not so much rules as their very absence. For every regularity discerned there would be a counter-case. Here interviewees defined gaming as voluntary – there, they reported that their own gaming often was not. Here they said winning was the only thing that matters – there, they stated that who wins wasn't really important: everyone having a good time is what counted. Here even diverting one's gaze for a second from the screen was an inappropriate distraction – there, one was expected to remain open to a little chit-chat with onlookers. Here gaming with serious consequences would no longer be gaming – there, it was actively used to stoke excitement. Here cheating was the ultimate taboo – there, just minutes later, the very same player happily reported using cheats, walkthroughs, and save games, considering it perfectly appropriate to do so. In short, the sheer heterogeneity of reported experiences, actions, and norms indicated that one cannot sensibly speak of *one* video gaming frame. However, once the analytic microscope was turned to a finer level of granularity, relatively stable, coherent, and socially shared forms emerged from the blur: not game genres, devices, or settings, nor social contextures, but *modes of leisurely gaming*, and *instrumental keyings of gaming*.

Leisurely modes, in short, refer to more or less institutionalised forms of gaming that, as Goffman observed, are pursued for the sake of autotelic enjoyment, but differ in the kind of enjoyment pursued, which 'tunes' the material and social organisation of a gaming situation as an overarching ethos. Instrumental keyings, in contrast, are instances of gaming that are (again, more or less institutionalised) transformed into a part of an overarching professional activity that gives gameplay an exotelic purpose. Where modes differ in the kind of enjoyment sought, keys differ in the kind of professional activity and exotelic purpose. This distinction not only emerged from the patterned differences of situated organisation and experience. Interviewees themselves voiced that they noticed clear differences in how they approached games, and had developed their own emic terms to refer to these forms: some spoke of 'contemplative playing' versus 'professional playing', 'playing for work' versus 'recreational playing', or gaming 'for fun' versus 'seriously' to separate leisurely modes and instrumental key-

ings. Others used terms like ‘hardcore’ versus ‘casual’ gaming, or ‘party’ versus ‘competitive contexts’ to distinguish different leisurely modes. A game designer engaged both in passionate leisurely gaming at home and professional instrumentally keyed gaming of competitors’ games at the office to tease out design features phrased the difference as follows:

P9: Well, I would, I would say, in the office I do not play for relaxation. So it’s like, there is a certain necessity that you simply inform yourself what the current market is like? How is this game designed? What can one learn from it? So it’s less an, an, such an escapism you have there, such a, such a relaxation mode, but really more an analytically thinking direction. (P9/45)

Modes and keys share a common set of ground rules that set the two groups apart: leisurely modes are all characterised by an autotelic focus on some enjoyment; instrumental keyings share an exotelic focus on some instrumental outcome. Modes are organised by different balances of gameworthiness, playworthiness, and social harmony. Keyings are organised by different professional norms of efficiency and craftsmanship. Leisurely modes are geared inconsequentially into the world – players are expected to divest their self from the outcome and not have too high a material stake invested; instrumental keys are geared into the world consequentially – the game can have serious consequences, and players are allowed to invest their professional self into them. Finally, in leisurely modes, dysphoric tension arises from the recalcitrance of game equipment or the pressure of social norms. In instrumental keys, dysphoric tension is much more frequent, grounded in a situational clash of professional demands and personal needs, which can be greatly amplified by the recalcitrance of game equipment.

Next to modes and keys, a second organising dimension of gaming encounters found in the data was social closeness: there are marked differences between single-player and multiplayer gaming, and between different forms of multiplayer gaming based on how close players felt to each other, both in terms of trust and familiarity, and in terms of response presence. The closeness of players, the practical effort of organising kinds of gaming encounters, and the importance of relatedness in the overarching ethos of the gaming encounter interacted to determine how strongly players perceive and enact *participation norms* – organising choices when to play, whether to play, what to play, who to play with, and when to stop playing.

The next sections will first flesh out the concept of leisurely modes and briefly introduce the main modes that appeared in the data, to then substantiate the concepts of social closeness and participation norms. They will then look in detail how the modes play out across the different aspects of frames, and relate the findings to contemporary psychological research on entertainment experiences in video gaming.

Chapter seven will turn to instrumental keyings. Again, it will first outline the concept of keyings and then provide more detailed portraits of the main keyings found. This leads to the ‘curse of the professional view’ – how instrumental keyings become habituated and bleed over into leisurely gaming – and to autonomy as the central concept for understanding how and why both leisurely and instrumental gaming feels ‘work-like’ – or not.

6.1 Modes of Gaming

The following excerpt is as good an entry point as any. Asked what characterises ‘video gaming’, an interviewee rejected the very idea of there being *one* such thing:⁸¹

P1: Well I believe, there is of course the- if you say, like, this with friends, yes, there are games, especially movement games, or singing games, *Singstar*, there is now this *Rapstar*. Those are things, like, you can simply do them with friends after having had a couple of beers, to entertain you.

Then there’s the situation where I have a game that puts great emphasis on the narrative. That is, I want to experience a story, and then I have to effectively bring myself into a state, like, where I am ready to take that in, that is, that’s nothing I can do on the side.

And then there are also games, like the arcade game *Super Meat Boy* for example, which appeared last year, which stands in a tradition of old arcade machines, like *Super Ghosts’n Souls* or- where it’s actually about a performance I bring, and where it’s for me- and *there* it actually again- so there in effect this leisure character is lost a bit, and it effectively gets something of a profession or studying. I have to train certain moves, movements to be able to pass these worlds in the first place.

And yes, as I said, so it all depends on the situation, on the player, and on the game, in my opinion. So it can become anything from pure::: from pure party entertainment, to, to experiencing a story, to, actually... yes, to a sportive event for myself. And that then also entails work for me. (P1-2/45-51)

On first reading, this passage might seem to suggest a fully dispersed heterogeneity of gaming varying ‘with the situation, with the player, and with the game’. Yet in context, one finds that the categories the interviewee makes out more in passing – ‘party entertainment’, ‘experiencing a story’, ‘sportive event’ – repeat themselves again and again within and across interviews. What this interviewee articulates, in short, are different *modes* of leisurely video gaming.

This term is taken from P.M. Strong’s (1979, 1988) ethnographic study of the interaction orders of mothers’ visits to paediatricians in Scottish and American clinics. Where Goffman assumed ‘just one ideal form’ for the frame ‘going to the doctor’, Strong found a ‘*plurality* of ritual orders’ that he called ‘modes’ (Strong 1988: 243). This is what *modes of gaming* denote: a plurality of similar-yet-different frames we commonly assume to be one, even though on closer account they are not. One common example for a widely shared, usually spontaneous mode of gaming is what Hung (2011: 151-74) has called ‘duelling’. Readers will likely be familiar with the phenomenon from their own leisure time: in the course of a gaming encounter, while already gaming, participants often more or less spontaneously suggest something to the effect of: ‘Let’s play a match’. Where gameplay was previously relatively open, where ‘outs’ or ‘fouls’ didn’t really ‘matter’, where participants might have kept track of a score, but not meticulously, and where all happened in quite a calm and relaxed spirit, with lots of joking and side remarks – suddenly, rules are strongly enforced, whether a certain move has been ‘out’ is hotly debated, the score becomes a matter of concern, emotions and arousal fly high, pauses and parallel chatting wane, and so on. Gaming suddenly becomes ‘serious’.

This small example demonstrates one of a total of five modes of leisurely video gaming that emerged from the data, namely competitive gaming. The other four (of which more in a minute) are relaxing, socialising, engrossing, and hardcore gaming. It also illustrates that modes may shift within one and the same gaming encounter (from socialising to competitive

⁸¹ German original transcripts can be found in the appendices.

in the above case). Modes can be more or less spontaneous and enduring in any given gaming instance. The degree of clarity and differentiation with which interviewees distinguished modes correlated with their video gaming experience: the more experience interviewees had across different social contexts, genres, etc., the more they were able to articulate differences between and specifics of modes. Interviewees noted that they would sometimes experience conflict or misunderstandings over what is appropriate or not with other people who had significantly less exposure to video gaming, highlighting that modes (like all frames) are more or less institutionalised and broadly shared. For example, one interviewee reported that his roommates frequently mistook his highly concentrated facial expression during gaming as a sign of discomfort rather than enjoyable engrossment. Another interviewee told a story of how the expectation and license to ‘trash talk’ each other in competitive online gaming would cause consternation among his family members if they entered the room and heard him shouting over VoIP. Similarly, it was not intelligible to his family members why video gaming would sometimes demand full attention, nor would they understand (or accept) the implicit meta-communicative cues he was giving off that he did not want to be disturbed:

P4: With people who have no experience with video games. They have no appreciation for that. I have a lot of people in my family with (3s) absolutely no video gaming socialisation, I’d say. There’s no necessary connection, but in this case the logical consequence was that video games are just rubbish and superfluous. For them the personal exchange always has priority. Intentionally or not. That is, no matter whether that’s show of meant seriously. In any case, they have no computer to play, or no television. With them it’s often that they simply have no sense that you could feel disturbed if you are just playing and then are approached. (3s) And they don’t even see the signal, that you say: <<Now is not so good.>> Because they can’t process that, they don’t understand that. For them it’s just a video game. (P4/192)

The central organising principle of the different leisurely gaming modes turned out to be their *motivational relevancy*: the kind of experience players seek out when they engage in this mode. In Goffman’s (and Bateson’s) terms, the motivational relevancy of a given mode forms its ‘ethos’; that is, the mutually acknowledged and enacted overarching joint atmosphere or experience that is valued and aspired to, ‘a spirit, an emotional structure, that must be properly created, sustained, and laid to rest’ (Goffman 1963: 19, cf. Goffman 1963: 96-7). This marks an important amendment to Goffman’s own account of gaming. For him, *all* gaming encounters involved *one and the same* set of motivational relevancies: autotelic deep involvement (leading to engrossment and euphoric ease) and display of character and skill. The data showed that although both are important, they do not exhaust the scope of experiences players pursue in video gaming, and feature to varying degrees in the different modes. More specifically, the overarching ethos of the gaming modes presented itself as a clustering of four aspects: motivational relevancy, telicity, attentive absorption, and arousal.

Motivational relevancy articulates the dominant experience that players focus on in a specific gaming mode and perceive one *ought* to focus on. It explains the sociomaterial organisation of a situation framed in a certain mode – both in practical terms (for example, why rooms

are set up in a certain way, why genres come with certain features) and in epistemic and normative ones as the rationale or 'vocabulary of motives' (Mills 1940) participants draw upon: it is the standard by which participants perceive they can legitimately evaluate whether a specific gaming encounter is or has been 'good', or 'satisfying', and reprimand other players for 'not playing right'. Gaming in 'the spirit of the game' means to game in a way that supports the specific motivational relevancy of the current mode: in the socialising gaming of *Singstar* with friends, 'the right spirit' is very different from that of a competitive player-versus-player match of *StarCraft*. In brief, the different motivational relevancies of the different modes are *relaxation* for relaxing gaming, *relatedness* for socialising gaming, *engrossment* for engrossing gaming, *competence* for hardcore gaming, and *achievement* for competitive gaming. No matter what the specific motivational relevancy, the fact that all modes are organised around an autotelic pursuit of some kind of (deemed-enjoyable) experience is a noteworthy characteristic of leisurely video gaming.

The motivational relevancies of the modes in turn determine the *telicity* of the gaming activity. This essentially restates Barr's (2007) observation of *paidia* (open, explorative) and *ludus* (closed, goal-focused) as two recurring video game values, albeit as a *dimension*: interviewees reported gaming with varying *degrees* of focus on and investment in reaching game goals, which entailed a varying focus on the rules of the game. Each gaming mode is characterised by a typical degree of telicity. Relaxing gaming, for instance, showed the lowest telicity, whereas hardcore and competitive gaming showed the highest. As one participant compared 'contemplative gaming' (his term for relaxing gaming) with 'hardcore' and 'professional gaming' (hardcore gaming and the instrumental keying of review gaming):

P3: Because with hardcore gaming, of course one has to, really, one has to get into it. For instance, one has to look- I previously mentioned game mechanics. There is also a point mechanic, so. And there is, with 2D shooters and such, there are systems how to get the most points possible. And with professional gaming one also has to look how intelligent this system is. And that means you have to make points and try, how are the multipliers and so on. And that's of course already such a hardcore way of thinking that engages with, really with the rule system and tries to be as successful as possible at it.

Interviewer: So that's, that's the core, that one looks at the rule system in both? Like, like [exactly-]

P3: [No, with-] with contemplative gaming one partially doesn't look at the rule system. Of course you have to understand the rules, that's a normal thing, of course one has to know what the basic mechanic is. But you can also just sit in front of something like *Bejeweled* and mindlessly push gems next to each other the whole time such that they disappear on the screen, and you actually use it, actually as a kind of video game yoga or such, and you relax with it and the brain empties during it, so. But then there's also the playing where you actually say: <<So, chum, I absolutely have to, if I'm not here at, in world three not at so-and-so-many points, then I won't get my high score>>, and play the, the very same game in a very- very different way. (P3-1/292-300)

In modes with low telicity, interviewees reported they feel free to 'let themselves drift', to willingly follow in-game instructions without much thought, joke with other players and onlookers rather than play, to attend to the aesthetics of the game displays, and so on. One interviewee described her experience of playing *FarmVille* in a relaxing mode as follows:

P12: Because everything is in its place, and that looks good, you look at it and think: Oh, that, that I find beautiful, so. At a certain point I started to make patterns in my fields with different plants and so. (P12/269-271)

In modes with high telicity, interviewees report the want or demand to focus strongly on reaching specific goals, and thus on the game rules to achieve those goals. This focus goes hand in hand with the next two dimensions, which split out the sub-components of involvement as understood by Goffman: as telicity increases, so do arousal and (to a lesser extent) attentive absorption.

Attentive absorption refers to the degree to which attention is and should be fully and exclusively held by gameplay – that is, the degree to which distractions and interruptions are seen as inappropriate. The fuller the ‘proper’ degree of attentive absorption, the more interviewees reported actively configuring the time window and physical setting in which they gamed to minimise distraction and interruption. Attentive absorption comprises both game fiction and game rules foci: in engrossing gaming, interviewees noted a very high degree of attentive absorption, especially in the game fiction, but only a low to medium degree of telicity (i.e. focus on achieving game goals). In hardcore gaming, interviewees reported both high attentive absorption (now mainly in the game rules) and high telicity.

Arousal, finally, refers to the level of physical arousal, reported by interviewees as experiences of ‘tension’, ‘suspense’, sweaty hands, or a high heart rate. Again, modes differ in the desired and appropriate degree of arousal. In relaxing gaming, for instance, gaming is actively sought out to *reduce* negatively experienced arousal, as the following instance of gaming a casual game on a tablet in parallel to watching television illustrates:

So that’s simply because crime movies- I like to watch crime movies, but when it’s too suspenseful, too brutal, then I get so nervous that I distract myself a little with the iPad. That is, I still notice what is going on in television, but I don’t have to look at it anymore ((laughs)). (P17/172)

In contrast, competitive gaming, which comes with the highest reported arousal of all leisurely gaming, is actively sought out for that arousal, sometimes aborted when that arousal itself becomes experienced as too physically taxing:

P10: Well, like, *StarCraft* perhaps for an, an hour, because then I also notice how it physically takes a toll on me. Because after an hour you are ((makes panting breathing)), your- there are somehow always up to, so your pulse is at 180, and you really notice afterwards, even after one match, how, how you sweat and simply bodily, yes, how it takes a toll on you. (P10/114-115)

Ideally, time window, spatial setting, chosen game genre, social contexture, and expectations and norms are all perfectly ‘in tune’ to support the ‘spirit’ of a gaming mode: its signature motivational relevancy and degrees of telicity, absorption, and arousal. Interviewees reported actively organising and configuring the situation to support it, and reacted with amused laughter over the imagination of bringing elements into an instance of a gaming mode that ‘obviously’ ‘did not fit’ – such as bringing a game designed for hardcore and competitive gaming (*Battlefield 3*) into an instance of socialising gaming at a party. Interviewees also reported dis-

pleasure when the features of a game and setting did not ‘fit’ the ‘spirit’ optimally, as well as moral devaluation of activities that went against the situational proprieties of that mode.

In terms of game objects and settings, software genres were most strongly associated with specific gaming modes, but in complex ways. Different genres more or less strongly afford different gaming modes. Relaxing gaming, for instance, was most frequently reported with casual games like *Bejeweled* or social network games like *FarmVille*. But participants also reported a relaxing gaming mode when engaging with genres like adventures, especially when they had significant gaming experience – illustrating how affordances are relational properties emerging from game features and player dispositions. One interviewee reported that a colleague of his used the typically highly engrossing, highly arousing shooter *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* as after-work relaxation to simply explore the visual scenery of the in-game landscape:

P3: So there are people who play first-person shooters that they may have to play at a higher difficulty level for a review, because they have to evaluate the AI of the opponents, who play them for a certain stretch just through and look at the landscape. So we have one, one colleague in our editorial office who is an unbelievable landscape fanatic. And he then goes in games like *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, which plays in postnuclear Russia and such, he simply walks around there and watches the destroyed forests and looks at the sunset and then just runs around in the place. And since the game is really easy there, he quickly shoots the enemies and then takes a walk in the worlds. (P3-1/288)

In turn, interviewees reported significant stretches of engrossing gaming with social network games, and Juul (2010) documented gamers engaging with casual games in a hardcore mode (and vice versa). We will return to this in the final chapter. For now, let’s quickly review the main modes that emerged in the data. The table below summarises the various modes, followed by short text portraits of them.

	Relaxing gaming	Socialising gaming	Engrossing gaming	Hardcore gaming	Competitive gaming
<i>Motivational relevancy</i>	Relaxation	Relatedness	Engrossment	Competence	Achievement
<i>Telicity</i>	Low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
<i>Attentive absorption</i>	Low	Low	High	High	Very high
<i>Arousal</i>	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Very high
<i>Contexture</i>	Mostly single-player	Mostly multi-player	Mostly single-player	Mostly single-player	Mostly multi-player
<i>Typical genres</i>	Social games, casual games	Party games, board games	RPGs, TBS, Adventures, Simulations	Shooters, Action, RTS, Horror, MMORPG	Multiplayer combat, sports, RTS, shooters
<i>Typical devices</i>	Mobile, PC	Console, PC	PC, Console	PC, Console	PC, Console
<i>Typical settings</i>	Transit, recreation spots, home	Private or public room home	Private room home	Private room home	Private room home

Table 4: Modes of leisurely video gaming

Relaxing Gaming

In relaxing gaming, the main motivational relevancy is relaxation from boredom or recovery from a previous demanding activity: 'It's simply relaxation' (P17/184). Relaxation from boredom might sound paradoxical to some, but there is evidence to suggest that boredom can occur with both hypo- and hyper-aroused states, and indeed *induce* stress (Thackray 1981). As Eastwood and colleagues (2012: 482) suggest, boredom is defined less by hypo-arousal than 'the aversive state that occurs when we (a) are not able to successfully engage attention with internal (e.g. thoughts or feelings) or external (e.g. environmental stimuli) information required for participating in satisfying activity, (b) are focused on the fact that we are not able to engage attention and participate in satisfying activity, and (c) attribute the cause of our aversive state to the environment'. In Goffmanian terms, in boredom, we seek involvement but experience dysphoric tension over being unable to find an activity that spontaneously involves us, or over situational proprieties not allowing us to engage in something we would find involving. Instead, we become self-consciously aware of this mismatch.⁸² Players engaged in relaxing gaming desire a known-to-be-pleasant activity that promises to engage attention just enough, has low cognitive or physical demands, induces relatively low arousal, requires no social obligations, and facilitates the ability to engage in another activity at any time:

P12: That is something simple. After a long, perhaps after a long work day, that you have something, something so easy. You look at the computer, you build just something and time somehow passes relatively quickly. And you... you don't have to think that much, I believe. I believe those are all very simple- you are also asked for everything. You get a request or a suggestion for everything and you don't have to think very much about what there is to do (...) 'Cause, you have already thought about things the whole day ((laughs)), or worked, so mental work. And yes, I believe, the difference to board games is perhaps that there you need your head a little more, and with something like *Farm-Ville*, there it's actually only a bit about the visuals. So my, when you're tired, you can simply stop. (P12/281-285)

Partially as an artefact of the types of video games and video gamers studied, the notion that video gaming might be used for relaxation and recovery has emerged only recently in the literature, but is gaining increasing theoretical and empirical support (Klimmt 2006: 34-5, Sherry et al. 2006, Reinecke 2009), so this finding is not completely surprising.

Relaxing gaming shows the lowest telicity, attentive absorption, and arousal of all gaming modes documented. It is usually not intentionally sought out, pre-planned, and pre-organised as a focused main activity, whereas all other modes involve a focus on gaming as main activity, and often do involve pre-planning and pre-organising. Relaxing gaming often occurs spontaneously as a 'filler' in situations where more satisfying activities are blocked, planned activities will occur in a time span that makes another main activity unpractical, or where players feel in need of some recovery or relaxation before another desired main activity:

⁸² That is, relative to the conceptualisation of Eastwood et al. (2012), the 'environment' to which the locus of causality and agency is ascribed includes internalised norms of situational propriety. Where a child might be actively kept from it, an adult might simply perceive that 'one ought not' read tweets or play a game on one's smartphone during a church ceremony, even if one feels the ceremony doesn't provide an involving focus of attention. Boredom ensues.

P17: I always play them when there's some time in between and I'm bored. So when there's- nothing on television. (P17/128)

Interviewer: How::: and when you play at your laptop, usually at your friend's, or at your mother's, then you said that's about half an hour, or...? Such a typical session, or...?

P10: Well that's then usually more a fill-in (('Lückenfüller')). (P10/110-111)

Also unlike any other gaming mode found, relaxing gaming often occurs as a secondary parallel activity with other activities:

Interviewer: Why did you play in the kitchen?

P12: Mostly because Xavier was cooking in the meantime, and that way, we could better talk with each other in parallel. ((Laughs)) (P12/75-77)

Interviewer: Is there any situation for you that is more typical or more usual when it comes to video gaming?

P17: Well, I believe now that would definitely be the situation for me that I simply sit with the iPad in, in my chair and play in the evening. Also in parallel to television. So I keep the television on and if it gets too frightening or too boring for me, then I play iPad on the side. (P17/162-164)

This comes with expectations and norms that it is appropriate to be distracted or interrupted, and to stop relaxing gaming at any time. It usually occurs as a solitary activity or solitary parallel activity to some other non-demanding leisure activity with others, which further reduces perceived demands. Typical genres are so-called casual games and social network games that feature a high interruptibility and a low challenge profile. Typical devices are PCs and mobile devices, which unlike desktop PCs or laptops allow players to take games into typical situations of boredom (transit), leisurely recreation (hotel pools), or relaxing regions at home (sofa in front of the TV, bed).

Socialising Gaming

In socialising gaming, the main motivational relevancy is an experience of *relatedness*, which 'refers to feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with others individuals and with one's community' (Ryan & Deci 2002: 7, cf. Reeve 2009: 161-4). Relatedness like relaxation is not an unknown candidate for video game enjoyment (Rigby & Ryan 2011: 56-80, Kaye & Bryce 2012). Unsurprisingly, socialising gaming occurs exclusively with others, and ideally bodily co-present. The prototypical manifestation of socialising gaming is playing so-called 'party games' like *Singstar*, *Wii Bowling*, or *MarioKart* in front of a console with family, friends, acquaintances, or colleagues as part of a pre-organised afternoon or evening together. Board gaming, which interviewees drew on as a comparison, was also characterised as predominantly enacted in a socialising mode. Gameplay is the ratified main activity, but ultimately serves as pretext and material for conversation and shared experiences of relatedness, trust, and belonging:

P7: Because it's, because it's, because it's part of the game, this, this, this social, this social experience playing. It's called <<party game>> for a reason, yes. So that's, that something with, with, there, the game is not in focus. There, the communal, the communal activity is more the focus, and not the game. The game is a means to that end, there. Which, which it is not with a game, with a real one, let's say an adventure or a, a soccer game. (P7/179)

Interviewer: Is there a difference between playing role-playing games alone and playing racing games with friends in the cellar? That you expect different things there?

P8: Yes, yes, most certainly. So when I play a role-playing game, than I expect relaxation for myself, as I said. But when I::: play with, with neighbours or so, then, hm, for me playing is not the important thing, but simply the socialising, the being together: Doing something together. You could just as well go bowling or whatever. That would be a similar situation: there the bowling is not in the forefront for me at that moment. I also don't have to be the winner, just like with, with the games we play then, but simply that you're together and do something together. (P8/245-247)

Because 'having fun together' is the ratified main reason for engaging in the activity in the first place, and because it usually takes place between persons with some initial social closeness, harmony (being a 'good sport', not taking a bad game move or losing seriously, willingly ridiculing one's own inadequacy at gaming, readily letting others repeat a botched move, etc.) is more pronounced in socialising gaming than all other gaming modes. Conversely, gameworthiness (enforcing rule-according gaming, focusing on winning, etc.) is preserved just enough for participants to get involved in the activity, but not so much that any serious symbolic injury of self might occur, or that winning would take precedence over shared enjoyment. In fact, taking winning 'too seriously', overtly playing out one's superior skills in a given game such that one reliably wins all rounds (instead of self-handicapping) is deemed inappropriate 'spoiling'. Thus, in socialising gaming, telicity and attentive absorption are relatively low. It is expected and appropriate to pay just as much attention to 'side activities' like conversations and commenting on gameplay as to gameplay itself. Arousal levels are medium, usually driven more by collective activity and embarrassment than the tension of gameplay itself: party games like Karaoke are often designed to embarrass the (divested) player self as a form of trust-building among participants. As each participant embarrasses herself a little, she affirms her trust in the others, and they demonstrate their trustworthiness not to exploit this vulnerability in cheering rather than ridiculing the embarrassment.

Again, this is not to say that socialising gaming cannot occur with other game genres, devices, or in other settings, nor that players would nonevert strive for relatedness in other gaming modes. In MMORPG raiding, for instance – typically a form of hardcore gaming – interviewees reported seeking and enjoying a sense of belonging and mutual support. After a raid, participants would switch into a socialising mode, where the raid becomes the occasion and interactional pretext to 'hang out' in the game world together and socialise. Several interviewees stated that in relaxing, engrossing, or even hardcore gaming, they would intentionally configure their spatial setting such that they could monitor and during pauses interact with other people around them. Take the following quote:

P4: I never wanted to be alone while doing that. Even when I was still living with my girlfriend, who also played video games. Or with my roommate back at university. It was always the case that I would still... wanted to have direct social exchange, always in parallel::, always with some interruption:: Simply never this locking yourself up. That was never my interest. I can play video games alone as well, also AT NIGHT, be just by myself. But still I always found it NICE when I WASN'T. So that I always found nicer. (2s) I'd also prefer to play video games in a room where there are others, or where others are in the vicinity, than in a room where I don't notice anything of that. (P4/161)

Some interviewees even reported experiences of relatedness towards mediated response-present others and virtual characters when playing social network games (cf. Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski 2006):

P12: You're needed ((laughs)). So, so, that may sound, that somehow sounds completely stupid, but- Yes, you, you have a certain responsibility, yes, for, for your own farm. And when you get requests from people, for instance: I need, somebody needs planks to build something, and then you can gift these planks. You do that, then you have the feeling that you have done something good ((laughs)) for that person. (P12/403)

In sum, relatedness – like the other motivational relevancies – is *found* across many modes, and in a socialising mode (as in the other modes), interviewees reported enjoying other types of experiences (like competence or achievement) as well. The marked difference is that in socialising gaming, it is mutually understood, acknowledged, and enforced that relatedness is the ethos, the avowed *dominant* motivational relevancy of the situation. This expectation is perceived to be legitimately enforceable in socialising gaming, but not in hardcore gaming, for example, where it may also feature, but has to fit itself into the dominant ethos.

Engrossing Gaming

In engrossing gaming, the avowed main motivational relevancy is getting utterly *engrossed* in gameplay, thus this mode comes with the highest attentive absorption. As with relaxing gaming, this engrossment is often phrased in terms of providing relaxation. But unlike relaxing gaming, engrossing gaming is intentionally sought out and often pre-organised as a main activity. It also typically involves higher cognitive demands, which are phrased as desirable precisely because they can generate the sought-after engrossment:

P7: Yes, then I get very focused on this game, I don't notice very much from my surroundings anymore, because I really focus on the, on the monitor, or better on, in my case, the, the television screen, and I let myself fully flow into this, this story (P7/41)

P9: I somehow want to be taken into a world, into a story. I want to be involved ((*eingebunden*)). Best case, I want to be involved so strongly that I simply can forget a lot of what I did over the course of the day. Put it to the files. (P9/172)

As seen in these excerpts, one recurring underlying motivation for engrossing gaming is to spontaneously absorb attention such that no capacity remains for self-conscious thoughts or ruminating about other everyday activities that are perceived as stressful, frustrating, or controlling. In engrossing gaming, interviewees report that they actively organise time windows to ensure a minimum of interruption, 'offload' or finish all other possible interfering demands beforehand, and configure their spatial setting and gaming equipment to maximise media exposure and minimise distracting signals: turning the light down, putting on headphones to surround themselves with game audio, using a large screen, etc. Yet because this very absorption is sought out as relaxation, it is not as telic and arousing as hardcore or competitive gaming. One interviewee fittingly described the experience he seeks from playing RPGs as 'between a book and a movie', something that *combines* relaxation and arousal:

P8: To a certain extent relaxation, as I said. Yes, that's, somehow, as I said, somehow like a book. A bit of variety, diversion. It's something in-between a book and a movie, somehow. It's another form of, of leisure activity for me, but one that is on par somehow with all these things, one that is not prioritised. (2s) As I said, I expect relaxation from it, perhaps also a bit of excitement. That it captivates me a little, somehow. Sometimes also a bit of venting frustration ((laughs)). (2s) Yes:::.. Yes, those are the things, really. But mainly the relaxation, actually. Simply switch off for once. Get your mind completely off from all that you have connected with work the whole time during the day. That- in that moment, you can't focus on that anymore. It's of course still there somehow, but it's no longer in the forefront. Because you can let yourself be distracted from other things very nicely by this story. (P8/243)

For Goffman (1972), engrossment was one main component of the 'fun in games'. In the game studies literature, it is likewise a 'usual suspect' for video gaming enjoyment, discussed under terms like escapism, immersion, or involvement (Klimmt 2006: 33-5, Calleja 2010, 2011). Mood management theory argues that people seek out attention-absorbing media to leave no cognitive room for negative mood-inducing thoughts – something that fits the reasons interviewees gave for engaging in engrossing gaming (Whitaker, Velez & Knobloch-Westerwick 2012).

As we have seen in chapter 3.3, the 'realness' of any event for Goffman derived from its ability to spontaneously generate involvement (attentive absorption and arousal) *and* be spontaneously framed. In chapter 4.6, we argued that games (and especially video games) afford *both* imagining-perceiving make-believe *and* rule-based gaming. Concurring with Juul (2005: 164-96), we further argued that these framings might interfere because both put demands of sequential consistency on interaction. It follows that the desired unselfconscious engrossment in one or both framings should falter when such incoherencies make it hard to smoothly frame an event. The data supports this. Game events that did not readily 'fit' the imagined-perceived fictional world were reported as involvement-destroying. As one interviewee noted, in the deemed-engrossing game *Heavy Rain*, both the narrative 'plot holes' and the incoherency between the game rules and the fictional world (in this case, effecting in-game/fiction events with a controller movement that had no iconic relation to them) were involvement-breaking:

P1: For instance, like making a circle with the control stick, or pressing it up and down. Partially there were movements that had absolutely nothing in common with the activity behind it, and in that moment the illusion immediately broke down for me. (...)

Interviewer: What, what illusion broke down?

P1: The illusion, in effect (2s) So this, this game appeared under the premise, somehow (2s) beyond... beyond all space shooters, or beyond, beyond any Science Fiction, or Western, or any other scenarios that you can imagine from literature or movies or games, yes, to depict almost a realistic world, with realistically looking people, with believable characters, to pull me, pull me very deep into this story. And that then simply broke down at several points. So in my opinion it was just very badly written. It was, there were unbelievably many plot holes, that you could have never forgiven a movie or a book, or would have forgiven.

And yes with, from the mechanics I didn't find it well designed. As I said, this discrepancy between the action that I really do in, in front of the screen, and the action that then happens there on the screen, that was so obvious to me, that this whole edifice collapsed. (P1-2/99-107)

It is worth noting that participants actively cared about and negatively evaluated such incoherencies of game rules and game fiction *only when they were reporting on engrossing gaming*, and not on the other gaming modes.

Genres that were reported affording engrossing gaming are open-world RPGs, 'sandbox games' like the *Grand Theft Auto* series, adventures, simulation games, and MMORPGs gamed solitarily. Apart from engrossment, participants also reported autonomy as a secondary important evaluative consideration in engrossing gaming (Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski 2006, Rigby & Ryan 2011: 39-64). The free, open, explorable spaces of open-world or sandbox games, the exploration of alternative characters and courses of action, the freedom to choose goals to pursue and different strategies to pursue them in simulation games were reported as providing a desired sense of high personal agency and autonomy, and constraints on one's freedom of action were reported as highly negative experiences. Interestingly, engrossing gaming was reported exclusively for solitary gaming. It might be that role-play intensive MMORPG gaming (Linderoth 2012) presents a flavour of *multiplayer* engrossing gaming, but in my dataset, I unfortunately had no participant engaged in it.

Hardcore Gaming

In hardcore gaming, the main motivational relevancy is *competence*, 'feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities' (Ryan & Deci 2002: 7). Players want to be able to 'seek challenges that are optimal for their capacities and to persistently attempt to maintain and enhance those skills and capacities' (ibid.). Hardcore gaming embodies the qualities most frequently associated with video gaming 'as such' or the 'fun of games' in flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), Koster's *Theory of Fun for Game Design* (2004), or theories of video game enjoyment as effec-tance, self-efficacy, mastery, and competence (Klimmt 2006, Klimmt & Blake 2012, Rigby & Ryan 2011: 15-38). The interview data suggests that competence is indeed an important motivational relevancy, but again not in all gaming encounters equally. Here are two interviewees articulating the enjoyment they want to experience in hardcore gaming:

P3: That is, this satisfaction that video games give you is: You exist in a rule system that you learn to master. (P3-2/681)

P5: So for me it's primarily about flying. About the feeling to control this helicopter. To be able to control my opponent through, through this control that I have over this helicopter. Then it's also the visual realisation, although I definitely don't care for any blood details or splatter stuff, instead, it's more the challenge to hunt the pixel, I'd say. Yes, I think that puts it quite well. (P5-1/202)

Since players seek the experience of (growing) competence in achieving game goals, telicity, attentive absorption and arousal are high in hardcore gaming. Hence, expectations and norms regarding interruption and distractions are very salient: players feel they have the right to be absorbed in gameplay, and to complain if others cross the line of sight between them and the screen, for example. Players devalue cheating behaviour because that would defeat the purpose of testing and experiencing one's own skill. The downside of this strong goal focus is the just-as-frequent experience of frustration over not achieving goals:

P4: Or sometimes it's also the case, with regard to the game, that you say: <<Today it doesn't work.>> That is, the game doesn't give you that day what you hoped for. Neither the experience of success perhaps:, or you are not happy with your, your performance. Because that's also important with a game, for you, that you..., take a first-person shooter for instance, that's a good example, that you get a certain statistic. That you are used to more or less. When you are far off from that, then it can frustrate you, and you say: <<I don't want to do this anymore, this is unnerving me, because it just doesn't work out today.>> (P4/416)

This is another thing that sets relaxing, socialising, and engrossing gaming apart from hardcore (and competitive) gaming: Because the former are (supposed to be) less intensely telic, the negative experience of frustration or thwarted competence is also less likely or at least less salient. As we already saw in the excerpt opening this section, the high telicity of hardcore gaming gives it an experiential signature that sometimes makes it akin to instrumental keyings of gaming – something we will return to in the next chapter.

Specific genres cater to hardcore gaming by intentionally providing a high and rapidly increasing level of challenge that requires 'real' instead of 'virtual' skill and skill improvement – that is, a player has to improve strategic understanding, hand-eye coordination etc., instead of 'just' gaming the game long enough such that her character acquires virtual items and skills (a higher strength score, say) that make overcoming a challenge factually *easier* in terms of required player skill (Schell 2008: 151). Typical genres reported as affording hardcore gaming were arcade games, first-person shooters, and sports and racing games. Players engaged in hardcore gaming tend to care about their gaming device providing optimal control of the game state more than players of relaxing, socialising, or engrossing gaming. Hardcore gaming takes place either solitarily or as cooperative multiplayer against the environment, most prominently in MMORPG raid gaming. The latter point to the development of more stable social organisations especially in multiplayer hardcore and competitive gaming that require significant coordination efforts. Three organisations that appeared in the data were MMORPG guilds, online shooter clans, and board gaming clubs. In terms of gaming modes, they also institutionalise different sub-forms and sub-modes of gaming with their very own distinct, palpable norms, practices, and languages.

Competitive Gaming

On first sight, competitive gaming appears to be little more than an amplified version of hardcore gaming. Players are expected to be utterly focused on winning, to show emotional investment in winning, and to not (at least overtly) self-handicap. Rules are meticulously clarified and agreed in advance, and monitored and enforced during gameplay. Players report intense arousal levels, and strongly aversive reactions to any kind of distraction that might distort the direct translation of player skill into game outcome. What sets competitive gaming apart is that it involves player-versus-player *multiplayer* gaming in which players not only seek out competence, but also *achievement*—‘the desire to do well relative to a standard of excellence’—,

producing a publicly recognised demonstration of one's competence (Reeves 2009: 175). In competitive gaming, players do not just want to experience that they are competent, but also to publicly demonstrate and be acknowledged for being better than others. Says one player:

P3: So there, that's of course a totally different form of, when you play with opponents, that, then playing also becomes a, a competition. Then it's also about demonstrating skills and so on. And there, there of course the, the, the basic setting simply changes. So there are then people who take this very, very seriously, especially in this competition context. (P3-1/354)

Achievement is again a known candidate among gaming motivations (e.g. Yee 2006a, Yee, Ducheneaut & Nelson 2012), and it is the second of the two motivational relevancies Goffman (1972: 61-2) ascribed to gaming. In gaming, we can demonstrate and be celebrated for our character and skills because the challenges in gaming provide a context where their display happens as a socially appropriate matter of course.

In face-to-face encounters, competitive gaming occurred mostly with synchronous competitive multiplayer sports and fighting games on consoles, such as the *FIFA* or *Tekken* series, or by linking up several local computers in one local area network (LAN) to organise a so-called LAN party and play competitive multiplayer real-time strategy games like *StarCraft* or *DotA* (*Defense of the Ancients*), or competitive multiplayer shooters from the *Quake Arena*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Counterstrike*, or *Team Fortress* families, as the following excerpts illustrate:

P4: There is of course also something like network night. That's a while ago now. I would like to do that again. Always have a lot of fun with that. That's then so (3s) loud, (3s) adolescent ((*pubertär*)), and also always, always a competition thing. So... never encountered it any other way. I believe I have never played a network night, where in the end it wasn't about the battle against each other, and about demonstrating how well you can play certain games, or similar, and that you... can triumph over somebody, that's in effect in such a game. That's actually... fundamental. But it's also the fun of it: the competition. (P4/334)

P9: It's also always a bit about claiming your skills. That is, that you try to rank yourself a bit, to test yourself, well I, my way of doing it is that I first take a look at the single-player mode and then try to apply what I learned in online mode, and there of course I'm looking, okay, how good are my skills really? That's something a single-player game can't reflect as well as when I'm in a contest with someone else. That's, yeah, that's something that the online mode definitely offers. Such a notion of competition. (P9/186)

In many ways, competitive gaming is the exact opposite of socialising gaming. Self-handicapping to help struggling opponents (highly appropriate in socialising gaming) is frowned upon in competitive gaming, while advantage-seeking action that would be grossly inappropriate in socialising gaming is par for the course in competitive gaming. As the interviewee in the next excerpt put it, even body checks in front of the console might happen:

P1: If you have a competitive game, for instance a beat'em'up game, *Streetfighter* or something like that. And then you have a friend around, then it's an opportunity to best each other without really having to beat each other up. That is, you can really gauge each other, and when you then throw the other on the floor with an incredibly good combination of kicks and punches and throws, that's an enormous feeling of satisfaction. Of course, sometimes you actually throw an elbow in the course, and that, that... (P1-2/185)

The contrast of socialising and competitive gaming becomes even more pronounced when we turn to the most competitive sub-form of competitive gaming documented in the interviews, namely anonymous online multiplayer competitive gaming. It also demonstrates the interac-

tion between the ethos of a gaming mode and the social closeness of participants, in turn afforded by player dispositions (expectations and norms) and material affordances. Several interviewees reported that anonymous online gaming formed almost a category on its own as the socially harshest, rude, aggressive gaming context they knew. Notably, this was only the case for game genres that were devised for and framed by their player community as competitive gaming, namely competitive real-time strategy games and shooters. In social network games, where players also often interacted with unknown others online, interviewees reported no such harsh communication climate. In the following excerpt, an interviewee compares his experience of playing *FIFA* with friends at home in front of the console with that of gaming it anonymously online:

P19: Well I, that's always a having-fun-evening. (...) I mean, sure, there's always a bit of challenging in it. Like: <<That one I want to defeat>> or whatever. <<I have lost the last five games against him.>> That's always part of it. But for-, there is always some joking in advance, or so. But it's usually the case, that you really say: <<So, having fun is paramount in any case.>>

Interviewer: What is paramount when you play FIFA online?

P19: There it's success. So... there it's really the case, that you say, so: <<Yes, I would really like to win>>, because... my old soccer trainer always said: <<Winning is fun, let's go out and have some fun.>>

Interviewer: But it's the same game. So why is success paramount when you play online, and with friends it's more being together?

P19: That's, you don't have any social obligations towards the others, or social contacts to the others. So that's extreme in FIFA, so, that you really only play against the other as an opponent, and no, no big social bonds or conversations or whatever come about. That's it, also, I don't play FIFA with headset. (2s) There the social aspect isn't so important to me then. So there the focus is then really more on, when I host a gaming night, or something, then I want everyone to have fun. That's like a small party. I would compare it to that. At a party it's likewise not nice when three are sitting in a corner and go <<Boooh ((imitates crying)), shit>>, and three are standing and celebrate. That's not a good party either. (P19-2/37-41)

The interviewee is not socially close to online players: he has no standing relations with them, the likelihood of future interactions is low, and he doesn't even interact with them in parallel to gameplay (he doesn't use a headset to speak with other players, which some interviewees reported doing because the language occurring in anonymous online gaming was so abusive),. Therefore, there is no social consequence attached to not balancing his own desire for achievement with the enjoyment of others. In addition, he doesn't even observe the frustration of the opposing players over not winning – something he describes as unpleasant in the case of face-to-face response presence during a party, for example.

Summary and Conclusions

This section argued that the notion of one leisurely video gaming frame has to be replaced with that of a 'plurality of ritual orders' (Strong 1988: 243) of video gaming – *modes* of gaming. Modes centrally differ in an *ethos*: a jointly acknowledged dominant motivational relevancy that guides the actual organisation of the gaming instance (including genre, setting, device, social contexture), and is drawn upon discursively as an evaluative standard and rationale for actions, events, and communications transpiring in the situation. Grounded in the motiva-

tional relevancy, each gaming mode comes with a signature telicity (low to high goal-focus), attentive absorption, and arousal level. Goffman assumed that all gaming encounters revolved around engrossment and achievement. These two motivational relevancies emerged in the data as the dominant ones of two modes. But they do not cover all modes, involvement (attentive absorption and arousal) varied across modes, and further relevancies emerged from the data—namely relaxation, relatedness, and competence. None of the modes is a complete surprise: their motivational relevancies have all made an appearance in the literature before. What is new here is that they do not capture stable motivations of video gaming ‘as such’, nor stable individual preferences. Modes are socially negotiated, situationally organised and shifting motivational foci.

In the following sections, we will see how the different motivational relevancies organise all dimensions of video gaming situations. Before we can turn to them, however, we have to address a second dimension organising these dimensions – social closeness – and an even more basic set of questions setting the parameters of any gaming encounter, namely, Who games? What? When? With whom? And for how long?

6.2 Participation Norms and Social Closeness

In *Behavior in Public Places*, Goffman noted that social situations centrally feature ‘rules of exclusion’ (Goffman 1963: 10) – some regulation about who may or may not enter a situation. In ‘Fun in Games’ (1972: 28), he picked up this thread, noticing that there are general social rules regarding what type of person can enter what type of situation. At a certain point in history, for instance, only courtiers were allowed to play chess (Goffman 1972: 28). Likewise, in contemporary Germany, children and teenagers under the age of 18 are not allowed to enter gambling halls. In *Frame Analysis* (Goffman 1986), rules of exclusion did not make an appearance. However, the interview data clearly demonstrated that long before any of the ‘unwritten rules’ of video gaming come to bear, the question *who* may legitimately partake in a gaming encounter has to be resolved, together with further basic questions such as *whether* to game, *when* to game, *what* to game – and *when* to stop gaming. In any leisurely video gaming encounter, the basic epistemic and normative expectation is that these choices are voluntary, driven by the individuals’ pursuit of some form of enjoyment:

P4: What actually plays more a role there is that, the leisure time, or rather, the decision how one, (2s), what one now wants to do. The feeling, I want to play on the computer now, and nothing speaks against that, because I don’t want to do anything else as well, then I do that, and then I start that. (P4/384)

Grounded in this basic norm, choices are informed by several interacting factors: available time windows; accessible gaming settings, devices, and software during those time windows; social closeness; fit of all these factors; and in multiplayer gaming, participation norms. People often actively configure these factors, by scheduling specific time windows in one’s week

for gaming, or making sure to pre-install certain software on certain devices, for example. The following paragraphs will look at each of the basic questions in turn.

When to Play: Windows of Leisure Time

Overwhelmingly, for adults, the usual time windows for leisurely video gaming are evenings during work days, and afternoons and evenings during weekends, when both work and family demands have been taken care of and are not expected to interrupt gameplay. That is, interviewees reported a hypothetical hierarchy of demands and enjoyments, where work and family obligations *ought* to outweigh leisurely video gaming, and thus set its temporal bounds.

P5: Those are the really regular windows. Because I simply need that for switching off, after, after work and after I have brought the little one to bed. Then I need to come down a little. Simply forgetting the world around me for a moment and be the hero, in quotation marks. And otherwise, if it works out time-wise on the weekend, then it depends. Well, the, the family has priority, for sure. But when my wife says she wants to telephone, then I just go play and then that goes from eight to twelve, one, two, depending on how much motivation and time there is. (P5/29)

Some interviewees even voiced an implicit hierarchy of different leisure activities: presumably more ‘social’ leisure activities *ought* to be valued higher, while evenings and winter times with little opportunity for outdoor activities were phrased as ‘guilt-free’ windows for gaming:

P10: It’s like this, I don’t know, maybe it’s simply so, so, so uncomfortable, but, well, maybe, because I- if it’s dark, I can somehow say to myself, it’s evening somehow, I can call it a day, and then I can perhaps also simply play with a cleaner conscience. (P10/21)

Leisurely gaming was also considered appropriate as ‘a time filler’ (P2/145) during waiting times in the course of the day. In these contexts, interviewees mainly reported relaxing gaming of casual games. Yet they also stated that they actively organised their days around gaming sessions to ensure an ‘optimal’ length of uninterrupted gaming time.

Interview: So that’s the usual process, that you, that you pick a day, and then on that day start in the afternoon and stop in the evening?

P7: That’s, yes, you can almost see that as the usual case with me. (...) If it is that way and I can focus on the afternoon, then I also plan it like that, such that I have finished everything until then, until that point, that could make me go to the door or interrupt the game. (P7/62-65)

This is especially the case in multiplayer gaming sessions that require the continued uninterrupted participation of multiple players to come off satisfyingly for all. Thus, in multiplayer console gaming, friends and acquaintances usually schedule a gaming day together:

P19: Yes, we have, well, it was said: <<So, listen do you wanna make a FIFA evening at my place? Whoever is interested.>> Well I have colleagues, they also have the game, and then you just make an appointment, we just said, I don’t even know, I guess it was a Friday, 8 or 9 pm at my place. (P19-1/23)

Such scheduling was most pronounced where the required time window and the dependency on all participants was the greatest, that is, in MMORPG ‘raids’ – missions requiring a larger number of player for sometimes multiple hours in one stretch. As one interviewee put it:

P18: Well, so we have had a fixed date for the- for the start of the raid. And you made sure that you were there about half an hour early. If that worked. Otherwise you made sure that you were there on time when the raid started. (...) Well, our usual raid time was always from 7 pm to 11 pm.

Interviewer: Ok. Did you have- did you arrange a fixed day in the week, or something like that? (...)

P18: Tuesdays and Sundays. And later we, no, that's not true. Later we went Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Sundays. (P18/113, 122-126)

What to Play: Game Choice

Given a window of time for gaming, the choice of the game is again principally determined by the sought enjoyment (and thus, gaming mode). In multiplayer gaming, this choice is dependent on collective agreement and thus might result in some dysphoric tension for individuals:

P17: We also do that, but it's, it's like this in this group, that we like to play cards together, and the ladies suggest that. I'm actually not the type for that. (...) I wouldn't necessarily have to have that, but they, they suggest it again and again and then we just do it (P17/692-696).

During field observations, I found that players would often circle through *multiple* games within one gaming encounter to either find and settle on one game that would match the current mood and skill levels of all co-present players, or to actively balance individual game preferences against each other. That is, players would, for example, first start one game that would cater to one player's tastes and skills, and then another that would cater to another player, and so on. Here, we can again see the prevalence of enjoyment as the dominant motivational relevancy of a leisurely gaming encounter, as well as the working of harmony norms that one ought to look out for the well-being and enjoyment of the other players.

In this selecting or cycling through game software, the desired gaming mode seemed to drive choices: certain game genres fit certain gaming modes better or worse. Socialising gaming, for instance, aims at shared experiences of relatedness. Hence, it ideally (a) involves all participants co-present in an encounter, either as players or by giving them a 'good show' as onlookers, with opportunities for cheering, teasing, and *schadenfreude*; (b) it avoids boring players by having them waiting for long times to get to their turns; and (c) is easy to pick up, with little learning required. We can see these features reflected in the following excerpt, where a game designer ponders why she considers certain games more or less appropriate for socialising gaming at a party:

Interviewer: What about parties and festivities? Are there specific genres, that, that, that are relevant there, or that one plays primarily there, or that one doesn't play?

P9: Yes:: there is of course also, well, it's always hard to put this in a genre context, but these are certainly more casual games, I would say. Yes, how do you call such games? Well, karaoke games, short diversions, somehow something like *Mario Party*, so short mini games which, which are easily and quickly accessible for everyone, where you don't have to somehow dive deep into the- into the game first. That's usually limited to the Wii console, in fact, which is designed more for family games.

Interviewer: Are there other games you have played, (...) where you would say: <<No, (...) never in my life would I dream of getting those out on-, at a party>>?

P9: ((laughing)) *Battlefield 3* would be a typical game that I would never get out at a party.

Interviewer: And why?

P9: Because, sure, certainly, it has a coop mode, that's something you could try. That involves, but that would only involve two.

Interviewer: What does coop mode mean?

P9: Coop mode means that two can play directly next to each other via split screen.

Interviewer: Yes. Why would that in principle be possible at a party?

P9: NOT possible.

Interviewer: No, I mean, why would this coop mode perhaps still be possible at a party? (...)

P9: It would actually be something, that in party, because, because multiple people quasi, can involve themselves in this game. So I could not bring a single player mode game with me and say: <<By the way, I am playing *Battlefield* now and all of you can watch me doing it.>> For it's really about that multiple people, that the game is designed such that multiple people can somehow interact at the same time. That's possible in those Wii games, you see, karaoke or *Mario Party*, where at least four players can play simultaneously. So I would s-, for starters I would exclude any single player game. But I also think that certain themes and certain games simply have a certain heaviness, which doesn't fit into this party context, if we want to define it as such. And that's *Battlefield* among others. (P9/63-75)

The individually sought or collectively negotiated gaming mode is thus one criterion that informs game choice. A second is practical feasibility: what games are accessible and enjoyable given the present setting, devices, and software? Despite the increasing ability of networked gaming devices to download or even stream games, present and/or pre-installed gaming software does make a difference: in one instance during my field observations, players inserted the DVD of a game they wanted to game into a console, only to find that the updates required to start it would take an hour to download, which led them to choose another game. Similarly, available hardware caters better or worse to certain genres supporting certain gaming modes. Engrossing or hardcore gaming of a first-person shooter for instance works less well with the 'sub-optimal' controls, processing power, and screen size of a laptop, as one interviewee noted:

Interviewer: Ok. What, if you now say, you sit (...) at your parent's home in- in the living room with the laptop. Are there typical genres you play then?

P10: That's a bit limited by the fact that my laptop is, well, solid, but not the most powerful one.

Interviewer: Aha. What does that mean? Or what influence does that have on the genres?

P10: Well, I would never want to play a first person shooter, because with a first person shooter I-, I then also want to turn the graphics up. So, when, when the games are somehow reduced too much, then I don't want to play that anymore. (P10/44-47)

A further constraining factor are the time windows themselves: does a game 'fit' into the available time until another scheduled activity will occur? 'Fit' means whether the expected length of gameplay suffices to reach a satisfying point of closure. For instance, RPGs that support engrossing gaming also require extended uninterrupted time until a satisfying closure point can be reached, which may clash with available time windows. One interviewee wouldn't even start the RPG *Skyrim* if he 'only' had three uninterrupted hours available:

P10: Yes, then I would now actually also have to mention *Skyrim*. So open world RPG. That was really so extreme, that I, even when I came home at 9 pm in the evening I said to myself, <<Ok, you wanted to go to bed at midnight, it's not worth starting the game again for just three hours.>> ((smiling)) So that's-

Interviewer: Why is it so especially difficult there? Or why does one need so much time to play it right?

P10: Because it's a game, where you lose track very quickly. I mean, immersive, (...) For example: <<Ah, I just wanted to bring a, a, one letter from A to B, but then I met someone there who asked whether I couldn't help him, and then he got robbed.>> And so you simply lose yourself in the game and then you look at the clock and ha- see that you have played three hours, but ((laughing)) still haven't brought this letter from A to B. And there you then just need time, to, let me put it that way, to achieve something, in quotation marks. (P10/58-64)

In contrast, games with short tournament rounds easily 'fitted' small time windows for him:

P10: *StarCraft* are practically always matches. So there I know for sure, a match takes between ten and twenty minutes on average, that's something I, that's something you can simply time very well.

There you can say: Ok, I'll play. So I can, when I want to, simply play my two matches and thereby have two closed experiences, so to speak. (P10/68)

The Role of Game Features

Generalising from the above, interruptibility and closure point span affect game choice in leisurely gaming. *Interruptibility* (Juul 2010: 36-39) refers to the technical possibility of pausing gaming and saving the game state, as well as the required amount of game state information the player needs to be aware of: an open-world RPG requires a lot of context to have present in one's mind (where is one's character, what are the multiple current quests, where to head to next). Thus, interviewees reported initiating stretches of 'reorientation' when re-entering an RPG – reading up quest logs, looking at in-game maps, etc. – that could take several minutes and thus makes a quick jumping into and out of the game problematic. An open-world RPG with no pausing feature and few saving points therefore would be not very interruptible.

'Closure points' (Björk & Holopainen 2005: 349-350) originally refer to points where a game goal is achieved and game state information can therefore be discarded by the game and the player. In interviews, closure points were described more in terms of the motivational satisfaction they provide than the discharging of 'cognitive load': the achievement of some (self-set) game goal, the end and winning of a (number of) game rounds. Closure point *span* refers to the typical time span until a satisfying closure point can be reached. In open-ended games, a closure point may also be more informally a point where a game state can be saved for later return without producing too much hassle upon re-entry: saving and exiting a game in the midst of an ongoing fight or hostile area would throw the player immediately into an unpleasant experience upon return and is thus generally avoided by players. As one interviewee described the process of finding such a good closure point in an open-ended MMORPG:

P2: I looked at the clock there and saw, it's already a quarter of an hour before the appointment. I have to find an end now, and then it just takes another three minutes, until I have reached a good position in the game, if you will, where I can do that, and then I switch it off and I'm not sad about it. (P2/148)

In solitary gaming, these are broadly the factors taken into account: the player will choose a game that is practically available (without 'undue' effort like long download times) and promises satisfaction of the desired enjoyment given the present setting, hardware, and available time window. This picture broadly fits the assumptions of the uses and gratifications approach in communication research (Katz, Blumer & Gurevitch 1973, Ruggiero 2000), but also reiterates its theoretical individualism. In multiplayer gaming, the picture becomes more complex: Already the type of enjoyment sought (the ethos or mode) is subject to negotiation, and gamers will often pre-arrange a window of response-present leisure time together. But even more factors come to bear. Initiation effort and participation dependency become important; that is, whether the collective achievement of a collectively deemed satisfying closure point depends on all or some initial players' continued active participation. Where this is the

case, not only is the now-collective game choice affected by the practical likelihood of reaching said closure given the time available to all required players. In addition, once players have committed to partaking, *participation norms* come into play.

Participation Norms

In brief, participation norms organise – first – who may legitimately partake in a gaming encounter (Goffman's 'rules of exclusion'). Interview data strongly supports that people do not strike up gaming encounters indiscriminately with others, nor are people indiscriminately allowed to partake. However, once people have committed to partake in a gaming encounter, participation norms also – second – regulate under which circumstances they may not show up, cancel, or leave, even if they do not particularly enjoy gaming anymore. This norm seems to be an aspect of other-regarding harmony norms: once one has agreed to partake, one takes on the moral responsibility of not negatively impeding the others' enjoyment by honouring one's agreement (showing up) and actively partaking until collectively satisfying closure is achieved. The salience and strength of this norm seems to depend on (a) the required effort of getting the gaming encounter going, combined with the participation dependency and closure point span of the chosen game, and (b) the degree of social closeness between participants (of which more shortly). The greater the initiation effort, participation dependency, and closure point span, the stronger and more formalised the participation norms, most pronounced in MMORPG raids. Not showing up on time for a scheduled raid, for instance, is considered appropriate only if sufficiently pre-announced:

P18: Well, well, there are such things, people attach importance to that, well, if you depend on going in with ten people, then you of course expect, that if somebody can't come, that that is given notice of so early, that you have a chance to replace that person somehow in a sensible fashion. That's just always shitty, if you learn about it only after the raid started. (P18/158)

There are certainly a couple of unwritten rules how to behave in a raid, yes. To be punctual. (P18/164)

Similarly, premature quitting (before the raid is over) is considered improper. If it cannot be avoided, it ought to be pre-announced well ahead of time:

P2: Especially in online roleplaying games there are many behaviours that are inappropriate, like (...) on an important battle, to bow out with the argument <<I just had a disconnect>>, or something like that. (P2/167)

In contrast, interviewees stated that premature quitting is acceptable in a situation with little or no participation dependency:

P15: Well, if you're not in the mood anymore, then you simply say: Hey, guys, I'm not in the mood anymore. So, I, I'm out. Then the others either say: Yes, okay, then we also stop. Or the others say: Yes, okay, we'll continue to play a little longer. Because there it's not so important, there you can, you can play it with two people, you can play it with three people or with four or alone. (P15/297)

Participation norms are not unique to video games: during a field trip to a board gaming club evening, players declared that I could not join for one round of a card game to try it out because the game was part of a tournament, so my leaving after one round would have possibly

prevented the proper closure of the larger tournament. In a session of *MageKnight*, a complex fantasy strategy board game that turned out to take about four hours, three hours in, one player voiced that he had not expected the game to take so long, and that he had promised his wife he would be home soon. The group convinced him to stay until the end, reasoning that it could not bring the game to a conclusion otherwise. In return, the group members made a visible effort to 'speed up' their turns. This episode nicely reiterates the implicit social value hierarchy at work around leisurely gaming: the player considered family-related demands a legitimate reason for quitting a gaming encounter prematurely. Still, by engaging in a negotiation with the other players, he acknowledged the collective enjoyment of all participants as another legitimate concern. Indeed, denying three others he did not know previously the closure on a collective effort of – by then – three hours was ultimately considered more grave than letting one's partner wait an additional hour at home.

Social Closeness: The Social Contexture of Gaming

It would have been interesting to see whether the same sense of moral obligation would have been perceived and enacted, had the game been a digital rendition with anonymous players on a site like *brettspielwelt.de*. For as already hinted, *social closeness* appeared in the data as a second main factor organising all 'unwritten rules' of a gaming encounter, specifically the salience of participation norms. The term 'social closeness' picks up on and amends one important aspect of the conceptual framework that guided initial data sampling and analysis. Simon (2007) suggested that four different *constellations* of players and non-players would lead to different forms of social interaction and gaming experience: playing with others, playing next to others, playing with others online, and playing alone. This matches Goffman's more general observation that situations can be classified into different types of 'social gatherings' (Goffman 1963: 18, 243), which come with different interaction orders.

What emerged from the data, however, was less a neat taxonomy of gatherings or contextures than a *dimension* of social closeness: The more socially close a player perceived herself to be to co-players, the more strongly she perceived participation and harmony norms to be in force. Says one interviewee on the effect of social closeness:

P1: And of course that generates a totally different dynamic, so if I'm in a group with people I'm close to, somehow spend a comforting evening, sit down with a glass of red wine for, whatever, *Risk*, and I try to achieve world domination. Or if I actually duel myself with five people that are totally unknown to me, who I can only hear, who I cannot see, (2s) duel myself.. in *Red Dead Redemption*. (P1-2/173)

This excerpt shows how 'social closeness' combines two more readily known constructs in sociology. One is *tie strength*, conceptualised in network analysis as the amount, duration, frequency, emotional intensity, and intimacy of interactions between people (Granovetter 1973, Marsden & Campbell 1984). The other, returning to Goffman, is *degree of response presence*, which connects to computer-mediated communication literature around Social Presence The-

ory, Media Richness Theory, or more general, the ‘cues filtered out’ perspective (see Baym 2010: 50-71 for an overview). This body of research centres on the argument that in comparison to face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction lacks or impedes the transmission of non-verbal cues (like facial expressions, posture, gestures, gaze, micro-synchronisations of body movement), which are seen to be essential in establishing emotional rapport and communicating subtexts and contexts such as social identity. This, some researchers argue, can lead to a lowering of conversational politeness norms, resulting in the well-known online phenomenon of ‘flaming’ (see also Hoffman, McCabe & Smith 1996).

In accordance with these theories, interviewees reported feeling closer to other players the longer and more intimate an interaction history (online or offline) they shared, but also that they felt closest in face-to-face gaming encounters, and most distanced in one-time online gaming encounters with unknown, anonymous others. Notably, interviewees differentiated computer-mediated encounters in terms of varying degrees of closeness: using an audio channel, for instance, was described to potentially transport more emotional sub-tones and thus create a greater sense of closeness than mere text chat:

P1: Because for *so* long- and then you hear, I mean, what *I* would otherwise see, one maybe hears in the voice of the other. If it’s *so* often that I have him, if I’m online with him for hours each day, and then maybe I don’t *see* if he looks cross, but I *hear* it if he looks cross (P1-3/193)

From a Goffmanian perspective, one would want to add that first, in strategic interaction terms, being identifiable and embedded in social ties with others means that one’s (im)polite, (im)moral behaviour incurs future costs or benefits in terms of trustworthiness and symbolic regard (see also Walther 1992, 1994). Second, response-present interaction and tie strength also actualise moral regard, i.e. potential (fears of) experiences of embarrassment in the eyes of others or of blemishes on one’s moral self-regard as a ‘good sport’. Third, they expose us more immediately to symbolic (and bodily) harm by the others. States one interviewee about the ‘recklessness’ of certain players in *World of Warcraft*:

P18: There are also some people, so you don’t have to expect any direct social consequence in WoW. If you treat others shitty you can still change the server. And then there are new people where you are a blank page, ideally. In social life, of course you have to live with your consequences. If you screwed up, you screwed up. (P18/385)

Tie strength and response presence showed an interesting relation: Interviewees stated that they preferred to engage in (high response-presence) face-to-face gaming with people with whom they had already established a certain tie strength. Both strong social ties and high response-presence positively correlated with the reported salience and strength of social norms in video gaming: norms of not quitting prematurely and watching out for the feelings of others were reported most emphatically were people engaged in face-to-face board gaming or video gaming with family members or partners. As one interviewee compared his experiences of board gaming and online gaming:

P1: I believe, I believe because, because I’m not so connected ((*verbunden*)) to these people ((in online gaming)), and because there’s also no visual connection, it’s like, and now it’s connection once more,

it's more non-binding ((*unverbindlicher*)) to play with them. That is: of course there's a reputation system for instance on Xbox Live, where you can give me stars afterwards, was he a nice guy, was he not a nice guy, or some such. But basically, it absolutely **doesn't matter** if I screw up with these people by insulting them, or some such, because out there there are millions of other people with whom I can play. I don't depend on these people. But the people with whom I play a board game, those are usually my friends, on whom I depend. (P1-2/177)

The above excerpt highlights another interesting fact: several interviewees mentioned reputation and moderation systems (Resnick et al. 2000, Farmer & Glass 2010) as well-known technological answers to online trust building. But they likewise emphasised the failure of such systems, because – in their eyes – they lacked serious consequence and were easy to override.

In terms of gaming modes, the highest social closeness was usually reported with socialising gaming, namely board gaming and face-to-face party gaming with friends and acquaintances; this was followed by hardcore gaming in online shooter clans and MMORPG guilds if one had already gamed with them for a long time and possibly met each other 'in real life.' This aligns with findings in computer-mediated communication research that a long interaction history can build community, trust, intimacy, and shared norms, irrespective of the immediacy or mediatedness of interaction (Baym 2010: 56, 78-81; Walther 1992, 1994).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the clearly distinguishable zero point of social closeness was solitary gaming: interviewees repeatedly voiced that the very idea of there being any norms of 'appropriateness' was nonsensical when applied to solitary gaming, and had a hard time recalling any kind of norm they would follow or could break while gaming solitarily. In fact, the absence of others to (morally) think and care about was articulated as a liberating experience. Right after solitary gaming came the aforementioned anonymous competitive multiplayer online gaming in temporary, transient groups (like *Call of Duty* or *Left4Dead*). Here, flaming-like trash talking, highly aggressive gaming, and frequent premature quitting of an ongoing gaming session were frequently noted (and lamented).

Two important qualifications are in order. First, social closeness clearly *interacted* with gaming modes. How salient norms were and what form they took differed with gaming modes: In competitive multiplayer console gaming with close friends, the competitive ethos meant that participants gamed very 'gameworthy' and considered it inappropriate to self-handicap for the enjoyment of other players. Yet the high social closeness of them as friends meant that this gameworthy ethos needed to be negotiated with mutual care. The following passage shows this interaction and negotiation of social closeness, ethos, and game features. In it, the interviewee reports on regular gaming nights with friends gaming the multiplayer soccer game *FIFA* on a console at his home:

P19: So we also have, as I said, we sometimes also have weaker players on board. There, at a certain point, you also- (2s) Well, they have- usually have the ambition to get better. And then it's sometimes, when, at a score of four to zero or so... well, like: <<Hey, do you WANT to continue?>>, or so. But that's then usually not really said. That just transpires. But, well, I believe we still haven't ever aborted a game, or so. So it's always more like a, sorry, like we make a last game or so. And then say: <<Come on, last game, and then we call it a day.>> (P19-1/57)

According to the player, multiplayer *FIFA* is usually played pretty competitively during those evenings, an ethos that is shared by the less skilled newcomers in their 'eagerness to get better'. At the same time, we see that even in such an agreed-to-be-competitive situation, there is some concern for the losing players' enjoyment *and* their face as skilled players, given that they are close friends. The latter is implied in the fact that the losing players are usually not directly asked whether they want to continue gaming, which would overtly voice the opinion that they are not gameworthy enough to face a frustrating series of defeats unmoved. Thus, the responsibility and desire for ending the game is verbally taken on by the winning players: 'Come on, last game, and then we call it a day'. This allows the losing players to get out of a frustrating match while saving face: The overall competitive ethos of the situation and the role demands that come with it are maintained, and yet the social ties of the participants are also honoured. All this is facilitated by the material features of *FIFA*. Because it offers relatively short rounds of only a couple of minutes each, the wholesale (and more embarrassing) quitting of a game mid-course was never necessary, as the interviewee reports.

A second qualification regards the relation of social closeness and participation and harmony norms more generally. Take premature quitting of a game: it was reported as inappropriate behaviour in all forms of multiplayer gaming. If we assume a direct positive relation between social closeness and participation norms, then premature quitting should still be most frequent among players with low social closeness, specifically in anonymous online gaming. This was indeed the case. Take the following excerpt:

P19: So that's... I've had that frequently with online games, that there are players who then simply, who if you lead 3:0 or so, after 30 minutes, who switched the thing off. Then they simply cut the connection. (P19-1/62)

The same interviewee, reporting on the same multiplayer online game (*Battlefield*), noted that when he joins the game solitarily to game with unknown others, he feels free to quit the game whenever he wants:

P9: Well, when, when I play online and I haven't committed myself anywhere, then I can always determine when I want to end the whole thing. It's in my hand, so to speak. It's of course always in my hand, but since I want to be and react appropriately- that offers more freedom. I mean I have a greater sense of freedom to start and end the gaming experience at any time, when I want to. (...) Yes, it's, it's simply, it's less of a commitment, and you're more anonymous. (P9/302-304)

In contrast, when he games the same game online with members of his 'clan' – a club formed to play the game regularly together and improve in play, including people he knows online and offline for many years –, he feels a social obligation not to quit prematurely:

P9: Well, if you play together in the game in the clan, then there are situations, where things are not finished yet, where you just have to endure the session. Then I cannot, I of course could voluntarily decide, I leave now, but it would be inappropriate if I left. Because then I would fail my team. (P9/290)

This supports a direct positive relation of social closeness and participation norms. But we should not discard two further (and not necessarily competing) explanations. For one, note that anonymous online gaming *makes practically possible* the premature quitting of a gaming

encounter without any damages to one's reputation, and without having to go through any remedial interchanges with others whose enjoyment one damages and whose self one symbolically disregards by doing so: 'One can flee more easily from the situation'.

Second, it might well be that the high degree of 'impolite' behaviour in anonymous competitive online gaming is not so much due to an *absence* of norm enforcement given the low degree of social closeness as to the *presence* of *specific* norms of 'disinhibited' competition that developed from the competitive ethos and the material features of anonymity and decreased likelihood of bodily and symbolic harm (cf. Baym 2010: 59). Interviewees who complained about the 'trash-talking' in anonymous online gaming ascribed it as a behaviour of 'the kids' (P3/330) that was common and expectable (though undesirable) in online contexts, off-putting mostly to people not (yet) accustomed to it.

Who to Play With

In leisurely multiplayer gaming, the dominant motive of co-player choice is again voluntary enjoyment of all participants, moderated, as we have seen, by participation norms ensuring a balance of individual and collective enjoyment in more effortful pre-arranged play: 'It's a play community. Who wants to, comes' (P5-1/25). Co-player choice seems to be determined by who it is enjoyable to game with and who is socially close: the more participation-dependent, response-present, or focused on socialising, the more co-players with high tie strength were preferred. Thus, more involved MMORPG raids were usually only conducted with well-known guild members, and board gaming sessions also usually involved known family members or friends. This raises the question why adults are willing to engage with strangers in face-to-face gaming in board gaming conventions or club nights. One explanation is that in these situations, participants usually still know the majority of people co-present from previous face-to-face engagements. Also, participants may expect that their interaction partners feel bound by a fear of public embarrassment in front of a community of board gamers they are likely to see again and may wish to engage with in future gaming session. Third, there are policing 'officials' who arrange and monitor the event and can be turned to for help (Goffman 1972: 331-2).

A novelty of online video gaming is that it allows one to game multiplayer games without much pre-planning. If players were looking for co-players and had not pre-arranged something with friends or acquaintances, they used online features like friends lists or player matching services like 'pickup groups', or specified chat channels in MMORPGs like 'SNG' ('Suche Nach Gruppe', looking for group). Not only does anonymous online gaming make strangers practically available for multiplayer gaming: its reduced bodily and symbolic dangers also take part in making a unique new situation where one engages with random strangers in gaming feel safe, something interviewees noted they would never do face-to-face:

P1: Or the situation, that I set up a board game at home, then go out on the street and then indiscriminately, bring five, six different people to my home, and then play a game with them, I don't

know them, I have no idea what kind of people they are, but I play a game with them. That will *never* happen, never, no. (P1-2/171)

When to Stop

Just like solitary leisurely gaming commences driven by an internal want that finds a matching time and game equipment, so it stops based on a negotiation of internal wants and outer demands. In general, players cease leisurely gaming when they have 'simply lost interest again' (P10/125), 'until [they] don't want to anymore' (P11-1/248). Upon closer inspection, this comprises three typical states: tiredness, frustration, or a satisfying closure.

As adults often engage in leisurely gaming during evenings when no outer demand is likely to interrupt, one of the most frequent reasons for stopping gaming is sheer *tiredness*: the need for sleep becomes stronger than the enjoyment of the game, or impedes one's ability to continue gaming, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

Interviewer: What usually ends gaming?

P8: Tiredness. Well, when the head hits the table ((laughs)). It's not that bad, but.. hm, sometimes it's simply that I am too tired. That I realise, doesn't work, can't focus any longer. (P8/103-104)

P7: I believe most of the time when I'm exhausted. Well, when I really, when concentration fails. And that can sometimes be after one hour. But sometimes I also have, when I have a good day, then it's six, seven hours, and then after that I am really exhausted. (P7/49)

In competitive gaming, tiredness also ends gaming because it negatively impacts skills:

P3: So you have a certain amount of concentration you can spend to interpret all these control signals, or, you only can keep your hand-eye coordination at a high level for a certain amount of time. And at a certain point, when your skills simply degrade, then it doesn't work anymore, and then you should stop. (P3-1/423)

In fact, hardcore and especially competitive gaming are reported to be so arousing, tense, and stressful that they require breaks and stops to recover from the very exhaustion gameplay itself creates – a phenomenon not reported for relaxing, socialising, or engrossing gaming.

A second reason cited equally frequently is *frustration*: for an extended stretch of time, gaming does not provide the desired experience (of relaxation, competence, etc.) because the balancing is off, resulting in game challenges (or in multiplayer gaming, competitors) that are too easy or too difficult given the players' current skill, energy level, and desired experience:

P4: Or sometimes it's, with regard to the game, that you say: <<Today it doesn't work.>> So the game didn't give you on that day what you expected from it that day. Neither the experience of success perhaps:: or you are not happy with your, your own performance. (P4/416)

P17: Well, when, so if continuously no, no, no positive experience of success comes, then at a certain point I say to myself: <<Then I do something else now.>> (P17/664)

P10: Often, or sometimes it's like that, that I simply lose my interest during, during certain games. Simply because, for example, the balancing doesn't work out that well, so that you then somehow reach such, such, such a threshold where it's really not a big challenge anymore. Because it doesn't get better and those are then, those are then simply killers. Where I then say, <<Ok, here I somehow, from this point I somehow don't enjoy it anymore.>> (P10/121)

No matter if tired, frustrated, or otherwise, players generally aim at ending gaming with 'a feeling of closure' (P3-2/569). We can again see players' dispositions and game features interacting: when players feel satisfied or tired enough to want to stop gaming, they engage in a

negotiation with the game whether there will be a closure point ‘close enough’ that having to game a little longer than desired is perceived as less of a hassle than having to regain a certain stretch of in-game progress one would lose through quitting right away. Says one player:

P8: There are certainly games where you cannot save any time, your game state, where you have the choice to say: Okay, I, I simply can't continue playing, I have to stop now, I simply abort here and then the next time I have to do this again for half an hour. Or you actually say: No, then I have to see this through to the end, until the game state can be saved. I find that very unpleasant. (P8/287)

However, many games, specifically open-ended simulation games and RPGs (like the above-mentioned *Skryrim*) support engrossing gaming by *avoiding* clear closure points or *ensuring* overlapping goal structures: one can always play ‘just one more minute’, and whenever one has achieved a game goal, one will likely have taken on two new ones in the course. Gamers usually respond to such designs with self-devised goals (Björk & Holopainen 2005: 317) to create a sense of closure for themselves, as in the case of the following two interviewees:

P11: I simply say: Okay, if I now, whatever, have reached the civilisation level of citizen, or aristocrat, or, or however they are called, then I stop. (P11-1/168)

P8: Or:: (2s) it sometimes happens, that I simply say: <<So, now I'm at a point in the game, when I continue now, then I know I'll be in the middle of another task again.>> (...) Then it's more sensible to say before that: <<So, cut, until here.>> That's a clean closing for now, where I can re-enter easily next time, and then you stop and then that's it. (P8/104-105)

Fatigue, frustration, closure; the fourth and final reason for ceasing leisurely gaming are *outer demands* that define the time window in which one can game. On weekdays, this is usually the fact that one knows one has to rise early the next day for work. During weekends it is typically another social or family appointment. In such circumstances, interviewees reported that they pre-determined a time when they wanted to stop, usually with a little ‘wiggle room’ around it to find a satisfying or practical closure point. In such cases, to ensure that they do not ‘forget the time’ because of becoming engrossed in the game, they often set up a timer or monitor a nearby clock from time to time:

P4: I have looked at the watch, because I... simply max out a certain limit to which I can stay up in the evening (...) Somewhere:: I draw my line, which is a bit variable, where I say: <<Because it's so nice, I can continue twenty, thirty minutes more>>. But in any case that's then the definite time, and since I have to be up very early nowadays, half past midnight has been the latest that I wanted to go to bed. (P4/73)

P2: Since I play in windowed mode, I constantly see the clock up in the right corner. And otherwise I also look at the watch quite often. (P2/147).

In *relaxing gaming*, preferable leisure activities (like watching a television show) were another reason to stop gaming. Interviewees engaged in *engrossing*, *hardcore*, and *competitive gaming* also noted that other leisure activities could be a reason to cease gaming, but these were framed less as preferred sources of enjoyment ‘than as social obligation. Be that girlfriend, be that household chores, be that the soccer team, or other activities.’ (P7/65) Here we see how relaxing gaming is seen as a ‘filler’, whereas the other modes are intended main activities.

In multiplayer gaming, participation norms factor strongly into the decision to stop play: even if an individual gamer might feel like no longer wanting to game, she might continue to

do so to not interfere with the others' enjoyment. One's own desire to cease gaming has to be negotiated with both the game-given closure points *and* the other players' desire to continue or stop. In *socialising gaming*, where relatedness and shared enjoyment are at the forefront, there seems to be little pressure to continue gaming beyond one's individual appetite – further supported by the design of party games that feature short rounds and the ability of gamers to join or leave with little interruption or required learning curve. As one interviewee has it:

P9: Yes, it's usually such a, such a, such a rotation, a cycle, so different people join, then you take turns, and then the one or the other loses interest and some time, when everybody says, <<I'm through>>, then you go back to, to the kitchen, eat something, or drink something, or communicate with the people. And then the console gets switched off. You notice that very quickly, when interest wanes. (P9/99)

In multiplayer *hardcore gaming* (such as MMORPG raids) or *competitive gaming* encounters that are pre-scheduled and require some initiation effort, the planned time and closure points are the basis of negotiations of when to stop – for example, a raid or a tournament. In less formally organised encounters involving pre-scheduling and initiation effort, there seems to be the tacit assumption that given everyone has put in the effort to show up, a 'decent' minimum amount of gameplay ought to occur, and that one ought to pre-announce if one already knows that one will have to leave 'early' compared to this minimum amount. As one interviewee observed on a LAN party set up with friends at home, where everyone brought their computers to link them up and engage in competitive network games such as *Counterstrike* and *Unreal Tournament 3*, the very effort required to arrange the evening generated a perceived demand to participate beyond his own desire:

P4: There is only the special situation, that the network- in the evening, with several people together, that (2s) Maybe you're tired, and for yourself, you would decide, I would stop now. That because of the rarity of that evening, 'cause it happens rarely, 'cause it's a special appointment, where many people find one date together to then come together. And also a special experience, that you maybe hold out longer as you actually would want to. And play longer although you perhaps don't enjoy the game itself anymore so much. (P4/489)

Gameplay usually stops if participants feel they do not enjoy gaming anymore, feel too tired to continue, or feel the pressure of outer demands, only that they now have to negotiate their individual needs with the group and find a 'proper' form of leave-taking. Outer demands seem to be the most morally legitimate 'official' reason, as they hold no silent implication that one did not enjoy the company of the others. This can then be used by others as a legitimate official reason for leave-taking as well – a well-known party phenomenon. One interviewee described how a *FIFA* gaming night was suddenly ended by everyone:

P19: There was a colleague, who took the other three with him, in his car. They came to me then. And he had to work on the next day. (...) And the others were also all a bit tired. (...) Then at some point the driver, just like it is in a disco or so, that the driver says at a certain point: <<Boy, mmh, tomorrow I have to get up early, I'm through. I'm tired>>, or so. That he says: <<Well, I'm driving now. Who wants to drive with me?>> And then the others said: <<Yes, okay, then we'll drive with you.>> (P19-1/44-55).

Summary and Conclusions

This section demonstrated that above and beyond ‘ground rules’ for how to act during a gaming encounter, the very parameters of the encounter are already subject to orderings: time choice, game choice, and co-player choice. The basic norm of leisurely gaming is that the individual player is expected and allowed to autotelically pursue some form of enjoyment based on her current needs, and ‘freely’ choose circumstances best suited to that pursuit. Closer analysis qualifies this in two regards. First, the total situation is not simply given, but often *pre-configured* by players (e.g. by making appointments) as well as configured *during* the gaming encounter (e.g. by circling through several games). Second, the individual has to negotiate its sought enjoyment with the material features of the situation – game equipment, game software, but also time windows –, and in multiplayer gaming, with the enjoyment of the *other* players involved. This latter negotiation is directly informed by *social closeness*: how close players perceived themselves to co-players – both in terms of response presence and past and projected future interaction chains – directly affects how much they balance their own enjoyment with perceived obligations towards the others. This shows itself most directly in *participation norms* regarding the scheduling and length of *gaming time*: to honour an appointment, show up on time, and not quit before a collectively deemed-satisfying closure, even if gaming is not enjoyable for oneself at that moment. How likely a gaming encounter is to be pre-scheduled and how strongly participation norms are in force depends on an interaction of mode, material features, and social closeness:

- *Mode*: Participation norms are more salient (and pre-scheduling is more likely) in modes where gaming is the avowed dominant activity, i.e. in hardcore and competitive gaming.
- *Features*: The higher the initiation effort, participation dependency, and closure point span, the more salient are participation norms, and the more likely is pre-scheduling.
- *Social closeness*: The closer players are to each other, the more they feel bound by norms.

When it comes to *game choice*, individual players choose among the available configurations of their situation based on (a) game software and hardware supporting the player’s current desired motivational relevancy or mode, (b) required configuration effort, (c) matching of the game’s closure point span and available time window. In multiplayer gaming, the chosen configuration is based on the collective negotiation of a mode, which may be pre-determined and pre-scheduled, and/or situationally re-negotiated.

Finally, *co-player choice* seems to be determined by an interaction of material features and social closeness: the higher the initiation effort, participation dependency, and closure point span of a game, the more players tend to choose socially close co-players who can be relied on to honour participation norms. The more response-present a gaming encounter (that is, the more bodily and symbolically vulnerable players make themselves to other players), the more they tend to prefer co-players with a minimum of existing tie strength.

In all aspect of this ordering of a gaming encounter, we find that typical forms arise from the alignment and mutual reinforcement of individual wants, material features, and social norms moderated by social ties. Multiplayer games running on consoles and PCs with connectivity to game servers materially provide access to socially distant co-players, but players actually engage with such untrustworthy co-players despite no existing ties because the mediated encounter makes bodily and symbolic harm unlikely, which in turn leads players to not honour and not expect the honouring of participation norms. In the socialising gaming of a party game, participants typically switch player roles in a quick series of turns, are 'free' to forestall their turn a little if they are just fetching a drink, and 'free' to ask somebody they are currently having a conversation with to quickly pause the conversation and 'be back in a minute'. This is energised and directed by the motivational relevancy of socialising. It is materially afforded by party games that typically feature short rounds and pause until the next player signals she is ready to take her turn. And it is socially legitimised and enacted in that the avowed ethos of a socialising gaming encounter is socialising first and foremost. This basic pattern we will see repeating in the following sections on the other dimensions of a gaming encounter: the instantiation of its 'ground rules' emerges from the alignment of individual wants, material features, and social demands.

6.3 Settings and Objects

Despite the rise of mobile and ubiquitous technology, leisurely video gaming still typically takes place in specific social and spatial settings. Even mobile gaming was reported to have 'appropriate' locales. And those settings are usually configured with some care as well. A good taste of the full complexity of factors involved in the choice and configuration of a gaming setting can be sampled from the following excerpt, in which an interviewee reflects on the difficulties of video gaming on a train:

P10: So I also travel a lot by train. I *could* also play, but somehow I find the setting doesn't fit there, so for- that's somehow such a (4s) yes, it simply doesn't have this external ambiance that I would say: <<Ah, ok, nice. Now I'll just go and play a session.>> Instead that is so, with people around me and, yes, on a train that goes at a speed of 300 through the landscape, and with me on this little table, that's not this, I, I, I simply don't like to play that way.

Interviewer: What's the problem with the little table?

P10: Well then somehow you can, you somehow sit perhaps, somehow too, too close to the screen, or you simply can only move the mouse under great difficulty. And yes, that's simply from, from, from the setup it's simply not really suited for gaming.

Interview: What else makes the setup problematic?

P10: Perhaps also a little the, the, perhaps also a bit the distraction. Because then you just have around you, even though you have earplugs in, ((there's)) somehow still the landscape that passes by, and random people that walk around. (...) So although you are then somehow, certainly, in flow, in quotation marks, and immersed and you're <<in there>>, but I still catch myself often how I still somehow can't concentrate one hundred percent on the game, and still somehow, somehow look outside the window, or look somehow somewhere else. (...)

Well, because you, you, you try, so I- I'm somebody who then also enjoys the, the, the protection of your, your own, your own row of seats. Also as, as a form of blinds. (...) Most importantly, that I have such, such a little two- two seat row for myself. If there's like a high seat before and behind me. And

there, well I (4s), so well, even there I would::: if I would, like, play a bit more frequently there, then maybe I wouldn't be like, that I would say to myself, okay, now I suppress emotions here. I still would not laugh out loud. (P10/28-39, 357-363)

As we can see, a train ride is considered a suboptimal place – indicating that situations and settings are far from neutral with regard to video gaming. First, the interviewee is seeking a corner visually ‘protected’ from the other participants, and even then, feels that gaming remains uncomfortable. He misses a ‘shielding’ of gaming from the perception of potentially disapproving onlookers. Second, the train provides suboptimal informational access to the game state, and manual access to the game controllers: having to sit too close to the screen, not having enough table room to manoeuvre his mouse. Third, the train generates a constant stream of distractions, like a moving landscape, other people passing, sounds that do not belong to the game. Shielding from disapproval, optimal access, shielding from distraction: this is a good starting list for how gaming settings are ideally configured; the only thing missing is the configuration for a specific level of arousal. Let's look into each list item in turn.

Shielding from Awareness of Disapproving Others

Adults' preferred setting for leisurely gaming is overwhelmingly a private home. Within homes, players tend to have a habitual ‘favourite place, where you enjoy sitting’ (P4/241). Singles living in one-room apartments configured their gaming settings either with a PC, monitor, and controls on a work desk, or with a couch or bed facing a TV with console and controller in reach. Objects that interviewees considered to be part of ‘video gaming’ were the main gaming device (screen plus desktop PC, tablet, smartphone, or console), and the gaming controllers. Interviewees often but not unanimously included the furniture where they sat (chair, couch, bed), stereo boxes or headphones, and the table if they gamed on a desktop PC. In multi-room, multi-person households, video gaming tends to happen in some ‘room of one's own’: a study or workroom where one has the right to be left alone. Thanks to mobile devices – tablets in specific – gaming has become a bit more spatially flexible in the house, allowing players to gravitate to the most comfortable spaces, especially in the case of relaxing gaming. Says one interviewee about her relaxing gaming:

P17: So I believe now for me that would definitely be the situation that, simply, that I sit with the iPad in, in my chair and play in the evening. Also in parallel to television. So I let the television run and if it becomes too suspenseful for me or too boring, then I play iPad on the side. That's something I did more on the PC in the past, because then was then the only place, where I had computer and television together, but now with the iPad I am a bit more independent in that regard, and it's simply more comfortable to sit in your armchair with feet up. (P17/164)

In Goffman's terms, what private homes (and in them, personal rooms) provide are the ‘tranquilizing properties’ of a ‘furnished frame’ (Goffman 1972: 284-5). In the environment of our home, we can lower our alarms because (to a certain extent) it shields from immediate dangers of physical harm and discomfort. It is well known and thus easy to navigate, and it does not hold unknown dangers of its own. This connects back to findings in developmental psychol-

ogy and ethology that play usually only occurs in settings with no immediately present danger. Finally, the furnished frame of private homes creates a shielding from the perception of others: here, we do not need to actively self-monitor whether we are keeping up ‘normal appearances’. Both the lowering of alarms and the lowering of self-monitoring facilitate the enjoyable unselfconscious engrossment leisurely gaming aims at:

P9: So if I feel unobserved, in my private rooms, then I can show any emotion, because there would be nothing inappropriate in doing so, because I wouldn’t offend anyone with it. At most I would offend myself ((laughs)). (P9/225)

In contrast, the moment one is gaming in the presence of bystanders who potentially do not understand or approve of gaming, dysphoric self-consciousness and self-regulation become an issue, as another interviewee describes his experience gaming mobile games:

Interviewer: If you play a mobile game, is there, in comparison to playing at home alone in front of the console, is there a difference in what emotions you can or are allowed to express?

P7: Since I am then mostly in a public surrounding, loud screaming or throwing that thing in the corner are not an option. Although you would really want to do it, you have to restrain yourself a bit there and, let’s put it this way, appear a bit more suited for public ((‘öffentlichkeitskonformer’)). (P7/269-271)

Gaming settings do not aim at a *total* shielding from the perception of *any* other actor, as any multiplayer gaming encounter demonstrates. The point is that as in any situation, one ought to maintain ‘normal appearances’, behaviours and emotional expressions that onlookers perceive as situationally intelligible and appropriate. If all response-present actors are ‘in on the game’, if all of them participate in the gaming encounter as players or (cheering, teasing, etc.) onlookers, then emotional expressions like the ones the interviewee above reported are intelligible and appropriate. Compare this with the train ride from the opening excerpt: here, the interviewee had to suppress loud laughter during gaming because (a) there are no immediately obvious-to-everyone environmental reasons why one should ‘suddenly’ start laughing (intelligibility), and (b) there is a social norm to keep a certain quiet and not disturb other passengers on a train ride (appropriateness). Even at home, if one has the sense that one’s gaming might be unintelligible or disturbing to family members, this elicits dysphoric tension and self-consciousness. As one interviewee reported, playing *World of Warcraft* in the living room with his mother present was highly irritating because it forced him to actively manage two framings. He had to remain attentively accessible to his mother while also wanting to engross himself in the game. And he had to worry whether his spoken communications exchanged with co-players through a headset would appear strange to her or disturb her:

P10: So I find it, or I found it incredibly irritating and even annoying when I talk with someone through Teamspeak, when I play with somebody, and at the same time there’s somebody else in the room. And, but that, that’s such a moment where I, what would, where it would disturb me if there is someone else in the room as well. (...) It’s like such a weird feeling, that you, like, talk with somebody in the game, about the game, but at the same time there is still somebody else beside me, sitting beside me. (...) She the usually left me unto myself, but of course, when she, like, wanted something from me or wanted to tell me something. And that I found incredibly irritating, because it somehow pulls me out of this, yes, out of my magic circle. And that confuses me then. Or, if somebody, somebody who has now clue about, no view of the game and hears me talking. So that’s some-

how awkward for me, because somebody who doesn't know what I'm doing just hears these weird, cryptic communicative lumps of language from me. (P10/221-237)

Leisurely gaming also takes place in public spaces, thanks to mobile devices, but was reported to happen only in (a) transit or waiting settings (in trains, subways, on airplanes, in waiting rooms), or in (b) recreational settings: hotel beds, deck chairs next to hotel swimming pools, cafés, and the like. What unites both types of public spaces is that individual attentive disengagement from the wider situation and engagement in a private, time-filling 'subordinate involvement' like newspaper reading is considered expectable and appropriate (Goffman 1963: 51-2). Basically, wherever we consider it appropriate to read a book or newspaper for leisure or to pass time, we can also legitimately engage in mobile gaming. One new element that mobile games bring into the situation is audio, which might disturb response-present others. Interviewees managed this by turning the game sound off or by wearing headphones or earbuds.

As noted, presumably to satisfy relatedness needs, several interviewees reported that they actively prefer to be around people during gameplay – not to *continually* interact with them while gaming (they also wanted to be left undisturbed if they were just involved in an attention-demanding in-game activity), but to have the sense that they were not disconnected from others. Some players even moved their computers into one room to each play a single-player game and still have an on-and-off stream of interaction happening alongside. However, in all such cases, the response-present others were without exception people with a very high social closeness (spouses, room mates, friends) who approved of this kind of parallel gaming-and-interacting. For instance, a couple enjoyed spending the evening together with her sitting in a chair reading and him playing a video game with headphones on to not disturb her reading, but able to respond if she found some event on the screen interesting, or able to point out something he found interesting in the game to her:

P8: So last time with *Skyrim* it was like this, my wife often reads here, then, so we're together in this room, talk a bit in-between, hm, so that, that, that you don't grow lonely ((laughs)), to put it that way, by gaming. That everyone does his or her thing. (P8/45)

Another interviewee reported setting up his laptop in the kitchen of a shared apartment to be able to play in parallel with roommates who also set up their laptops there, or to at least monitor the others. He explained:

P:4 The room is the communal kitchen, and it's *social* for me. I'm not away from what's happening, I'm *there*. And necessarily, something's happening around me, because the kitchen is a meeting point. It's interesting for me. *And* I have my fixed place there anyhow, and sometimes my computer sits in front of me, then I always set it up more or less the same way. (P4/245)

Informational Access to Game State

The second organising principle of video gaming configurations is that players attempt to optimally access all audiovisual information on the game state. In the initial excerpt, gaming on a train was considered suboptimal because the player was sitting 'too close to the screen'. In mobile gaming with tablets and smartphones, gaming occurs 'everywhere where there's no

sun' (P17/152); that is, where sunlight does not impede one's ability to see the screen. Genres factor in here: in simulation games with many, often small menus and information displays, sitting upright at a PC and close to the screen was reported to be more practical. In engrossing or hardcore gaming of shooters or roleplaying games on consoles, big screens were seen as important, as they allow players to sit comfortably laid back on a bed or couch and still have their viewing angle filled with the game screen. As one player describes his console setup:

P3: Then I lie there, and I have these, like, blankets and other cushions as a backrest. And yes, because the television is humongous, that works. There are some games, of course, where you have to be very close to it, where you have to interpret many screen interfaces, look at maps, and so on. Sometimes, when you're too far away from the television, that's then a bit difficult, even on an HD television (P3-1/45)

Just as the situation is configured for optimal visual information access, so for auditory access. The part of the game audio that carries information about the game state is ensured to optimally reach the player, whereas background music is frequently muted and exchanged for personal music – something explicitly supported by the features of most games:

P3: So one setting for instance are the sound effects, these days you actually do need them, because the sound effects aren't pure... pure, pure sound ambiance, but also always information carrier for games. That is, you hear enemies from afar when they come, you can locate them in the stereo field, whether they come from the left or the right, or so. That is, sometimes I listen to records here, but the sound effects come from the game. (P3-1/177)

Finally, in engrossing, competitive, and hardcore gaming, gamers sometimes arrange to have auxiliary information beyond the game ready-to-hand:

P10: That was also in *Skyrim*, so where I then ((used)) the wiki, that is, because I wanted to know when you can build what with what objects where, where you find resources, so just to access this database. Also during the game. For that there was then always the second computer. Or with, with *StarCraft*, to look, ok, which units have what stats exactly? (P10/257)

In multiplayer gaming, informational access has to be ensured for *all* participating players as well as the audience of ratified onlookers. As one interviewee noted, the relatively small screen of desktop PCs does not lend itself to socialising gaming with multiple participants. Party games designed for socialising gaming are mainly a console game phenomenon, often played in homes where one player has a particularly large television screen. However, even desktop PC games *can be configured* to support socialising gaming with attentive access to all. One interviewee reported regularly organising gaming evenings with neighbours in a cellar, gaming the car racing game *Dirt* on a desktop PC. They made the setting 'work' for socialising gaming with several large monitors next to each other, and a row of chairs behind the chair of the currently active gamer such that the others could comfortably observe and comment:

P8: But usually we do like this, that we for instance, put up a table in the basement. So. How do I do this? Well, here I have a table ((draws)). There. Then here the monitors get put up. With speakers around. Then the computer is somewhere here. Steering wheel. I'll indicate that like this. Then here's the chair of the person who plays, and usually there's another table somewhere on the side. So last time we had a table here. And then there are some chairs around. And there's something to eat, and there's something to drink. And at some point the chairs move over and you sit behind it ((points at area behind player chair also facing at the monitors)) and you spectate, chat. Give good hints ((laughs)) or maybe not so good hints. (P8/183)

Transparent Configuration of Game Controls

The third organising principle is to make gaming controllers maximally ‘transparent’; that is, to allow a more or less immediate translation of one’s intentions into game inputs without conscious effort or friction. On the train ride, one issue was that the tables are so small that the interviewee did not have enough space to move his controlling mouse freely. Interviewees reported an interesting interaction of game controls, socialisation, and game modes affording more or less transparency. Just like desktop PC screens are more suited to the display of highly detailed game information, so keyboard and mouse lend themselves to ‘finer’ control, which in highly competitive gaming is perceived as preferable and providing an edge:

P9: Yes. It’s a fact, especially first-person shooters are better suited for PCs. Just because of the controls, that is, with keyboard and mouse, you simply can have a much better reaction time and, and interaction than with a controller. (P9/83)

Thus, several deeply invested gamers who game in a hardcore or competitive mode start buying and configuring special ‘gamer keyboards’ and ‘gamer mice’ with presumed finer controls and the ability to personalise and program their additional keys:

P19: Well::: so I also have a laptop that’s specifically designed for gaming. With an illuminated keyboard and all this stuff and quite good performance. It’s made for gaming. And it’s connected to a gaming mouse that has additional macro buttons. (P19/101)

Note though that caring about the fine control offered by mice and keyboards with special keys was voiced only with regard to hardcore and competitive gaming, and itself requires training on the part of the player. This brings us to the second aspect: preferences for certain types of controllers (and connected to that, gaming devices) was understood to depend on one’s own video gaming socialisation. Players tend to stick to console game controllers, tablet and smartphone touch controls, or mouse and keyboard depending on which kind of gaming device they learned to game on. Thus, interviewees identified as ‘console’ or ‘PC player’:

P11: I need, I need, I’m a keyboard-and-mouse person. That’s also why I don’t play at consoles, that’s nothing for me. So such a, such a game pad, that is somehow, I don’t know, I just can’t handle it. (...) May be that I, I grew up with mouse and keyboard, more or less. So from the start I had PCs, I never owned a console. (P11/87-91)

Mode-Congruent Arousal Level

A fourth organising principle is objects and settings should support a level of arousal congruent with the gaming mode. In hardcore and competitive gaming, where players aim at a high level of arousal, they would actively configure their setting to support this by, for example, turning the light down for a horror video game like *FEAR*:

P11: There are certainly points, in earlier games, when it was daytime, I perhaps would let down the window blinds, or darken the room, if it was a special game. But otherwise there are no big preparations.

Interviewer: Why then darken?

P11: For two reasons. Reason number one: You can’t see anything. Reason number two: The game demands that. There’s for instance, I don’t know, do you know *FEAR*?

Interviewer: Mhm ((agrees)).

P11: Yes? With the little girl?

Interviewer: Mhm ((agrees)).

P11: That's no fun during daytime. It has to be dark. Because, because the whole game is dark. That is, as if you're watching a horror movie on your laptop out in the park. That is somehow, yes, doesn't fit. The, the effect doesn't happen. And that is what I want. (P11-1/216-228)

Another interviewee used music to raise arousal during competitive PvP in *World of Warcraft*:

P19: For a time, I listened to hard techno... hardcore, that is. So I put that on. Or rock music or something like that, metal or so. That I put that on and then gamed. Well a bit to evoke this combat atmosphere (P19-1/100)

Just as light turned off can support suspense, dimmed to the right point it can also create relaxation during an instance of engrossing gaming of an RPG:

P10: Well, the lighting has to fit.

Interviewer: How exactly?

P10: Also not too bright. So I have more two, two little indirect lights. And not this, so I, neither do I like a specially harsh, bright light, nor somehow if it's too dark. So more somehow such a, such a comfy basic ambiance. (P10/169-171)

Seating was also used to regulate arousal. In relaxing and engrossing gaming, the preferred seating places are beds and couches more than chairs at desks, because, as two players have it,

P3: Yes, because many activit- much of what I do, even beyond the pure media enjoyment and aesthetic edification, let's say, I do to relax. And the bed is in and of itself a great place where you can relax awesomely, lay down. (P3-1/57)

P17: Yes, I lay down in bed ((laughs)), turned on the iPad. That's what I do practically every evening. That is, instead of reading. And then I played one, two Solitaire games, but I didn't get far, and then I was gone, simply because I was too tired. (P17/192)

In contrast, sitting upright on a chair in front of a PC is associated with higher body tension and therefore, higher arousal than lounging on a couch or in a bed in front of a console or with a tablet. Gaming modes, genres, devices, and settings are thus mutually affiliated: certain genres cater to certain modes, but also demand and facilitate certain levels of arousal and attention that are in turn facilitated by certain body postures connected to certain seating arrangements, which again practically only work with certain genres, modes, and devices. Lying on a couch or bed with the legs up while gaming a relaxing casual game or an absorbing shooter with relatively imprecise controls works relatively well. It is less suited for a simulation game requiring lots of micromanagement, and practically impossible for a hardcore MMORPG raid where a high degree of arousal, attention, and fine control is demanded.

Focusing Attention, Minimising Interruption

In relaxing gaming, players want to and ensure they remain relatively open to interruptions from potentially more relevant or enjoyable events. In engrossing, hardcore, and competitive gaming, they dislike interruptions and configure their setting to minimise it. Thus, they tend to seek out individual rooms that are unlikely to be passed through by others, and shielded from sounds of visual movements that would distract attention – a fact so normal that interviewees usually weren't even consciously aware of it. One for instance had drawn his typical gaming setting, including the walls of the room where he played. Asked which of the elements

that he drew for him ‘belong to gaming’, he first noted that the walls did not belong to the situation, to add on second thought:

P2: So perhaps I would indeed include the wall. Because I want to shut myself off a bit as well, of course. When I’m really playing, well. (P2/125)

In public spaces, interviewees reported using headphones for the same purpose. Even in their own private home, headphones would be used if the walls themselves did not suffice as interruption and distraction shields:

P15: Yes, well, my room, there I just placed by desk behind, behind the bed. And yes, so that’s as far away as possible from the door, also so that I don’t hear as much of what’s outside. For instance, if someone walks through the hall, then I don’t necessarily want to hear that during the game. Because, I don’t have a noise-cancelling headphone, so you do hear quite a lot of what is happening in the environment, and therefore it’s better if I don’t sit too close to the door. (P15/17)

Especially in engrossing gaming, interviewees frequently reported configuring their setting, dimming the lights and using headphones such that they would be maximally enveloped by the game stimuli and minimally distracted by other environmental stimuli:

P2: And then maybe also, when I’m right in the mood for a bit, for the story, and I switch off the lights and put on headphones and somehow try to have more immersion. (...) Now in the case where this new expansion of WoW had just come out, I thought by myself, now I want to take in this new content somehow specially, especially well or nicely. And there I then, whether I switched off the light, I don’t know, but full screen ((the interviewee reported otherwise gaming most games in windowed mode)), headphones and then really savour the cut scenes and the whole story that is happening then especially in the first campaigns, in the quests, that is unfolded, yes. There I explicitly set myself the goal: <<I now want to just savour the story.>> (P2/59-61)

One final distraction to be managed are ‘creature releases’ (Goffman 1963: 69) – such as a desire to itch, yawn, stretch, go to the toilet, drink, or eat something. To minimise these distractions, almost all interviewees reported visiting the toilet and arranging something to drink (and often, to eat) in grasping distance prior to gaming. Snack food that doesn’t require too much attention in eating was reported to be preferred. Also, they preferred locations for sitting with surfaces that allow the placing of drinks, food, ashtrays in grasping distance, as is everything that might need controlling (light, audio, TV, etc.):

P4: So beforehand, it’s often the case that I (5s) arrange things a little. So the classic thing, that you don’t have any long distances, that everything is close by, drink, perhaps something... to eat, if it’s not something complicated that would... hinder you during playing, like a plate with pasta. But more something, olives in a bowl or something similar.

Interviewer: Why? (2s)

P4: It’s (3s) a form of making yourself comfortable... I’ll *spend* some time here, with *playing*, and then I make it as comfortable as *possible*, as comfortable as possible. (P4/129-133)

Summary and Conclusions

This section showed that video gaming indeed ‘moves and has its being within a play-ground’, if only a much less ‘consecrated’ or ‘magic’ playground than Huizinga (1955: 10) suggested. Video gaming typically happens in settings that are (a) *appropriate* for leisurely side and main involvements and (b) *shield* the gaming encounter from physical harm and discomfort, views of disapproving others, distracting sounds and movements, and interruptions by others or one’s own bodily needs. This shielding provides relaxation, a lowering of conscious upkeep of

normal appearances, a reduced need for environmental and self-monitoring, and thus, supports full attentive absorption in the game state. Players actively configure the chosen gaming setting – including light, seating arrangements, screens, audio output, game devices and controllers, and food and drinks – to provide all players and ratified onlookers attentive access to the game state, shield them from distractions, facilitate an arousal level fitting the desired gaming mode, and give players optimally transparent control of the game – though what controls are most transparent depends on players' video gaming socialisation and the control schemes of the game genre.

In summary, it seems the main function and concern of a video gaming setting is to optimally involve all participants in gameplay – optimal for the gaming mode in question. It is not just that games themselves present us with 'engrossables', things that spontaneously attract and bind our involvement: by staging engrossables, we create a proper environmental backdrop designed to both shield and recede from attention. Yet even that is not enough, as Goffman noted again and again. In any situation, there are also expectations in effect about what we may and ought to get attentively involved in.

6.4 Internal Organisation, Actors, and Metacommunication

As seen in the previous chapter, the majority of existing work on the internal organisation of gaming encounters has dealt with the different laminations of framing. However, the interview data gave away only little in these terms – presumably an artefact of the chosen method. For as Fine (1983), Linderöth (2004), Aarsand (2007a), and others note, switches in laminations are typically implicit. Players do not even notice that they perceive, understand, enact, and communicate the ongoing flow of phenomena according to different laminations. Hence, it is unlikely that they have a reflexive, discursive understanding of this internal organisation, which means in turn that they likely are not able to verbalise it in interviews.

The internal organisation of gaming encounters that *did* come out strongly was that between gaming encounter and gameplay, as well as the chunking of gameplay itself into rounds or turns. Here, interviewees could clearly articulate typical procedures, as well as implicit and explicit metacommunication.

The Gaming Encounter: Pre- and Post-Proceedings

Before actual gameplay commences, there is usually a preparatory phase, which almost invariably involves configuring the setting to minimise possible distractions and to ensure optimal arousal. In solitary gaming, most interviewees additionally reported checking e-mail and social network updates before starting the game software, which can be understood as further supporting involvement by reducing anxieties over 'missing out' on anything urgent when one is about to engage in a prolonged gaming instance. As one player describes his preparations:

P8: The usual process is like this: I start the computer, check e-mail, see if there's something new from acquaintances or whatever. Perhaps also look into Facebook. Or Stayfriends or wherever. And that's it, then, then it starts, then I start the game. (P8/97)

In relaxing gaming, interviewees reported the least specific and involved preparation or post-proceedings, since gaming occurred mostly spontaneous and with little forethought. Socialising gaming in contrast usually features a quite involved phase of preparatory talking and chatting that is considered to be worthwhile on its own (since the main goal here is relating to others). However, in all multiplayer gaming that involved physical co-presence, some form of initial 'getting to know each other' seems to be necessary. Gaming is commenced when initial conversation has established a shared sense of trust and ease and doesn't hold the spontaneous interest of participants anymore. As one interviewee described an instance of gaming party games at someone's home:

P9: First you get to know people a little. You drink something, you chat with the people, get in contact with them, then a relaxed atmosphere develops and when you simply notice that the mood is going down a bit, or all somehow would enjoy very much to convene in one place and focus together on something. Then it's like this, that the console is switched on and then everyone gathers around the television and then this event starts. (P9/93)

Notice again the interrelation of tie strength and response-presence: To be willing to engage with somebody in response-present gaming, a certain trust grounded in tie strength has to be established. During a board gaming session I organised with several friends who did not know each other previously, gameplay would not commence before everyone around the table had been introduced, exchanged some small talk with the others, and was in a relaxed mood. The last person arrived about half an hour late, and still there was the sense that – *because* the person was late and therefore in a rushed and slightly anxious state – we had to let her 'arrive', that is, calm down and get to know the others before we could start gaming. At a public board gaming night of a board gaming club, there was likewise a round of introductions before any new game in a new round where not everybody already knew everybody else. However, these introductory rounds were much shorter, reduced to exchanging names and passing out snacks and drinks everybody had brought. This made sense given that the jointly agreed ethos was much less about socialising than being able to play new games.

After the play-through of a game or the ending of gameplay overall, in multiplayer gaming, usually there follows a post-proceeding of informal exchange about the just-experienced game. In socialising gaming, this mostly revolves around retelling especially interesting or funny game events. This also happens in socialising single player gaming, where gamers arrange to play single-player games co-located in one room such that they can interact during or in-between game play. Re-sharing and re-stating memorable experiences of the joint activity seems to create experiences of relatedness by confirming that one's own thoughts and emotional reactions to game events resonate with those of the others. As one player put it:

P4: You had a shared experience, like in everyday life, in the social *outside*, to put it that way. You had a shared experience, *both* were there. And still you want to tell each other what great things

you experienced, because you experienced it together and... want to complement the reported experience of the other: <<And yes and I also remember, and no>>. (P4/432)

In hardcore and competitive gaming, while there were also clear pre- and post-proceedings, involving socialising and sharing experiences, interviewees reported that these focused much more around the game and winning it. They used the pre-proceedings to actively collect thoughts and plan strategies ahead of gameplay, something that was not reported for relaxing or socialising gaming. Here's how one player described preparing for a *StarCraft* tournament with another player:

P10: Okay, first, somehow set up the whole, the whole stuff. (4s) And also then, so then likely also, well, talking through a strategy you two want to execute together. Because you have these cooperative aspects and you think, you say: <<Yes, come on, this time I'll do this. What will you do then?>> <<Yes. Ah, okay, that's a good idea. Let's try it that way.>> And then to get the most, most synergy effects out of it. (P10/195)

Likewise, participants reported involved stretches of detailed post-game analysis, with the express purpose of finding points of possible improvement of one's own skills. Such extended, highly analytic debriefing was considered explicitly *inappropriate* in socialising gaming. In the following excerpt, an interviewee compares post-proceedings in party gaming with those in competitive multiplayer online gaming:

Interviewer: What do you usually do in a party context, after the game was over? (...)

P9: Most of the time, you discuss the game outcome then. Or draw some kind of conclusion, résumé, who was good, who was bad? Who behaved how? Certainly those are also conversation starters to mock somebody somehow (...)

Interviewer: Is there a specific way in which you can behave inappropriately, in how you relate to the game afterwards?

P9: Yes, you should, you don't put yourself too much in the centre of attention. So you should somehow, not put the discussion front and centre for too long, because the game is over, you can give a short comment on it, but I think, if somebody focuses too much on that and lets it get out of hand, this discussion, and approaches it analytically, how what happened. That would be inappropriate.

Interviewer: Okay. How is that with online gaming? How do you relate to the game afterwards there? Do you do that at all?

P9: Yes. You can do that, you can do that in online fora, or afterwards somehow in communication via chat or Skype, or however, that's what you can do. There you are indeed more analytically focused and go through different situations once more that didn't go well. To see where there is potential for improvement. Yes, there you are a bit more goal-oriented. (P9/261-266)

Gameplay: Turn Organisation

Closure points not only structure the gaming encounter as a whole: they also give gameplay an internal structure of units of tension and release, activity and pausing. Different game genres feature different closure point punctuations: RPGs for instance tend to come with a 'quest' structure organised into 'main' and 'side' quests: moving through the game, the player can choose from a series of presented quests (i.e. game goals), some of which build on each other in a main narrative line whose completion usually 'wins' or ends the whole game, some of which are optional. This quest structure is usually designed such that at any given point in gameplay, a player has at least one and ideally multiple uncompleted quests. RPG players tend to accept this internal turn organisation of gameplay, actively negotiating it (as we have seen)

with surrounding demands to maximise a sense of closure and accomplishment when stopping the game. They also select main and side quests so as to achieve an overall desired length of gameplay, and find games that do not give them the freedom to continue engaging in side quests or open game fiction exploration after the closure of the main quest line frustrating:

P8: So I think especially in role-playing games you need a certain structure. Otherwise you'll get lost very quickly. But that also depends a lot on the game, of course. That prescribes a certain structure as well. But in principle, role-playing games are designed to offer different strands of action, usually a main, main line and several side lines (2s). Such that you have to decide: <<Do I follow the main line directly, or do I use this, that I play some side lines perhaps?>> (P8/113)

P8: Games sometimes end very abruptly. (2s) Such that you have the feeling, this should still go on at this point. So perhaps you've been put in such a mood by the game, but that mood is then abruptly destroyed by the end of the game. That is of course also very::: ((laughs)) constraining at that moment. (P8/147)

Sports and racing games in contrast are usually organised into relatively short rounds of only a few minutes of playtime, usually organised into various possible higher-order 'modes'. The *Tekken* martial arts game series, for instance, over the span of its history, offered a total of 26 different modes, including the 'versus mode' in which players are able to choose gaming against each other or the computer in one to five rounds, the winner being determined by who won the most rounds at the end.⁸³

Thus, various organisations of gameplay into 'rounds' and higher-order 'matches' or 'tournaments' or 'stories' are materially afforded by the game software. However, these affordances are differently realised by players. For instance, even though the soccer game series *FIFA* offers various tournament modes for multiplayer gaming, I observed players gaming just one round and then spontaneously deciding to play a 're-match' and then a 'two out of three' match without making use of the game software offering to organise and keep track of this. They followed and made use of the basic round organisation of the game to then integrate it into their own higher-level tournament organisation.

Similarly, on a more micro level, players organised their gaming within the bounds of one round into a more or less spontaneously emerging flow of 'beats': in a *Tekken* game I participated in, after an especially stressful bout of fighting, both players receded their character into opposite ends of the game space and thus gave each other a little pause before one or both decided to attempt the next attack. In a multiplayer shooter game I participated in, players would similarly stay with their characters in an area of the game space where they knew they would not be attacked by computer opponents, in order to rest, or to explain a certain gaming control. Cutscenes – movies playing that usually convey some narrative and don't allow any player input during them were also used as such short breaks, as the following excerpt shows:

P7: For instance, when levels change or a job, a task has been done, such that, or I have a, I have a, an, an in-game movie phase, where I don't have to pay attention that much the whole time, then I can also take a quick look at the mobile phone: Okay, twenty minutes left, and then I slowly prepare my-

⁸³ See http://tekken.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Game_modes, last accessed May 17, 2013.

self, that I, slowly prepare myself that I will then for the game, will have to pause from the game for a while. (P7/69)

Players also used the 'pause' function to interrupt gameplay and provide a time window for a creature release – but rarely in competitive gaming. As one interviewee reported, in a competitive multiplayer *StarCraft* game, the other players would likely exploit this weakness rather than politely halt the flow of gameplay; thus, pauses could only be taken when a round or 'match' was over. In single-player games with diffuse closure points, he would negotiate between himself and the closure points whether and when to take a break:

Interviewer: Are there any usual, no idea, pauses or stop points?

P10: I make ((clears throat)), that, those are then usually prescribed by the game. So that you, of course, in *StarCraft* you still have the pause block after the matches. In, in, in adventures it doesn't really matter. That is, when I have to go to the toilet, then I go to the toilet, because I, yes. And with, with other games, so with, especially with such, such games where a, the, where the missions or levels are only, or don't exist, or are only very diffusely discernible, there it's like this, that I always say to myself: <<Okay, I bring this, like, this one mission to its end or complete this task.>> Although I might perhaps say: <<Okay, actually, I need to go to the toilet.>> But I pull myself together for another ten minutes ((chuckles)). (P10/176-178)

Actors and their Footing

Leisurely video gaming shows the same differentiation between players and onlookers already observed by Goffman for board and card gaming. Onlookers are allowed to be less attentively involved in the gameplay than players. In socialising gaming, however, it is positively valued for onlookers to get involved in observing gameplay and amplify the involvement of everyone involved by cheering or teasing. One interviewee describes a socialising Kinect session thus:

P2: That was with friends who had a new Kinect, that were usually games you played with two, also because the room wasn't that big. That is, we were six or so and four always stood around and cheered and two played. So, they logically stood, yet stood next to each other in front of the camera and the big [screen].

Interviewer: [You] say <<cheered>>. What exactly did they do, those who stood on the side?

P2: So, somehow signalled participation, like you do, so <<Oh, great hit!>> or ((laugh)) <<You have to jump higher!>>, or something like that. (P2/179-181)

P2: So there is, on, the focus of the players, the people who play right then is of course completely different from that of those who stand on the side. That is, they logically look on the screen and are inside of what they have to do as a demand in the game. While the others then certainly drink something or chat or something ((laughs)). (P2/191)

The difference between players and onlookers is materially marked and organised by who is actively affecting the game state through the game controllers. This does not mean that onlookers are not allowed to affect gameplay, but the ultimate limit remains that they ought not to take over the game controller, at least not in a competitive game.

In hardcore and competitive multiplayer gaming that requires more substantial coordination, organisational structures of groups and group roles develop that have specific rights, obligations, and powers within gameplay, but also in and beyond the gaming encounter. In MMORPGs, designers have long known and observed that players tend to organise into groups. Therefore, they started to build functionality into the software to directly support (but also pre-structure) such organisation into *guilds*. Guilds are usually formed to have a trusted

pool of known players to organise raids or other in-game activities involving collective action. For instance, in *World of Warcraft*, forming a guild is an in-game feature with certain technical requirements (a minimum of starting members), and unlocks technical features like guild-internal chatting or a shared 'guild bank' where players can collectively store and access virtual items.⁸⁴ In raids, in-game leader roles ('raid leader') and specified functional roles (e.g. 'tank', 'healer', 'damage dealer') developed more informally at first as a dominant strategy of organising raid play, to be today materially inscribed in the game software. For instance, for players who wish to spontaneously find a group of other players for a raid in *World of Warcraft*, they can use matchmaking functionality added in later patches of the game – Raid Finder and Dungeon Finder – where players have to select one of the functional roles they wish to play in, and the functionality auto-assembles a group of players such that all functional roles are filled.⁸⁵

Somewhat comparably, online multiplayer shooters have *clans* with designated *clan leaders* and *server administrators*. Their role activities include acting as a master of ceremony and final arbiter whether new members should be allowed into the clan or whether a member should be excluded, or whether a server should be rented to run an instance of the gaming software. As we will see in more detail in the following section on rules, their power is socially and materially stabilised: by virtue of their role as clan leader, they may legitimately reprimand a player for inappropriate behaviour. By virtue of their access level to the server and game software, they can enforce a ruling by technically excluding a player from gameplay. This goes hand in hand with gameplay-internal roles, one player often being situationally designated as the group leader who determines an overall strategy and gives commands.

Metacommunication

Metacommunication was reported by interviewees to be mostly implicit, involving gaming equipment, player body posture and specific control movements. Just finding a gaming device like an Xbox or a specific arrangement of desktop PC screens indicates a gaming encounter. Deep attentive focus on the screen on one's face, emotionally charged shouts, using a gaming controller or multi-purpose controllers in a specific fashion all indicate gaming:

P4: Concentration, the movements, with certain games- As I said ?in? first person shooters, you work a lot with the mouse, of course. Click very much. With some mice, that produces sounds as well, less so with others. But of course you notice that, and you also notice it, sometimes, in the *facial expression*, whether somebody is very focused for instance. With a game. For instance, people say about me that I always look very focused if things get difficult, and that you can read that very clearly in my face. (4s) Photos were made ((laughs)). (P4/342)

If a player is response-present with others in the room, the sheer fact that she interrupts her talking and starts interacting with the computer is seen as a sign that she has started gaming – especially if it is accompanied by a sound from the computer 'typical' for the starting of a

⁸⁴ See <http://www.wowwiki.com/Guild>, http://www.wowwiki.com/Guild_bank, http://www.wowwiki.com/UI:Guild_List, last accessed May 17, 2013.

⁸⁵ See http://www.wowwiki.com/Dungeon_Finder, last accessed May 17, 2013.

game. Similarly, taking on a relaxed body posture and facial expression, moving one's body and gaze away from the screen was reported to indicate that gaming has ended or is paused:

P4: With us I always notice it, especially when there are loading time, when gaming starts, but not the actual gaming, but everything runs in the background, that then people still talk. But the, the start of the game usually begins with a pause... in talking. Then you can pick it up again. (P4/358)

During gameplay, the metacommunicative brackets and directional cues are short interactional sequences between player and device. Gameplay is initiated by the player making a specific input to the gaming device after having started the gaming software, usually pressing a designated controller button, mouse-clicking or tapping a designated interface element that reads 'start game' or similar. This indicates and ensures that the player is able, attentive, and intent to start to the device. The device then feeds back some conventionalised signals that gaming has started. This may be exchanging some loading screen with the main gameplay view, but is usually accompanied by some text, animation, and/or audio signal that differs from normal gameplay – presumably to clarify ambiguities and elicit attention from players who during longer loading times might have become distracted. However, for gaming to actually start, it requires the player to start inputting. 'The game' may have started – that is, begun accepting inputs and producing outputs – but 'gaming' starts when the player in response to the bracket signal of the gaming device does start attentively engaging with it. Says one player:

P9: So, when the game, when I start the game, so I actively confirm <<I want to start the game>> and *then* I go into interaction, via the hardware and clicks on my, on my controller, then the game starts. Then I know that, then the game sends me the corresponding signals. And it is ended then when I end it ((laughs)). That us, when I close it again, yes. (P9/162)

In games without explicit conventionalised metacommunication of the start, players recognise that gaming has started from the fact that their inputs produce perceivable changes in the game state, or by the fact that the game state starts to perceptibly change:

P19: With WoW, there is a countdown. With::: other things, shooters or some such, there you notice it in that you are either shot at or.. (P19/2-3)

The following excerpt shows again the socio-materiality of metacommunication. During an MMOPRG raid, one player had an Internet issue, was disconnected, and then reconnected. Although this fact was already automatically communicated by the game software itself by changing the colour of an interface element, the player perceived the need to explain and apologise for the disconnect as well. This might be explained by the fact that interviewees also reported that one ought to ensure a stable Internet connection during raids, and that some players used 'Internet issues' as a false excuse to leave a raid early, against participation norms. Hence, the player would follow up with a remedial interchange to reaffirm that he is aware of said norm, and to reaffirm that his interruption was accidental, not intentional:

Interviewer: How, if we stay with the disconnect example, how did you re-enter the game?

P2: For me noticeably simply in that the respective avatar, that is, the group display first shows disconnect and then again colour, is coloured and back again and then accordingly accompanied with <<Oh sorry, I had a disconnect>> in chat, or via VoIP, yes that's pretty clear. (P2/294-295)

If players do not actively decide to pause or abort gaming, the ending of a round is constituted by the game no longer accepting player inputs, and visual and auditory signals that indicate the ending, like a switching from the main game view to some other screen. Says one player:

Interviewer: Okay: When is gaming over?

P9: When interaction ceases. When I am told, when some screen blends in, when I am shown a high score, or a confirmation screen. At the latest when I can't actively *do* anything in the game, then the game is over. (P9/159-160)

In multiplayer gaming, metacommunicating beginnings and ends has to coordinate attention and action of multiple players and devices. *All* players and devices need to ensure and signal to each other that *all* are ready to start gaming. In the following excerpt, we see how an instance of multiplayer gaming of a motion-controlled game first required the players to communicate to each other that they are now ready to start gaming, then to coordinate their bodily positioning in front of the gaming device, indicating to each other that they are ready to start, and then to each indicate with a specified starting gesture to the gaming device that they are ready:

Interviewer: If we stay with this situation with the Kinect, how do you recognise that the game starts. That you <<Okay, [now we're playing]>>?]

P2: [Yes.] Pretty concretely in that when, so, on on the micro level so to speak, before you make your-game move, you always have to once ((imitates sound)) there, lift the hand and activate the sensor and then you know, now it'll start soon. Now I can make my movement. More on a macro level, you might say, don't know, when the start screen is there, or you switch the thing on: <<So, now we are playing>>, like that.

Summary and Conclusions

A gaming encounter usually consists of some *pre- and post-proceedings* that enclose main gameplay and differ based on the gaming mode. In relaxing gaming, pre-and post-proceedings are almost absent. In socialising gaming, they are mainly about establishing closeness between participants – in fact, these side activities can become the main activity. In engrossing gaming, interviewees reported configuring their setting for minimum distraction and optimum involvement. In hardcore and competitive gaming, finally, pre- and post-proceedings typically entail strategic planning and post-game analysis.

Gameplay itself was reported to be usually interspersed with more or less prolonged pauses that belong to the gaming encounter. Just as gaming encounters need to be 'fitted' into the course of a day, their internal temporal organisation emerges from a negotiation between the game software – its closure point structure – and the players. Different genres offer different, more or less clear, more or less overlapping structures of closure points and with them, more or less clear temporal units or 'rounds' of gameplay. These are usually organised into higher-level units like matches, tournaments, or similar. On a micro level, interviewees reported organising gameplay into a rhythm of activity 'beats' and pauses, either tacitly agreeing on brief moments of pause (in competitive, player-versus-player multiplayer gaming) or using the closure points the game provides to pause.

Ratified participation roles in leisurely video gaming are onlookers and players, which in turn might be functionally specialised in more complex multiplayer games. In MMORPGs and online multiplayer shooters, more stable social groups tend to develop, with more stable managing and leading roles that span multiple gaming encounters, whose rights and responsibilities are sociomaterially established by the group and the game software.

Metacommunication takes place mostly implicitly through the spatial setting, present gaming equipment, and observable activities, postures, and facial expressions of players. The starting and stopping of gameplay itself involves a more complex sociomaterial synchronisation sequence in which players and game device need to indicate to all involved that they are now ready to game, that is, able and accessible to receive inputs from the others and give inputs in return.

6.5 Attention and Involvement

The ordering of attention in any kind of situation involves at least three aspects: what actors can legitimately have attentive access to, what they should focus their attention on (and in turn, disattend), and how deeply they should get involved in their attentive focus. In board and card gaming, Goffman noted that players are expected to not access ‘hidden’ information tracks (such as other players’ hands in a game of Poker), and be spontaneously focused and deeply involved in gameplay.

Access

As in board and card games, in video gaming where asymmetric information between players is game-relevant, equipment is configured to ensure that accidental glancing is minimised, and a social norm is enacted that accessing the others’ information state is inappropriate. This norm also extends to onlookers, as interviewees reported. They, too, are not allowed to, for example, walk around in a room and share the information from one player’s screen with another player. As one interviewee described the arrangements and norms at a multiplayer LAN party:

P5: Yes. Looking on the screen is taboo.

Interviewer: Ha. [That means?]

P5: [Yes, naturally.] I mean, not, not on your own screen, that’s obvious ((laughs)). So of course you may look on your own screen, but the tables are placed in a way, or were placed in a way that the screens always stood with their backs to each other. So that you really only saw your friend and could not look on the screen of the other person. (P5-1/151-153)

Involvement

Moving on to involvement, the first and most general principle articulated by interviewees was that one *ought* to want to game and win the game:

Interviewer: Is there something you shouldn’t do during playing?

P1: I don’t know, if you want to do something else, then you should do something else. And if you want to play video games, then you should play a video game. (P1-4/297-299)

P3: Well, you shouldn't necessarily stubbornly want to win, but people of course also have to be there with a minimum stake, in wanting and tactics, to come ahead as far as possible, because otherwise the game collapses. (P3-1/356)

In single-player gaming, this usually doesn't pose a problem – which in turn is a noteworthy feature of single-player gaming: If gameplay doesn't spontaneously hold the interest of a player, she simply terminates the game, tries another level, switches to another game, etc.

It is in multiplayer gaming where the complications again occur. As we have seen, if a gaming encounter is pre-scheduled, participants are expected to either cancel the event in due time or show up – and bring proper overt engagement to the situation, even if gameplay doesn't spontaneously involve them. If they don't, this in turn impinges on the enjoyment of the other players, as seen in the following excerpt:

P11: That depends on how the game came about. If I say: <<Do we want to play a game together?>> And then: <<Yeah:::, yeah, let's do that>> ((impersonates bored voice)). When it comes out like that, and then... then it would be okay ((if no game transpires)). I'll say. Because then there wasn't really that huge enthusiasm to begin, that you absolutely have to play a game. But if you would make an appointment for a gaming night, and you came specifically for that, and then. That would then be a bit: <<Yeah, you know what: Then we'll go to the movies next time!>> ((angry voice)) (P11-2/52)

This holds for the entire stretch of gameplay until the collectively agreed closure point. Because engrossment is so vulnerable to other players' non-engrossment (their lack of involvement or enjoyment makes salient our norms that we ought to care for their enjoyment in turn), players who do not show a proper minimum of engagement and enjoyment are seen as 'spoilsports' who depress the mood of the whole gaming encounter:

Interviewer: Remember, remember the situation, or can you remember a situation where somebody who did not play right then, but stood on the side, did something where you said: <<That's inappropriate.>>

P2: Not really. That is, except for these, these people who also, so who are also sometimes with such groups, who are simply in the mood for nothing. Who document that ((laughs)) then, from <<Ahhh, that's stupid>> or, when it's their turn somehow are frustrated the whole time, because nothing works out and they don't take it playfully lightly, but so to say always broadcast their frustration about it. (P2/186-187)

As already noted, the 'proper' degree of involvement in trying to win varied with gaming modes: Whereas in relaxing and socialising gaming, caring to win was not seen as important beyond the minimum involvement necessary to 'sustain' the situation, in hardcore and competitive gaming, higher degrees of involvement in wanting to win were seen as appropriate.

Attentive Focus

When it comes to attentive focus on gameplay, and devaluing of distractions and interruptions, these were articulated least strongly in single-player, turn-based games, and in relaxing gaming. Here, being temporarily distracted from the game state did not have negative consequences in terms of the game state, nor would it force co-players to wait, nor would it interfere with the main motivational relevancy too much:

Interviewer: Is it, is it okay to be interrupted with *FarmVille*?

P12: Yes, most definitely. 'Cause there's nothing that necessarily happens during that. (P12/317-319)

The upper end of the spectrum was formed by 'real-time' gaming where the game state continues to change even when one player stops inputting, especially if played in hardcore and competitive gaming modes. Here, players are expected to fully focus their attention on game rules and the game state; even averting one's gaze from the screen for a second was considered an atypical form of distraction. As one interviewee reported on gaming *StarCraft* with a friend of his co-located in a room against others online:

Interviewer: How would you have told whether one of you was distracted or not?

P10: Well, in::: actually already just somehow look away from the screen. That is, even, there, when I, like, play and so, am just in such a game and then, like, turn my head to you and talk. That would actually already be distraction.

Interviewer: Why is that in such a game already distraction?

P10: Because then for perhaps five seconds or so I don't see what's happening there. What under certain circumstances can already be decisive in the game.

Interviewer: Okay. And that's not the case with adventure games?

P10: No.

Interviewer. Okay (11s.) That means, with adventure games, would it be more acceptable to be distracted from the game sometimes?

P10: Mhm ((affirmative)). (P10/315-323)

This attentive focus included all information channels that are perceived to provide a strategic advantage. Thus, in online multiplayer shooters and MMORPG raids, players used chat and the common Voice over IP software Teamspeak to communicate game information, and expected their teammates to use the same technology and pay attention to it as well, because not doing so would constitute a strategic disadvantage:

P5: So and otherwise, (2s) the round or the two rounds that I played weren't really successful, because the team play, when you're not connected via headset, then you can more or less forget it.

Interviewer: And you were connected via headset, but the other one not? Or-?

P5: So in the usual case it's like this, that I am in a Teamspeak channel with my clan people. And then we go on the server together and coordinate ourselves over talk. (P5-1/16-18)

In competitive gaming, even participants who were currently only onlookers reported using their onlooking as a strategic information source to assess the other players' playing styles. One interviewee described his experience playing a *FIFA* tournament with friends as follows:

P19: But we usually have played such a tournament mode, where more or less often one or two people sat on the side and did nothing. Then they talked like usual, or watched. Sometimes, I, so I do like to watch, because then I see what the people can do, where they like to attack or something like that. So that's quite handy. (P19-1/24-25)

Attentive focus on the game state and any other strategic information is not just a personal focus and expectation: it is normatively demanded by others, most strongly from players who are team members in an instance of competitive team versus team gaming. According to one interviewee, in hardcore MMORPG raid gaming, players know very well how a fully attentive team member would perform on a given game position, and often can see from specified statistics displays whether one player is currently performing his or her role well. Thus, they would call an apparently distracted player to attention, even though they could not directly see whether his or her gaze was focused on the screen. But even where players do not game in

teams and gameplay is turn-based, if the situational ethos of the group is hardcore or competitive, all participants are expected to be attentive to immediately take over when it is their turn:

P7: We played soccer, so we played *Pro Evolution Soccer 2012*, with several friends, online, against each other. So we were a two-player team in our living room, and in Vienna friends of us were sitting, and we played against them. And the one did indeed look on his mobile phone from time to time, and then I told him: <<Hey, let that be! I don't want to lose here, against them.>> You're quite captivated there, and- It was similar when I once, with my friends, every two weeks we play, we make a gaming night and play *Golf* together, *Tiger Woods*. And it's annoying when people don't press <<continue>>. That is, when they, like, talk with each other or want to go have a smoke or something like that, so that's, that impedes the game flow, simply because you don't get further. (...)

Interviewer: So it's okay to say that aloud, whenever the game continues?

P7: Yes, then they have to pay attention, yes. I think, when, when, so I think, if constant reminding would be necessary, then that person, I don't think, that person would be invited less and less frequently, at least to these gaming nights. Because I think then it's, then you just notice: yes, he doesn't really want to play anything, because he is too easily distracted or something. So that would perhaps be, that is perhaps already a criterium for exclusion, if you really want to play intensely.

'Cause it's not just about this social event on the evening, yes, where you meet with friends, but you have a common goal: you want to continue playing that game. You want to get better, or with, with *Golf* for instance, we want to, I want to improve my handicap there, or I want to get through with less strikes, want to be better at putting. And that I only get when I get my points. Then I get a bonus, that is not on my strike style, where I can influence how I improve my strike. Then I have to play that. And the I want to play that, and not somehow talk about knick knack, this here is about the *game*. (P7/115-127)

In contrast, in socialising gaming, being distracted by 'knick knack' was seen as unproblematic for both onlookers and players:

P8: So everyone is relaxed if somebody makes stupid remarks. Everyone is relaxed if he is being distracted. It's a game after all. It's really just a game and that's how it's perceived. It's a pastime and nothing more. (P8/199)

Because experiences of relatedness arising from interaction with each other are the dominant ethos, players *ought* to remain attentively open for interaction with the other participants beyond gameplay. The following excerpt gives a nice example of this difference:

Interviewer: Is there something you have to do during party gaming, to play right? Orderly? Appropriately? As it should be?

P9: I believe, if you have enough of a distance from the game and you're still aware in what context the whole thing takes place, namely in an amicable frame, in, in a party frame, to be jolly and not too focused and fully focus on it and no communication happens, then it really failed, I would say. Because it's really about getting to interact with each other, having fun, communicating, being able to laugh about it, being able to laugh about yourself. I would say, if somebody would fully shut himself off and focuses exclusively on it and doesn't interact with co-players, then I would say it failed, yes.

Interviewer: <<Focus>>, you said. Focus on what [exactly]?

P9: [On the] game, on the action. If somebody is completely in his own world and fully shut off and takes it too overambitiously, I would say. Yes. I would say, the way I play *Battlefield*, I really wouldn't be fit for social contact (('sozialfähig')) ((laughs)). Yes. (P9/127-131)

More specifically, during socialising gaming, part of one's attention *ought* to be directed towards the other players' current *emotional* states – something not reported for the other modes. Compare how differently situational norms play out in the following reports on card gaming sessions and *Singstar* by the same player:

Interviewer: Anything else that you keep an eye on apart from the actual cards?

P17: No. Perhaps, as I said, the interaction of the other players, but that's something you notice anyhow.

Interviewer: What does interaction mean?

P17: Well, if somebody, let's say, somewhere then, so, is mega frustrated or something. So when, if you notice that somebody is extremely angry because he loses the whole time. (P17/782-788)

Interviewer: Are there differences between the different genres? Regarding how attentive you are, how much you can also do something else, whether you're getting distracted or not?

P7: I think yes, because it's (3s) but it's also, I believe it also depends on what you fancy. So depending what, where you, where you put your preferences with the game, yes. So if that's *Singstar* for instance, where you play something together, and then not only the interaction on the screen is important, but the interaction among each other, which happens in the living room, with your friends and everyone laughs together, and has a drink. There it's okay I think. But if you, if you are focused on something together as a team or alone, to reach a goal then I think it's, so, so an adventure or role-playing game, or sports game, there you can hardly unglue yourself. (P7/167-172)

In engrossing gaming with adventures, RPGs, and simulations, players reported that their attention was usually less focused on game rules and goals, or other players, and more on the game fiction or story:

Interviewer: What do you actively notice then?

P9: Yes. Definitely a stronger focus on the, the, the story, on, on the, on the world that presented to me there. Then I can identify more strongly with the avatar I play, I would say. (P9/234-235)

P1: There is the situation that I have a game that places great emphasis on the narrative. That is, I want to experience a story, and then I have to bring myself into a state, somehow, where I am ready, like, to take that in, that means it's nothing I can do on the side. (P1-2/47)

As noted in the previous section, players would actively configure their whole gaming setting to optimally afford engrossment in the game state. Additionally, in terms of their own practice, they would actively cease parallel activities like checking e-mail or social media notifications – something the same interviewees reported they felt they had to keep themselves accessible to during instrumental review gaming.

Summary and Conclusions

When it comes to attention, the ground rules of video, board, and card gaming are very much alike: respecting other players' 'hidden' tracks in games of asymmetric information, overtly display that they care about the game and about winning it, and attentive focus on the game state. New in comparison to Goffman's observation is again the variation of how deeply to focus on what across the different gaming modes: a more distractible focus on gameplay in relaxing gaming, a general openness towards participants and side engagements in the wider gaming encounter in socialising gaming (complete with at least partial attention devoted to their emotional states), intense absorption in game fiction in engrossing gaming, equally intense focus on the game state in hardcore and competitive gaming. Other novel aspects emerging in video gaming are single-player and real-time gaming, which were also seen to impact attention norms: Whereas participation norms especially in pre-scheduled multiplayer gaming might sometimes lead the individual to game despite not being spontaneously attentively absorbed by the game, in solitary gaming, players simply switch the game or cease gaming. If there is pressure on the player to play attention, it comes from single-player games where the

game itself continually changes game states even without the player taking action – in a sense, social participation norms are replaced by material participation requirements.

6.6 Emotion and Emotion Display

Interviewees reported that video gaming comes with a relatively narrow spectrum of typical affective states, first and foremost positive experiences of success and negative experiences of frustration. After that, fear and arousal were named as the most frequent. The main difference between the different modes was sheer intensity of emotions, with relaxing gaming involving the weakest and hardcore and competitive gaming the strongest. In addition, hardcore and competitive gaming were the only modes where feelings of strong anger or even aggressiveness towards oneself or others were reported as frequent – and even appropriate.

Self-Regulation of Emotion Display

No matter what the actual emotions experienced, interviewees reported that they would regulate what emotions they openly display during video gaming. Social closeness again seemed to affect the degree of such self-regulation. Interviewees described solitary gaming as a context where they felt no need to self-regulate – players were mostly at a loss to report any norms of emotion regulation for (predominantly solitary) relaxing, engrossing, and hardcore gaming:

Interviewer: ((When you're playing on the iPad, are)) there any feelings that one should better control, not show openly?

P17: No. There I am by myself. I have no contact with others and when I don't want to anymore, I stop. (P17/738-740)

After solitary gaming, competitive anonymous online multiplayer gaming was reported to be the most 'unhinged' when it came to emotion display. Interviewees noted that they perceived the competitive context to be more appropriate for openly venting aggressive states, that the anonymity meant they felt less of a moral commitment, and that one could show one's emotions because such displays would not be communicated by the game infrastructure:

Interviewer: How is it when you're playing online? Is it the same?

P19: There you get agitated... There you usually sit alone here and then you get even more, so I sometimes get loud, or something. But ((puffs)).

Interviewer: So while you're in front, while you play [you work yourself-]

P19: [Yes, exactly,] while I play. Yes (3s) what do I know, you say <<Shit hobo!>>, or something, and... but he doesn't, he doesn't hear it then. So it's not like he would notice it, or so. But yes, so there it's not so...

Interviewer: And that would not happen when you're playing with friends on your couch?

P19: Yes, I think I wouldn't insult them. (...)

Interviewer: Okay. But, would you, when you sit with your friends on a table, get upset as well? So?

P19: Yes, you get upset as well. Sure. But that's then:::, yes, that's then not as permanent and not as loudly. So if you sit alone here, then you more often let your feelings run free, than if you sit together with a group or so, and get upset about something. (P19/89-96)

In bodily co-present gaming, the strength of social ties showed an interesting inverse relation. For players to openly display emotion or engage in teasing and similar behaviours, a certain base level of tie strength or trust was seen to be required:

P7: Getting a bit upset is okay. Also to give the other a bit, I also find it okay, if you just pulled the ball between his legs and he, or you had a wonderful goal against him, and then provoke him naughtily. (3s) But that you only do with friends. So I don't think that I would like that, if I would stand at a console in the supermarket, or at the Media Markt or somewhere, and play against someone unknown there, then, then I might show him my triumph, but, but I don't let him feel, that he is an asshole. Or that I just, let's say that I just took him for a ride. Instead I just show him that I won, I'm happy about that, and showing happiness is okay then. But I believe it is, in, this, it's like a social norm: So I think, when I, with friends I can be a bit more rough, especially if I know them a little longer. With, with unknown people I'm a bit more restrained, I think. (P7/231-237)

Competitive gaming in specific showed a fascinating internal tension when it came to emotion display. On the one hand, the arousal, involvement, even aggression generated through mutual teasing is a desired part of its enjoyment, because it is mutually understood to be 'non-serious':

P4: Anger, aggression when you're playing video games together with, (2s) via network, via Internet, (3s) those are all things accompanying gameplay, that are often also playful. That are intended as provocations and similar, or simply the outer, your own frustration about the gaming, that you don't really play badly. But it's nothing negat-

Interviewer: Okay.

P4: Nothing that is wrong or so. Goes in the wrong direction.

Interviewer: Any situation, where you, when you say frustration or aggression, do you remember a situation where somebody took that the wrong way?

P4: *No*, no, no. That's with the people with whom I've played up to now, so that they (3s) take that in a way, that it shows me, they see that similarly. Evaluate that in the same way, are apparently (2s) socialised similarly, know that that's part of gaming and not meant in a malign manner, is even even part of the whole. (P4/600-608)

On the other hand, especially for players with a more intense gaming biography whose self is invested in their gaming skills, hardcore and competitive gaming come with certain expectations of gameworthy poise. As one interviewee put it, if he became frustrated over a certain passage in a game, openly displaying it would be an admittance of one's own lack of skill:

P4: There your own gamer ego is hurt, and because of that you wouldn't show that immediately. First you would try to solve that in the background, the conflict, and then still to triumph over your own frustration. And that you would then show outwardly. The triumph. (P4/460)

Another player noted that even though he might feel strong 'hatred' against another player beating him repeatedly, he would not reveal that:

P5: Hatred. Hatred, yes. So hatred ((breathes deeply)), if you, so when I'm continually killed by the same player, then you effectively develop such a kind of hatred. But that's not like I would have something against that human being personally, but simply against the way he plays. So tha- that's effectively also an admission that you are inferior. (3s) But that I would (2s) wouldn't say.

Interviewer: What kind of reaction do you show instead?

P5: Nothing.

Interviewer: Nothing.

P5: No, that's really. There I completely contain myself. Because that, that is, as I said, such a matter of honour. (P5-1/187-191)

Part of this honour of gamesmanship was to adhere to a certain etiquette of greeting and congratulating the other player, no matter how frustrated one might be – thus reasserting that the game is happening 'in good spirit' and oneself is a good gamer. The following observation on online multiplayer shooters is quite representative:

P5: So that was quite usual with the smaller multiplayer, so with *Counterstrike* and with *Quake*, that after the game you simply wrote a <<Good Game>>. So that (2s) always made sense. No matter whether lost or won, <<Good Game>> is always something like the handshake after handball, or after the soccer match. (3s) But that, (5s) if I write that, I mean it like that. No matter whether we lost or

won, that's, that's part of it. Sort of a, a thank you. Exactly, just like before the game begins, now in league games back then you wrote this <<HF>> and <<GL>>, so <<Have Fun and Good Luck>>. That was part of it. (P5-1/228)

Beyond matters of gamespersonship honour, general norms of politeness were also cited as impacting emotional expression. For instance, when team members in cooperative hardcore gaming are instructing or critiquing each other, interviewees noted that they should watch out not to formulate critique or use a voice that could be perceived as a personal attack.

Collective Emotion and Arousal Modulation

Picking up on Durkheim's (1915: 226) notion of 'collective effervescence' and Goffman's derived argument that attentive absorption and arousal are amplified if shared and impede each other if not (Goffman 1967: 113, 1972: 35; 1986: 346; 1983: 3), Collins (2004) has recently suggested that the attunement of attention, action, and emotion in response-present interaction can give rise to strong experiences of relatedness and 'emotional energy' – an argument similar to but going beyond that of social presence research (Gajadhar 2012). This interaction of response-present participants' emotions and arousal came out strongly in the data. Interviewees noted that seeing other players openly display the same emotion and arousal they experienced would give them the license to openly display their emotional state as well, and would amplify it, which came with a feeling of relatedness. Take the following interviewee comparing his experience of solitary gaming of *StarCraft* with that of playing it together with a friend in bodily co-presence:

P10: Of course also, like, the, the winning. But just as well (5s) yes:: also the, the shared experience, somehow, of it. So that you, when I, when I play *StarCraft* alone at home and win, then I also say <<Puh>> ((exhales)). But that way, you also work each other up a little. That is because you, like, communicate so much with each other and then also a bit, then also oft-, just also curse verbally somehow about the enemy who just ran a, a shit strategy or crush you in the end. Or that you crush *them*, and then you hit them over once more, verbally, and then after a, after a win, then you also make a high five. So there the experience is something totally different. (P10/284-285)

This collective amplification effect extends to onlookers. As Goffman observed, once a situation includes ratified onlookers, it becomes at least partially a public performance, which in the case of games and sports entails the license for players to act out emotion, as that contributes to the onlookers' involvement (Goffman 1986: 570). This became apparent in e-sport athletes reporting on tournaments with live, bodily co-present audiences, but also in socialising and competitive gaming. As one athlete reports in the following excerpt, in such situations, emotion is amplified, and otherwise purely strategic communication ('calling the shots') became laced with emotion and arousal. He shouted out his feelings about an in-game success in a highly visible manner, noting that in retrospect this could appear as somewhat weird behaviour, but felt appropriate at the time. As he notes, part of his heightened arousal stemmed from the fact that the co-present onlookers and co-players made highly salient to him the consequences of the outcomes of his actions:

P15: Yes, so, with an audience, that's, I haven't played in front of an audience that often, have only been in front of a real live audience I only played once. And actually, it wasn't different. The only

thing that is, if you for instance, there's a little difference, if you're training, there you usually call shots in a normal manner. And when you have a real league game, then you get more energetic calls. That is, there people really scream so that you react quickly, there is much more power behind it, and for instance at the video game exhibition I had a situation where I got an important round, and there I have- the audience, I just stood up and screamed how good I am. Even if in retrospect it sounds actually quite: <<What did I do *there*?>> But that simply had to get out, because I just wanted to scream: <<Crazy good!>> And that's just a gorgeous feeling then, when you get such a round, in front of an audience.

Interviewer: Yes. What are, during tournament games, or during, during playing in front of an audience, what are typical emotions? So feeling good. Are there, are there other typical feelings you have then?

P15: Yes, well, especially when you play on LAN, also in front of an audience, you rejoice more, because you see your teammates, you can, when he ((got)) something important, you can shake him and say, like: <<Great, man!>> But just like that it is, when you see your team loses a round very narrowly, then you get just as upset of course. Then all five sometimes sit like... ((makes depressed face)) and are just upset. And yes, the emotions are a bit higher on a LAN, there it's a bit more-

Interviewer: Yes. Anger. Happiness. Are there other emotions?

P15: So, nervousness. That is, has a big role, as I said. Later that goes away, but especially in front of an audience, even if you switch it off, it is, I especially feel that. When, when it's a one against one situation. Four enemies are dead already, and four of your own team are dead already, and then you have one against one. Then you sometimes do notice your heart beat, so. Then, I mean: you have to get that round. You have to keep your team in the tier. And then you get nervous. (P15/275-285)

Interviewees also reported actively managing this collective amplification to achieve situationally appropriate shared emotion and arousal. This practice of *up- and downtalking* was a pervasive and indeed constitutive part of multiplayer gaming, irrespective of mode or key. If onlookers or players were not observably involved in gameplay, they were perceived not to partake in the gaming encounter as a whole, and the most directly and easily observable form of involvement was to produce up- and downtalking utterances, response cries, facial expressions, or gestures that were synchronised with and understood to refer to gameplay.

Uptalking refers to emotion signalling of players and onlookers who fraternise with one player or player group through empathetically displaying an emotion similar to theirs – 'oohs', 'aahs', 'yeah's, 'no's, smiles, applause, air punches and the like –, through cheering, congratulating the player on a good outcome, and cheering her up on a bad one.

Downtalking (often called 'trashtalking' by the interviewees) refers to emotion signalling from players and onlookers who take the opposition of one player or player group through teasing (inviting the player to a challenge, implying or explicitly stating that he or she will not be able to overcome it), expressing one's own (or one player's) supremacy over another player, emphasising and overtly displaying satisfaction over one player's failure, verbally belittling a player's skills, even using verbal insults.

The emotional amplification gained from up- and downtalking was seen as a significant source of enjoyment and reason for multiplayer gaming, specifically in competitive gaming. Interestingly, up- and downtalking was seen to improve the emotional experience of *all* response-present participants, including the presumed opponent: overtly venting frustration over not being able to best another player would give the opposing player a satisfying sense of achievement and skill; conversely, failing to show any positive or negative emotion over one's

fate during gameplay would make one a 'spoilsport', devaluing the gaming instance as a whole, denying emotionally amplifying feedback to the others, and also creating dysphoric tension in them: because the expectation is that everybody ought to have fun, a participant visibly disengaged in the proceedings puts the moral demand on the others to monitor, try to cheer up, or not alienate the disengaged with one's own enjoyment. Due to this effect of up- and downtalking, producing an 'appropriate' amount of it was seen as an actual situational norm in gaming encounters with bodily co-present participants, for players as much as for onlookers:

P2: Yes, so in a group game, in a group game it is expected that you show elation when you have achieved something, somehow. That is, you should show that then. (3s) You should certainly also be appropriately frustrated when something doesn't work, and not say: <<Ahh, who cares.>> And then, not in online games, but in group situations like with the Kinect, there it's certainly also the case that you should appropriately be happy for somebody else, if somebody made a new high score, because that's certainly socially, like, desired. (P2/260)

In competitive gaming, up- and downtalking can also have a strategic function – for example, misportraying one's actual level of skill or making a player lose her cool:

P4: In the context of a competition, of playing together it's also a building block of the whole, (4s) to say something, to embellish your own successes, and the defeats of the others, or, respectively (2s), failures... to bolster them up as well. As a form of, (2s) yes simply teasing each other, that's part of gaming then, of the communal as well. (4s) The best example are things like, observing... such video game experts, when they play against each other. Like for instance those of Game One, MTV. They have a category that's called Royal Beef, where they play against each other and are observed by the camera. How they bad-mouth each other, how they provoke each other, try to... trick each other, to lure each other and everything. Those are of course also things that happen. Where you consciously display feelings to perhaps... signal somebody, I am the better gamer, or to mislead somebody. There you use that as well. But *only* in playing together. (P4/468-472)

Up- and downtalking seem to require a delicate situational balancing: noticing when it adds to or detracts from the overall involvement and enjoyment of the participants. Interviewees noted that up- and downtalking should be in tune with actual game events. Downtalking should be avoided if it threatens to 'seriously' hurt players' selves or emotions. For instance, if a player is noticeably in a bad mood for other reasons, that ought to be respected:

P15: For example, we had, let's say, when a player from my team, what also happened, for instance had just broken up with his girlfriend. Then you're a little down, or you're angry. And then, for instance, you should, when you notice that, shouldn't taunt him on top of that. For instance, if you for instance make some jokes he previously would have understood, and you notice: Hey, he is pretty hurt, something has happened. Let's better leave him in peace today. (P15/327)

More typically, though, downtalking gets toned down due to the current game state: the weaker and/or more 'behind' one player is, the greater the likelihood it will tip her into a state of non-contained frustration or feeling of unfairness, the more careful one ought to be with downtalking. Newcomers and beginners should therefore be spared downtalking, and when there is a clear imbalance of skills or successes, one ought to uptalk, not downtalk, the weaker player. During my field trips, I noticed how I myself initially teased my opponent quite a bit, but toned it down more and more as I was on a winning streak, to the point where I noticed the other player did not seem to have fun anymore, and I suggested switching to another game (where I presumed he might have better chances of winning). In another instance, a player in a

match of *Tekken 5* that tipped strongly into his favour would apologise, nervously laugh, and at the end offer accounts that would connect his victory not to his skill (and his opponent's lack thereof), but to the materiality of the game, namely, that the special moves of his avatar were easier to trigger and learn than those of his opponents' character. One further strategy interviewees reported was to defer game outcomes to chance, for instance by reminding the losing player of the overall distribution of losses and wins over a longer time range. Heide Smith (2006: 217-221) similarly reports many such interchanges to maintain a 'gaming climate', like praising the other players, encouraging them when they feel like their losing, or even apologising for taking a good move. Interviewees repeatedly emphasised that both up- and downtalking are 'just play', supposed to carry competition and involvement but still be taken 'not seriously'. Thus, turns of phrase, intonations and the like are chosen that display an ironic twist rather than direct aggression or celebration:

P19: Although, as said we have usually done that more a bit jokingly. So that you crack a remark or something, is what happens. And then nobody is immediately offended.

Interviewer: So jokingly is okay, [seriously meant is not okay?]

P19: ((coughs)) [Yes, so if you,] exactly, so if you tell them: <<Hey::, here, hm, you play a *really good* ball.>> So a little ironically or so, then that does happen. But, that's never so, that you would really put somebody down, or something. So then the others would properly also step in, because I, so I would probably do that. Because I think, that's not okay. (P19-1/86-89)

Finally, downtalking is completely inappropriate towards a co-player in cooperative gaming:

P3: So you can play against each other, but in so-called coop games, so with cooperative playing, that means to people play together, for instance a jump and run, *Donkey Kong Country* and so on. There it's improper to poke fun at the opponent, at your partner. That is, so you, your own, the, you, it, it, what always works for instance is to praise skills and to boast how hot you are yourself. But it's not allowed to put down the skills of the opponent with that. (P3-1/326)

Turning to modes, interviewees reported the strongest positive valuing of uptalking and devaluing of downtalking for socialising gaming. In contrast, downtalking was reported to be an appropriate part of competitive gaming, as long as it is not misunderstood as carrying malign intent. Anonymous competitive multiplayer online gaming showed the harshest form of downtalking, including overstepping the perceived boundary of verbal insults, something mostly associated with 'younger players'. Explains one online shooter clan gamer:

P5: I have to add to that, that we are all already a bit older in our clan. Back then we had a basic rule: <<No one gets in below 23.>> Because the so-called flaming, that's something that comes more from the younger generations. So the (3s), yes, complaints about weird playing styles or unfair playing styles, that had the consequence that people started to get personal.

Interviewer: What does flaming mean?

P5: Flaming in the end is, yes, bitching around. To put it bluntly. So, really throw around nasty words. (P5/70-72)

Summary and Conclusions

Interview data suggests that response-present others have a significant effect both on the display and the intensity of emotions experienced in a video gaming encounter. Through their sheer presence, emotion display, and active up- and downtalking, co-players and onlookers mutually modulate arousal and emotion. The more telic the agreed gaming mode, the higher

emotion and arousal fly, and the more downtalking is seen as appropriate. As a kind of counterbalance, telic modes at the same time make salient norms of maintaining cool and ‘professional’ good manners. Conversely, the more players trust each other due to tie strength, and/or the more a gaming encounter is a public performance, the more players feel inclined to openly show emotions. The more relatedness is relevant in the encounter, the more norms of watching out for the other players’ emotional state and adjusting one’s own emotion display and up- and downtalking are in force. In anonymous, mediated gaming encounters, the perceived absence of emotional monitoring and social consequence leads to players caring less about the other players’ emotional states, such that balanced up- and downtalking for the enhancement of shared arousal, emotion, and enjoyment devolves into what players perceive as pure ‘flaming’ or ‘trashtalking’.

6.7 Rules for Action and Communication

When it comes to the ground rules for actions, board and card gaming are characterised by the fact *that* there is a specified, formalised set of rules, the expectation being that players game by ‘letter and spirit’ of the rules, don’t cheat, and try to establish a skill balance at the outset of a game to provide optimal suspense. Most of these points we find in video gaming as well, though with certain additions and variations.

Focused Gaming

The first norm that showed in the data is that players should make an effort to understand the rules and controls of the game and make strategically sensible moves. Interviewees voiced frustration over players who would not do so even after repeated explanations or demonstrations. Modes mainly differed in the expected minimum level of understanding and control command. In socialising gaming, as this excerpt shows, only a basic grasp is required:

P17: What would annoy me is in fact a player, who doesn’t really... so one who can play, so one who, who continues to not understand the logic of the game and who then always gives somebody else good cards or gives me bad ((laughs)) cards. But I would, I think, not necessarily say that. (P17/680)

In fact, caring *too much* about rules and their enforcement to the letter was seen as an inappropriately high degree of telicity in socialising gaming. As one described party gaming events:

P2: So there are also, in gaming rounds that are then also a bit bigger sometimes, such people who just take the game too seriously in my eyes. Get upset about things that don’t work where not just me but ninety percent of the round says: <<Well, that’s not so bad now>> or so. And who then also, regarding the execution of the rules, are very nit-picky to an excessive degree. That’s something that gets noticed as inappropriate. (P2/264)

In contrast, in hardcore and competitive gaming, the interviewees appealed to much more sophisticated levels of strategy and tactics – basic understanding and control command were already presupposed. Take the following excerpt by a hardcore MMORPG raid player. When

prompted what it would mean ‘not to play correctly’, she spontaneously started discussing high-level strategy questions of optimal game statistics, items, and team members:

Interviewer: Yes. Or that you think of anything, where if you didn’t do that, where then the others would say: <<You’re not playing properly>>?

P18: Oh, no idea, there is so much. So, of course there are 150 different opinions. There are usually one or two that prevail, where there are people who really make the effort and calculate precisely for a class, what is how good and so, that for instance, let’s say tempo, willpower or something, all of that gets a certain score. And with that you then calculate how much that gets you. (...) So certainly there are things that are no-go, where you, where you, simply because it doesn’t make any sense. Where you do say sometimes: <<Man, have you looked at this?>> Or <<Enchanted in a completely wrong way.>> (P18/227-229)

Cooperation

A logical extension of the first norm, interviewees voiced the expectation that in cooperative multiplayer games, players should not only make strategically sensible moves for themselves, but actively monitor their team members and recognise and act on possibilities to help them:

P10: Yes:: okay, so you play in a team. Well, because, that also determines, like, the way you play, that you, like, most basic example, the other is being attacked and I don’t come to help him. So there this, this, this cooperative thought plays the biggest role, yes. Or that you also, dunno (3s), tell the other when there is something that might be important for him. (P10/386)

Again, these expectations were most sophisticated and salient in more telic, complex, and involved forms of multiplayer gaming. In MMORPG raids, interviewees reported calculating before a raid how many items of what kind would be needed, and each player would then have to contribute his or her share in advance by either paying virtual gold to buy the required material from the in-game auction house, or by ‘farming’ and depositing items in the virtual guild bank. Similarly, in multiplayer online shooters that support team play, interviewees reported that players were expected to act in their specified functional roles rather than taking the sometimes more satisfying route of just shooting opponents. Enforcing such role-according behaviour was supported by game features in that performing the designated actions of one’s role would earn larger amounts of points that counted towards the overall.

Skillplay

A further commonly mentioned expectation was that players ought to refrain from strategies that do not require the actual skills focused on in the game. In online shooters, for instance, it was considered good manners to not shoot a character if it was visible from its non-movement that the controlling player was ‘away from keyboard’ – doing so earned ‘cheap points’ that did not demonstrate game skill. This entails refraining from dominant strategies that leave opposing players no realistic chance right from the start, like positioning a sniper such that characters re-entering the ongoing game could be immediately killed again. Similarly, interviewees considered strategies inappropriate that effectively relied on chance in an instance where the ‘spirit of the game’ would demand a reliance on skill. In the real-time strategy game *StarCraft*, such strategies were called ‘cheesing’:

P10: Well, if you only cheese, that is, <<cheese> are early game all ins, that means you, you play an incredibly risky strategy right at the start, but if an attack, so a very early attack, but if that doesn't work, then you have lost. (...) So that's, and somebody who only plays like this, that is, that has no skill. That's also a bit bad mannered, when you always only play these all ins. And not also somehow sometimes real strategies. (...)

Interviewer: Why is that not a real strateg- real strategy?

P10: Well, there, there he might just as well throw a die, whether he wins or not. So that's such a, although the game, well, although the game doesn't have any luck or randomizer in that sense, that is a gamble. It would be as if I threw a die, with a one and two and three I win, with four, five, six the other wins. So.

Interviewer: Okay.

P10: Such things I find, as a player I somehow find that stupid, because I'm asking myself: <<So why are we playing then at all?>> And as an onlooker it's also plain boring. (P10/347-352)

Interesting in this excerpt is the implication that skillplay (and refraining from dominant strategies) shows care for the enjoyment of onlookers. Where Goffman argued that games predominantly serve to demonstrate skill and character, this suggests that the normative focus on skill is also at least for some players carried by other-regarding social motivations as well.

Not Breaking Game Flow

In multiplayer gaming, such care for the enjoyment of the others furthermore entails that one should try to minimise their waiting times. As in sports, one should not drag gameplay on when a winner is clear. In board gaming, interviewees also noted that spending large amounts of time on determining the 'correct' answer on an open rule question was sometimes less desirable than just finding a temporary answer that seems fair and reasonable to all players. Spending extended amounts of time on preparing for a round of gameplay was also seen as inappropriate, for example by configuring one's character or team in *FIFA*:

P19: Well, so we have a colleague with us who always needs really long to get his line up done. At the start he tinkers with his team, and here that guys there and this guy there, and he changes in his favourite players and so. (P19-1/59)

What amount of time was voiced as inappropriate was relative to player skill and average setup time. Longer setup times were seen as acceptable for 'newbies' or games where all players spent considerable time setting things up.

Playing to Win Versus Situational Harmony

One of the more interesting inherent tensions in gameplay was that between 'gameworthiness' (Goffman 1969) and relatedness or situational harmony. On the one hand, even in socialising gaming, interviewees voiced strongly that players ought to make the best possible move to achieve the game goal – to do otherwise was seen as 'not really playing':

P12: Well, so I think, if you have the possibility of keeping somebody from winning, then you should do that. So, yes, that's what I think. That is, not being compassionate with the other player, because that I find, that is also playing half-heartedly, in the end. (P12/233)

On the other hand, participants just as steadfastly reported that opponents ought to try to balance their skill levels, for instance by forming teams that evenly distribute weaker and

stronger players – although from a purely strategic, ‘gameworthy’ perspective, it would make sense to try to set up a team at maximise one’s chances of winning. Take another example: One interviewee observed that since the amount of gameplay experience strongly affects the odds of winning, when two players game against each other with time in between, one should not intentionally try to clock more gameplay hours in that interstice than the other, or even allow the other to play herself ‘warm’ before re-entering a competitive player-versus-player match. Note though that this view was far from universally shared – others reported intentionally gaming a game alone for a couple of hours to gain a little ‘home advantage’ before friends came over for a shared gaming night. More important than the actual contours and variations of such balancing norms is the general observation that gameworthiness does not unilaterally dominate gameplay, but is in dialogue with balancing expectations.

A second, even more frequently voiced counterpoint to gameworthiness was self-handicapping. Interviewees reported not taking the best possible move if they felt that another players might be emotionally hurt by losing with too much of a margin:

P11: I also had that with my former girlfriend, who wasn’t the best loser, I’d say. And when it went downhill a bit, (...) then you sometimes (3s) acted a bit differently than you would have usually. So that, you behaved differently, than, than-

Interviewer: How exactly differently?

P11: Didn’t make obvious moves to gain an advantage, for instance. That didn’t have to be necessarily, but that was somehow appropriate for the situation in that moment. Perhaps don’t celebrate just as much when you made something again and the other didn’t. That you adjust yourself a little to that. (P11/171-175)

Others reported self-handicapping strategies such as switching the game to a lower difficulty level, consciously choosing an in-game character that one knew to be weaker, or allowing the weaker player to ‘team up’ with onlookers who would give useful tips. Notably, the propensity to engage in such self-handicapping varied with social closeness and gaming mode: self-handicapping was most likely in bodily co-presence with close others and in socialising gaming, and least likely in competitive gaming with anonymous others online, as seen in the following excerpt comparing face-to-face gaming with friends with anonymous online gaming:

P19: That you don’t humiliate people with, that you don’t show *everything* you are capable of. So I am then usually like that, that a game I could win ten to zero, that it only ends two to zero. Because... then I’ll also try to play nicely, to come at it from the flank [in ??].

Interviewer: [How, how] is that if you play *FIFA* online?

P19: No, there you put out whatever you can. So there it’s really the case that you show what you have. (P19-2/47-49)

Note that the interviewee adjusted the situation to both make it more enjoyable (or at least, less frustrating) for the co-player and keep it interesting for himself by ‘trying to play nicely’, that is, attempting some more challenging strategies. What kind of onlooker help was appropriate likewise varied with gaming modes: in solitary and any form of cooperative multiplayer gaming, it is allowable and appropriate for onlookers to help as long as the player asks for help and does not want to solve a certain game challenge on her own.

P8: And my wife also always liked to play role-playing games, but she's not as good with the computer and, that's why we said: okay, we can also this together. My wife took notes, gave tips, especially with riddles she's very good, so that we solved the riddles together that came up. (P8/51)

In socialising gaming, onlooker help or encouragement is also considered appropriate as long as it improves rather than worsens balance between players and does not completely break the intended skill challenge by giving away supposed-hidden information. In competitive gaming, the amount of permissible onlooker help is smaller.

Cheating

Cheating was perceived by interviewees as making any kind of advantageous game move that would not be technically accessible to regular players. Thus, practices that were considered 'cheating' included using 'walkthroughs' (explanations of how to reach a certain game state not provided as part of the game); using save games of other players to directly jump to a game state one did not reach on one's own account; using 'cracks' and 'mods', that is, additionally installed software that would allow changing in-game parameters in an advantageous manner; using 'cheat codes' built in by the game designers that would allow changing in-game parameters advantageously; and using special 'gamer' mice and keyboards that would allow programmed 'macros', i.e. a series of input commands automatically triggered on one button press, which can provide a significant speed advantage. What kind of advantage constituted an impermissible cheat was not always clearcut. One important aspect seemed to be whether the advantage directly connected to the perceived main skill tested in the game in question or not. Thus, one interviewee who emphatically stated he never used any kind of cheats and walkthroughs in leisurely gaming at the same time thought nothing of looking up unit statistics in *StarCraft* (which are not included in the game software itself) or details about the crafting system in an RPG in online wikis – presumably because acquiring or remembering that knowledge is arguably not the core skill of these games.

A second important differentiation was social closeness: As long as one is 'with oneself', one can basically interact with the game however one likes. The very idea of 'cheating' did not make sense to many interviewees when thinking about single-player gaming:

Interviewer: Is there something like cheating with *FarmVille*?

P12: (1s) No, I wouldn't say so. I don't think. So, I've never, never thought about that. But I don't think you can cheat. Because basically, everyone is tinkering for him- or herself. (P12/207-209)

Where interviewees saw cheating in single-player gaming inappropriate, this was usually connected to a motivational explanation: cheating would take the challenge and suspense out of the game. Hence, it was seen as sensible if one had already mastered the game and thus could not take any suspense or joy out of mastering it, or when one saw no possible way to overcome an in-game challenge any other way, that is, when a perceived impasse would itself become a roadblock to, rather than source of, enjoyment. Said one interviewee:

P11: I haven't used cheats in a long time. (...) Certainly, with *Tombraider* for instance, there you have to solve some riddles, and there I looked into a complete solution when I couldn't get any further. But I don't know whether that's cheating ('bescheißen'). I think it becomes cheating when you play against other humans and then get an advantage through that, I would say. When you do it against the computer, then I don't know. Then I don't care. (...) So I wouldn't, so I have, to get through a game, I never did that, but there are these god modes, when you don't, when you become invincible, have unlimited ammunition. I never used that.

Interviewer: Why?

P11: Because then it isn't fun anymore. Then it's too easy. Then I would, wouldn't have to play at all, because then it doesn't give me anything. Then I can, then you can just run through it and that's it. (P11-2/71-81)

In multiplayer gaming, in contrast, cheating was seen as impermissible. Both in single- and multiplayer gaming, the strength of devaluing cheating and distancing oneself from it seemed to be connected to interviewees' self-image as a gamer: if one treated video games a bit more 'seriously', 'professionally', then one would take pride in not cheating. One player marked it as a matter of pride to not use cheats when he was playing as part of an online shooter clan, but had no qualms cheating when he played on his own:

P5: Yes, in single player actually, actually nothing really matters. That is, it doesn't have any consequences. We represent our clan in multiplayer and then it's like this, that we in the mean time, we only have people on board who carry the clan tag with pride and don't want to present themselves as lammers of such. No, instead, we represent our clan. We are fair, we play clean, we play without cheats. (P5-1/102)

Rule Enforcement

That interviewees connected cheating in video gaming to game hardware and software brings us to a final point: how rules are enacted and enforced in video gaming. According to Bergström (2010: 91), in board and card gaming, whatever norm or rule organises a gaming instance, they are mainly enforced through verbal rebukes. Much more rarely, players might exclude others as future gaming partners, or even terminate a game mid-course. The main moral emotion that gaming norms hook into is fear of shame and embarrassment (Woods 2009: 281).

Scholars like Calleja (2012) and Liebe (2008) claim that players of video games need not mutually enforce or willingly abide by the rules because these are 'hard-coded' into the software and hardware. We countered this claim in the previous chapter with the double argument that (a) human players still need to *constitute* the activity in question as gaming and to willingly submit to gaming the video game in question, and that (b) cheating and 'unfair' behaviour in front of the computer screen still presented possibilities breaking rules not prevented by the game software. Looking at the interview data, the novelty of video gaming revolves not so much around the game equipment making rule-breaking impossible than around rule-breaking becoming *predominantly* a matter of *manipulating* the game equipment. (Similarly, when asked whether anything could 'go wrong' when video gaming, the first thing interviewees spontaneously mentioned were technical breakdowns, not human gaffes.)

Indeed, the very enforcement of a rule in video gaming was often reported to be a socio-material accomplishment. To illustrate this, let us look more closely at two excerpts from an

interview with an online clan gamer. As noted, online multiplayer clans are stable social groups that regularly game together and even collectively purchase and set up dedicated hardware like a server, where some clan members become the server administrator. In the case of our interviewee's clan, their preferred game was the multiplayer shooter *Battlefield*, and their dedicated infrastructure involved a private server as well as a homepage that outlined rules for permissible and impermissible in-game moves – though not all practically enforced rules were also written down, and many rules were written in a form already presupposing familiarity with the specialised language of the game community. That is, it included terms like 'spawn fragging', 'the tactic of taking up a position with a good view of an un-capturable "red flag" base, and continually killing opponents as they spawn, or using other methods to achieve such results',⁸⁶ neither of which are used anywhere in the game software itself, nor explained on the clan homepage. The following instance illustrates how the clan server's home rule against spawn fragging was enforced neither by the players alone, nor by the game, but in a socio-material assemblage of the two:

Interviewer: So how do you agree with the group that is there, with the people that play on a server: <<Hey, by the way, this is something we don't do, because this is unfair play>>?

P5: That completely depends on the server administrator. Or on the person who rented the server. That person always has the possibility to insert notifications. He also has the possibility of saying: <<Okay, guys, if you, if you spawn frag or do the so-called base raping, then you'll get kicked. After the third kick you get a ban and then you can forget it. Then you stay off the server.>>

Interviewer: Getting kicked means what?

P5: It means that you are excluded from the game for the moment. There are, I believe there are several possibilities- So I have never experienced myself being kicked, but I believe there is the possibility of setting the time, how long you have to stay off the server.

Interviewer: Who decides how that somebody gets kicked?

P5: That's controlled by the server admins. So the server admin himself has to be in the game. And he can then decide accordingly. So there's the server in Timbuktu for instance, where a friend of mine is admin and I just have to tell him: <<Look here, he's using rocket launchers on infantry. That's not okay.>> So, and with them, it's also a *written* law, that is, through the server notifications. And when I tell him that, then he says: <<Alright. Who was it?>> I say: <<Blah, Räuber84.>> And he says: <<Okay, goodbye, Räuber84.>>. And then he's out.

Interviewer: Okay. That means he doesn't look first, whether that person actually did that, but he trusts [that statement?]

P5: [Yes,] so I know him for forever, almost six, seven years now. And he completely trusts me there. Because, he, he knows me and I would never knowingly call out somebody although he didn't do anything. (P5-1/83-91)

In this episode, the rule itself was agreed upon and formalised by the player community. However, its enforcement required player activity – noticing an instance of rule violation, communicating it to the server administrator, initiating the ban of a player – in combination with game equipment: the server software enabling the administrator to write and send server notifications, and to block individual player accounts from the server. This coming-together itself was enabled by the technical means of communication between player and server administrator as much as by the trusting relationship of the two.

⁸⁶ See http://battlefield.wikia.com/wiki/Spawn_Killing, last accessed May 28, 2013.

In the next episode (concerning a rule not to use a certain weapon), we see that even the question of which rules are ‘hard-coded’ and which are enforced through player activity with the use of material equipment is malleable:

Interviewer: How is it communicated or determined: <<Hi, there is this rule>>, that you [can only have this one weapon now?]

P5: [That is,] there’s a server notification then, which pops up sporadically, where (4s) either it says <<Note the rules on our homepage>>, or the rules themselves are displayed. (...)

Interviewer: Can you, or have there also been situations where you could make that a hard setting? So that per team, only the following weapons [could be chosen, or similar?]

P5: [That happened later.] That happened later. Because there were always only problems with this one gentleman who didn’t care what the others did, the important thing was he got his weapon. And then that worked.

Interviewer: That happened later in: Later, someone from the clan configured [the server]?

P5: [Exactly.]

Interviewer: Set it in hard in the configuration, that [you can’t take that weapon?]

P5: [Right.] Right.

Interviewer: Okay. Was that previously already technically, theoretically possible and you just said, we rely on everyone being a sportsperson [here?]

P5: [Yes.] Exactly. That’s how it went first. And later it was installed administratively. (P5-1/59-68)

At first, the rule not to use the weapon was enforced just like the rule against spawn fragging through the combined means of communication and enforcement afforded by the software. Yet eventually, it became automated in the software. If one identified the ‘constitu(a)tive’ rules of a video game with those hard-coded in the software, this would make the game on this server a different game. Yet if we take a wider look at the overall socio-technical system, we see that one and the same rule was in force all the time, only instituted through different means.

Summary and Conclusions

In video gaming, players are expected to learn the basic game rules and controls and make an honest effort to determine and take the most advantageous game move. Players should refrain from moves and strategies that are technically possible but realise advantages not directly connected to the main skill tested in the game. Also, they should balance their gaming to win with a concern for the enjoyment of the others by self-handicapping, for example – though how much to care for the others, how deeply to learn the game, and how strongly to demand rule-according behaviour varies with gaming modes.

Interesting novel phenomena emerged around game objects and single-player gaming. Against arguments that rule enforcement in video games is constituted solely by the game software and hardware, data suggested it to be a socio-material accomplishment that centrally involves the game software and hardware. This does not present a categorical difference to board and card games: The material fact that *Monopoly* money is relatively difficult to counterfeit during a game takes part in the enforcement of its rules just as much as a player in the role of the bank watching that others do not illegally take money from the game box. Yet there certainly is a difference in degree if not quality: Because the game object dynamically responds to player moves in a rule-according way, where cheating in board and card games involves mainly

taking actions that are materially easily possible for involved players but do not constitute legal game moves, in video gaming, cheating is seen to mainly involve manipulating the game software or using advantageous information that is not immediately provided by it.

In single-player gaming, the ground rules are again far less salient: Here, players consider cheating not so much as a moral trespassing than a spoiling of one's own enjoyment. Only if they strongly connected their sense of self with being a gamer would they articulate cheating in single-player gaming not just as self-defeating, but inappropriate.

6.8 Relating to the World

Frame Limits

'Frame limits' define what events, actions and communications can expectably and permissibly become subject of a frame (Goffman 1986: 56, 49-52). In congruence with German public debates around video games, the two topics recurring throughout the interviews were depictions of violence and Nazism⁸⁷ – which may partially be a social desirability effect. Interestingly, interviewees distinguished between unjustified and justified depictions, in their reasoning drawing on the ethos of the mode they reported on. When they spoke about engrossing gaming, they argued that depictions of violence or Nazism were justified (if undesirable) if they were historically accurate, and thus supported immersion in the game fiction:

P8: So I don't like it if there are exaggerated depictions of violence in games. (...) Hm, there I ask myself: <<What for?>> Yes, that's nothing for the story. (2s) The ambiance is more disturbed by that for me, than it would transport it. On the other side, of course you have to say: When something is placed in a fantasy world, which is somehow close to the middle ages, and if you imagine the middle ages, then certainly there was a certain brutality prevalent. And, if you try to transport that through such means, then I can somehow understand that a bit. (P8/123)

P11: So, that doesn't need to be, that you have swastikas hanging on all the walls. (...) Unless you play games that take place during this time. (...) If you, what was it called, *Call of Duty*, for instance, that takes place during that time. There it would be strange when on these cars, I don't know, there would be a yellow flower. A swastika belongs there. So.

Interviewer: It belongs there because...?

P11: Well, because it is from that time, and it should, more or less reflect reality. (P11-2/137-145)

In contrast, interviewees reporting on hardcore gaming argued that depictions of violence that caused concern among onlookers were not meant 'seriously' and mainly served the enjoyable experience of achieving a game goal:

P3: And many people who were not socialised with video games, I spoke of *Bulletstorm* at the beginning, and there it's about spectacular killings. And if I jubilate because I achieved to first pull this guy close with the whip and then throw him into a loose electric wire, and then I jubilate, because I never, never achieved this type of death before. And that can cause real head shaking in people who don't play video games. So. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't talk about it afterwards, or so, or whatever, usually it's the case that I, that you then feel such a pressure to legitimate yourself, and you say: <<Well, it's not really like that.>> (P3-1/501-503)

⁸⁷ That depictions of Nazism were mentioned several times is likely a predicament of German media and youth protection laws that take a specifically strong stance towards them, which has led to many video games set in World War II to either not be openly sold or advertised, or to be amended for publication in Germany, which in turn has been a frequent subject in the German gaming community and media.

Gearing Into the World

Turning finally to how video gaming is 'geared into the world' (Goffman 1986: 248), that is, how phenomena of other situations can come to bear inside the gaming situation (and vice versa), Goffman (1972: 19) observed that in board and card games, neither the social status of participants nor the material, aesthetic, or emotional value of the gaming equipment should factor in. Gaming encounters are materially organised such that irreversible bodily and material consequences are minimised and replaced with socially negotiated ones that are just consequential enough to provide arousing suspense, without becoming so consequential that they would be a real threat (Goffman 1972: 262). This basic portrayal is borne out in the data for all modes of leisurely video gaming. Interviewees emphasised that letting gameplay affect other situations (and vice versa) was inappropriate, but that they themselves possessed the requisite framing literacies and self-control to keep the two apart. As one interviewee put it:

P9: Because, there, I differentiate that too much ((laughs)), that the game is still a game and in my private context doesn't have that much of an influence or can have far-reaching consequences. Because somehow it's still another area. It's its own world, which has nothing to do with my own world. (P9/234)

More specifically, events, actions, and communications from or about other situations were not supposed to manifest during gameplay if they impacted enjoyment – for example, voicing emotional distress that distracts from the game, playing in a sour mood that infects the others, or using the game to act out a personal grudge. Conversely, one ought to not let positive or negative emotions of the gaming situation affect later situations 'too much': one should not sulk, brag, or 'rub it in' 'excessively'. This essentially extends the norms for emotional up- and downtalking to what happens after gameplay: One should visibly enjoy one's victory – but watch out that one's display does not hurt the losers' feelings. As a loser, although one should put visible effort into winning until the last moment, when the game outcome is resolved, one should congratulate the winner and immediately stop minding the fact that one lost. These norms were articulated as not being a 'sore loser' or 'bad winner':

P17: No, you are a sore loser if you, if you burden the others with your own frustration. That means, when you vent your anger and, and, and you're in a sour mood and that becomes a burden for the others. So otherwise, I mean, that you get angry when you lose, that's alright. That's normal. You play in order to win and not to lose. But when you then become annoying for the others, because you get into a sour mood or say: <<I don't want to play anymore>> or are even offended... then, then I find that a sore loser. (P17/444)

P9: If you lose, you have to accept that and shouldn't play the offended, but continue to grin and bear it, stand above it. And a winner shouldn't celebrate too boisterously that he won. (P9/125)

Appropriate forms of relating to gaming instances in other situations are mainly talking with others about game experiences, and to inform oneself about games through websites and gaming journalism. As one interviewee put it:

P8: I separate that very strictly, so: work is work, and this is leisure, and, that doesn't go together, apart from the fact that you may talk about it with colleagues at work. (P8/265)

Even talking about games comes with norms: one ought not to become visibly invested with one's self in the gaming events: 'When there is too much blurring of game and real life in the sense that the person defines herself too much in terms of the game' (P4/478). As one interviewee noted, even if one cherished an in-game success higher than an out-of-game one, one should not make this visible to others:

P2: So, certain forms of relating to the game are not socially desired, and, well, if I ((have)) experiences of success in the game, when they are worth more to me than experiences of success in real life, then that's certainly something that you don't show overtly. (P2/258)

Indicators of such inappropriate self-investment noted by interviewees were strong emotional excitement, and talk that did not properly distance one's real person from one's in-game character through pronoun use and irony markers. Here is how one interviewee tried to make out what exactly put him off about the way that a colleague spoke of his in-game successes:

P4: If somebody, who sees that differently, and for that person it's extremely important, and he says: <<That is *me* who has advanced here>>, then that's something I don't understand. If he also signals happiness and says: <<Great.>> And for me it doesn't have just the appearance anymore, or just the: <<I had a success in the game and I'm proud that I achieved a certain point in the game, that is part of the game and I made another level.>> No, if the other says: <<I grew myself as a person>>, because he achieved something in the game. And this mixing, if I hear real floodings of emotion or something like that, that really isn't necessary. (P4/484)

Irony markers and footings point to the issue of metacommunication. Beyond the improper investment of self, another issue with actions and communications is that their framing may not be immediately intelligible to response-present others, thus breaking normal appearances. One interviewee told the story how one of his colleagues would re-enact in-game events, something he found inappropriate:

P5: So (4s) there is one person who ((smilingly)), who's happy, so that fine colleagues takes an extreme pleasure if he (3s) if he managed to finished a work colleague with a knife. So, and that he then also carries over into the company, and, ha, I'd say, generally, I separate that. I would never go and say: <<Haha, boy did I shoot you last night.>> And he's more the kind of colleague who gets pretty worked up about it and then he pulls the other colleague back, just like he finished him the last night with a knife. And then he's crazy happy and, I don't know, that doesn't, that doesn't have to be. Playing games and real life.

Interviewer: How do the others react in such a situation?

P5: Yes, we laugh about it then. So that's nothing, so there are not somehow offensive comments or any kind of glamourising. Just as I said, this presentation of how the knife kill took place. And then, then everyone who has played the game immediately knows what to do with that, but that was it then. (P5-1/235-237)

Note again the humorous effect generated by inappropriate-but-perceived-benign frame breaks, but also that this instance was seen as unproblematic *because* all response-present actors shared the gaming context and thus would 'immediately know what to do with it', i.e. how to frame an action that would be otherwise inappropriate and strange in a work environment.

The main inappropriate gearing of gaming situations mentioned again and again was 'addiction'. The shared sense was that one's involvement in games ought neither to determine one's daily life, nor negatively impact one's health, livelihood, or social and family life, and definitely not have any adverse effect on *other* people. Here is how one interviewee phrased it:

P8: So way back when there were friends who were so deeply immersed in games, stepped into them, that they forgot their surroundings and especially from my job- (...) there was a colleague, who, when *World of Warcraft* started back then, who fully got into it and that went so far that he- that his girlfriend left him. And he only showed up for work infrequently. Had health issues. And in the end it let to his being let off. I had to fire him. (...) That- the danger is there with games, that you get too... dependent on them, especially with role-playing games, certainly, with such epic things like, like *Skyrim* for instance. That you there forget your environment, family, whatever, the interaction with your environment. (P8/239)

For some interviewees, scheduling work and leisure time in order to be punctual for an MMORPG raid was already 'too much' game-affecting-life; social network game players themselves wondered whether arranging their workday around the appointment play of *FarmVille*, or ruminating about the game throughout the day, was 'too much'. Then again, social network game and MMORPG players also reported that they *did* schedule their day to fit the game, and found this appropriate. In response to the frequently voiced opinion that MMORPGs are the main 'culprit' of games harming life, some MMORPG players reported not openly sharing and discussing their game engagement with everyone.

Material Consequence

In terms of material consequence, the interviews paint a nuanced picture. In general, interviewees stated that leisurely gaming ought to have no material or other 'serious' consequences. Thus, damaging property as a consequence of gaming, like smashing a keyboard out of anger or accidentally destroying a television set with a slipped Wii controller, are definitely undesired. Along these lines, most interviewees found that virtual item sales in MMORPGs or social games are inappropriate as well:

Interviewer: So the auctioning off of virtual goods is-

P4: That has nothing to do with a game anymore, and therefore it is a boundary crossing for me.

Interviewer: Why? (3s)

P4: For me, the boundary seems to be very clear between a video game and the ((laughs)) real physical world out there, I'd say. To which money belongs, to which friendships belong, social relations, and similar. (P4/586-592)

P8: So I would also never spend money to buy additional armour or such. I don't accept that, that's:: money making and nothing more. No, I think, I am aware of that and, I draw a clear boundary for myself. Game is game and shouldn't have any effects into reality. At least also- *most importantly* not in monetary terms. (P8/283)

Interestingly, even players who did engage in virtual item purchases stated that they later questioned that behaviour. They were also careful to emphasise that the money they spent was only a small, non-serious, inconsequential amount: 'In the first place it should serve as entertainment and not as making or spending money' (P17/580), as one player put it.

Which brings us to a general point: *some* (material or other) consequence of video gaming was accepted, but only if it is 'very slightly consequential' (Goffman 1967: 269). Several interviewees reported that they had actively attached consequences to game outcomes to make gameplay more arousing. Gaming for money is acceptable (if seldom) because 'the thrill is bigger', but only if one plays for cents instead of 'for *real* money' (P11/337-345). For something to be

‘playing’, ‘what you play for has to remain playful as well’ (P4/518), like ‘who does the dishes.’ Yet what constitutes ‘slight’ consequence, ‘cents’ versus ‘real money’, ‘playful’ versus ‘real’ stakes is a relative, personal matter. Based on her income, one interviewee found spending a hundred Euros on virtual items still inconsequential enough.

Where material consequences of gaming became ‘serious’, interviewees started to refer to the activity as ‘gambling’ instead of gaming:

P19: Yes, for instance, that, because I think, that that’s not a serious consequence if you lose five Euros. So I wouldn’t have played for a pot of 500 Euros. Then I would have said: <<So, hey, guys, are you crazy? That’s too much>>, or something. So small amounts, if it’s, don’t know, a Euros or something or five, or ten. If you can afford it. Those are things I cannot understand, because I have known one person in our soccer team, with him I sometimes player Poker for money. And he had his 20 Euros he had for the rest of his week, for three or four days or something, he made it dependent on whether he won or not, whether it would be a good weekend or not. And there I just think, that goes too far. That is nothing that I want to have, because I want to have fun and play. (...) So that’s gambling, then, in my opinion. (P19-2/84-87)

Summary and Conclusions

Compared with what we already know about board and card gaming, the frame limits and gearing into the world of video gaming presented no real surprise: extreme depictions of violence were questioned (and partially justified in terms of the different gaming modes). Players should be ‘good winners’ or ‘good losers’, divesting their biographical self from the game outcome, and caring for the enjoyment of the opposing (winning or losing) party. Also, gaming ought not to have negative long-term symbolic or material consequences for oneself or others, something interviewees emphasised especially with regard to video gaming ‘addiction’. When it comes to material consequences, many interviewees found novel phenomena like real-money trading or virtual item sales inappropriate. Yet the ultimate evaluative yard stick remained the same Goffman already hypothesised: consequences are allowed as long as they do not become ‘serious’ – where ‘seriousness’ is a subjective matter of the individual player. Where monetary consequences become serious, interviewees categorised the activity as ‘gambling’ not ‘gaming.’

Maybe the most interesting thing to observe about the data is that the gearing of video gaming into the wider social world is not only accomplished during and immediately before and after a video gaming encounter, but also in *other* situations, such as in how one talks about one’s video gaming experiences. Just like the reality of a wedding is enacted in all situations that follow it, so is the *unreality* of gaming.

6.9 Summary and Conclusions

‘Really video gaming I do in that moment where I and the game, where we agree that we want to do something together now’. (P1-2/295)

The Ground Rules of Gaming, Revisited

Overlooking the previous sections, it becomes clear that the ‘unwritten rules’ of leisurely video gaming share some ground with those articulated by Goffman and others for leisurely board and card gaming: The dominant motivational relevancy is the autotelic pursuit of enjoyment, which involves the engrossment in gameplay itself. Players are expected to care about the game outcome and to be attentively focused on the game state. They ought to play by the rules and ‘spirit’ of the game. They are allowed more overt emotion display, especially under the presence of ratified onlookers, but should retain a ‘cool head’ all the while. And they should not take the game outcome ‘too seriously’ – wherefore games are allowed at most ‘slight’ consequences that support engrossment rather than induce anxiety.

Stepping outside this known and common ground, we found participation norms as an important aspect largely neglected by Goffman and others: norms whether to game, when to game, when to stop gaming, and who to game with. Similarly, we observed the importance and active configuration of the spatial embedding of video gaming: it takes place in settings that are socially deemed appropriate for gaming; provide shielding from harm, distraction, and potentially disapproving, non-ratified bystanders; and support optimal informational access to the game state, transparent configuration of the game controls, and a desired arousal level.

The main finding of the present chapter, however, was that there is no one ‘video gaming frame’, but rather a plurality of *modes of gaming*, which organise themselves around a central motivational relevancy: a specific *kind* of enjoyment, including a signature degree of telicity (goal and rule focus), arousal, and attentive absorption. Five such modes were identified that ‘tune’ the organisation of a video gaming encounter across all dimensions of its ground rules.

The tuning of a gaming encounter to a certain mode emerges from and aims to align individual needs, social contextures, and material features of the given situation. With the individual, we find a situationally dominant motivational relevancy. With social contextures, we find epistemic and normative expectations regarding gaming mode and social closeness: in single-player gaming, players find themselves mostly freed from any other-regarding norms and expectations. In multiplayer gaming, the salience of these norms and expectations varies with social closeness, or tie strength and response-presence: the stronger existing and future ties and the more response-present players are, the more salient they found norms and expectations. With material features, we find the time window, spatial setting, gaming device, and game software (genres). Different genres come with different requirements for attentive focus and the interface of the gaming device, and different afforded kinds of enjoyment, arousal lev-

els, and attentive absorption. Different devices afford different kinds of interface access to the game state and controls, which fit players' socialisation better or worse. Further important game features we found are initiation effort, participation dependency, and closure point span. These strongly affect how gaming encounters are embedded in the flow of people's lives, how salient participation norms are, and how gameplay is temporally organised. In solitary gaming, dysphoric tension occurs when individual needs and material features misalign: a controller does not work; a game challenge demands more focus and induces more arousal than desired; the player is tired, but the next save point is still twenty minutes away. In multiplayer gaming, dysphoric tension emerges from the interaction of individual needs, material features, and social contextures: gameplay spontaneously affords deep engrossment and a competitive mind, but the proprieties of socialising gaming at a party demand another stance.

Turning to the individual modes, in *relaxing gaming*, players are focused on relaxation, including a relatively low level of telicity, arousal, and attentive absorption. It typically occurs more or less spontaneously as a 'filler' activity to bridge time between main activities or recover from previous stress. Players may start, interrupt, and stop at more or less any time, can maintain parallel side activities, are not very attentively focused or invested in the game outcome. They typically experience no intense emotions nor the need to regulate their emotion display, and don't perceive any strong normative demands about how to game.

In *engrossing gaming*, players are focused on engrossment, including a medium level of telicity and arousal, and a high level of attentive absorption. Engrossing gaming typically occurs in a room and time of one's own. Players configure setting and time to ensure full attentive absorption predominantly in the game fiction for an extended uninterrupted period. Because it is usually solitary, players perceive little few demands about how to game or express their emotions. The main salient problems are that the game either does not spontaneously bind attention, or requires too long an involvement.

In *socialising gaming*, the main focus is relatedness, which comes with a low degree of telicity and attentive absorption, and a medium degree of arousal. Socialising gaming occurs as multiplayer gaming with extended pre- and post-proceedings and interruptions devoted to social interaction. Players ought to remain attentively accessible to such side involvements. There are strong salient norms to game 'nicely' and show 'proper' emotions to improve the overall enjoyment of the response-present group.

Experiences of competence from overcoming challenges and improving one's skills are the dominant motivational relevancy in *hardcore gaming*. This entails a strongly telic focus, high arousal, and high attentive absorption in gameplay. Players enforce norms of not cheating chiefly because this would ruin one's experience of competence in 'earned' achievements. Hardcore gaming can occur solitarily or as multiplayer, but in the latter case, it is typically team-versus-environment multiplayer.

Once gameplay moves to player-versus-player gaming, we find *competitive gaming*. Players strive for an experience of achievement, a publicly recognised demonstration of superior skill. This comes with the highest degrees of telicity, attentive absorption, and arousal in leisurely gaming. Not cheating is strongly enforced because it would hurt the direct link between player skill and game outcome required for legitimate experiences of achievement.

Between Self and Others, Involvement and Detachment

Zooming out, we see that video gaming is suspended between several opposing poles:

- Players are expected, allowed, and demanded to pursue their own enjoyment, but not be ‘too’ egocentric and not show up for a pre-planned game or leave before its closure.
- Players are to get invested in winning, but not ‘too’ invested: they are not to put winning above shared enjoyment, and they are to divest themselves from the outcome the moment the gaming encounter ends.
- Players are to take the strategically most advantageous moves, but not be ‘too’ aggressive. They are not to seek advantage beyond the rules and ‘the spirit’ of the game, nor to pursue dominant strategies or take on much weaker players such that other players have ‘no fair chance’. They are to seek a balancing of skills and even self-handicap if they see other players are in danger of being ‘really’ hurt in their self-worth or emotions.
- Players are to focus and enforce rules, but not be ‘too’ nit-picky to break interaction flow.
- Players are to focus attention on the game state, but not be ‘too’ deeply absorbed to be inaccessible for side involvements with others and lose sight of their emotional states.
- Players are to feel and openly display arousal and emotion, but not become ‘too’ excited that they lose the ability to calmly plan and execute strategically sensible action, become ‘seriously’ emotionally affected, or hurt the other players’ feelings.
- Players are to actively amplify arousal and emotion with up- and downtalking, but never be ‘too’ direct such that talk devolves into un-ironic bragging or flaming, nor ‘too’ intense such that it hurts the others’ feelings.

What plays out across all these dimensions is a balancing of *gameworthiness* as understood by Goffman (1969) with two other organising principles we might call *harmony* and *playworthiness*. (The term ‘organising principle’ is used to indicate that these are not just epistemic and normative expectations grounded in dispositions, but also instantiated in the material and practical organisation of settings, objects, actions, communications and events.)

For one, we see that gameworthiness in fact figures strongly in video gaming: it is a situation with the rare opportunity, license, and demand to be a strategic actor in the fullest sense, utterly egocentric and rational. We can and ought to focus entirely on maximising our payoff, strategically assess the system we are in, determine and execute the best possible move, detached from any emotional or other-regarding moral shading of our action. As long as we still

‘play by the rules’, any kind of bluffing, tricking, double-talking, out-maneuvering, or overpowering is par for the course and even lauded in their cunning and elegance. It is worth highlighting once more the very ‘strangeness’ of this organising principle: in few other social situations would such overt strategic action be appropriate.

Yet even in video gaming, *pure* gameworthiness is disapproved. Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 269-71) for instance distinguish ‘standard players’ from ‘dedicated players’ with a ‘special interest in mastering rules’ and an ‘intense interest in winning’, which are again separate from the ‘unsportsmanlike player’ who ‘violates the spirit of the game’ by ‘sacrificing ‘fun’ in exchange for a shortcut to victory’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 272). In RPG discourse, players who game in a purely gameworthy manner are devalued as ‘powergamers’ (Laws 2002: 4). As Taylor (2006: 71) nicely put it: ‘power gamers, while sharing the same world as their fellow players, seem to be at times *too* focused, *too* intent, *too* goal-oriented’. Another devaluing term for such players is ‘munchkin’ (Gribble 1994). To quote *Wikipedia* (2013):

In gaming, a munchkin is a player who plays what is intended to be a non-competitive game (usually a role-playing game) in an aggressively competitive manner. A munchkin seeks within the context of the game to amass the greatest power, score the most ‘kills’, and grab the most loot, no matter how detrimental their actions are to role-playing, the storyline, fairness, or the other players’ fun. The term is used almost exclusively as a pejorative and frequently in reference to powergamers.

This passage nicely articulates the first counter-pole to gameworthiness: ‘the other players’ fun’. Players are to honour participation norms, seek a balancing of skills, refrain from known dominant strategies, self-handicap, not break the flow of interaction by taking too long, remain attentive to side involvements and the others’ emotional states, make sure their emotion display and up- and downtalking improves the others’ mood – because all these things contribute to the other players’ fun. We might call this counter-balancing principle *harmony*. Juul (2010: 127) speaks of harmony as the ‘game as a social event’ frame, characterised by a ‘desire for [the] management of [a] social situation’. DeKoven (2010: n.p.) has called a situation where harmony is prevalent a ‘fun community’:

‘It is the nature of a fun community to care more about the players than about the game. If fun is what we truly want for each other, it matters less to us what game we are playing. ... We are caring. We are safe with each other. This is what we want. We are having fun together, even though we can’t name what game we’re playing’.

Where gameworthiness is prevalent, deKoven speaks of a ‘game community’. Here,

The conventions that we tend to enforce with each other are those which are more directly related to the maintenance of a particular game than they are to the establishment of a community. Winning takes precedence over establishing trust. Winning takes precedence over providing for the safety of the players. Winning even takes precedence over the willingness to have fun. The fun community becomes a game community, devoted to the pursuit of a particular game, measured in terms of our success or failure as players of that game.

We find a similar articulation in the concept of sportpersonship (Shields & Bredemeier 1995). In empirical studies on the moral reasoning happening in sport, Shields and Bredemeier (1995: 118-24) found what they call ‘game reasoning’: In sportive competitions, people’s moral reasoning is typically *more* egocentric than in other situations in life, an effect that was stronger for

athletes than amateurs, and men than women. However, this egocentricity was still couched in wider moral concerns, which Shields and Bredemeier call the 'bracketed morality' of sports:

First, the moral exchange that occurs in sport is different from that of daily life, where mature moral action is marked by attention to relational equalization in terms of obligations and benefits. Sports, however, is characterized by a greater degree of personal freedom and a lessening of relational responsibility. Focus on self-interest is not only allowed in sport, it is presupposed. But not all action supportive of self-interest is morally appropriate, even in sport; that is the second point. Bracketed morality connotes a form of moral action that is nested within a broader, more encompassing morality. ... It is set apart, yet it remains connected to the basic presuppositions of morality. For example, the focus on self-interest presupposes the moral necessity of guaranteeing initial conditions of fairness, procedural safeguards that insure fair opportunity throughout the process of play, and reasonable protections of physical well-being. (Shields & Bredemeier 1995: 120-2)

The virtue of sportspersonship, they continue to argue, is the 'mature' form of game reasoning: a 'good' sportsperson 'properly' balances the situation-internal, egocentric pursuit of winning with the external appreciation of the inconsequentiality of sport and its wider, overarching morality: 'we suggest that *sportspersonship* involves an intense striving to win combined with a commitment to the 'play spirit' of sport, such that ethical standards will take precedence over strategic gain when the two conflict' (Shields & Bredemeier 1995: 188). In the terms suggested here, sport is characterised by gameworthiness couched in harmony – and a 'good sport' is somebody who in the end will give harmony precedence over gameworthiness.

The interview data aligns well with these portrayals, but also calls for qualifications. First, deKoven and Shields and Bredemeier unanimously devalue a 'pure' 'game community' or egocentricity as a situation where individuals lost sight of their moral commitments. Yet as the data showed, *gameworthiness is itself a socially expected and enforced, epistemic and normative demand of gaming* (and likewise, an organising principle of its material configuration).

Both the gameworthy, egocentric 'will to win' and the harmonious 'intention to play well together' (DeKoven 2010) take hold in gaming encounters, but – that is the second qualification – *to varying degrees given the gaming mode in question*. While the fun community for deKoven is *always* preferable, the data suggests that enjoyable gameplay actively depends on not only a minimum of harmony, but also a certain minimum of gameworthiness – and that players sometimes prefer gaming in a competitive mode with high gameworthiness and low harmony. Similarly, Taylor notes that 'power gamers' 'consider their own play style quite reasonable, rational, and pleasurable' (Taylor 2006: 72). In this, she portrays power gaming as a relatively stable personality trait or gaming style of an individual. This may well be the case. But the data suggests that we should *also* understand it as part of a temporary, situational framing. The jointly enacted gaming mode articulates a specific balancing of gameworthiness and harmony, the *kind* of ethos or 'spirit of the game'. Conflicts emerge not when gaming is too gameworthy or not harmonious enough, but when players' perceptions, understandings, enactments of the *currently* 'proper' degree of gameworthiness and harmony misalign. It is on this basis that players can be legitimately critiqued as being 'too aggressive' or 'not paying enough attention'.

The modes' varying balances of gameworthiness and harmony arguably align with and facilitate their motivational relevancies: in socialising gaming, gameworthiness is muted and harmony maximised. Since the enjoyment of relatedness is at the centre, players should never be so intent on winning and absorbed in gameplay that they forget interacting with others or act in a way that would hurt them. Any such egotistic pursuance would create an experience of opposition and untrustworthiness, not relatedness. Here, uptalking that puts speaker and player in the same group is always preferable to distancing downtalking. Gameworthiness is kept at the minimum required to stoke enough suspense and arousal that they energise the collective experience of relatedness. Hardcore and competitive gaming present the polar opposite. Here, the main motivational relevancies are competence and achievement regarding skill and character through *problematic* situations. Anything that reduces problematicness or inserts effects on the outcome that are not tied to skill diminishes the sought enjoyment. Hence, gameworthiness is highly salient – cheating is strongly devalued and rules are strongly enforced – and harmony muted to a minimum to not interfere with the pursuance and experience of competence and achievement in a direct skill-outcome link. Players are given the social license to *fully* exercise and experience their strategic competence. They are not supposed to 'spare' each other in any way, such that a victory will be fully linked to their skills. This maximises a sense of achievement that is amplified further by the allowed intense uptalking, which provides public recognition of one's achievement. Similarly, players can maximally display character by remaining coolly detached despite 'unsparing' hits and the most 'harsh' teasing.

Moving on to the third qualification, whereas DeKoven sees 'game' and 'fun community' as ideal-typical poles of *all* play, interviewees articulated these norms as salient *only in multiplayer gaming, varying with social closeness*. Harmony norms were very salient in face-to-face encounters with friends and family (= strong social ties, presumed future interactions). In anonymous online gaming – with no past or future ties, little perceptual access to emotional cues, and little danger of bodily or symbolic harm – players typically thought nothing of aborting a game when it wasn't fun for them anymore, nor of using non-skill-linked dominant strategies. They neither self-handicapped nor modulated their emotion display and up- and downtalking to maintain harmony. Solitary gaming was repeatedly portrayed as a *liberating relief* from the demand of having to take others into account – a relief both materially afforded and socially expected and normed. If interviewees felt bound by harmony or gameworthiness in solitary or anonymous online gaming, then because this contributed to their own enjoyment, or they connected these norms to their own self as a gamer. 'Cheating' was seen as problematic only when it ruins the desired suspense and experience of competence and achievement, or when one's moral self-regard as a gamer forbids it (that is, thoughts about how specific others or a Generalised Other would think about oneself would one tell them that one had cheated).

Where *harmony* balances the gameworthy pursuit of one's own enjoyment with the enjoyment of others, *playworthiness* balances gameworthy telicity and investment in the game outcome with the paratelic, means-over-ends, detached-from-consequence character of play. Gameworthiness entails the ability, expectation, license, and demand to get fully invested in the game and its outcome. Playworthiness entails the ability, expectation, license, and demand to *not* fully invest one's self and emotions in the game outcome. It means treating a game as 'just a game'. Part of this detachment pertains to other-regarding harmony: Being a 'bad' winner or loser who brags or sulks too much again impinges on the other's enjoyment. But arguably, the larger part is self-regarding: For if we take a game 'too seriously', we likely spoil our own enjoyment. We begin to focus more on what self-worth we are to gain or lose in winning than on what pleasure the process of goal pursuit itself holds for us. We create a condition where a frustration or loss produces a displeasure that is the very opposite of what we sought in gaming in the first place. Playworthiness is obviously tied to gaming's inconsequential (or 'slightly' consequential) gearing into the world. The sociomaterial organisation of gaming affords that we treat it as 'just a game', but also comes with normative expectations: we *ought* to treat it as 'just a game', and we incur symbolic damages to our public self if we visibly take a leisurely game that is 'just for fun' 'too seriously'.

It is worth reiterating that gameworthiness, harmony, and playworthiness supposedly all serve to *support* the motivational relevancy of the mode in question. Gameworthiness affords our undiminished enjoyment of competence and achievement. Playworthiness safeguards that anxiety over the outcome does not overpower enjoyment. Harmony introduces regard for the others such that we can enjoy relatedness. Ultimately, if we thoroughly dislike a gaming encounter, even in socialising gaming, we ought to be able to not engage in it again, to leave the encounter, or at least legitimately complain that gaming is not enjoyable for us.

In summary, the ground rules of video gaming show a peculiar double balancing tuned to the specific mode – between self and others and between investment and divestment, that is, between gameworthiness (self-regarding, invested), harmony (other-regarding), and playworthiness (divestment). In contrast to traditional sports, board and card gaming, video gaming materially enables situations of solitary gaming and highly socially distant gaming where players need not exert effort to keep up overt appearances of harmony and playworthiness. That is, the 'legitimated regression' (Shields & Bredemeier 1995: 122) that sport and gaming already provide becomes even more articulated in solitary and anonymous gaming.

Modes and Motivations

Overall, gaming modes can be arranged as a spectrum ranging from low to high telicity, arousal, and attentive absorption, with the specific motivational relevancies being relaxation, relatedness, engrossment, competence, and achievement. This emerging total picture aligns

well with recent two-process models of entertainment experiences in video gaming (Reinecke et al. 2012, Vorderer & Reinecke 2012), which have tried to integrate more traditional theories of media enjoyment, notably Mood Management Theory (MMT), with theories of intrinsic motivation, notably Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

According to SDT (Deci & Ryan 2012), human well-being derives from and human activity strives towards experiences that satisfy three basic, innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence (a sense of affecting desired change in the world and of one's growing capacity to do so), and relatedness (a sense of intimate attachment to others). A series of experimental studies suggests that video gaming can provide strong experiences of intrinsic need satisfaction, which in turn explains to a significant extent what we call 'entertainment', 'enjoyment', or 'fun': Gaming well-designed games provides competence experiences of achieving goals and getting better; relatedness experiences of socialising and helping each other; and autonomy experiences of having a wide range of meaningful choice who to be, what goals to pursue, how to pursue them, and what actions to take (Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski 2006, Przybylski, Rigby & Ryan 2010, Tamborini et al. 2010, 2011, Rigby & Ryan 2011, Reinecke et al. 2012, Peng et al. 2012).

Following MMT (Zillman 1988, 1988a, Knobloch-Westerwick 2006), individuals selectively expose themselves to media stimuli to improve their current mood, managing two aspects of their psychological state: *arousal* and *attentive absorption*. Individuals alleviate the hypo-arousal of boredom or the hyper-arousal of stress through arousing or relaxing media stimuli, and improve or disrupt negative moods through media stimuli with a positive hedonic valence that absorb one's cognitive capacities such that no attention remains for ruminating on negative thoughts. Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 46) noted that acting 'with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life' is one of the eight signatures of optimal or 'flow' experiences. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) saw gaming as one of the main activities where flow experiences are likely. Researchers have recently begun to empirically explore the role of involvement for entertainment and media enjoyment, and the use of video gaming for mood management. Data suggests that video gaming and specific games are intentionally sought out for and effective in alleviating boredom and stress through managing arousal levels and providing distraction (Wirth 2006, 2012, Whitaker, Velez & Knobloch-Westerwick 2012).

Reinecke and colleagues (Reinecke et al. 2012, cf. Vorderer & Reinecke 2012) recently suggested a two-process model integrating MMT and SDT: media stimuli can be sought out to *distract from* and/or to *repair* the causes of negative mood or create causes of good mood. Individuals might seek out media to directly provide hedonic pleasure or positive affect while remaining in a relatively passive state of low effort: they receive media stimuli that generate a desired arousal level, come with a positively valenced affect, and absorb attention to stop ruminating. In addition, individuals might seek out media to directly generate experiences of

intrinsic need satisfaction to create positive or repair negative mood: a frustrating experience of failure or being bossed around at work, for instance, might thwart one's competence and autonomy needs and hence leave one in negative mood. Because video gaming can provide experiences of autonomy and competence need satisfaction, it might repair the thwarted needs and thus the origin of the negative mood.

This connects surprisingly well both to Goffman's general theories of response-present interaction and the present empirical findings. For one, arousal and attentive absorption as conceptualised by MMT plainly restate Goffman's conception of involvement. The two processes of media entertainment (distraction vs. repair or 'enjoyment' vs. 'appreciation', Vorderer & Reinecke 2012) fit the modes emerging from the data: relaxing and engrossing gaming are essentially two 'flavours' of distraction-enjoyment, differing in the intensity of involvement. Hardcore and competitive gaming in contrast can be seen as forms of need-satisfying appreciation. As Vorderer and Reinecke (2012: 23) note, activities of this type can be pursued even if they are not *directly* pleasurable, which is borne out by the frequent reported incidents of frustration in hardcore and competitive gaming but patently absent in relaxing gaming.

What frame analysis adds to this line of argument is unsurprisingly a social dimension. First, Goffman argued that matching spontaneous involvement of multiple participants in a situation tends to amplify itself, whereas mismatching involvement tends to dissolve itself. We have seen that 'proper' investment in learning the game and trying to make strategically sensible moves are a normative demand in multiplayer gaming. We have also seen that mutual emotional attunement and amplification (through up- and downtalking, cheering, teasing, etc.) is extremely common in multiplayer gaming. Second, individuals do not simply freely pick and choose their actions (such as media consumption) and resultant involvement: they have to gear their situational needs and actions, their foci and depth of involvement into the normative proprieties of the situation at hand. Translated into the language of media selection and entertainment, this means that given a choice, actors will seek out activities (including engagement with media) where they believe their current needs will align not just with the material affordances (relaxing games when in need of recovery, challenging games when in need of competence), but also with the normative proprieties of the present situation. This pertains both to the surrounding wider situation (no *Wii Bowling* at a funeral) and to the jointly negotiated and enacted mode of gaming itself: no *Battlefield* during socialising gaming. Third and finally, what actors individually choose or collectively negotiate to pick is not so much a game as a (pre-prepared, situationally configured and adjusted) total configuration of software, hardware, settings, and co-players that best fits the desired gaming mode while not requiring too much configuration effort and fitting into the available time window.

7 Instrumental Keyings

We can finally bring our attention to one of the driving reasons for game studies' turn to frame analysis: a series of scholars has argued that 'instrumental play' (Taylor 2006: 59) troubles contemporary conceptions of 'fun' and 'games' on at least two accounts. First, authors like Taylor (2006), Yee (2006), Malaby (2007), Dibbell (2008) or Nardi (2009) hold that the opposition 'work *versus* play' engrained in Huizinga's (1955) or Caillois' (2001) theories of play and games is a Western modernist rhetoric exploded by contemporary phenomena like work-like grinding in MMORPGs, 'power gaming', or virtual item sales: they show that gaming can be highly full of effort, stress, pain, tedious repetition, and serious consequence – qualities 'we' usually associate with 'work'. Conversely, even if gaming has structural properties familiar from work and officially becomes waged work, as in the case of goldfarming, individual goldfarmers still sometimes display playful enjoyment of said gaming (Dibbell 2008).

Second, authors like Sicart (2011) argue that the current instrumentalisation of games for serious purposes rests of the flawed belief that a game's 'meaning' is already determined by the rules of the game object, a belief Sicart dubs 'proceduralism'. Against this, he holds that meaning-making is ultimately determined by the players in the process of playing the game:

Play, again, is an act of appropriation of the game by players. This understanding of play contradicts the designer-dominant perspective of the proceduralists, all too focused on rules and systems and their meaning. Play, for being productive, should be a free, flexible, and negotiated activity, framed by rules but not determined by them. The meaning of a game, its essence, is not determined by the rules, but by the way players engage with those rules, by the way players play. The meaning of games, then, is played, not procedurally generated. (Sicart 2011: n.p.)

In her ethnography of 'power gamers' – gamers who invest immense amounts of effort and time in mastering a particular game, acting in the eyes of other gamers 'too focused, too intent, too goal-oriented' (Taylor 2006: 71) – Taylor arrives at the same conclusion through different ways. The instrumental play of power gamers and the negative reactions it engenders empirically *demonstrate* that one and the same game is often played in radically different ways: 'we would be well served to tease out specificities around not only different game genres but styles of play, forms of interaction/communication, and the various pleasures of gaming. The variety

of subject positions and forms of engagement available to players can help us understand the lived meanings of play in diverse sets of communities' (Taylor 2006: 92).

This, in essence, has been the argument developed so far: based on socially shared frames, actors can and do frame their engagement with a video game in different ways. On closer inspection, even 'video gaming' entails a *multitude* of diverse frames, a 'variety of subject positions and forms of engagement' organised around 'the various pleasures of gaming', in Taylor's terms. Her portrait of power gamers mirrors the gaming modes of hardcore and competitive gaming. Such modes, now following Sicart, have to be situationally enacted, realised in a framing process that is afforded but not determined by the game object. Put differently, frame analysis offers a systematic theoretical approach to video gaming that accounts for Taylor's 'variety' and Sicart's 'negotiated activity' while steering a socio-material, relational middle course between social constructionism and technical determinism. The argument of the present section is that frame analysis can *also* account for the *other* trouble caused by instrumental play: its questioning of the 'work versus play' dichotomy.

The previous section ended on the observation that people seek out (and configure) situations where their individual needs align with material affordances and social proprieties. Part of the fun in games, Goffman (1953: 243-57, 1972: 38-41) argued, results from the 'euphoric ease' of the *spontaneous* alignment of the three. In turn, this section will demonstrate that the *displeasure* associated with instrumentalised forms of video gaming arises from the mismatching of individual needs and situational proprieties generated by the keying of video gaming into work: what Goffman called 'dysphoric tension', a state of self-conscious, effortful self-monitoring and control to fit oneself into situational demands. This tension, it will be argued, is connected to autonomy and appears both in non-instrumental, leisurely modes and instrumental keyings of gaming. Together, the concepts of keying, autonomy, and dysphoric tension offer an empirically grounded unpacking of how people *frame* activities as playing or working, and when and why activities *feel like* play or work, even if framed differently.

The argument will unfold as follows: first, we will detail the concept of keying as applied to video gaming. Second, we will outline the four instrumental keyings that emerged from the interview data. We will then turn to the troubles of the 'work versus play' dichotomy, arguing that the concept of autonomy (as understood in SDT) can address them, because it articulates a causal connection between voluntariness and consequentiality: certain consequences afford the experience of lacking voluntariness. Interview data suggests that instrumental keyings thwart contextual autonomy supports found in leisurely gaming. Returning to Goffman's notions of euphoric ease and dysphoric tension, the final section will demonstrate that participants *both* in leisurely gaming and instrumental keyings report moments of gaming feeling like work when the situationally salient mismatch of current individual needs, material affordances, and social proprieties gives rise to an experience of lacking autonomy.

7.1 Keyings of Video Gaming

To remind ourselves one final time, a keying is a 'systematic transformation' (or secondary framing) of an already-framed situation that usually changes its organisation only little, but its perception, understanding, and experience very markedly (Goffman 1986: 45). Playful keyings are a ready example: 'Just as it is possible to play at quite instrumentally oriented activities, such as carpentry, so it is also possible to play at rituals such as marriage ceremonies' (Goffman 1986: 45). In video gaming, we have already encountered keyings as *internal* laminations of a gaming encounter: when a pen-and-paper RPG player enacts a character, say, and that character itself plays a character in a theatre piece, this would be a theatric keying of the game fiction, which itself is a keying of the player's activity. Yet keyings can also be laminated *externally*. Goffman gave the example of practicing poker: The activity is still visibly poker – participants go through all the motions (taking cards, raising stakes, and so on). But they jointly understand and enact that it is only a *practice* gamble. In the end, chips are not exchanged into real money – wherefore the practice keying of poker may quickly devolve into a *mock* keying with ridiculous stakes (Goffman 1986: 366).

Keyings, like modes, can be more or less institutionalised and broadly shared, and more or less transient or enduring in a given stretch of activity. Hung (2011: 131-51) has documented 'training' as one relatively spontaneous and temporary keying of video gaming – another instance of the practicing key (Goffman 1986: 59). When children are training in video gaming, Hung observed, losing does not 'mean' anything, and players are allowed and encouraged to repeat the same movement over and over until they have mastered it, while the others do not attack them; scores are not being kept, and players do not keep strategic information hidden from each other. In 'regular play' (as the players themselves called it), where the agreed-upon goal is to try to win the game, all these actions and normative licenses would simply not make sense. This is a major difference between modes and keys: different modes are merely different emphases regarding the same overarching goal of a situation. In modes, a particular action might be deemed more or less *inappropriate* given the avowed motivational relevancy (like goal-oriented play in socialising gaming), but it would still be *intelligible*. In keyings, the whole understanding 'what it is that's going on here' changes with the overarching goal of the activity. In a wedding rehearsal, the goal is not to marry two persons, but to test and ensure no problems will occur during the actual procedure. Similarly, in training gaming, the overarching goal is not to enjoy the pursuit of winning, but to learn a certain move.

Keyings can be institutionalised to the point where they become primary frames themselves (Goffman 1986: 58-66). Arguably, e-sports are on their way there. They emerged from spontaneously and locally organised multiplayer gaming sessions in private homes that grew during the 1990s into larger and larger connected communities organising formal events – LAN parties – in which players from distant geographic locations could convene to play. LAN

parties gave rise to at first spontaneous and disconnected tournament play, keying leisurely competitive gaming into *sportive competitions*. Over time, these were increasingly stabilised, formalised, and institutionalised by the community, industry sponsors, and even government stakeholders (in South Korea) into *e-sports*, comprising specialised settings and objects, changing motivational relevancies, rules, and so on (Tepe 2005, Taylor 2012).

Instrumental Keyings of Video Gaming

In sum, there are many ways in which video gaming might be transformed through external laminations. *Instrumental* keyings are just one – interesting – subset. Most importantly, *the interviewees themselves considered ‘what it is that’s going on here’ during instrumental gaming as different from leisurely gaming*. They used their own emic terms to distinguish leisurely gaming from instrumental keyings, such as ‘contemplative playing’ versus ‘professional playing’, ‘recreational playing’ versus ‘playing for work’, or gaming ‘for fun’ versus ‘seriously’. As we will see, the chief experiential quality that differentiated instrumental keyings from leisurely gaming was a lacking sense of autonomy and intrinsic enjoyment. Here is one excerpt from a game designer deliberating on her experience of lacking autonomy when gaming is part of her work:

Interviewer: How is that in the work context, when you game and have the feeling that it is not voluntary? How is that experience? Can you just tell me a bit about it?

P9: It’s, it’s not as intense. It’s, I’m also looking at games then, or engage with games that **don’t** interest me. That’s usually less intense then. Your interest quickly wanes. And usually, you do not play it to the end, not with such a great enthusiasm, that’s more involuntary then.

Interviewer: Would you describe it as playing, then?

P9: That’s a good question ((laughs)). (4s) Yes, it is a game somehow, in, in, in, its basic substance, because it has game rules, and those I follow. But I wouldn’t say that I play it very passionately. So it’s still a game as such, and defined as such, but I would not say that **I** play it at that moment. Because that has a different meaning for me, that- if I play in that moment, then I would have fun with this thing. (P9/285-288)

The differentiation she makes is quite revealing: the object she is engaging with is still ‘a game’ (*‘ein Spiel’*) because ‘it has game rules’; even the activity of gaming is given – ‘and those ((rules)) I follow’. But *her understanding and experience of that activity is not ‘gaming’*: ‘I would not say that **I** play at that moment’ (*‘ich würde nicht sagen, dass *ich* in dem Moment spiele’*), since that experience to her is characterised by intrinsic enjoyment: ‘then I would have fun with this thing’. *The object in question is a game, but its situational framing is not ‘gaming’*. More precisely, the type of activity, the primary frame ‘gaming’ is still present – she is going through the requisite movements – but how she comes to understand and experience it has markedly shifted: it is now gaming, keyed as professional work.

Four instrumental keyings could be discerned from the data: (1) review gaming by game journalists, (2) analytic gaming by game designers and researchers, (3) e-sport training by e-

sport athletes, and (4) e-sport tournament gaming, also by e-sport athletes.⁸⁸ Given the multitude of instrumental gaming forms referenced in the literature, one can assume that this list is but a small sample. Serious gaming, usability testing, goldfarming, and other forms of professional work with video games are obvious further candidates for more or less independent keyings. Still, examining the four keyings will give us more than sufficient material to tackle some of the major questions raised by instrumental play.

Review Gaming

In review gaming, the central instrumental outcome is to produce a representative and ideally comprehensive experience of a video game, including written notes and screenshots that allow the subsequent writing of a journalistic article. Here, professional craftsmanship entails not ‘sloppily’ skimming gameplay, but ‘properly’ playing a game through, ideally exploring multiple alternative courses of action and varieties of gameplay. Game features producing certain experiential effects ought to be noticed so that they can be reported. Cultural references ought to be noticed, and the game reflected in its wider cultural significance. Professional norms furthermore entail finding and documenting ‘evocative’ or ‘illustrative’ moments of gameplay that make for vivid, funny, or informative passages in an article.

In review gaming, what games to play is determined in editorial conferences where new titles are distributed among journalists for review. This allows a modicum of choice, but often enough entails having to review games one would not pick spontaneously. Game settings, devices, and times are also subject to professional demands: out of piracy concerns, some game publishers arrange ‘review events’ at their own premises or a hotel, where journalists are invited to come in at a pre-scheduled time to play a to-be-released game. Alternatively, publishers provide journalists with so-called ‘review versions’ of the game software – software that only works on the specific ‘debug consoles’ also provided by the publisher, which are not available in retail stores. Hence, if journalists play such a game to review it, they either play it in the office, or take the game and review console with them home overnight. These outer strictures combined with fixed publishing schedules mean that gameplay times are almost without exception pre-organised and scheduled. Often, analytic and review gaming are organised into a first, more ‘gaming’-dominant phase, and a second, more writing-dominant phase where

⁸⁸ In addition to the four keyings documented here, as part of the research for this thesis, interviews with several users of the ‘gamified’ application *Foursquare* were conducted. *Foursquare* usage was not included in the portrayals as it revealed a complex of phenomena that would have gone beyond the scope of this thesis. To wit, in *Foursquare* usage, at every single interaction with the application, users framed their interaction as either predominantly ‘gaming’ or predominantly ‘instrumental using’, which itself again splintered into different acknowledged use frames (‘shouting out’, ‘lifelogging’, etc.). The users’ differential engagement with the application as either gaming or usage was sometimes a jointly focused activity between multiple participants (two users competing with each other for the status of ‘mayor’ in the office – a title bestowed on the person who ‘checks in’ to the venue in question the most frequently in a given time period). Sometimes, users arrived at differing frame understandings of the same ‘check-in’. Sometimes, it even produced emergent conflicts between user groups – users who checked in frequently in order to improve their game score were detested by other, more utility-focused users for the fact that their indiscriminate check-in activity reduced the utility they themselves were more focused on (e.g. ‘spamming’ their notification stream).

saved games are revisited for taking screenshots, for example. Journalists noted the importance of the game's own internal structuring, though more in terms of how it supported or impeded writing a review: pauses between turns and closure points could be used to take notes, and games were frustrating when they did not provide automatic save points that allowed easy reviewing or replaying. The fact that journalists have to start and finish a game within set time windows creates a very telic, instrumentally focused gameplay, often immense time pressure, and the inherent tension that one is professionally required to get a *comprehensive* impression of the game while at the same time having to *limit* gameplay time:

P1: And that's of course also difficult, if you're under time pressure, which is usually the case, given the editorial deadline. Or at a review event because I know I only have two days of time, then I have to be very routinised, to play as much as possible of the game.

Interviewer: [Okay.]

P1: [must not] let myself drift. Of course I can do that to a certain extent, which poses the main challenge... Because I want to... give the reader a.. Or give the reader the most comprehensive evaluation, whether, whether one simply has to run through and, and bullishly do the tasks the developer had in mind for me. Or whether, for example, on the side of the road there are also somehow further possibilities to experiment with, to do nice things (P1-2/237-241)

Gaining a comprehensive impression of a game entails collecting scenic material or 'atmospheric details' that can convey the game fiction to readers. It also means that one cannot skip perceived boring cut scenes one would skip in leisurely gaming. Thirdly, it involves a very peculiar gaming style, namely to systematically evaluate the scope of choice and variation provided by a game, to try out different variations of gameplay, difficulty levels, language versions, etc., or to walk out the whole terrain of a level to get an idea of how large the designed world actually is. As one reviewer described it:

P3: So, in professional gaming you have to try more things. That is, for example, in a game that you play just for fun, you can run through it, here and there. (...) In professional gaming I have to look very closely first off, and then listen to all these strange things, in the story, for instance to evaluate: How good is the German language version. (...) And that's the one thing: You have to pay very close attention when it comes to the story. And then you have to try things. That is, you have to try to approach scenes in as many variations as possible. (P3-1/176-179)

This systematic charting of a game's possibility space is combined with and driven by an analytic attentive focus on the game as a designed system, which includes reflection on wider cultural meanings. A violent video game that one might 'just' enjoy in leisure time now *has* to be viewed with professional journalistic standards. The distancing from gameplay is further facilitated and required by two factors. First, the professional duties of journalism require that one is not fully and exclusively immersed in the game, but remains open to parallel activities:

P1: So as a journalist you really have to be present in all channels all the time, like, have 30 windows open in your laptop at the same time, are one half here and one half there, somehow, and that's something I also experience as problematic, because it's somehow, for me it's also this, that I have to write down, this review-gaming is then in the end something else than the <<I play by myself>>, when I sit down myself in front of the screen or television and really want to let myself sink into it. (P1-4/299)

Second, during review gameplay, journalists have to document their observations in a form they can later use to produce an article. Hence, journalists make sure to have screenshot and

screen video recording software installed on their devices before gaming. The most important tools, however, are plain pen and paper for notes. As one journalist noted, review gaming observably differs from leisurely gaming in this circling between gaming and documenting:

P1: ((Reviewing gaming)) I would recognise after ten minutes at most, probably, because up to now really all video game journalists I have observed reviewing have a notepad with them and take notes in an interval of, I don't know, ten minutes, quarter of an hours, about something they have seen. (P1-4/315)

This demand to remain analytically focused to put engendered emotions into words creates the internal tension that it blunts the very emotion one wants to capture. Thus, muted emotion and a lessened attentive focus were mentioned as further signposts of review gaming:

P3: And, of course it may be that in contemplative gaming certain emotions (3s) come up in... a more pure form, because then you are not in such a work setting. That is, when you let yourself fall or something, and simply savour that, then it may be that you... certain things are simply more intense. That a joy is a pure joy and not a relief that the game is finished because then you can end your work session. (P3-2/493)

P1: So I really think that, (8s) that when I'm playing reviewingly, that I then (3s) also on... that is, that I am somehow taking part cognitively in a different way. That means, beforehand I'm already in this mood: <<Okay, I do, I work now, and I try to grasp intellectually what is going on here now.>> And in a normal non-reviewing gaming situation exactly that is a great advantage for me, that I don't try to grasp things intellectually, but instead let myself be drifted by the sensual impressions, and that can of course emotionally evoke very different things, yes? For instance, at the end of *Metal Gear Solid 4* I cried like a baby, because it was a completely different situation than for Peter, who, he wasn't yet with the game magazine then, but he reviewed the game back then. That's of course, of course I have to capture these emotions, but I can't give myself so fully into them that over that I forget to bring that into words. (P1-4/325)

Given the professional demand for the comprehensive appreciation of a game and massive amounts of gameplay time, the typical frustrations of review gaming are game length and poor design. Game length forces extra hours of work on journalists, which is experienced as all the more dysphoric when the game itself isn't even enjoyable or interesting for oneself:

P3: But then there are in fact also games that I have to play then, and I absolutely don't want to play them, because for instance it's a game that's about the human energy balance. And it has different renewable energies, and it has nuclear power plants you can build, for instance. And then you cannot evaluate this game at all unless you play it quite far. To know, don't perhaps nuclear power plants really also have an advantage? (P3-1/583)

Combining the time demands of playing through a whole game with the regular journalistic job duties at the office, most review gaming takes place in the journalists' presumed-leisure-de-facto-work-time, during high times forcing journalists to game through a game in all-nighters although they feel too tired to enjoy it:

P3: But in fact it's, when you have to play, a maddening, it can be maddeningly exhausting, because you then have to do it at home: you have a production phase, that is, the phase where the issue is put together, so to speak, where you have to see as much as possible as quickly as possible. And games put up resistance, so to speak. That is, they sometimes don't want to be played through quickly. And that means you need to have a very focused setting. And in the evening I am often also too lazy to write down things. When I have sat at the PC the whole day and typed and wrote e-mails and such, and then in the evening you have to motivate yourself to write these things down. (P3-1/159)

As seen in this excerpt, because journalists have to game games they often find uninteresting or poorly designed; the required analytic, detached mode of engagement; and gaming times where journalists are often already tired, attention and arousal frequently have to be managed

to ensure focus on the instrumental task. Whereas dimming the light and leaning back in a couch or bed were preferred for relaxing, absorbing, leisurely gaming, during review gaming, journalists reported intentionally keeping the light on and sitting in an upright position to stay focused and alert. As one reviewer describes his review gaming setup:

P3: I believe, the light is, the light is on more often with people who play professionally.

Interviewer: Okay.

P3: So, simply because you get tired easily, when you, when the light is out in the evening and such and when you- You also have to see your notes, of course, and then, somehow, then the light is in fact more likely on than off. (P3-1/460-464)

P3: And I write things down then. And that means, when I'm really, that is, oftentimes, have to work very focused, then I more likely sit than lie down. (P3-1/125)

The typical consequence of failure is missing deadlines and thus having to 'crunch' one's calendar, that is, load additional hours of work into the following days, evenings, or weekends:

P3: Well, there are of course the consequences of, of working. And when you fail and know: <<I can't write the review tomorrow>>, because you actually haven't reached these and these things, then that is of course also simply pretty annoying. Because the consequence then means for instance, that you have to get up in the morning two hours early to start the game again. And that can be incredibly infuriating. Because in the hard production phase you have little sleep anyhow, and when you then in fact, then, so that failure can also... can be very infuriating. (3-2/631)

Analytic Gaming

Although game designers and researchers ultimately engage in different professional activities, their reported instrumental keyings of video gaming were so similar that they are treated as one here. In analytic gaming, the main instrumental outcome is a series of documented data points from a pre-defined sample of games that allows answering a pre-defined question, which again makes gameplay very telic and analytically detached. Says one game designer about reviewing competitor games for design inspiration:

P9: At the office, I should indeed not let the, the gaming session get out of hand, because, as I said, that's a different context. I have to focus on the game analytically, and not say, I let myself go and play the whole day, and at the end no results. That would be inappropriate. (P9/142)

A game researcher puts his experience this way:

P10: It's, that is clearly the epistemic interest, that is, that I have set myself a, a, a goal that is not a goal given by the game, but one that I set myself depending on why I play it. That goal I want to achieve to then be able to work with the insights, or the results of the playing. (P10/287)

Where professional efficiency for review gaming means using the least amount of time to see the vastest amount of one game, in analytic gaming, efficiency means using the least amount of time to locate the maximum number of relevant data points across a wide range of games. Again, the goal is to produce 'appropriate' documentation (entry in a spreadsheet, screenshot, etc.), hence screenshot and screen video software, word processors and spreadsheet software, but also plain notebooks are set up in advance to document gameplay. Consequences were reported to be more diffuse: results of analytic gaming flow into a publication, internal company presentation, or subsequent design process, which can be attached to verbal complaints from superiors or colleagues; but time pressures were reported to be less intense.

Professional norms entail, first, thoroughly searching the space of available games to achieve the 'best' (i.e. most comprehensive, non-skewed, representative, 'state-of-the-art') possible sample for answering the respective question. Game choice is fully determined by the research question or area at hand:

Interviewer: In the office, you said, you only play casual or social games, which is due to the fact that you, that those are the games that you have to deal with as part of your job. You never played any other games in the office?

P9: No, because that, I think, also wouldn't be allowed. So it's not looked well upon, because that would be recreation, when you play a game that doesn't fall into this genre that we currently work on. Yes. (P9/59-60)

This leads researchers to likewise often game games they do not find enjoyable. Efficiency norms demand that they not only search and access specific games, but also game mods, cheats, and saved game states they download to 'jump' right to the point in the game they believed to most directly answer their research question – 'ruining' the game for them:

Interviewer: Something that one has to do to play properly or normally or right during work?

P10: Yes. Well, this, this, this goal-oriented. (3s) Then also simply games you actually, somehow, don't want to play. So that's something that you have to bring yourself to do, to play games you would not *voluntarily* play. Yes perhaps also to ruin the game with walkthroughs, save games, or cheat codes. So that's something one does intentionally. And well, I would never do that otherwise. Yes, in the end, everything to, to, what, what's helpful to reach the goal you set before. (P10/380-382)

Once a game (state) is detected and installed, professional norms demand the reviewer methodically work through the game and efficiently navigate to the point that holds data for the question. Researchers reported that gameplay feels like 'racing' through the game where everything that would otherwise pose an interesting challenge or engrossing piece of game fiction became 'basically just noise' (P10/41). As one of them explains:

P10: In the game, I hurry more through the areas. Because I am really looking for *one* specific thing. Or because in the back of my head, I have very precisely what I then- or my epistemic interest is, like, very clear, I have an epistemic interest, if you see it that way, why I am gaming. And for, for- then I take the shortest possible route. Symbolically speaking. That is, in that case, I wouldn't read any quest texts and I wouldn't collect everything, but I would as fast as possible. So, if I knew I had to get into the second level briefly, then I would, like, simply race through it as fast as possible. (P10/208-210)

Thus, attention during gameplay is focused neither on game fiction nor gameplay or attaining game goals, but on the specific aspect of the game that is relevant for the question at hand:

P2: Yes, so I of course look at certain game elements differently, so usually I have a specific question in my head, if I (2s) look at it for my work. I have, *Tombraider Underworld* I only test played (('angespielt')) to be able to make certain assertions about it in a presentation, and then I look, in that case I look specifically at the repertoire of movements that is there. Or forms of presentation of game information. And I blend out other things, so, and that is relatively instrumentalised, and because of that not the game feel that would transpire when I play in my leisure time. (P2/57)

As seen in this excerpt, the attentive focus entailed an analytic distancing from engrossment in gameplay, a refocusing of attention onto the game's design features. At the same time, because they take a more analytic stance, rush through gameplay, and engage with games they don't find necessarily interesting to begin with, researchers and designers also reported not getting as deeply attentively absorbed in gameplay, something amplified by the fact that analytic gaming typically takes place during regular work hours in a workplace, where they have

to remain open to possible interruptions from more important work tasks. Gameplay is stopped or interrupted when the instrumental goal is achieved, when the 'allotted' time is over, or when another work demand of higher priority comes up. As one designer put it:

P9: So, when something else important comes in, an important e-mail, or a colleague who needs something from you, or a meeting, conference call, whatever, then the game is immediately ended. That would be unexpected, but it always has a higher priority than the game. (P9/114)

Engrossment was further hindered (and intentionally kept at bay) by conditions and norms regarding appropriate levels of arousal, emotion, and emotion display. The bodily co-presence of colleagues without more than professional ties creates a situation akin to public spaces: participants reported not wanting to expose their emotional selves to potential embarrassment by vaguely known others. Beyond that, even befriended co-present colleagues made salient that response cries of frustration or elation ought not to occur, as they would disrupt the productivity of co-workers and signal a depth of engrossment that was perceived to be in opposition to work. Hence, in analytic gaming, emotions

P9: (...) are more inhibited, so the game-long dash? the game experience is markedly more inhibited at the office, because I cannot let myself go. Because it takes place in a frame where there are multiple people in the room who are not my friends, who are colleagues with whom I have a working relation, which happens on a different level than in the party context. (...) It is more inhibited. In fact it's not as if a great deal of game fun would transpire, because in the foreground you always see what purpose this here has right now, that I play, and what is it that has to come out of it at the end? (P9/199-201)

P9: And of course you cannot let yourself go even in terms of your seating position. That you say: <I play now>> and sometimes curse when something frustrates me, instead it's somehow, still a public room, whereas at home I am in my private room and can allow myself different things when I play.

Interviewer: What can you allow yourself for instance? That would work in the job?

P9: Exactly. Cursing, for instance, when something infuriates you extremely, that it does happen that I curse, or get loud. Or, well, that I punch my fist on the table and have to leave the room and briefly ((laughs)) have to cool myself down with a glass of water. That doesn't happen in the office, because there I also don't develop that level of ambition. (...) Also, because I am sitting with two other colleagues in the office. And a certain code of conduct is somehow desired. At least I don't want my colleagues to curse, loudly, or slam on the table. And a certain body posture is simply considered decent. That is, I can't simply slack off in the chair in front of the computer, as it sometimes happens at home, because I simply relax, but then I really sit upright and straight and also try to really ((laughing)) make an interested impression. And yes, so it's a different posture towards the game. (P9/46-56)

In fact, the same participant reported covering up gaming activity at the workplace with an e-mail program or similar when colleagues not working on games passed her table, as they would not consider such activity 'proper working' – generating the feeling of being 'caught red-handed' when others saw games on the screen.

E-Sport Training Gaming

E-sports – gaming a specific game as a form of professional athletics – presents an interesting special case in that it early on revealed two keyings, training and tournament gaming. Athletes had very clear terms and expectations for them, as well as their leisurely counterpart, which they called 'fun play' or 'mixed play'. The latter term refers to the fact that in such leisurely gaming, they would mix freely with friends or fans:

P13: Of course sometimes we also play, for instance Friday, Saturday we never have training, those are your days off. Where you don't have to work, at least on the next day. And there it also happens that you play for fun. With friends, with others, so simply mixed. That's how you call it when I play with four others who are not my team. Then it's a mix (P13/135)

The different motivational relevancies come out quite nicely in the following excerpt regarding how many rounds interviewees would usually play in tournament, training, and mix play, and why. The game in question here is *Counterstrike*, a game with short rounds lasting about two minutes on average. A common arrangement is that two competing teams play thirty rounds, and the team who takes the majority of rounds wins.

P13: Oh, so, in a, briefly: in a tournament game there are, after sixteen it's over. Because the difference in turns that's [important]

Interviewer: [Okay, so that's] tournament games.

P13: Exactly, tournament games. And in a, well yesterday we had a game where we won twenty ten. So sixteen had already been reached a long time, and there, well in a training game it's like this, when the opponent is good, then you play, even if you have won the rounds, you still play focused and even if you won, it's about, you want to learn something through it. (P13/335-339)

P13: Exactly, after sixteen, so in a mixed game you always end. There you only play for the win. And not for thirty rounds. Because you don't learn anything from it. You just play for fun. (P13/351)

In mix play ('regular' leisurely gaming), the main relevancy is fun in competing. Thus, gaming stops when one side has won. In tournament gaming, gameplay also stops, but now because winning itself is the main relevancy. Only in training gaming would players sometimes continue after one team had collected sixteen rounds, because here, the instrumental outcome is improving the winning ability of the athletic team; hence, if it promises learning gains, gameplay will be continued even beyond winning. Such learning was reported to include improving individual skills, team communication, testing out and routinising gameplay strategies, and adapting to and learning about the strengths, weaknesses, and strategies of opponents.

Naturally, the central sports game the team works on dictates what is played both in training and tournament keying – and dictate is an apt term here because athletes reported that they did not always feel like wanting to engage in their sports game. As one athlete compared his experience of leisurely gaming of *Commandos* with his sports game *Counterstrike*:

P15: No, well, *Commandos* we always only played when we wanted to. That, that I would, wouldn't ever play for instance, I would never, apart from *Counterstrike* I would never play another game when I don't want to. (P15/195)

E-sports showed the most strictly pre-organised times. Athletes reported that they arranged their week to fit the training schedule, but that training and leisure time or work would often enough still conflict. Here's one exemplary training schedule:

P13: And in *Counterstrike* it's like this, that we see each other three times a week, always, in the evening at 7pm, until 10pm. That's, every match, every game lasts 45 minutes, on average. And thus it takes three hours, if you play three matches. (P13/29-31)

Similar to leisurely gaming with high participation dependency and initiation effort, there are strong participation norms that one should show up on time, pre-announce an inability to do so, and not quit prematurely – only that in this case, the rationale is efficient training:

P13: During training, I mean, you, what, of course there are certain rules of conduct (...). So you don't agree to with a team, say: okay, we'll play tonight at 8pm, and then simply don't show up. So you

should cancel in advance. And that as far as it's possible, as soon as you know. So of course, if you learn on last minute: Okay, he has some problem with the Internet, doesn't work, okay. Then there's no ill intent. But if nothing comes from them, then you think: Okay, why doesn't he say something? Because then we have to look for new opponents and lose time. (P13/217-220)

Not or belatedly 'showing up' for training or delivering a sub-par performance would result in verbal sanctioning by other players or the team manager as a consequence. Not all time of a training encounter is fully dedicated to training, however. A training session usually involves pre- and post-proceedings with tactical preparation, debriefing, and sportive 'warming up':

P14: Yeah:::, so on the one hand it's, as I said, the warming up. That you get a little, so that you go on the Deathmatch-Server and simply get the mouse feeling, and on the other hand, okay, that's not that much the case with us anymore, that we speak through tactics beforehand. That is, our whole game moves and such, but there we have become so good that most of that we have already internalised and- okay, especially with things like making a new game and if- *then* you speak through it in advance. (P14/55)

After the 'duties' of training and post-game analysis have been done, participants reported often switching into leisurely 'hanging around' with each other for a while:

P15: After the game we, usually we stay a little in Teamspeak then, and do anything, watch some funny videos together, on YouTube or similar, or play other games, *HoN* for instance. (P15/57)

Not only are game and gaming times fixed: one's co-players are also predetermined by the team one trains with – to the point of signing a contract with the e-sport club that manages one's team. Specialised roles are the team members, a team captain, and a team manager comparable to a manager and coach in other sports. The captain plans and decides gameplay strategy; in gameplay, s/he can (but need not) be the announcer who gives instructions how and when to do what. There might also be game-specific functional roles. For the individual training sessions, the manager schedules matches with competing teams of roughly the same skill to maximise training efficiency. The player perceive this to be very different from their leisurely gaming of the very same game. As one of them describes:

P13: Well, all sessions are arranged by our orga-, organiser, during the course of the day, or, no matter how he does it, no matter when he does it, the important thing is, when we play in the evening, when we have our training times, then the opponents have to come. Or we come to them on the playing field.

Interviewer: On the other hand, if you, let's say, if you play mixplay, on the weekend?

P13: Then you search spontaneously. (P13/223-227)

Interviewer: Do you pre-organise things as thoroughly when you, when you play during the weekend, just so?

P13: No, no, no. Then it's all spontaneous. So I go online, look, who else is online, look who I feel like just then. Let's say Peter Müller. Write to him: What are you doing right now? He tells me what he's doing. Chilling, watching, something. Then I join him, on Teamspeak, and say: Do we want to play some game? He say: Okay, what, what would you like? Then we say: Okay, let's say *Counterstrike*. Then we search us some, do you have some? Wait, I'll search, I search, both search some folks, anyone. We invite them, we're five, we start. (P13/243-244)

Such pre-scheduled gaming irrespective of one's situational predilections can lead athletes to game far beyond the point of enjoyment, such that they develop a dislike for the game resulting in poorer performance – a phenomenon so well-known it has its own term, 'overplaying':

P15: That's for instance when you, let's say, when you train a lot. And then maybe you also play a lot in your free time. And at some point you are simply overplayed ((English in original)), so to speak,

overplayed. Then, then you're absolutely, absolutely fed up with seeing the game, in principle, but you train nevertheless. And usually then it's even the case that you even get worse instead of better. (P15/171)

When it comes to attention, athletes report a hierarchy ranging from leisurely mix play involving the lowest degrees of telicity and attentive focus, to tournament gaming involving the highest degrees. Yet even in training, attention is to be focused much more exclusively on gameplay than in already-competitive leisurely mix play – even short pauses between games should not be used for any side activities:

P13: I mean, during training I am more focused, because, because I also want to win at the other one ((mixplay)), but it doesn't have as much of an importance. So the will to win is there, but I don't have to beat myself up over- that is, really lean in there. And whereas I ((take)) every round of training as important and try to play it through very focused, there I'm sometimes disinterested (('lallig')) or look at Facebook or something. (...) During training I never do that. Because I am always focused on the game and if somebody writes me something, that has to, then he has to wait until I answer, that's for sure. (P13/203-205)

During training encounters, attention ought to be focused on training goals, gameplay strategies, and fulfilling one's role in those strategies. In gameplay itself, this means a focus on the game rules and goals, including again a more analytic, distanced perspective, only now focused less on game design than on the meta-level of tactics and strategy:

P14: So if you play professionally like we do in the league, we look more on the tactics of it, what is, how are game moves put together? What are we doing wrong? How does the enemy play? We try to read the enemy in the game, his line-up, how he is positioned, and reposition ourselves accordingly. And as a leisure-time player you just go on the public server and try to play a little. (P14/16)

This extreme attentive focus entails that any communication not directly pertaining to the game was actively discouraged during training, while such chatting or joking characterises the athletes' leisurely gaming. As one team captain describes his behaviour during training:

P15: And if for instance there is only fooling around, then I also have said, Hey guys, pull yourself together now, we have the chance to get the title on the weekend. This here is no fun or so, this is, we want to get the title! Now a bit, up into training, now pull yourself together, full throttle, so that we will be fit for the game on the weekend. (P15/345)

Turning attentively away from the gaming device or starting parallel activities were reported as indicators that a player was not engaged in training anymore. Even in-game, e-sport athletes said they were able to easily tell 'visibly' methodical, planned, careful 'professional' training and tournament gaming apart from leisurely mixplay. While challenging opponents would spontaneously bind and focus attention, 'easy' opponents would not, and would also not help skill improvement. Thus, if one was 'stuck' for the time of a match with an 'easy' opponent, players reported downkeying into more disorganised, leisurely gaming:

Interviewer: Was there ever a moment where you had the feeling that you have just switched from a training game into an everyday, leisurely playing-for-fun, in the midst of a game?

P14: Yes. So that's usually more when the enemies are too inferior ((laughs)). So in and of itself, when the enemies are good, then that doesn't happen, because then we're all on one level, then we play through it focused and then usually something like that doesn't happen. Unless the enemies are so bad that you simply don't have to exert any tactical effort, big tactical effort, that you beat them to zero. And then it happens. In itself it's pointless to play against such enemies, because actually you only get better when you play against others who are better, and then it may happen, but then you don't take it seriously anyhow anymore. And then you play a little more in a leisurely fashion. But...

Interviewer: Okay. What's the difference between the two states? So between playing seriously and then leisurely playing?

P14: Well, you run wherever you want to. So with us it's like this, when we play against poor opponents, then we don't make any strongly tactical announcements, but just say: <<Do what you want.>> Then everybody runs where he wants to. And in case it gets a bit more narrow again, then you can switch back again. (P14/158-161)

The telic focus in training gaming comes with a decidedly higher perceived arousal and tension than leisurely gaming. One e-sport athlete compared training with leisurely gaming *Commandos* with his teammates as follows:

P15: Yes, so it's always like this, with *Counterstrike*, we are, so to say, we're now playing it for one and a half years are we playing it together, us five. And it's just, there, everyone knows what the other has to do. There's simply a certain focus. If mistakes are made, then of course there's also some griping from the team captain, that's Peter in this case, because such things just must not happen. And with *Commandos* it's just fun, there it's a bit straight on, it's a bit of fooling around, there it's a bit, if somebody for instance, I'll take Kurt, who tries something three times in a row: <<Wait, I'll try something, I'll try something!>> And then he dies immediately every time and that's quite funny and, yes. It's most definitely a very big difference, simply in terms of tension and non-tension. (P15/85-87)

The telic focus on training also entailed keeping oneself emotionally composed such that emotional response cries would not negatively impinge on team performance. As one player put it, if one has made a bad move resulting in one's in-game death, professional norms demand to immediately inform team members – and not wallow in frustration:

P16: For me, to a certain degree, it's appropriate to, let's say... you die, that is, in the game. You die, you say- I have to make another side remark first. If you die, you are supposed to announce immediately where you died so that your colleagues can put that into action immediately and position themselves differently. That's something that happens to me even nowadays, for instance, when I die: <<Shit!>> But then I immediately switch over, and after this second, with reaction time two seconds where I said something, cursed, I immediately switch and say: <<The enemy is there and there.>> That is appropriate for me, that you say: <<Damn.>> Yes: <<Oh god, I made a mistake.>> Or <<Ah::, he got lucky.>> But then immediately switch over and say where the enemy is. As I said, that's appropriate, to be cursing briefly but still continue to act professionally. What is *not* appropriate is to scream around, not announce anything, continue screaming, while the others are still playing. You yourself are dead. And as a dead man you have to remain silent. (P16/84-87).

This emotional self-regulation extends towards communication style: to support optimal performance, feedback should be given in an informative, calm manner that doesn't increase team members' arousal levels and thus impede their performance.

Training typically takes place via Internet with individual team members located at home, or – before tournament events – physically co-present in specialised training rooms in club homes. E-sports athletes reported being much more discerning about their gaming devices in training and tournaments than in leisurely gaming, especially when it comes to the speed and reliability of their Internet connection, as lag times or disconnects could seriously thwart performance. Game equipment was treated with similar care. Aiming for optimal performance, athletes reportedly test out and then stick to one very specific configuration that maximises the transparency of their controls. As one athlete describes:

Interviewer: Do you configure your computer any different for playing *Counterstrike*, compared to leisure-time playing?

P13: No, not different. But, but, everything does have to be the same. So I need my mouse and my keyboard, my headphones. Because there, I'm played into them (('auf die eingespielt')), with them I

know what the sensitivity is, what the reaction time is, so to speak, whether, where the keys are, without having to look, so you really never look down on them. (P13/163-164)

Such configuration work includes fine-tuning all settings of the computer – background processes, screen resolution, graphic settings, server connection, keyboard shortcuts, etc. Some athletes use specialised programs to create, save, and execute a central configuration file that automatically arranges all software settings according to one's e-sport demands. Again, whereas athletes took these settings seriously in training and tournaments, they were not considered relevant in leisurely gaming. Here is one participant comparing his e-sport setup with a leisurely instance of playing *Commandos*:

Interviewer: Do you arrange your computer in any specific way when you're playing *Counterstrike*?

P15: Yes. So basically I get all of this from my brother. I don't really know my way around the whole computer, PC and CPU. But my brother knows his way all the more. And then, for instance, before I started with *Counterstrike*, that's quite a while ago, we sat down together and wrote a config. That is, all the, so all the commands that are automatically saved. For instance, how to run forward. Or how you pull a grenade, or so. And all of that you configured beforehand....)

Interviewer: Okay. Writing a config for, for keyboard commands, or-

P15: Actually for, for everything. For instance, there are, the config runs endlessly long, graphic settings, for instance, everything. How bright the game should be, whether the plates, the corners are aliased or more blurred or everything. How you move, how your mouse, how fast it reacts to the screen and such, all of that you configure.

Interviewer: And you also have that with *Commandos*?

P15: No, so there I have, I just let everything as it is, I started it and then I just started with the mouse, looked around, and yes, I just let it be as it is. (P15/227-239)

A final characteristic of e-sport is that the focus on and enforcement of playing by the rules is even more strongly articulated than in competitive gaming, which already is the most rule-focused and rule enforcing mode. As one athlete noted, the main difference between leisurely gaming and professional e-sports is that any form of cheating is taboo:

P13: The difference between a leisure time gamer, I think you also call that a casual gamer, and a professional gamer, it's simply that the free gamer in his solitary game, in his solitary game (...), where he, let's say, is overwhelmed or simply didn't achieve something for a minute or so, doesn't have the ambition to try it again, but takes to some aid. Like the so-called cheats, provided by the programmers who allow this in the game, to code or cheat yourself certain advantages, whatever. (...) So in, in professional gaming it's like this, that it all solely depends on the player, on the skills, on the brains of the player as such. And of course it's not allowed to use any aids. (P13/9-11)

Given the enormous technical and social efforts e-sport league and tournament organisers invest to prevent cheating, this is of course nothing if not a highly idealised self-image, but all the more revealing for it: For it demonstrates how much e-sports athletes invest their selves into 'the skills' and 'the brains of the player as such'.

E-Sport Tournament Gaming

As the name suggests, tournament gaming occurs in specific tournament events that form the end of league seasons or are organised as separate events and leagues by bodies like the Intel Extreme Masters. The instrumental outcome (and serious consequence) here is qualifying for, advancing in, and ultimately winning the tournament, which is connected to prize money and

reputation. As one player responded to the question whether the trophy and prize money of ten thousand Euros of their next tournament somehow changed his experience of gaming:

P13: Yes, because in and of itself, I mean, then we are German masters, should we win that. Like back there, then you have a trophy, I'm sure you've already seen it ((points to other room with trophy case)). And that's of course a very good feeling. I mean, you've achieved something, and that's yes. (...) And that is completely different from me playing for fun. Because for fun, I don't have a goal in front of me, there I only have my enjoyment, which is almost nothing of any worth. So with worth I don't mean money. But just, I can't say: Hey, I have achieved something. So, I have won this. That I can't say, because then I only say: Okay, I had fun. Of course that's an important, important matter, that is, important point. Of course you always should have fun, that is, I don't want to say that fun shouldn't be a priority. But when you have the ambition to be successful in the competition, and to make it, then that's a completely different matter. And then you also do more for it. With free gaming we would, how do you say, we wouldn't train, you would simply go straight at it and just play. So just fun, so, and. Because you have no goals, but you just want to play something, like that. And with the other, there of course you train to be better, better than the others. So that you can also title yourself better and present yourself better and prove yourself that you are the superior, and such. (P13/377-381)

As seen here, athletes report that gains in self-regard and reputation are often more important motivators for them than the prize money. This may be a social desirability effect, but remember that in leisurely gaming, being 'too ambitious' about winning, and connecting the game outcome immediately to one's self-regard are considered *inappropriate* taking the game 'too seriously'. In e-sports, such overt striving for reputation and self-esteem in gaming is seen as *appropriate*. Once gaming becomes tied to one's *professional* identity, and the game outcome becomes evidence of one's *professional* skill, drawing positive self-regard from winning, and displaying strong ambition to win become appropriate.

The professional norms in tournament gaming are mostly similar to those of training gaming, but strongly amplified. The main palpable differences are material organisation, arousal, and emotion management, which result from the fact that the gameplay outcome is now connected to high immediate stakes. Materially, qualifying matches in tournament gaming can take place Internet-mediated. But finals usually occur in specially designated event locations. Time windows and opponents are now organised by the tournament host, not the team manager, including often strict additional rules that ensure players do not use dominant strategies or exploits that are considered bad gaming (and bad spectatorship material). Game equipment is partially brought along by teams and again meticulously configured for optimum performance. One player reported having built his own armrest which he installs during tournaments to mimic the configuration he is used to from training:

P16: Very important, it's very important that the feeling is just like at home. I tinkered myself an armrest, for instance. Because at home, I play with an armrest, where I rest my arm. At offline events, like for instance the one coming up tomorrow, there are no armrests. That is, I would play completely differently. That is, basic requirement is to play just as you do at home, to feel comfortable. (P16/22)

However, during tournaments, players do not have full control over their gaming equipment. For one, team sponsors might require the team to use their brand equipment – a source of lamentation especially with monitors, where players reported they prefer old cathode ray tube

monitors over the modern flat-screen monitors they are required to use. In addition, tournament organisers often demand that players install specific anti-cheating software, have their game equipment vetted before the tournament, use pre-determined IP addresses, and install software that displays and broadcasts their screen displays to 'live' audiences – via Internet video streaming or bodily co-present at the event location. As one player describes it:

P14: Yes, you have to start Anticheat and such, if you mean that. So, external software, that you yourself don't use any software that gives you an advantage, so to speak. And then a couple of things about your computer are checked, whether you, yes, your computer is simply checked. (P14/36)

Regulation of material equipment may forbid certain graphics cards or settings, as they give an unfair advantage in comparison to other graphics cards – something happily tolerated during mixplay, but not at all in tournaments, which again illustrates how rule enforcement to maximise pure skillplay is much more articulated in e-sports than leisurely gaming.

The second main difference between training and tournament gaming is the intensity of arousal and emotion. High stakes, awareness of onlookers, and physical co-presence of team members all amplify them:

P14: So in a league game, when we make a narrow round, then it's much more emotional, you rejoice much more than if you would get a narrow round during training. You still say <<Very good>> and such, but not so, so you are happy, but not that intensely emotional as in real games. And that, yes, you're probably even more focused. You dare less, perhaps, because you don't want to make any mistakes in a tournament game. (P14/26)

As noted in the previous chapter on mutual amplification of emotion, tournaments as performances come with the license and expectation to openly display or perform one's emotional state if this does not interfere with advancing in the game. Athletes reported that uptalking is an essential, expected part of tournament gaming:

P15: Yes, for instance last year, during the XYZ Finals, there two teams played. And they, somehow they didn't motivate each other at all. And that's something I find, I find that's part of it. You should motivate yourself and your team. I mean, that's in every- I also see e-sport as a sport, otherwise I wouldn't do it professionally. And I think, just like you motivate yourself during soccer, when somebody did something well, you should motivate yourself during the game as well. Because the more motivation, the better you play. And there I always find it sad, when it's really just five guys sitting next to each other and are silent at each other ('sich anschweigen'). They get a round and simply don't say anything, and that I then find pretty sad, actually. (P15/301-303)

This results in a perceived internal tension: athletes are highly aroused by a perceived pressure to perform and mutually amplify arousal and emotion on the one hand, while on the other, they are to keep their cool and not 'flood out', that is, not let their emotion and arousal interfere with their own or their team's performance:

P16: Or if you hand over a round because of really, really stupid mistakes, my god there were always extreme cases, slamming on the table and screaming: <<Fucking shit!>> Not in our team, with us it's usually professionally calm. There was another case where somebody jumped up, insulted his teammates and then slammed so hard on his notebook that it broke. Yes, those are extreme cases. With us, as I said, it's more like, that you identify the mistake very quickly, as I said before, and then say: <<Here, please don't do that again>>, and then you continue. Staying calm, staying calm as much as you can. Sure, especially now, with what is coming up on the weekend ((a league finals game)), there the emotions come up, adrenaline and such. (P16/35-36)

Summary and Conclusions

This section argued that when journalists review games, when designers and researchers analyse them, or when e-sports athletes train or compete in tournaments, they engage in a *keying* of leisurely gaming: their overt activity changes in small (yet crucial) ways, but covertly their understanding and experience ‘what it is that’s going on here’ change drastically.

All observed instrumental keyings are united by (a) an exotelic focus on some instrumental outcome rather than an autotelic focus on some form of enjoyment, (b) professional norms of efficiency and craftsmanship (rather than gaming norms of sportsmanship), and (c) a consequential gearing into the world – whether and how one reaches the avowed instrumental outcome is understood and expected to have ‘serious’ consequences: money, deadlines, professional reputation, and the like. Actors strictly planned and structured gameplay. Although we saw pre-planning and structuring in more complex forms of multiplayer leisurely gaming as well, in instrumental keyings, they are a requirement tuned to professional demands.

Where leisurely gaming modes are ‘tuned’ by the overall ethos of a motivational relevancy, instrumental keyings are tuned by the main instrumental outcome. In fact, *because* all instrumentally keyed gaming was organised towards one instrumental goal, all participants reported a very high degree of perceived and enacted telicity compared to their usual leisurely gaming. Whereas leisurely hardcore and competitive gaming – which are also highly telic – typically *spontaneously* focus and bind attention, in instrumental keyings, participants frequently reported *having to actively keep up and focus attention*. Between the Scylla of having to play a game one doesn’t find interesting and the Charybdis of a well-designed game luring one into engrossment, instrumental keyings require an active *focusing on* the instrumental outcome, and an active *analytic distancing from* gameplay. All instrumental keyings were characterised by frequent experiences of tension, pressure, and frustration that were not perceived as coming from a difficult in-game challenge per se, but rather from specific situational circumstances conflicting with the players’ own current interests, energy levels, or needs. In Goffman’s terms, what players would *spontaneously* get involved in and what the situational proprieties *demand*ed them to get involved in mismatched, such that they could not let themselves be unselfconsciously engrossed in the activity, but had to effortfully self-regulate. In short, players would experience *dysphoric tension* (Goffman 1972: 38-9).

In review gaming, the inherent sources of such dysphoric tension were having to explore a game systematically and comprehensively while keeping gameplay time short; having to be engrossed in gameplay to create an ideally ‘authentic’ leisurely emotional experience, while at the same time having to take a reflexive, analytic stance towards it, and regularly interrupt gameplay to take notes of this experience; finally, having to pick up and continue playing a game even though it doesn’t cater to one’s taste, is poorly designed, or one is tired.

The tensions of analytic gaming were, first, that one focuses on efficient data extraction while the game might put long, now deemed-undesired stretches of necessary gameplay before the data point one is after, or make reproducing a discovered relevant game state for documentation difficult. Second, one has to play games that one finds not catering to one's tastes, boring, or badly designed. A third tension was that gameplay usually takes place in office spaces where the very act of engaging with games (and potential emotional reactions) are seen as inappropriate – hence one is required to monitor and self-regulate one's emotion.

In e-sport training gaming, the main sources of dysphoric tension are having to retain discipline in the training routine against other instrumental or desirable leisure activities, as well as against temporarily losing interest in or even actively detesting the game, and having to retain a gameworthy cool while gameplay generates high levels of arousal. In e-sport tournament gaming, the central tension was the pressure to perform at one's best and remain maximally cool and focused while the performance pressure and overall situation stoked enormous arousal.

This frequency of dysphoric tension in instrumental keyings of gaming corroborates Goffman's concept of interaction tension. Maybe even more interestingly, Goffman argued that the avowed goal of (now we have to add: leisurely) gaming is just the *opposite*, namely *euphoric ease*: When spontaneous and officially demanded involvement match, people can let themselves be unselfconsciously, effortlessly engrossed by the focus of involvement. For Goffman, not only are gaming encounters designed to maximise the possibilities of euphoric ease. 'Euphoria in encounters' is one of 'bases of fun' in gaming (Goffman 1972: 59). Which immediately raises the question how and why euphoric ease is enjoyable, and how and why instrumental keyings manage to flip gaming into its own experiential opposite. As the following section will argue, the answer to these questions is *autonomy*. And this answer will allow us a more nuanced unpacking of the relation of 'work' and 'play' in games.

7.2 Autonomy, Work, and Play

The instrumental keyings portrayed above all feature properties we commonly associate with work: pre-scheduling, repetition, serious consequences, and the like. Furthermore, interviewees reported frequent unpleasant experiences of pressure or (dysphoric) tension during instrumentally keyed gameplay, a mismatch of what they spontaneously want to do and what they are demanded to do – something we also commonly associate with work. Interviewees *themselves* referred to and understood such activity as belonging to their professional work life – that, after all, is what keying something *as work* means. The source activity, what people are observably doing is 'gaming'. But this gaming is then keyed as work, related to an exotelic, instrumental outcome beyond the autotelic enjoyment of gaming itself. On first sight, then, frame analysis and the interview data provide a ready and easy answer to arguments of con-

temporary scholars that instrumental play undermines a clear dichotomy of 'work' and 'play': Once we carefully distinguish between video games as institutionalised types of objects, and video gaming as an institutionalised type of framing, and allow for *re*-framings – keyings –, then neither video games nor video gaming are strangely 'work' and 'not work' (or 'play') at the same time. They become 'working' when they are keyed as such, which brings in all the formal features and experiential qualities we associate with work, while at the same time remaining intelligible to us and players as video games and video gaming 'underneath'.

On closer view, however, things become more complicated. During a field visit to a 'gold farm' in China in 2006 – a place where people are employed to play games like *World of Warcraft* for a salary in order to accumulate virtual items or currency or level up virtual characters that would then be resold by their employer for real money – journalist Julian Dibbell marvelled about two phenomena. First, he was struck how a good number of employed players, after ending their work shift of *World of Warcraft*, would go into an Internet café and continue playing the same game, now in their leisure time:

It might be said, of course, that there was no puzzle here – that in fact the defining difference between gaming as work and gaming as play was laid out plain as day before me. It might be said, that is, that what those off-duty gold farmers in that Internet café were doing was not at all the exact same thing they'd been doing on the job but in a sense its precise opposite. Instead of playing a game for other people and for other ends – for their bosses, for their wages – they were playing it now for themselves, on their own terms and as an end in itself. (Dibbell 2008: n.p.)

Dibbell here nicely restates a point we already observed: that part of the 'working' frame (at least in the culture to which he belongs) involves instrumental pursuit of an exotelic goal, and that the 'playing' (or 'gaming') frames in that culture entail that the activity in question be pursued as autotelic enjoyment. Framing engagement with a video game as 'working' or 'gaming' entails framing it as 'exotelic' or 'autotelic'. Interestingly, though, this framing apparently made the activity *experientially, motivationally* a very different thing to the players themselves, so much so that they voluntarily engaged in it, *although* they had already engaged in that activity for eight hours straight, and *although* that activity showcased structural features of repetitive 'arduousness' which, as Dibbell (2008) reports from his own experience, often 'felt like labor'. Under the impression of this observation, Dibbell returned to the gold farm the next morning, only to make a second observation ...

about all that alienated play on the shop floor: It actually looked, here and there, rather playful. There sat 23-year-old Xu Xuidong, for instance, taking a *World of Warcraft* gnome character into battle while behind him 26-year-old Shao Meizhong stood watching. The gnome died, Shao laughed, and when he reached down to the keyboard to demonstrate a more effective combination of combat spells, there was an eagerness in the gesture that suggested Shao would not mind sitting down for a turn himself. It was a scene repeated in one form or another throughout the room and throughout the shift, one worker breaking briefly out of the prevailing solitude to watch another's progress, argue strategies with him, cheer him on.

Not only was Dibbell at a loss to explain how and why people might pursue an arduous, repetitive activity voluntarily and with apparent enjoyment in their leisure time, but also how and why such apparent voluntariness and enjoyment might arise during work time as well. The

same phenomenon appeared clearly in my interview data: not only did video game journalists, researchers, designers, and e-sport athletes report enjoying gaming as a leisure activity, they also noted that gaming as part of their work would at times be quite enjoyable, and that leisurely gaming in turn sometimes felt quite work-like. Frame analysis might give us a good explanatory handle on how one strip of roughly similar activity becomes intelligible, enacted, and referred to as ‘gaming’ or ‘working’. But it doesn’t seem to explain how two strips of activity that are understood and performed as gaming or working both can and cannot *feel* ‘like labor’ – or *feel* ‘like play’. It also does not readily explain why the framing of one and the same ‘arduous’ activity as ‘playing’ would change its experiential quality to such a degree that people feel motivated to pursue it voluntarily. The answer to this riddle that emerged from the data is just that last word: ‘voluntariness’. Not only is voluntariness itself a desirable experience that motivates conduct, but it is also so deeply intertwined with our understandings and expectations regarding ‘work’ and ‘play’: when people come to speak of a stretch of activity as ‘feeling like work’ or ‘feeling like play’, they refer to a certain state of voluntariness. Voluntariness, finally, also allows us to understand the enjoyment derived from euphoric ease (and the displeasure of dysphoric tension).

We will lay out this argument as follows. First, we will turn to how ‘voluntariness’ has been treated in game studies in the past, noting that the recent misfortunate dismissal of voluntariness as a characteristic of ‘gaming’ has been due to outmoded and unclear conceptions of voluntariness and to the fact that gaming has been conceptualised as an object. We will then look at current psychological research on voluntariness, specifically the concept of autonomy as developed in self-determination theory (SDT). We will show how and why autonomy figures differently in gaming, playing, and working, and how this connects to frames and framings. Equipped with this framework, we will look at the interview data: interviewees report experiences of gaming ‘feeling like work’ or ‘not feeling like play’ *both* in leisurely and instrumental gaming. Underlying these experiences is always a sense of lacking autonomy. Finally, we will show that experiences of autonomy (or lack thereof) are not continual, but emerge and wane based on how a player’s situational needs, the material features of the game, and the social demands of the current framing align, which provides an explanatory model for Goffman’s concepts of euphoric ease and dysphoric tension.

Voluntariness in Game Studies

When it comes to voluntariness, the game studies literature basically falls into two camps. On the one side, philosophers and scholars interested in *play* as an activity or attitude have all emphasised ‘voluntariness’ as its defining criterion: ‘[W]hoever plays, plays freely. Whoever *must* play, cannot *play*’ (Carse 1986: 4). ‘First and foremost, then, play is a voluntary activity. Play to

order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it' (Huizinga 1955: 7).⁸⁹ 'There is also no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity. ... A game which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play' (Caillois 2001: 6). 'In order to establish the freedom to play, which is the prerequisite of being able to play at all, there is a complementary freedom that must be created along with it – the freedom to quit' (deKoven 2010: n.p.). '[P]laying a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (Suits 2005: 55). 'The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself', notes Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 67) – and playing games for him is the principal case of such 'autotelic experience'. Apter (2006: 41-2) suggests that what we commonly call 'work' and 'play' really refers to 'telic' and 'paratelic' metamotivational states: whether we are focused on means towards an end (telic) or take the means as an end (paratelic). As we have seen in section 4.2, these definitions are backed up both by contemporary ethology and developmental psychology. Animal play is characterised by being spontaneous, autotelic as well as of limited immediate function; it is performed in a nonfunctional way (Burghardt 2005: 73, 81). Childhood play is identified as intrinsically motivated or autotelic, 'nonfunctional', with a 'means over ends' focus (Pellegrini 2009: 20, 8-20).

On the other side, we find contemporary definitions of games as systems that erase 'voluntariness' from the picture: Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 79) in their survey of eight game definitions find voluntariness to be present in only three of them (neglecting that Huizinga also defined play as voluntary), to then drop voluntariness from their own definition without any reasoning. In their later definition of *play* they state: 'Play is free movement within a more rigid structure' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004: 304). But they continue to define 'free' in a formal way as a possibility space generated by a rule system: 'Play is an expression of the system, one that takes advantage of the space of possibility created from the system's structure' (ibid.).⁹⁰

Juul, while repeating Salen and Zimmerman's oversight of Huizinga, at least discusses voluntariness before discarding it: 'Roger Caillois claims that games are voluntary. The problem is that it is quite unclear what this means. Is it not a game if social pressure forces the players to play? Because human motivation is too complex to be explained in terms of its being voluntary/involuntary, I believe that it is not possible to meaningfully describe whether games are voluntary or not' (Juul 2005: 31-3). This passage is instructive. First, note that Caillois (2001: 9), in the very definition Juul quotes, does not speak about *games*, but about 'play' as 'an activity', a situated process. Again, if we follow the central suggestion of frame analysis and keep playing-as-activity (framing) apart from games-as-objects, then 'the problem' Juul sets up – does a game not stay a game no matter if you're forced to play it or not? – goes away. *Of course*

⁸⁹ In Huizinga's most-frequently cited summative definition of play, that first adjective usually gets over-read: 'Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a *free* activity ...' (Huizinga 1955: 13, emphasis added).

⁹⁰ Again, this is not to deny that Salen and Zimmerman's definition has value as a 'design-centric' (2004: 302) perspective on what characterises games that *afford* experiences of autonomy.

the game as *an object* (with certain social meanings) remains that object, but *how* people situationally frame and thus experience it might change, and that's what Caillois is talking about: 'playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality' (Caillois 2001: 9). *Playing*, not games. Conversely, it is of course 'not possible to meaningfully describe whether games are voluntary or not' (Juul 2005: 33) if one defines games as objects: that would be a category error of applying a phenomenal quality or psychological state to an inert object. Once more, 'the problem' only appears if one – like Juul – *by definition* merges games-as-objects and gaming-as-framing into a *necessary* unity. In contrast, it is possible (and quite sensible) to state that if people are socialised into gaming frames with the epistemic and normative expectation of voluntariness, then if they situationally feel pressured to engage with a game object, that experience likely doesn't fit their frame knowledge of 'gaming', and thus they might not perceive, understand, and experience it as gaming – or voice *that* the experience was somehow 'weird', 'strange', 'unexpected' for play, etc.

Second, it is quite daring of Juul (2005: 33) to claim that 'human motivation is too complex to be explained in terms of its being voluntary/involuntary' without actually engaging with the psychological literature on motivation. Juul is right that *in game studies*, it has remained 'quite unclear what this means' (Juul 2005: 33), because where game studies scholars have engaged with voluntariness, they by and large synthesised the work of philosophers (Caillois, Suits), historians (Huizinga), or educators (Sutton-Smith), whose publications date back up to 75 years, present a confusing panoply of terms ('free', 'voluntary', 'autotelic', 'paratelic', 'means over ends'), and usually don't unpack these terms any further. If Juul or other game studies scholars had engaged with contemporary motivational psychology, however, they would have found the theoretically and empirically robust concept of *autonomy* in self-determination theory (SDT), which not only is able to integrate and explain the various facets of the voluntariness of play, but also to make sense of the 'work versus play' dichotomy in gaming.

Autonomy in Self-Determination Theory

Recall that for SDT, human beings strive to satisfy three innate, basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Autonomy is defined as the 'capacity for and desire to experience self-regulation and integrity'; 'To be autonomous is to behave with a sense of volition, willingness, and congruence. It means to fully endorse and concur with the behavior one is engaged in' (Deci & Ryan 2012: 85). Autonomy is not only a basic need: any human activity is experienced to be motivated on a spectrum from highly autonomous to highly controlled, with individuals innately striving towards and flourishing under conditions of autonomous motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* describes an activity that directly satisfies needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and therefore is experienced as highly autonomous, as 'interesting', 'enjoyable', 'its own end' – autotelic (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) or paratelic (Apter 2006). *Ex-*

trinsic motivation describes an activity done for a consequence that is separate from the activity itself. This is often experienced as highly controlled, a pressuring ‘ought’, ‘must’, ‘have to’.

Importantly, individuals have the innate tendency to integrate ‘psychic material’ from the world over the course of their life: ‘Thus, nonintrinsic, socially transmitted motivations and regulations can become fully internalized and form the basis for autonomous or self-determined extrinsically motivated behavior’ (Deci & Ryan 2012: 88). SDT differentiates several degrees of such internalisation. If parents want their child to learn to read, for example, they might use extrinsic consequences like rewards or punishments. If the child perceives itself to study reading because of these consequences, it is *externally regulated*, which is the most controlled form of motivation. Yet the child may also internalise the demand of its parents by connecting it to its self-worth; then it would learn to read for fear of feeling disapproval by (internalised) others, a state SDT describes as *introjected regulation*. If the child comes to understand the value of the activity for itself – for example, if it realises that learning to read will enable it to read a cooking book, and cooking is something the child intrinsically enjoys – then the motivation is *identified*. Finally, if in the web of different wants, needs, goals, and self-identifications that make up the internal motivations of the child, the goal to learn reading has been brought into congruence with all other motivational directions, it is said to have become *integrated*. Even if reading is extrinsically motivated for the child (the reason that energises and directs the activity lies outside the activity itself: being able to cook on your own from a cooking book), that extrinsic motivation, if well-integrated, will still be highly autonomous.

Whatever people do, multiple motivations tend to co-occur, with the *overall tone of autonomous or controlled motivation* being determined by the relative weight of autonomous (= intrinsic, integrated, and identified) versus controlled (= externally regulated and introjected) salient motivations (Deci & Ryan 2012: 89). Thus, at any given point in an activity, an autonomous or controlled tone may be dominant, which makes the overall activity ‘feel’ like an autonomous ‘wanting to’ or a controlled, pressured ‘having to’.

Autonomy in Playing, Gaming, and Working

Applying this model to playing, gaming, and working, we can readily see how it makes sense of playing and gaming being defined as both ‘voluntary’ and ‘inconsequential’. First, as evidenced by a series of recent experimental studies, video gaming can provide strong experiences of intrinsic need satisfaction – competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan, Rigby & Przybylski 2006, Przybylski, Rigby & Ryan 2010, Tamborini et al. 2010, 2011, Rigby & Ryan 2011, Reinecke et al. 2012, Peng et al. 2012). Hence, it is very likely that in gaming well-designed games matching one’s dispositions, one will experience intrinsic and thus *autonomous* motivation: something one ‘wants to do’, something one ‘does for its own sake’.

Second, social contexts have been consistently shown to be autonomy-supportive or controlling (Deci & Ryan 2012). Tangible rewards or punishments and feedback that is perceived as controlling thwart the experience of autonomy in an activity. Such forms of consequence and feedback enter perceived-externally regulated or perceived-introjected motivations into the situation, tilting the perceived locus of causality (who or what is determining one's action) from oneself towards the environment: We feel we do something *because* of the reward or praise, or *because* of the fear of punishment or blame. In this light, the 'nonfunctional' (Pellegrini 2009: 20), 'not fully functional' (Burghardt 2005: 71) quality of play, its being 'connected with no material interest' (Huizinga 1955: 13), its lack of consequence shifts from a defining quality to a facilitating factor: *because* playing and gaming are sociomaterially organised as inconsequential, without tangible rewards or punishments or controlling verbal feedback, they do not make salient controlled (introjected or externally regulated) motivations, which further moves the overall experience towards autonomous motivation. This in turn also provides an explanation for Goffman's suggestion (corroborated by the interview data) that 'slight' consequentiality is acceptable in gaming; the important point is for consequences not to be 'too much' such that they become 'serious', stir anxiety – or in SDT parlance, give rise to an experience of controlled motivation, 'having to' win *because* of the consequences, tilting the overall balance from the autonomous to the controlled.

As Caillois (2001: 6) put it, professional players (athletes, gamblers) 'who must think in terms of prize, title, or salary – it is clear that they are not players but workers'. In SDT terms, gaming for 'prize, title, or salary' is not *automatically* work *by definition*. But to the extent that professional players in their activity perceive themselves to be directed *predominantly* by such controlled motivations (anxiety over loss of social status or disapproval from peers, having to make ends meet with the prize money) rather than autonomous ones (enjoying the competence, autonomy, relatedness experiences the sports or gaming brings, feeling identified with the activity), their playing will feel like a controlled 'having to'. Apter (2006: 42) references several empirical studies that support this, and it is a phenomenon that also appeared in the present data. Like professional athletes who would regain the joy that led them to their sport after they quit their professional careers, one journalist reported that colleagues of his who had lost all enjoyment of video gaming found that enjoyment again as they left the profession.

Conversely, a work activity that is congruent with our values, needs, and identity; where we feel emotionally supported by colleagues; where we perceive we can affect significant change and grow our skills in doing so; where we perceive great choice in regard to what kind of work tasks to tackle, when, how, and with whom; where feedback is phrased in informational rather than controlling form – such a work activity should, all else being equal, be experienced as highly autonomous (rather than controlled). Swaths of empirical studies support this (Deci & Ryan 2012). Still, even in the best possible workplace, paid work does come at-

tached to one's material livelihood (and risk of losing it), the possibility that one's superior or colleagues or clients get angry over what one does, with some necessary constraints and negotiations about what to do when and how, and some understanding that *in the end*, things are done for the sake of outcomes not enjoyment of the process. Given these circumstances, it is unlikely that it will ever be experienced as autonomous as leisurely gaming can be – where objects, settings, and activities are purpose-designed to maximise intrinsic need satisfaction (not productivity), where there are no 'serious' risks attached, and where players share and enforce the understanding that *in the end*, one should neither get irate at each other nor demand participation, because 'it's just a game' done for the sake of enjoyment.

Autonomy and Framing

With this basic connection between autonomy, gaming, and working established, we now have to link them up to frame analysis. For this, let's return to Caillois' athlete once more. Even if an athletic challenge comes with a high cash prize and prestige, this doesn't *determine* that all involved athletes *will* think of it predominantly 'in terms of prize, title, or salary' (Caillois 2001: 9). Feeling autonomously motivated – locating causality internally rather than externally – is ultimately a perception, as is the autonomy-supportive or controlling valence of the environment. This point is articulated in SDT in the concept of '*functional significance*': 'individuals will actively construe social-contextual inputs in terms of their informational and controlling meanings, and ... it is the relative salience of informational versus controlling components that will, in large part, determine subsequent intrinsic motivation' (Ryan & Deci 2002: 12). Whether communications, actions, and events are perceived, understood, and experienced as informational (and thus, competence-supporting) or controlling (and thus, autonomy-thwarting), and whether one locates the causality of one's action in them, is a matter of *active meaning construal*. This is where autonomy and frames link.

Let's say I choose to take a month-long retreat in a cloister, where I have to wake up every morning at 6am to sweep the stairs. I may still be able to perceive 'a sense of volition, willingness, and congruence' in that activity, 'to fully endorse and concur with the behavior' (Deci & Ryan 2012: 85), if and when I focus my attention on the fact that I actively *chose* to enter the cloister knowing it is good for me (integrated extrinsic motivation). Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 90-3) points out instances of concentration camp prisoners who were able to find flow by focusing their attention on some activity they felt they had control over. Just as we can subjectively reframe the situation we are in (e.g. the covert gameful keying), we can construe our activity as autonomous – by focusing on its connection to our own goals, values, and identity, on our own prior choices leading to it, or by finding something in the activity where one does have choice. Says Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 92):

When adversity threatens to paralyze us, we need to reassert control by finding a new direction in which to invest psychic energy, a direction that lies outside the reach of external forces. When every

aspiration is frustrated, a person still must seek a meaningful goal around which to organize the self. Then, even though that person is objectively a slave, subjectively he is free.

Understood this way, the framing of an activity can be connected to autonomy in three ways. First, I may be able to gamefully key the stair sweeping into a little contest with myself, thus wringing a bit of competence satisfaction from that otherwise god-awful early chore, which tilts the overall scale of motivation a bit to the autonomous side. Second, a gameful or playful keying *itself* can be a reassertion of autonomy: by *choosing* to overcome unnecessary obstacles – sweeping the stairs in a more complicated fashion than externally demanded – I create an aspect of the activity I feel I have control over and do autonomously, something ‘I want to’ rather than ‘I have to’. Third, since framings *specify* the meanings of elements in a situation, they may also specify the functional significance of ‘social-contextual inputs’ (Ryan & Deci 2002: 12): in the framing of leisurely gaming, the direct order from my raid leader in an MMORPG to do a certain thing that in a professional work context might be perceived as strongly autonomy-thwarting becomes something I perceive I *chose* to submit myself to.⁹¹

Now to claim that such construal is fully subjective would be ridiculous in the face of concentration camps (and several hundred pages discussing actor-environment relations). As Csikszentmihalyi and SDT emphasise, circumstances matter – a lot. Social-contextual inputs more or less strongly *afford* being perceived as controlling or autonomy-supportive. It will arguably require considerable *effort* from me to overcome the obduracy of the seventh 6am wake-up bell and stair sweeping in a row and still approach it as something I ‘want to do’, and maybe gamefully key it. Conversely, sitting together with friends and a beer in front of a console with the latest sports game running on my Saturday off with no duties awaiting the next day will strongly afford autonomy experiences.

Just as framings – and the very *act* of framing something as gaming or playing – may support the experience of autonomy, so experiences of autonomy in turn likely partake in affording the framing of the situation *as* leisurely gaming, because they ‘fit’ our frame expectations. When play and game scholars define ‘play’ as ‘voluntary’, ‘free’, etc., either they implicitly equate the two words, or they refer to the fact that playing is *typically* experienced as highly autonomously motivated, as something we ‘want to do’ rather than ‘have to do’. Frame analytically, however, it would be wrong to say that playing *is* autonomous, or that working *is* controlled – the ‘is’ referring to some essential quality. Working and playing are frames. Whether any given situation ‘is’ or ‘isn’t’ working or playing comes down to the empirical question *how the participants themselves define that situation*, whether they frame, constitute, enact, perceive, understand, discursively indicate it as such or not. This definition of the situation (framing) is different from the (motivational) experience of the situation as autonomously or controlled

⁹¹ See Voss (2011) for a similar argument on voluntary submission in BDSM practices.

motivated. But (a) it likely affords certain motivational experiences, and (b) it furnishes the context and social meanings with which people make sense of said experience.

(a) As frames, 'gaming' and 'playing' organise the frequent situational co-occurrence of circumstances that make the experience of intrinsic need satisfaction (competence, autonomy, relatedness) likely and the experience of controlled motivation (material or social consequences, controlling feedback) unlikely. Thus, any given playing or gaming framing is typically sociomaterially organised such that an overall experience of autonomous motivation is strongly afforded. Similarly, working framings are typically sociomaterially organised so that they give rise to the experience of controlled motivation: serious consequences of payment, social status, and professional identity; little choice in what to do, how, when, and with whom; actions that are often not intrinsically need-satisfying; and feedback that is often controlling. These frames furthermore entail epistemic and normative expectations (instantiated as bodily dispositions) that 'working' *typically* feels controlled, and that in working, it ultimately *ought* to be irrelevant whether one feels controlled or not. These expectations are situationally enacted and enforced when actors frame a situation as 'working', which makes it even more likely that the given situation affords experiences of controlled motivation. 'Playing' in contrast comes with expectations of typically autonomous motivation; productive outcomes ultimately *ought* to be irrelevant, because enjoyment (of which autonomous motivation is a component) is the avowed goal of the activity, and participants in a 'playing' framing enact this. 'The individual ... claims a right to complain about a game that does not pay its way in immediate pleasure' (Goffman 1972: 17). This brings us to the second point.

(b) As we argued in the preceding chapters, for Goffman, the frame of gaming entails an 'ends in themselves' motivational relevancy (Goffman 1963: 19; 1953: 128-30); 'fun alone is the approved reason for playing' games (Goffman 1972: 17); for some activity to be transformed into playing, 'all must be free willing to play, and anyone has the power to refuse an invitation to play or (if he is a participant) to terminate the play once it has begun' (Goffman 1986: 42). Based on their socialisation into the playing and working frames of their society, actors come to expect, understand, and enact 'playing' as typically highly autonomous, and 'working' as typically highly controlled. This includes actors learning the words 'work' and 'play' referring to and being enrolled in the reproduction of these frames. Actors associate these words with their own experiences, but also the social meanings established in instruction, observation, reflexive indication, explicit terminological definitions, and participation in the practices and discourses in which these words are used. Thus, actors will likely have learned that 'play' is defined in their language (among other things) as 'Free action; freedom, opportunity, or room

for action; scope for activity', and as 'Exercise or activity engaged in for enjoyment or recreation rather than for a serious or practical purpose; amusement, entertainment, diversion'⁹²

Given that few people are familiar with the vocabulary of motivational psychology, it can be assumed that they draw on these kinds of readily available everyday terms to make sense of and describe their experience. Thus, when people say that something 'is work', but 'feels like play', what they describe is that an activity *framed* by them as 'work' comes with an *experience* of autonomous motivation. At the same time, their framing of the activity as work will lead them to draw on and make salient certain dispositions and enact expectations such that conditions affording controlled motivation become more likely again. Alto, their frame knowledge will make this experience of autonomous motivation, this 'feeling like play' stand out as something unusual, maybe even a little embarrassing to admit, especially if the working frame they have been socialised into involves the Protestant work ethic that defines and positively values working as a plight (Weber 2010/1905). Finally, it might even lead them to not just describe the activity as 'feeling like play', but to frame it as playing, to take their motivational state as the main contextual cue as to 'what it is that's going on here'. Conversely, the experience of controlled motivation should lead people to describe the activity in question as 'feeling like work', even frame the activity as 'working', and note that it is strange if gaming (which they expect to be autonomous) feels like work. This is exactly what the interview data showed.

In the next two sections, we will first examine when experiences of controlled motivation emerged both in leisurely and instrumental gaming, to then show that these experiences were described by interviewees as 'work' and 'not play'. The third section will show that experiences of controlled motivation only emerge if certain circumstances align (or better, misalign) – connecting back to Goffman's concept of interaction tension.

Experiences of Autonomy and Control in Video Gaming

Whether and how video games might support (or thwart) experiences of autonomy is not an entirely new question. In SDT-informed psychological research, several features of a game's design have been found to reliably afford autonomy experiences through providing 'meaningful choices' (Rigby & Ryan 2011: 49, see *ibid.*, 39-63 for an overview): in well-designed games, players can choose who to be, what goals to take on, what strategies to pick in pursuance of those goals, and what actions to take at any given step of the strategy. Also, game narratives motivate action with appeals to values shared by players, such that players feel they act in congruence with their own values. Interview data on how game design *thwarts* autonomy experiences supported all these points strongly: players reported feeling thwarted in their sense of autonomy whenever they *expected* to be able to take a certain in-game action and therefore

⁹² 'play, n.'. OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/145474> (accessed May 29, 2013).

tried it, or expected to be able to choose from a variety of options, but then found that the attempted action was not possible, that no variety existed, or that the variety was only a false pretence of variety. Examples include running into 'invisible walls'; 'tube levels' ('Schlauch-level') where players had to stick to a pre-determined space and/or array of game goals; 'cut scenes' during which players had no ability to affect the game state; not being offered multiple ways of achieving the same game goal; finding that actions which appeared 'logical' or possible weren't – and the list continues.

Interestingly, though, many participants also reported experiences of thwarted autonomy relating not to gameplay actions, but to the wider gaming encounter, something that has not been covered by research so far yet appears immediately logical from the above frame analytic perspective. Namely, players reported experiences of controlled motivation when they were constrained in gaming time, game choice, choice of gameplay style, and their bodily displays.

A Time of One's Own: When to Start and Stop Gaming

Interviewees described the very act of video gaming – especially solitary gaming – as a source of autonomy experiences: the fact that one consciously chose a certain activity, determined a certain stretch of time to be a time of one's own: 'Now I have a bit of time for myself, then I take that time' (P8/45). This was supported by the sense that oneself alone could at any time decide to start or end the activity, switch off the computer. Any leisure-time activity – video gaming or other – that involved other people, be it friends, family, or partners, was often phrased as a social 'obligation'. Not so in solitary video gaming:

P9: When I in principle have no time limit, that is, when I can say, I can play until I say: <<I don't want to anymore.>> No appointments and no obligations, both inside the game and outside of the game, then I find, that's an experience of freedom. (P9/308)

As a consequence, interviewees reported a sense of thwarted autonomy when they could not freely choose whether or when to play, whether to achieve a certain game state in a certain time, or when to stop playing – both in instrumental and leisurely gaming. What differed between the two were the reasons why one felt one 'had to play'.

In instrumental keyings, the most obvious and immediate instance of controlled motivation was that the instrumental outcome demanded gaming at a certain point or beyond a certain point where gaming was perceived to be not (or no longer) enjoyable. This often generated time pressure, as a certain game state has to be achieved within a certain time window. Asked when gaming felt involuntary to him, one game researcher answered:

P10: At most in situations where there is a certain time pressure.

Interviewer: Okay. For instance?

P10: So if I'm, whatever, in two or three days there's a project, some workshop and there we need, I don't know, these five or ten games have to run on all computers. You have to, you have to know your way around the games at least a bit but you don't really want to do it, but you nevertheless have to make yourself acquainted with them once more. (P10/314-317)

In instrumentally keyed multiplayer gaming, this sense of controlled motivation can turn into or be mixed with perceived social commitment to the others, whose attainment of their own instrumental outcomes depends on one. Says one e-sports athlete:

P13: And if that is necessary, that I play every day, even if I don't want to, then I force myself to do it, I pull on that rope with the others, so that the, that the goal of the whole is attainable. Because you are there, so it's a team sport. You can, there are of course also people who are egocentric, but that cannot really be. Because you always have to think in terms of the whole. You may not focus on your own person alone. (P13/361)

In leisurely gaming, such social demands were the main source of thwarted autonomy, specifically participation norms. Such experiences were sometimes reported with regard to whether to start a game at all or not, but mostly when the interviewees wanted to stop gaming, yet felt that the other players' closure or success depended on their continued participation:

P3: There is of course the thing that you play with colleagues in coop, where you absolutely don't want to play any longer and another person still wants to play. (P3/579)

P9: So if you play together in a clan, then there are situations where things aren't over yet, where you just have to finish the session. There I cannot, of course I could decide voluntarily to leave, but that would be inappropriate, if I would leave. Because then I would let my team hang. (P9/290)

Another social motivation perceived to be controlling gameplay time was reputation: how other people would think of one if one did not regularly game, or continue gaming. As one *Foursquare* user noted, when he felt pressure to use the service despite not enjoying it, it was mainly to maintain an online appearance of somebody active and up-to-date: 'Where its more about, are you perceived as somehow <<behind>> by others' (P6/217). From an SDT perspective, it makes immediate sense that considerations regarding personal reputation would be experienced as controlling, as they are an instance of introjected motivation. Reputation as a pressuring 'having to' play was articulated strongly by e-sports athletes, but maybe most strongly by MMORPG raid gamers. The following long excerpt gives a good image of how the various dimensions of social pressures intertwine:

P19: Yes it's like this, you have an obligation towards the others. What my girlfriend just said about the reputation, that was in classic times of WoW very often the case, that, or it was always that the reputation stood above everything. If you had a bad reputation, so like <<Yes, he went raiding twice with us and then never returned. You grabbed the loot>>, so the booty.

Interviewer: Reputation, was that something technical? Or what?

P19: No, that was something social. So that was, your name counted for something back then. It wasn't like::: it is today. Back then that was really server-related, if you had a good reputation, so like <<Yes, he's totally a good hunter>> or something, then you were approach by others about things you achieved. (...)

But that with that forced, that's something I had from time to time with raids. So if you... I had the conflict, for instance, that I played soccer, so really played soccer and sometimes during the evenings, where there was soccer training, there was also a raid. And then it was like this, that I told the raid leader from the get-go: <<Listen, at most every two weeks that I would drop soccer training and come, or something.>> And then sometimes there were some people missing and then I said: <<Come, I let soccer training slide for once.>> And then you join in there, and then, or if you don't really feel like it. You also enter a kind of commitment towards the other people. And I don't find it decent if you then say: <<Yeah::: I put my interests definitely over the, over those of the others>>, because that's a social group that wants to reach a goal. (...)

So with other games I never had it like that, that if I didn't feel like it, that I would then go. With WoW you had, especially with WoW you somehow had as social, yes somehow a social coercion behind it. Because as I said, this reputation and then also the social contexts that you maintained

through it. Or found there. That they moved you to go there. Because I think, that's the thing with sport. That you don't feel like training in the evening, or something, and you still go there. Because you feel socially obliged somehow. (P19-2/68-78)

Interestingly, social games were another context where interviewees felt controlled. In particular, the gifting mechanic was reported to motivate them to game although they did not want to, hooking into norms of reciprocity: when a player received a notification that another player had 'gifted' a virtual item, the player was then able to return that gift, which became a de-facto obligation to gift back. One player reported delaying eating or not watching a television show she wanted to see because a Facebook notification of a new *FarmVille* gift created a sense of 'pressure' to immediately reciprocate:

P12: Yes, this, this, I really think this pressure, or what do I say, pressure is perhaps a little strong, but that it has, it has to be finished. There you always have this, you get stuck in it, that's just how it is. It is, or there is, you hear, the computer: Plopp. You hear the sound that again something came in. Some present from somebody or so. And then you again go to the computer and quickly do that. (P12/363-367)

P12: When you just got gifted something from people, and perhaps you were not in the mood to send them something back then, so to say. Well, exactly, you were not in the mood, and you felt bad for not doing. And that's why you quickly do it, so do it again. Because you, before you feel bad again. Although you're not in the mood right then. (P12/451)

As can be seen in this example, material game features took part in constituting situations where players felt controlled. The same player observed that because of the public visibility of individual game states to other players afforded by another Facebook game, she felt anxiety over what others might think of her when she did not continue gaming.

'Play by appointment' (Zagal, Björk & Lewis 2013) was also reported as a frequent source of controlled motivation in social network games. Play by appointment describes the mechanism that players have to return to the game and make a certain game move to receive a certain game resource – if they don't return to the game in the allotted time frame, the resource perishes, which is usually communicated to the player with an e-mail or other notification (e.g. withering crops in *FarmVille*).

P12: When it actually doesn't suit me time-wise, but I got a message that the crops are ripe. And then I was just not in the mood or had no time, and then I did it nevertheless.

Interviewer: How enjoyable was that, how did that feel?

P12: ... Well, not fully, not fully voluntary perhaps in that moment. So you just did it quickly. (P12/467-469)

In other games, closure point spans were reported to engender similar experiences of controlled motivation, now with regard to ending gameplay.

A Space of One's own: Expressing Emotion

In the last chapter, we saw that people overall preferred video gaming in their private rooms because they shielded them from the view of potentially disapproving others; in public, one has to regulate one's emotion display to keep 'normal appearances'. This even extended to gaming in private spaces with socially close others: being a good sportsperson demands monitor-

ing the emotional states of the others and adjusting one's own displays of frustration, elation, or empathy to keep the overall harmony. This self-regulation of emotion display to fit situational norms was again articulated by interviewees as a source of experiences of control. In turn, especially solitary gaming was phrased as a source of autonomy experiences because for once one could freely express whatever emotion one currently felt:

P9: Freedom I would also say, certainly in the private context, because there I can simply show all emotions that I develop when I play this game. And that I of course don't have when I'm sitting in the office. That's not a feeling of freedom. I would say, if I had the opportunity to play *Battlefield* in the office, I would enjoy it less because I then don't have this feeling of freedom.

Interviewer: Is that experience of freedom also present when you play together with several people on your couch?

P9: Y:::, to a certain extent it is, yes, but there the considerateness for the friends dominates, for the people with whom I'm sitting there. So then it's less the case, that I focus on the game and say: <<I am now, now I am free and can determine this.>> Instead it's also more about me being the host, and being a guest of somebody and still take regard of that. (P9/309-311)

A Game of One's Own: What Game to Game

Not being able to choose what game to engage with is a source of thwarted autonomy unique to instrumental keyings. Multiple interviewees noted that gaming games that did not fit their tastes or they found poorly designed was a unique phenomenon of instrumentally keyed video gaming – one that came with a feeling of involuntariness and 'having to':

P9: Especially in the work context it's not always voluntary. So voluntarily I wouldn't prefer this genre very much. That's more unfree, I would, it's not coercion, but it's not like I would do that very much in private. (P9/284)

This foregrounds one taken-for-granted autonomy in leisurely video gaming: choosing games that suit one's tastes – and choosing to switch to another game once one has lost interest.

P15: No, *Commandos* we always only played when we felt like it. There, there I would never play for instance, I would never play any, apart from *Counterstrike* I would never play any other game when I don't want to. Because for instance, when, I wouldn't, say when *Diablo 3* comes out now, then I will really want to play it, so I will play it very much. But if I don't want to play it at a certain point, then, then I will not play it if somebody asks me: Do we want to play a round of *Diablo*? When I don't want to, then I don't want to, and then I don't play it. (P15/195)

An Act of One's Own: How to Game

In congruence with previous empirical findings, interviewees reported controlled motivation where they felt they could not freely choose what courses of action to pursue in a game, nor how to pursue them. Yet while existing research has focused on the mere range of choices afforded by the game, autonomy in how to game showed to be affected by the wider situation as well. In instrumental keyings, the instrumental outcome prescribes very specific, telic forms of gameplay: in analytic and review gaming, quickly locating certain game states, and efficiently yet systematically documenting the game's possibility space were reported to be things the interviewees (usually working alone) had to force themselves to do. In e-sports, gaming was constrained by the agreed-upon strategy, enforced by other team members:

P13: You could say that the tactics, or depending how a team is playing, force your game. So in the sense of: one, when the tactician of the team is of the opinion that you have to play static, then

you're bound to these instructions or to the ways he wants to see from you, although you might not like them. (P13/411)

The same phenomenon occurred in MMORPG raid gaming: players agreed to a joint strategy and then had to stick to a specific functional role within that strategy, even though they might personally not enjoy that role:

P18: Yes, sure. So there are, there are bosses, where, I don't know, some special jobs have to be allocated. And where you are then for a time, so I was DD, so damage dealer, and usually my job is to make damage, when you then get certain special jobs with that boss and you know well, yes, you will only run around or search around or you have to keep your eye out for something, and you can't make as much damage as you could do, then it's the case that you sometimes think: <<I'd rather like to do something else.>> (P18/339)

A second qualification of existing research is that in-game autonomy did not depend on the amount of perceived choice alone. It also emerged from *distal telicity*. Both in instrumental keyings and leisurely gaming, some in-game actions served a goal that was perceived to be distant from those actions themselves, which turned the experience into something 'work-like'. In instrumental keyings, this is unsurprising: gameplay is engaged in for the exotelic goal of achieving a certain outcome that feeds into one's professional activity, usually driven by extrinsic motivations. As a game researcher put it:

P10: And when I play for the job, then it's this goal-oriented. So there it's basically, I wouldn't play if I could get directly to the point I want to get to, let's put it that way. So there the activity of playing is more, so purely utilitarian (('zweckgebunden')), or a necessary evil. (P10/406)

P10: So when I, as said, set myself such a clear goal that I want to reach, a most clear goal and play to that, then it isn't really a game for me. (P10/441)

Interestingly, though, the same phenomenon *also* occurred in leisurely gaming, namely when players were engaged in some form of *preparatory gaming*. Whereas playing usually is 'purely' autotelic or paratelic – the activity is its own end, an immediate source of intrinsic need satisfaction –, the complex joy of *gaming* is a form of autotelic telicity: players pursue a goal that is not the activity, but do so chiefly because the activity of goal pursuit itself is again perceived as enjoyable. What happened in 'preparatory' gaming was that players engaged in the pursuit of some in-game goal, but didn't find the goal pursuit enjoyable; rather, they pursued the goal because it enabled some *other* future gameplay that players considered enjoyable. Thus, although gameplay *overall* was perceived to be done for the sake of enjoyment, such stretches of preparatory gameplay were not, and generated experiences of 'having to'. The most frequent instances of preparatory gaming reported were RPG and MMORPG 'grinding' – doing an in-game activity over and over again in order to collect certain game resources that would be required to access other game challenges, or improve one's chances of winning. As one player remembered one instance in *World of Warcraft*:

P2: Switch from play to, to, to work, simply. What can happen with WoW sometimes, when you notice: <<Now I'm not really doing anything that would be fun.>> Theoretically. Instead I'm only doing again and again repetitive things.

Interviewer: Can you tell a concrete example when that happened for you? Do you remember anything?

P2: Yes, I once was, I once was very much after crafting a certain, a certain sword and had set myself the goal not to do that through auction houses or so, but to really go and kill the animals myself. That's what I set myself as a goal, as a game goal, and then I have farmed the very same animals pretty persistently, to get the required items. And that did::: take quite some hours. So and there I knew exactly, I'm gonna sit down for an hour now, farm animals again and more I don't do then. And that's of course relatively (2s), so in retrospect I wouldn't call that a playful activity. (P2/71-73)

One must emphasise that it is neither distal telicity nor repetitiveness *as such* that *necessarily* turn gameplay into a work-like experience of controlled motivation: players report enjoying telic hardcore gaming, and that they sometimes actively seek out repetitive gameplay as a relief from the demands of everyday life, in casual games, social network games, and MMORPGs. Nor is it the lack of challenge entailed in the repeated activity. As one interviewee noted, even games with extremely steep difficulty curves would sometimes generate work-like experiences of 'having to' during the intense required amounts of practicing. Repetitive activity only started to feel controlling *if* players engaged in it for some (in-game or out-of-game) goal beyond the current gameplay *and* gameplay itself did not promise nor afford any kind of enjoyment. As an e-sport athlete put it, the experience of 'having to' emerged most strongly when his team had to fight against its relegation from a league, chaining one loss after the other. Similarly, an MMORPG raid gamer said that the demand to game at a pre-scheduled time became an unpleasant having-to when it was foreseeable that her group would only lose.

One can turn this phrasing around: Only *because* players were motivated by an in-game or out-of-game goal strongly enough would they engage in gameplay they did not find enjoyable. And the motivation to reach this goal was often enough a controlled one: social pressure by MMORPG raid peers or superiors or colleagues in instrumental gaming. Hence, controlled motivations become salient, while autonomous motivations (enjoyable gameplay) are amiss, and the overall scale tips towards the controlled. This foregrounds a hidden facilitating condition of autonomy experience in leisurely video gaming: because players are free to quit or switch to another game if current gameplay doesn't satisfy their needs, is boring or frustrating, they rarely come into the situation where gameplay is not intrinsically enjoyable for a prolonged period, or where there is a salient controlling motivation in tension with the activity at hand not being intrinsically enjoyable. As one journalist observed, leisurely gaming is characterised by the fact that people do not put up with games they do not find enjoyable:

P3: And so to say, if somebody, I believe, the contemplative player would quit far sooner. I mean, many people play games very, very briefly, so that's, there is a moment when you play and it's not fun, unless you just spent seventy Euros and know, after four hours this will get awesome, then maybe you still play it. Otherwise you rarely find people cramped, well, maybe cramped, but grumpy in front of a console. And the typical video game journalist, he sits angrily and lost in soliloquies in front of a console. (P3-1/438)

Similarly, in my field studies I found that players would often cycle through many games in a row, change game modes or difficulty levels, until they arrived at a game setup that was enjoyable for everyone involved – and when it wasn't any longer, they just switched games again.

Salient Consequentiality

Speaking of controlling motivations energising distal goals, both in leisurely and instrumental gaming, interviewees reported experiences of controlled motivation if and when irreversible consequences of game outcomes that connected to extrinsic or introjected motivations became salient. As one player noted, he would never play for money:

P8: Because then there's the pressure that you have to win. Of course, everybody who plays wants to win somehow. Or have some successes, at least. Otherwise you wouldn't play, presumably. But when it's about money, that's a real thing, and, that you have to work hard for. That wouldn't have a playful character for me then. (P8/297-303)

In the same vein, an e-sports athlete noted that highlighting the consequences of a bad game move puts a player under 'pressure' that decreases performance and motivation:

P13: Because, you can point out to the co-player: You know what went wrong right there, but you should never put him down. (...) And he knows himself that it was shit what he did right there. (...) And if you then say to somebody: You have to win, if you don't win, you're kicked out, and, and, and. Then it's obvious that the motivation of that player and the performance of that player go down. As if you said: Give your best, and even if we don't walk off victoriously today, at least we can say we gave our best. (P13/269-271)

From an SDT perspective, both instances articulate the so-called undermining effect: adding extrinsic motivations to an already intrinsically motivated activity makes it less, not more, motivating because it thwarts autonomy (Deci, Koestner & Ryan 1999).

Autonomous Reconstrual

One interesting phenomenon emerging from the data was that gamers configured and construed situations such that what felt controlled would become perceived autonomous gameplay again. We see this in action in the following excerpt. Here, an e-sports athlete describes how leisurely and professional gaming differ for him in that leisurely gaming is choosing to game because one wants to, whereas professional gaming is a non-optional time demand. However, these demanded training and tournament times is something he voluntarily, consciously chose, and thus is still autonomous. Put differently, the athlete re-focused his attention and construal from the narrower time windows in which he was not able to choose whether to game to the wider context in which he did choose just this constraint:

P14: So leisure-wise, if you just feel like it or, yes, if, if you want to play. If you, somebody gets you to, so says *have to*, <<You should play now>>, but when you really want to and when you want. And that's voluntary for me. And as I said, something like, when you're in a team, as I said twice or thrice, you have to know that it's a time investment. And then I don't find that involuntary, instead you enter a compromise, and that's voluntary. That's a decision of a person. Whether I want to make that time investment or not. Seen that way, it's all voluntary. (P14/156-157)

Another player reported how she was sometimes able to re-construe perceived-pressuring *FarmVille* gameplay (a notification of a friend's gift 'demanded' instant reciprocation) into something she wanted to do through a period of pausing the game:

Interviewer: When you have the feeling in a game that you didn't play fully voluntarily, did you then do anything to recreate that feeling, that you are the master of the situation? That you decide and choose this?

P12: Well either you, when you have to do something now, either mentally you get the curve and you find some enjoyment again. Especially in the moment on the game, and then you turn the table on it, not to have to, but to do it voluntarily. Or... that you perhaps, I don't know, forget the game for a certain time and approach it anew. So maybe at another point in time. And then I had more the feeling: Now I want to play, and now I have it under control again when I want to play ((laughs)). (P12/491-493)

In SDT terms, one can parse this episode as follows: either, by not engaging with the game despite notifications asking her to do so, the player reasserted her agency in a classic act of reactance, or, since the notifications happened long ago enough or frequently enough without response by her when she returned to the game, the act of returning would be construed by her as caused by a perceived-internal energy rather than the notifications.

Controlled Motivation as 'Work' and 'Not Play'

In summary, we see that *both* in leisurely and instrumental gaming, players report experiences of thwarted autonomy or controlled motivation, a sense of pressure and 'having to'. The previous section reasoned that participants should associate experiences of controlled motivation with 'work' and 'not play', and find it 'strange' in leisurely gaming. We already came across several such instances in passing, but it is worth substantiating the point.

First, when interviewees were talking about in-game activities they did not enjoy yet still pursued for some more distal goal, they frequently used the terms 'working' and 'working for' (*erarbeiten*). To progress in an RPG, one player notes, one has to follow a certain pre-determined structure, which involves 'having to work':

P8: Having to work for the experience, and, but in the end also having to work for a certain wealth, to get the appropriate equipment or similar. That is, you have to follow a certain scheme, and you have to work towards it, that you acquire this wealth, naturally, and in the same way collect this experience. (3s) So that structure is always prescribed. (P8/113-115)

Another player noted that getting the maximum resources from mutual helping and gifting in a social network game requires a large number of in-game friends: 'You always have to work hard for them, no?' (P17/28). Upon starting a social network game, the first step for her would always be to reciprocate all gifting notifications before one could finally turn to gameplay proper: 'And those I then worked off like that' (P12/133). Getting a big farm in *FarmVille* without paying, 'that way, yes, you had to effortfully work for that in the beginning' (P17/304). When hardcore gaming of games like *Super Meat Boy* demand intense practice, 'there, in effect, this leisure character is lost a bit, and it effectively gets something of a profession or studying. I have to train certain moves, movements to be able to pass these worlds in the first place. (...) And that then also entails work for me.' (P1-2/49-51) Less surprisingly, when interviewees involved in instrumental keyings reported on having to engage in an unenjoyable stretch of gaming, they highlighted this as 'work': 'you have to keep in mind that it's work, it's not just fun, that's something that often gets overlooked with video game journalists, that they are

working in that moment' (P1-4/321). As another video game journalist put it, the moment there is a 'having to' (*müssen*), he would no longer call the activity 'play', but 'work':

P3: And then there are indeed jury jobs, there I have to play things. The game isn't really good. But I have to evaluate whether it's clever or not. And there then really a kind of having to enters. (...)

Interviewer: Yes. Would you call that, would you call such a situation a game? When, when, when there is this having to?

P3: No, then it's definitely work. (P3-2/585-593)

One player noted that gaming for him constituted a 'private' environment where he wanted to be, and had the autonomy to shape it as he wants, whereas the workplace is an environment where he has no autonomy in shaping the environment:

P7: I think the, I think the, this submersion into the private as well. That I, that I withdraw a bit from everyday life. So that I am really in my environment, or in the environment that I desire, so work isn't my desired environment, it's my determined environment. And when I come into my desired environment, and I find myself there and then say: I'll now stay the next eight hours- I'll sacrifice the whole Saturday for *Arkham City*, then I have, create a space for myself that I don't want to leave again then. (...) And at work it's like this: you can't influence how your workplace looks, very much, because, that's given, more or less. You can't influence the way you go about things, more or less, because the processes are determined by others, usually. Although the game determines me as well, but I am still the acting-, the acting person, who has to accomplish a goal, but, *I* accomplish that goal. (P7/289-291)

The last sentences demonstrate once more the complex relation of autonomy experience and the words 'work' and 'play'. 'Work' describes a specific type of situation whose circumstances are given, pre-determined. 'Play', the 'private', describes a type of situation whose circumstances are chosen and desired. At first, the interviewee associates these with spatial contexts, only to then notice that outer pre-determination of what to do and how to do it is also a feature of games. But as in the instance of the e-sports athlete who construed his training as something he autonomously chose, the interviewee then notes that the real difference is his autonomous choice of submitting to the constraints of the game, his sense of agency and autonomy in doing it: '*I* accomplish that goal'.

We see the same difficulties of classifying instances of in-autonomous gaming in leisurely gaming. As one player observed, video gaming was characterised for him by voluntary engagement. However, in social network games and MMORPGs, he often experienced involuntary engagement – and then, he wouldn't classify the activity as 'gaming' anymore:

Interviewer: Okay. (4s) Very generally, when you think about video gaming, the word video gaming, as an activity, as something that you do. What does it mean to you? What's characteristic?

P2: First off a computer ((laughs)).

Interviewer: Okay, yes.

P2: Exactly. So, for me personally anyhow, since I rarely play on a console, mostly on a PC. (3s) Then, oh god, now I have to try to somehow not always ((laughs)).

Interviewer: No, [just tell it like it's in your head.]

P2: [Yes, yes, as it comes, okay.] Exactly, so somehow something self-determined, somehow, voluntary, in comparison to other media, something interactive (6s). Yes, those would be the first keywords. I can also continue ((laughs)).

Interviewer: Okay. What do you mean with <<self-determined>> and <<voluntary>> in contrast to other media?

P2: So that wasn't necessarily in contrast to other media, and so that was now, in and of itself. Yes::, the, the, the question of definitions, that I often encounter when I sit down in the mornings at my computer and play *CityVille* ((laughs)), where I then again- would actually not even say that I really

play there. That it, it's actually about turning yourself toward something out of your own free will. That it doesn't have any concrete end, apart from being an end in itself. So.

Interviewer: Why would you say that you don't really play anymore with *CityVille*?

P2: Because there apart from those few gratifications when you climb a new level, actually runs pretty much automated and so to say only (2s) satisfies very basic desires, which I can't really identify. But it's like that, pretty routinised and that's why I just still do it.

Interviewer: So it's a, a morning routine that you do, okay. And if it's, if it's routinised, then it's no longer play for you?

P2: N:::o, I wouldn't put it that way, but, when, so to say, when I have the feeling that I'm working more and, so to say, look: <<I still have to do this>> to get my daily click there, then, then, then it's not really a game anymore. Or the activity is not playing anymore. (P2/21-32)

Again, we see the interviewee struggling to come to grips with classifying his experience, and in the course to pin down what exactly defined 'video gaming' for him. Engaging with *CityVille* seems to be 'video gaming' because it is done on the computer and provides some gratification, but it is really more 'working' than 'playing' because despite said gratification, it is something he feels he 'has to do'. Later in the interview, he reiterated this distinction: having to instrumentally focus on the efficient attainment of some in-game goal in MMORPGs and social network games both 'approach work':

P2: As I said, it approaches work. Then it feels like working, well, when you somehow- The feeling: <<I have to do this now. Do it as productively and quickly as possible.>> But I had to do it, so. That is a form that you also find in other contexts, in working, actually. (P2/54)

Things get even more complex when he qualified MMORPG raid gaming as still being 'playful from its feeling' when a raid provided an interesting challenge, against which stood the sense that the pre-scheduling of raids became a controlling 'commitment' or 'duty' to him:

P2: That- why I did not play for a while was less because I noticed it's no longer fun, it's work, but there I played more this big battles and such and that took even more time and had more commitment, so. And that, that were then these outer commitments that got you to join in at times where you don't want to. The activity itself was in any case still playful from its feeling. Especially if it were challenging opponents and such, then (3s) it definitely was a playful activity, but as I said this frame who made the whole thing not voluntary, that was what, what annoyed me. (P2/79)

Still later, the interviewee returned to the same matter a final time, when asked whether there had ever been any misunderstandings about whether something was perceived by all participants as 'video gaming' or not:

Interviewer: Was there ever a situation, where there were misunderstandings between you and others or between other people, whether what was going on was video gaming or not? <<Are we playing [here now?]>>

P2: [Yes, yes.] You can, if you want, transfer that to such group things. So when, when I notice that somebody takes something so seriously as I would not take a game seriously, then I would have another idea of play at that moment, so.

Interviewer: Do you remember any situation?

P2: Basically this situation that I described, where I said at a certain point, that I don't want to partake regularly in battles. And when you say that in a group, then that stirs these debates, no? That, when I say: <<I don't want this to become an obligation for me>>, then I am representing in that situation the position, then it's no longer play, and they represent the position: <<Why? It's fun>> ((laughs)). Then the definitions are different. (P2/276-279)

The first thing to note here is the continued struggle with putting into words 'what it is that's going on here'. In the last excerpt, the interviewee ascribed the difference between 'play' and 'not play' to 'taking seriously'. Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, not 'taking too seriously'

is part of the gearing norms of leisurely gaming. But the excerpt actually reveals a finer point: To the others, scheduled raid gaming was ‘playing’ because it was still something that ‘is fun’, something they feel they do because they intrinsically enjoy it. To the interviewee, at least at the moment of the discussion, scheduled raid gaming ceased to be ‘play’ because it had become ‘a commitment’. And as he noted in the previous excerpt, in earlier situations where he raided, he did so ‘at times where you don’t want to’. In all instances, autonomous or controlled motivation are able to explain his classifications and struggles with them: feelings of ‘having to’ or ‘being committed’, as in the case of the morning *CityVille* routine or pre-scheduled raiding, are experiences of controlled motivation, which the interviewee described as ‘not play’ and ‘work’. Once he engaged in raiding, this ‘felt playful’ because gameplay did provide intrinsic enjoyment and his attention got so absorbed in the course that he wouldn’t or couldn’t turn attention to the fact that the raid happened at a time ‘where you don’t want to’. So the overall scale during raiding tipped from the predominantly controlled towards the more autonomous. But compared with ‘pure’ gaming, it didn’t move fully to the autonomous side, because there was ‘still this frame that made the whole thing involuntary’, as he put it.

Autonomy and Interaction Tension

To summarise, when players experience an overall controlled motivation during gaming, they tend to label that experience as ‘work’ and ‘not play’, and find it confusing specifically in leisurely gaming. Players experience controlled motivation in gameplay when they perceive they have little choice (a) *whether to game* (the scheduled raid or training hour, the notification of the ripe *FarmVille* crop), (b) *when to stop gaming* (the friends who want to finish the round, the review that is due tomorrow), (c) *what game to game* (the friends who want to play cards, the boring game to analyse), (d) *how to game* (the assigned tactical role in a raid, the analytic testing of language versions), and (e) *how to express themselves emotionally* (gaming in public or at the office). The controlling motivations behind these instances were fears of perceived-relevant consequences, be they social (loss of approval and connection, blemishing one’s reputation, embarrassing oneself in public, not reciprocating, being seen rude by one’s friends, being seen as letting one’s team hang) or material (having to work longer hours, losing a decaying in-game resource, not winning a prize).

However, neither of the two on their own suffices to explain when an overall experience of controlled motivation occurs. It is not the existence of limited choice as such – be it limited by social demands or material means – that makes gaming feel controlled. Else, any raid or e-sport training session would feel controlled, and that is not what interviewees reported. Nor can it be the existence of controlled motivations (social judgements or material consequences) connected to gaming, for the same reason. Nor the conjuncture of both, because again, this conjuncture reportedly occurs in training or reviewing or raiding, and still, interviewees re-

port not necessarily experiencing them as a drag. The third and missing component is the player's spontaneous current interests, needs, and wants. Lack of choice and the controlled motivation enforcing it become salient only if there is a *current misalignment* between the actions a player spontaneously wants to take and the choice of actions given and demanded. As an e-sport athlete notes, most of the time, despite a strict training regimen with attached consequences, e-sport doesn't feel like an obligation. Only if there is something he would spontaneously like to do even more does training become a controlling 'have to':

P16: In:: 95 percent of the cases no. It's still a hobby. You- it's still a passion. You enjoy playing it, also because something like:: a professional level comes in, money and you get around and you get to know new people. That's nice, no question. And those remaining five percent, those are the percentages where you say: <<Hm, not training again from 7 to 10pm? Now I could have gone to the movies with my girlfriend.>> For example. Where you would say: <<I so would have wanted to go with her to the movies. Damn, damn, damn. Why do I have to train now?>> (P16/97-99)

As this instance illustrates, an actor's spontaneous wants and needs are a shifting, changing result of the total situation at hand. Had the dates of going to the movie and training not coincided, had he not enjoyed going to the movies with his girlfriend more than training, there would have been no experience of 'having to'. Take preparatory gaming or 'grinding' as another frequent instance of controlled motivation. Even there, the same prescribed gameplay is not *always* frustrating. Says one interviewee about her experience grinding to increase the strength of her character ('levelling up') in the MMORPG *Aion* (she speaks of *Anno*, a strategy game series, but later in the interview corrects that she was talking about *Aion*):

P18: Yes, with *Anno* the levelling takes much longer and the EP you can get in a normal way are relatively limited, so that to reach the max level, in the end you have to bluntly/dully (('stumpf')) smash some random creatures and at a certain point, that becomes really annoying. There are people you enjoy doing that. There are also times where I enjoy doing that. Because you don't have to think a lot there, instead you just always follow the same schema. Dunno, take aim, this spell, that spell, that spell, dead, bleeds, next. Or something like that. (P18/369)

'In the end', she found it annoying, but 'there are also times' when she 'likes to do it'. That is, based on her current state, she might prefer an activity with low cognitive demands, perhaps for relaxation. But the moment that is no longer the case, the moment she for instance would like a more varied challenge, the fact that gameplay doesn't offer that option and the distal goal of levelling up still compels her to move on generates annoyance and frustration.

This total situational (mis)alignment of demands and spontaneous needs is precisely what Goffman called *interaction tension* (Goffman 1953: 243-57, 1972: 38-41). Where there is 'some discrepancy between obligatory involvements and spontaneous ones' (Goffman 1972: 40), the actor becomes consciously aware of it, engages in effortful self-monitoring and self-control, and experiences *dysphoric tension*. When an actor's attentive focus and involvement, her actions and communications can directly express her current needs because they spontaneously (rather than forcedly) align with the demands of the current situation, Goffman argues, she experiences a positively valenced state of *euphoric ease*, a loosening of effortful self-awareness and self-regulation, a perceived lowering of the pressure of normative demands – not necessar-

ily because there are *fewer* normative demands, but because of the incidental *alignment* of spontaneous impulses and situational proprieties. From an SDT perspective, what Goffman describes with effortful self-regulation is essentially the becoming-salient of internalised controlled motivations: We don't want to game any longer, but we internally self-regulate with an introjected ought (one ought not be a spoilsport), or when we voice our desire to quit, the others verbally respond, potentially appealing to this ought. Dysphoric tension is essentially a situational state of overall controlled motivation, while euphoric ease is an overall state of autonomous motivation arising from a sense of acting in alignment with one's goals, needs, and identity. This explains both the experiential qualities Goffman ascribed to the two, and how and why they arise when situational proprieties and spontaneous interests (mis)align.

What needs to be added to Goffman's perspective is, first, intrinsic need satisfaction: a directly need-satisfying activity – a source of autonomous motivation –, moves motivation towards the autonomous despite the salience of some controlled motivation. Says one player:

Interviewer: Would you call such a situation playing? When you say: I have to play this to the end, because I can't save at this point? Is that playing for you?

P8: That depends on the games. If it's fun, then I tolerate that. And if it's something where:: (1s) where the fun factor isn't that big, then, no, then it wouldn't be a game for me anymore. And then, that would also be a reason for me not to continue playing it. (P8/289-291)

Second, it is social demands *intertwined with material affordances* that stand against (or align with) spontaneous needs: The e-mail notification about the *FarmVille* gift that comes with the perceived norm of reciprocation *together* feel controlling if the player spontaneously does not want to game at that moment. This means, third, that response-present others are not needed to make situational demands salient: game journalists, designers, and researchers are perfectly capable of making themselves miserable (that is, feeling controlled) sitting alone in front of a game device actualising their introjected social demands.

What Goffman adds to SDT is an interesting attentional and situational perspective: when we become attentively aware of misalignments, this breaks a full attentive absorption (engrossment) – and this absorption we find in and of itself desirable. Second, the experience of autonomous motivation is not a direct correlate of maximised intrinsic need satisfaction and free choice: we can feel autonomous even in a very constrained situation as long as our current needs align with what is given and allowed.

The full picture that emerges is this: typically, in leisurely gaming, players choose to game a game based on their current needs, experiencing autonomy in this very choice they perceive to flow from themselves, congruent with their needs, goals, and identity. This free choice also makes it likely that players actually pick a game that fits their currently salient needs and produces intrinsic need satisfaction, making the overall motivation of the situation even more autonomous. As long as gaming is intrinsically need-satisfying (and no other interest becomes more salient), players feel autonomously motivated: they game because they 'want to', because they 'enjoy it'. The interesting thing happens when another interest becomes more salient and/

or gameplay ceases to be intrinsically enjoyable – when it becomes too hard or easy to generate competence experiences, for instance. Players’ spontaneous impulse will be to change the situation to fit their needs again. In leisurely gaming, games give room for such reconfiguration: players may try another quest, or switch the difficulty level, or load an earlier saved game and try another approach, etc. If none of these options satisfy – intrinsic need satisfaction cannot be restored –, the gaming situation itself gives players the license to switch to another game, or another activity entirely. Thus, experiencing controlled motivation during leisurely gaming is unlikely, as players can and will continually reconfigure the total situation to align it with their current needs, and simply cease gameplay when alignment cannot be established or something more relevant appears.

Experiences of controlled motivation occur when this adjustment process is thwarted: Wanting to change or leave the situation, a social or material constraint becomes salient, as does the social or material consequence of not staying within that constraint: we want to end the game, but there is no save point or our friends want to finish the tournament, and we realise that if we end the game nevertheless, we will lose game progress or anger our friends. Thus, a controlled motivation becomes salient, as does the thwarting of our autonomous choice; and it becomes likely that the gameplay we stick to does not align with our current needs anymore, wherefore it also produces less intrinsic need satisfaction. If gameplay is need-satisfying enough, this might still tilt the overall perceived motivation towards the autonomous, but it is not as fully autonomous as when given gameplay aligns with spontaneous needs.

The following excerpt helps illustrate how this plays out in practice. A video game journalist reports the most typical, intense moments of perceived control in review gaming:

P3: There was a time when the magazine came with a DVD. And with certain games we filmed game scenes. And if you reviewed the game, that was okay, but there were also games of free authors, that were reviewed externally. And they sit in Timbuktu and can deliver video. Then we sit in the editorial office in the evening, play games we can’t play and have to shoot video of that where we look good as players. And then you think: <<Ah, we can’t show just the first level>>, even if you only shoot three minutes. That is, actually we already want to go home for a long time because we have to ((review)) the next game, and we have to. Then we have to play some weird military shooter. And in order that not all images come from the desert setting, you really have to get further. And then, then, then you only play half-heartedly, and then you don’t make it of course, and then, then the game is also hard and unfair and so. These are, so video and film shootings are really moments of frustration.

Other moments of frustration are that you get stuck in adventures that you review. That is, you get a game relatively late in the production phase, perhaps for days before the end, two days before you have to hand in the text. The game is completely new, you find no so-called walkthroughs online (...) and then you get stuck. And you know that from adventures: You try out all possible objects, and you try everything, and it, it, you just don’t get any further and such. (...) And that’s the moment where I tell friends: <<This is simply incredibly stressful now.>> So. (3s)

Interviewer: Okay. Can you name what exactly it is that makes it so frustrating for you?

P3: Yes, that’s the time pressure. And so that is the relation of time and having to see as much as possible, so. (...) And you have to, with, with writing you would usually say: <<Okay, I take a couple more notes, let it rest, I’ll look at it tomorrow and start afresh.>> But sometimes you just have to play, you have to get further, no matter whether you want to or not. And then, then that is, then playing is indeed work. (P3-1/223-233)

What makes these situations so frustrating is their total conjunction of circumstances, even beyond the game and the player: he already feels the controlled motivation and time pressure of having to review another game, *and then* he has to game a game he apparently doesn't like ('weird military shooter'), *and* it's tightly prescribed how to game, *and* the game is difficult ('unfair'), *and* he's tired and makes mistakes. Stuck in an adventure game, he would simply stop if it were leisurely play – but he cannot because he has to review it. He might let it lie for an evening – but he cannot because the deadline presses. He might use a walkthrough – but because the game is new, none have appeared yet.

Summary and Conclusions

This section turned to the question how experiences of 'work' and 'play' emerge in leisurely and instrumental gaming. Frame analysis, it argued, can explain how engagement with one and the same video game may be *framed as* leisurely gaming, or activity *framed as* leisurely gaming *keyed as* working. However, it does not as readily explain how an activity framed as working can 'feel like play', or an activity framed as leisurely gaming can 'feel like work'. It was argued that 'voluntariness' lies at the ground of our (Western, modernist) cultural categories of 'work' and 'play', and that formalist game studies has overlooked voluntariness because it is not conceivable as a formal property of an abstract system. Autonomy, as conceptualised in SDT, allows to understand 'voluntariness' as appealed to by many play scholars, and how and why both working and playing activities can feel work-like or play-like. In any situation we are energised and directed by multiple motivations, which range from the highly controlled (external regulation through punishments and rewards) to the highly autonomous (intrinsically need-satisfying activity). Depending on what kinds of motivation are salient in a given situation, both working and playing activities can be experienced as overall controlled or autonomous. When scholars define play as voluntary, what they refer to is that playing and gaming are framed such that a strong overall autonomous motivation is afforded, expected, and demanded. This happens through several means. Framing a situation as gaming (or playing):

- is itself an autonomous act of defining one's own situation;
- specifies the meanings of socio-contextual inputs as self-chosen, inconsequential, and non-binding, and focuses attention on this self-chosenness;
- sociomaterially organises circumstances in which experiences of intrinsic need satisfaction (and other autonomous motivations) are more likely and experiences of controlled motivation less likely (e.g. no 'serious' consequence, lots of interesting challenges);
- entails the normative expectation that gaming and playing ought to be 'fun' (intrinsically enjoyable) and 'voluntary' (autonomously motivated). This gives actors the social license to change the situation to make it intrinsically enjoyable, or leave it when it is not.

The 'working' frame and controlled motivation are linked in the very same ways. In turn, autonomous motivation is associated with, expected from, and discursively established as defining gaming or playing, and vice versa for controlled motivation and working. Thus,

- autonomous motivation can cue the framing of a situation as gaming or playing;
- lacking other discursive means, actors will use the words 'play' or 'play-like' to describe autonomous experiences (and 'work' or 'work-like' to describe controlled experiences);
- actors will find mismatches between expected and actual levels of experienced autonomy in situations framed as working, gaming, or playing as strange.

This explains how something can be framed as 'gaming' but 'feel like work', or be framed as 'working' and 'feel like play'. This theoretical portrayal matches the interview data: both in leisurely and instrumental gaming, interviewees report experiences of controlled motivation, which they label as 'work' and find puzzling especially in leisurely gaming. Experiences of controlled motivation arise when players perceive little choice whether, what, or how to game, when to stop gaming, and whether and how to self-regulate overt bodily displays. The controlling motivations behind these instances were social consequences such as loss of approval, reputation, or connection, or material consequences such as monetary prizes or loss of game progress. Although interviewees found instrumentally keyed gaming overall less engaging and autonomous, experiences of autonomous or controlled motivation are not a constant: they arise from the situational (mis)alignment of an actor's needs with sociomaterial affordances and consequences: When an actor's spontaneous needs align with what is situationally afforded, the situation tends to feel autonomous. When needs and affordances misalign, the actor will typically want to and change or leave the situation. If needs and affordances misalign *and* changing or leaving the situation comes with consequences that manifest controlled motivations, the actor will experience controlled motivation. This situational (mis)alignment is what Goffman called 'interaction tension'. It explains the euphoric ease of alignment as autonomous motivation, and the dysphoric tension of misalignment as controlled motivation.

This portrait mainly focused attention on the situational, moment-to-moment rise and wane of needs and interests of the actor and affordances of the situation relative to them. Here, the higher frequency of experiences of controlled motivation in instrumental keyings stems from the fact that autonomy-thwarting social and material circumstances are likely to reoccur more frequently. But as the next section shows, such stabilisation also happens on the side of the actor. As players routinely engage with games in an instrumental fashion, they habituate dispositions that make instrumental framings more likely.

7.3 'The Curse of Professional Vision'

One recurring feature of instrumental keyings is a telic and analytically distanced stance towards gameplay that requires effort to maintain. This interaction tension can sometimes become so strong that players inappropriately upkey or downkey the situation: reviewing a highly engrossing game, journalists may lose focus of the instrumental goal of reviewing and 'just play'. As this section will show, continual engagement in this analytic distancing over time habituates to a point where players might switch from leisurely gaming into an instrumental key against their will – something one interviewee called 'the curse of professional vision' (P3-1/189). This apt phrase captures the strong negative sentiments interviewees expressed over such *inappropriate* downkeyings of instrumental into leisurely gaming and *undesired* upkeyings of leisurely gaming into something instrumental. These upkeyings are undesirable because the analytic distancing involved in instrumental keyings diminishes one of the joys of leisurely gaming, namely engrossment, the deep involvement in the activity over which one temporarily loses self-concern. The more often one engages with games in an instrumental key, and the more game experience one collects, the harder it becomes to shake off this analytic detachment: a *déformation professionnelle*. The inherent tragedy of professionalised gaming is that the very amount of gameplay one desired when turning gaming into a profession makes it harder and harder to achieve the engrossment that made gameplay desirable in the first place. In response, players engage in active boundary work, trying to keep leisurely gaming and its instrumentalised keying as far apart as possible. As the quoted interviewee explains:

P3: So, well, it's like this, that (3s) the enchantment that game worlds have, wanes over time anyhow. That is, you (3s) you (2s), with time, you get a much more analytic view on all the things anyhow. That's something you always get when, when, so that's the curse of professional vision. That's something that somebody who writes screenplays for instance also gets. That person knows exactly, in a Hitchcock movie, now the side character appears, and perhaps somebody is going to be killed shortly. (...) That's such a view, so to say.

And that's also something in games, that you, so to say, can read the signs that the game gives you professionally. That is, the game sends signals. You see very quickly the, the rules that such a game has. You know exactly: Here I will have to kill three enemies, then a bigger one comes, you have to jump on the head of the final boss there and so on. And this vision you can't switch off completely during contemplative gaming anymore. That's such a knowing.- But you can make smoke it away with weed, in contemplative gaming. And I also have, and I think that's really important, if you want to do this for long, the ability to still let myself be enchanted. (P3-1/189-193)

The following section unpacks these dynamics in three steps. First it looks at situational moments of accidental 'slipping' between laminations, to then turn to the long-term development of a 'professional vision', and end with the ways in which players counteract it.

Frame Slippage

In analytic and review gaming, accidental downkeyings of instrumental gaming is described as losing sight of the exotelic goal pursued in gameplay. There were two main circumstances where such slippages could occur. The first was when a player had just achieved the instrumental goal she set out to accomplish: therefore, continuing to engage with the game did not

carry with it the instrumental framing of work (the 'job' was done); rather, it became a short leisure-time break during work. Says one game researcher:

Interviewer: When did you notice that you slipped from playing for work into a leisurely playing?

P10: Well, when, when you either notice, okay, you, you, you let yourself be distracted from your set goal in the game and then suddenly do something else that doesn't serve the attainment of that goal. Or you attained the goal and then still continue playing. So everything that doesn't go towards that goal. (P10/395-396)

In the following excerpt, we see how the same researcher downkeys an instrumental keying at the very moment he finished the only task he had with the game, namely, to set up all devices and software such that they would run in a following educational event:

P10: For a LAN I recently prepared *TrackMania* and I just wanted to, I wanted to see whether the server tool works, and if you can get onto it together. So if everything works, just in technical terms. And then I thought <<Ah, come one, now you can also drive a round.>> And then you drive a round and then you drive the next map as well and the next and [then-]

Interviewer: [When,] when, when ex*actly* did you say to yourself: <<Ah, now I can drive a round?>> When was that?

P10: That was, well, still (3s). Yes, I had seen, okay, the software, the server is running and somehow, all games get into the race. And then it was like, I was already sitting on it, and then I just had ((chuckling)) to put fingers on the keyboard and then that *was* already this act where you say: <<O-kay, now I'll take a round.>> (P10/400-403)

A second circumstance for frame slippage is if the game is so well-designed that players get fully engrossed in gameplay and forget about their instrumental goal. They might reflexively realise that they lost focus and then decide to let themselves engage in leisurely gaming – to 'give themselves a break'. As one journalist described such an instance in flow-like terms:

P3: So there is for instance also a point where you don't take any notes anymore and suddenly play for two hours. And sometimes you think for a moment: <<Yes, I really should take notes, but fuck it, now it's important to play.>> So, there you slip during work into such a flow and then you just play. Then you may have to make some notes afterwards, but then you say: <<Fuck it, this is so much fun right now>>, and then you're just in it and then, there, there, there you switch. So sometimes the game gets you so that the professional view is switched off. Because everything runs so smoothly that you don't even stop and also don't have to note anything regarding the game mechanics, then you just slide into it and it flows down like that. (P3-1/268)

The journalist made the decision to put an autotelic focus on enjoyment above the instrumental focus on taking notes, which would have broken the flow experience. Note that he phrased this choice as normatively unwanted: 'Yes, I really *should* take notes, but...' Relative to his dispositions, the game afforded such deep engrossment that he decided to inappropriately downkey (and enjoy) his engagement rather than put up with the dysphoric tension of continually staving off engrossment. Conversely, games that do not strongly afford engrossment were reported to invite undesired upkeying and an attentive focus on *analysing* gameplay, for instance if the game story was perceived to be shallow. As another game journalist put it:

P2: Yes, of course, when I see a bad story line or something and then I think, that's the typical media-studies-person-watches-a-movie or so. (P2/71)

One possible explanation for this effect is that 'bad story lines' essentially refers to a strongly *formulaic* design whose invariants are therefore picked up more easily. Slippages into other keys or modes do not even necessarily require specific circumstances. In the following excerpt, one journalist describes his experience of playing video games to socialise with his girlfriend:

P3: And then there are often situations, where I actually lie in my bed with a friend contemplatively, and we play together, but I already see the signals of the game, and she is playing. And then I say: <<Hey, you have to get up there now>>, and: <<Go that way, and then here>>, and there have really been moments where we got into a fight. Because, then I am in, from this setting of lying in my bed with my girlfriend on a Sunday morning and playing I slid into this professional thing and got impatient. And I get impatient, and that of course ruins such a thing. Because especially the people who don't know this kind of thing very well, they suddenly feel a performance pressure, a pressure I build up, that's no fun at all. (P3-1/262)

Despite being with a close other, in his preferred leisurely game setting, the bed, and on a weekend day off, the slow speed of his girlfriend's in-game progress afforded to the journalist as a highly experienced gamer no full engrossment in gameplay. What was suspensefully problematic to his girlfriend was unproblematically easy for him. To modulate this experienced dysphoric tension (becoming 'impatient'), he tried to speed up the gameplay of his girlfriend with giving tips, to a point where this created the experience of controlled motivation ('performance pressure') in her. More generally, then, frame slippages tend to occur when the afforded engrossment in a certain attentive focus and the demanded or desired degree of engrossment and attentive focus of the current framing are in too strong a tension.

One can see this exact relation play out again in e-sports. Where a stretch of leisurely gaming suddenly afforded an unexpected challenge to his skill and reputation (the avowed attentive focus in training or tournament gaming, but not in socialising gaming), an e-sport athlete would slip into professional, highly competitive gaming:

Interviewer: Did it happen to you, that you slid from the, from a leisurely playing into... (...) serious, professional gaming? That during gaming you [suddenly thought, now]

P13: [Yes], that happens from time to time. In the, in such a situation, like when I'm suddenly, when we are outnumbered. So, if it's two against five. Then I suddenly become serious. (P13/303-305)

On the other hand, if a training game was so utterly easy to win that focus on winning and training was not strongly afforded, he would downkey into leisurely, less telic gaming:

P13: For instance, when something funny happened, or you made a joke in the middle of training, then it does happen, ((laughs)) that you have to laugh so long that you don't play focused anymore. That does happen, of course. Or if you're just winning massively. Or let's say, we have won fifteen to zero, then we have to switch sides, then we need one more round to win, and another fifteen rounds are to play, so the enemies are shitty. Because if we win by that much, the enemies have to be shitty. (P13/319)

Professional Vision

Slippages from leisurely into instrumental keyings obviously require that the instrumental keying itself is readily available as a disposition in the player. This entails long and intense practicing of taking an instrumental stance towards gaming until it becomes *habitual*, a reconfiguration of one's dispositions that is hard to counteract even if one wants to.

One part of this habituation is acquiring the 'professional vision' (Goodwin 1994) of one's craft as an e-sports athlete, journalist, game designer, or scholar: learning the conceptual entities of one's field or discipline, and how to perceive and reflexively indicate them in gameplay. The other is the sheer familiarisation with video games through thousands of hours of gam-

ing. In Gibsonian terms, this intense learning reorganises one's perceptual system to pick up ever-more easily and quickly more and more, and ever-more 'higher order', compound invariants in gameplay. As one participant described the phenomenon:

P3: They ((other, less experienced friends)) try things in a game I would never try. There's a ladder in the corner, for instance. And for me it's absolutely clear: this ladder, you can't take it, you can't climbWC up that ladder. Because in the rule system of this game it is not planned that you do these things. And they are so deeply into this world that they can't differentiate between the world and the rules, and they try to take the ladder. Or try to climb up at ledges where it doesn't work. And I have this professional vision and know that the whole world is built from multiples of my avatar. That is, if the ledge is as high as my avatar, then I can reach it. And if it's a little higher in the graphics, then I immediately switch that off and don't even try it. (P3-1/195-197)

Another participant, a game scholar, traced his tendency to view games analytically back to his first prolonged and intense period of hardcore gaming – raiding in the early *World of Warcraft*:

P10: So I, I think, I believe for me it's very hard to separate: Do I do this just for, for, for entertainment, to pass the time, or do I do this with some afterthought? So often I catch myself how I start to analyse although I don't want to analyse at all ((chuckles)). (...)

Interviewer: Can you say when that started, that you suddenly, as you said, think through games or look at them more analytically?

P10: Puh ((clears throat)). Good question. From, when did that start? (7s) I believe that was, that could well have been this very long and intense *World of Warcraft* time.

Interviewer: Why? What do you think?

P10: Hm, several possible explanations. So I played it pretty excessively. Luckily I didn't have studies then, which demanded very much ((laughs)), in and of itself. I was, so that was one of the, that was my first online game. It was the first time I played in a guild. With others, in a raid. (P10/150-155)

As seen, the resulting 'professional view' is analytic, intellectual, distanced, and highly telic. It 'sees through' the audiovisual representations and picks up just those *Gestalten* that are relevant action possibilities in terms of the game's rules. Frame analytically, the focus is usually on either the instrumental goal or the gameplay, not the game fiction. Even where fiction is focused, it is attended to as a narrative design in its madeness. Says one game designer:

P9: Sure, when the game would generate fun, then you would of course try to analyse: <<What was it that was fun here? What in detail was it and how can I use that for myself?>> (P9/195)

The professional vision developed in instrumentalised keyings is highly similar to hardcore and competitive modes of leisurely gaming – arguably grounded in the same intense gaming practice. As one 'power gamer' interviewed by Taylor (2006: 74) articulated his professional vision: 'I look at *EverQuest* as the numbers. If you do this you'll get this, this is a better combination, you'll have a better chance to kill. That's all it is for me'. One interviewee likened 'hardcore gaming' (his emic term) to professional gaming as a video game reviewer himself:

P3: Because with hardcore gaming, of course one has to, really, one has to get into it. For instance, one has to look- I previously mentioned game mechanics. There is also a point mechanic, so. And there is, with 2D shooters and such, there are systems how to get the most points possible. And with professional gaming one also has to look how intelligent this system is. And that means you have to make points and try, how are the multipliers and so on. And that's of course already such a hardcore way of thinking that engages with, really with the rule system and tries to be as successful as possible at it. (P3-2/292)

In fact, hardcore and competitive gamers regularly aid this process by enrolling specialised software that displays only game-rule-relevant *Gestalten*, such as a threat meter in *World of Warcraft* (Chen 2010: 130-80). Professional vision is afforded by specific configurations of both

bodily dispositions and material features. As one journalist noted, the review keying for him was intricately linked to his note pad: seeing, holding, placing the note pad next to him cued that what now transpired what review gaming, requiring a more detached, analytic stance:

P1: You approach it with a completely different, so I am, I am in a completely different, in another expecting, evaluating, and emotional grasping in that moment when I have the note pad lying next to me ((knocks with hand on a virtual note pad on the table)) and know, somehow, my job is to bring this into words. (P1-4/325)

Boundary Work

To deal with the bleed of professional vision into leisurely gaming, participants reported a series of strategies – as seen in the introductory quote, one journalist even took to smoking weed to switch off his professional vision. The first and most frequent strategy was to construct separate settings for instrumental and leisurely gaming. Instrumental keyings were the only instances where participants reported that they would engage with a video game in an office space, and feel that that would be appropriate to do. States a video game journalist:

P3: Well, there are different settings for me: There's the professional game setting, in the editorial office, then there is the professional setting at home and then there's the purely contemplative setting. And I mean, sometimes, as a journalist it's the case that these settings blur, because you also can play the game you review just like that at home. But of course even there we have to take notes, because the more you write down during the game, the easier it is to write the review. And then it's just not so good if you are in your bed, because then to also always take these notes, there you are too, too laid back for that. (P3-1/39)

As the journalist continued later in the interview, to prevent the 'blurring' of leisurely and review gaming, and create conditions conducive to the analytic focus of the latter, review gaming at home would usually take place sitting upright in a chair at a desk rather than lying on his bed, something also reported by the other journalists, academics, and designers. The simple spatial separation of settings and a configuration supporting focus or relaxation was enrolled as part of the active construction of different framings of video gaming. Another strategy, reported especially in e-sports, was to select different games:

Interviewer: Something, where you say: That thing, that game I play for fun?

P14: Ugh. Yes. Well *HoN*, so *Heroes of Newerth*, and otherwise not really anything. Otherwise a bit of Playstation. (...) *FIFA*. But otherwise. *Counterstrike* only in the evening, when I have to, during training times, but otherwise not really anymore.

Interviewer: Ok. Why not really anymore?

P14: Pf, because it doesn't tempt me that I somehow have to play it the whole day, instead it's simply only the training that counts and more I actually don't need. (P14/11-14)

Players also limited overall play time of their sports game, not playing it during leisure time:

P13: So if I would only play *Counterstrike* every day, then I wouldn't have any interest during the trainings anymore. Because then I would have, I would be fed up with it. And that's why I keep it within limits. (P13/145)

Summary and Conclusions

This section analysed how and when frame slippages between leisurely gaming and instrumental keyings occur. On the most general level, slippages happen when the attentive focus on

and gearing into one lamination spontaneously afforded by the situation came into tension with the official, demanded lamination. This affordance naturally involves the actor's dispositions: actors who continually engage in highly telic and analytically detached instrumental gaming habituate this form of gaming as a 'professional vision', tending to approach any gameplay more analytically and goal-oriented. Their perception-action system is reorganised to directly perceive invariants both in game rules and game fiction. Thus, 'formulaic' gameplay is likely to hold little challenge to them and surface these invariants in their attention, such that players find it hard to be attentively absorbed in the moment-to-moment flow of gameplay, and don't find it spontaneously need-satisfying or surprising. This leads game journalists, designers, and researchers to upkey from engrossed leisurely gaming into their analytic keyings when faced with 'easy' and 'formulaic' games, and e-sport athletes to downkey training into leisurely gaming when their opponents are likewise too 'easy' to generate the training-required focused attention. In turn, when gameplay is surprising and challenging enough, it generates spontaneous engrossment in moment-to-moment gameplay that may lead players to downkey instrumental into leisurely gaming. Because the analytic distancing entailed in instrumental gaming is anathema to the spontaneous engrossment sought in leisurely gaming, players would engage in active boundary work to keep the two separate through game choice, timing, and spatial setting, even using psychoactive substances.

7.4 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter explored instances of so-called 'instrumental play' (Taylor 2006), which trouble and blur contemporary folk-theoretical notions of a clear-cut opposition of 'work' and 'play'. It found that the frame analytic distinction between frames ('work', 'play'), frame configurations (work objects and settings, play objects and settings), situational framings of activity (as an instance of 'working' or 'playing'), and keyings could disentangle phenomena of instrumental play as encountered in the interview data. Game journalists, designers, researchers, and e-sport athletes, when engaged in instrumental play as part of their profession, would interact with a video game (object) in a form patterned on and observably similar to leisurely gaming (primary frame), but would key this gaming *as working* (that is, as the specific kind of working they engaged in: reviewing, analysing, training, tournamenting). Such instrumental keyings are organised around the motivational relevancy of an exotelic, instrumental outcome. Setting and activity are transformed in small but crucial ways to support this outcome, while the actors' experience 'what it is that's going on here' changed dramatically. As one e-sport athlete reprimanded his team members: 'Pull yourself together, (...) this is not for fun here!' (P15/345) All instrumental keyings showcased high telicity, analytic detachment from gameplay, professional norms of efficiency, and a consequential gearing into the world.

Instrumental keyings were also characterised by specific forms of dysphoric tension: having to explore a game comprehensively while keeping gameplay time short; having to be authentically engrossed and reflexively capturing that engrossment; having to game a game that one finds uninteresting or frustrating; having to game while one wants to engage in another activity; having to efficiently locate gameplay states faced with voluminous games; having to monitor and self-regulate one's emotion display; having to remain cool and detached in situations of intense pressure and arousal.

The chapter turned to the concept of autonomy developed in self-determination theory to explain these states of dysphoric tension, and why activities framed as gaming can 'feel work-like'. In leisurely and instrumental gaming, experiences of dysphoric tension, labeled by players as 'work', refer to states of overall controlled motivation (or thwarted autonomy). Whereas existing research chiefly studied autonomy support in video gaming in terms of the game's design, the chapter showed that *situational* autonomy support plays a crucial role in whether and when players experience gameplay as autonomous or not. Leisurely video gaming typically feels autonomous because it is sociomaterially ordered to have minimal symbolic or material consequence; generates high degrees of intrinsic need satisfaction; and allows players to freely enter, configure, and leave the overall situation to fit their current needs. Leisurely *solitary* gaming in specific was described as a 'room of one's own', a relief from outer demands, a resort of autonomy in their everyday life. 'Work-like' experiences of controlled motivation would occur when the actor's spontaneous needs misaligned with sociomaterial affordances and symbolic and material consequences charged with controlled motivation were attached to reconfiguring or leaving the situation.

In instrumental play, as to be expected, this chiefly occurs when players cannot choose when or how long to game, what game to game, or how to game it, leading to instances where they cannot configure gameplay such that it is intrinsically enjoyable, but engage with it nevertheless to pursue the instrumental goal outside gameplay itself, which is energised and directed by controlled motivations of extrinsic professional consequence and social demands from colleagues. In these moments, the overall experience tilts from autonomous to controlled, and players report feeling pressured, 'having to' game the game.

In leisurely gaming, experiences of controlled motivation arise where players cannot freely choose whether or how long to game, how to game, and how to express their emotions due to perceived social norms and demands of their peers, or – especially in MMORPGs and social network games – due to game features that put gameplay in the service of some *other* in-game goal. Again, players cannot configure time and form of gameplay to fit their current needs such that gameplay doesn't provide intrinsic enjoyment, but engage in it nevertheless energised and directed by concerns over damaging relations to others, damaging one's reputa-

tion, or losing in-game resources that would allow perceived-enjoyable future gameplay. Thus, the overall experience once more tilts from autonomous to controlled.

Finally, the chapter showed that instrumentally keyings were stabilised in and reproduced not only by shared social expectations, norms, and material arrangements, but also by the habituation of dispositions, to wit, a 'professional vision' that players continually engaged in instrumental play would develop. This professional vision made inappropriate and/or undesired up- and downkeyings of situations more likely. When the tension between appropriate and spontaneously afforded focus of attention would become too great, players would switch from leisurely gaming into a more instrumental, analytically detached instrumental key, or from an instrumental keying into leisurely gaming.

8 Discussion

We began this thesis moved by a double disquiet. One was digital convergence, dissolving previously stable ‘media’ into their requisite components. Thanks to mobile, multifunctional devices, ubiquitous connectivity and digital content, people can engage with many kinds of content in many ways on many devices in many contexts. Thus, what it is that people are engaging with, how they engage with it, and how they make sense of all this is no longer enshrined by a stable ‘dispositive’ (Hickethier 1995) – it becomes a question of people’s situational action and meaning-making. This troubles contemporary conceptions of ‘media’ and the ‘medium video games’. The second disquiet was the cultivation of *ludus*: the rise of instrumental play – like serious games, gamification, gaming-as-work, real-money trading, virtual item sales, and work-like grinding in games – is undermining traditional conceptions of play and games as fun, voluntary, inconsequential, the opposite of work, and separate from the rest of life. In the light of convergence and instrumental play, conceptualising media or video games as ‘given’ types of objects with clear properties and boundaries no longer works. In response, researchers have been looking for ways of theorising media usage and video gaming as types of situated action. Goffman’s frame analysis has been repeatedly pointed at as a candidate for this theoretical shift, but the literature largely remained at such mere gesturing: both a critical appreciation of frame analysis in the context of contemporary social theory and its systematic theoretical and empirical application to video gaming have been amiss so far.

The central objective of this thesis was to provide just such a systematic frame analytic account of video gaming. Surveying the state of research, it identified five specific tasks on that path: (1) Theorising video gaming as frames, in so doing (2) accounting for situated action and historic change as well as (3) materiality – specifically, how game objects and settings partake in the ordering of a video gaming encounter, and how wider spatial and social settings of gaming factor into this. (4) It had to empirically describe the ‘unwritten rules’ of adult leisurely video gaming – whether and how they differ from the accounts Goffman and others offered for board and card gaming, and whether and how the novel social contextures of soli-

tary gaming and online multiplayer gaming make a difference. (5) Finally, it had to empirically describe whether and how instrumental gaming differs from 'canonical' leisurely gaming.

The present chapter synthesises the findings of the previous pages as answers to these questions. It first sketches the main conclusions regarding frame analysis and the role of processes and materiality in framing and video gaming, to then articulate the main tenets of a frame analytic account of video gaming, and how it answers the troubles of media convergence and instrumental play. The following two sections then outline the main empirical findings regarding the 'unwritten rules' of video gaming and instrumental gaming. After that, findings are situated in the context of related work, ramifications discussed, and limitations and future research needs outlined.

8.1 Main Findings

Frame Analysis

The first contribution of this thesis has been to counter a common impoverished reading of frames as *either* socially shared cognitive schemata actors draw on to understand situations as layers of meaning, *or* social rules that constitute types of situations but don't account for 'subjective' meaning-making and experience. Both readings ignore Goffman's insistence that frames organise *both* covert experience *and* overt behaviour and events. However, Goffman himself failed to substantiate just *how* frames are materially instantiated and accomplish such organising work. Filling this gap has been the second theoretical contribution: the thesis developed a pragmatist, deflated model of *frames* as nexuses of actors, actions, communications, experiences, events, objects, and settings that reproduce-and-change their perceivably similar co-occurrence as types of situations across space and time. *Framing* in turn was conceptualised as the process of constitutive ordering in which a situated activity system is generated and maintained: a temporary self-organising set of actors, actions, communications, objects, settings, and events being attended to, perceived, understood, organised, and enacted as a specific type of situation. Frames and framing span material, epistemic, and normative orderings that specify motivational relevancies, attention and involvement, emotion, actions and communications, objects, settings, and events, actors and their roles, an internal organisation of the situation, metacommunication, and a gearing into the wider world. That is, they articulate what is situationally possible, expectable, intelligible, and appropriate. A third common misreading conceptualises frames as layers of meaning added 'on top' of a basic, ultimate 'everyday reality'. Yet according to Goffman, 'everyday reality' is the total mesh of strips of framed activity. As social beings, our sense of 'realness' derives from the depth and spontaneity of our engrossment in a strip of activity, the spontaneity and ease with which we can frame it, and the degree to which this engrossment and framing are shared with and amplified by others.

The Processuality of Frames and Video Gaming

One important piece missing in Goffman's frame analysis is the specification of how framings get situationally established, and how frames historically evolve, stabilise, and change. As to situational framing, we drew on post-Wittgensteinian philosophy, practice theory, and ethnomethodology to flesh out how in an open, reflexive, indexical, and sequential process, objects, settings, events, actors, actions, and communications are enrolled as a co-constitutive contexture of the framing that also cues actors' frame understandings, which in turn inform their perceptions, understandings, experiences of and interactions with that contexture. Framing is thus organised by the affordances emerging from the relation of environmental features and actors' dispositions, and accomplished, affirmed, or changed at every turn at interaction. Metacommunication as understood by Bateson and Goffman plays an important role in this process. It includes explicit verbal and gestural, but also material 'brackets' such as lines drawn around a soccer field: actors offload cognitive and communicative work establishing what entities are framed how into material objects and settings. Importantly, metacommunication itself is indexical – it remains underspecified if divorced from the total context –, and framing mostly occurs implicitly, as a matter of course (of the interaction sequence), through the routine means actors use to jointly organise any situated action and its meaning.

Drawing on existing empirical literature, we found the same thing to hold for video gaming, across the presumed divides of 'in game', 'in room', and 'in world' (Stevens, Satwicz & McCarthy 2008), and through the very same routine means. To quote Aarsand's (2007a: 18) pithy summation: 'if the participants orient to the activity as gaming, then it is gaming'. Closer analysis of the 'magic circle' or presumed game/non-game boundary showed it to be a false reification: None of the empirical phenomena considered to constitute or being caused by 'the magic circle' – a bounded space and time, a ruled ordering, an attitude, social meanings, attentive focus, metacommunication, a gearing into the world – require a separate 'boundary' entity to explain how they coming about. Nor do they on their own suffice to constitute an instance of 'gaming'. If anything, 'the magic circle' describes the utterly mundane process of framing found in any situation in our social world.

Applying this processualised understanding of framing to gaming, we saw that constituting an action as 'gaming' involves *two* constitutive orders: the general 'unwritten rules' of framing a situation as 'gaming *a* game', and the specific constitutive rules of the specific game in question, whose enactment renders actors, actions, communications, objects, and events into its specific game entities, states, and moves ('gaming *this* game'). In contrast, the conception of games, rules, and rule-following dominant in formalist game studies replicates certain conceptual flaws of cognitivist and structuralist sociology and AI. Just like 'the magic circle' reifies the process of framing into a separate, abstract entity, so do formalist conceptions of games like chess as abstract sets of 'constitutive' rules. They gloss over the world in which

there is nothing but individual chess pieces, boards, printed rule books, and chess players who based on their socialisation make sense of these objects and enrol them in the production of actions that are intelligible to them and acknowledged by the others as ‘following the rules of chess’. For the engagement with a game to constitute ‘gaming’, we require a human actor having a practical understanding of at least some game rules, actively enforcing these constitutive rules, and most of all, acting in accordance with all the constitutive rules.

Chess and other formal games allowed to illustrate the historical processes of frame institutionalisation and change. Here we drew on Giddens’s structuration theory and Bijker’s theory of technical frames. Since frames are ‘nothing but’ the total nexus of settings and objects, actors, actions, communications, and events that hang together in a way that makes their similar re-occurrence as a type of situation more likely, any situational framing is materially a part of the frame it instantiates, reproducing but also changing it in the course. Thus, frames continually change, and new frames evolve in an order-from-order process, institutionalised in communities, and stabilised in the obduracy of material objects and human bodies. Frames guide the production, usage, and understanding of frame-belonging objects. Objects in turn enable and stabilise the learning and self-same production of frame-belonging actions, communications, perceptions, understandings and experiences. Individuals from different communities may bring different frame dispositions to an object, revealing different, novel uses and understandings. These may then be socially shared, and objects may be (re)shaped to better support these novel uses and understandings, stabilising and distributing them across space and time. For instance, in formal games like chess, the evolution of player communities (including ‘authoritative’ bodies) in which novice players get socialised into gaming the game, and the mass production and distribution of highly similar chess sets and chess rule books together practically accomplish the stability and repeatability scholars commonly associate with formal games.

In sum, this thesis contributed a specification of (a) situational processes of framing and (b) historical processes of frame institutionalisation, (c) the situational process of framing in video gaming, and (d) the institutionalisation process of new (formal games), in so doing highlighting how the stability of gaming encounters and games is not due to some quasi-Platonic entity (‘magic circle’, ‘constitutive rules’), but a practical accomplishment.

The Materiality of Frames and Video Gaming

The second missing piece identified in frame analysis was materiality. The main argument (and contribution) here was to highlight and explicate the little-noticed complementariness of Gibsonian affordances and Mead’s philosophy of the act, which in turn allowed to systematically integrate materiality into frame analysis, and address a series of issues the affordance concept faces when applied to human actors living in a social world.

Affordances describe the snapshot state of the current relations of features of the environment and dispositions of an actor, which make future actions and events of relevance to the actor more or less possible and effortful. Most affordances in today's world are social: both objects and actors have been shaped in a social world; they wouldn't persist without maintenance from it; the object's uses would be neither possible nor intelligible without its enrolment in nets of social interaction; and the dispositions enabling the actor to realise said uses are learned in those nets of social interaction. Furthermore, affordances are situated: they depend on the total contexture in which object and actor are embedded; actors perceive, understand, and act on affordances based on their current frame understanding of the situation; and actors actively configure objects. Finally, affordances are more extensive than commonly thought, including actions, communications, emotions, motivational states, and experiences.

In *Strategic Interaction* (1969) and 'Where the Action Is' (1967), Goffman laid out a first incisive analysis of the role of materiality in gaming encounters. Game equipment *makes* gaming inconsequential by involving objects and affording actions that run a minimal risk of incurring harm, often by replacing them with symbolic representations. Game equipment provides a central 'engrossable' that all participants have easy attentive access to and can spontaneously focus attention on; it is clear and unambiguous in its current placement and state, and hard to manipulate by one participant without others noticing. Finally, game equipment is designed to compress actions and effects around a central problematic, suspenseful outcome into one maximally separated and interdependent web that plays out within the spatial and temporal bounds of one response-present encounter.

Based on this initial analysis, we identified specific features of *video* games, as well as empirically open questions: how video game equipment factors into the organisation of video gaming, and – exemplarily in mobile gaming – what role differing spatial settings and social occasions play. We found that even in public, people choose settings where gaming is situationally appropriate: recreational, transit, and waiting spaces where leisure and time-filling activities are common and do not disturb bystanders. Preferred video gaming settings shield from harm, distraction, and the attention of potentially disapproving bystanders, thus supporting relaxed and full engrossment in gameplay. People also actively configure their setting to achieve a desired degree of attentive absorption and arousal in video gaming – by adjusting lighting, background music, seating, by putting on headphones, etc. People would also actively use settings to maintain boundaries between leisurely and instrumental gaming.

The same was found with gaming devices: instrumental gaming sometimes involves dedicated devices, and people set up specified documentation tools, hardware configurations, or controllers to optimally support instrumental gaming. More generally, gaming devices serve as implicit metacommunicative cues for both leisurely and instrumental video gaming. People choose devices and seating arrangements that fit their desired level of arousal and attentive

absorption. Device choice is also connected to how its game controllers fit people's dispositions (what controller they grew to master) and the demands of specific game genres.

When it comes to *game software*, we saw that the algorithmic implementation of rules in video games often turns the gaming equipment into a quasi-natural object: instead of being instructed in explicit rule representations (as in board games), players learn by interacting what game moves are possible and what effects they have. This blackboxes the rules, which players sometimes counter with attempts to retro-engineer the rules ('theorycrafting'). But it also allows rules of a much higher complexity than would be possible for human actors to manage. Large parts of rule enforcement in video gaming are offloaded into this obdurate resistance of the equipment towards not rule-conforming inputs. Thus, most rule-breaking revolves around manipulating or overstepping the game software and hardware in terms of what game moves are enabled, what input forms are accepted, and what information is provided.

We also found a clear but non-deterministic relation between game genres (Apperley 2006, Arsenault 2009) and gaming modes. Different game genres differently afford specific modes. Still, people could and did engage with one and the same game in different modes. Drawing on analyses of frames as media genres, one may assume that game genres stabilise and interlock expectations, understandings, evaluations, and practices of game producers, distributors, regulators, journalists, players, etc. (Livingstone 1996, Winter 1992, Willems 2000).

The temporal organisation of video gaming – how gaming is lodged in the flow of people's lives, and how gaming encounters are internally organised – proved to be strongly affected by the game software. Beginnings and endings of gameplay involve a sequence of metacommunication between involved players *and* the game equipment. Once gameplay has commenced, its attentive demands and connected social norms of non-interruption are strongly dependent on whether the game is 'real-time' or not, and on how interruptible gameplay is. Whether certain games are chosen, whether gameplay is pre-planned, and when gameplay is ended – all these questions are impacted by the game's *closure point span*: how long it takes to reach a satisfying closure of a stretch of gameplay.

In sum, beyond articulating how materiality factors into frames and framing, this thesis contributed a Meadian take on affordances, a theoretical articulation of the role of game equipment in the ordering of gaming encounters, and empirical answers to the function of spatial and social settings, gaming devices, and game genres in video gaming encounters.

The Social Contextures of Video Gaming

Analysing the specific material features of video gaming, we found that they also afforded two novel social contextures: single-player gaming against computer opponents, and multiplayer gaming mediated over computer networks (Crawford 1981: 4). This raised the open empirical question whether and how the two differ from bodily co-present multiplayer gaming, which

formed the basis of Goffman's analyses. First, we found that in bodily co-present multiplayer gaming, people prefer players with a minimum of established social ties, as bodily co-presence heightens bodily and symbolic vulnerability, especially with unknown, untrusted others. Thus, in bodily co-presence with unknown others (e.g. during mobile gaming in public), people would more strongly self-regulate their emotion display during gameplay, presumably to not appear strange and open themselves up to embarrassment.

Second, social norms of *harmony* and *participation* – caring about the other players' enjoyment, honouring the appointed beginning and closure span of a gaming encounter – were more salient the more *socially close* players were to each other, that is, the stronger their social ties were, and the more response-present players were. Hence, anonymous online gaming was found to be an especially 'rude' multiplayer gaming context, a fact interviewees ascribed to the lack of bodily and symbolic consequence afforded by the technical setup, and to the lack of nonverbal cues. However, with communication channels such as Voice over IP and with social ties growing through repeated interaction, social norms can become highly salient even in mediated multiplayer gaming, as MMORPG guilds and online shooter clans demonstrate.

Third, we saw that the mutual attunement and mirroring of emotion and arousal among bodily co-present participants would amplify and give license to the even fuller expression of emotion, arousal, and engrossment in gameplay. In multiplayer gaming, players and onlookers would engage in the practice of *up- and downtalking* to actively produce this 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim), as well as the enjoyment of the public approval of players' superior performance. In contrast, we found that *solitary gaming* is perceived as a space of desirable relief from social demands: harmony and participation norms, but also gameworthiness norms (e.g. not cheating) are almost absent. Where gameworthiness is salient in solitary gaming, this is due to the internalisation of these norms as part of one's identity as a 'gamesperson'.

To summarise, the main contributions with regard to social contextures were (a) foregrounding this taken-for-granted feature of solitary gaming and (b) empirically re-articulating notions of distinct multiplayer gaming contextures (Simon 2007) into a dimension of social closeness, offering (c) a theoretical, frame analytic account of how and why this dimension affects gaming encounters.

A Frame Analytic Account of Video Gaming

Turning to the focal question of this thesis: How can we theorise 'video gaming' in terms of a processualised, materialised frame analysis? The first thing to note is that frame analysis presents a fundamental shift in the mode of reasoning: it does not engage in semantic and formalist conceptions of 'games' (or 'media' more generally) as a somehow definable set of properties – be that intensional genus-differentia definitions, cluster accounts, or family resemblances. We argued that such accounts at some point engage in a form of (logical) idealism and fall for

fallacies of misplaced concreteness, taking the secondary, abstracted representations they generate of and in social reality to exist somehow independent of it (in the form of archetypes, logical propositions, or scientific meta-language), glossing over instead of explaining just how this abstracted entity 'games' is instantiated, produced, and reproduced, and how scientific descriptions of it are made of and feed back into the social reality to which they refer.

Frame analysis also does not engage in the subjectivism of certain forms of radical constructivist or cognitivist accounts of 'media' (or 'games') as ultimately subjective construals and schemata, since they also fall for fallacies of misplaced concreteness, if in the more attenuated fashion of narrowly localising their abstract entities 'in the brain'. They tend to not account for or minimise the necessary embodiment, embedding, and socialisation of said brain. They tend to explain cognition and perception with representations that beg the question just *how* their 'representational power' and the 'matching' of percepts and concepts is achieved, if not by a 'little man in the head' (Gibson 1986, Chemero 2009, Wilson & Golonka 2013). They tend to not acknowledge or minimise the actor-environment relationality of perception and action, in the last analysis not being able explain why just these (and not other) cognitive schemata develop (if they don't relate to environmental features that somehow hold relevance to the actor), or how they could develop (if not in lockstep with the material formation of new objects and practices in the social world), or why just these (and not other) perceptions and actions are occurring at any given moment (if any environmental 'irritation' is ultimately just that: epiphenomenal noise). Finally, they tend to not engage with or minimise the ongoing sequential perception-action process occurring between an embodied actor and its environment in which perceptions, understandings, actions are accomplished. This is not to say that *all* cognitivist or constructivist accounts do and must out of principle fail in these regards, but the current mainstream in media and communication research tends to.

In short, frame analysis argues that we cannot sensibly conceive of 'video games' as a set of formal features of a material box, nor as a representational concept in a brain, because both accounts fall for some fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Instead, frame analysis offers a pragmatist, deflated conception of a 'video game frame' as a time-and-space spanning nexus of actors and their dispositions, objects and settings and their features, actions, communications, and events that reproduces-and-changes its reoccurrence as types of situations, and of 'video gaming' as a situated activity system or framing that constitutes a situation as belonging to the video game frame. Boxes and their formal features are an inherent part of this nexus: They stabilise in their obduracy the reoccurrence of specific affordances (relative to actors' dispositions) such as minimised bodily consequentiality, spontaneous engrossment, and the like. Actor's frame 'knowledge' (the socially acquired dispositions that enable them to perceive, understand, enact an object as a 'video game', and a situation as 'video gaming') is likewise an inherent part of this nexus: for the constitution of an object 'being a video game' and

of a situation 'being video gaming' necessarily requires a human actor doing constitutive ordering. Also, in our social world, it is only human actors who can build up a reflexive, discursive understanding of these nexuses and situations and produce symbols and representational media that refer to and become a reproducing-and-changing part of them.

Yet neither boxes with features nor frame knowledge in brains (and other frame dispositions in bodies) would or could exist independently of this total nexus, nor could they on their own bring it into being, nor would they work and make sense without their relationality. Frames and framings are material, epistemic, and normative orderings of both covert perception, understanding, experience, and overt objects, actions, events. Contra cognitivist and even Symbolic Interactionist accounts, frames and framings are always also orderings of overt, observable bodies, objects, settings, actions, events, and 'meanings' or 'cognitions' are always also empractical and normatively, emotionally, motivationally charged with relevance. Contra ethnomethodology, non-observable subjectivity matters, and the observable constitutive ordering of action, objects, etc., is not exhausted in matters of intelligibility: it also affords relative to actors certain actions, perceptions, understandings, experiences.

In contemporary media and game studies, formalist attempts at defining 'video games' as boxes with features (or sentences with logical propositions) have clearly dominated, and thus, so has the formalist flavour of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (e.g. Salen & Zimmerman 2004, Juul 2005, Tavinor 2008, cf. Bogost 2006, Sicart 2011). Specifically, formalist game studies have tended to define 'games' as abstract, reified entities ('systems') in a neitherland between objects and activities with certain features 'as such', backgrounding that these features only exist and are only intelligible relative to human actors, and backgrounding that most of these features can only be situationally instantiated by a human actor. They have also tended to define individual games as abstract, reified units of 'rules' that are then merely implemented by objects and actors, when the very constitution of an act or event as 'rule-following' is a practical capacity and communal ascription.

Empirically, the fallacies inherent in these formalist conceptions don't even become a problem in 'cool' periods of slow socio-technical change where the features of objects and actors' fitting dispositions are highly institutionalised, stabilised, self-similar across situations in time and space, with 'orderly' situations where interaction remains nicely spatiotemporally focused and people engage with 'canonical' objects and settings in the 'canonical' way. Here, patterned surface regularities become very easy to pick up and discursively state. It is only in 'hot' periods of innovation and in 'disorderly', non-canonical situations that the problems of formalist definitions are foregrounded. Today's media convergence and cultivation of *ludus* produce just this heated disorder. This is one frame analytic explanation *why* researchers are questioning formalist accounts *now*. (Though it bears repeating that long before, people al-

ready could and did do many different things with games beyond gaming them, and could and did game with very many things beyond games.)

In short, we can easily define ‘video games’ (or ‘medium X’) as objects with certain formal features until objects and their features change and people still call them ‘video games’ (or ‘X’), or until the objects stay the same but people don’t call them ‘video games’ (or ‘X’) anymore – that is, until the situational underspecification of meaning and the process of constitutive ordering become salient. When someone watches a YouTube channel of videos pirated from a broadcaster on their smartphone at a bus station and calls that ‘television’, when a usability tester tests a video game and calls that ‘testing’, or when an e-sports athlete does or doesn’t call what she does ‘playing a game’, then formalism just can’t compute anymore ‘what it is that’s going on here’, because it tries to define ‘video games’ (or ‘medium X’) independent of the situation, and thus has no systematic place for the actors’ definition of the situation.

In the case of video gaming, we have argued that such problems disappear once we clearly distinguish *games* and *gaming grounds* as *objects and settings* from *gaming* as the *situational framing* in which actors perceive, understand, enact a situation (typically involving game objects) *as gaming*, and from the *game frame* as the *total social nexus* in which game objects and settings were formed in their specific shape, against which they become intelligible and usable, and in which actors develop the frame knowledge to perceive, understand, and enact certain objects *as games* and certain situations *as gaming*. This effectively dissolves the problem of defining ‘video games’ (or ‘medium X’) as a set of situation-independent formal features. Instead of saying that a given object is ‘a video game’ based on formal features, we say that actors perceive, understand, enact an object *as a video game* (and are able to do so) based on the object’s features and the actors’ dispositions partaking in the total nexus of the ‘video game’ frame. This explains why people ‘think of’ a game as a game based on its features without having to connect the two through an abstract quasi-idealist entity, and without letting brains (or symbolic actors) ‘run wild’ with subjective construals decoupled from bodies and matters. It also allows us to understand how actors can engage with an object they define as ‘a game’, but in a way they don’t define as ‘gaming’, and how actors can engage with objects they don’t define as ‘games’, while defining what they do as ‘gaming’. Socially learned ‘canonical’ meanings for objects and situational framings need not coincide.

Distinguishing ‘games’ as objects with learned social meanings from ‘gaming’ as the situational process of framing solves the problem of convergence-driven diversifying devices, settings, distribution channels, etc., as follows: in a social world, people continually learn anew how to perceive, understand, enact different objects and settings as parts of one or more different frames, affording to be enrolled in one or more different framings. These framings have always been active material configurations anyhow, as seen with people choosing specific settings, dimming lights, etc., in preparation of video gaming. People’s situational framing of

these configurations is different from but also differently afforded by the objects. As object configurations proliferate, the total frame changes in terms of what objects partake in it, how, and what frame knowledge people have about them. Yet arguably, the frame knowledge of 'gaming' (what constitutes the situational framing) remains far more stable and institutionalised, though it naturally changes over time as well.

Calling out the situational framing process also solves the troubles pervasive game genres pose to definitional questions of what 'is' or 'belongs to' a given gaming encounter: constituting some entity or event as part of 'gaming' necessarily involves some human actor who does so, as well as its being brought into joint response presence of the participating actors. Regarding Alternate Reality Games, neither the 'negative experience' of frame ambiguities nor intentionally pursuing it as an aesthetic strategy are novel phenomena. Frame analysis unpacks why it can be engrossing and discomfiting, and how its fabrication is accomplished. Regarding pervasive games that disperse events and entities across space and time, again, whether they are constituted as part of gameplay depends on human actors doing that constitutive ordering, *enrolling* matter, time, and space in the process. If anything, pervasive games foreground just how players together with their material environment *accomplish* this framing.

Thirdly, distinguishing objects and framing processes allows to systematically account for gaming-related phenomena that have so far had no real place in formalist conceptions of games and gaming, like gamification, playful design, playfulness, and the like. Here, the concept of *keyings* – reframings of already-framed situations – proved useful. We identified *playful keyings* as spontaneous transformations of activity or objects already framed otherwise into an instance of playing, *playlike interactions* as incidental configurations of the environment that invite playful keyings, *playful interactions* as objects and settings intentionally designed to afford playful keyings, as well as *gameful keyings* as spontaneous re-framings of already-framed activity and objects into an instance of gaming, with *gamelike* and *gameful interactions* affording them. We also demonstrated that conceptions of playfulness as a mere subjective reordering of experience (as suggested by Malaby 2007) overlook that actors have to make playfulness intelligible to other actors, and even if it takes place covertly, still carries an identifiable signature of transformation of (now-mental) activity, which frame analysis does acknowledge.

Fourthly, the distinction between objects and situational framing, together with the notion of *keying*, solve the conceptual issues of instrumental gaming, namely that engagement with a video game object that overtly looks like video gaming still has situational features (consequentiality, involuntariness) that go against common definitions of gaming. The solution is that just like other situations can be keyed as playing or gaming, so can gaming be keyed as work: the object remains the same and is understood in its canonical social meaning (a video game), so does the activity (video gaming), but the *keying transforms* in slight but cru-

cial ways observable action and organisation of the situation, and very dramatically the actors' understanding, experience, emotion, and attentive focus.

In summary, this thesis contributed a frame analytic conception of video gaming as frame and framing that steers clear of the fallacies of misplaced concreteness entailed in most formalist and cognitivist accounts, and solves the conceptual issues of (a) how to identify 'video games' in conditions of proliferating devices and settings; (b) how to identify 'video gaming' in novel game genres that are not as nicely spatially, temporally, and socially focused as, for example, gaming in front of a console; (c) how to conceptualise phenomena like playfulness and gamification; and (d) how to conceptualise instrumental play.

Modes of Video Gaming

The first empirical research objective of this thesis was to substantiate the 'unwritten rules' of leisurely video gaming, and how they relate to those Goffman and empirical research since described. The main finding here was that there is not *one* 'video gaming' frame, but a 'plurality of ritual orders' (Strong 1988: 243), namely five different *leisurely modes of video gaming*. These modes do share some commonalities: an autotelic focus on enjoyment as the avowed motivational relevancy, voluntary participation, and an inconsequential (or 'slightly' consequential) gearing into the world, including a divestment of one's self and emotions from the game outcome after gaming ends. People also understood all leisurely modes of video gaming to include *some* game software and *some* computing device running it. What *specific* device (smartphone, console, etc.) they engaged with and what *specific* spatial setting and wider occasion they were in (living room, public train, etc.) was not seen as defining.

Beyond this minimal common ground, the different modes diverged based on the avowed motivational relevancy, which comes with a signature level of telicity (goal focus), arousal, and attentive absorption, and organises a given gaming encounter materially, epistemically, and normatively: how strongly to enforce rules and pursue winning; how fully to be attentively absorbed in the game state; whether to be more absorbed in the game rules or the game fiction; what kinds of emotions to display; and how to choose and configure settings, devices, game genres, and social textures to best support the sought enjoyment. *Relaxing gaming* constitutes relatively short and spontaneous stretches of gameplay to alleviate boredom, bridge time, or recover from a previous taxing activity. Players seek gameplay with low cognitive and other effort, low telic focus and low arousal, and tend to be highly distractable by more urgent or enjoyable activities. It typically involves so-called casual games, puzzles, and social network games. In *socialising gaming*, the focal motivational relevancy is relatedness. It takes place as a multi-participant encounter (players and onlookers), usually with so-called party games, plenty of up- and downtalking, pre- and post-proceedings and side involvements rich in social interaction. Attention is partially directed at the other participants' emotional states, and

players gear their personal enjoyment into the situation such that it does not impinge on and ideally adds to the shared enjoyment of relatedness. In *engrossing gaming*, which typically involves RPGs, adventures, and simulation games, the motivational relevancy is to be fully attentively absorbed in gameplay, often especially the game fiction, to leave no attention for ruminating thoughts on recent negative events or moods. Telicity and arousal are at medium levels, but attentive absorption is high. Players often actively configure their settings and devices to support this absorption. In *hardcore gaming*, the main motivational relevancy is an experience of competence in attaining game goals and improving one's skills. Thus, it comes with a high telicity, but also with high attentive absorption in gameplay and high arousal partially stoked by experiences of repeated frustration. Genres include shooters, arcade games, real-time strategy games, and MMORPG raids. In *competitive gaming*, essentially the player-versus-player rendition of hardcore gaming, achievement is added to competence as a motivational relevancy, and telicity, attentive absorption, and arousal are even more amplified. Up- and downtalking can become very intense, and players strongly enforce rules and devalue any form of cheating.

These findings make two main contributions to the literature. First, they document the actual ground rules of video gaming, as well as peoples' definitions of video gaming. Second, while the basic observed ground rules align with Goffman's portrayal of board and card games, we were able to document a far broader span of motivational relevancies, and a divergence of multiple modes of video gaming. As the section on related work will show, there are several articulations of different forms of gaming in the literature. However, the existence of modes as different sociomaterial orderings has not been documented yet.

Instrumental Keyings and Consequentiality

The second empirical research object was to establish whether and how instrumentalised differs from leisurely gaming, plus the specific question how players frame and experience 'serious' consequences attached to leisurely gaming, such as virtual item sales. The data indicated that game journalists, researchers, designers, and e-sport athletes engaging with video games as part of their profession still understand the objects they engage with as video games, and even produce activity that looks roughly similar to leisurely modes of gaming – but they frame 'what it is that's going on here' as something else entirely. Frame analysis makes ready sense of these reported experiences as instances of *keying*. Leisurely gaming becomes transformed into review gaming, analytic gaming, and e-sport training and tournament gaming.

All four instrumental keyings share an exotelic focus on some instrumental outcome, professional norms of efficiency and craftsmanship, a strong telic focus, an analytic distancing from gameplay, and a consequential gearing into the world: the game outcome has serious consequences, and players are allowed to invest their professional self into them. Keying requires active upkeep from people, as they would sometimes accidentally downkey an instance

of instrumental gaming into a leisurely mode. Prolonged instrumentally keyed engagement with video games over time habituates into a 'professional vision' that interviewees reported to be difficult to fully 'shake off', leading to accidental upkeyings of leisurely into instrumental gaming. Because people consider these upkeyings undesirable – their analytic detachment and high telicity impedes the enjoyment of engrossment and more open, socialising forms of gaming – they engage in active boundary work to keep instrumental and leisurely gaming separate.

Furthermore, a difference emerged in the data between game engagement being *framed* (perceived, understood, enacted) as 'working', and '*feeling like*' work. Interviewees reported that not all game engagement they framed as work also felt like work, while some game engagement framed as leisurely gaming *did* feel work-like. They considered this work-like experience noteworthy and inappropriate for gaming. We found that *autonomous motivation* as conceptualised in SDT provides a fitting explanation for these phenomena. According to SDT, the different motivations that drive and energise human activity range from the highly controlled (extrinsic rewards and punishments, introjected 'oughts') to the highly autonomous (integrated values and identity parts, intrinsic enjoyment of an activity), with the overall balance of situational motivations determining whether an activity feels like a controlled, outwardly driven 'having to', or an autonomous, internally driven 'wanting to'. When interviewees reported on game engagement '*feeling like*' work, they described it as pressuring 'oughts', 'musts', and 'having to' – in a word, as overall controlled motivation. Because controlled motivation is likely in working, people would refer to controlled motivation as '*feeling work-like*'.

While there seems to be a general difference in experience between leisurely and instrumental gaming, data showed that experiences of controlled motivation become situationally salient when there is a mismatch of the actor's spontaneous needs, the material affordances of the game equipment, and the social demands of the situational framing – what Goffman called *dysphoric tension*. Relative to the actor's current dispositions, the game does not afford the kinds of (autonomous) intrinsic need satisfaction and/or instrumental outcomes the actor currently seeks. Thus, the actor feels the want to change gameplay or fully disengage. Yet simultaneously, controlled motivations (thinking of serious consequences, obligations towards other players) become salient that energise the actor to effortfully self-regulate and continue against her spontaneous wants – an experience of thwarted autonomy. In instrumental gaming, these kinds of dysphoric tension are very frequent due to serious professional consequences (lost wages or prizes, verbal sanctioning by superiors, disapproval by peers, loss of professional status) and strong prescriptions of game choice, time, and form of gameplay. That is, there is ample controlled motivation, and little room for situational configuration. In leisurely gaming, these dysphoric tensions are less frequent, emerging around (a) social harmony and participation norms (e.g. gaming longer than one wants to because the others want to finish the game); (b) game design patterns that operate with social reciprocity norms and

time pressure (gifting, appointment play); and (c) preparatory gaming such as MMORPG 'grinding', where players perform a stretch of gameplay that provides no immediate intrinsic enjoyment in order to achieve a distal game state players believe to be enjoyable.

These moments of dysphoric tension foreground a crucial, usually taken-for-granted fact. Leisurely video gaming – especially *solitary* gaming – is enjoyable *as a situation* because it provides a strong experience of autonomy: we experience ourselves freely choosing when to game what game and how; we can continually re-configure the total situation (game, difficulty level, form of gameplay, etc.) to optimally afford intrinsic enjoyment, and quit when we 'don't feel like it' anymore; and there are no serious consequences that we might perceive as outer controlling motivations. Which leads to the question of how people perceive and experience leisurely gaming *with* attached consequences.

To reiterate, from a frame analytic stance, 'lack of consequence' is not a defining formal, semantic, or essential property of 'video gaming', but a material organisation and epistemic and normative expectation: video gaming encounters are typically organised such that they have minimal irreversible bodily and symbolic consequences, and – as the interview data confirmed – actors understand, expect and demand them to have no such consequences. More precisely, we found that actors tended to accept a 'slight' consequence to stoke arousal. Yet what actors considered 'still slight' varied based on their own relevancies. While some categorically refused *any* monetary payout attached to game outcomes, others accepted them as long as they were mere cents, while yet others spent around one hundred Euros on virtual items and still did not consider that 'serious'. What is common however is that once actors considered the degree of consequences 'serious', they would no longer consider the activity 'playing', and refer to it as 'working' or 'gambling' instead.

In summary, the empirical section on instrumental play made five contributions. First, it documented the existence and *variety* of instrumental forms of gaming. Second, it provided a frame analytic account able to conceptualise and explain video gaming, instrumental gaming, and work-like experiences both in leisurely and instrumental gaming. Third, it documented the phenomenon of professional vision among people continually engaged in instrumental gaming. Fourth, it articulated the role and importance of situational autonomy support in video gaming. And fifth, it offered an empirically grounded explanatory account of interaction tension as the situational becoming-salient of autonomous versus controlled motivation.

8.2 Related Research

The following section will situate the main findings of the present thesis in the existing literature, starting with conceptions of situated media usage in media and communication research, to then move on to plural forms of gaming in game studies.

Situated Media Use

This thesis answered the challenge of media convergence by turning attention to situated action, distinguishing and relating frames, objects and settings, and framings. This conception holds strong parallels to the usage approach ('Nutzenansatz') of Teichert and Renckstorf (1989) that understands media usage as social action beginning with people's definition of the situation, but goes beyond it in linking this situation definition to the *longue durée* nexuses of frames. Similarly, it articulates more clearly the role of materiality, normativity, and the socio-material process of framing *vis-à-vis* conceptions of genre frames (Winter 1992, Willems 2000), communicative genres (Ayaß 2004, Keppler 2006), or media genres (Rusch 1993, Schmidt 1994). It is similar to the notion of communication modes (Hasebrink 2004, Hölig 2011) as 'specific pattern[s] of expectations and forms of action that users employ to achieve specific communicative functions' offered by a communication service (Hasebrink 2004: 73, translation SD). But again, frame analysis points to the necessary relationality of 'modes' and 'services' (neither one would have developed nor be intelligible without the co-evolution of the other as part of their overall frame), as well as to the normative, emotional, motivational charging of 'expectations and forms of action', and the socio-material, sequential process of constituting and changing framings (or 'modes'). It is largely congruent with Höflich's (2003) conception of media frames, but spells out more clearly how the historical 'social shaping' of communication technologies is again linked into the nexus of frames. Finally, the notion of media dispositives (Hickethier 1995) shows interesting parallels. Dispositives describe historical stabilisations of specific distribution forms, end devices, spatial settings, content genres, and temporal structures of content distribution that together prefigure actors' actions and experience. This conception is intriguing in that it highlights the importance of the total configuration of these elements. It also acknowledges that individuals can take different 'reception stances' (Hickethier 1995: 74), a flexibility *afforded by* the material dispositive. Dispositives describe what we have called configurations of objects and settings. Thus, they require a threefold amendment to fully account for situated media usage. First, actors still have to situationally frame what it is that they are doing with this dispositive *as* gaming (or watching television). Second, Hickethier's notion of different reception stances remains relatively 'thin' and limited compared to the highly divergent modes we found. Third, actors actively *reconfigure* dispositives to fit their desired mode, beyond just choosing content genres or positioning their bodies within a setting.

Forms of Gaming

Turning from media and communication research to game studies, the main empirical finding of this thesis has been that there is no 'one' video gaming frame, but rather a plurality of gaming modes. The notion that there are multiple forms in which people engage with games – and different reasons why they do so – is of course nothing new. Broadly speaking, there are

two groups of accounts: those speaking of different situational styles gaming, and those modelling different types of player motivations. As for the first, Barr has pointed out *paidia* (playing openly to explore) and *ludus* (gaming by the rules to win) as two distinct, enduring ‘video game values’, defined as ‘players’ beliefs about preferable conduct during play’ (Barr 2007: 67). Barr’s account basically articulates the different *typical degrees of telicity* of gaming modes. He suggests that video games mediate these values by actively promoting (signalling as desired) certain forms of conduct, and by defining what kinds of input a player can make. Despite this focus on game features shaping affordances, Barr (2007: 75-6) also reports instances where players themselves changed gameplay from a more ludic to a more paidic form, suggesting an interaction between actor and object. He also observed that enacted video game values may change within the bounds of one gaming encounter – which aligns with the theoretical arguments and empirical findings of the present study.

Second, Linderoth (2012) and Glas et al. (2012) have documented ‘role-play intensive’ (RPI) gaming as a stable playing style jointly enacted by subgroups of MMORPG players – presumably a form of *social engrossing gaming*. Importantly, Linderoth, Glass, and colleagues model styles as grounded in *groups*, *enduring* across multiple shared gaming encounters. Frame analytically, this speaks to the institutionalisation of frames or modes, and is not unexpected. Note though that the framing of a gaming encounter (or stretch of gameplay within a gaming encounter) in a specific mode still remains a situational accomplishment. That is, even a group of RPI gamers has to (tacitly) enact each new gaming encounter as yet another role-play intensive one, but may also during the encounter switch into another mode.

Maybe closest to the modes of gaming described here are a series of emic theories in the pen-and-paper RPG fandom, variously called the Fourfold Way, the Threefold Model, GNS Theory, or The Big Model. RPG players early on started to notice and call out enduring types of players and player motivations (Mason 2003: 5), as well as enduring *and situationally enacted* types of playing styles: ‘group contracts’ (Kim 2008) or ‘creative agendas’ (Edwards 2004, 2001). Broadly speaking, RPG groups in a given encounter might emphasise *gamism* (strategic gaming to win), *narrativism* (telling an interesting, immersing story), *dramatism* (performatively acting out roles), or *simulationism* (exploring and realistically simulating a world).⁹³ The fact that players themselves developed emic categories to describe, organise and negotiate their own gaming lends support to the notion that different modes of gaming exist and become socially institutionalised. ‘Gamism’ aligns closely with what we called hardcore gaming, whereas ‘narrativism’, ‘dramatism’, and ‘simulationism’ seem to spell out different possible footings of player-character relations within an engrossing mode. This partial alignment of RPG agendas and video gaming modes re-emphasises the need to be cautious of overgeneralising from one form of gaming to another.

⁹³ The models vary in whether they separate out dramatism and narrativism or not.

Moving on to types of motivations and players, in section 6.10 we already saw that the identified motivational relevancies of modes resonate with current psychological research on media entertainment grounded in SDT and MMT (e.g. Reinecke et al. 2012, Vorderer & Reinecke 2012). Read through their lens, relaxing and engrossing gaming present instances of mood management through directly pleasurable stimuli and attentive absorption that blocks ruminating thoughts, whereas socialising, hardcore, and competitive gaming are instances of need-satisfying appreciation. However, SDT and MMT are far from the only approaches to motivations in video gaming. Historically first came models that try to identify player types – ideal typical preferences for certain types of game enjoyment and thus, gameplay styles as stable personality traits (see Bateman, Lowenhaupt & Nacke 2011 for an overview). Most prominent here are Bartle’s (1996) four player types of Multi-User Dungeons (MUD), namely ‘achievers’ who seek out the achievement of game goals, ‘explorers’ who want to discover the game world, ‘socialisers’ who want to socialise with others, and ‘killers’ who enjoy ‘imposing themselves on others’. Bartle’s model has since come under critique as it is not empirically grounded and asserts that the four types are mutually exclusive. Also, it explicitly only accounts for MUDs. Grounded in Bartle’s work, Yee and colleagues (Yee 2006a, Yee, Duchenaut & Nelson 2012) have developed and tested a three-factorial model of online gaming motivations that each energise individual players to different degrees, namely achievement (comprising accumulating, progressing, competing, mastering), social (socialising, relation building, teamwork), and immersion (roleplaying, discovery, customisation, and escapism). In a uses and gratifications-based survey study, Sherry and colleagues (2006) identified arousal, diversion, social interaction, fantasy, challenge, and competition as clusters of sought gratifications in video gaming. Finally, in a combined survey and interview study, Kallio, Mäyrä, and Kaipainen (2010) developed a model of nine ‘gamer mentalities’ or ‘reasons to play’ that individual players over time differently acquire and combine in their own gamer identity, and situationally actualise. These mentalities are clusters of values across three different aspects, namely intensity of gaming, sociability of gaming, and kinds of games. Based on this, Kallio, Mäyrä, and Kaipainen (2010) suggest three groups of mentalities: *social* or ‘doing something together’ (gaming with kids, with mates, or for company), *casual* or ‘games provide something to do’ (gaming to kill time, fill gaps, or relax), and *committed* or ‘gaming is important in itself’ (gaming to have fun, to entertain oneself, or to immerse oneself).

As can be seen in the below table, these different typologies align quite well with the five modes identified here: Bartle’s ‘achiever’ and ‘killer’, Yee’s ‘achievement’, and Sherry and colleagues’ ‘challenge’ and ‘competition’ match what we described as hardcore and competitive gaming. Bartle’s ‘explorer’, Yee’s ‘immersion’, and Sherry and colleagues’ ‘fantasy’ fit what we found as engrossing gaming. Together, these two groups comprise what Kallio and colleagues called ‘committed’ mentalities. Bartle’s ‘socialiser’, Yee’s ‘social’ component, Sherry and col-

leagues' 'social interaction', and the 'social' mentality profiles of Kallio and colleagues match our socialising gaming. And finally, Sherry and colleagues' 'diversion' and Kallio and colleagues' 'casual' profiles match what we called relaxing gaming.

	Relaxing	Socialising	Engrossing	Hardcore	Competitive
Bartle 1996		Socialiser	Explorer	Achiever	Killer
Yee 2006a		Social	Immersion	Achievement	Achievement
Sherry et al. 2006	Diversion	Social Interaction	Fantasy	Challenge, Arousal	Competition, Arousal
Rigby & Ryan 2011		Relatedness	Autonomy	Competence	Competence
Vorderer & Reinecke 2012	Enjoyment	Appreciation	Enjoyment	Appreciation	Appreciation
Kallio, Mäyrä & Kaipainen 2010	Casual	Social	Committed	Committed	Committed

Table 5: Comparison of leisurely gaming modes with gaming motivation and player typologies

This fit lends the present findings plausibility, but it is important to emphasise that motivations, player types, and modes target very different analytic constructs. Rigby and Ryan; Reinecke and Vorderer; Yee; and Sherry and colleagues model stable motivations differently prevalent across gamers and/or differently situationally salient. Bartle construes types of inter-individually different stable preferences. Kallio, Mäyrä, and Kaipainen conceptualise individually acquired and stabilised preferences that are differently situationally realised, also noting that mentalities are associated with 'typical' games and devices. Yet in the end, all these models identify stabilities of *individual motivations*. Modes, in contrast, are organised *around* motivations, but are conceived as *socially shared* and *situationally enacted orderings* that are *normatively charged*: no matter what the individual's stably or currently salient motivation, when the individual configures or joins a type of gaming situation, *she then has to enact and fit herself into it*. This is especially true in multi-participant gaming: in a given instance of competitive gaming, one individual might not desire arousing competition anymore, and would rather have gameplay take a more relaxed pace. But she understands that competition is the official ethos of the current situation, and thus gears herself into this material, epistemic, normative order (or has to go into active negotiation to change this framing). Yet even in solitary gaming, the encounter between player and gaming equipment is geared into the wider world as a type of situation with specific sociomaterial affordances, expectations, licenses, and demands. *That* and *how* one can and legitimately may relax oneself with gameplay on a mobile phone screen in a subway is a *social (sociomaterial) fact*. The motivational relevancy is but one aspect of it.

However, since gaming presumably evolved from play as the institutionalisation of autotelic activity focused on enjoyment, it is plausible that if there are distinct types of motivation prevalent among a population, distinct modes of gaming would develop that articulate these types. It is likewise plausible that due to their personality traits or current biographical circumstances, individuals may have stably reoccurring situational needs that lead them to more frequently seek out and configure gaming in modes that fit these needs. If a person is stably more desiring of relatedness, or in a biographical situation where she has few opportunities to satisfy relatedness needs, then such a 'socialiser' will be more likely to organise or join socialising gaming encounters, because she can legitimately expect that socialising gaming will afford relatedness. The data suggests that different interviewees indeed engaged in certain modes more often than others – or at least, that certain modes were more salient to them. But all interviewees remembered *several* modes of gaming they engaged in, and these modes *were* stable across the different interviewees. This indicates that modes are indeed socially shared, not mutually exclusive individual preferences.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

The main goal of the present study was to offer a theoretical frame analytic account of video gaming, the empirical section being more than anything exploratory and theory-refining. Given the qualitative method and small sample, no statements can be made as to their reliability or generalisability. The first obvious trajectory for future research is therefore to operationalise and test the different modes and keyings of gaming with quantitative methods. This might include survey-based and observational studies as well as experimental studies.

Both theoretical descriptions and empirical findings showed themselves to be interdisciplinarily robust: they align well with the current state of research in ethology, developmental psychology, anthropology, and motivational psychology. In addition, findings converge with other empirical studies on board and card gaming ranging from the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (Goffman 1967, 1969) to contemporary Sweden (Bergström 2010) and international surveys (Woods 2009). This indicates that the findings are likely not purely particular. Still, frame analysis itself suggests that frames *will* vary across time and cultures. Thus, as the interviews were conducted at one point in time with a highly homogenous group (adult Germans born and raised in Germany), one may legitimately expect historical and cultural differences not captured in the data. Cross-cultural and historical comparative studies would therefore significantly enrich our understanding of the variety and stability of forms of video gaming.

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the present findings offer a comprehensive mapping of all modes and keyings of video gaming. As already noted, there are many obvious candidates for further instrumental keyings, such as goldfarming or gaming serious games. A fruitful line of future research would be to conduct more in-depth qualitative studies of such

individual forms of video gaming, both to complement, substantiate (and challenge) the present findings, and to explore the internal stability or variability of modes and keyings.

As also noted, interviews are not well-equipped to capture people's actual situational action and experience. This was a conscious methodological choice given the existence of a fair number of video interaction analyses on the processes of framing. But many interview findings related to normative expectations (where social desirability effects are likely) or states such as arousal or attentive absorption, which are not easy to perceive or accurately recall. This again calls for observational studies of people's actual behaviour across modes and keyings, as well as for psychophysiological or experience sampling studies that would provide more authentic, moment-to-moment data on subjective states.

Beyond research needs stemming from the limitations of the present study, there are several opportunities that were only touched on briefly. The first is the analysis of Alternate Reality Games and their 'This Is Not A Game' aesthetic. With 'negative experience', frame breaks and ambiguities, laminations and fabrications, frame analysis arguably provides a powerful conceptual tool set to unpack the workings of this game genre, while Alternate Reality Games in turn offer highly relevant data on *how* actors accomplish framing (or frame ambiguity).

A second topic worth pursuing is the connection of character and action: Goffman argued that games and other forms of commercialised safe action (such as action movies) provide an arena where males can symbolically demonstrate *character* – unfazed cool in the face of fate. We found some evidence for this in competitive gaming and its practices of intense up- and downtalking. Character display provides an interesting perspective on the gendering of gaming, especially the motivational appeal, embodiment of role expectations, and potential developmental and identity functions of action games and competitive gaming for adolescent males. There has been some research on depictions of violence in video games pointing in similar directions (e.g. Jansz 2005), but little in terms of character display.

Third, Goffman's notions of involvement and reality hold obvious connections to research on presence and immersion in video games. Of special interest here is his suggestion that *joint* involvement with response-present others can greatly facilitate and amplify one's own involvement. We found several potential explanations for this effect: the active situational management of attention and arousal through up- and downtalking, for example, or the socially signalled license (and demand) to fully, unselfconsciously engross oneself. Although there have been attempts to connect Goffman and presence research (Rettie 2004), this perspective on the sociality of immersion and presence arguably remains to be explored.

A fourth interesting concept that emerged is embarrassment. Players engaged in mobile gaming in public spaces reported shielding themselves from the views of others, and acting more emotionally reserved for fear of embarrassment-inducing looks of disapproving others. This suggests that one main hurdle for health games, serious games, productivity games, or

games for change that take gameplay into novel settings is to deal with the potential (fears of) embarrassment induced by the mismatch of gameplay and situational proprieties. Here, it would be interesting to study what conditions make embarrassment (fears) especially salient, and what conditions would reduce (fears of) embarrassment.

Lastly, modes of gaming provide an interesting angle for applied game design research. If players indeed predominantly organise and 'tune' gaming in modes, and if we can describe the specific motivational relevancies, arousal, telicity, and absorption levels of these modes, this would provide a ground for design recommendations. Beyond the specification of individual game design patterns (Björk & Holopainen 2005) or play personas (Canossa 2009), one could explore, test, and specify templates for design recommendations connected to modes – for example, what kind of game features ideally support socialising gaming.

8.4 Ramifications and Outlook

In closing, what are the wider academic and practical ramifications for media and communication research and game studies of the findings presented here? Three directions appear worthy of attention: what they mean for theorising media convergence; what they imply for the rising tide of attempts to instrumentalise play in serious games and gamification; and what they suggest for the study of media enjoyment and video games in general.

Media and Media Usage in the Age of Convergence

The thesis suggested that frame analysis offers a conceptual apparatus capable of resolving the issues media convergence posed to conceptualisations of video games by distinguishing video game frames (and modes), video game configurations (objects and settings), and video gaming as a framing. The obvious next question is how generalisable this apparatus is for other media. A straightforward generalisation would suggest that one likewise distinguishes a *medium frame*, *medium objects and settings*, and *medium-ing framings*. People make sense of medium objects and settings based on their socialisation into the medium frame, and they situationally frame their engagement with these objects in these settings as medium-ing. A medium frame and a medium-ing (or potentially, several *modes* of medium-ing) organise what the central motivational relevancy is, who may legitimately participate, what content to pick, when to engage with it and for how long, how deeply to get attentively absorbed, how aroused to get, how to act and communicate, what emotions to experience and display, how a medium-ing episode is internally organised and metacommunicated, what participation roles and footings it provides, what can legitimately become a subject matter of that medium, and how medium-ing is geared into the world. As producers, distribution channels, storage media, end devices, and settings proliferate, what remains relatively constant is the situational medium-ing realising a specific motivational relevancy, and a 'content genre' (for lack of a better word) as its relational

counterpart whose affordances fit the medium-ing more or less. However, settings and end devices likewise support the motivational relevancy pursued in medium-ing better or worse.

We can assume that novel content genres, devices, institutionalised settings, and forms of medium-ing will slowly co-evolve (as in the case of solitary video gaming or MMORPG raiding). In that evolution, material features and epistemic and normative orders should be historically retraceable as a line of cultural ancestry. That is, media evolution is no *creatio ex nihilo*: it moves in an order-from-order process, continually reframing configurations and reconfiguring material bases of a framing to reveal, realise, and stabilise new affordances.

To give an example: historically, the movie frame (frame) evolved with movies (content genre) being shown on films and film projectors (storage medium and end device) in cinemas (settings) where people engaged in 'movie-watching' (framing). Grounded in their socialisation into the movie frame, people may recognise a movie as a movie, a film as a film, and a cinema as a cinema, even if they have long stopped watching movies on film in a cinema. People may be looking at a movie as a digital stream on their smartphone in a hotel lobby, and they will likely define the content flowing by as a movie, and the activity they are engaged in as movie-watching. But they will also note that the small screen and the busy environment do not support the attentive engrossment and emotional involvement they typically seek out in watching a movie. At home, they may actively configure their living room with a large screen and big boxes, dim the light, wait for the evening when there are no distractions, maybe even switch off their phone to create a configuration that optimally supports movie-watching. Such 'home movie theatres' may become a novel institutionalised coupling of setting, devices, genres, and framing, but we can make easy sense of *why* they take the form they do, and *where*, from what chain of cultural ancestry, these specific orderings originated. The theoretical suggestion, then, is that the most stable (and still moving and morphing) targets are framings (and their potential offshoots) as sociomaterial orderings around central motivational relevancies that make sense of *why* these orderings involve the features and expectations and norms they do, and why specific existing or novel configurations fit better or worse.

The methodological ramification is that if we want to understand 'media' and 'media usage', we cannot start from the derived classifications and categories of media researchers, nor from the formal features of producers, devices, or content genres. Instead, we have to observe and ask people how *they* call, categorise, make sense of, enact 'what it is that's going in here', what different framings *they* feel they may enact with one and the same content genre and device and setting, what framing *they* feel they may enact across different content genres and devices and settings, and what features of genres, devices, and settings *they* consider and enact as relevant with regard to the motivational relevancy of that framing. The aspects or 'ground rules' of a frame identified in the present thesis offer a general, non-media-specific, theoretically grounded conceptual model that may be of use in such research.

Autonomy and Instrumental Play

One further finding was the central role of autonomy in the experience and enjoyment of video gaming. Where instrumental keyings geared gameplay into tight prescriptions and controlling motivations, what would have been an enjoyable and inviting possibility space to explore flipped into an oppressing demand. Wherever gameplay became *too* charged with controlling norms, expectations, and consequences, and *too* telic and constrained to allow players reconfiguration of the situation into a shape that would bring the kind of intrinsic enjoyment they were currently seeking, enjoyment diminished, to the point where even leisurely gaming felt like work. In contrast, it became visible that leisurely video gaming is enjoyable at least partially because it affords a strong *situational* autonomy support: the sense of agency in choosing a time, place, and activity of one's own, and the freedom to rearrange this situation such that it optimally fits our own current needs, free from concerns over consequences or other people's (dis)approval. To exaggerate: We don't play games voluntarily because they are so enjoyable: We enjoy playing games because it is voluntary, one of the principal resources (and resorts) of autonomy experience in our society.

Importantly, this 'freedom from' the pressures, demands, and consequences of social life is not a given, but itself a precarious sociomaterial achievement, entailing the enforcement of social norms. This is maybe the fundamental paradox of play: it *ought* to be *oughtless*, its freedom from norms and demands is itself a normative demand, wherefore we only experience something as playing when we do not notice that the norms (and material circumstances) constituting it are in effect because they align with our spontaneous inclinations.⁹⁴

But if anything, this makes the autonomy of playing and gaming more, not less, precious. And it puts a significant question mark behind current attempts to harness the motivational power of games and game design in other situations including serious games and gamification for education, health, productivity, and the like. Because such applications disrupt that very sociomaterial configuration, they put gameplay into contexts that are almost invariably characterised by their lack of situational autonomy support, which makes it plausible to assume that they will generate similar kinds and frequencies of dysphoric tension as the interviewees in the present study reported. There seems to be no principled difference between a journalist review-gaming a game under a tight deadline, fearing the verbal sanctions of her superior, and a student homework-gaming a serious game under a tight deadline, fearing a bad grade and the subsequent verbal sanctions of teacher and parents, or a knowledge worker typing away in a gamified enterprise wiki, fearing the upcoming quarterly review in which she will be questioned why she has received fewer virtual trophies and is placed fifteenth in the wiki-internal leader board for how many articles she submitted. Anecdotal evidence suggests that workers

⁹⁴ And on closer inspection, we have also seen that playing and gaming are not norm-free at all, only governed by *specific* situational proprieties partially devised to make the existence of these proprieties disappear from experience.

can perceive presumed-motivating game design elements like leader boards as pressuring forms of micro-management (Lopez 2011). A recent study by Heeter and colleagues (2011) found evidence that forced serious game engagement caused increased negative affect and decreased performance *if* players disliked the game, a finding that makes good sense in the light of the model of interaction tension we outlined here. As we have seen, this does not mean that instrumental play in serious games for education, games for health, or gamified applications will always and necessarily be unenjoyable – but that dysphoric tension might be more likely, and that enjoyability may never reach the level of leisurely video gaming because keying gameplay into an instrumental task diminishes the very source it tries to tap into: the joy of autonomy. Also, when interviewees reported fully enjoying instrumental gaming, this occurred when they downkeyed it into leisurely gaming. Which highlights another potential issue: the moments actors really enjoy instrumental gameplay fully are the moments where they change the dominant motivational relevancy to enjoyment – the instrumental outcome gets out of focus, productivity decreases.

The present findings are initial and qualitative, so we cannot state with great certainty that, how, and under what circumstances thwarted autonomy will become an issue for instrumentalised gaming and game design. But the findings are plausible and coherent enough, and the possible ramifications significant enough, that they strongly urge further research.

Situating Video Game Enjoyment

This last point ties nicely into the third ramification. Research on media entertainment and video game enjoyment has made significant advances in the past decade, nowadays more and more driven by experimental psychological studies. This development is welcome: We need more, not less research of this kind. However, the present study indicated several social, situational sources, forms, conditions, and dynamics of video game enjoyment that would have arguably been hard to find and study in a laboratory context. To take the above example once more, if situational autonomy support (freely choosing whether and when to game and stop gaming what game, without attached consequences, in a room and time of one's own) is an important part of video game enjoyment, then laboratory studies – putting subjects at a predetermined time and place in front of games, prescribing gameplay, making cash remuneration (or mandatory student lab hours) and social obligations towards the experimenters salient – not only presumably introduce a strong situational main effect. When autonomy experience as suggested emerges from the interaction of spontaneous interests, sociomaterial affordances, and sociomaterial consequences – and the fact that the actor can and does freely and continually *reconfigure* the situation to maximise alignment – then this *meta*-process and *meta*-effect characteristic for leisurely gameplay enjoyment will never occur in a laboratory that is set up specifically to minimise any but the studied variable. If game selection depends not on the

direct match of the individual's needs and game features, but how needs, game features (such as closure point span), time window, available devices, setup effort, and situational proprieties interact, then surveys and experiments merely comparing genre preferences, feature preferences, or stably sought uses and gratifications will tell us little about the actual situational *gestalts* from which players choose. If trust-inducing up- and downtalking and joint embarrassment among friends in a 'safe' place shielded from unknown others is a significant part of the enjoyment of socialising gaming, then the full effects of social contexts on game enjoyment will be hard to notice let alone replicate in a laboratory that removes the familiar safe space, introduces observing eyes of unknown others, etc.

Gibson suggested that psychology's disembodied theories of perception were an artefact of mistaking the isolated and arrested eye-light contact effortfully created in laboratories to be the basic building block of natural vision. Under these circumstances, it was literally impossible to see for researchers that and how perception is a continual perception-action process of the total animal-environment system. Useful as they are, contemporary media psychological studies seem to be prone for this very problem: arresting and isolating singular player-game contacts in an artificial laboratory context, they are in danger of mistaking them for the building blocks of game enjoyment, when indeed enjoyment may be the outcome of player and game interacting in a total, continually re-configured situation. In short, theoretically and methodologically, we are in want of *an ecological approach to video game enjoyment*. The present thesis tried to make a first step in this direction.

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Appendices

Transcription Conventions

The transcription is a simple transcription aiming at readability. The transcription conventions used are based on Jefferson's (2004) 'Glossary of transcript symbols'. Basic rules of transcription have been:

- Approving back-channel continuers (like 'mhm', 'ah', 'yeah') by listeners were not transcribed, unless they constitute speaker shifts where the continuer is an answer to an implied question, in which case they are transcribed as a new segment with 'mhm ((approving))', 'mhm ((disapproving))', etc.
- Dialectal and slurred utterances were transposed into 'regular' expressions to improve readability.
- Punctuation is used in grammatically correct form to improve readability.
- The interviewer is marked as 'Interviewer' at the beginning of segments, participants are marked as 'P#', where # is replaced with the running number of participants.

Element	Example	Explanation
P#/#-##	P2: That's how it was. Utterly frustrating. (P2/3-4)	A code at the end of an excerpt indicates the participant (P2) and the paragraphs (3-4), which are taken from the full transcripts.
X:	Interviewer:	A word followed by colon at the beginning of a segment indicates a new speaker.
(())	((coughs)) ((laughing)) ((train passes))	Non-spoken audible events and explanations of the transcriber are placed in double round brackets.
??	Yesterday ?? drove.	Inaudible words are replaced with two quotation marks.
?x?	Yesterday ?he? drove.	Presumed but not clearly identified words are placed between two question marks.
[]	I: If you [for instance] P1: [Yes.] I: do it like this.	Overlapping utterances of multiple speakers are placed in square brackets.
-	But was-	Soft hyphen at the end of a word indicates interrupted talk.
...	Well...	Longer pauses of more than 0,2 seconds. Shorter pauses are not transcribed.
(#s)	Well. (5s) Good question.	Pauses over one second are written out in number of seconds.
:	So:::	Colons at the end of a vowel indicate a prolonged tone; the number of colons indicates relative duration
x	That was *really* bad.	A word between stars signifies emphasised or louder speech.
<<>>	And he said: <<That's really bad.>> But I didn't think so.	Quoted speech is placed in quotation marks.

Final Interview Guidelines

Ziel, Forschungsfragen	Fragestellung
Vorstellung, Aufwärmen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <Selbstvorstellung, Kurzvorstellung des Projekts> • <Aufwärmung> Erzählen Sie mal: Was spielen Sie gern? Was haben Sie zuletzt gespielt?
(c) Setting und interpretative Schemata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wann und wo spielst du normalerweise? • Können Sie mir einmal aufmalen, wie das aussieht? Wo findet das statt, wer ist dabei, was ist dabei, wie ist das angeordnet? • Gibt es Bestandteile, die Sie eingezeichnet haben, die eigentlich nicht zum Computerspielen dazugehören? • Gibt es noch andere Situationen, in denen du spielst? Kannst du die aufzeichnen? • Ist eine Situation „typischer“ oder „normaler“ als die anderen? Warum? • Mit welchen Geräten, Genres, Konstellationen spielst du in diesen Situationen normalerweise? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i>
(d) Ablaufskripte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenn Sie sich an das letzte Mal zurückerinnern, dass sie gespielt haben: Wie lief das ab, Schritt für Schritt? Aufzeichnen • Was machen Sie normalerweise vor dem Spielen, was danach? • Woran erkennen Sie, dass es beim Computerspielen „losgeht“? Und dass es „zu Ende“ ist? • <Zeichnung hervorholen> Woran erkennen Sie, dass ein Schritt anfängt oder aufhört? • Erinnern Sie sich: Ist schon mal jemand „unnormale“ oder „ungehörig“ vom Ablauf abgewichen? • Gibt es etwas, dass man tun sollte, um „richtig“ zu spielen? („Du spielst ja gar nicht richtig!“) • Erinnern Sie sich: Ist schonmal was „schief“ gegangen? Was kann „schief gehen“? • Gibt es etwas, das man beim Computerspielen <i>nicht</i> tun sollte? (Was passiert öfters, auch wenn klar ist, dass es eigentlich <i>nicht</i> geschehen sollte?) • Wird etwas parallel getan? • Machen Geräte, Genre, Räume, Konstellationen einen Unterschied? Oder anderes? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>
(h) Transformationsregeln	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was passiert mit dem Spielgeschehen und Spielergebnis normalerweise nach dem Spiel? Hat es eine Bedeutung? Wird es genutzt? • Erinnern Sie sich an eine Situation, als jemand nach dem Spiel unangemessen mit dem Spielgeschehen oder -ergebnis umgegangen ist? Was ist unangemessen? • Was passiert mit Dingen, die vor dem Spiel oder außerhalb des Spiel passieren – welche Rolle haben die innerhalb des Spiels? • Erinnern Sie sich an eine Situation, als jemand Dinge, die vor oder außerhalb des Spiel geschehen sind, „unangemessen“ ins Spiel gebracht hat? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>
(e) Rollen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenn Sie mit anderem spielen – zusammen in einem Raum oder vermittelt über Medien: Wer nimmt da alles teil? Was machen die? Gibt es sowas wie feste Rollen? • Erinnern Sie sich an Momente, an denen jemand aus seiner Rolle „ausgebrochen“ ist? Wie war das? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>
(f) Gratifikationen und Evaluationskriterien	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was versprechen oder erwünschen sie sich, wenn sie Computer zu spielen? • Woran machen sie fest, ob eine Spielsitzung für sie „erfolgreich“ oder „befriedigend“ war? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>

Ziel, Forschungsfragen	Fragestellung
(b) Emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was sind typische Gefühle, die man beim Computerspielen erlebt? Was würden Sie erwarten? • Gibt es Gefühle, die man schonmal hat, die man aber besser nicht offen zeigt? • Gibt es Gefühle, die man zeigen sollte, auch wenn man sie gar nicht empfindet? • Fällt Ihnen eine Situation ein, in denen jemand beim Computerspiel Gefühle gezeigt hat, die ihnen unangemessen erschienen? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>
(a) Aufmerksamkeit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenn Sie Spiel spielen: Was nehmen Sie üblicherweise wahr? • Gibt es etwas, dass sie gleichzeitig im Auge behalten – oder behalten müssen? (Was? Warum?) • Wenn Sie mit anderen spielen: Wann wäre es in Ordnung, sich bei jemandem zu beschweren, dass er abgelenkt ist? • Erinnern Sie sich an eine Situation, an denen jemand unangemessen beim Spielen ihre Aufmerksamkeit gestört hat? Wie war das? Wann wäre eine Störung angemessen? • <i>Wenn Sie das mit Brettspielen vergleichen?</i> • <i>Wie unterstützt die Technik?</i>
Subjektive Theorie von Computerspielen – Normalfall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haben Sie einmal etwas gesehen, bei dem Sie unsicher waren, „Ist das jetzt Computerspielen oder nicht“? • Waren Sie einmal in einer Situation, bei der Sie dachten: „Das ist jetzt aber kein Computerspiel mehr“? • Was verstehen Sie unter „Computerspielen“ als Tätigkeit? Was kennzeichnet es? • Wenn Sie Computerspielen mit anderen Situationen vergleichen – Arbeit, Schule, Haushalt, Freizeit – was ist typisch für Computerspielen? Was anders? • Gibt es Situationen, die ähnlich sind wie Computerspielen? (Welche?) (Was macht sie ähnlich?) • Gibt es Situationen, die ganz anders sind als Computerspielen? (Welche? Was macht sie anders?)

Interview Consent Form

Einverständnis- und Datenschutzerklärung

Forschungsvorhaben: Dissertationsprojekt „Der Computerspiel-Rahmen“

Was geschieht mit Ihren Angaben?

- Projektaufsicht und Projektleitung tragen dafür Sorge, dass Ihre Angaben streng vertraulich behandelt werden. Unsere Arbeit folgt streng den Bestimmungen des Datenschutzes. Die Weitergabe persönlicher Daten an Dritte ist nicht möglich.
- Die im Rahmen des Interviews entstandenen Aufzeichnungen (Audiodateien, Zeichnungen, Fragebögen) werden gesondert von der Einverständniserklärung aufbewahrt und lassen sich dieser lediglich über einen gemeinsamen Code (z.B. „TN4“) zuordnen.
- Die im Rahmen des Interviews entstandenen Audiodateien werden mit Abschluss des Forschungsvorhabens, spätestens aber fünf Jahre nach Aufzeichnung vernichtet.
- Zugang zu den Aufzeichnungen haben ausschließlich Projektaufsicht, Projektleitung sowie Hilfskräfte zur Auswertung.
- Zu Auswertungszwecken wird ein schriftliches Transkript der Audiodateien erstellt. Sämtliche persönlichen Angaben werden darin anonymisiert, Personennamen, geographische Orte, Unternehmensnamen etc. werden durch Pseudonyme ersetzt, sodass kein Rückschluss auf Ihre Person möglich sein wird.
- Das Transkript wird auch nach Abschluss des aktuellen Forschungsvorhabens für weitere Forschungsvorhaben interessierter WissenschaftlerInnen aufbewahrt. Der Zugang ist in jedem Fall mit einer Verpflichtung zur Einhaltung des Datenschutzes verbunden.

Einverständniserklärung

Ich erkläre mich einverstanden, dass ich im Rahmen des Forschungsprojektes „Der Computerspiel-Rahmen“ interviewt werde und Aufzeichnungen (Audiodateien, Fragebögen und Zeichnungen) des Interviews erstellt und wissenschaftlich ausgewertet werden.

Transkribierte Ausschnitte aus den Audiodateien, Zeichnungen sowie tabellarische Übersichten der Fragebogenangaben können in wissenschaftlichen Vorträgen, Publikationen und Seminaren verwendet werden. Dabei wird sichergestellt, dass eine Identifikation meiner Person nicht möglich ist. Die Verwertungsrechte (Urheberrecht) der im Interview entstandenen Aufzeichnungen liegen dazu beim Projektleiter.

Diese Einwilligung ist freiwillig und kann jederzeit widerrufen werden.

TN-Nr.: _____

Ort, Datum: _____

Unterschrift der/s Interviewten: _____

(Bei Minderjährigen zusätzlich der/die Erziehungsberechtigte/r)

German Transcripts

P1

P1: Also ich glaub, es gibt natürlich das- wenn du sagst, irgendwie, dieses mit Freunden ja, es gibt Spiele, vor allen Dingen irgendwie Bewegungsspiele, oder so Singspiele, *Singstar*, es gibt jetzt dieses *Rapstar*. Das sind Sachen irgendwie, die kann man auch wenn man ein paar Bier getrunken hat mit Freunden einfach nur machen, um sich zu unterhalten.

Es gibt die Situation, dass ich ein Spiel hab, was sehr großen Wert auf Narrative legt. Das heißt, ich will eine Geschichte erleben, und muss mich dann praktisch auch in einen Zustand bringen irgendwie, in dem ich bereit bin irgendwie das auch aufzunehmen, dass heißt es ist nichts, was ich nebenher machen kann.

Und es gibt aber auch Spiele, wie zum Beispiel das Arcade-Spiel *Super Meat Boy*, was im letzten Jahr raus gekommen ist, was in so einer Tradition alter Arcade-Automaten steht, wie *Super Ghosts'n'Ghouls* oder- wo es tatsächlich um eine Leistung geht die ich erbringe, und wo es für mich, und DA hat es dann tatsächlich auch wieder- Also geht tatsächlich dieser Freizeit-Charakter so ein bisschen davon verloren, und es kriegt tatsächlich so ein bisschen was von einer Profession oder von einem Studieren. Ich muss bestimmte Moves, Bewegungen einstudieren, um überhaupt in der Lage zu sein diese Welten zu absolvieren.

Und ja wie gesagt, also es steht und fällt halt mit der Situation, mit dem Spielenden, und mit dem Spiel, meiner Meinung nach. Also es kann tatsächlich von reinem::, von reiner Party-Unterhaltung, über, über Geschichte erleben, bis, bis hin tatsächlich zu einem... ja zu einem sportlichen Ereignis für mich selber werden. Und das bedeutet dann auch Arbeit für mich. (P1-2/45-51)

P1: Zum Beispiel irgendwie mit dem Control Stick einen Kreis zu ziehen, oder rauf und runter zu drücken. Teilweise waren es auch Bewegungen, die absolut nichts gemein hatten mit der Tätigkeit, die dahinter stand, und in dem Moment ist diese Illusion sofort für mich zerbrochen. (...)

Interviewer: Welche, welche Illusion ist da zerbrochen?

P1: Die Illusion praktisch- (2s) Also dieses, dieses Spiel war ja unter der Prämisse angetreten, irgendwie (2s) abseits von... von allen Weltraumshootern, oder von, von irgendwelchen Science Fiction, oder Western, oder irgendwelchen anderen Szenarien, die man sich irgendwie in Literatur, oder Film, oder Spiel, vorstellen kann, ja schon fast irgendwie, realistische Welt, mit realistisch aussehenden Menschen, mit glaubwürdigen Charakteren irgendwie abzubilden, um mich, um mich halt in diese Geschichte ganz tief rein zu ziehen.

Und das ist halt an mehreren Stellen zerbrochen einfach. Also meiner Meinung war es halt extrem schlecht geschrieben. Es war, es waren unfassbar viele Handlungslöcher, die man im Film, oder einem Buch niemals hätte verzeihen können, oder niemals verzeihen hätte.

Und ja beim mechanisch fand ich es, wirklich nicht gut gemacht. Wie gesagt also diese Diskrepanz zwischen der Aktion die ich wirklich im, vor dem Bildschirm ausführe, und der, die dann da auf dem Bildschirm stattfindet, die war für mich halt so ersichtlich, dass halt dieses ganze Gebäude in sich zusammengebrochen ist. (P1-2/99-107)

P1: Oder die Situation dass ich ein Brettspiel zu Hause aufbaue, dann auf die Straße gehe und mir dann wahllos, fünf sechs verschiedene Leute zu mir nach Hause hole, und mit denen dann ein Spiel spiele, ich kenne die nicht, hab keine Ahnung was das für Menschen sind, aber ich spiele mit denen. Das wird *niemals* eintreten, niemals, nee. (P1-2/171)

P1: Und das bringt natürlich auch noch mal eine vollkommen andere Dynamik, also ob ich mit einem Kreis von mir vertrauten Menschen, irgendwie einen gemütlichen Abend, mich mit einem Glas Rotwein, irgendwie an was weiß ich *Risiko* setze, und versuche irgendwie die Weltherrschaft an mich zu reißen. Oder ob ich tatsächlich mit fünf mir vollkommen fremden Menschen, die ich nur höre, die ich nicht sehe, (2s) mir.. in *Red Dead Redemption* Duelle liefere. (P1-2/173)

P1: Ich glaube, ich glaube durch die, dadurch, dass ich den Menschen nicht so verbunden bin ((im Onlinespiel)), und dadurch, dass es halt auch keine visuelle Verbindung gibt, ist es halt, und jetzt kommt noch mal Verbindung, ist es halt unverbindlicher mit denen zu spielen. Das bedeutet: klar es gibt ein Bewertungssystem zum Beispiel bei Xbox Live, wo man mir halt nachher Sternchen geben kann, war der nett, war der nicht nett, oder so. Aber im Grunde genommen, es ist vollkommen EGAL, ob ich es mir mit diesen Menschen verscherze, indem ich sie beschimpfe, oder so, weil da draußen sind Millionen andere Menschen, mit denen ich spielen kann. Ich bin nicht auf diese Leute angewiesen. Aber die Leute mit denen ich ein Brettspiel spiele, das sind in der Regel meine Freunde, auf diese bin ich angewiesen. (P1-2/177)

P1: Wenn man halt ein kompetitives Spiel hat, wie zum Beispiel ein Prügelspiel, *Streetfighter* oder so was. Und man hat dann halt ein Freund da, ist es eine Möglichkeit sich mit dem auch zu messen, ohne das man sich so prügeln muss. Ja das heißt, also man kann das schon irgendwie ausloten, und wenn man den anderen dann in der unfassbar guten Kombination von Tritten, Schlägen und Würfen irgendwie auf den Boden brettert gibt das auch ein enormes Gefühl der Befriedigung. Natürlich, geht dann auch schon mal der Ellenbogen rüber irgendwie und das, das... (P1-2/185)

P1: Und das ist natürlich dann auch schwierig, wenn man unter einem Zeitdruck steht, der ja meistens da ist, durch den Redaktionsschluss. Oder bei so einem Review Event dadurch, dass ich weiß ich habe nur zwei Tage Zeit, dann muss ich um möglichst viel von dem Spiel zu spielen, sehr routiniert vorgehen.

Interviewer: [Okay.]

P1: [Darf mich] nicht treiben lassen dabei. Natürlich muss ich das auch ein Stück weit machen, was halt die Schwierigkeit dabei... darstellt. Denn ich will ja... dem Spieler möglichst..., oder dem Leser möglichst nachher ein umfassendes Urteil dadrüber abgeben, ob, ob man halt einfach nur durchläuft, und, und stur die Dinge erledigt die der Entwickler für mich vorgesehen hat. Oder ob es beispielsweise, am Wegesrand für mich auch noch irgendwie Möglichkeiten gibt, zu experimentieren, tolle Sachen zu machen. (P1-2/237-241)

P1: Dadurch, dass man *so* lange- und dann hört man, also das, was *ich* dann sonst sehe, hört man dann auch vielleicht in der Stimme des anderen. Wenn ich den *so* oft, wenn ich stundenlang mit dem online am Tag bin, irgendwie, und dann *sehe* ich vielleicht nicht, wenn der schief guckt, aber ich *höre* es, wenn der schief guckt. (P1-3/193)

P1: Richtig Videospielen tue ich in dem Moment, wenn ich und das Spiel, wenn wir uns halt irgendwie einig sind, dass wir jetzt zusammen was machen wollen. (P1-4/295)

Interviewer: Gibt es etwas, das man beim Spielen nicht machen sollte?

P1: Weiß nicht, wenn man Bock auf was anderes hat, dann sollte man was anderes machen. Und wenn man Bock auf Videospiele hat, dann soll man das Videospiel spielen. (P1-4/297-299)

P1: Also als Journalist musst du halt echt immer alle Kanäle bedienen, irgendwie, hast 30 Fenster im Laptop gleichzeitig auf, bist halb da und halb da, irgendwie, ähm, und das empfinde ich halt irgendwie dann auch als schwierig, weil's halt irgendwie, das ist für mich halt auch dieses, dass ich Aufschreiben muss, dieses Rezensier-Spielen, ist halt dann doch anders als das <<Ich selber spielen>>, wenn ich mich persönlich vor den Bildschirm oder vor den Fernseher setze und dann mich auch wirklich drauf einlassen möchte. (P1-4/299)

P1: ((Rezensierendes Spielen)) Würde ich spätestens nach zehn Minuten wahrscheinlich erkennen, weil bis jetzt wirklich alle Videospieljournalisten, den ich beim Rezensieren zugesehen habe, haben alle einen Block dabei und machen sich in Abständen von, ich weiß nicht, zehn Minuten, Viertelstunde irgend eine Notiz, über irgendwas, was sie gesehen haben. (P1-4/315)

P1: man muss ja dabei bedenken, dass es ja auch Arbeit ist, einfach, dass es nicht einfach nur Spaß ist, was halt bei Videospieljournalisten oftmals irgendwie übersehen wird, dass sie halt arbeiten in dem Moment. (P1-4/321)

P1: Also, ich glaub tatsächlich, dass (8s) dass wenn ich rezensierend spiele, dass ich dann (3s) auch auf.. also so kognitiv irgendwie anders dabei bin. Also das heißt, ich bin vorher schon in dieser Stimmung: <<Ok, ich mache, ich arbeite jetzt, und ich versuche das irgendwie intellektuell zu erfassen, was da jetzt abgeht.>> Und in'ner normalen, nichtrezensierenden Spielesituation ist gerade das für mich ein großer Vorteil, dass ich nicht versuche, es intellektuell zu erfassen, sondern dass ich mich von den sinnlichen Eindrücken da treiben lasse, und das kann natürlich emotional auch ganz andere Sachen hervorrufen, ja? Zum Beispiel hab ich beim Ende von *Metal Gear Solid 4* geheult wie ein Schlosshund, weil es halt für mich 'ne vollkommen andere Situation auch vielleicht dann war als für Peter, der, da war ich noch nicht bei der Spielezeitschrift, aber der hat damals das Spiel rezensiert. Das ist natürlich, natürlich muss ich diese Gefühle auch erfassen, aber ich kann mich nicht so in die reingeben, dass ich darüber vergesse, das in Worte zu bringen. Man geht halt mit 'ne vollkommen anderen, äh, also ich bin in nem, nicht 'nem vollkommen anderen, aber doch schon in 'nem anderen Erwarten, Bewerten, und für mich emotional Erfassen in dem Moment, in dem ich den Block tatsächlich neben mir liegen habe ((klopft mit Hand auf einen virtuellen Block auf dem Tisch)) und weiß, irgendwie, meine Aufgabe ist es, das in Worte zu bringen. (P1-4/325)

P2

Interviewer: Ok. (4s) Mal ganz allgemein gefragt, wenn du über Computer spielen, das Wort computerspielen, nach denkst, für eine Tätigkeit, für etwas, was man tut. Was bedeutet das für dich? Was kennzeichnet das?

P2: Zunächst mal einen Computer ((lacht)).

Interviewer: Ok. Ja.

P2: Genau. Also, da bei mir persönlich sowieso, da ich selten auf Konsole spiele, meistens am PC. (3s) Dann, ach Herrgott, jetzt muss ich versuchen irgendwie nicht immer alles ((lacht))-

Interviewer: Nein [erzähl, so, so wie es bei dir im Kopf drin ist.]

P2: [Ja ja, so wie es kommt, ok]. Genau, also irgendwie was selbstbestimmtes, irgendwie, freiwilliges, jetzt im Vergleich zu anderen Medienformen, was interaktives (6s). Ja das wären so die ersten Stichworte. Ich kann sonst auch weiter ((lacht)).

Interviewer: Ok. Was meinst du mit <<selbstbestimmt>> und <<freiwillig>> im Verhältnis zu anderen Medien?

P2: Also jetzt, das war jetzt nicht zwingend im Verhältnis zu anderen Medien, und so das war jetzt, an sich. Ja:, das, das, die Definitionsfrage, die begegnet mir oft, wenn ich morgens an den Computer gehe und CityVille spiele ((lacht)), wo ich dann schon wieder- eigentlich nicht einmal sagen würde, dass ich da wirklich spiele. Dass es, halt darum geht, dass man sich dem aus eig- aus freien Stücken zuwendet. Dass es erst einmal kein konkreten Zweck, außer dem Selbstzweck hat. So.

Interviewer: Warum würdest du bei CityVille sagen, dass du da eigentlich nicht mehr spielst?

P2: Weil es bis auf die paar Gratifikationen, wenn man mal einen Levelaufstieg hat, eigentlich relativ automatisiert abläuft und sozusagen nur so ein (2s) also sehr basale Bedürfnisse befriedigt, die ich irgendwie gar nicht so richtig ausmachen kann. Aber es ist halt so, schon relativ routiniert und deshalb mache ich es gerade noch.

Interviewer: Also es ist eine, es ist eine Morgenroutine, die du machst, ok. Und wenn es, wenn es routiniert ist, ist es für dich eigentlich gar kein Spiel mehr?

P2: N::ein, so würde ich jetzt so nicht sagen, aber, wenn sozusagen, das, wenn ich das Gefühl habe eher zu arbeiten und sozusagen, gucke <<ich muss das jetzt noch machen>> um mein daily Klick da zu erzeugen, dann dann dann ist es für mich eigentlich kein Spiel mehr. Oder die Tätigkeit kein Spielen mehr. (P2/21-32)

P2: sich, wie schon gesagt, der Arbeit annähern. Dann fühlt sich sozusagen arbeiten so an, ne, also, wenn man sich irgendwie- Das Gefühl <<Ich muss das jetzt erledigen. Mach das möglichst produktiv und schnell>>. Aber ich muss es halt machen, so. Das ist halt eine Form, die man auch in anderen Kontexten wiederfindet, so beim Arbeiten eigentlich. (P2/54)

P2: Ja, also ich gucke natürlich anders auf bestimmte Spielelemente, also habe meistens eine konkrete Frage im Kopf, wenn ich jetzt (2s) mir für die Arbeit angucke. Ich habe das, *Tombr Raider Underworld* habe ich nur einmal angespielt um sozusagen bestimmte Aussagen darüber treffen zu können, in einem Vortrag, und dann gucke ich mir halt, in dem Fall jetzt das Bewegungsrepertoire besonders an, was es da gibt. Oder Vermittlungsformen, von von Spielinformationen. Und blende andere Sachen dann aus, so und das ist halt relativ instrumentalisiert, und von daher nicht das Spielgefühl, was sich einstellt, wenn ich mich, jetzt in der Freizeit spiele. (P2/57)

P2: Und vielleicht dann auch noch, wenn ich gerade in the mood bin auf ein bisschen, auf die Geschichte, und Lichter ausmache und Kopfhörer auf und versuche da irgendwie mehr Immersion zu haben. (...) jetzt in dem Fall, wo gerade die neue Erweiterung rauskam von WoW, dachte ich mir, jetzt will ich mir mal diesen neuen Content irgendwie besonders besonders schön aneignen. Und da habe ich es dann, ob ich jetzt das Licht ausgemacht habe, weiß ich nicht, aber Vollbild, Kopfhörer und dann wirklich schön die Cutscenes genießen und die ganze Story, die da gerade in den ersten Kampagnen dann auch passieren, dann Quests, entfaltet wird, so. Da habe ich mir halt extra zum Ziel gesetzt <<Ich will jetzt die Geschichte einmal genießen>>. (P2/59-61)

P2: Ja klar, also, wenn ich jetzt irgendwie eine schlechte Storyline sehe oder so etwas und dann denke so, das ist ja das typische der-Medienwissenschaftler-sieht-einen-Film, oder so. (P2/71)

P2: von Spielen auf Arbeit um-, um-, umswitcht einfach. Was ja auch bei WoW mal vorkommen kann, wenn man so merkt, oh, dass, <<Jetzt mache ich eigentlich nichts, was mir Spaß machen könnte>> theoretisch, sondern ich mache nur immer wieder repetitive Dinge so.

Interviewer: Kannst du eine, ein konkretes Beispiel erzählen, als das passiert ist für dich? Erinnerst du dich an was?

P2: Ja ich war mal, ich war mal sehr dahinterher ein bestimmtes, ein bestimmtes Schwert zu craften und hatte mir dann auch zum Ziel gesetzt, das nicht irgendwie über Auktionshäuser zu machen oder so, sondern wirklich loszugehen und die Tiere selbst zu erlegen. Das habe ich mir halt schon einmal zum Ziel gesetzt, sozusagen als Spielziel und habe dann relativ ausdauernd immer die selben Tiere gefarmt, so, um dann die entsprechenden Gegenstände zu kriegen. Und das hat schon:: relativ viele Stunden gekostet. So und da wusste ich dann genau, ich setze mich jetzt eine Stunde daran, farme nochmal die Tiere und mehr mache ich dann auch nicht. Und das ist natürlich schon relativ (2s), also das würde ich jetzt nicht im Nachhinein, als als spielerische Tätigkeit bezeichnen, so. (P2/71-73)

P2: Dass- warum ich dann auch eine Zeit lang nicht gespielt habe, lag weniger daran, dass ich gemerkt habe, es macht mir keinen Spaß mehr, es ist Arbeit, sondern da habe ich dann mehr das große Schlachtzug machen und so gespielt und darauf hat es noch mehr Zeit gekostet und mehr Verpflichtung gehabt, so. Und das das waren dann halt diese äußeren Verpflichtungen, die einen dazu gebracht haben zu Zeiten einzuschalten, wo man nicht will. Die Tätigkeit selbst war aber auf jeden Fall noch vom Gefühl her spielerisch. Gerade, wenn es sozusagen anspruchsvolle Gegner und so weiter sind, dann (3s) war das auf jeden Fall eine spielerische Tätigkeit, aber wie gesagt dieser Rahmen, der das Ganze nicht freiwillig gemacht hat, der war dann eher der, der mich gestört hat. (P2/79)

P2: Also möglicherweise würde ich die Wand sogar noch dazu nehmen. Da ich mich ein bisschen natürlich auch abschotten möchte. Wenn ich wirklich spiele, naja. (P2/125)

P2: so ein Zeitfüllerding (P2/145)

P2: Da ich ja, im Fenster spiele, sehe ich ständig die Uhrzeit rechts oben. Und gucke ansonsten auch relativ oft auf die Uhrzeit (P2/147).

P2: ich habe auf die Uhr geguckt und gesehen, es ist schon eine Viertelstunde vor dem Termin. Ich muss jetzt ein Ende finden und dann dauert es halt noch drei Minuten, bis ich sozusagen eine gute Position im Spiel erreicht habe, wo ich das auch machen kann, und dann mache ich ihn aus und bin auch nicht traurig. (P2/148)

P2: Gerade in Onlinerollenspielen gibt es viele Verhaltensweisen, die sich nicht gehören, wie (...) bei einem wichtigen Schlachtzug sich zu verabschieden mit dem Argument <<Ich hatte gerade einen Disconnect>>, oder so. (P2/167)

P2: Das war bei Freunden, die eine Kinect neu haben, das waren meist Spiele, die man zu zweit spielte, weil auch der Raum nicht so groß war. Das heißt wir waren irgendwie zu sechst und vier haben immer dabei gestanden und angefeuert und zwei haben gespielt. So, die standen sich dann logischerweise irgendwie, ja die standen nebeneinander die, vor der Kamera und vor dem großen [Bildschirm].

Interviewer: [Du] sagst angefeuert. Was haben die genau gemacht, die die dabei standen?

P2: Also, irgendwie Anteilnahme signalisiert, wie man das so macht, also <<Oh, toller Treffer>> oder ((lacht)) <<Musst höher springen>> oder so etwas. (P2/179-181)

Interviewer: Erwinnere dich in der Situation, oder kannst du dich an eine Situation erinnern, wo jemand der nicht gerade gespielt hat, sondern der daneben stand, irgendwas gemacht hat, wo du gesagt hast: <<Das gehört sich hier eigentlich nicht.>>

P2: Nicht wirklich. Also abgesehen, von so so Menschen, die ja auch, also mit solchen Gruppen auch manchmal auch dabei sind, die einfach keine Lust haben. Die das dokumentieren ((lacht)) dann von <<Oh doof>> oder, wenn sie selbst dran sind irgendwie ständig frustriert sind, weil nichts klappt und das halt nicht irgendwie spielerisch leicht nehmen, sondern halt sozusagen den Frust darüber verbreiten. (P2/186-187)

P2: Also es gibt auf, die die die Fokussierung der Spieler, die, der Leute die gerade spielen, ist natürlich eine ganze andere als, der die daneben stehen. Also, die gucken, logischerweise auf den Bildschirm und sind irgendwie in dem drin, was sie gerade da als Erfordernis machen müssen im Spiel. Während die anderen sicherlich dann gerade mal trinken oder sich unterhalten, oder ((lacht)) so. (P2/191)

Interviewer: Wenn wir bei dieser, bei der be- der Situation mit der, mit der Kinect bleiben, woran erkennst du, dass es beim Spiel losgeht? Dass du <<Ok, jetzt wird, [jetzt wird gespielt]>>?

P2: [Ja.] Relativ konkret dadurch, dass wenn, also jetzt, auf der Mikroebene sozusagen, bevor man seinen- seinen Spielmove macht, muss einmal immer ((lautmalerisches Geräusch)) da, die Hand heben und den den Sensor sozusagen aktivieren und dann weiß man, jetzt geht es gleich los. Jetzt kann ich meine Bewegung machen. Auf einer

eher Makroebene, kannst du halt, keine Ahnung, sagen, wenn jetzt der der Startbildschirm da ist, oder das Ding angemacht wird <<So, jetzt spielen wir>>, so. (P2/193-196)

P2: Also so bestimmte Formen der Anteilnahme am Spiel sind ja sozial nicht erwünscht und, also, wenn ich jetzt Erfolgserlebnisse im Spiel, wenn mir die mehr wert sind, als Erfolgserlebnisse im realen Leben, dann ist das sicherlich etwas, was man jetzt nicht so nach außen trägt. (P2/258)

P2: Ja so im Gruppenspiel im Gruppenspiel gehört es sich halt sich zu freuen, wenn man was geschafft hat, irgendwie. Das heißt, das sollte man dann zeigen. (3s) Man sollte sicherlich auch angemessen frustriert sein, wenn etwas nicht klappt und nicht sagen <<Och egal>>. Und dann halt, in so jetzt nicht Onlinespielen, sondern in so Gruppensituationen wie bei Kinect, dann ist es tatsächlich auch irgendwie so, dass man sich angemessen mitfreuen sollte, wenn jemand einen neuen Highscore geschafft, weil es sicherlich sozial irgendwie erwünscht ist. (P2/260)

P2: Also es gibt halt so in Spielerunden, die dann auch etwas größer manchmal sind, auch so Menschen, die die einfach dann das Spiel in meinen Augen zu ernst nehmen. Sich über Dinge sehr aufregen, wenn sie nicht klappen, wo dann aber nicht nur ich, sondern auch sozusagen 90 Prozent der Runde sagen <<Ja, nicht so schlimm jetzt>> oder so. Und die halt auch, was die Durchführung von Regeln angeht sehr penibel sind und in übersteigertem Maße. Das fällt dann als unangemessen auf. (P2/264)

Interviewer: Gab es gab es Situationen in denen es Missverständnisse zwischen dir und anderen oder zwischen anderen Leuten gab, ob das was gerade da passiert Computerspielen ist oder nicht? <<Spielen wir eigentlich [gerade hier]?>>

P2: [Ja, ja.] Kann man, wenn man will, halt auf so Gruppengeschichten in Onlinerollenspielen übertragen. Also wenn sozusagen, wenn ich merke, dass jemand etwas so ernst nimmt, wie ich eigentlich ein Spiel nicht ernst nehmen würde, dann hätte ich halt eine andere Auffassung von Spiel in dem Moment, so.

Interviewer: Erinnerst du dich an irgendeine Situation?

P2: Im Prinzip diese Situation, die ich beschrieben habe, wo ich irgendwann sagte, dass ich nicht regelmäßig an so Schlachtzügen teilnehmen will. Und, wenn man das äußert in der Gruppe, dann entstehen halt solche Diskussionen, ne. Dass, wenn ich sage, <<Das soll mir nicht zur Verpflichtung werden>>, dann vertrete ich ja sozusagen in dieser Situation gerade die Position, es ist dann nicht mehr Spiel und die vertreten die Position <<Wieso? Macht doch Spaß>> ((lacht)). Da sind dann die Definitionen unterschiedlich. (P2/276-279)

Interviewer: Wie wie, wenn du jetzt bei dem disconnect-Beispiel bleibst, wie steigt, wie wie ist dann jemand wieder eingestiegen?

P2: Für mich merkbar einfach dadurch, dass dass der entsprechende Avatar so, die Gruppenanzeige erst auf disconnect geht und dann wieder Farbe, farbig wird und wieder da ist so und dann entsprechend begleitet <<Oh sorry, hatte gerade disconnect>> im Chat, oder per VoIP, ja ist ziemlich deutlich. (P2/294-295)

P3

P3: Na ja, es gibt ja verschiedene Spielesettings bei mir halt: es gibt halt das berufliche Spielesetting, in der Redaktion teilweise, dann gibt es das berufliche Spielesetting zu Hause und dann gibt es das rein kontemplative Spielesetting. Und, ich meine manchmal ist es natürlich so, als Spielejournalist schwimmen natürlich diese Settings, weil natürlich irgendwie man das Spiel, was man rezensiert, auch zu Hause man einfach mal so spielen kann. Aber wir müssen natürlich streckenweise dabei auch Notizen machen, denn je mehr man beim Spielen aufschreibt, desto leichter schreibt sich halt eine Rezension. Und das ist dann halt nicht so gut, wenn man im Bett ist, weil dann halt auch immer noch diese Notizen machen, da ist man dann halt auch zu, zu abgehangen dabei. (P3-1/39)

P3: Ich liege dann da, und habe so, so irgendwie so Decken und andere Kissen so als Rückenlehne. Und genau, da der Fernseher riesengroß ist, funktioniert das auch. Es gibt natürlich Spiel, wo man sehr nah dran sein muss, wo man halt viele Bildschirmanzeigen interpretieren muss, Karten sehen muss, und so weiter. Das ist dann manchmal, wenn man zu weit vom Fernseher entfernt ist, ein bisschen schwierig, selbst auf einem HD-Fernseher. (P3-1/45)

P3: Ja weil ich viele Tätig- vieles von dem tue, auch neben dem reinen Mediengenuss und der ästhetischen Erbauung, auch sage ich mal, dann auch um zu entspannen. Und das Bett ist schon mal per se halt ein super Ort wo man halt geil entspannen kann, sich hinlegen kann. (P3-1/57)

P3: Also ein Setting ist zum Beispiel die Soundeffekte, braucht man ja heutzutage auch, weil die Soundeffekte ja nicht mehr reiner... reines, reine Geräuschkulisse sind, sondern immer auch Informationsgeber für Spiele. Das heißt, man hört Gegner von weitem wenn sie kommen, man kann sie im Stereofeld orten, wenn sie sich von links oder rechts nähern und so. Das heißt ich habe dann manchmal hier Platten laufen, die Soundeffekte kommen dann aber aus dem Spiel. (P3-1/77)

P3: Und, da schreibe ich dann halt Sachen auf. Und das heißt, wenn ich jetzt halt wirklich, also oftmals, konzentriert arbeiten muss, dann sitze ich eher als dass ich liege. (P3-1/125)

P3: Aber tatsächlich ist, wenn man spielen muss, ein wahnsinnig, es kann wahnsinnig anstrengend sein, weil man dann eben das zu Hause machen muss: man hat eine Produktionsphase, also quasi die Phase, wo das Heft sozusagen zusammengesetzt wird, man dann möglichst schnell möglichst viel sehen. Und Spiele leisten ja auch Widerstand, sozusagen. Das heißt, sie wollen sich manchmal nicht so schnell durchspielen lassen, und wehren sich. Und das bedeutet, man muss halt ein möglichst konzentriertes Setting haben. Und ich bin dann halt abends oftmals auch zu faul, um Sachen aufzuschreiben. Wenn ich den ganzen Tag am Rechner gesessen habe und getippt habe und E-Mails geschrieben habe und so, und dann halt abends sich noch zu motivieren, eben die Sachen aufzuschreiben. (P3-1/159)

P3: Also, beim professionellen Spielen muss man mehr ausprobieren. Also man kann zum Beispiel einen, einen, ein Spiel, wenn man das rein so zum Spaß spielt, kann man einfach durchlaufen, streckenweise. (...) Bei dem beruflichen Spielen muss ich natürlich sehr hinschauen erst mal, und mir diese ganzen komischen Sachen anhören, in der Geschichte, und, um zum Beispiel zu beurteilen: wie ist dann die deutsche Sprachausgabe. (...) Und das ist so die eine Sache: Man muss halt sehr genau aufpassen, was so die Geschichte betrifft. Und dann muss man auch manchmal Sachen probieren. Das heißt, man muss versuchen, möglichst variantenreich an Szenen ranzugehen. (P3-1/176-179)

P3: J- ja, also, es ist natürlich so, dass (3s) die Verzauberung, die Spielewelten haben, mit der Zeit generell sowieso nachlässt. Das bedeutet, du (3s) du (2s) Man kriegt mit der Zeit ohnehin schon viel analytischeren Blick auf die ganzen Sachen. Das hat man immer wenn, wenn, also das ist dann der Fluch des professionellen Blicks. Das hat auch jemand, der beispielsweise Drehbücher schreibt oder so. Da weiß der ganz genau, in einem Hitchcock-Film, jetzt taucht die Nebenfigur auf, und vielleicht wird gleich jemand getötet. (...) Das ist sozusagen so ein Blick. Und den gibt es bei Spielen natürlich auch, dass man halt sozusagen die Zeichen, die einem das Spiel gibt, professionell lesen kann. Das heißt, das Spiel sendet Signale. Man sieht sehr schnell, die, die Regeln, die sozusagen so ein Spiel hat. Man weiß halt ganz genau: Hier muss ich jetzt drei Gegner töten, dann kommt der Größere, man muss dem Endgegner dann irgendwie hier auf den Kopf springen und da und so weiter. Und diesen Blick, den kann man natürlich auch beim kontemplativen Spielen nicht mehr komplett ausschalten. Das ist sozusagen so ein Wissen. Aber man kann diesen wissenden Blick sozusagen wegstreifen, beim kontemplativen Spielen. Und ich habe auch, und das ist glaube ich auch echt wichtig, wenn man auf Dauer so etwas machen möchte, die Fähigkeit, mich auch immer noch verzaubern zu lassen. (P3-1/189-193)

P3: Die versuchen Sachen in Spielen, die ich nie probieren würde. Da steht zum Beispiel eine Leiter in der Ecke. Und für mich ist es total klar: Die Leiter, die kann man nicht nehmen, oder die kann man nicht hochklettern. Weil in diesem Regelsystem des Spiels ist es nicht vorgesehen, dass man diese Dinge tut. Und die sind dann halt so in der Welt drin, und können nicht zwischen Welt und Regeln unterscheiden, und nehmen dann, versuchen die Leiter zu nehmen. Oder versuchen an komischen Absätzen hochzuklettern, wo es nicht geht. Und ich habe diesen professionellen Blick und weiß halt, das die ganze Welt so aus Vielfachen einer Spielfigur aufgebaut ist. Das heißt, wenn sozusagen ein Absatz so hoch ist wie meine Figur, dann kann ich da ran. Und wenn er halt ein bisschen höher ist von der Grafik, dann schalte ich das automatisch aus und probiere es gar nicht erst, so. (P3-1/195-197)

P3: Es gab auch mal eine Zeit, da hatte das Spielmagazin zum Beispiel eine DVD beigelegt. Und bei Spielen, oder da wurden Spielszenen abgefilmt. Und wenn man das Spiel selber rezensiert hat, war es zum Beispiel okay, aber es gab auch Spiele von freien Autoren, die extern rezensiert wurden. Und die beispielsweise in Timbuktu sitzen und keine Videos anliefern konnten. Dann sitzen wir abends in der Redaktion, spielen Spiele, die wir überhaupt nicht können, und müssen dabei Videoaufnahmen machen, in denen wir als Spieler möglichst gut aussehen. Und dann denkt man

halt: <<Ah, wir können nicht immer nur den ersten Level zeigen>>, selbst wenn du nur drei Minuten zeigst. Das heißt, wir müssen irgendwie, eigentlich wollen wir schon lange nach Hause, weil wir das nächste Spiel müssen. Dann müssen wir halt irgend einen komischen Militärshooter spielen. Und damit nicht alle Bilder aus dem Wüstensetting sind, muss man dann echt immer weiter kommen. Und dann, dann, dann spielt man das natürlich auch nur halbherzig, und schafft man das halt auch nicht, und dann, dann ist das Spiel auch noch schwer und unfair und so. Das sind halt tatsächlich, also so Video und, und, und Filmaufnahmen sind auf jeden Fall Frustmomente.

Weitere Frustmomente sind zum Beispiel bei Adventures, die man rezensiert, dass man irgendwo hängen bleibt, Also man hat, kriegt ein Spiel relativ spät in der Produktionsphase, beispielsweise vier Tage vor Ende, zwei Tage bevor der Text abgegeben werden muss. Das Spiel ist komplett neu, man findet keine sogenannten Walk-throughs im Netz (...) und dann hakt man halt. Und man kennt es ja so in Adventures: Man probiert alle möglichen Gegenstände, und probiert alles aus, und es, es, es, man kommt einfach nicht weiter, und so.(...) Und das ist dann halt dieser Moment, wo ich dann auch Freunden sage: <<Das ist einfach wahnsinnig anstrengend gerade>>. So. (3s)

Interviewer: Okay. Kannst du für dich, für dich selbst benennen, was genau das so frustrierend macht?

P3: Ja, das ist der Zeitdruck. Und also das ist das Verhältnis von Zeit und möglichst viel sehen müssen, so. (...) Und man muss halt dann, beim, beim Schreiben würde man sagen: <<Okay, ich mache noch ein paar Notizen, lasse es liegen, gucke es mir morgen halt entsprechend an und fange noch mal frisch an.>> Aber manchmal muss man halt einfach spielen und muss weiterkommen, egal, ob man Bock hat oder nicht. Und da, da ist dann halt, da ist Spielen dann tatsächlich Arbeit. (P3-1/223-233)

P3: Und da gab es halt oft Situationen, wo ich dann halt eigentlich kontemplativ mit einer Freundin im Bett liege, und wir spielen zu zweit, wo ich aber diese Signale des Spiels halt schon sehe, und sie spielt. Und dann sage ich: <<Na, du musst doch hier hoch jetzt>>, und: <<Geh doch mal da längs, und jetzt mal da>> und es gab echt Momente, da haben wir uns halt einfach gestritten, so. Weil, da bin ich dann halt in, aus diesem Setting: mit meiner Freundin Sonntag morgens im Bett zu liegen und zu spielen, bin ich dann halt in dieses berufliche Ding reinge- reingerutscht und bin halt ungeduldig gewesen, so. Und werde ungeduldig, und das ruiniert natürlich dann auch so was. Weil gerade Leute, die sich damit nicht so gut auskennen, dann so einen Leistungsdruck plötzlich zu verspüren, den ich aber aufbaue, so, das macht überhaupt keinen Spaß. (P3-1/262)

P3: Also das ist zum Beispiel auch so ein Punkt, wenn man einfach keine Notizen mehr macht und spielt plötzlich zwei Stunden. Und manchmal vielleicht denkt man so einen Moment: <<Ja, eigentlich sollte ich Notizen machen, aber scheißegal, jetzt erst mal wichtig, zu spielen>>. So, da rutscht man dann beim Arbeiten auch in so einen Flow rein und spielt einfach. Dann muss man danach vielleicht noch Notizen machen, aber dann sagt man halt: <<Scheiß drauf, das macht jetzt einfach gerade so viel Spaß>>, und dann ist man so drin und dann, da, da, da switcht man dann. Also manchmal kriegt einen das Spiel sozusagen auch, dass der professionelle Blick ausgeschaltet wird. Wenn das alles so flüssig läuft, dass man gar nicht stoppt und auch gar nichts unbedingt notieren muss, so was mit der Spielmechanik zusammenhängt, dann rutscht man einfach rein und dann fließt das so runter. (P3-1/268)

P3: Also es gibt halt Leute, die spielen Egoshooter, die sie vielleicht in der Rezension dann auf einem höheren Schwierigkeitsgrad spielen müssen, weil sie die KI der Gegner beurteilen müssen, die spielen die streckenweise auch einfach durch und schauen sich die Landschaft an. Also wir haben einen, einen Kollegen in der Redaktion, das ist ein unglaublicher Landschaftsfanatiker. Und der geht dann halt bei Spielen wie *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*, was im postnuklearen Russland spielt und so, da läuft der einfach rum und schaut sich die zerstörten Wälder an und guckt sich den Sonnenuntergang an und läuft dann da durch die Gegend. Und da das Spiel total einfach ist, schießt er mal eben die Gegner weg und macht aber einfach Spaziergänge in den Welten. (P3-1/288)

P3: Weil beim Hardcore-Spielen muss man natürlich auch echt, man muss rein kommen. Man muss zum Beispiel auch gucken, ich habe ja vorhin so Spielmechaniken erwähnt. Es gibt ja auch eine Punktemechanik, so. Und es gibt bei, bei 2D-Shootern oder so, gibt es halt Systeme, wie man möglichst viele Punkte erlangen kann. Und beim professionellen Spielen muss man auch schauen, wie intelligent ist dieses System. Und das heißt, man muss dann Punkte erreichen und versuchen, wie sind so Multiplikatoren da und so weiter. Und das ist natürlich schon so einfach eine Hardcore-Denkweise, die sich tatsächlich sich, wirklich mit dem Regelsystem auseinandersetzt und versucht, dort möglichst erfolgreich zu sein.

Interviewer: Also das ist, das ist der Kern, dass man in beiden auf das Regelsystem guckt. Ganz, ganz [genau]

P3: [Nein, beim] beim kontemplativen Spiel guckt man streckenweise nicht auf das Regelsystem. Natürlich muss man auch die Regeln verstehen, das ist eine ganz normale Sache, wenn man ein Puzzlespiel spielt, und es kontemplativ

spielt, muss man natürlich auch wissen, wie die Grundmechanik ist. Aber man kann auch einfach vor so etwas wie *Bejeweled* sitzen und dir ganze Zeit einfach stupide irgendwelche Juwelen aneinander schieben, damit die auf dem Bildschirm verschwinden und benutzt das eigentlich, eigentlich so als Computerspiel-Yoga oder so und entspannt sich dabei und das Hirn wird leer dabei, so. Dann gibt es aber auch das Spielen, dass man tatsächlich sagt: <<So. Alter, ich muss jetzt unbedingt, wenn ich jetzt hier bei, in der Welt drei nicht bei soundsoviel Punkten bin, dann kriege ich meinen Highscore nicht>> und das, das selbe Spiel halt auf eine ganz- ganz andere Art spielen. (P3-1/292-300)

P3: Also man kann gegeneinander spielen so, aber beim sogenannten Coop-Spielen, also beim kooperativen Spielen, das heißt zwei Leute spielen zusammen beispielsweise ein Jump-and-Run durch, *Donkey Kong Country* und so weiter. Da gehört es sich zum Beispiel nicht, sich über den Gegner, den Partner lustig zu machen. Das heißt, also man, die, die eigenen, die, man, es, es, es geht zum Beispiel immer, die Fähigkeiten zu loben und sozusagen zu prollen, wie geil man selber ist. Aber nicht erlaubt ist es, die Fähigkeiten des Gegners dabei herabzusetzen. (P3-1/326)

P3: Also da, das ist natürlich auch eine ganz andere Form von, wenn man mit Gegnern spielt, das, da wird Spielen ja halt dann auch zur, zur Competition. Da geht es halt darum, Skills zu zeigen und so weiter. Und da, da verändert sich natürlich auch das, das, das Grundsetting einfach. Also es gibt halt Leute, die nehmen das halt sehr ernst, so, gerade in diesen Wettbewerbskontext. (P3-1/354)

P3: Also man muss jetzt halt nicht verbissen irgendwie gewinnen wollen, aber die Leute müssen natürlich mit einem Mindesteinsatz an, an Willen und Taktik da sein, um möglichst weit nach vorne zu kommen, weil sonst, sonst bricht das Spiel halt ein. (P3-1/356)

P3: Also man hat ein gewisses Maß an Konzentration, was man aufbringen kann, diese ganzen Steuerungssignale zu deuten oder halt, die Hand-Auge-Koordination kann man halt nur eine gewisse Zeit auf einem hohen Level aufrechterhalten. Und irgendwann, wenn die Skills einfach nachlassen, dann funktioniert es nicht mehr, und dann sollte man aufhören. (P3-1/423)

P3: Und sozusagen, wenn jemand, ich glaube der, der kontemplative Spieler würde halt viel früher aufhören. Ich meine, viele Leute spielen halt wirklich Spiele sehr sehr kurz, also das hat, da ist noch ein Moment, wenn du spielst, und es macht keinen Spaß, es sei denn du hast jetzt siebzig Euro ausgegeben und weißt, das wird nach vier Stunden geil, dann spielst du es vielleicht noch. Ansonsten siehst du aber selten Leute verkrampft, na ja, verkrampft vielleicht schon, aber misstrautig vor einer Konsole sitzen. Und der typische Spielejournalist, der sitzt dann einfach auch streckenweise ärgerlich, in Selbstgespräche versunken dann vor der Konsole. (P3-1/438)

P3: Ich glaube, das Licht ist, das Licht ist öfter an, bei Leuten, die professionell spielen.

Interviewer: Okay.

P3: So, einfach aus Gründen dessen, das man auch leicht müde wird, wenn man, wenn das Licht aus ist abends und so und wenn man. Man muss halt auch seine Notizen zum Beispiel natürlich sehen können und so und irgendwie dann, dann ist das Licht tatsächlich auch eher an als aus. (P3-1/460-464)

P3: Und viele Leute, die nicht Computerspiel-sozialisiert sind, ich habe ja eingangs von *Bulletstorm* gesprochen, und da geht es halt um möglichst spektakuläre Töten. Und wenn ich dann halt jubele, dass ich es geschafft habe, erst diesen Typen irgendwie mit der Peitsche ran zuziehen und dann danach irgendwie in ein noch hängendes Stromkabel zu, zu, zu schmeißen, und dann jubele ich, weil ich echt diesen, diese Todesart noch nie vorher geschafft habe. Die kann tatsächlich bei Leuten, die nicht- die nicht Computer spielen, also wirklich extremes Kopfschütteln hervorrufen. So. Das heißt nicht, dass man danach nicht drüber reden sollte, so, oder was weiß ich, meistens ist dann auch so, dass ich dann eben, man fühlt dann so einen Legitimationszwang, und sagt so: <<Ja, das ist eigentlich gar nicht so.>> (P3-1/501-3)

P3: Aber es gibt dann tatsächlich auch Spiele, die muss ich dann spielen, und die will ich überhaupt nicht spielen, weil zum Beispiel es ein Spiel ist, was den menschlichen Energiehaushalt thematisiert. Und es hat verschiedene erneuerbare Energien, und hat Atomkraftwerke, die man zum Beispiel machen kann. Und man kann dieses Spiel dann überhaupt nicht beurteilen, wenn man nicht wirklich es weit spielt. Um zu wissen, haben Atomkraftwerke nicht wirklich auch einen Vorteil? (P3-1/583)

P3: Es gibt natürlich das Ding so, dass man mit Leuten zusammen spielt, im Coop, dass man selber überhaupt keinen Bock mehr hat und eine andere Person natürlich immer noch weiterspielen möchte. (P3-1/579)

P3: Und dann gibt es tatsächlich Jurytätigkeiten, da muss ich auch Sachen spielen. Das Spiel ist eigentlich nicht gut. Ich muss aber noch beurteilen, ob es schlau ist oder nicht, so. Und da kommt dann auch wirklich so ein, so ein Muss rein. (...)

Interviewer: Ja. Würdest du das, würdest du so eine Situation als Spiel bezeichnen? Wenn, wenn, wenn dieses Muss gegeben ist?

P3: Nein, das ist dann auf jeden Fall Arbeit. (P3-1/585-593)

P3: Und, es kann natürlich sein, das beim kontemplativen Spielen, manchen Gefühle (3s) in... purerer Form vorkommen, weil man halt dann halt nicht so einen Arbeitssetting dabei hat. Das heißt, wenn man sich fallen lässt oder so, und das einfach genießt, dann kann das sein, das man... gewisse Sachen einfach intensiver sind. Das halt eine Freude eine reine Freude ist und nicht eine Erleichterung, das jetzt das Spiel geschafft ist, weil man damit die Arbeitssitzung beenden kann. (P3-2/493)

P3: Na ja, es gibt da ja natürlich schon die Konsequenzen des, des Arbeitens. Und wenn man halt scheitert und weiß: <<Ich kann die Rezension morgen nicht schreiben>>, weil man tatsächlich die und die Sachen nicht erreicht hat, dann ist es natürlich auch schon einfach ziemlich ärgerlich. Weil die Konsequenz dann zum Beispiel bedeutet, dass man morgens zwei Stunden früher aufstehen muss, um das Spiel wieder anzufangen, so. Und das kann streckenweise halt schon wahnsinnig ärgerlich sein. Weil man hat dann in der harten Produktionsphase eh wenig Schlaf, und wenn man tatsächlich dann, dann sozusagen, also das Scheitern kann auch... kann sehr ärgerlich sein. (P3-2/631)

P3: Das heißt, diese Befriedigung, die Computerspiele einem schaffen, ist halt: Man existiert in einem Regelsystem, das man lernt zu beherrschen. (P3-2/681)

P4

P4: Ich habe auf die Uhr geguckt, weil ich... einfach so ein Maximum ausreize was ich Abends wach sein kann (...) Irgendwo:: zieh ich meine Grenze, die ein bisschen variabel ist, wo ich sage: <<weil es jetzt schön ist, kann ich zwanzig dreißig Minuten länger>>. Aber auf jeden Fall ist das dann eine endgültige Zeit, und dadurch, dass ich jetzt sehr früh raus muss, war null Uhr dreißig das späteste wo ich ins Bett gehen wollte. (P4/73)

P4: Also davor ist es oftmals so das ich, (5s) mich ein bisschen einrichte. So das klassische, das man nicht zu weite Wege hat, das man alles in der Nähe hat, Getränk, vielleicht noch was... zu essen wenn es jetzt nicht irgendwas umständliches ist, was einen... beim Spielen hindern würde, wie ein Teller mit Nudeln. Sondern eher so was, man hat Oliven in der Schale oder ähnliches halt.

Interviewer: Warum? (2s)

P4: Es ist (3s) eine Form von einrichten jetzt... werde ich eine Zeit hier *zubringen*, mit dem *spielen*, und mach es mir so gemütlich wie *möglich*, so angenehm wie möglich. (P4/129-133).

P4: Ich wollte nie alleine da sein dabei. Auch als ich noch mit meiner Freundin zusammen gelebt habe, die hat auch Computer gespielt. Oder mit meinem Mitbewohner damals im Studium. Das war immer so, dass ich trotzdem... noch... direkten sozialen Austausch haben wollte, immer parallel::, immer mal mit Unterbrechung::. Einfach nie das in sich einschließen. Das war wirklich nie mein Interesse. Ich kann auch alleine Computer spielen, auch *nachts*, ganz alleine für mich sein. Aber trotzdem fand ich es immer *schön* wenn ich es nicht *war*. Also das fand ich eigentlich immer schöner. (2s) Hätte auch lieber in einem Raum wo andere sind, oder wo andere in der Nähe sind, Computer gespielt, als in einem Raum wo ich davon nichts mitbekomme. (P4/161)

P4: Bei Leuten die nicht Erfahrung mit Computerspielen haben. Die haben kein Verständnis dafür. Ich hab in meiner Familie sehr viel Leute mit, (3s) absolut keiner Computerspielsozialisation sag ich jetzt mal. (...) Es hängt ja nicht zwingend miteinander zusammen, aber in dem Falle war es bei denen eine logische Folge, dass Computerspiele für sie halt auch nur Tinnel sind und Überflüssigkeiten. Für die ist der persönliche Austausch Priorität. Ob nun Absicht oder nicht. Also ob nun Show, oder ob es ernst gemeint ist. Auf jeden Fall haben sie keinen Computer zum spielen, beziehungsweise keinen Fernseher. Bei denen ist es oft so, die haben gar kein Empfinden dafür, dass man sich gestört füh-

len kann, wenn man gerade Computer spielt, und dann angesprochen wird. (3s) Und sehen das Signal auch gar nicht das man sagt: <<Jetzt eher nicht>>. Weil das können sie nicht verarbeiten, das verstehen sie nicht. Für sie ist es nur ein Computerspiel. (P4/192)

P4: In dem Fall ist es halt, der Raum in der Gemeinschaftsküche, und der ist eben auch für mich *sozial*. Ich bin nicht raus aus dem Geschehen, ich bin *dabei*. Und um mich rum geschieht zwangsläufig irgendwas, weil die Küche ist ein Anlaufpunkt. Es ist für mich interessant. *Und* ich hab da sowieso meinen festen Platz, und mal steht da mein Rechner von mir, dann baue ich den mehr oder weniger ähnlich immer auf. (P4/245)

P4: Es gibt natürlich auch so was wie Netzerkabende. Das ist jetzt schon ein bisschen länger her. Würde ich gerne mal wieder machen. Hab ich immer großen Spaß dran. Das ist dann so (3s) laut, (3s) pubertär, und halt auch immer, immer ein Wettbewerbsthema. Also... kenne ich nicht anders. Ich hab noch nie glaub ich ein Netzerkabend gespielt, wo es nicht um den Kampf gegeneinander letztlich ging, und das Beweisen wie gut man bestimmte Spiele spielen kann, oder ähnliches, und das man... jemanden übertrumpfen kann, wirkt bei so einem Spiel. Das ist eigentlich... grundlegend. Aber es ist auch der Spaß da dran: der Wettbewerb da. (P4/334)

P4: Konzentration, die Bewegungen, bei bestimmten Spielen- Wie gesagt ?in? Ego-Shootern wird sehr viel mit der Mouse natürlich gearbeitet. Sehr viel geklickt. Das erzeugt bei manchen Mäusen ja auch Geräusche, bei manchen weniger. Aber man nimmt das natürlich war, und merkt dann halt auch, manchmal in der *Mimik*, ob jemand sehr konzentriert ist zum Beispiel. Bei einem Spiel. Mir wird zum Beispiel nachgesagt, dass ich immer sehr konzentriert wirke, wenn es knifflig wird, und das ganz deutlich an meinem Gesicht abzulesen ist. (4s) Es wurden auch schon Fotos geschossen. ((lacht)) (P4/342)

P4: Also, (3s) bei uns merke ich es halt immer so, gerade wenn Ladezeiten sind, wenn das Spielen anfängt, aber noch nicht das Eigentliche spielen startet, sondern im Hintergrund alles läuft, dass dann noch gesprochen wird. Aber das der Einstieg des Spiels meistens, mit einer Pause... im Gespräch beginnt. Es kann dann wieder aufgenommen werden. (P4/358)

P4: Da spielt eigentlich eher das, die Freizeit beziehungsweise, die Entscheidung, wie man, (2s) was man jetzt machen möchte eher ne Rolle. Das Empfinden, ich möchte jetzt Computer spielen, und es spricht nichts dagegen, weil ich nicht irgendetwas anderes auch machen will, dann mach ich das, und dann starte ich das. (P4/384)

P4: Oder manchmal ist es auch, im Zusammenhang mit dem Spiel, das man sagt: <<Heute funktioniert es nicht.>> Also das Spiel hat nicht das, was man sich von versprochen hat, an dem Tag für einen gebracht. Weder das Erfolgserlebnis vielleicht:, oder man ist nicht mit seinem, seiner Performance zufrieden. Weil das ja beim Spiel auch wichtig ist, für einen vielleicht, dass man... bei einem Ego-Shooter zum Beispiel, das ist ein gutes Beispiel, eine bestimmte Statistik hat. Die man so ungefähr gewohnt ist. Wenn man da weit von ab liegt, kann es einen frustrieren, und auch sagen: <<Ich habe keine Lust mehr, das geht mir auf den Keks, weil heute läuft es nicht.>> (P4/416)

P4: Man hat was gemeinsam erlebt, wie auch im ganz normalen Alltag, im sozialen *draußen* sag ich jetzt mal. Man hat was gemeinsam erlebt, *beide* waren dabei. Und trotzdem möchte man sich gegenseitig schildern, was man den Tolles erlebt hat, weil man es gemeinsam erlebt hat, und... möchte den Erlebnisbericht des anderen ergänzen: <<und ja und ich weiß ja noch, und ne>>. (P4/432)

P4: Da ist das eigene Spielerego auch schon gekränkt, und deswegen würde man das nicht sofort zeigen. Man würde erst mal versuchen im Hintergrund das zu lösen, den Konflikt, und dann doch über seinen eigenen Frust zu triumphieren. Und das würde man dann nach außen zeigen. Den Triumph. (P4/460)

P4: In Zusammenhang mit einem Wettbewerb, des miteinander Spielens ist es auch Bestandteil des Ganzen, (4s) sich zu äußern, und eigene Erfolge groß zu machen, und Niederlagen von anderen, oder beziehungsweise, (2s) Misserfolge... ebenso aufzuplustern. Als Form von, (2s) ja einander aufziehen einfach, das ist Bestandteil des Spielens dann, des Gemeinsams auch. (4s)

Bestes Beispiel sind solche Dinge wie, Beobachtung von... solchen Computerspielexperten, wenn die gegeneinander spielen. Wie zum Beispiel die von Game One, MTV. Die haben eine Kategorie, nennt sich Royal Beef, da spielen sie gegeneinander und werden von der Kamera beobachtet. Wie sie sich auch beschimpfen, wie sie sich provozieren, sich versuchen... reinzulegen gegenseitig, zu locken und alles. Das sind natürlich auch Dinge die auch passieren. Wo man

auch bewusst Gefühle äußert, um jemandem vielleicht... zu signalisieren, ich bin der bessere Spieler, oder um jemanden in die Irre zu leiten. Das benutzt man halt auch. Im Zusammenspiel aber *nur*. (P4/468-472)

‘Wenn da zu viel Vermischung von Spiel und echtem Leben insofern stattfindet, dass derjenige sich zu stark über das Spiel definiert.’ (P4/478).

P4: Wenn jemand, das aber anders sieht, und für den das enorm wichtig ist, und er sagt: <<das bin *ich*, der sich da weiterentwickelt hat>>, das verstehe ich nicht. Wenn er da auch Glück signalisiert und sagt: <<Toll>>. Und es hat für mich nicht mehr nur den Anschein beziehungsweise nicht mehr nur das: <<Ich hab ein Spielerfolg erreicht und bin darauf stolz, dass ich sozusagen im Spiel einen Punkt erreicht hab, das ist Bestandteil des Spiels und ich hab jetzt eine weitere Stufe geschafft>>. Nein wenn derjenige sagt: <<Ich hab mich persönlich weiterentwickelt>>, weil er im Spiel etwas geschafft hat. Und die Vermischung, wenn ich dann echte Gefühlsausbrüche oder irgendwie so was höre, oder die müssen ja nicht echt sein. (P4/484)

P4: Da ist nur die Sondersituation, dass das Netzwerk- abends, mit mehreren Leuten gemeinsam, das (2s) wenn man vielleicht müde ist, und für sich eigentlich entscheiden würde, ich würde es jetzt aufhören. Dass man aufgrund der Besonderheit dieses Abends, weil es auch selten vorkommt, weil es eine extra Verabredung ist, wo viele Leute gemeinsam einen Termin finden, um sich dann zusammen zu setzen. Um auch ein besonderes Erlebnis ist, dass man dann länger durchhält als man eigentlich wollte. Und länger spielt obwohl man vielleicht längst am Spiel selbst nicht mehr den Spaß hat. (P4/489)

P4: auch noch spielerisch sein, um was man spielt (P4/518)

Interviewer: Aber das Versteigern von virtuellen Gütern ist für dich-

P4: Das hat nichts mehr mit einem Spiel zu tun, und ist deswegen für mich eine Grenzüberschreitung.

Interviewer: Warum? (3s)

P4: Bei mir scheint die Trennung ganz klar zu sein zwischen einem Computerspiel, und der ((lacht)) richtigen physikalischen Welt draußen, sag ich jetzt mal. Zu der zum Beispiel Geld zählt, zu der zum Beispiel Freundschaften zählen, soziale Beziehungen und ähnliches. (P4/586-592)

P4: Wut, Aggression im gemeinsamen Spielen von Computerspielen bei, (2s) übers Netzwerk, übers Internet, (3s) das sind alles spielbegleitende Dinge, die eben oftmals auch spielerisch sind. Provokation sein sollen und ähnliches, oder einfach nur der äußeren, der eigenen Frustration über das Spielen halt, das man nicht gerade schlecht spielt. Es ist aber nicht was ne-

Interviewer: Okay.

P4: Nichts was falsch ist und so. In die falsche Richtung geht.

Interviewer: Irgendeine Situation wo du, wenn du sagst Frustration oder Aggression, erinnerst du dich an die Situation wo dann jemand das dann mal in den falschen Hals gekriegt hat oder?

P4: *Ne*, Ne Ne. Das ist bei den Leuten mit denen ich bisher immer gespielt hab, so dass die (3s) das so einordnen, dass es mir zeigt die sehen das ähnlich. Bewerten es auch gleich, sind ähnlich anscheinend (2s) sozialisiert, wissen dass, das zum Spielen dazu gehört, und nicht böse gemeint ist, und Bestandteil des Ganzen sogar ist. (P4/600-608)

P5

P5: So und ansonsten, (2s) die Runde beziehungsweise die zwei Runden, die ich gespielt habe waren nicht so wirklich von Erfolg gekrönt, da das Teamplay halt, wenn man nicht über Headset verbunden ist, dann kann man es eigentlich mehr oder weniger knicken.

Interviewer: Und Sie waren über Headset verbunden, aber der andere nicht? Oder?

P5: Also im Normalfall ist es so, dass ich meinen Klanleuten in einem Teamspeakchannel bin. Und wir dann halt zusammen auf den Server gehen und dann sprechen wir uns dementsprechend ab. (P5-1/16-18)

P5: Ist halt eine Spielgemeinschaft. Wer Bock hat kommt. (P5-1/25)

P5: Das sind so die wirklich regelmäßigen Fenster. Weil ich das einfach zum Abschalten brauche, nach der, nach der Arbeit und nachdem ich die Lütte halt ins Bett gebracht habe. Dann muss ich ein bisschen abschalten. Einmal für einen Moment die Welt um mich herum vergessen und auch mal der Held sein, in Anführungsstrichen. Und anson-

sten, wenn es am Wochenende dann zeitlich passt, dann kommt es darauf an. Also in, im Vordergrund steht die Familie, ganz klar. Aber wenn meine Frau sagt, sie will telefonieren, dann gehe ich halt daddeln und dann geht es von acht bis zwölf, eins, zwei, je nachdem wie viel Lust und Zeit da ist. (P5-1/29)

Interviewer: Wie wie wie wird, wie wird kommuniziert oder festgesetzt <<Hallo, es gibt diese Regel>>, dass man dass man [nur diese eine Waffe haben darf]?

P5: [Das wird], es gibt es gibt so eine Servernachricht, die dann halt sporadisch auftaucht, wo dann (4s) entweder drinsteht <<Beachtet unsere Regeln auf der Homepage>> oder die Regeln selber werden halt eingeblendet. (...)

Interviewer: Kann man das, oder gab es auch Situationen, wo man das halt einstellen konnte? Also, dass pro Team nur folgende Waffen genommen werden [können, oder so?]

P5: [Das das kam danach.] Das kam danach. Weil es halt immer nur Probleme gab mit diesem einen Herren, dass ihm das egal war, was die anderen gemacht haben, Hauptsache er hat seine Waffe gekriegt. Und dann funktionierte das eigentlich auch.

Interviewer: Also das kam danach, im Sinne von, danach hat hat jemand vom vom Klan, der den Server [konfiguriert hat?]

P5: [Genau.]

Interviewer: In der Konfiguration halt eingestellt, dass [man die Waffe nicht nehmen darf?]

P5: [Richtig.] Richtig.

Interviewer: Ok. Ging das vorher technisch theoretisch auch schon und man hat dann einfach nur gesagt, wir verlassen uns jetzt darauf, dass quasi hier Sportmänner [sind]?

P5: [Ja.] Genau. Also so lief es erst. Und nachher wurde das halt administrativ so eingerichtet. (P5-1/59-68)

P5: Ich muss dazu sagen, dass wir alle schon ein bisschen älter sind bei uns im Klan. Wir haben damals eine Grundregel bei uns gehabt <<Unter 23 kommt keiner rein>>. Weil die sogenannte Flamerei, die geht halt eher von den jüngeren Generationen aus. Also die (3s) ja, halt Beschwerden über komische Spielweisen oder feige Spielweisen, das hat dann nach sich gezogen, dass die Leute halt angefangen haben persönlich zu werden.

Interviewer: Was heißt Flamerei?

P5: Flamen ist im Endeffekt, ja, Rumschimpfen. Auf Deutsch gesagt. Also, wirklich mit bösen Worten um sich schmeißen. (P5-1/70-72)

Interviewer: Aber wie einigt man sich dann sozusagen mit der mit Gruppe, die da ist mit den Leuten, die jetzt auf dem Server spielen: <<Ey übrigens, das ist was, was wir nicht machen, weil das ist unfaires Spielen>>?

P5: Das hängt immer ganz vom Serverbetreiber ab. Beziehungsweise von demjenigen, der den Server angemietet hat. Der hat immer die Möglichkeit, Nachrichten einzuspielen. Der hat auch die Möglichkeit zu sagen <<Alles klar Jungs, wenn ihr das, wenn ihr spawnfragt oder das sogenannte Base Rapsen betreibt, dann werdet ihr gekickt. Nach dem dritten Kick gibt es einen Bann und dann könnt ihr es vergessen. Dann bleibt ihr runter vom Server.>>

Interviewer: Gekickt heißt was?

P5: Das heißt im Endeffekt, dass man für den Moment vom Spiel ausgeschlossen wird. Es gibt, ich glaube, es gibt verschiedene Möglich-. Also ich habe es selber noch nicht erlebt, dass ich gekickt wurde, aber es gibt glaube ich die Möglichkeit die Zeit einzustellen wie lange man vom Server wegbleiben muss.

Interviewer: Wer entscheidet dann wie, dass jemand gekickt wird?

P5: Das wird durch die Server-Admins gesteuert. Also der Server-Admin selber muss im Spiel sein. Und der kann dann halt dementsprechend entscheiden. Also, es gibt beispielsweise einen Timbuktuer Server, da ist ein Kumpel von mir halt Admin und dem muss ich im Endeffekt nur sagen <<Guck mal, der benutzt Raketenwerfer auf auf Infanterie. Das geht nicht.>> So, und das ist auch bei denen auch ein *geschriebenes* Gesetz, halt über über die Servernachrichten. Und, wenn ich ihm das sage, dann sagt er <<Alles klar. Wer war das?>> Ich sage <<Blablupp, Räuber84.>> Und dann sagt er <<Ok. Tschüss Räuber84.>> Und dann geht er.

Interviewer: Ok. Das heißt, der guckt dann nicht noch einmal, ob er tatsächlich das tut, sondern er vertraut dann [der Aussage?]

P5: [Ja], also ich kenne ihn Ewigkeiten über bald sechs sieben Jahre. Und der vertraut mir da voll und ganz. Weil, er er kennt mich und ich würde da nie jemanden wissentlich anschwärzen, obwohl er nichts gemacht hat. (P5-1/83-91)

P5: Ja im Singleplayer ist eigentlich, da ist eigentlich alles egal. So das das hat keine Konsequenzen. Wir vertreten unseren Klan ja im Multiplayer und da ist es so, dass wir mittlerweile, wir haben halt nur Leute dabei, die das Klantag mit Stolz tragen und die sich auch nicht irgendwie als Lamer oder so darstellen wollen. Sondern wir repräsentieren halt unseren Klan. Wir sind fair, wir spielen sauber, wir spielen ohne Cheats. (P5-1/102)

P5: Ja. Auf den Monitor gucken ist halt tabu.

Interviewer: Aha. [Das heißt?]

P5: [Ja logisch.] Also nicht nicht auf den eigenen, das ist klar ((lacht)) also auf den eigenen darf man natürlich gucken, aber die Tische werden schon so aufgestellt, oder wurden so aufgestellt, dass die Monitore halt immer mit dem Rücken zueinander standen. So dass man halt wirklich nur seinen Kumpel gesehen hat und nicht auf den Monitor des anderen gucken konnte. (P5-1/151-153)

P5: Hass. Hass, ja. Also Hass ((atmet tief durch)), wenn man, also wenn ich durchgehend von dem gleichen Spieler abgeschossen werde, dann entwickelt man im Endeffekt schon so eine Art Hass. Aber das ist jetzt nicht so, dass ich gegen diesen Menschen persönlich etwas hätte, sondern einfach gegen die Art wie er spielt. So da-, das ist im Endeffekt ja eigentlich auch so ein Eingeständnis, dass man schlechter ist. (3s) Aber das würde ich (2s) würde ich nicht äußern.

Interviewer: Was was zeigen Sie denn stattdessen in Reaktionen?

P5: Gar nichts.

Interviewer: Gar nichts.

P5: Nee, das ist wirklich. Da halte ich mich komplett zurück. Weil das das ist, wie gesagt, so eine so eine Ehrensache. (P5-1/187-191)

P5: Also mir geht es primär ums Fliegen. Um das Gefühl quasi diesen Hubschrauber zu kontrollieren. Dadurch, durch diese Kontrolle, die ich dann über den Hubschrauber habe, meinen Gegner auch kontrollieren zu können. Dann ist es auch die optische Umsetzung, wobei ich definitiv nichts von irgendwelchen Blutdetails oder Splattergeschichten halte, sondern es ist die Herausforderung eher halt den Pixel zu jagen, sage ich mal. Ich glaube das ist ganz gut ausgedrückt. (P5-1/202)

P5: Ach so, *doch*. Ja klar, sicher. Also, das war das war Gang und Gäbe bei den bei den kleineren Multiplayern, also bei *Counterstrike* und bei *Quake*, dass man nach dem Spiel einfach ein <<Good Game>> hingeschrieben hat. Also das hat (2s) immer irgendwie Sinn gemacht. Ob jetzt verloren oder gewonnen, <<Good Game>> ist halt immer so quasi wie der Handshake nach dem Handball, oder nach dem Fußballspiel. (3s) Aber das (5s) das meine ich so, wenn ich das schreibe. Egal, ob wir gewonnen oder verloren haben, das ist halt, das gehört dazu. Quasi so ein so ein Dankeschön. Genauso, wie man vor Beginn des Spiels, jetzt in Ligaspielen damals halt dieses <<HF>> und <<GL>> geschrieben hat, also <<Have Fun und Good Luck>>. Das gehörte dazu. (P5-1/228)

P5: Also (4s) es gibt eine Person der ((schmunzelnd)), die freut, also der der gute Kollege freut sich halt extremst, wenn er (3s) wenn er einen Arbeitskollegen mit dem Messer erledigt hat. So, das trägt er dann auch in die Firma und, ha, ich sage mal generell, ich trenne das. Ich würde niemals hingehen und sagen <<Haha, habe ich dich letzte Nacht aber dolle abgeschossen.>> Und er ist halt eher so der Kollege, der sich da ziemlich reinsteigert und dann zieht er den anderen Kollegen halt so zurück, wie er ihn die letzte Nacht mit dem Messer dann erledigt hat. Und freut er sich tierisch drüber und, ja weiß ich nicht, muss nicht, das muss nicht sein. Spiele spielen und das Real Life.

Interviewer: Wie reagieren die anderen dann in in so einer Situation?

P5: Ja, da wird auch drüber gelacht. Also, das ist nichts, also irgendwie anstößige Bemerkungen oder irgendwelche Verherrlichungen gibt es an sich nicht. Nur wie gesagt, diese Darstellung halt wie der Messerkill dann stattgefunden hat. Und dann dann kann auch jeder, der der das Spiel gespielt hat, gleich etwas anfangen, aber das war es an sich. (P5-1/235-237)

P6

‘Wo es eher so darum geht, wird man irgendwie als behind von anderen wahrgenommen.’ (P6/217)

P7

P7: Ja dann werde ich sehr fokussiert auf dieses Spiel, nehme auch nicht mehr so viel in meiner Umgebung wahr, weil ich mich halt wirklich auf den, auf den Monitor, oder besser gesagt auf, bei mir in meinem Fall, den, den Fernseher konzentriere, und ich mich ganz in, in diese Geschichte einfließen lasse. (P7/41)

P7: Ich glaube meistens, wenn ich erschöpft bin. Also wenn ich wirklich, wenn die Konzentrationsphase nachlässt. Und das kann manchmal nach einer Stunde sein. Manchmal habe ich aber auch, wenn ich einen guten Tag habe, ist das mal sechs sieben Stunden, und dann bin ich nachher aber auch wirklich erschöpft. (P7/49)

Interviewer: Also das ist der normale Ablauf, dass du dir einen, dass du dir einen Tag aussuchst, und dann in dem Tag nachmittags anfängst und abends aufhörst?

P7: Das ist, ja, das kann man schon fast als Normalfall betrachten bei mir. (...) wenn es dann so ist und ich mich dann konzentrieren kann auf den Nachmittag, dann plane ich den auch so, dass ich bis da, bis zu dem Zeitpunkt alles abgeschlossen habe, was mich bringen könnte, zur Tür zu gehen oder das Spiel zu unterbrechen. (P7/62-65)

P7: soziale Verpflichtungen: Ob es, sei es nun Freundin, sei es Haushalt, sei es Fußballmannschaft oder auch andere Aktivitäten (P7/65)

P7: Wenn zum Beispiel Levelwechsel sind oder eine Aufgabe, ein Task erfüllt worden ist, so dass ich, oder ich habe eine, ich habe eine, eine In, eine In-Game-Movie-Phase, wo ich dann halt mal nicht die ganze Zeit so darauf achten muss, dann kann ich auch mal kurz auf das Handy gucken: Okay, jetzt noch zwanzig Minuten, und dann richte ich mich so langsam darauf ein, dass ich, richte ich mich so langsam darauf ein, dass ich mich dann für das Spiel, von dem Spiel erst mal kurz pausieren muss. (P7/69)

P7: Wir haben Fußball gespielt, also wir haben *Pro Evolution Soccer 2012* gespielt, mit mehreren Freunden zusammen, online, gegeneinander. Also wir waren ein Zweierteam bei uns im Wohnzimmer, und in Wien saßen halt Freunde von uns, haben wir gegen die gespielt. Und der eine hat dann halt auch ab und an aufs Handy geguckt, und ich habe ihm gesagt so: <<Hey, lass das sein! Ich will hier nicht verlieren, gegen die.>> Da ist man doch schon sehr sehr gefesselt, und-

Ähnlich war das auch, wenn ich mit meinem Freunden, einmal, wir spielen alle zwei Wochen spielen wir, machen wir einen Spieleabend und spielen Golf zusammen, *Tiger Woods*. Und es nervt, wenn die Leute nicht <<weiter>> drücken. Also wenn sie dann, wenn sie irgendwie diskutieren oder rauchen gehen wollen oder so, also das, das hemmt den Spielfluss, einfach so, weil man nicht weiter kommt. (...)

Interviewer: Also es ist okay, eben das zu sagen, immer dann, wenn das Spiel weiter geht?

P7: Ja, dann müssen sie aufpassen, ja. Ich glaube, wenn, wenn, also ich glaube, wenn eine ständige Erinnerung notwendig wäre, wäre die Person glaube ich nicht, würde die Person immer weniger eingeladen werden zu solchen Spieleabenden. Weil ich glaube dann ist, dann merkt man halt einfach so: Ja, er hat eigentlich keinen Bock, das zu spielen, weil er lässt sich zu leicht ablenken oder so. Also das wäre vielleicht, ist vielleicht auch schon wieder ein Ausschlusskriterium, wenn man wirklich intensiv spielen möchte.

Es geht ja nicht nur um dieses soziale Ereignis an dem Abend, ja, wo man sich dann mit Freunden trifft, sondern man hat ja ein gemeinsames Ziel: Man möchte dieses Spiel weiterspielen. Man möchte sich verbessern, oder, bei, bei Golf ist zum Beispiel, wir möchten, ich möchte mein Handicap da verbessern, oder ich möchte mit weniger Schlägen durchkommen, möchte besser putten. Und das kriege ich halt nur, wenn ich meine, meine Punkte erreiche. Dann kriege ich ja Bonus, die nicht auf meinen Schlagstil, dann, wo ich eine Schlagverbesserung beeinflussen kann. Dann muss ich das halt spielen. Und ich will dann auch spielen, und ich will dann nicht irgendwie hier über Schnickschnack reden, das geht jetzt gerade ums *Spiel*. (P7/115-127)

Interviewer: Gibt es Unterschiede zwischen verschiedenen Spielgenres? Was das angeht, wie aufmerksam man ist, wie sehr man auch mal was anderes machen kann, ob man gestört wird oder nicht?

P7: Ich glaube schon, weil es (3s) aber es ist auch, ich glaube es ist auch immer je nach Gusto. Also je nach dem, was, wo du, wo du deine Präferenzen beim Spiel legst, ja.

Also ob das jetzt bei *Singstar* zum Beispiel, wo man was zusammen spielt, und dann ist ja nicht nur die Interaktion am Bildschirm wichtig, sondern die Interaktion untereinander, die ja im Wohnzimmer stattfindet, mit den Freunden und alle lachen zusammen, und und trinken was. Da ist es okay, glaube ich. Aber wenn man, wenn man gemeinsam im Team oder alleine auf irgendetwas fokussiert ist, um ein Ziel zu erreichen, ist es glaube ich, so so so ein Adventure oder Rollenspiel, oder Sportspiel, dann kann man sich nur schwer losreißen. (P7/167-172)

P7: Weil es, weil es, weil es zu dem Spiel dazu gehört, dieses, dieses dieses soziale, dieses soziale Erlebnis. Das heißt ja nicht umsonst <<Partyspiel>>, ja. Also das ist ja dass etwas mit, mit, da ist das Spiel nicht im Fokus. Da ist die gemeinschaftliche, die gemeinschaftliche Aktivität eher der Fokus, und nicht das Spiel. Das Spiel ist halt Mittel zum

Zweck, da. Was ja, was ja bei einem Game nicht ist, bei einem richtigen, also sagen wir mal so ein Adventure oder bei einem, bei einem Fußballgame. (P7/179)

P7: Ein bisschen ärgern, ärgern ist okay. Den anderen auch ein bisschen diesen, finde ich auch okay, wenn man ihm gerade mal den Ball durch die Beine gezogen hat und er es, oder man hat gegen ihn ein wundervolles Tor gehabt, schlimm provozieren. (3s) Aber das macht man auch nur mit Freunden. Also ich glaube nicht, dass ich das so, wenn ich jetzt an der Konsole im Supermarkt stehen würde, oder beim Media Markt oder irgendwo, und da gegen irgendjemand Unbekannten spiele, dann, dann zeige ich ihm zwar meinen Triumph, aber, aber ich lasse ihn nicht spüren, dass er ein Arschloch ist. Oder dass ich ihm gerade, dass ich ihn gerade, na ja sagen wir mal verarscht habe. Sondern ich zeige einfach nur, dass ich gewonnen habe, ich freue mich da drüber, und dann ist Freude auch okay. Aber es ist glaube ich, in, diese, es ist ähnlich wie eine gesellschaftliche Norm: Also ich glaube, wenn ich, mit Freunden kann ich auch mal ein bisschen derber sein, vor allem, wenn ich sie länger kenne. Bei, bei Fremden ein bisschen zurückhaltender, glaube ich. (P7/231-237)

Interviewer: Wenn du ein Handyspiel spielst, gibt es da, also im Verhältnis zum alleine zu Hause vor der Konsole sitzen, einen Unterschied darin, welche Emotionen du zeigen kannst oder zeigen darfst?

P7: Da ich mich ja meistens in einem öffentlichen Umfeld befinde, ist laut Schreien, das Ding in die Ecke werfen, wohl nicht drin. Obwohl man es am liebsten machen würde, man muss sich da schon ein bisschen zügeln und, sagen wir mal so, öffentlichkeitskonformer auftreten. (P7/269-271)

P7: Ich glaube der, ich glaube die, dieses Eintauchen in das Private auch. Dass ich mich aus dem, dass ich mich ein bisschen aus dem Alltag zurückziehe. Also dass ich wirklich in meinem Umfeld bin, oder in dem von mir gewünschten Umfeld, also von der Arbeit ist ja nicht mein gewünschtes Umfeld, das ist ja mein bedingtes Umfeld. Und wenn ich in meine gewünschte Umfeld komme, und mich dort befinde und dann sage: Ich bleibe jetzt die nächsten acht Stunden- opfere ich jetzt den ganzen Samstag für Arkham City, dann habe ich, schaffe ich mir einen Platz, den ich dann nicht mehr verlassen möchte. (...)

Und bei der Arbeit ist es halt so: Du kannst nicht beeinflussen, wie die Arbeitsplatz aussieht, großartig, weil, ist ja vorgegeben, grob. Du kannst nicht die Art und Weise, wie du vorgehst, beeinflussen, großartig, weil die Prozesse ja von anderen bestimmt werden, meistens. Auch wenn das Spiel mich, mich ja auch bestimmt, aber ich bin ja noch die Handlungs-, die handelnde Person, die zwar ein Ziel erledigen muss, aber, *ich* erledige ja das Ziel. (P7/289-291)

P8

P8: 'Jetzt hab' ich mal 'n bisschen Zeit für mich, dann nimm' ich mir die. Auch bei *Skyrim* halt zuletzt war es halt so, meine Frau liest auch oft hier, dann, wir sind also schon zusammen im Raum, unterhalten uns da zwischendurch auch, hm, so dass, dass, dass man nicht so irgendwie vereinsamt ((lacht)), sach' ich jetzt' mal, durch das Spielen. Dass jeder irgendwie so sein Ding macht. (P8/45)

P8: Und, hm, meine Frau hat auch immer gerne Rollenspiele gespielt, aber sie ist halt nicht so fit mit dem Computer und, hm deswegen haben wir gesagt: Okay, wir können sowas auch zusammen spielen. Meine Frau hat dann halt Notizen gemacht, hat Tipps gegeben, gerade bei Rätseln ist sie sehr gut, dass wir gemeinsam dann auch die Rätsel gelöst haben, die vielleicht aufgetreten sind. (P8/51)

P8: Der normale Ablauf ist so: Ich starte den Computer, prüfe die Emails, ähm, guck' ob's irgendwas neues gibt von, von irgendwelchen Bekannten oder was auch immer. Vielleicht auch noch mal bei Facebook reingucken. Oder Stay-friends oder wo auch immer. Und das war's dann, dann geht's los, dann starte ich das Spiel. (P8/97)

Interviewer: Was beendet normalerweise das Spielen?

P8: Müdigkeit. Also wenn der Kopf auf den Tisch fällt ((lacht)). So schlimm is' es nich', aber.. hm, manchmal ist es einfach so, dass ich zu müde bin. Dass ich feststelle, geht nicht, kann mich nicht mehr konzentrieren. (P8/103-104)

P8: Oder:: (2s) es kommt auch vor, dass ich einfach sach': <<So, jetzt' bin ich an 'nem Punkt in dem Spiel, wenn ich jetzt weitermach', dann weiß ich, dann bin ich wieder mitten in irgendeiner Aufgabe>>. (...) Dann ist es also sinnvoller,

vorher zu sagen: <<So, cut, bis hierhin>>. Das ist 'n sauberer Abschluss jetzt erstmal, da kann man beim nächsten Mal wieder gut einsteigen, und dann macht man jetzt Schluss und dann war's das dann auch. (P8/104-105)

P8: Also gerade bei Rollenspielen glaube ich, braucht man 'ne gewisse Struktur. Ansonsten verzettelt man sich recht schnell. Aber das hängt natürlich auch sehr stark vom Spiel ab. Das gibt natürlich auch 'ne gewisse Struktur vor. Aber prinzipiell sind Rollenspiele ja so angelegt, dass sie, ähm, verschiedene Handlungsstränge bieten, meistens einen Haupt-, Haupthandlungsstrang und mehrere Nebenstränge. (2s) Sodass man also sich schon entscheiden muss: <<Geh ich jetzt den Hauptstrang direkt entlang, oder nutze ich das auch, dass ich vielleicht Nebenstränge spiele?>> (P8/113)

P8: Sich die Erfahrung erarbeiten muss, und, aber letztlich auch vielleicht ein gewisses Vermögen erarbeiten muss, um eben entsprechende Ausrüstung oder ähnliches eben zu bekommen. Das heißt, man muss da natürlich nach diesem Schema schon vorgehen, und muss darauf hinarbeiten, dass man sich dieses Vermögen irgendwie aneignet, logischerweise, und genauso natürlich diese Erfahrung irgendwie möglichst sammelt. (3s) Also die Struktur ist immer vorgegeben. (P8/115)

P8: Also, ich mag es nicht, wenn übertriebene Gewaltdarstellungen in Spielen sind. (...) Ähm, pff, von daher frage ich mich: <<Wofür?>> Ja, das is' nichts für die Handlung. (2s) Das Ambiente wird für mich dadurch eher gestört, als dass es das vielleicht irgendwie weiter transportiert. Auf der anderen Seite muss man natürlich sagen: Wenn sowas in 'ner Fantasywelt, die ja irgendwo mittelalternah ist, angesiedelt ist, und man sich das Mittelalter vorstellt, dann ist da sicherlich 'ne gewisse Brutalität vorherrschend gewesen. Und, ähm, wenn man die natürlich versucht darüber zu transportieren, dann kann man das auch wieder irgendwie 'n bisschen verstehen. (P8/123)

P8: Spiele enden manchmal sehr abrupt. (2s) Sodass man das Gefühl hat, ähm, das müsste eigentlich weitergehen an der Stelle noch. Man ist also vielleicht durch das Spiel in so eine Stimmung versetzt worden, die dann aber abrupt zerstört wird durch das Ende des Spiels. Das, äh, ist natürlich auch sehr:: ((lachend)) einengend in dem Moment. (P8/147)

P8: Aber, in der Regel machen wir das also so, dass, äh, wir dann, ähm, zum Beispiel im Keller 'nen Tisch aufbauen. Also. Wie mach ich das? Ja, ich hab' hier'n Tisch. So. Dann wird hier, werden die Monitore aufgestellt. Boxen drumrum. Ähm, dann steht irgendwo der Computer hier. Lenkrad. Deute ich jetzt mal so an. Dann ist hier der Stuhl für denjenigen, der spielt. und, ähm, meistens steht irgendwo noch am Rand 'n Tisch. Also beim letzten Mal hatten wir hier so'n Tisch stehen. Und dann stehen hier noch so'n paar Stühle drumrum. Und da gibt's dann was zu Essen, da gibt's was zu Trinken. Und, irgendwann rücken die Stühle rüber und man sitzt dahinter und guckt zu, unterhält sich. Gibt wie gesagt gute Tipps, ((lacht)) oder auch nicht so gute Tipps. (P8/183)

P8: Also es is' jeder entspannt, wenn irgend jemand dumme Kommentare gibt. Es ist jeder entspannt, äh, wenn er abgelenkt wird, ähm. Es ist halt 'n Spiel. Es is' wirklich nur 'n Spiel und so wird's auch wahrgenommen. Es ist 'n Zeitvertreib und mehr nicht. (P8/199)

P8: Also ganz früher gab's natürlich durchaus Freunde, die so stark in die Spiele eingegangen sind, eingestiegen sind, dass die tatsächlich ihre Umgebung vergessen haben und gerade jetzt auch aus meiner beruflichen Tätigkeit- (...) da gab's durchaus auch einen Mitarbeiter, der dann als *World of Warcraft* damals anfing, da voll eingestiegen ist und das so weit gegangen ist, dass er- dass seine Freundin ihn verlassen hat. Und er nur noch unregelmäßig zur Arbeit kam. Gesundheitliche Probleme hatte. Und letztlich das sogar zur Kündigung geführt hat. Ich musste ihm tatsächlich kündigen. (...) Das- die Gefahr ist da bei Spielen, dass man da zu sehr... abhängig von wird, auch gerade bei Rollenspielen, sicherlich, bei solchen epischen Sachen auch wie, wie *Skyrim* halt zum Beispiel. Dass man da z- seine Umwelt, seine Umgebung vergisst, Familie, was auch immer, die Interaktion mit seiner Umgebung. (P8/239)

P8: Ein Stück weit Entspannung, wie gesagt. Ja, das, irgendwie, wie gesagt, wie ein Buch irgendwo. Ein bisschen Abwechslung. Es ist so'n Mittelding zwischen Buch und Film irgendwo. Ist ne andere Art der, der Freizeitgestaltung halt einfach für mich, die aber gleichberechtigt irgendwo zwischen all diesen Sachen ist, die da nicht priorisiert wird. (2s) Ich erwarte wie gesagt Entspannung davon, ein bisschen auch Aufregung vielleicht auch irgendwo. Dass mich das ein bisschen fesselt auch irgendwo. Manchmal auch ein bisschen Frustabbau ((lacht)). (2s) Ja::: Ja das sind eigentlich so die Sachen. Aber hauptsächlich halt die Entspannung tatsächlich. Einfach mal abzuschalten. Mal die Gedanken vollkommen von dem lösen zu können, was man eigentlich tagsüber die ganze Zeit so mit der Arbeit verbunden hat. Das- in dem Moment kann man sich da nicht mehr so drauf konzentrieren. Das ist natürlich immer noch irgendwo da,

aber es ist halt- es steht da nicht mehr im Vordergrund. Weil man sich da sehr schön ablenken lassen kann von anderen Dingen natürlich mit dieser Geschichte. (P8/243)

Interviewer: Gibt's da einen Unterschied zwischen Rollenspielen alleine und mit den Freunden im Keller Rennspiele spielen? Das sie sich da irgendwas anderes erwarten?

P8: Ja, ja, auf jeden Fall. Also wenn ich ein Rollenspiel spiele, dann erwarte ich wie gesagt die Entspannung für mich. Und wenn ich aber:::mit, mit Nachbarn oder so spiele, dann, ähm, steht für mich nicht mehr das Spielen im Vordergrund, sondern einfach die Geselligkeit, das Zusammensein: Gemeinsam was machen. Man könnte genauso gut zum Bowlen gehen oder weiß ich nicht was. Das wär'ne ähnliche Situation: Da steht das Bowlen für mich dann in dem Moment nicht im Vordergrund. Ich muss auch nicht der Sieger sein, genauso wie bei, bei den Spielen die wir dann spielen, sondern dass man einfach zusammen ist und was gemeinsam unternimmt. (P8/245-247)

P8: Ich trenn' das auch ganz strikt, also: Arbeit ist Arbeit, und das ist Freizeit, und äh, das passt da nicht zusammen, bis auf die Tatsache halt, sich mit dem Arbeitskollegen auch schon mal drüber zu unterhalten. (P8/265)

P8: Also ich würde auch niemals Geld dafür ausgeben jetzt ne zusätzliche Rüstung oder sonst was zu erwerben. Das sehe ich nicht ein, das:: das ist Geldmacherei und mehr nicht. Ne, also, ich glaub, da bin ich mir dessen bewusst und, äh, da zieh ich auch ne klare Grenze für mich. Spiel ist Spiel und sollte keine Auswirkung in die Realität haben. Zumindest auch- vor ALLEN Dingen nicht monetär. (P8/283)

P8: Es gibt ja durchaus Spiele, wo man halt nicht jederzeit speichern kann, den Spielstand, wo man dann die Wahl hat, zu sagen: Okay, ich, ich kann jetzt nicht weiterspielen, ich muss jetzt Schluss machen, ich brech einfach da ab und dann muss ich beim nächsten Mal da halt nochmal die halbe Stunde das ganze nochmal machen. Oder man tatsächlich sagt: Ne, dann muss ich das jetzt halt bis zum Ende bringen, bis halt der nächste Spielstand gespeichert werden kann. Finde ich sehr unangenehm. (P8/287)

Interviewer: Würden Sie so eine Situation als Spielen bezeichnen? Wenn sie sagen: Ich muss jetzt eigentlich hier noch zu Ende spielen, weil ich kann es jetzt an dem Punkt gar nicht abspeichern? Ist das dann Spielen für Sie?

P8: Das hängt vom Spiel ab. Wenn's Spaß macht, ähm, dann tolerier ich das. Und wenn das was ist, was:: (1s) wo der Spaßfaktor gar nicht so groß ist, dann, äh, nee, dann wär das auch kein Spiel mehr für mich. Und dann, das wär auch ein Grund für mich das nicht weiterzuspielen. (P8/289-291)

P8: Weil dann der Zwang dahinter steht, gewinnen zu müssen. Klar will jeder der spielt, auch irgendwo gewinnen. Oder Erfolge verzeichnen, zumindest. Sonst würde man wahrscheinlich auch nicht spielen. Aber:: wenn's um Geld geht, das ist ne reale Sache, und ähm, die muss man sich real hart erarbeiten. Das hätte nicht mehr den spielerischen Charakter für mich dann. (P8/297-303)

P9

P9: Ja, ich würde ich würde sagen, im Büro spiele ich halt nicht zu Entspannung. Also es ist halt, es besteht eine gewisse Notwendigkeit, dass man einfach sich erkundet wie wie ist derzeit der Markt? Wie ist dieses Spiel aufgebaut? Was kann man dadurch lernen? Also es ist halt weniger ein, so so ein so ein Eskapismus, den man da hat, so ein so ein Entspannungsmodus, sondern wirklich eher eine analytisch denkende Richtung. (P9/45)

P9: Und klar man kann sich einfach nicht so:: gehen lassen auch alleine von der Sitzhaltung her. Dass man sagt <<Ich spiele jetzt>> und fluche auch mal, wenn mich das irgendwie ärgert, sondern es ist halt irgendwo, ein öffentlicher Raum immer noch, während ich Zuhause halt in meinem privaten Raum bin und mir da andere Dinge raus nehmen kann, wenn ich spiele.

Interviewer: Was, zum Beispiel, raus nehmen kann? Was im Beruf nicht geht?

P9: Eben. Zum Beispiel fluchen, wenn einen extrem etwas ärgert, dann kommt es mal vor, dass ich fluche, oder laut werde. Oder, na ja, mal irgendwie auf den Tisch haue und den Raum verlassen muss und mich kurz ((lachend)) kurz abkühlen muss mit einem Glas Wasser. Das kommt im Büro so nicht vor, weil ich da natürlich auch nicht so den Ehrgeiz entwickle.(...) Zumal, weil ich ja mit zwei anderen Kollegen noch im Büro sitze. Und dann ein gewisser Verhaltenskodex irgendwie erwünscht ist. Ich möchte zumindest nicht, dass meine Kollegen fluchen, lauthals, oder auf den Tisch knallen. Und dass einfach eine gewisse Körperhaltung auch einfach anständig ist. Also ich kann nicht einfach im Stuhl versacken und mich vor den Rechner klemmen, wie es teilweise zu Hause passiert, wenn ich mich entspanne,

sondern sitze dann schon aufrecht und gerade und versuche auch wirklich ((lachend)) einen interessierten Eindruck zu zu machen. Und ja, also es ist eine andere Haltung, dem Spiel gegenüber. (P9/46-56)

Interviewer: Im Büro, hast du gesagt, da spielst du nur Casual oder Social Games, was damit zu tun hat, dass dein, dass das die Spiele sind, mit denen du dich beruflich beschäftigen musst. Im Büro hast du auch keine anderen Spiele gespielt außer die?

P9: Nein, weil das auch, denke ich mal, nicht erlaubt ist. Also es ist nicht gern gesehen, weil das wäre ja aktiv Freizeitbeschäftigung, wenn man ein Spiel spielt, was halt nicht in dieses Genre fällt, was wir jetzt irgendwie beackern. Ja. (P9/59-60)

Interviewer: Was ist mit Party und Feier? Gibt es das spezifische Genres, die die, die da relevant sind, oder die man da primär spielt, oder die man da nicht spielt?

P9: Ja:: es gibt natürlich auch, also es ist im Genrekontext immer schwer einzuordnen, aber sicherlich sind das eher auch Casual Games würde ich behaupten. Ja, wie nennt man denn solche Spiele? Also Karaoke-Spiele, kurzweilige Geschichten, irgendwie sowas wie *Mario Party*, also kurze Minispiele, die die jedem schnell zugänglich sind, wo man nicht großartig irgendwie tief erst einmal in die- in das Spiel einsteigen muss. Das ist auch meistens beschränkt auf die Wii-Konsole tatsächlich, die ja eher so für familiäre Spiele ausgelegt sind.

Interviewer: Gibt es andere Spiele, die du gespielt hast, (...) bei denen du gesagt hast <<Nee, (...) da würde ich nie im Leben auf die Idee kommen, die jetzt beim Party bei einer Party herauszukramen>>?

P9: ((lachend)) *Battlefield 3* wäre so ein klassisches Spiel, was ich niemals bei einer Party rausholen würde.

Interviewer: Und warum?

P9: Weil, klar sicherlich, es hat einen Coop-Modus, das könnte man natürlich ausprobieren. Das betrifft, würde aber nur zwei einbinden.

Interviewer: Was heißt Coop-Modus?

P9: Coop-Modus heißt, dass zwei quasi per Splitscreen direkt nebeneinander spielen können.

Interviewer: Ja. Warum wäre das tendenziell für eine Party denkbar?

P9: NICHT denkbar.

Interviewer: Nein, warum wäre dieser Coop-Modus vielleicht doch für eine Party denkbar (...)?

P9: Es wäre tatsächlich was, was in Party rein, weil, weil mehrere quasi an, sich einbinden können in dieses Spiel. Also ich könnte jetzt kein Single-Player-Modus Spiel herausholen und sagen: <<Ich spiele jetzt übrigens *Battlefield* und ihr könnt mir alle zuschauen.>> Also es geht ja wirklich darum, dass mehrere, dass das Spiel ausgelegt ist, damit mehrere gleichzeitig irgendwie in Interaktion treten können. Das ist bei diesen Wii-Spielen möglich, eben, Karaoke oder *Mario Party*, wo halt mindestens vier Spieler gleichzeitig spielen können. Da würde ich s-, jedes Single-Player-Spiel erst mal ausschließen. Ich denke aber auch, dass gewisse Themen und gewisse Spiele einfach eine gewisse Schwere haben, die nicht in diesen Partykontext, wenn wir ihn so definieren, hineinpassen. Und das ist eben, unter anderem, *Battlefield*. (P9/63-75)

P9: Ja. Tatsächlich eignen sich besonders Ego-Shooter besser am PC. Allein aufgrund der Bedienung, also dass man halt mit Keyboard und Maus einfach eine eine viel bessere Reaktion und und Interaktion haben kann, als jetzt mit einem Controller. (P9/83)

P9: Man man lernt die Leute erst einmal kennen. Man trinkt ein bisschen was, redet mit den Leuten, tritt mit denen in Kontakt, dann entwickelt sich meist eine lockere Stimmung und wenn man einfach merkt, so irgendwie die Stimmung sackt ab, oder alle haben Lust irgendwie großartig irgendwie, sich zu versammeln an einem Ort und sich auf irgend etwas zu konzentrieren. Dann ist es halt so, dass die Konsole angemacht wird und dann versammelt man sich quasi vor dem Fernseher und dann beginnt dieses Event. (P9/93)

P9: Ja, es ist ja meist so ein so ein so ein Turnus, so ein Wechsel, also es kommen halt verschiedene Leute dazu, dann wechselt man sich ab und dann verliert der eine oder andere das Interesse und irgendwann, wenn alle Leute dann sagen so <<Ich bin durch damit>>, dann geht man halt wieder über zur, zur Küche, isst was, oder trinkt was, oder kommuniziert weiter mit den Leuten. Dann wird die Konsole ausgemacht. Das merkt man dann relativ schnell, wenn das Interesse absackt. (P9/99).

P9: Also, wenn irgendetwas anderes wichtiges reinkommt, eine wichtige E-Mail, oder ein Kollege, der irgendetwas von einem möchte, oder ein Meeting, Telefonkonferenz, Pipapo, dann wird das Spiel sofort beendet. Das wäre unerwartet, aber hat immer höhere Priorität als das Spiel. (P9/114)

P9: Wenn man verliert muss man das akzeptieren und dann sollte man nicht den den Beleidigten spielen, sondern weiterhin irgendwo irgendwo, zumindest gute Miene zum bösen Spiel machen, da drüber stehen. Und ein Gewinner sollte sich nicht zu sehr ausgelassen darüber äußern, dass er gewonnen hat. (P9/125)

Interviewer: Gibt es etwas, das man beim Partyspielen machen muss, um richtig zu spielen? Ordentlich? Angemessen? So wie es sich gehört?

P9: Ich glaube, wenn man einfach genügend Abstand zu dem Spiel hat und immer noch sich bewusst wird, in welchem Kontext das Ganze stattfindet, nämlich im freundschaftlichen Rahmen, in in einem Partyrahmen, eben ausgelassen und nicht zu sehr fokussiert ist und sich völlig darauf konzentriert und einfach keine Kommunikation stattfindet, dann ist es wirklich fehlgeschlagen würde ich sagen. Weil es geht ja wirklich darum, dass man in Interaktion tritt, dass man Spaß hat, dass man kommuniziert, dass man darüber lachen kann, dass man über sich lachen kann.

P9: Ich würde sagen, wenn sich jemand völlig abschottet und darauf konzentriert und nicht in Interaktion tritt mit den Mitspielern, dann würde ich sagen, ist es fehlgeschlagen. Ja.

Interviewer: Sich <<Sich darauf fokussiert>>, hast du gesagt. Sich worauf fokussiert [genau?]

P9: [Auf das] Spiel, auf das Geschehen. Wenn jemand so völlig in seiner eigenen Welt ist und völlig abgeschottet und, das zu ehrgeizig nimmt, würde ich sagen, ja. Ich würde sagen, so wie ich wie ich *Battlefield* spiele, ist auf jeden Fall nicht sozialfähig ((lacht)). Ja. (P9/127-131)

P9: Im Büro sollte tatsächlich die die Spielesession nicht ausarten ausarten, weil, wie gesagt, das ist ein anderer Kontext. Ich muss mich analytisch darauf fokussieren und nicht sagen, ich lasse mich jetzt gehen und spiele hier den ganzen Tag, und am Ende ohne Ergebnisse. Das wäre unangemessen. (P9/142)

Interviewer: Ok. Wann ist das Spielen zu Ende?

P9: Wenn die Interaktion endet. Wenn mir gesagt wird, wenn irgendein Screen eingeblendet wird, mir eine Highscore angezeigt wird, oder ein Bestätigungsscreen. Spätestens dann, wenn ich nichts mehr aktiv an dem Spiel *machen* kann, dann ist das Spiel vorbei. (P9/159-160)

P9: Also, wenn das Spiel, wenn ich das Spiel starte, im, also aktiv bestätige <<Ich möchte das Spiel starten>> und ich *dann* in Interaktion trete, durch Hardware und Klicks auf meinem auf meinem Controller, dann startet das Spiel. Dann weiß ich das, dann dann sendet mir das Spiel auch entsprechende Signale. Und beendet ist es dann, wenn ich wenn ich es beende ((lacht)). Also wenn ich es wieder schließe, ja. (P9/162)

P9: Ich möchte irgendwo in eine Welt mitgenommen werden, in eine Geschichte. Ich möchte eingebunden werden. Ich möchte am besten, so stark eingebunden werden, dass ich einfach auch vieles von dem, was ich tagsüber gemacht habe irgendwo vergessen kann. Ad acta legen kann. (P9/172)

P9: Es geht auch immer so ein bisschen darum, dass man seine Fähigkeiten absteckt. Also, dass man versucht sich so ein bisschen einzuordnen, um abzutesten, also ich, meine Vorgehensweise ist halt so, dass ich mir erst den Singleplayermodus anschau und dann das gelernte versuche im Onlinemodus anzuwenden und dann schau ich natürlich, ok, wie gut waren meine Fähigkeiten wirklich? Das kann mir ein Singleplayerspiel nicht so gut widerspiegeln, als wenn ich denn im Contest halt mit jemand anderem trete. Das ja, das offeriert der Onlinemodus definitiv. Also ein Wettbewerbsgedanke. (P9/186)

P9: Klar, wenn das Spiel Spaß generierte, dann versucht man natürlich zu analysieren: <<Was hat hier gerade Spaß gemacht? Was en detail war das und wie kann ich das für mich irgendwie verarbeiten?>> (P9/195)

P9: Sie sind gehemmter, also die die die Spiel- das Spielerlebnis ist im Büro deutlich gehemmter, weil ich eben nicht ausgelassen sein kann. Weil es eben in diesem Rahmen stattfindet, dass mehrere im Raum sind, die nicht meine Freunde sind, die meine Kollegen sind, mit denen ich ein Arbeitsverhältnis pflege, was auf einer anderen Ebene stattfindet, als jetzt irgendwie im Partykontext. (...) Es ist gehemmter. Es ist tatsächlich nicht so, dass da großartig Spielspaß aufkommt, weil man immer im Vordergrund so sieht, welchen Sinn hat das jetzt hier gerade, dass ich spiele und was was muss am Ende bei raus kommen? (P9/199-201)

P9: Weil also, dass da, da differenziere ich zu sehr ((lachend)), dass das das Spiel immer noch Spiel ist und in meinem privaten Kontext nicht so:: sehr Einfluss hat und weitreichende Konsequenzen haben kann. Weil es irgendwo immer noch ein anderer Bereich ist. Es ist quasi eine eigene Welt, und die hat mit meiner Welt nichts zu tun. (Pg/234)

Interviewer: Was nimmst du dann aktiv wahr?

P9: Ja. Definitiv eine stärkere Fokussierung auf die die die Story, auf auf die auf die Welt, die mir da präsentiert wird. Ich kann mich dann stärker mit dem Avatar, den ich spiele identifizieren, würde ich sagen. (Pg/235-236)

Interviewer: Was machst du im Partykontext normalerweise, nachdem das Spiel zu Ende war? (...)

P9: Meistens diskutiert man dann immer noch den Spielausgang. Oder zieht so ein so ein Fazit, Resümee, wer war gut, wer war schlecht? Wer hat sich wie verhalten? Sicherlich sind das auch Aufhänger um irgendwie jemanden ja in die Pfanne zu hauen (...)

Interviewer: Gibt es da eine Art und Weise, wie man sich da unangemessen verhalten kann, in diesem sich nachträglich auf das Spiel beziehen?

P9: Ja man sollte, man stellt es nicht zu sehr in den Fokus. Also man sollte irgendwo, die Diskussion nicht zu lange in den Vordergrund stellen, weil das Spiel ist vorbei, man kann das kurz kommentieren, aber ich glaube, wenn sich jemand zu sehr darauf fokussiert und das ausarten lässt, diese Diskussion, und analytisch da herangeht, wie was passiert ist. Das wäre unangemessen.

Interviewer: Ok. Wie ist das beim Onlinespiel? Wie bezieht man sich da nach dem Spiel auf das Spiel? Tut man das überhaupt?

P9: Ja. Das kann man tun, das kann man eben in in Foren tun, oder in nachträglich irgendwie noch über Kommunikation per Chat oder per Skype, oder wie auch immer, das kann man noch tun. Da ist man tatsächlich aber dann eher analytisch fokussiert und geht dann noch einmal verschiedene Situationen durch, die nicht gut gelaufen sind im Spiel. Guckt, wo ist Verbesserungspotential, ja, da ist man ein bisschen zielgerichteter. (Pg/261-266)

P9: Gerade im beruflichen Kontext ist das nicht immer freiwillig. Also ich würde freiwillig eben nicht dieses Genre großartig bevorzugen. Das geschieht eher unfrei, ich würde jetzt, das ist jetzt auch kein Zwang, aber es ist nicht so, dass ich das jetzt großartig privat betreiben würde. (Pg/284)

Interviewer: Wie ist das im Arbeitskontext so dann, wenn du spielst und du das Gefühl hast, das ist nicht freiwillig? Wie ist dann dieses Erleben? Kannst du das einfach mal schildern?

P9: Es ist halt, es ist nicht so intensiv. Es ist, ich schaue mir dann auch Spiele an, oder beschäftige mich mit Spiele, Spielen, die mich *nicht* interessieren. Das ist denn weniger intensiv. Da ebbt das Interesse schnell ab. Und man spielt es dann meist auch nicht zuende, meist nicht mit so einem großen Enthusiasmus, das ist dann eher unfreiwillig.

Interviewer: Würdest du das dann als Spielen bezeichnen?

P9: Das ist eine gute Frage ((lacht)). (4s) Ja, es ist schon es ist schon irgendwo ein Spiel, von von von der Grundsubstanz her, weil es hat Spielregeln und die befolge ich. Ich würde nur nicht sagen, dass ich es besonders passioniert spiele. Also es ist immer noch ein Spiel an sich, und so definiert, aber ich würde nicht sagen, dass *ich* in dem Moment spiele. Weil das ist für mich anders aufgeladen, dass wenn ich in dem Moment spiele, dann hätte ich Spaß an der Geschichte. (Pg/285-288)

P9: Also, wenn man halt zusammen im Spiel spielt im Klan, dann gibt es Situationen, wo Dinge noch nicht beendet sind, wo man einfach die Session durchziehen muss. Da kann ich denn nicht, könnte ich natürlich freiwillig entscheiden, ich gehe jetzt, aber es wäre unangemessen, wenn ich gehen würde. Weil ich dann mein Team im Stich lassen würde. (Pg/290)

P9: Na, wenn wenn ich online spiele und mich nirgendswo verpflichtet habe, dann kann ich jederzeit sagen, wann ich das Ganze beenden möchte. Es liegt quasi in meiner Hand. Es liegt sowieso immer in meiner Hand, aber da ich angemessen sein und reagieren möchte- das offeriert mir mehr Freiheit. Also ich habe ein größeres Freiheitsgefühl, das Spielerlebnis jederzeit anzufangen und zu beenden, wann ich das möchte. (...) Ja, es ist, es ist einfach, es ist weniger Verpflichtung und man ist anonymer. Man kann schneller aus der Situation flüchten. (Pg/302-304)

P9: Wenn ich prinzipiell kein Zeitlimit habe, also, wenn ich sagen kann, ich kann jetzt spielen bis ich sage <<Ich habe keine Lust mehr.>> Keine Termine und keine Verpflichtungen, sowohl innerhalb des Spiels als jetzt auch außerhalb des Spiels, dann finde ich, ist das ein Freiheitserlebnis. (Pg/308)

P9: Freiheit würde ich auch sagen, sicherlich im privaten Kontext, weil ich da einfach alle Emotionen zeigen kann, die die ich entwickle, wenn ich dieses Spiel spiele. Und die habe ich natürlich nicht, wenn ich jetzt im Büro sitze. Das ist kein Freiheitsgefühl. Ich würde behaupten, wenn ich die Möglichkeit hätte im Büro Battlefield zu spielen, hätte ich weniger Spaß daran, weil ich nicht dieses Freiheitserlebnis habe.

Interviewer: Gilt dieses Freiheitsempfinden auch dann, wenn du mit mehreren Leuten zusammen auf dem Sofa spielen würdest?

P9: J::, im gewissen Grad schon, ja, aber da dominiert dann doch eher die Rücksichtnahme auf die auf die Freunde, auf die Leute, mit denen ich dort sitze. Also es ist dann weniger so, dass ich mich auf das Spiel konzentriere und sage <<Ich bin jetzt bin jetzt frei, und kann das bestimmen.>> Sondern es geht jetzt auch eher darum, dass ich irgendwo Gastgeber bin, oder halt bei jemandem zu Gast bin und immer noch darauf Rücksicht nehme. (P9/309-311)

P10

P10: Es ist so, ich weiß nicht, vielleicht ist es einfach so so so ungemütlich, sondern, also vielleicht, weil ich beim-wenn es dunkel ist, dann kann ich irgendwie für mich sagen, es ist halt irgendwie Abend, Feierabend und dann kann ich vielleicht auch einfach besseren Gewissens spielen. (P10/21)

P10: Also ich fahre auch viel Zug. Ich KÖNNTE auch spielen, aber irgendwie finde ich, das Setting passt da nicht, also daf- das ist irgendwie so ein (4s) ja es hat einfach nicht so dieses äußerliche Ambiente, dass ich sage <<Ah, ok, schön. Jetzt spiele ich einfach mal eine Runde>>. Sondern das ist so mit Menschen um mich herum und ja, im Zug, der mit 300 durch die Gegend brettet und irgendwie auf so einem kleinen Tischchen, das ist nicht so dieses, so so so mag ich einfach nicht spielen.

Interviewer: Was ist das Problem an dem kleinen Tisch?

P10: Naja dann irgendwie kann man, sitzt man irgendwie vielleicht irgendwie zu zu nah am Bildschirm, oder kann die Maus einfach nur unglaublich schwer bewegen. Und ja, das ist einfach so vom vom vom Setup ist es einfach nicht wirklich geeignet zum Spielen.

Interviewer: Was macht das Setup noch problematisch?

P10: Vielleicht auch so ein bisschen die die, vielleicht auch noch ein bisschen Ablenkung. Weil man einfach um sich herum dann, obwohl man irgendwie Stöpsel drin hat, einfach noch irgendwie die Landschaft, die an einem vorbeirast und irgendwie Leute, die durch die Gegend laufen. (...) Also obwohl man ja irgendwie dann doch irgendwie klar so im Flow, in Führungszeichen, drin ist und immersiv und also drinsteckt, also erwische ich mich oft, wie ich dann irgendwie doch irgendwie mich:: nicht hundert Prozent auf das Spiel konzentrieren kann und dann irgendwie, doch irgendwie so, irgendwie aus dem Fenster gucke, oder irgendwie woanders hin. (P10/28-39)

P10: im Grunde genommen nur Rauschen. (P10/41)

Interviewer: Ok. Was für, wenn du jetzt sagst, du sitzt (...) bei deinen Eltern im- im Wohnzimmer mit dem Laptop. Gibt es da typische Genres, die du dann da spielst?

P10: Das ist ein bisschen dadurch eingeschränkt, dass mein Laptop jetzt solide ist, aber auch nicht das Stärkste.

Interviewer: Aha. Das heißt was? Oder welchen Einfluss hat das auf die Genres?

P10: Naja, ich würde niemals einen First-Person-Shooter spielen wollen, weil beim First-Person-Shooter, da- da will ich dann auch irgendwie die Grafik hochdrehen. Also, wenn, wenn die Games irgendwie grafisch zu sehr beschnitten sind, dann möchte ich das auch nicht mehr spielen. (P10/44-47)

P10: Ja, da müsste man jetzt eigentlich noch *Skyrim* nennen. Also Open-World-RPG. Da war das echt so extrem, dass ich mir, wenn ich sogar um neun Uhr abends nach Hause gekommen bin und mir gesagt habe: Ok, du wolltest ja eigentlich um zwölf ins Bett, wegen drei Stunden lohnt es sich nicht mehr, das, nochmal das Spiel anzufangen ((schmunzelnd)). Also das ist-

Interviewer: Warum ist das da besonders schwierig? Oder warum braucht man da dann so besonders viel Zeit um es richtig zu spielen?

P10: Weil das ein Spiel ist, wo man unglaublich schnell und häufig versackt. Also immersiv, (...) dieses Beispiel: <<Ah, ich wollte ja eigentlich nur ein ein ein Brief von A nach B bringen, aber dann habe ich da jemanden getroffen, der hat gefragt, ob ich ihm nicht helfen kann und dann wurde er überfallen.>> Und so verliert man sich einfach in dem Spiel und schaut dann auf die Uhr und ha- sieht, man hat irgendwie drei Stunden gespielt, aber ((lachend)) immer noch

nicht diesen Brief von A nach B gebracht. Und da braucht man dann einfach Zeit um auch dann, ich sag mal, was zu schaffen, in Anführungszeichen. (P10/58-64)

P10: *Starcraft* sind ja quasi Matches immer. Also da weiß ich ganz genau, ein Match dauert im Durchschnitt zwischen zehn und zwanzig Minuten, da kann ich, da kann man es einfach sehr gut timen. Da kann man sagen: Ok, ich spiele mal. Also ich kann, wenn ich will einfach mal meine zwei Matches spielen und habe dadurch quasi abgeschlossene Erlebnisse. (P10/68)

P10: Also das ist dann häufig eher so ein Lückenfüller. (P10/110-111)

P10: Also, irgendwie *Starcraft* irgendwie mal eine eine Stunde, weil ich da dann auch merke, wie es einen körperlich mitnimmt. Weil nach einer Stunde ist man ((hehelt)), man ist halt irgendwie da immer auf, also der Puls auf 180, und man merkt danach richtig, selbst nach einem Match, wie wie man irgendwie schwitzt und einfach körperlich auch, ja, wie wie einen das mitnimmt. (P10/114-115)

P10: Häufig, oder manchmal ist es so, dass ich bei bei manchen Spielen einfach die die Lust verliere. Einfach weil, zum Beispiel, das Balancing nicht so unglaublich gut hinhaut, also dass man dann irgendwie so so so eine Schwelle erreicht hat, wo es eigentlich jetzt keine großartige Herausforderung mehr ist. Weil es auch nicht irgendwie besser wird und das sind dann, das sind dann einfach so Killer. Wo ich dann sage <<Ok, da habe ich dann irgendwie, ab der Punkt irgendwie keine Lust mehr drauf.>> (P10/121)

P10: einfach wieder die Lust verloren (P10/125)

P10: Also ich, ich glaube, ich kann es auch nicht, ich kann bei bei so Games auch unglaublich schwer trennen, mache ich das jetzt irgendwie als, nur rein zum zum zum Entertainment, zum Zeitvertreib, oder mache ich das auch irgendwie noch mit irgendwelchen Hintergedanken?

Also ich erwische mich häufig dabei, wie ich dann anfangs, zu analysieren, obwohl ich eigentlich gar nicht analysieren will ((schmunzelnd)). (...)

Interviewer: Kannst du sagen, wann das losgegangen ist, dass du Spiele plötzlich auch mit, mit- wie du sagtest, so eher so durchdenkst oder eher analytischer betrachtest?

P10: Puh ((räuspert sich)). Gute Frage. Von, wann hat das angefangen? (7s) Ich glaube, da war das, könnte so durchaus auch diese sehr lange und ausgiebige *World of Warcraft*-Zeit gewesen sein.

Interviewer: Warum? Was meinst du?

P10: Hm, gute, mögliche Erklärungen. Also ich habe das ziemlich exzessiv gespielt. Zum Glück hatte ich kein Studium, was unglaublich viel gefordert hat ((lacht)), von sich aus. Ich ich war, also das war so eines der, es war mein mein erstes Onlinespiel. Es war das erste Mal, dass ich in einem in einem, in einer Gilde gespielt habe. Mit mit anderen zusammen, in einem Raid. (P10/150-155)

P10: Gut, das das Licht muss so ein bisschen stimmen.

Interviewer: Wie genau?

P10: Auch nicht zu hell. Also ich habe dann eher so zwei zwei kleine indirekte Leuchten. Und nicht so, also ich, weder mag ich ein besonders helles, grelles Licht, noch irgendwie wenn es zu duster ist. Also so auch eher irgendwie so ein so ein gemütliches Grundambiente. (P10/169-171)

Interviewer: Gibt es irgendwelche normalen, keine Ahnung, Pausen oder Unterbrechungspunkte?

P10: Mache ich ((räuspert sich)), das w::, die werden dann eher auch durch das Spiel vorgegeben. Also, dass man, klar in in *StarCraft* hat man ja immer nach den Matches quasi den den Pausenblock. In in, in in *Adventures* ist es relativ egal. Also, wenn ich halt irgendwie aufs Klo muss, dann gehe ich halt aufs Klo, weil ich, ja. Und bei bei anderen Spielen, also bei, gerade bei so so:: Spielen, wo quasi eine, die, wo die Missionen oder die Level nur, oder nicht existieren, oder nur sehr diffus abgrenzbar sind, da ist es dann, doch so, dass ich mir dann auch immer sage <<Ok, ich mache jetzt noch irgendwie so, diese eine Mission zu Ende oder erledige noch die die Aufgabe.>> Obwohl ich eigentlich vielleicht sage <<Ok, eigentlich müsste ich jetzt schon mal aufs Klo.>>, aber dann jetzt nochmal irgendwie zehn Minuten irgendwie zusammenkneifen ((amüsiert)). (P10/176-178)

P10: Gut, erst mal irgendwie das Ganze, den ganze Krempel aufbauen. (4s) und auch da dann, also da dann wahrscheinlich ja noch häufig, na vorab irgendwie eine Strategie besprochen, die man zu zweit eben ausführen will. Weil man da

eben diese kooperativen Aspekte hat und legs- überlegt, sagt man sich <<Ja komm, ich mache diesmal das. Was machst du denn?>> <<Ja. Ah ok, das ist eine gute Idee. Versuchen wir das mal so.>> Und dann eben möglichst möglichst Synergieeffekte rauszuholen. (P10/195)

P10: Im Spiel haste ich da mehr durch die Gegend. Also weil ich ja wirklich EINE spezielle Sache suche. Oder weil ich ganz genau im Hinterkopf habe, was ich dann, oder mein Erkenntnisinteresse ist irgendwie ganz klar, ich habe ein Erkenntnisinteresse, so gesehen, also warum ich was spiele. Und daf- f-, nehme ich dann eben auch den den kürzesten Weg. Symbolisch gesprochen. Also jetzt in dem Fall, ich würde keine Questtexte lesen und ich würde nicht alles auf-sammeln, sondern ich würde halt möglichst schnell. Also, wenn ich wüsste, ich muss halt kurz in das zweite Level, dann würde ich einfach nur irgendwie möglichst schnell durchrasen. (P10/208-210)

P10: Also ich finde es, oder ich fand es unglaublich irritierend und auch schon störend, wenn ich mich über Team-speak unterhalte, wenn ich mit jemandem zusammen spiele, und es ist gleichzeitig noch jemand im Raum. Und, aber das das ist so ein so ein Augenblick, wo wo ich, was was mich, wo es mich stören würde, wenn noch jemand im Raum ist. (...) Es ist irgendwie so so ein komisches Gefühl, dass man irgendwie mit- mit jemandem spricht im Spiel, über ein Spiel, aber gleichzeitig noch, weiß nicht neben mir, jemand neben mir sitzt. (...) sie hat mich häufig dann quasi in Ruhe gelassen, aber dann natürlich auch, wenn sie was von mir irgendwie, was von mir wollte oder mir etwas mit-teilen wollte. Und auch das fand ich unglaublich irritierend, weil es mir irgendwie so rausreißt aus diesem, ja, aus meinem magischen Kreis. Und das verwirrt mich dann irgendwie. Oder auch, wenn mir jemand quasi beim, jemand der überhaupt keinen Einblick über das Spiel hat, mich- mich reden hört. Also das ist mir auch irgendwie unangenehm, weil da jemand, der irgendwie gar nicht weiß, was ich da mache und so immer nur so komische, kryptische kommun- kommunikative Sprachbrocken quasi von mir mitbekommt. (P10/221-237)

P10: Natürlich auch irgendwie das das gewinnen. Aber eben auch (5s) ja:: eben auch das das gemeinsame Erleben irgendwie da dran. Also dass man, wenn ich wenn ich halt irgendwie zu Hause *Starcraft* allein spiele und ich gewinne, sage ich denn auch <<Puh>> ((stößt Luft aus)). Aber so, man man schaukelt sich dann auch so ein bisschen hoch. Also dadurch, dass man irgendwie so viel miteinander kommuniziert und dann auch ein bisschen dann auch häu-, dann einfach auch mal verbal flucht irgendwie über die Gegner, die jetzt irgendwie eine eine scheiß Strategie gefahren ha-ben, oder einen dann doch irgendwie platt machen. Oder man *die* platt macht, und dann noch irgendwie so ein bisschen drauf haut, verbal, und dann nach einem, nach einem Gewinn, dann auch mal high five macht. Also da ist so das das Erleben noch einmal ein ganz anderes. (P10/284-285)

P10: Das war auch in *Skyrim*, also wo ich dann das Wiki, also, weil das, ich wissen ich wissen wollte, wann man wo mit welchen Gegenständen was bauen kann, wo man welche Rohstoffe findet, also um einfach auf diese Datenbank zuzu-greifen. Auch während des Spieles. Dafür war dann der zweite Rechner immer da. Oder bei, bei, bei *Starcraft* dann, um noch einmal ganz genau zu gucken, ok, welche Einheiten haben welche Stats? (P10/257)

P10: Es ist, das ist eindeutig so das Erkenntnisinteresse, also dass ich eben ein ein Ziel ein Ziel, was nicht das vom Spiel vorgegebene Ziel ist, sondern was ich mir selber irgendwie abhängig, je nachdem warum ich es spiele, mir gesteckt habe. Das will ich erreichen um eben mit mit den mit den Erkenntnissen, oder den Ergebnissen des Spielens eben arbeiten zu können. (P10/287)

P10: Wenn dann höchstens in Situationen, wo einfach ein gewisser zeitliche Druck ist.

Interviewer: Ok. Zum Beispiel?

P10: Also wenn jetzt für ein für ein, keine Ahnung, in in in zwei oder drei Tagen ist ein Projekt, irgendein Workshop und da brauchen wir, weiß nicht, die fünf oder die zehn Spiele müssen halt auf allen Rechnern laufen. Man muss es, man muss sich halt zumindest ein bisschen auskennen mit den Games und dann hat man aber eigentlich gar keinen Bock drauf, aber man muss sich halt trotzdem noch einmal damit vertraut machen. (P10/314-317)

Interviewer: Woran hättest du das festgemacht, ob einer von euch abgelenkt ist, oder nicht?

P10: Also in::, eigentlich alleine nur irgendwie vo- vom Bildschirm weggucken. Also, selbst da, wenn ich irgendwie spiele und also, in gerade in so einem Spiel und ich dann irgendwie meinen Kopf zu dir drehe und mit dir rede. Das ist eigentlich schon Ablenkung.

Interviewer: Warum ist das in gerade so einem Spiel schon Ablenkung?

P10: Weil ich dann für vielleicht fünf Sekunden nicht sehe, was da passiert. Was dann unter Umständen auch spielentscheidend sein kann.

Interviewer: Ok. Und das ist bei Adventurespielen nicht so?

P10: Ne.

Interviewer: Ok. (11s) Das heißt bei Adventurespielen, wäre es auch eher mal in Ordnung vom Spielen abgelenkt zu sein?

P10: Mhm ((zustimmend)). (P10/315-323)

P10: Also, wenn man nur cheesed, also <<cheese>> sind early-game-all-ins, das heißt man man spielt eine unglaublich riskante Strategie direkt am Anfang, aber wenn ein Angriff, also ein sehr früher Angriff, aber, wenn der nicht hinhaut, hat man verloren. (...) Also das ist, und jemand, der nur so spielt, das ist halt so, hat halt kein Skill, so. Auch das ist irgendwie: ein bisschen bad mannered, wenn man immer nur diese all-ins spielt. Und nicht mal irgendwie auch richtige Strategien. (...)

Interviewer: Warum ist das keine richtige Strateg- richtige Strategie?

P10: Ja, da, da kann er auch gleich würfeln, ob er gewinnt, oder nicht. Also, das ist halt so ein, ja, obwohl das Spiel, also, obwohl das Spiel keine Glücks- oder Randomizer in dem Sinne hat, ist das eben so ein Gamble. Es ist als würde ich einen Würfel werfen, bei einer eins und zwei und drei habe ich gewonnen, bei vier, fünf, sechs hat der andere gewonnen. So.

Interviewer: Ok.

P10: So was finde ich, als Spieler finde ich das irgendwie schwachsinnig, weil ich mich frage <<So, wieso spielen wir dann überhaupt?>> Und als Zuschauer ist es einfach auch stinkend langweilig. (P10/347-352)

P10: Naja, dadurch, dass man, man man versucht sich ja, also ich f- bin da jemand der, dann auch immer so den den den Schutz irgendwie des des eigenen, der eigenen Sitzreihe oder so, auch immer genießt. Also auch, also, in in Form eines Sichtschutzes. (...) Hauptsache, dass ich quasi so so eine eigene kleine zwei- Zweiersitzreihe für mich habe, so. Wenn eben, so ein hoher Sitz irgendwie vor mir und hinter mir. Und da, also ich (4s), also gut, auch da wäre: würde ich irgendwie da häufiger etwas spielen, wäre das jetzt auch nicht so, dass ich mir sagen würde, okay, ich würde jetzt hier Emotionen unterdrücken. Ich würde nicht laut loslachen. Das könnte mir noch am ehesten passieren. (P10/357-363)

Interviewer: Irgendwas, was man machen muss, um ordentlich oder normal oder richtig bei der Arbeit zu spielen?

P10: Ja. Also eben auch dieses dieses dieses zielgerichtete. (3s) Dann auch einfach Spiele, auf die man irgendwie eigentlich gar keinen Bock hat. Also dazu dazu muss man sich ja auch mal überwinden, erstmal irgendwie Spiele zu spielen, die man FREIwillig nicht spielen würde. (2s) Ja sich, vielleicht auch, das Spiele eben durch irgendwie Walk-throughs, Savegames oder Cheatcodes kaputt machen. Also das macht man ja, bewusst. Also das würde ich sonst so niemals machen. Ja, also letzten Endes, alles eben um um, was was hilfreich ist, um das vorab gesteckte Ziel zu erreichen. (P10/380-382)

P10: Ja: gut, also man man spielt halt im Team. Also dadurch, das bestimmt ja dann auch irgendwie die Art und Weise des Spielens, dass man eben irgendwie, ne, simpelstes Beispiel, der andere wird halt angegriffen und ich komme ihm nicht zu Hilfe. Also da spielt dann eben so dieses, dieser dieser kooperative Gedanke mit eine, ja mit die größte Rolle. Oder dass man eben auch, keine Ahnung (3s), dem dem dem anderen sagt, wenn halt gerade irgend etwas ist, was halt irgendwie wichtig sein könnte für ihn. (P10/386)

Interviewer: Wann hast du gemerkt, dass du aus aus aus dem Spielen für die Arbeit mal in so ein normales freizeitliches Spielen gerutscht bist?

P10: Naja, also wenn wenn wenn man entweder merkt, ok man man man lässt sich eben von von dem abgesteckten Ziel irgendwie im Spiel ablenken und macht dann plötzlich etwas anderes, was nicht mehr dem Erreichen des Zieles dient. Oder man hat das Ziel erreicht und spielt dann halt irgendwie trotzdem noch weiter. Also alles was quasi eigentlich nicht mehr zu diesem Ziel dann hin geht. (P10/395-396)

P10: Ich habe neulich mal, auch für- für eine LAN irgendwie *TrackMania* irgendwie vorbereitet und ich wollte eigentlich nur mal, ich wollte halt gucken, ob quasi die, das Servertool geht, und ob man irgendwie gemeinsam irgendwie draufkommt. Also ob technisch, quasi, alles funktioniert.

Und dann dachte ich mir <<Ach, jetzt komm, jetzt kannst du auch noch einmal ein Ründchen fahren.>> Und dann fährst du halt irgendwie eine Runde und dann fährst du nochmal die nächste Map und dann nochmal die nächste und [dann-]

Interviewer: [Wann,] wann, wann genau:: hast du dir gesagt: <<Ach, jetzt kann ich auch noch ein Ründchen fahren>>? Wann war das?

P10: Das war eben, also, quasi noch (3s). Ja, ich hatte halt irgendwie gesehen, okay, die, die, die Software, oder die Serversoftware läuft und irgendwie, man, es kommen auch alle Spiele, irgendwie in das Rennen herein. Und dann war es halt irgendwie so, ich saß ja halt schon irgendwie direkt dran, und dann musste ich ja ((schmunzelnd)) irgendwie nur noch meine, meinen meinen Finger auf die Taste legen und dann *war* das ja eigentlich auch schon genauso dieser Akt dann, wo man sagt <<Ok, jetzt fährt man dann auch noch eine Runde.>> (P10/400-403)

P10: Und, wenn ich für die Arbeit spiele, da ist es ja dieses Zielgerichtete. Also da ist im Grunde genommen würde ich nicht spielen, wenn ich sofort an dem Punkt wäre, zu dem ich hin will, sagen wir mal so. Also da ist die Tätigkeit des Spielens eigentlich eher, also rein rein zweckgebunden, oder ein notwendiges Übel. (P10/406)

P10: Also wenn ich, wie gesagt, mal so mir mir eindeutiges Ziel abstecke, was ich erreichen will, ein möglichst klares Spiel und mir das erspiele, dann ist es für mich eigentlich kein Spiel. (P10/441)

P11

P11: Ich brauche da, ich brauche da, ich bin Tastatur-und-Maus-Mensch. Deswegen spiele ich auch keine Konsolen, das ist nichts für mich. Also so, so ein Gamepad, das ist irgendwie, weiß ich nicht, komme ich nicht mit klar. (...) Mag sein, dass ich, ich bin mit, mit Tastatur und Maus aufgewachsen, mehr oder weniger. Also ich habe von Anfang an PCs gehabt, ich habe nie eine Konsole besessen. (P11/87-91)

P11: Ich sage halt: Okay, wenn ich jetzt, was weiß ich, die Zivilisationsstufe Bürger erreicht habe, oder Aristokraten oder oder wie sie auch alle heißen mögen, dann höre ich auf. (P11-1/168)

P11: Ich habe das mit meiner Exfreundin gehabt, die war halt nicht so die ganz gute Verliererin, sag ich mal. Und wenn es dann halt so ein bisschen bergab ging, (...) da ist man dann schon mal (3s) anders vorgegangen, als man das normalerweise getan hätte. Also das, man hat sich dann doch schon anders verhalten, als als-

Interviewer: Wie genau anders verhalten?

P11: Offensichtliche Züge nicht ausgeführt, um ihr einen Vorteil zu verschaffen, beispielsweise. Was eigentlich nicht hätte sein müssen, aber war halt irgendwie der Situation angemessen in dem Moment. Sich vielleicht nicht ganz so gefreut, wenn man mal wieder was geschafft hat und der andere nicht oder die andere nicht. Dass man sich halt so ein kleines bisschen daran anpasst. (P11/171-175)

P11: Es gibt sicherlich Punkte, in früheren Spielen habe ich, wenn es Tag war, vielleicht noch das Rollo runtergemacht, oder das Zimmer verdunkelt, wenn das jetzt ein bestimmtes Spiel war. Aber sonst gibt es da keine große Vorbereitungen.

Interviewer: Warum damals verdunkelt?

P11: Aus zweierlei Gründen. Grund Nummer eins: Du kannst nichts sehen. Grund Nummer zwei: Das Spiel fordert das. Es gibt beispielsweise, ich weiß gar nicht, ob du FEAR kennst?

Interviewer: Mhm ((zustimmend)).

P11: Ja? den mit dem kleinen Mädchen?

Interviewer: Mhm ((zustimmend)).

P11: Das macht am Tag halt auch nicht so viel Spaß. Das muss halt dunkel sein, so. Weil das, weil auch das gesamte Spiel dunkel ist. Das ist halt, wie wenn du draußen im Park auf einem Laptop einen Horrorschocker guckst. Das ist halt irgendwie, ja, passt nicht. Die, die Wirkung kommt halt nicht rüber. Und das ist ja das, was ich will. (P11-1/216-228)

P11: bis ich keine Lust mehr habe (P11-1/248)

P11: Kommt darauf an, wie es zu dem Spiel gekommen ist. Wenn ich jetzt sage: <<Wollen wir nicht alle was zusammen spielen?>> Und dann: <<Ja:::, ja lass mal machen>> ((gelangweilter Ton)). Wenn das dann so kommt, und dann... dann wäre es relativ okay. Sag ich mal, weil das ja eh nicht jetzt gerade der Riesenenthusiasmus da war, dass man jetzt hier unbedingt Spiel spielen muss. Wenn man sich aber zum Spieleabend verabreden würde, und extra deswegen kommt,

und es dann. Dann wäre das halt ein bisschen: <<Ja, weißt du: Dann gehen wir das nächste Mal ins Kino!>> ((zornig))
(P11-2/52)

P11: Cheats habe ich lange nicht mehr verwendet. (...) Ich habe sicherlich bei *Tombraider* beispielsweise, da musst du ja doch ein paar Rätsel lösen, mal in eine Komplettlösung geschaut, wenn du nicht weiter gekommen bist. Aber ich weiß nicht, ob das bescheißen ist. Bescheißen wird es dann, finde ich, wenn du gegen andere Menschen spielst und dir dadurch einen Vorteil erhascht, so, sage ich jetzt mal. Ob du das jetzt gegen den Computer tust, ja, weiß ich nicht. Das ist mir egal. (...)

Also ich würde jetzt bei, also ich habe, zum Durchkommen durch ein Spiel, was ich noch nie gemacht habe, ist, es gibt ja diese God Modes, dass du halt nicht, unbesiegt bist, oder dass du unendlich Munition hast. Habe ich noch nie eingesetzt.

Interviewer: Warum?

P11: Weil es dann keinen Spaß mehr bringt. Dann ist es zu einfach. Dann bräuchte ich, dann bräuchte ich tatsächlich nicht spielen, dann bringt es mir einfach nicht mehr. Dann kann ich, dann kannst du da so durchlaufen, das war es dann. (P11-2/71-81)

P11: Also, das muss ich jetzt nicht zwingend haben, das da Hakenkreuze überall an der Wand hängen. (...) Es sei denn, du spielst Spiele, die in dieser Zeit spielen. (...) Wenn du jetzt irgendwie, wie hieß es denn noch, *Call of Duty*, beispielsweise, das spielt ja in der Zeit. Da wäre es halt komisch, wenn auf diesen Wagen, weiß ich nicht, eine gelbe Blume wäre. Da gehört halt ein Hakenkreuz hin. So.

Interviewer: Das gehört dahin, weil...?

P11: Na ja, weil es aus der Zeit ist, und es soll ja das, es soll ja mehr oder weniger die Realität widerspiegeln, so. (P11-2/137-145)

P12

Interviewer: Warum hast du in der Küche gespielt?

P12: Meistens, weil Xavier währenddessen gekocht hat und wir uns so besser nebenbei unterhalten konnten. ((lacht))
(P12/75-77)

P12: Und das habe ich dann so abgearbeitet. (P12/133)

Interviewer: Gibt es, gibt es bei *FarmVille* so was wie Schummeln?

P12: (18) Nein, würde ich auch nicht sagen. Glaube ich nicht. Also, habe ich nie drüber, so drüber nachgedacht. Aber glaube ich nicht, dass man da schummeln kann. Weil jeder tüftelt ja für sich alleine, grundsätzlich, rum. (P12/207-209)

P12: Ja, also ich denke, wenn man die Möglichkeit hat, jemand anderes am, am Gewinn zu hindern, dann sollte man das auch tun. Also, also das denke ich schon. Also jetzt nicht mit Mitleid der anderen Spieler gegenüber, dann, das finde ich dann auch, das ist auch halbherziges Spielen, letztendlich. (P12/233)

P12: Wenn alles so an seinem Platz steht und das sieht gut aus, man guckt es sich an und denkt: Och, das finde ich jetzt, finde ich ganz schön, so. Ich habe dann irgendwann angefangen, Muster in die Felder zu machen mit verschiedenen Pflanzen und so. (P12/269-271)

P12: Das ist so was Simple. Nach einem langen, vielleicht nach einem langen Arbeitstag, dass man so was, so was Einfaches hat. Man, man guckt da auf den Rechner, man baut sich irgendwas zusammen und die Zeit vergeht irgendwie relativ schnell. Und man... man muss nicht groß nachdenken, glaube ich. Ich glaube, das sind sehr simple, man wird ja auch für alles gefragt. Man kriegt für alles eine Anfrage oder Vorschläge und man muss nicht viel nachdenken, was man da eigentlich zu tun hat. (...) Man hat ja den ganzen Tag schon nachgedacht ((lacht)) oder gearbeitet, so Kopfarbeit. Und ja, ich glaube, der Unterschied zu so Brettspielen vielleicht, dass man da den Kopf ein bisschen mehr braucht, und bei so wie *Farmville*, da geht es eigentlich nur ein bisschen um Optik. Also mein, wenn man kaputt ist, kann man es auch einfach aufhören. (P12/281-285)

Interviewer: Ist es, ist es okay, beim *FarmVille* spielen unterbrochen zu werden?

P12: Ja, auf jeden Fall. Weil es passiert ja währenddessen nichts unbedingt. (P12/317-319)

P12: Ja, eben dieser, dieser, glaube ich tatsächlich, Druck, oder was heißt Druck ist vielleicht ein bisschen doller, aber, das es hier fertig, es muss ja fertig gemacht werden. Man hat da immer so dieses, man bleibt da so hängen, das ist einfach so. Es ist, oder es kommt, man hört, der Rechner: Plopp. Man hört das Geräusch, das wieder irgendwas reingekommen ist. Irgendein Geschenk von jemandem oder so. Und dann geht man schon wieder an den Rechner und macht das mal eben (P12/363-367)

P12: Man wird gebraucht ((lacht)) Also, also, das klingt vielleicht, das klingt irgendwie total blöd, aber. Ja, man, man trägt gewisse Verantwortung ja für, für seinen eigenen Hof da. Und wenn man Anfragen von Leuten kriegt, zum Beispiel: Ich brauche, jemand braucht Bretter für irgendwas zum Bauen, und man kann dann diese Bretter ja schenken. Man tut das, dann hat man das Gefühl, man hat was Gutes getan ((lacht)) dieser Person gegenüber. (P12/403)

P12: Wenn man von Leuten was geschenkt gekriegt hat, und man hatte vielleicht keine Lust gerade, denen was zurückzusenden, sozusagen. Also, genau, man hatte keine Lust, und man fühlte sich dann schlecht, wenn man es nicht gemacht hat. Und deswegen hat man es schnell wieder, also noch mal gemacht oder so was. Weil man, bevor man sich schlecht fühlt. Obwohl man vielleicht keine Lust gerade dazu hat. (P12/451)

P12: Wenn es mir eigentlich gerade vielleicht gar nicht zeitlich passte, ich aber eine Nachricht kriege, dass die Felder reif sind. Und dann hatte ich aber vielleicht gerade gar keine Lust, oder keine Zeit, und habe es aber dann trotzdem gemacht.

Interviewer: Wie, wie, wie vergnüglich war das, wie fühlte sich das an?

P12: ... Ja nicht ganz, nicht ganz freiwillig vielleicht gerade in dem Moment. Also dann hat man es mal eben gemacht. (P12/467-469)

Interviewer: Wenn du mal in einem Spiel das Gefühl hattest, nicht ganz freiwillig zu spielen, hast du dann mal irgendwas gemacht, um für dich selbst wieder das Gefühl herzustellen, dass du eigentlich Herr der Situation bist? Das, das, das du das jetzt hier bestimmst und dir aussuchst?

P12: Ja entweder man kriegt, wenn man jetzt irgendwas machen muss, entweder kriegt man so gedanklich die Kurve, und findet dann doch wieder Freude. Gerade in dem Moment am Spiel, und dreht quasi den Spieß um, nicht zu müssen, sondern das freiwillig zu machen.

Oder ... dass man vielleicht, ich weiß gar nicht, das Spiel auch mal sozusagen, mal vergisst für eine gewisse Zeit und neu rangeht. Also vielleicht zu einem anderen Zeitpunkt. Und dann hatte ich dann eher das Gefühl: Jetzt möchte ich spielen, und jetzt habe ich das wieder sozusagen unter Kontrolle, wann ich spielen möchte ((lacht)). (P12/491-493)

P13

P13: Der Unterschied zwischen einem, einem Freizeitspieler, den nennt man auch glaube ich Casual Gamer, und einem professionellen Spieler, ist einfach, dass der freie Spieler in seiner Einzelspiel (...), wo er ja sage ich mal überfordert ist oder ist gerade mal wegen einer Minute oder sonstiges nicht geschafft hat, nicht die Ambitionen hat, und es erneut zu versuchen, sondern sich ein, also meistens sich an Hilfsmittel anwendet.

Wie diese so genannten Cheats, gegeben von den Programmierern, die das im Spiel erlauben, gewisse Vorteile sich zu encoden, erschlummeln, wie auch immer. (...) So im, im, in dem Profibereich ist es halt so, dass die, dass es halt nur auf den Spieler selbst ankommt, auf die Fertigkeiten, auf den Verstand des Spielers an sich. Und es ist natürlich nicht erlaubt, irgendwelche Hilfsmittel zu benutzen. (P13/9-11)

P13: Und in *Counterstrike* sieht das so aus, dass wir uns dreimal die Woche, auf jeden Fall, treffen, abends um sieben Uhr, bis 22. Das sind, jeweils ein Match sozusagen, ein Spiel, dauert 45 Minuten, durchschnittlich. Und dementsprechend dauert es halt drei Stunden, wenn man drei Matches absolviert. (P13/29-31)

P13: Natürlich spielen wir ab und zu auch, zum Beispiel Freitag Samstag haben wir nie Training, ist ja die Tage, wo man frei hat. Wo man auch nicht arbeiten muss, also zumindestens an dem nächsten Tag. Und da gibt es natürlich auch, dass man auch Spaß spielt. Mit Freunden, mit anderen, einfach so mixt. Also so nennt man das, wenn ich jetzt mit anderen vier Leuten spiele, die nicht in meinem Team sind. Dann ist es ein Mix. (P13/135)

P13: Also wenn ich jetzt jeden Tag nur *Counterstrike* spielen würde, hätte ich in den Trainings ja überhaupt keine Lust mehr. Weil ich hätte, weil ich hätte die Nase vorn, voll davon. Und deswegen hält sich das natürlich ein bisschen mehr in Grenzen. (P13/145)

Interviewer: Richtest du dir am Rechner zum *Counterstrike*-Spielen versus zum freizeitlichen Spielen irgendetwas anders her oder ein?

P13: Nein, anders nicht. Aber, aber, es muss schon alles immer dasselbe sein. Also ich brauche meine Maus und meine Tastatur, meine Kopfhörer. Weil da, auf die bin ich eingespielt, auf die, also auf die weiß ich, was meine Sensitivität ist, was die Reaktionszeit sozusagen ist, ob, wie, wie die Tasten liegen, ohne hinzugucken, also man guckt ja wirklich nie hin. (P13/163-164)

P13: Ich meine, im Training bin ich konzentrierter, weil ich, weil ich will zwar jetzt bei dem anderen ((Mixplay)) auch gewinnen, aber es ist halt nicht sehr stark von Belang. Also der Wille zum Sieg ist da, aber ich muss mich dafür nicht fert- also so so richtig reinhängen. Und, und während ich jede Runde im Training für wichtig und konzentriert versuche, runterzuspielen, bin ich da ab und zu mal lallig oder gucke mal Facebook oder so. (...) Im Training mache ich das nie. Weil ich immer fokussiert auf das Spiel bleibe und jetzt wenn mir jemand was schreibt, hat das, also muss er warten, bis ich antworte, ist ganz klar. (P13/203-205)

P13: Im Training, ich meine, man, was, natürlich gibt es auch Verhaltensregeln (...). Also man sagt nicht einem Team zu, sagt: Okay, wir spielen heute Abend um 20 Uhr, und kommt einfach nicht. Also man sollte schon vorher absagen. Und das, soweit es geht, soweit man weiß. Also natürlich, wenn man in letzter Minute erfährt: Okay, der eine hat jetzt Internetprobleme, geht nicht, okay. Das meint einer nicht böse. Aber wenn jetzt da nichts von denen kommt, denkt man sich: Okay, warum sagt der das jetzt nicht? Weil wir müssen ja neue Gegner suchen und wir verlieren Zeit. (P13/217-220)

P13: Also alle Session sozusagen werden von unserem Orga, Organisator, geklärt, im Laufe des Tages, oder egal wie er es macht, egal wann er es macht. Hauptsache, wenn wir am Abend spielen, wenn wir in unsere Trainingszeiten kommen, müssen die Gegner kommen. Oder wir gehen zu denen auf den Spielplatz.

Interviewer: Wenn ihr dagegen, sagen wir wenn du Mixplay machst, am Wochenende?

P13: Da sucht man spontan. (P13/223-228)

Interviewer: Organisierst du das so gründlich vor, wenn du, wenn du am Wochenende einfach so spielst?

P13: Nein, nein, nein. Das ist alles spontan. Also ich gehe online, gucke, wer online ist, gucke, auf wen ich gerade Lust habe. Sagen wir mal Peter Müller, schreibe ich an: Was machst du gerade? Er sagt mir, was er gerade macht. Chillen, gucken, irgendwas. Dann geselle ich mich zu ihm, im Teamspeak, und sage: Wollen wir irgendwas spielen? Sagt er: Okay, was, worauf hast du Bock? Dann sagen wir: Okay, sagen wir *Counterstrike*. Dann suchen wir uns, hast du welche? Warte ich suche, ich suche, beide suchen irgendwelche Leute. Laden wir ein, sind wir fünf, fangen wir an (P13/243-244)

P13: Weil, man kann zwar den Mitspieler darauf hinweisen: Du weißt gerade, was falsch gelaufen ist, aber man sollte ihn nie runter machen. (...) Und er weiß ja selber schon, dass es Scheiße war, was er gerade gemacht hat. (...) Und, wenn man zum Beispiel jemandem sagt: Du musst unbedingt gewinnen, wenn du nicht gewinnst, fliegst du, und, und, und. Dann ist ja klar, dass die Motivation des Spielers und die Leistung des Spielers sinkt. Wie wenn du sagte: gibt einfach dein Bestes, und selbst wenn wir heute nicht siegreich davon gehen, wenigstens können wir sagen, wir haben unser Bestes gegeben. (P13/269-271)

Interviewer: Ist es dir schon mal passiert, dass du aus dem, aus dem freizeitlichen Spielen in... (...) ernstes, professionelles Spielen rübergerutscht bist? Dass du beim Spielen plötzlich [gedacht hast, jetzt]

P13: [Ja] das passiert öfter. In dem, in so einer Situation, wie wenn ich jetzt auf einmal, wenn wir eine Unterzahlsituation haben. Also sprich, wenn es jetzt zwei gegen fünf ist. Dann werde ich dann schon serious auf einmal. (P13/303-305)

P13: Wenn man jetzt zum Beispiel, wenn was Witziges passiert ist, oder man einen Witz gerissen hat mitten im Training, dann kommt es natürlich auch mal, ((lacht)) dass man sich so lange schlapp lachen muss, dass man nicht mehr konzentriert spielt. Das passiert natürlich auch. Oder wenn man gerade überragend am Gewinnen ist. Oder sagen wir mal, wir haben jetzt fünfzehn null gewonnen, dann müssen wir die Seiten wechseln, dann brauchen wir noch eine Runde, um zu gewinnen, und noch fünfzehn Runden sind zu spielen, aber die Gegner sind kacke. Weil wir, wenn wir so hoch gewinnen, müssen die Gegner kacke sein. (P13/319)

P13: Ach so, also, in einem, ganz kurz: In einem Turnierspiel gibt es, ist es ab sechzehn vorbei. Weil es an die Runden-differenzen [wichtig]

Interviewer: [Okay, also das] waren Turnierspiele.

P13: Genau, Turnierspiele. Und in einem, also gestern haben wir ein Spiel gehabt, da haben wir zwanzig zehn gewonnen. Also sechzehn war ja schon längst erreicht, und da, also in einem Trainingsspiel ist es halt so, wenn der Gegner gut ist auch, dann spielt man, selbst wenn man die Runden gewinnt, trotzdem konzentriert und auch wenn man gewonnen hat, es geht darum, man will ja was lernen dadurch. (P13/335-339)

P13: Genau, nach sechzehn, also so ein Mixed-Spiel hört man eh immer auf. Da spielt man nur um den Sieg. Und nicht um die dreißig Runden. Weil man lernt ja nichts an sich davon. Man spielt einfach nur um das Vergnügen. (P13/351)

P13: Und wenn es dann das benötigt, dass ich jeden Tag das spiele, auch wenn ich es nicht will, dann zwingt mich dazu, ziehe mit an dem, an der Leine, damit das, damit dieses Ziel des Ganzen erreichbar ist. Weil man ist da, also das ist ein Teamspiel. Man kann hier an sich, gibt es natürlich auch Leute, die egozentrisch sind, aber kann man eigentlich nicht sein. Weil man muss immer im Ganzen denken. Man darf sich nicht auf seine eigene Person konzentrieren. (P13/361)

P13: Ja, weil an sich, ich meine, dann sind wir die deutschen Meister, wenn wir das gewinnen. Wie da hinten dann so ein Pokal da steht, hast du bestimmt schon gesehen ((deutet mit Finger zu anderem Raum mit Trophäenschrank)). Und das ist natürlich ein sehr schönes Gefühl. Ich meine, man hat dann was erreicht, und das ist ja. (...) Und das ist ein ganz total Unterschied, wie wenn ich nur aus Spaß spiele. Weil aus Spaß habe ich kein Ziel vor Augen, da habe ich ja nur mein Vergnügen, der einfach fast nichts von Wert ist. Also mit Wert meine ich jetzt nicht Geld. Sondern einfach, ich kann nicht sagen: Ey, ich habe was geschafft. So, ich habe was gewonnen. So kann ich ja nicht sagen, weil dann sage ich ja nur: Okay, ich hatte Spaß. Natürlich ist das ein wichtiges, wichtiger Thema, also wichtiger Punkt. Man sollt natürlich immer Spaß haben, das ist, ich will ja nicht sagen, dass Spaß nicht im Vordergrund stehen sollte. Aber wenn man halt eine, die Ambition hat, im, in der Competition erfolgreich zu sein und es zu schaffen, dann ist das natürlich ein ganz anderes Thema. Und da tut man auch viel mehr für. Beim freien Spiel würden wir, wie sagt man, dann würde man nicht trainieren, da würde man einfach draufgehen und würde man einfach spielen. So einfach Spaß, so, und. Weil man ja keine Ziele hat, sondern man will einfach was spielen, so. Und bei dem anderen, da trainiert man natürlich, damit man besser ist, besser als die anderen ist. Damit man sich auch besser betiteln und auch besser darstellen kann und sich beweisen kann, dass man der Bessere ist und so. (P13/377-381)

P13: Man könnte davon sprechen, dass Taktiken, oder je nachdem, wie ein Team spielt, einen das Spiel erzwingen. Also in dem Sinne von: Wenn jetzt ein, wenn es, wenn der Taktiker vom Team der Meinung ist, dass man statisch spielen muss, dann bist du natürlich gebunden an die Anweisungen oder an die Wege, die er von dir möchte, obwohl du sie vielleicht nicht magst. (P13/411)

P14

Interviewer: Irgendetwas, wo du sagst: Das mache ich, das Spiel spiele ich zum Spaß?

P14: Uff. Ja. Also HoN, also *Heroes of Newerth* und sonst eigentlich nicht mehr wirklich was. Sonst halt ein bisschen Playstation (...). *FIFA*. Aber ansonsten. *Counterstrike* halt nur abends, quasi, wenn ich muss, also in Trainingszeiten, aber ansonsten nicht mehr wirklich.

Interviewer: Ok. Warum nicht mehr wirklich?

P14: Pf, weil es mich einfach nicht so reizt, dass ich irgendwie nur den ganzen Tag spielen muss, sondern es einfach nur das Training zählt und mehr brauche ich eigentlich nicht. (P14/11-14).

P14: Also wenn du jetzt, so wie wir professioneller spielen in der Liga und so, wir gucken halt eher auf das Taktische, was ein, wie sind unsere Spielzüge aufgebaut? Was machen wir falsch? Wie spielt der Gegner? Wir versuchen den Gegner in dem Spiel, seine Aufstellung, zu lesen quasi, wie er steht und uns dementsprechend umzustellen. Und als Freizeitspieler geht man halt auf den public Server und versucht halt einfach ein bisschen zu spielen. (P14/16)

P14: Also wenn wir ein Ligaspiel haben und eine knappe Runde entscheiden, dann ist es eben viel emotionaler, man freut sich viel mehr, als wenn man nur ein Training eine knappe Runde holt. Man sagt zwar <<Sehr gut>> und so, aber

halt nicht so im, also man freut sich schon, aber nicht so krass emotional, wie im richtigen Spielen. Und das, ja an sich ist man konzentrierter wahrscheinlich noch mehr. Man man traut sich wahrscheinlicher weniger, weil man weniger Fehler machen will im Turnierspiel. (P14/26)

P14: Ja, man muss halt Anticheat und sowas starten, wenn du die Richtung meinst. Also, externe Programme, dass man keine, dass man selbst keine Programme nutzt, die einem Vorteil verschafft quasi. Und und das halt ein paar Sachen noch von deinem Computer überprüft und ob du halt, ja einfach, dass dass dein Computer überprüft wird. (P14/36)

P14: Ja:, also zum einen ist es, wie schon gesagt, das Einspielen. Dass man so ein bisschen, also auf dem Deathmatch-Server geht und halt einfach das Mausgefühl bekommt und zum anderen ist, gut was bei uns jetzt nicht mehr so ist, dass wir taktische Dinge vorher absprechen. Also unsere, ganze Spielzüge und so, aber da sind wir mittlerweile so weit, dass wir das meiste so schon drin haben und- ok, gerade, so ne Sachen, dass wir ein neues Spiel machen und wenn- *dann* spricht man so etwas vorher ab. (P14/55)

P14: Also freizeittechnisch, wenn man halt Lust hat oder auch, ja wenn wenn man halt Lust hat quasi zum Spielen. Wenn man, wenn dich irgendjemand dich dazu bringt, also sagen *muss*, <<Du sollst jetzt spielen>> sondern, wenn du wirklich Lust hast und wann du willst zu spielen. Und das ist für mich freiwillig. Und wie gesagt, so etwas wie, wenn du im Team, wie ich schon zwei- dreimal gesagt habe, du musst dir bewusst sein, dass es ein Zeitaufwand ist. Und dann find- empfinde ich das nicht als unfreiwillig, sondern dann geht man den Kompromiss ein und das ist freiwillig. Das ist ja eine Entscheidung von einer Person selbst. Ob ich den Zeitaufwand machen will, oder nicht. So gesehen ist eigentlich alles freiwillig. (P14/156-157)

Interviewer: Gab es schon einmal einen Moment, dass du das Gefühl hast, dass ihr gerade aus einem Trainingsspiel in so ein alltägliches, freizeithliches, Zum-Vergnügen-Spielen gewechselt seid mitten im Spiel?

P14: Ja. Aber das liegt dann eher daran, dass die Gegner zu schlecht waren ((lachend)). Also an sich, wenn wenn der Gegner gut ist, dann passiert so etwas nicht, weil da sind wir alle auf so einer Ebene, da wird konzentriert durchgespielt und da passiert so etwas normal nicht. Außer die Gegner sind natürlich so schlecht, dass man einfach kein taktischen Aufwand quasi, großen taktischen Aufwand bringen muss, dass man den Gegner halt quasi zu Null besiegt. Und da passiert es halt. Das ist halt an sich auch sinnlos gegen solche Gegner zu spielen, weil man wird ja eigentlich nur besser, wenn man gegen Bessere spielt, und da kann es vielleicht mal passieren, aber das nimmt man da sowieso nicht mehr so ernst. Und da spielt man halt mal ein bisschen mehr in die Freizeitrichtung. Aber...

Interviewer: Ok. Was was macht dann den Unterschied aus, zwischen den beiden Zuständen? Also zwischen ernst spielen und dann freizeithliches Spielen?

P14: Ja da läuft man halt hin, wo man will. Quasi, also bei uns ist es halt so, wenn wir gegen schlechte Gegner spielen, dann dann sagen wir nicht irgendwie etwas krass Taktisches an, sondern sagen <<Ja, macht halt, was ihr wollt.>> Dann rennt halt jeder dahin, wohin er will. Und wenn es halt dann doch mal knapper wird, dann kann man wieder umswitchen quasi eher so. (P14/158-161)

P15

P15: Ja, also halt mein Zimmer, da habe ich halt mein Schreibtisch einfach hinters, hinters Bett gestellt. Und ja, also aber möglichst weit weg von der Tür, auch, dass ich nicht so viel höre, was draußen halt. Wenn jetzt zum Beispiel auf dem Flur jemand läuft, dann will ich das beim Spiel nicht unbedingt hören. Weil, ich habe jetzt auch nicht so ein schallgedämpftes Headset, da hört man schon ziemlich viel, was in der Umgebung passiert, und deswegen ist es besser, wenn ich nicht so nah an der Tür sitze. (P15/17)

P15: Nach dem Spiel haben wir, meistens bleiben wir dann noch in bisschen im Teamspeak, und machen halt irgendwas, gucken uns zusammen noch irgendwelche lustigen Videos an, auf Youtube oder so, oder spielen auch andere Spiele, zum Beispiel HoN. (P15/57)

P15: Ja, also es ist immer, bei *Counterstrike*, da sind wir, sozusagen das spielen wir seit anderthalb Jahren spielen wir jetzt zusammen so, wir fünf. Und es ist einfach, da weiß jeder, was der andere zu machen hat. Es ist eine gewisse Konzentration da. Wenn Fehler gemacht haben, wird natürlich auch mal vom Teamcaptain, das ist in dem Fall der Peter, mal rum gemeckert, weil sowas einfach nicht passieren darf.

Und bei *Commandos* ist es einfach nur Spaß, da wird ein bisschen darauf los, wird ein bisschen Scheiße gemacht, dann wird da ein bisschen, wenn jemand jetzt zum Beispiel, nehme ich jetzt einfach mal Kurt, der dreimal was versucht: <<Warte, ich versuch was, ich versuch was!>> Und dann jedes mal direkt stirbt und dann ist halt schon ziemlich witzig und, ja. Es ist auf jeden Fall ein sehr großer Unterschied, allein von Anspannung und Nicht-Anspannung. (P15/85-87)

P15: Das ist zum Beispiel wenn man jetzt, sage ich mal, man trainiert sehr viel. Dann spielt man vielleicht noch sehr viel in der Freizeit. Und irgendwann ist man sozusagen einfach overplayed, also überspielt. Dann, dann hat man einfach überhaupt, man hat keinen Bock mehr, das Spiel zu sehen, eigentlich, aber trainiert halt trotzdem. Und meistens ist es dann sogar noch, dass du dann sogar noch schlechter wirst statt besser. (P15/171)

P15: Nein, also *Commandos* haben wir immer nur gespielt, halt wenn wir Bock drauf hatten. Da, da würde, würde ich zum Beispiel nie spielen, ich würde nie irgendwie ein, außer *Counterstrike* würde ich nie ein anderes Spiel spielen, worauf ich keinen Bock hätte. Weil zum Beispiel, wenn, ich würde ja jetzt nicht, zum Beispiel wenn jetzt *Diablo 3* rauskommt, da werde ich erst mal voll Bock drauf haben, das werde ich erst mal voll viel spielen. Aber wenn ich keinem Bock gerade mal darauf habe, dann, dann werde ich es auch nicht spielen, wenn mich jemand fragt: Wollen wir eine Runde *Diablo* spielen? Wenn ich keinen Bock drauf habe, habe ich keinen Bock drauf und dann spiele ich es auch nicht. (P15/195)

Interviewer: Richtest du dir fürs *Counterstrike*-Spielen deinen Computer irgendwie besonders her?

P15: Ja. Also ich habe das eigentlich alles von meinem Bruder. Ich kenne mich mit den ganzen Rechner, PC und CPU, nicht so wirklich aus. Dafür kennt mein Bruder sich damit um so besser aus. Und dann habe ich zum Beispiel, bevor ich mit *Counterstrike* angefangen habe, das ist schon ziemlich lange her, haben wir uns zum Beispiel ran gesetzt, haben eine Config geschrieben. Das heißt, die ganzen, so ganz viele Befehle, die automatisch immer gespeichert bleiben. Zum Beispiel, wie man vorwärts läuft. Oder wie man irgendwie eine Granate zieht oder so. Und so hat man halt dann alles davor eingestellt. (...)

Interviewer: Okay. Config geschrieben dafür, dass man, für, für Tastaturbefehle, oder-

P15: Eigentlich ja, eigentlich für alles. Da gibt es zum Beispiel, es ist halt so eine endlos lange Config, der zum Beispiel Grafikeinstellungen, alles. Wie hell das Spiel sein soll, ob da die Platten, die Kanten geglättet sind oder ob die eher verschwommen oder alles sind. Wie du dich bewegst, wie deine Maus, also wie schnell die auf dem Bildschirm reagiert und so, das stellst du halt alles da ein.

Interviewer: Und bei *Commandos* hast du das auch?

P15: Nein, also da habe ich alles, da habe ich alles so gelassen, habe es gestartet und dann mit Maus einfach angefangen, geguckt, und ja, habe es so gelassen. (P15/227-239)

P15: ...Ja, also, mit Publikum, das ist ja, ich habe jetzt auch noch nicht so oft vor Publikum gespielt, war jetzt auch erst einmal so vor richtigem Livepublikum habe ich erst einmal gespielt. Und eigentlich, es war nicht anders. Das Einzige, was halt ist, wenn man zum Beispiel, ein bisschen Unterschied gibt es, wenn man zum Beispiel Training hat, da sagt man halt normal an, so. Und wenn man zum Beispiel ein richtiges Ligaspiel hat, dann kommen auch mal energische Ansagen. Das heißt, da wird richtig geschrien, damit schnell reagiert wird, da ist viel mehr Power drin, und- Zum Beispiel auf der Gamescom hatte ich einmal eine Situation, da habe ich ein, eine wichtige Runde geholt, und da habe ich- das Publikum, bin ich einfach aufgestanden und habe geschrien, wie gut ich bin. Auch wenn es im Nachhinein klang es eigentlich ziemlich so: <<Was habe ich *da* gemacht?!>> Aber musste einfach raus, weil wollte ich einfach schreien: <<Wahnsinnig gut!>> Und das ist einfach ein geiles Gefühl dann, wenn man so eine Runde holt, vor Publikum.

Interviewer: Ja. Was sind, was sind dann beim, beim Turnierspielen oder beim, beim, beim vor Publikum Spielen typische Gefühle? Also sich super fühlen. Gibt es, gibt es noch andere typische Gefühle, die man dabei hat?

P15: Ja, also, auch gerade, gerade wenn man halt so auf LAN spielt, auch vor Publikum und so, ist es, man freut sich mehr, weil man sieht seine Teammates, man kann sich, wenn er was wichtiges, man kann ihn schütteln, und sagen, jetzt: <<Super, Mann!>> Aber genauso ist auch, wenn man sieht, so sein Team verliert gerade so ganz knapp eine Runde, und dann ärgert man sich natürlich auch genauso. Dann sitzt, sitzen manchmal alle fünf so... ((macht niedergeschlagenes Gesicht)) und ärgern sich einfach nur. Und ja, dann sind die Emotionen ein bisschen höher noch auf LAN, da wird noch ein bisschen mehr-

Interviewer: Ja. Ärger, Freude. Gibt es noch andere Emotionen?

P15: Also, Nervosität. Das ist, sehr große Rolle, wie ich es gesagt habe. Nachher legt es sich zwar, aber gerade vor Publikum, auch wenn man es ausschaltet, ist es, gerade ich spüre das, wenn, wenn man eins eins gegen eins Situation hat. Vier von den Gegner sind schon tot, und vier aus dem eigenen Team sind schon tot, und dann hat man eins gegen eins.

Dann merkt man schon manchmal das Herz schlagen, so. Dann, ich meine so: Du musst jetzt die Runde holen, du musst dein Team jetzt im Tier halten. Und dann wird man schon nervös. (P15/275-285)

P15: Ja, wenn man da keinen Bock mehr hat, dann sagt man eigentlich einfach nur: Ey Jungs, ich habe halt keinen Bock mehr. So, ich, ich höre auf. Dann sagen die anderen entweder: Ja gut, dann hören wir auch auf. Oder die anderen sagen: Ja okay, wir spielen noch ein bisschen weiter. Weil da ist da nicht so wichtig, da kannst du, das kannst du zu zweit spielen, das kannst du zu dritt spielen oder zu viert oder auch alleine (P15/297).

P15: Ja zum Beispiel letztes Jahr, bei dem XYZ Finals, da haben, da haben zwei Teams gespielt. Da, die haben sich irgendwie, die haben sich überhaupt nicht motiviert. Und das finde ich halt, ich finde, das gehört immer dazu. Man sollte sich und sein Team motivieren. Ich meine, das gibt es bei jeder. Ich betrachte eSport auch als Sport sonst würde ich es ja nicht so professionell betreiben. Und ich meine, so wie man sich beim Fußball motiviert, wenn jemand was Gutes gemacht hat, sollte man sich auch bei dem Spiel motivieren. Weil um so mehr Motivation, um so besser spielt man eigentlich. Und da finde ich es zum Beispiel immer schade, wenn wirklich nur fünf Leute nebeneinander sitzen, und sich vielleicht sogar anschweigen und sich. Sie holen eine Runde und sagen einfach gar nicht, und das finde ich immer ziemlich traurig eigentlich dann. (P15/301-303)

P15: Zum Beispiel, wir hatten jetzt, sagen wir mal, wenn ein Spieler aus dem Team, was auch schon vorkam, zum Beispiel gerade Schluss mit seiner Freundin war. Ist man vielleicht ein bisschen geknickt, oder man ist sauer. Und dann zum Beispiel sollte man, wenn man das merkt, nicht noch auf ihm herum sticheln. Zum Beispiel, wenn man zum Beispiel irgendwelche Späße macht, die man vorher verstanden hat, und man merkt: Ey, der ist ziemlich gekränkt, irgendetwas ist passiert. Lassen wir den heute lieber in Ruhe ein bisschen. (P15/327)

P15: Und wenn zum Beispiel dann nur Mist gemacht wird, habe, habe ich auch gesagt: Ey Jungs, jetzt reißt euch doch mal ein bisschen zusammen, wir haben an dem Wochenende die Chance den Titel zu holen. Da ist jetzt kein Spaß oder so, das ist, wir wollen den Titel holen! Jetzt ein bisschen, auf ins Training, jetzt mal zusammenreißen, Vollgas geben, damit wir am Wochenende fit sind für das Spiel. (P15/345)

P16

P16: Ganz wichtig ist es so ganz wichtig ist es, dass man vom Feeling so ist wie Zuhause. Ich hab jetzt zum Beispiel eine Armlehne gebastelt. Weil ich ich spiele Zuhause mit Armlehne, damit ich den Arm entlaste. Auf Offlineevents, wie jetzt zum Beispiel was morgen ansteht, gibt es keine Armlehne. Das heißt, ich würde komplett anders spielen. Das heißt Grundvoraussetzung so spielen, wie Zuhause, sich komfortabel fühlen (P16/22)

P16: Oder wenn man wirklich wirklich durch dumme Fehler eine Runde abgegeben hat, mein Gott da gab es immer Härtefälle, auf den Tisch hauen und rumbrüllen <<Verdammte Scheiße>>. Jetzt nicht auf unser Team bezogen, bei uns ist alles eigentlich professionell ruhig. Es gab mal einen anderen Fall, da ist der aufgesprungen, hat seine beiden Teamkollegen beleidigt und hat so hart auf ein Notebook draufgehauen, dass es kaputt ging. Ja, das sind Härtefälle. Bei uns ist das so, da wird eigentlich ganz schnell, der Fehler wird halt gesucht, wie wir vorhin sagten, und gesagt <<Hier mach das bitte nicht nochmal>> und dann wird weiter gemacht. Ruhig bleiben, so gut wie es geht ruhig bleiben. Klar, besonders jetzt, was am Wochenende ansteht, da kommen Emotionen hoch, Adrenalin und so. (P16/35-36)

P16: Angemessen ist es für mich in einem gewissen Grad, sprich... man stirbt, also jetzt auf das Spiel noch einmal bezogen. Man stirbt, man sagt, muss ich jetzt noch einmal kurz zwischenhaken. Wenn man stirbt, soll man sofort ansagen, wo man gestorben ist, damit das die Kollegen sofort umsetzen können und halt sofort sich anders hinstellen können. Das habe ich selbst heute noch, wenn ich zum Beispiel sterbe: <<Scheiße!>> Aber dann schalte ich sofort um und nach dieser Sekunde mit Reaktionszeit zwei Sekunden, wo ich gesagt habe, wo ich geflücht habe, schalte ich sofort um und sage <<Der Gegner ist da und da.>> Das ist für mich angemessen, dass man sagt <<Verdammt.>> Ja, <<Oh mein Gott, ich habe einen Fehler gemacht.>> Oder beziehungsweise <<Ah:: da hat der doch Glück gehabt.>> Aber dann sofort umschalten und sagen, wo der Gegner ist. Wie schon gesagt, das ist angemessen, dass man kurz ausfällig wird, aber immer noch professionell weiterhandelt. Was NICHT angemessen ist, herumzuschreien, nicht anzusagen, weiter zu fluchen, während die Kollegen noch spielen. Man selbst ist tot. Und als Toter h- hat man still zu sein (P16/84-87).

P16: Zu::: 95 Prozent nein. Es ist immer noch ein Hobby. Man sch- es ist immer noch eine Leidenschaft. Man man spielt es gerne, auch weil halt so etwas wie:: ein professionelles Level dazukommt, Geld und man kommt herum und man lernt neue Leute kennen. Das ist was schönes, ohne Frage. Und diese fünf übrigen Prozent, sind dann die Prozent, wo man dann sagt: <<Hm, jetzt wieder 19 bis 22 Uhr trainieren? Jetzt hätte ich mit einer Freundin ins Kino gehen können.>> Als Beispiel. Hätte man sagen können <<Mit der wäre ich so gerne ins Kino gegangen. Verdammt, verdammt. Warum muss ich jetzt trainieren?>> (P16/97-98)

P17

P17: Die muss man sich ja immer so mühsam erarbeiten, ne. (P17/28)

P17: Die spiel ich immer, wenn ich zwischendrin mal Zeit habe und Langeweile habe. Also wenn es an so- im Fernsehen nichts gibt. (P17/128)

Interviewer: Wie::: und wenn du am Laptop, normalerweise bei deinem Freund, oder bei deiner Mutter, spielst, dann sagtest du, ist das so eine halbe Stunde, oder? So eine so eine typische Session, oder?

P17: Also ich glaube jetzt wär für mich definitiv die Situation einfach, dass ich mit dem iPad im, im Stuhl sitze und abends daddel. Auch neben dem Fernsehen. Also ich lass den Fernseher laufen und wenn es für mich zu spannend wird oder zu langweilig wird, dann spiele ich nebenbei iPad. Das habe ich früher mehr mit dem Computer gemacht, weil das eben der einzige Ort war, wo ich Computer und Fernseher zusammen hatte, aber jetzt bin ich ja mit dem iPad eben dann in der Beziehung ein bisschen unabhängiger und es ist einfach bequemer im Sessel zu sitzen mit Füße hoch. (P17/162-164)

P17: Also das liegt einfach daran, dass ich Krimis- Ich guck gern Krimis, aber wenn es zu spannend wird, zu brutal wird, dann werde ich so nervös, dass ich mich dann quasi mit dem iPad so ein bisschen ablenke. Das heißt ich kriege noch mit, was im Fernsehen läuft, aber ich muss nicht mehr hin gucken ((lacht)). (P17/172)

P17: Ja, ich habe mich ins Bett gelegt ((lacht)), das iPad angemacht. Das mache ich eigentlich abends immer. Jetzt, statt lesen. Und dann habe ich ein, zwei Solitär-Spiele gespielt, aber bin nicht weit gekommen, dann war ich also weg, weil ich einfach zu müde war. (P17/192)

P17: das war ja, man musst sich das ja also relativ mühsam erstmal erarbeiten am Anfang. (P17/304)

P17: Nee, ein schlechter Verlierer ist man dann, wenn man, wenn man die anderen mit, mit seinem Ärger dann belastet. Also das heißt, wenn man den Ärger raus lässt und, und, und stinkig ist und das für die anderen zur, zur Last wird. Also sonst, ich mein, dass man sich ärgert, wenn man verliert ist ja in Ordnung. Das ist ja normal. Man spielt ja um zu gewinnen und nicht um zu verlieren. Aber wenn man dann eben nervig wird für die anderen, weil man eben schlechte Laune bekommt oder sagt: <<Ich spiel nicht mehr>> oder gar beleidigt ist ... dann, dann finde ich das, also schlechter Verlierer. (P17/444)

Interviewer: Aber das heißt, das ist ein Spiel, dass du auch nur mit ... mit Leuten, die du kennst, spielst?

P17: Ja, definitiv.

Interviewer: Also du würdest nicht, wie bei *FarmVille*, jetzt irgendwie (2s.) quasi jemand Fremden einladen [und dann]

P17: [Nö] mhm ((verneinend)).

Interviewer: *Phase 10* spielen.

P17: Nö, nee. mhm ((verneinend)) (P17/502-512)

P17: Es ist in erster Linie sollte es ja zur Unterhaltung sein und nicht zum Geld verdienen oder Geld ausgeben. (P17/580)

P17: Ja wenn, also so permanent kei-, keine, kein positives Erfolgserlebnis kommt, dann irgendwann sag ich mir <<Dann mach ich etwas anderes jetzt >>. (P17/664)

P17: Was mich nerven würde ist tatsächlich eben ein Spieler, der nicht wirklich ... also spielen kann, also der, der sich, der das, das Prinzip des Spiels auf Dauer nicht kapiert und der dann immer permanent irgendjemand wem anderen

gute Karten hinlegt oder mir immer schlechte ((lacht)) Karten hinlegt. Das, aber ich würde es, glaube ich, nicht unbedingt sagen. (P17/680)

P17: Das machen wir auch, aber es, es ist eben in dieser Runde so, dass wir gerne miteinander so Karten spielen und die, die Damen schlagen das vor. Ich bin eigentlich nicht der Typ. (...) ich müsste das jetzt nicht haben, aber die, die schlagen das immer wieder vor und dann machen wir das halt (P17/692-696).

Interviewer: ((Gibt es beim Spielen am iPad für dich)) Da irgendwelche Gefühle, die man besser kontrolliert, nicht, nicht offen auslebt?

P17: Nö. Da bin ich ja mit mir selber. Ich habe keinen Kontakt mit anderen und wenn ich keine Lust mehr habe, höre ich auf. (P17/738-740)

Interviewer: Sonst irgendwas, was du neben dem, also den tatsächlichen Karten ... was du im Auge behältst, mit beobachtest?

P17: Nein. Vielleicht, wie gesagt das, das Miteinander der Mitspieler, aber das bekommt man sowieso mit, also.

Interviewer: Was heißt das Miteinander?

P17: Ja, ob jemand jetzt, sagen wir mal, irgendwo dann, also, megamäßig frustriert ist oder so. Also wenn, wenn man merkt, dass irgendeiner jetzt extrem sauer ist, weil er permanent verliert. (P17/782-788)

P18

P18: Na gut, wir haben also einen festen Zeitpunkt für den für den Start des Raids gehabt. Dann hat man immer zugehört, dass man so eine halbe Stunde vorher ungefähr da war. Wenn das halt ging. Sonst hast du halt zugehört, dass du möglichst pünktlich zum Raidbeginn da bist. (...)

Also unsere normale Raidzeit war immer von 19 bis 23 Uhr.

Interviewer: Ok. Hattet ihr dafür hattet ihr einen festen Tag eingerichtet in der Woche, oder so? (...)

P18: Dienstags und sonntags. Und nachher sind wir, nee, gar nicht wahr. Wir sind später dienstags, mittwochs, und sonntags gegangen. (P18/113, 122-126)

P18: Also also das sind halt Sachen, dann wird natürlich Wert drauf gelegt, also wenn man darauf angewiesen ist, dass man mit zehn Leuten da rein geht, dann erwartet man natürlich auch, dass wenn einer nicht kann, dass das halt so früh abgesagt wird, dass man dann eine Chance hat denjenigen irgendwie sinnvoll zu ersetzen. Das ist halt immer scheiße, wenn du dann so nach Raidbeginn erst erfährst, so. (P18/158)

P18: Es gibt halt schon so ein paar ungeschriebene Regeln, wie man sich zu verhalten hat im Raid, ne. Dass man pünktlich ist (P18/164).

Interviewer: Ja. Oder, dass dir irgendetwas einfällt, dass wenn man wenn man das nicht gemacht hat, das andere dann gesagt hätten <<Du spielst ja gar nicht richtig>>?

P18: Ach, keine Ahnung, da gibt es unheimlich viel. Also, gibt natürlich auch immer 150 verschiedene Meinungen. Es gibt so eine oder oder zwei, die sich dann durchsetzen, wo sich dann auch echt Leute irgendwie Arbeit machen und für eine Klasse genau ausrechnen, was wie gut ist und also, dass also zum Beispiel was weiß ich Tempo, Willenskraft und so was, das bekommt alles eine gewisse Wertigkeit. Und mit der rechnest du dann aus, wie viel dir das bringt. (...) Also es gibt mit Sicherheit Sachen, die sind so No-Go, wo man wo man, weil es weil es einfach keinen Sinn macht. Wo man dann schon sagt <<Boah, du hast du dir das mal angeguckt?>> Oder <<Völlig falsch verzaubert.>> (P18/227-229)

P18: Ja klar. Also es gibt halt, gibt halt Bosse, wo, weiß ich nicht, irgendwelche Sonderaufgaben verteilt werden müssen. Und wo du dann quasi zeitweise, also als ich bin halt DD gewesen, also Damagedealer und mein normalerweise ist meine Aufgabe Schaden zu machen, wenn du dann beim Boss irgendwelche Spezialaufgaben hast und du weißt dann ganz genau, ja du bist dann nur am Rumrennen, oder am Rumsuchen, oder musst irgendetwas im Auge behalten, oder so, und kannst halt nicht so Schaden machen, wie du das sonst machen könntest, dann ist das halt manchmal schon so, dass du dir denkst <<Würde lieber das andere machen.>> (P18/339)

P18: Ja, bei Anno dauert das Leveln wesentlich länger und die EP die du kriegen kannst, also auf normalem Wege, sind halt relativ begrenzt, so dass du um das Max-Level erreichen zu können, am Ende doch relativ viel irgendwo stumpf

irgendwelche Viecher kaputtprügeln musst und das ist irgendwann echt nervig, also. Es gibt Leute, die machen das gerne. Es gibt auch Zeiten, wo ich das ganz gerne mache. Weil du da halt nicht groß nachdenken musst, sondern du fährst halt immer Schema F. Keine Ahnung, anvisieren, der Zauber, der Zauber, der Zauber, tot, bluten, nächster... Oder so. (P18/369)

P18: Es gibt dann aber auch einige Leute, also du hast halt keine direkten sozialen Konsequenzen zu erwarten in WoW. Wenn du dich scheiße verhältst hast du immer noch die Möglichkeit den Server zu wechseln. Und dann sind da wieder neue Leute, wo du ein unbeschriebenes Blatt bist, im besten Falle. Im sozialen Leben musst du natürlich mit deinen Konsequenzen leben. Wenn du da Mist gebaut hast, dann hast du Mist gebaut. (P18/385)

P19

P19: Ja, wir haben, also wurde halt gesagt: <<So pass auf, wollt'er einen FIFA-Abend bei mir machen? Wer Lust hat.>> Also ich hab halt Kollegen, die haben das Spiel auch und dann verabredet man sich halt, wir haben mal gesagt, ich weiß gar nicht, das war glaube ich ein Freitag 19 oder 20 Uhr bei mir. (P19-1/23)

P19: Aber wir haben meistens so einen Turniermodus gemacht, wo dann halt öfter mal ein oder zwei Leute dann daneben saßen und halt nichts gemacht haben. Die haben da sich dann ganz normal unterhalten oder was, oder zugeguckt. Ich bin dann gelegentlich, also ich gucke dann ganz gerne auch zu, weil ich dann sehe so, was die Leute können, wo die am liebsten angreifen oder so. Also das ist dann ganz praktisch. (P19-1/24-25)

P19: Also ich, das ist immer so ein Spaß-haben-Abend. (...) Ich meine, klar, dass immer so ein bisschen so Herausforderung dabei ist. So von wegen: <<Den einen will ich jetzt mal besiegen>> oder was. <<Ich habe die letzten fünf Spiele gegen den verloren.>> Das ist immer dabei. Aber daf- da wird auch im Vorhinein immer so ein bisschen gefrötelt, oder was. Aber es ist normal so, dass man wirklich sagt: <<So, Spaß steht auf jeden Fall im Vordergrund.>>

Interviewer: Was steht beim online FIFA spielen im Vordergrund?

P19: Da schon der Erfolg. Also... da ist es dann schon so, dass man sagt, so <<Ja, ich würde schon ganz gerne gewinnen>> weil... mein alter Fußballtrainer hat immer gesagt <<Gewinnen macht Spaß, lässt uns rausgehen und Spaß haben.>>

Interviewer: Aber es ist ja das gleiche Spiel. Also warum steht der Erfolg beim online spielen im Vordergrund und bei den Freunden eher das Zusammensein?

P19: Das ist ja, man hat ja keine soziale Verpflichtung gegenüber den anderen, oder soziale Kontakte zu dem Anderen. Also bei FIFA ist es ganz extrem so, dass man halt wirklich nur gegen den als Gegner spielt und keine keine großartigen sozialen Verpflichtungen oder halt Gespräche oder was aufkommen. Da ist es ja, ich spiele auch nicht mit Headset bei FIFA. (2s) Da ist mir dann der soziale Aspekt nicht so wichtig. Also da ist dann wirklich mehr der Fokus beim, wenn ich so einen Spieleabend mache, oder was, dann will ich halt auch, dass jeder Spaß hat. Das ist dann wie so eine kleine Party. Also würde ich das jetzt mal so vergleichen. Bei einer Party ist es halt auch nicht schön, wenn drei in einer Ecke sitzen und <<Hu ((imitiert Weinen)), scheiße.>> machen und drei stehen da und freuen sich einen Ast. Das ist ja auch nicht ist ja auch keine gelungene Party (P19-2/37-41)

P19: Da war ein Kollege, der hat die anderen drei mitgenommen, mit dem Auto. Sind dann zu mir gekommen. Und der musste am nächsten Tag arbeiten. (...) Und die anderen waren auch alle so ein bisschen durch. (...) Der Fahrer hat dann irgendwann halt so, wie das in der Disko oder so dann bestimmt auch ist, dass dann irgendwann der Fahrer sagt, so: <<Boah, mmmh, morgen früh raus und so, keinen Bock mehr. Bin müde>> oder so. Dass er sagt: <<Ja, ich fahre jetzt. Wer will mitfahren?>>, und dann haben die anderen halt gesagt <<Ja, komm dann fahren wir mit.>> (P19-1/44-55)

P19: Also wir haben auch halt, wie gesagt, wir haben auch öfters Schwächere dabei oder was. Da wird dann auch mal irgendwann so (2s). Ja, die haben- haben dann meistens auch den Ehrgeiz, dann halt auch besser zu werden. Und dann ist es halt auch mal, wenn bei einem Stand von vier zu null oder was... ja so: <<Ey, willst du noch weitermachen?>>, oder so. Aber das wird dann normalerweise auch nicht gesagt. Das ergibt sich. Aber also wir haben glaube ich noch nie ein Spiel abgebrochen, oder so. Also es wird dann immer so, wie so ein, Entschuldigung, wie so ein letztes Spiel, oder so gemacht. Und dann gesagt <<Komm, letztes Spiel, und dann ist Feierabend.>> (P19-1/57)

P19: Ja, also wir haben einen Kollegen dabei, der braucht halt immer recht lange für seine Aufstellungen. Der friemelt halt am Anfang auch bei seiner Mannschaft rum, und hier den da hin und den da hin, und wechselt seine Lieblingsspieler ein und so. (P19-1/59)

P19: Also das... ich habe das bei Onlinespielen oft gehabt, also dass da Spieler waren, die dann einfach, die wenn du dann 3-0 geführt hast oder was, nach 30 Minuten, die haben dann das Ding ausgemacht. Dann die haben einfach die Verbindung unterbrochen (P19-1/62).

P19: Wobei, wir das wie gesagt dann meistens eher so ein bisschen witzelnd machen. Also wird dann mal so ein flachsiger Spruch oder sowas, kommt dann. Da ist dann auch niemand sofort beleidigt.

Interviewer: Also witzelnd ist okay, [ernst gemeint ist nicht ok?]

P19: ((hustet)) [Ja, also wenn man], genau, also wenn man denen so sagt <<Ey:: ne hier, spielst ja *richtig tollen* Fußball.>> So ein bisschen ironisch oder so, dann kommt das schon mal vor. Aber, das ist nie so, dass es man jemanden wirklich runterbuttert, oder was. Also da würden dann wahrscheinlich auch sogar die anderen einschreiten, weil ich also ich würde das wahrscheinlich so machen. Weil ich denke, das ist so was ist nicht ok. (P19-1/86-89)

Interviewer: Wie ist das beim Onlinespiel? Ist das da genauso?

P19: Man regt sich da... dann sitzt man meistens hier auch alleine und dann regt man sich halt nochmal also ich rege mich dann gelegentlich mal schon lautstark auf, oder was. Aber ((prustet)).

Interviewer: Also während du vor dem, während du spielst [regst du dich-]

P19: [Ja genau,] während ich spiele. Ja (3s) was weiß ich, sagt man halt mal <<scheiß Penner>>, oder was und... aber der kriegt es ja auch, der hört das ja auch nicht. Also ist ja jetzt nicht so, dass er es unbedingt mitkriegt, oder was. Aber, ja, also da wird wird das jetzt nicht so...

Interviewer: Und das würde beim Spielen mit dem mit den mit den Freunden am Sofa nicht passieren, dass du dann?

P19: Ja, ich glaube ich würde die nicht beschimpfen. (...)

Interviewer: Ok. Aber, würdest du dich, wenn du mit den Freunden am Tisch sitzt auch aufregen? Also?

P19: Ja, da regt man sich auch auf. Klar. Aber das ist dann:: ja das ist dann halt nicht so permanent und auch nicht so lautstark. Also, wenn man alleine si- hier sitzt, dann lässt man da seinen Gefühlen mal eher freien Lauf, als wenn man jetzt mit einer Gruppe zusammen sitzt, oder was, und sich über etwas aufregt. (P19-1/89-96)

P19: Ich habe eine Zeit lang harten Techno... also Hardcore gehört. Das habe ich dann angemacht. Oder halt mal so, Rockmusik oder so, also so Metall oder so. Dass ich das angemacht habe und dann gezockt habe. Na so ein bisschen so diese Kampfstimmung, so nochmal ein bisschen.. heraufzubeschwören. (P19-1/100)

P19: Ja::: also ich habe halt auch einen Laptop, der extra auf Gaming ausgelegt ist. Mit beleuchteter Tastatur und all so einem Kram und halt relativ leistungsfähig. Der ist halt auch auf Gaming ausgelegt. Da ist auch eine Gamingmaus dran, die noch zusätzliche Makrotasten hat. (P19-1/101)

P19: Bei WoW hat es halt immer runtergezählt. Bei::: anderen Sachen, Shootern oder so, dann merkst du halt, dass entweder wirst du beschossen oder.. (P19-2/3)

P19: Dass man so Leute dann irgendwie nicht demütigt mit dem, dass man wirklich *alles* zeigt, was man kann. Also ich bin dann auch immer so, dass ich dann nochmal ein Spiel was ich eigentlich zehn zu null gewinnen könnte, dass es dann nur 2-0 ausgeht. Weil... ich halt dann auch versuche so ein bisschen schön zu spielen, über die außen kommen Flanken [rein ??].

Interviewer: [Wie wie] ist das beim online FIFA spielen?

P19: Nein, da haut man raus was man kann. Also da ist es dann schon so, dass man schon zeigt was man kann. (P19-2/47-49)

P19: ja es ist halt so, man hat halt eine Verpflichtung gegenüber den anderen. Was meine Freundin vorhin auch schon gesagt hat mit dem mit dem Ruf, das war halt so Classic-Zeiten von WoW war das ganz oft so, dass, oder war es eigentlich immer so, dass der Ruf stand über allem. Wenn man einen scheiß Ruf hatte, so von wegen <<Ja, der ist zweimal mit uns raiden gegangen und dann kam der nie wieder. Hat da Loot abgegriffen>> also so Beute.

Interviewer: Ist ist der Ruf etwas Technisches gewesen? Oder was?

P19: Nein, das war etwas Soziales. Also das war, der Name zählte da noch etwas. War jetzt nicht so, wie::: es inzwischen ist. Damals war das halt wirklich noch so serverbezogen, wenn man da einen guten Ruf hatte, so von wegen <<Ja, das ist voll der gute Jäger>> oder so, dann wurde man halt auch von anderen Leuten angesprochen auf Sachen, die man erreicht hat. (...)

Aber das also mit diesem Gezwungenen, das hatte ich ab und zu bei den Raids. Also wenn man... ich hatte zum Beispiel den Konflikt, dass ich Fußball gespielt habe, also richtig Fußball gespielt habe und ab und zu dann an den Abenden, wo ich dann Fußballtraining hatte, hatte ich auch Raid. Und da war es dann so, dass ich dem Raidleiter von Anfang an gesagt habe <<Pass auf, bestenfalls alle zwei Wochen, dass ich Fußballtraining mal ausfallen lasse und dass ich dann komme, oder so.>> Und dann ab und zu war es dann so, dass Leute gefehlt haben oder so und dass ich dann gesagt habe: <<Komm, dann lässt du einmal Fußball ausfallen.>> Und dann machst du da halt mal mit, oder so, und dann, oder wenn man halt nicht so wirklich Lust drauf hatte. Das, man geht ja irgendwo eine Verpflichtung gegenüber den anderen Leuten ein. Und ich finde es auch nicht gut, wenn man dann sagt, so: <<Ja::: ich stelle meine Interessen definitiv über die an- die der anderen,>> weil das ist schon eine soziale Gruppe, die ein Ziel erreichen will. (...)

Also ich, bei anderen Spielen hatte ich das nie so, dass wenn ich keine Lust hatte, dass ich dann dran gegangen bin. Bei WoW hatte man, vor allem bei WoW hatte man irgendwo einen sozialen, ja halt noch irgendwo einen sozialen Zwang mit dahinter. Weil wie gesagt, dieser Ruf und halt auch die sozialen Kontakte, die man darüber geführt hat. Oder halt gefunden hat, dass die halt einen dazu bewegt haben, da hinzugehen. Weil ich denke, dass das beim Sport genauso ist. Dass man mal abends kein Bock hat auf Training, oder was, man geht trotzdem hin. Weil man gerade sich irgendwo sozial gebunden fühlt. (P19-2/68-78)

P19: Ja zum Beispiel, dass, weil da denke ich, dass das keine ernste Konsequenz ist, wenn man mal fünf Euro verliert. Also ich hätte jetzt nicht um einen Pott von 500 Euro gespielt. Da hätte ich dann auch gesagt <<So hey Jungs, seid ihr bescheuert? Das ist zu viel>> oder was. Also so kleine Summen, wenn es dann, was weiß ich, ein Euro oder was ist oder fünf oder zehn. Wenn man es sich auch leisten kann. Das ist auch sind auch Sachen, die ich selber nicht nachvollziehen kann, weil ich habe zum Beispiel einen bei uns gehabt im Fußballverein, mit denen habe ich ab und zu abends gepokert um Geld. Und der hat halt seine 20 Euro, die er halt für den Rest der Woche noch hatte, für drei oder vier Tage oder was, der hat es dann halt auch davon abhängig gemacht, ob er gewinnt, ob es ein gutes Wochenende wird, oder nicht. Und da denke ich dann einfach, das geht zu weit. Das ist nicht das, was ich haben will, weil ich will Spiel und Spaß haben. (...) Also das ist dann Glücksspiel meiner Meinung nach. (P19-2/84-87)

Deutsche Kurzfassung der Ergebnisse

Theorien des Computerspiels stehen derzeit vor einer doppelten Herausforderung: Während digitale Konvergenz 'die Medien' als stabile Bündel auflösen, hinterfragen Phänomene instrumentellen Spiels wie Serious Games, Gamification, Arbeit in Spielen und arbeitshaftes Spielen Definitionen des Spiels als unterhaltsame, folgenlose, und raumzeitlich klar abgegrenzte Entität, die Arbeit konträr gegenübersteht. In der aktuellen Forschung vermehren sich daher Rufe nach Theorien der Medien(nutzung) und des Computerspielens als situiertes Handeln. In Antwort hierauf hat die vorliegende Arbeit eine rahmenanalytische Theorie des Computerspielens entwickelt und empirisch angewandt.

Erving Goffmans Rahmenanalyse wurde dabei mit Konzepten der ökologischen Psychologie und Theorien situierten Handelns verknüpft. *Rahmen* wurden als Kopplungen von Akteuren, Handlungen, Kommunikationen, Objekten, Settings und Ereignissen konzeptualisiert, die ihr eigenes Wieder-Zusammenkommen als *Typen von Situationen* über Zeit und Raum stabilisieren. *Rahmungen* wurden als situative Aktivitätssysteme definiert, die sowohl verdeckte Wahrnehmung, Verständnisse und Erlebnisse als auch beobachtbare Handlungen, Kommunikationen und Ereignisse als Reproduktion-und-Änderung eines Rahmens organisieren. Diese Konzeption korrigiert aktuell gängige Verkürzungen von 'Rahmen' als kognitive Schemata. Empirisch wurden 19 qualitative Interviews mit adulten Computerspiel-JournalistInnen, ForscherInnen, GestalterInnen sowie 'regulären' SpielerInnen durchgeführt, um die Organisationsprinzipien des Computerspielens zu ermitteln. Die Datenanalyse indiziert, dass es nicht *einen* homogenen gegenwärtigen Computerspielrahmen gibt, sondern eine *Pluralität* von mindestens fünf freizeitlichen Modi und vier instrumentellen Modulationen des Spielens. Freizeitliche Modi teilen einen autotelischen Fokus auf Vergnügen, 'vernachlässigbare' Folgen, und eine verschiedentliche Balance von Normen der *gameworthiness* (Versuchen, zu gewinnen), Harmonie (Sorge um andere), und *playworthiness* (Distanzierung des eigenen Selbst nach dem Spiel). Modi unterscheiden sich desweiteren in der zentralen Form von Vergnügen, die den offiziellen 'Ethos' der Situation bildet: Entspannung, Verbundenheit, Absorption, Kompetenz, und Anerkennung. Instrumentelle Spielformen konnten als *Modulationen* erklärt werden, *Umrahmungen* schon gerahmten freizeitlichen Spielens in eine Form des Arbeitens, was die Aktivität und das materielle Setting nur marginal transformiert, das Verständnis und Erleben der Situation jedoch stark. Alle vier identifizierten Modulationen (rezensierendes, analysierendes, trainierendes, und Turnier-Spielen) teilen einen (unterschiedlichen) exotelischen Fokus auf ein instrumentelles Ergebnis, Professionsnormen, und ernste Konsequenzen. Sowohl in freizeitlichen Modi als auch instrumentellen Modulationen findet man darüber hinaus Erlebnisse, die Befragte als 'arbeitshaft' und 'nicht spielerisch' benannten. Die Dissertation kombinierte Goffmans Konzept der Interaktionsspannung mit dem der Autonomie aus der psychologischen Selbstbestimmtheitstheorie, um diese als Erlebnisse in-autonomer, kontrol-

lierter Motivation zu erklären. Diese erscheinen, wenn die spontanen Bedürfnisse von Akteuren nicht in die soziomateriellen Affordances der Situation passen *und* soziomaterielle Konsequenzen der Veränderung oder des Verlassens der Situation salient werden, die als kontrollierend erlebt werden. Dies indiziert, dass situative Autonomieförderung ein komplexer Meta-Prozess des Computerspiel-Vergnügens ist, und stellt eine bedeutsame Herausforderung für Serious Games und Gamification dar, welche Spiele (und Spiel-Design) in nicht-autonomiefördernde Kontexte transplantieren.

English Summary of Results

Contemporary theories of video games face a double challenge: While digital convergence decouples the previously stable bundles of ‘media’, instrumental play phenomena like serious games, gamification, work in games and work-like gaming troubles notions of games as fun, inconsequential, and spatiotemporally bounded entities opposite of work. Several scholars have therefore called for theorising media (usage) and video games as situated action. In response, this thesis developed and empirically applied a frame analytic theory of video gaming. It combined Erving Goffman’s frame analysis with ecological psychology and theories of situated action. *Frames* were modelled as socio-material nexuses of actors, actions, communications, objects, settings, and events that stabilise their re-occurrence as *types of situations* across time and space, and *framings* as situated activity systems that organise both covert perception, understanding, and experience and overt action, communication, and events as reproducing-and-changing a frame. This conception corrects prevalent misreadings of frames as cognitive schemata. 19 qualitative interviews were conducted with adult video game journalists, designers, researchers, e-sport athletes, and ‘normal’ players to identify the organising principles of video gaming. Data analysis suggested that there is not *one* homogenous contemporary video gaming frame, but a *plurality* of at least five leisurely modes and four instrumental keyings of gaming. Leisurely modes share an autoelic focus on enjoyment, ‘slight’ consequence, and a differing balance of norms of gameworthiness (trying to win), harmony (caring for others), and playworthiness (detaching one’s self after the game). They further differ in the central kind of enjoyment that forms the avowed ‘ethos’ of the situation: relaxation, relatedness, engrossment, competence, or achievement. Instrumental play phenomena are explained as *keyings*, re-framings of already-framed leisurely gaming into a form of work that transform activity and settings slightly, but understanding and experience strongly. All four identified keyings (review, analytic, training, and tournament gaming) share a (differing) exotelic focus on an instrumental outcome, professional norms, and serious consequence. Both in leisurely and instrumentally keyed gaming, experiences occurred that interviewees labeled ‘work-like’ and ‘not play’. Combining Goffman’s concept of interaction tension with autonomy modelled in self-determination theory, the thesis explained these as experiences of in-autonomous, controlled motivation occurring when an actor’s spontaneous needs misalign with sociomaterial affordances, *and* perceived-controlling sociomaterial consequences of changing or leaving the situation become salient. This suggests that situational autonomy support is a complex meta-process of video game enjoyment, and indicates a severe challenge for serious games and gamification taking game (design) into non-autonomy-supporting contexts.

Liste der Vorveröffentlichungen

The following publications emerged during the course of writing this thesis:

- Deterding, S. (2009a). Fiction as Play: Reassessing the Relation of Games, Play, and Fiction. In J. R. Sageng (Ed.), *Philosophy of Computer Games 2009* (pp. 1–18). Oslo: University of Oslo. Retrieved from <http://proceedings2009.gamephilosophy.org>
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