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Action aesthetic in childrens' computer gaming

The present paper analyses and discusses children's use of computer games in their everyday lives. The analyses have been done on data from the international project "Everyday lives of working families in Italy, Sweden and USA". Data consist of 300 hours of video film from eight Swedish families during one week as well as interviews with children and adults. The analytical work is inspired by ethnomethodology and discourse psychology (Heat & Luff, 2000; Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996).

In game activities, computer games are seen as actors that make a difference to the situation. This means that in computer game activities they are given the status as agent (actant) (cf. Latour, 1999).

Analytically, I have chosen to focus upon children's use of response cries (for instance wow, cool, no, shit) (Goffman, 1981) to understand the interaction between actants in this heterogeneous network (computer gaming). Response cries can be seen as performative elements in children's gaming, where these cries are used to keep attention from their co-players and to display their game involvement. In addition, in the interaction between the participants (game-child-child), it can be seen how children use different strategies like singing along, sound effects and animating to make gaming a social activity. These communicative actions can be understood as a kind of *action aesthetic*. Put differently, action aesthetic is not solely verbal, it can also be seen in how the participants use of their body and their material environments. In the present paper, action aesthetic is seen as a type of performative action used to secure and display involvement as well as cooperation in gaming. This is a form of aesthetic that has similarities to improvisation in Jazz (Duranti & Burrell, 2004) as well as with improvisation in children's play (Sawyer, 1997). In the present paper, action aesthetic would not only be seen as an example of which aesthetic aspects that children bring into social interaction, but even more important, it will be used to discuss the borders of computer games. I will argue that the computer games transgress the virtual space in that a part of the game takes place around the screen. This shows that the borders of computer games cannot be taken for granted, rather it is the result of negotiations and performances between the actants. Though, spaces for gaming and action are created in the interaction between the children and the computer games.