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The Sociality of Gaming

A mixed methods approach to understanding digital gaming as a social leisure activity.

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To my father,
for all the things we dream of
and all the things we do

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List of studies

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Preamble

A Brave New Digital World?

I remember when in the early 1990's my mother pulled me and my brother aside and explained to us that unprecedented luck had come our way. She had decided that our family should invest in one of the new game machines which had become so popular with the kids of the time. Probably she had heard our enthusiastic voices and seen our sparkling eyes as we talked about the neighbour's Nintendo and noticed all the time we were suddenly spending in their basement jumping on turtles and driving cars together. I recall the day clearly; we were standing in the hallway with our muddy shoes still on as she looked at us with serious eyes and said that we should be very grateful about this expensive piece of technology as it was an entertainment machine just for us children.

When the new Super Nintendo entered our home it was with great reverence we took the sleek grey machine out of its packaging and installed it. I wish I could say that this piece of plastic changed everything and that it was the beginning of something brand new. Alas, this was not the case. We mostly forgot about it, only bringing it out occasionally when the mood struck us. What I still remember, though, are the small things. On each Christmas morning my brother and I were given a game that we then spent the cold holiday engaged in together, shouting encouragements and abuse at the machine as we lost and won. And I remember a summer evening smelling of rain and damp earth when together we finally overcame the last enemy in *The Secret of Mana* (Square, 1993), which we had been struggling with for months; the way we jumped for joy and laughed out loud when we finally saved the world.

But the thing that really stuck with me over all these years is how utterly wrong my mother had been about the role of the game machine. Sure, on some occasions it was placed in my brother's room or mine, but mostly it was standing on the floor of the living room, cords trailing like snakes across the wooden boards. There my mother would sit and play *Super Mario World* (Nintendo, 1990) and *Donkey Kong Country* (Rare, 1994) for hours, waving the controller around and humming along to the catchy tunes. We gathered on evenings and rotated, doing a course each as we tried to get the monkeys to beat the evil crocodile; but when my brother and I, and later on also my sister, had to go to bed, my mother often stayed and kept on playing.

The strange thing, if you will, is that none of this was ever something I considered odd or out of the ordinary. It was just something we did, the same way that we watched the latest soap opera on Fridays or went on Sunday walks together. It was always there, I suppose, in the back of my mind, together with all the other things I did and enjoyed as a child, but it never took precedence. This lasted until I was about halfway through work on my thesis, when suddenly these old memories started to resonate against stories my informants kept telling me when I asked them about what gaming meant to them, in their lives.

Getting into Game Studies as I was reaching the end of my university education was initially a way for me to study the massive online worlds emerging. I, like so many others at that time, was infatuated by the large numbers of users, the beautiful online spaces and the joint collaboration and effort put into these emerging social worlds where online identity, escape from physical constraints and alternative realities seemed to offer new ways of being. So I went looking for the brave new digital world. What I found was instead a resurrection of old forgotten memories and a realisation that perhaps new was not the correct qualifier to be used.

This is a thesis about taking the new digital technology which surrounds us—everywhere and all the time—seriously. It is about engaging in digital games together with others, about trying to understand an activity that at times has been called revolutionary and at other times the greatest danger of all time. It is about understanding the joy of gamers and the context and structure of the activity, as well as the inexorable link between online and offline realities. In the end it became a thesis about the role of digital gaming in everyday life. So enough stalling, welcome to the game!

Part 1: Introduction

Digital Gaming

People have always played games; from Chess, board games and different dice games to the *Ludi Romanus* (Games for Romans). On to football and other modern sports, and finally to the topic for this thesis, digital gaming; games engaged in on a screen. Games in all shapes and forms have been in evidence throughout human history and are part of how we spend our everyday lives together. In their basic form games add amusement to our lives; that they are fun is the approved reason for engaging in them. Perhaps because of this, Goffman (1961) contends that games are seldom taken seriously.¹ This is especially true of adults engaging in games just for the sake of gaming (Thornham, 2009); there exist some reluctance to admit that adults engage in and indeed enjoy playing digital games.

In Huizinga's now classic work (1950[1938]) we are shown that play and games are inherent parts of human societies and essential for human cultural development. We are *homo ludens*, 'man the player'. "*As a regularly recurring relaxation (...) [play] becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general*" (Huizinga, 1950[1938]: 9). Play, Huizinga argues, is one of the bases for civilization; many human institutions arise in play behaviour. Caillios (1958), a follower, goes on to show how central games are in modern life, e.g. sports and gambling, but also in their many other forms. The digital revolution has brought new dimensions to play. Games, in all their digital forms, are proliferating as never before, adding a new sense of fun to our everyday lives. Are we, perhaps, seeing a games revival in contemporary society? Today digital games are present in everything from advertisements to our mobile phones to computers at work; and we now interact in massive online 3D worlds, shoot angry birds at pigs, and compete around racetracks driving turtle shells. We play songs on plastic guitars, move tiles in word games on our mobile phones, and engage in epic adventures where we are the heroes of our own story, saving the world over and over again.

In our new digital world, as games in all shapes and sizes have penetrated our culture, ideas of game and play are being rethought, and as games go

¹ Although some notable exceptions are found in developmental research on how children and teenagers become adults (see e.g. Mead, 1934) as well as in anthropological studies of 'other' cultures (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

digital they change the premises for their own existence. Games we could not have dreamed of 50 years ago are now commonplace and the study of games even has its own field of research—Game Studies.

Media technologies in general are increasingly important in all spheres of society, with entertainment media a fast growing sector. Digital games were an early application of digital technology and game consoles preceded computers at every stage in its general adaptation (Williams, 2006a). Game consoles and early computers used for making and engaging in games introduced an entire generation to computing. In Sweden the game industry turnover in 2010 was 200 million euro, with over 5 million games sold (Lindell, 2010), figures that do not include e.g. web based games running on micro transactions² or free games financed by advertising, two common economic models for digital games today.

Among the 15 games most sold in the Nordic countries in 2010 we find titles such as *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, 2010), a shooter game; *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (Blizzard, 2010), a multiplayer online game; *FIFA 10* (HB studios, 2010), a sports game; *The Sims 3* (The Sims Studio, 2009), a ‘life simulation,’ and *Wii Fit Plus* (Nintendo, 2009), a workout game (Lindell, 2010). Digital games today, as seen in the disparate titles above, are aimed at wider audiences than in previous decades (Juul, 2010); and gaming has changed from being a marginal, sub-culture activity to becoming a prominent part of our mainstream culture (Castronova, 2005; Westecott, 2009; Juul, 2010); no longer a pastime only for adolescents (Findhahl, 2011), if indeed it ever was.

Games everywhere change with cultural and technological development. Today there is talk of ‘ludisation’ or ‘gamification’ (Deterding *et al.* 2011), a process whereby game elements are being incorporated into other fields, for example occupational training and military recruitment. Simulation games for firemen training rescue missions (Backlund *et al.* 2007) and games for post-stroke rehabilitation (Backlund *et al.* 2011) are some further examples. ‘Games for Good’ (McDaniel & Henry, 2010), like the game *Utförsäkrad[No longer insured]–The Game* (SVT, n.d.), are aimed at raising awareness of specific issues and aspire to bring about social change. These uses of digital games have changed the view of games as pure entertainment products (Brubaker, 2010). Gaming and game elements have spread far beyond leisure pursuits and into the sphere of work and production. The increased use of social network sites like Facebook for both work and leisure (Skeels and Grudin, 2009) and the increasing gaming on smart phones has further blurred the distinction between when and where we engage in games.

As games and game elements proliferate it becomes increasingly important to understand them. We engage in games for fun, relaxation, identity

² Micro transactions in digital games often involve buying in-game currency, items, or benefits which can be solely decorative or advance gameplay (see Oh & Ryu, 2007).

creation, social interaction, skills training, and so on. In his paper, *Fun in Games* (1961), Goffman asks himself how far you can go in treating fun seriously and goes on to show how games are structured by a sanctioned orderliness in social encounters, and so are no different from any other element of social life. So while games, mainly, are part of leisure and are engaged in because they are fun (Lazzaro, 2004), they are far from unimportant if we are to understand society (Huizinga, 1950[1938]). Studying digital games sociologically can offer insights into the everyday structure of the social world along with the role of digital technology in contemporary life. Caillois (1958) writes that the games a society engages in tells us something about that society—show me your game and I will tell you who you are. In other words, games are engaged in within a social structure and sometimes only make sense in a specific historical context. The increasing engagement with digital games today can be seen as a consequence of the increased leisure time available to us as well as the increasing digitalization of many life spheres.

Digital games and controversy

Digital gaming is part of a development of increased entertainment consumption (Williams, 2006a) and we engage in games in many different settings, from gaming as a family activity in the home (Eklund, 2013) to gaming on smart phones and touch pads when using public transport the games made to fill up small, leftover time fragments (Mortensen, 2009) and that help us maintain a ‘tactful inattention’ (Simmel, 1903) to others around us. Digital games have entered many of the spheres in which we are active and are prime examples of the use of digital and Internet technology. Digital games are in this sense typical for contemporary life. Studying the use and meaning of digital games therefore becomes a way of understanding the consequences of the digital evolution for our social lives.

Today we buy gaming equipment for our children to make sure they are entertained in the safe containment of the home, away from the perceived dangers of the outside world (Jenkins, 1998). In our risk society (Beck, 1999) digital gaming is perceived as safer than many other activities (Jenkins, 1998). At the same time, games are judged by their own inherent dangers as the latest in a long history of activities our youth need to be protected from. In the early history of digital gaming, arcades with coin games were said to have a detrimental effect on young people’s morals and discipline (Haddon, 1988); although these worries, Haddon (*ibid.*) suggests, probably had more to do with the street culture and working class environment of these places. More recently, digital gaming was blamed for the school shootings in Columbine in 1999 and several unsuccessful lawsuits against computer game companies followed (Cooley, 2003/4). Again in 2011, digital games were accused of playing a part in the Norwegian mass-shooting tragedy at Utøya. Yet, as Carbone and Ruffino (2012) have shown in a compari-

son of the two cases, in the latter it was more quickly dismissed and also contested both by experts and the media.

Research has shown that news reporting on games often reflects larger social issues of the time in question. For example, during the 1990's in the U.S., reports about gaming often dealt with single mothers in an increasingly technological world (Williams, 2003). The argument for terrorists training in virtual worlds, as was the case with Utøja, has been raised before (Castronova, 2005: 227-235) and is surely a reflection of a larger media awareness of terrorism in the world after the 9/11, 2001 terrorist attacks. However, the debate on digital games is becoming more nuanced and research is contesting the one-sided view of games as detrimental in themselves (see e.g. Bergmark & Bergmark, 2009). Today many point to the positive learning effects of gaming (e.g. Prensky, 2006). However, empirical research has put into question both positive and negative learning effects of games (Bennerstedt *et al.* 2012).

The term moral panic has been used to understand when different—especially youth—phenomena are construed as threatening the social order (Cohen, 1972). Digital games clearly constitute one of the later activities treated in this manner in mainstream media. Yet, the first decade of the new millennium was when digital games began their journey towards social acceptance (Juul, 2010), a process still in progress. For example, in 2008, on the family page of a leading Swedish newspaper we find a young woman being sent “*Congratulations on level 80*”³ (Enevold & Hagström, 2009: 12). Reaching the highest level in a digital game is apparently something worth commending and being proud of.

Digital games today dwell in this mix of the exotic and the mundane; a relatively new (re)created activity which still stuns us with technological innovations and colourful cultural forms. However, in this thesis on games from a sociological point of view, the attempted task is to peel away the exotic expressions of games and to investigate how they affect the structure of everyday social life; to look into the appropriation and use of games. This thesis is about some of that tension between the peculiarities of digital games and the commonplace. It is about what is new (if anything?) and what are just classic interaction patterns woven into novel designs.

The digital revolution has had an effect on our social lives, that much is clear. Reachability, constant access to others and they to us; almost unlimited access to information, and social connectivity over barriers of time and space are a few examples of the effects of digital technologies. Digital games utilize many technological possibilities and have even driven the development forward through constant demands for better graphics and more computer power; which has created a symbiosis between game developers and

³ In this case, level 80 refers to the highest achievable character level in the massive online game *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004) a very popular game in Sweden at the time.

hardware manufacturers (Williams, 2004). Digital games early on took the opportunities of the Internet seriously and gaming with people from all over the world is today commonplace. As contemporary examples of how leisure and interaction is being rethought in the digital era, one cannot help but wonder what consequences the new forms of play and games will have for our identities and our sociality.

The Sociality of Gaming

One important aspect of engaging in games has always been that games are collective enterprises (Huizinga, 1950[1938]). Engaging in digital gaming with others (Kerr, 2006) has been a part of the activity from the very beginning, indeed the first commercially successful digital game, *Pong* (Atari, 1972), was a two person game. When discussing digital games we should be aware that they have many things in common with their non-digital predecessors. Their ancestry can be traced in analogue games going as far back as the Egyptian board game *Senet*, a distant relative to backgammon dating from around the year 2700 BC (Juul, 2005). However, out of the many intersecting lineages that make up this complex medium, board games are only one predecessor (Haddon, 1988). Adventure games have a history going back to such pen-and-paper role playing games as *Dungeons and Dragons* (TSR, 1974), in turn inspired by the Fantasy literature of J.R.R Tolkien published in the 1950's (Veugen, 2004). Fantasy role playing introduced a new type of gaming where everyone could win, the game being a collaborative effort against the game (Fine, 1983); a game format that digital games have taken to heart. Yet another ancestry comes from sports and competition, as is obvious in the multitude of sports and racing games engaged in on computers and consoles. The strategic war games that were developed from amended versions of *Chess* during the late nineteenth century were among the first games to be adapted to a digital format, and strategy games are still a popular genre that has developed immensely in this format (Deterding, 2009a).

In 1970s gaming arcades, young people met to try the latest games and spend time. Local high scores were often of importance and watching and commenting on others' game performance was an important part of arcade gaming (Price, 1985). Games were more often than not engaged in with more than one gamer, but the introduction of high-score boards with personal signatures in 1979 for the game *Asteroids* (Atari, 1979) made even single player gaming into a social challenge (Bogost, 2004). Digital games consist of a multitude of game types embedded in digital technology, including entirely new types made possible by the technology. However, while digital games utilize computer and communication technologies, they are still games. All games consist of rules as well as narratives—fictional worlds—which give meaning to the rules (Juul, 2005). When we engage in a

game we interact with the rules of the game as well as the fictional setting of the game and this goes for an analogue game like *Monopoly* (Magie & Darrow, 1934) as well as a digital game like *Pac-man* (Iwatani, 1980).⁴ The rules determine the structure of the game. At the same time, the narrative interprets the rules for us and has a strong impact on the game experience (Begy & Consalvo, 2011).

The digitalization of games has allowed both rules and narrative to expand and grow more complicated and detailed (Juul, 2005). As the computer can ‘remember’ the rules for us, infinitely more complex rules are possible as well as more intricate game worlds and stories. Juul (2005) argues that because of games’ rule-based structure they share an affinity with computers, which is why the two technologies work so incredibly well together. Moreover, digital technology also makes it possible to engage more easily in games with several participants. The computer can either be the other participants or opponent or allow you to connect with gamers over the Internet, making it possible to game without being in the same place as other participants.

While digital games can be engaged in alone,⁵ the social aspects of digital gaming are a prominent part of the activity and always have been (Williams, 2004; Stenros *et al.* 2009). Today, even most single-user digital games have a multiplayer mode and/or online chat functions and score comparisons. Digital distribution systems like Valve’s *Steam* not only sell games, they also provide free voice chat services and social networking features across games, so that even when engaging in different games you can still interact with your friends. Even single-user games have been shown to be more social than they are given credit for, as they are connected to gaming culture and often are ‘parasocial situations’ where a partner serves as audience to the active gamer (Stenros *et al.* 2009).

Social aspects as well as social contexts for gaming are importation parts of this activity that in many ways embody the things we associate with contemporary digital media: social interaction, networking, and interactivity. Gaming needs to be understood as a socially situated praxis; the meaning of gaming cannot be understood solely by looking at the artefacts. Investigating social gaming is about looking at the practices of gaming together, but also about the meaning ascribed to the activity; what does gaming together entail?

⁴ There are of course games that exist chiefly on either side of rules and narrative. Some board games and digital games, e.g. *Tetris* (Pajitnov, 1984) or *Scrabble* (Mosher Butts, 1948), are mostly rule based, while *Live action role-playing* games (LARP) are often more focused on narrative than rules.

⁵ The first written reference to *Patience* (solitaire) is from 1798 (Parlett, 2008). Today, digital technology provides many types of such single-user games. You can now engage in gaming alone in the same way as people reading, watching TV or a film can singly engage in their chosen pastime. Engaging in games can be a way to explore a rich fictional universe and narratives where gamers engage with both rules and fiction.

Aims

This thesis is an explorative, in-depth study of a vital digital arena—digital games—where engagement in digital gaming is investigated in several case studies utilizing a mixed methods approach. How technology and society shape each other in a reciprocal process is a basic question of the thesis, since digital games both are shaped by and shape the lives of the individuals engaging in them. Digital technology has changed the basic premises of how we interact in society, offering new infrastructure through which we can act (Castells, 2001). It is therefore in the *form* of games—not in their specific content—that we can understand the role of digital games, and the aim here is to reach a sociological understanding of social digital gaming. More specifically, what does social gaming entail and what is its role as a social leisure activity? In the aftermath of the digital revolution, computer mediated communication (CMC) constitutes an intrinsic part of our lives and it seems difficult to imagine a life without the range of digital technologies available. Studying social gaming offers a window into the appropriation and use of digital media in our everyday lives.

The main focus of the research presented here is on social interaction, in, around, and through digital games. Study I focuses on the nature of social gaming based on what gamers themselves think of, discuss, and do with social gaming. It shows how understanding relationships between gamers is an intrinsic part of understanding social gaming. Study II builds on Study I and further investigates the dynamics of social gaming, exploring structures and practices using Swedish survey data. Study III investigates social interaction between strangers in an online game and explores the role of design structures for social interaction. Study IV, finally, explores the online-offline relationship and shows how important offline social context is for gender and sexuality construction and expression in online gaming.

Part 2: Background

Game and Play

The relatively short theoretical and conceptual history of digital games has taken most of its inspiration from the history and theory of play and games (not to be confused with economic game theory). Huizinga was one of the first to make the study of play and games⁶ a serious venture in the 1930's, followed by Caillois in the 1950's. These two in many respects very different researchers have shaped our understanding of games and subsequently also digital games. Huizinga (1938[1950]: 6-10) starts his book by postulating three assumptions about play/game that he subsequently explores:

- (1) *Play is freedom.* Play is a voluntary activity, we play because we enjoy it and it can be suspended at any time, we are not dependent on it.
- (2) *Play is not real life.* We step outside ordinary life to play. It is pretend, though not entirely frivolous; we can play a game with utmost seriousness.
- (3) *Play is distinct from 'ordinary' life both as to locality and duration.* Play is played out within certain spatial and temporal limitations. It takes place on a marked playground, mentally or physically; e.g. an ice hockey rink or a chess board. Play creates order; for a limited time we adhere to the local rules of play (and all play has rules).

These assumptions will be explored in the following paragraphs in relation to digital games. It should not be forgotten as well that Huizinga had much to say about the importance of play and games for the development of culture, and his theories and those of Caillois (1958) have been very influential for game studies.

Huizinga (1938[1950]: 13) defines play as, “[A] free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life and being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly.” This activity is not

⁶ Huizinga makes no distinction between the words ‘play’ and ‘game’ since in Dutch, the language he used, there is only one word for the two (Juul, 2005). English researchers writing on play and game tend to separate the two, with play more often the verb and game the noun. In the Scandinavian languages this linguistic separation is even more pronounced as both play and game are equally verb and noun. Since it is clear that Huizinga does talk about games, but sees them as more organized forms of play, this thesis uses both play and game even when writing about researchers originally writing in languages without this division, as a distinction is made here.

one that we need to perform in order to survive and it has nothing to do with our basic needs. So while playing has often been seen as a biological function, as Sutton-Smith (1997) has shown,⁷ play, according to Huizinga (1938[1950]: 9), rather is cultural. Play exists on a higher, voluntary level. Moreover, we step outside real life to play, a game is pretence, and we play simply for fun. Yet play demands that we follow the rules. For example, to put hotels on all squares in *Monopoly* (Magie & Darrow, 1934) would allow us to win faster but would not be playing the game. Here, to play by the rules is voluntarily to agree to take a less efficient path. Caillois (1958), following Huizinga, defines play as a free activity separated from ordinary life, where the outcome is always uncertain, i.e. we do not know beforehand what will happen. That play is outside ordinary life, for Caillois, is because play is unproductive; we do not produce anything of material value when we play. We may play for money or glory, but this is not the same as producing and therefore play is not synonymous with ordinary life. In pre-digital play and game theory games do not lead to any goal other than winning, they do not produce anything and they do not increase our wealth. In this tradition, continued by other works (e.g. Suits, 2005[1978]), games often gain a mythological shimmer, promising to teach us something profound about human nature. Caillois (1958), like Huizinga, also puts emphasis on the importance of rules.⁸ A basic idea is that we *play* games and games are seen as rule based play. Play is the activity of engaging in a game. Play, then, is a wider concept than games. Only some play activities can be seen as games, but all games are played. The definition of play as an activity we can freely choose—i.e. voluntary, free from the rules that govern other areas in life, limited to a play space and separated from the logic of production—has been a connective strand in research on engaging in games and is an essential part of many definitions of games. Salen and Zimmerman, in their influential *Rules of Play*, further build on this concept of game freedom with their focus on digital games as outside ordinary life, contending that, “*Games maintain a boundary from so-called “real life” in both time and space*” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004: 80). Caillois’ (1958) view is that games are freer than

⁷ In his book, *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), Sutton-Smith presents an extensive overview of the different uses of the play concept. One of these is research about play as a biological function for both animals and humans. In this tradition, play is seen as having a developmental, extrinsic function for the organism, and play between young people and between adults is separated as adults’ playing does not fit with the idea of play as preparation for life. Sutton-Smith contests this, arguing that while it is true that play can be found in a multitude of species and so clearly has some biological function it is more likely that this meaning of play is multiple for both animals and humans. For the study of animal play, he suggests play as skill (progress), play fighting (power), bonding (identity), flexibility (the imaginary), emotional experience (the self) (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 18-34).

⁸ Caillois (1958: 9) argues that play can be governed either by rules or by make-believe, but not both. Games are ruled, but make-believe is pretending, e.g. playing with dolls. This is in contrast to Huizinga who saw make-believe as also governed by rules. For Huizinga (1938[1950]) rules are more abstract in comparison with Caillois’s more formalist model.

society in general when it comes to social structures and limitations. When playing a game we are all bound by the same rules, the rules of the game. Juul (2005) furthermore argues that game rules separate games from the rest of the world into a space of their own, yet, he points out, games cannot always be said to exist outside normal life; games have negotiable consequences. An activity in which the consequences are not negotiable is therefore not a game. Juul (2005) gives traffic as an example of a structure that can be seen and talked about as a game but which does not have negotiable consequences, we have to follow the rules or we are in real danger, while *Chess*, for example, can be played as a serious competition with money or lives at stake, or for fun without any consequences; thus the same game can be played with or without real life outcomes. In formal definitions of games as structured play activities—and often in our common sense understanding of games—they have a carnivalesque nature, existing outside the drudgery of day-to-day life.

Games and rationality, why we are not ‘playing’ games

Rationality and work have traditionally been seen as the opposite of play (Huizinga, 1938[1950]). As Goldman and Wilson write, “*The essence of play, its lack of regulation, its disdain for material outcomes, its exaltation in uncertainty, is the antithesis of the work values of a technological world*” (1977: 1). Spariosu, in an investigation of how play has been understood in Western thinking, argues that play often is set up to symbolise the opposite of rationality (Spariosu, 1989). This is clear in contemporary ideas about play and games. Mortensen (2009: 15-16) emphasises the anti-rational and rebellious aspects of games and Suits (2005[1978]) goes so far as to name play the supreme human good; if all instrumental (rational) activity were abolished, playing would be all we do. We return to the idea that play is not something adult individuals engage in but an activity for children, separate from the logics of production. In the view of Sutton-Smith (1997: 4-5), however, engaging in a game is a form of play among many forms of play. Play as a concept is utterly ambiguous and in different contexts can mean completely different things, which makes the play concept problematic (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

To see that we always are playing games, with play defined as an ideal human activity where we are free from ‘society’, does not hold in empirical studies of digital games. For instance, in a discussion of gold farming,⁹ Dibble (2007) argues that it is an activity which is highly productive and in-

⁹ Gold farming is the practice of gathering objects or currency in a game and then selling these resources to gamers for ‘real’ money. Gold farming is often but not always banned by game rules and end user agreements (EULA). Larger game companies often have deals with sites like E-bay which forbid the selling of in-game currency and items. Gold farmers are often organized in company structures operating from low-wage countries such as China. Buying in-game currency is a way to save time in games with gamer controlled economies, but is often considered to be cheating by the gamer community (Consalvo, 2007).

strumental, but monotonous, with We can see several similarities to the Taylorist organization of work (Taylor, 1903). Today many digital games include the opportunity for gamers, as part of the game, to make money by selling items or in-game resources for 'real money'. For example the popular game *Diablo III* (Blizzard, 2012) has an auction house where gamers buy and sell virtual goods. As part of 'playing' the game, money can be made and trade engaged in.

In a study of *EverQuest* (Sony, 1999, henceforth *EQ*), a Massive multi-player online game (MMO), Taylor (2006) shows how some gamers focus on efficiency and instrumental play, implying a rational and goal oriented style of play even when the purpose of play is amusement. While for gold farmers gaming has a primarily productive function, Taylor's *EQ* gamers have a productive game style. Some gamers in Taylor's (2006) study attempt to make the most of their time in the game by undertaking actions to produce efficient reward patterns. Yee (2006) has also pointed out the blurring of play and work as he shows that MMO gamers often consider part of their gaming in similar terms as work.

The boundaries between play and work also blur in professional gaming (Nardi, 2010) and experiences from the social organization of large-scale online games can today be used to further one's work career (Prax, 2010). In two studies of an online game, Pearce (2006; 2011) notes that online games are productive; creative production for its own sake is part of gameplay. Aspects of repetitive gaming share characteristics with productive work and gamers have been shown to be producers (Taylor, 2006), where games can be seen as rational structures, forcing gamers through their design into rational behaviour with focus on optimization of effort and calculation of results (Grimes & Fennberg, 2009). Engaging in a digital game can be a rational activity where we are producers even when playing for fun. Games in this sense are rational structures comprising rationalisation processes of modern life (Eklund & Jonsson, 2012).

In a sociological study of contemporary game use we should therefore be careful not to equate gaming and playing, as play traditionally signifies freedom both because it is voluntary and because it is separate from production and so apart from ordinary life. Games can certainly be played, but then most structures are more or less playable (Genvo, 2009). There is a huge variety of human activities beyond engaging in games that can be played (Sutton-Smith, 1997). There is no sign of identity between play and game. As Montola expresses it, "*Systemic approaches implicitly assume that games are isolated from ordinary life because they are unable to explain the non-systemic outside reality...*" (2012: 307). In other words, games are often portrayed as isolated complete systems, with no effect on 'real life', and are seen, therefore, as being outside everyday life. Malaby (2007) argues that to see playing games as safe, fun, and separate from everyday life is not an intrinsic and universal feature of games when they are studied empirically.

While individuals certainly *play* at games, they do not do so all the time. Due to the theoretical, and sometimes ideological, luggage that comes with the term play it would seem highly imprudent to assume that all engagement in digital games is playing.

Still, games certainly, for most people, belong to the leisure sphere of life, as something not done as work but rather for fun. We work mainly for instrumental reasons, the goal of work outside of the activity, for example in the salary we are paid. With gaming, on the other hand, the means and the goal are generally the same; gaming as a leisure activity is pursued mostly for the activity itself; the point being made here that engaging in a game is a varying activity with multiple meanings that will differ according to purpose and context. Huizinga and Caillois made a great and commendable effort in putting the study of games on the agenda and realizing the importance of play and games in modern society. Yet, we should be careful of assuming that all engagement in digital games is of a playful nature. Moreover, we cannot always choose freely to engage or not in a game; games are not free from ordinary life. Cricket's strong alignment along class lines and role in the spread of English culture (Guttman, 1994), the resistance against female participation in the Olympics (Toohey & Veal, 2007), and the stereotyped inclusion of black people in digital games (Pace *et al.* 2009) are some examples of limitations of both types of freedom normally associated with play and games. In a game we are indeed governed by rules, but these are not free from the rules and norms in our ordinary life.

The alternative: an everyday life perspective

The ideas about freedom and 'unordinariness' presented above are not unique for play and games, but is a shared view on leisure in general that has permeated studies on activities we 'voluntarily' engage in. Play and game are often described by the same words as leisure (e.g. Kelly, 1983) and even equated with leisure (e.g. Goldman & Wilson, 1977). Leisure is irrefutably connected to the question of freedom of choice as it is the reward for productive work (Rojek, 2010). Leisure time is a relatively new phenomenon; as the working week decreased at the beginning of the last century, workers gained 'free' time, making the concept of leisure important (Goldman & Wilson, 1977; Fuehrer, 2010). Leisure time is one of the new aspects of modern society. Where free time historically has been something reserved for the affluent classes, today leisure time is something we take for granted and filling it with meaningful activities is a goal in itself. In this context digital games have in the last 20 years become a prominent part of many people's leisure, both young and old (Findahl, 2011).

Engaging in games is seen as something we do in our 'free time', a part of life that—contrary to production—is voluntary and liberated from all but the

game's own rules; it is free time because we can choose how to spend it. Gaming in leisure time has come to signify a part of our lives that is the opposite of the everyday and the drudgery of work, as it occupies a space in itself where different rules apply. However, as Lefebvre (1958[1947]) and later Rojek (2010) have shown, leisure and everyday life are far from free. Leisure is also about power (Rojek, 2010). Who can do what and when depends on access to resources such as money and knowledge. There are frictions, multiple meanings and power issues in leisure and gaming as in any other human sphere.

For Schütz (1967[1932]: 533-534) the reality of daily life is an inter-subjectively created 'world' that we take for granted and that is based in the here and now as we live it. It is the scene and object of our actions and interactions. Lefebvre lifted the concept of the everyday into focus and showed that by studying day-to-day routines we can better understand the social world around us (1958[1947]). For Lefebvre, the study of everyday life, constituted of work, family life and leisure, and the many interactions between these three (Lefebvre 1958[1947]:31), means looking at the mundane actions of our day-to-day routines.

Lefebvre (1958[1947]: 40) further claims that we cannot move beyond the everyday, yet leisure is experienced as the non-everyday in the everyday and it must at least appear to break away from the ordinary, to be exceptional, otherwise it cannot fulfil its role as reward for production. Yet Lefebvre concedes that leisure is not free from social structures (1958[1947]: 40). Schütz (1967[1932]) as well as Royek (2010) would argue that knowledge is of great importance here, we must know how to game in order to have access to gaming. To view games as freely chosen, voluntary and apart from everyday life becomes problematic as it assumes that play and games are ruled by other logics than aspects of human sociality. As mentioned above, research on digital games rather points towards a messy integration of gaming into everyday life.

This thesis takes a perspective based on the mundane practices of everyday life, where game/play does not equal freedom from the structures and logics that govern us elsewhere. Digital gaming is studied as situated in everyday life, in the social lives, practices and routines of gamers. In taking an everyday life perspective, gaming is studied as day-to-day practices that can tell us something about the usage and meaning of digital gaming as a contemporary activity.

Defining and understanding games

As this thesis is about the people engaging in games rather than the games themselves, only some brief remarks will be included here on the subject of what a game is. As is clear from the discussion above, this is far from an

easy question to answer. There are as many definitions as there are researchers.¹⁰ More recently it has been suggested that digital games have not yet found their form. As they are constantly evolving, attempting to establish a final definition is like trying to pin down a moving target (Mäyrä, 2008). Wittgenstein (2009[1953]: 36-41) claims the problem to be that there are no intrinsic characteristics that all games share, only a family resemblance. Games, Wittgenstein (2009[1953]: 36-41) argues, form a family because they share an overlapping criss-cross of similarities. The concept of the game is without boundaries; we all know what a game is and can talk about games even without an exact definition (Wittgenstein, 2009[1953]. 36-41).

If Wittgenstein is correct and we cannot define exactly and undoubtedly what a game is we can still understand them. What is true of any game, digital or not, is that it is created in the social situation in which it is engaged. In this thesis games are understood as dependent on the subject, the gamer, and created within a social context. Mosca (2011) asserts that the gamer is always at the centre of the game; the game is a 'user-created system' or an intentional state. A game is about culture and psychology, not everyone considers the same system a game (Mosca, 2011). This is not an uncommon position in game studies and others (see e.g. Mäyrä, 2008; Consalvo, 2009; Corliss, 2011; Crawford, 2012) claim that games only take form as they are engaged in. Aarseth (1997) early on named digital games *ergodic systems*, 'texts' that require input from the 'reader', where meaning is produced as the user interacts with the game.

If games come to be as they are engaged in, the theories of Erving Goffman become of use to us. While Goffman (1961) sees games as a separate reality where rules of irrelevance govern (we do not take into account things

¹⁰ Some influential examples are: Huizinga, 1950[1938]; Caillois, 1958; Suits, 1978[2005]; Juul, 2010. For Huizinga play is free and if play is ever forced upon us, it ceases to be play. Play is a rule governed activity that is an escape from the routine and responsibilities of our ordinary lives. Caillois further defines play as a free activity that is separate from ordinary life, with always uncertain outcome. Play is always unproductive and governed by rules or make-believe. Suits argues that playing a game is a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. There is a rule which can be defined outside or before the game, a prelusory goal, e.g. I want to cross the line first; but there are rules which prohibit the easiest way of achieving this goal, e.g. starting before the others or running across the infield. Lastly, we sport an attitude that we want to play the game, follow the rules. Juul defines games as, "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 negotiable" (Juul, 2005: 36). However, he continues to say that digital games often break away from this definition as they do not always have a valorised outcome; some digital games you cannot win in the classical sense. In a game like *The Sims 3* (The Sims Studio, 2009), the object is to create a character and let it live its life, leading to the description 'virtual doll-house'. Here we have what Juul calls a borderline case. One of Juul's critiques of Huizinga is that he saw games as having no material interest, something Caillois also argues against. Juul means that the outcome of games are negotiable, the same game can be played with or without real life consequences.

that do not matter for the game), he still admits that externally based matters seep into the game reality. For Goffman, obviously, there are no absolute lines between the understanding of the game and that of daily life. Fine (1983), in a study of fantasy role-playing games, uses Goffman's concept of frames to understand how gamers make sense of their gaming. A frame is an organizing principle that governs social events and our experience of them, and frames constitute social worlds (Goffman, 1974: 10-11). Fine (1983) developed the concept of frames to show that the otherworldliness of games lies in the frame which participants take towards the activity, and participants have no trouble orienting themselves to multiple frames at the same time. Fine (1983:185-186) also writes that, while gaming, fantasy gamers produce a fantasy world which is still grounded in the physical world, with the game frame grounded in what Goffman names a primary framework, our commonsense understanding of the world. Gamers can then 'key'¹¹ up and down between different frames.

Deterding (2009b) also suggests that using the concept of frames to understand digital gaming allows us to move beyond the worn out debate of what a (digital) game is and on to the question of how they come to be. The concept of frames allows a phenomenological approach. Linderoth (2004), in his dissertation on children's digital gaming, shows how gaming consists of several different interlocking frames. An example he uses is how it makes sense within a game frame to tell a friend, "*I died*," a statement which outside the particular game frame makes no sense (if you are dead how can you tell me?). Thus the game world can make sense to participants gaming together and sharing a certain frame at the same time as daily life also makes sense. This explains how games are integrated *into* rather than separated from ordinary life. In formalist approaches games are seen as isolated systems with no connection to reality (Montola, 2012), while in a frame perspective the game is a frame kept up by the gamers. Games, in this dissertation, are seen as frames in a Goffmanian sense rather than as objects. This means studying how meanings of games are socially and subjectively created; how games come to be.

To take a brief example, the MMO *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004. Henceforth: *WoW*) consists of several different game modes with varying gameplay options. *WoW* cannot be considered one game, but rather a platform for different games. The software will sanction certain framings by its material conditions and these different game modes will have different frames which will gain their meaning from gamers' engagement in them.

¹¹ Keying, for Goffman (1974:45-47), plays a role in determining what it is we think that is really going on in a certain frame. A situation can be keyed very differently, the same event can be primary, real, or pretend, e.g. a real fight or a fight on a theatre stage. It should be noted, however, that Goffman takes the term 'real' with a large amount of scepticism. Consalvo (2011) argues that for Fine, keying is rather a transition between frames, in contrast to Goffman who sees different keys as alternative versions of frames.

The meaning of a game—the relevant frame—will change over time and space, and different individuals will have different notions of what games and gaming are and what it means.

Often rules are pointed to as the underlying absolute, material structure of what a game is. The rules and underlying structure of the game are important, as Caillois (1958) and Juul (2005) have contended. Yet, these two take a very formalist approach to games, where rules are objective structures. Juul (2005) even calls them real in contrast to the narrative, which he designates as the non-real aspect of games. Yet to see rules as ‘real’ and narrative as ‘unreal’ becomes strange indeed, and as Montola expresses it: “*After all, rules only exist as social constructions; while their absoluteness is sometimes taken for granted, the practices of play show that rules are intangible, changing, and arbitrary.*” (2012: 303). Rules are constantly negotiated and changed even in digital games, constant updates and patches change rules that do not work and gamers also appropriate and invent new rules in games (see e.g. Jakobsson, 2007).

Moreover, not everything that gamers do in the games is stated or defined by the rules (Linderoth, 2011). Both the rules and the fiction of a game are based on the code of the game and so are *as* real and *as* socially constructed (Montola, 2012). As Consalvo (2009: 416) points out: “*Of course [game rules] apply, but in addition to, in competition with, other rules and in relation to multiple contexts, across varying cultures, and into different groups, legal situations, and homes.*” Game rules then, are important for the experience of the game, as both Huizinga and Caillois point out. Yet, their meaning is highly dependent on our cultural understanding of them, and certain games will be more or less prevalent in certain places and at certain times. Of course digital games, the focus of this thesis, in contrast to analogue games, are mostly engaged in using a screen (Kerr, 2006) and involve engaging with digital technology, which is an underlying material condition.

Social gaming

Social gaming can take many forms, from simultaneous, co-located (in the same physical space), co-operative games such as *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1985) to asynchronous (not simultaneous) competitive games of *Chess* over the Internet. Stenros *et al.* (2009) describe social gaming as a sliding scale which gradually becomes more social along the way. As endpoints they use examples of the most extreme types possible; at the one end a single player game engaged in by the creator alone and at the other, a multiplayer game which everyone in an entire society engage in. In a later study they divide social interaction in games depending on the number of participants, single/two/multi/massively multi/massively single-player and emphasises both social talk and social game-play as important for understanding

social gaming (Stenros *et al.* 2011). In a similar vein, Simon (2007) creates a scale of more intense social gaming with co-locative, multiplayer games at the top and single-user games at the bottom, which he argues are also social or at least multi-participant, as while gaming, the gamer interacts with artificial intelligence as well as with the designer of the game. Both approaches take as their defining factor how the gaming encounter is mediated; is it face-to-face or online? and are there one, two, or more participants? However, a problem in both models is the lack of a definition of ‘social’. As a result, contrary to the aim of the researchers, social context and social encounter become mixed up in the descriptions.

It might be theoretically interesting to consider gaming against or with computer controlled characters as a multi-participant event, something which if using Asplund’s (1987: 52-53) concept of *responsorium*¹² as the computer reacts to our input. Yet, this is difficult to operationalise in empirical research. To claim that all gaming is social gaming, since it takes place in a social context and in interaction with a computer, without defining what we mean by social makes the concept practically useless. In practice it seems genuinely complicated to create classifications for understanding social gaming, partly due to the many different ways gaming can be mediated and engaged in. Moreover, all gaming is situated within a social frame and so cannot be seen as completely isolated. Values from society, individuals in and outside of games, and the games themselves are all part of the social environment, which creates the context for engaging in games.

There are several versions of ‘social’ to take into account when talking about digital gaming. First, we have the culture in which gaming takes place,

¹² The fact that we interact with the game is for many what defines gaming as a digital medium, the interactive aspects are also often seen as the essence of digital games. Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 56) explain that interactivity in digital games takes place within a designed system; it is relational in that it involves a relationship between the gamer and the procedural (rule-based) structure of the game. Digital games are designed to be interactive systems, when we interact with the game it responds to our actions. For Asplund (1987) this response that we seek—foremost from other persons but also from objects—is at the heart of the following argument. According to Asplund we can gain social response from an object because we project certain characteristics onto it—a process of identification—and that in turn it ‘responds’ to us. These are cases of borderline social response. When we transfer this view to games, and especially to digital games, we can see that these games have opportunities to be responsive in themselves. When playing a game we interact with the game and it responds to us, to our actions. I press the button and the tile in Tetris slides into the position chosen by me. To borrow Asplund’s terminology; to play a digital game is to perform a *borderline social action*. The responsive aspects of games, the game mechanics and narrative, here comprising computer controlled characters among other things, respond to us and we ascribe to them certain human characteristics. We are oriented towards the machine because it responds to us when we interact with it; both on the rule and on the narrative level. To this we can add other gamers and move further down the scale towards social actions. This can explain some of the fun and attraction of games and gaming. We can satisfy, while gaming, one of our basic human needs according to Asplund (1987); to be responded to. I would, however, limit myself to calling these borderline social actions rather than social actions.

both a general culture and a gaming culture. The context of digital gaming, the gaming culture, consists of a complex weave of interactions between a wide array of invested parties. There are the gamers themselves, the game industry, and the journalists, reporters and others writing about games and gaming (Consalvo, 2007). Additionally, for example, single-user game experiences can be used as a resource in interacting with others and can be a means to achieving status (Consalvo, 2007). A game is moreover created by a designer who has encoded certain meanings in both narrative and rule structure that the gamer has to engage with. Secondly, there is the sociability of gaming. Sociability (Simmel, 1949[1910]); the idle talk gamers can engage in, in and around gaming. There is also the actual gaming together that can be done in a multitude of ways, the gaming encounter. Social gaming, therefore, comprise a mass of layers of ‘social’.

While gaming has a history of formal models creating classifications that build on the material conditions this thesis, in its phenomenological approach, argue that we cannot ignore how agents themselves define the situation. This is quite imperative.

Social action

It is likely that the ever shifting, contextual and user centred experience of gaming that makes the activity in itself so hard to pin down also makes social gaming difficult to define. A game can be engaged in/played in many ways, and often the same game can be engaged in both alone and together with others, so the social meaning of each game encounter will vary. Corliss (2011) states in his review of the field that a defining factor of games is that they are interactive. We are embedded in a virtual playscape that disciplines us into certain ways of acting and thus we become part of the game (*ibid.*). While interaction can be defined in many ways it is here conceptualized as simply the process in which we act on the game and the game acts on us. To engage in a game is to act within the designed structure of the game.

If we see gaming as acting within the structure of the game, then social gaming, as in interaction in the actual gaming encounter, can be seen as social actions. Weber (1922: 88-115) wrote that social actions are the building blocks of the world and that social relationships are created from and through them. Social actions are oriented to the behaviour of other persons, either present, past or anticipated in the future; in other words, they can be both synchronous and asynchronous. Others can here be individuals or groups; they may be known or unknown, present or absent, yet an action is social only when it is related to someone else; the action must derive its orientation in relation to another person. If we transpose this to gaming we can see that while single-user games might take place within a social context and might indeed be used as a social resource afterwards, the gaming encounter itself will not be social by this definition, since a consequence of social actions is social relationships. For Weber (1922: 118-120), a social relationship

exists when two or more people are oriented towards each other; when behaviour is reciprocally adjusted towards others with respect to the meaning which they give their behaviour. As long as gamers believe that they are gaming with someone else and adjust their gaming—their acting inside the interactive structure of the game—it can be defined as social gaming. Important, according to Weber, is the *subjective meaning* ascribed to the action.

Social action is a necessary part of social relationships. A relationship may be of many kinds—hostile, friendly, loving, sexual, violent, etc.—but without social action there can be no social relationship (Weber, 1922: 118), because be it a marriage, membership in a gaming guild, or a competitive online match with a stranger, all relationships consist only of this possibility for action. In this sense, an online session of the first-person-shooter game *Counter-Strike* (Valve, 2000) is a social gaming encounter as well as a co-locative game of the *SingStar* party game (London Studio, 2004-2009), in addition to a asynchronous game of digital Scrabble. Using Weber's concept of social action we can move beyond the normal distinctions of off-line/online, multiplayer/two-player, asynchronous/synchronous, and so on. Gaming is social when game actions are oriented towards the behaviour of other persons, whether physically close or not, known to us personally or not. As we engage in gaming with others, social relationships are created around the activity and these relationships can be life-long and deep or only last for a few minutes.

At the same time, gamers can engage in sociability both with other gamers and with other individuals not engaged in the game, whether physically present or connected through CMC. Talking with other gamers is of course a large part of the activity and constitutes social action in itself but is not necessary part of the encounter. In this case gaming functions as foci of activity, something around which social interaction and relationships can develop (Feld, 1981).

Social interaction

Simmel, a contemporary of Weber's, had a different focus on the social world. According to Lawrence (1976), Simmel sees sociation as the patterns and forms in which people associate and interact with each other. Simmel's sociology in general is based on a distinction between form and content. Social forms are abstract processes that look the same in different social contexts. Content, in relation to interaction, is rather the needs, drives, and purposes that lead individuals to enter into association with each other (Levine, 1971). Simmel himself gives several examples of common social forms: *Exchange*, the most common form of inter-individual life; individuals exchange such things as thoughts, love, goods (Simmel, 1907). *Conflict* between individuals or groups leads to change and protects individuals from indifference—the absence of interaction when humans no longer acknowledge each other as human beings—something entirely negative according to

Simmel (1908a). *Domination* is another form of interaction; the subjects united by the fact that the dominating person wants the condition of the other to be a product of their will (1908b). Sociability or pure sociality is defined by Simmel as the play form of association; that is, interaction free of meaning or purpose. Sociable talk, according to Simmel, is the only talk that is “*a legitimate end in itself*” (Simmel, 1949[1910]: 259). The pure social forms, for Simmel, are social constructs, a theory which helps us to understand society. In reality, he claims, no social actions are ever purely of one form or another. Yet, while content is heterogenic and varying, forms tend to be stable over different contents.

Interaction is certainly not consistent and can take several forms, which give the interactions different meanings. Simmel concentrated on the relational aspects and saw individuals as secondary, while Weber has the conscious acting individual as his main focus. Paying attention to relations offers a more dynamic perspective where we can see the unfolding of the social world (Emirbayer, 1997). Weber’s work has been categorised as methodological individualism (Udehn, 2002), a perspective Emirbayer takes as an example of substantialism, focusing on ‘things’ as the fundamental unit of enquiry. Emirbayer (1997) argues instead for a relational sociology where focus is on relations between actors rather than the actors themselves. We come to exist in relation to others and social actions unfold in transpersonal relational contexts, a perspective represented by Goffman among many other sociologists. This allows us to reconcile the idea that gaming frames are created in the relations between gamers acting socially together.

Sociality in the digital era

With the explosion of digital technologies and foremost the Internet, some conditions for sociality today are being rethought. Castells (2001) points out that the communication from many to many made possible by digital technology has promoted the emergence of a new societal structure, the network. Characteristic of networks is that they are flexible and changeable and that people to a larger degree choose whom they wish to be connected to. The effect of the Internet on social relationships is a complex issue, yet the very practices through which people interact with each other is one of the main agenda both for previous and future research on the new media and the Internet (Lievrouw, 2011). Benkler (2006: 356-377) suggests that we are seeing two main effects, first, a strengthening of pre-existing relations with family, friends, etc.; and secondly, the emergence of many looser relationships with weaker ties, as in virtual communities. With the aid of digital technology we both keep in contact with the people we already know and create new relationships. Around the turn of the last century, Simmel (1903) argued that modern society increasingly consists of intersecting rather than overlapping social circles, an early network perspective. This, he stated,

allows for more personal freedom at the same time as it reduces social control, for better or for worse. Both of these processes can be identified in online interaction; we are in some sense less controlled by local norms and more free to express our individuality. To give some examples, the opportunity for relative anonymity in online games has been argued to allow a certain amount of fluidity in identity creation (Filiciak, 2003). On the other hand we have griefing, a behaviour in online games that aims to disrupt others' gaming experiences. Griefing is common although deemed unacceptable by most gamers (Chesney *et al.* 2009), yet lack of social control makes griefing possible.

While early Internet research was quite enthusiastic about the new opportunities for sociality and identity construction online (see e.g. Turkle, 1997), we now know that much of Internet use is purely practical (Castells, 2001) and that online interaction is not completely disconnected from social control. In short, the use of Internet technology for communication and personal relationships is highly contextual and depends on our needs and desires, and the technology takes many different forms. Classic sociological theories of interaction, sociality and phenomenology in general, for example Goffman and Schütz, build on the idea of co-presence; that we are face-to-face with those we interact with. However, this is not a pre-requisite for Internet and communication technologies (ICTs). This precondition is broken and remade due to the structure of digital technology. Giddens (1990) points out that whereas in the pre-modern era, social space and physical place mostly coincided, now, in late modernity, through new technologies that allow us to sustain relationships with others located elsewhere, place (physical location) and social space (e.g. digital game worlds) have become separated. What communication technologies have accomplished, according to Giddens (1990), is allowing for time and space to separate.

However, there is no one-to-one relationship between face-to-face and online interaction. Interaction online takes on different shapes depending on access to information. Online we have no or limited access to things like facial expressions or body language and no access to smells and sounds; all of which are of great importance for Goffman's perspective on interaction, for example. Persson (2011) points out that online interaction in many ways is limited in comparison with face-to-face interaction systems, and that technical limitations of expression flows will make e.g. turn taking, framing and recoding, and so on more distinct and mechanical. Yet online interaction, as an example, often gives access to entire conversations saved in text form that one can go back to and review before answering. The point made in this thesis is that rather than seeing online interaction as limited, we would benefit more from seeing it as simply different. To compare online interaction with face-to-face interaction and judge it accordingly hides a normative assumption about preferred interaction. Recent research has shown that different communication situations and mediums, such as face-to-face, telephone

and e-mail, complement rather than replace each other in people's practices (Mok *et al.* 2010). They fill different functions and should not be measured on the same scale. Moreover, there are differences in interaction online, both due to the technology itself and to the different uses of technologies and platforms.

Simons *et al.* (2009) define two aspects of sociality in gaming, which goes well for understanding sociality online in general. 1) Designed sociality, i.e. the social architecture/structure of the game; 2) Played¹³ sociality, i.e. what gamers do. These two parts of sociality regulate social gameplay and are intertwined and dependent on each other. Yee (2009), studying computer mediated communication in the online game *EverQuest* (*EQ*, Sony, 1999), also argues that designed sociality matters. *EQ* is a difficult game to master alone as the different game characters are highly dependent on one another. This dependency on others fosters a culture of seeking and providing assistance, and through the many crises occurring in *EQ*, gamers quickly learn about the importance of trust. The social architecture of *EQ* provides ways for gamers to help other gamers and is partly a manner of social engineering (Yee, 2009). What we can see is how Internet platforms, like digital games, allow for different interactive behaviour. These opportunities or allowances of the technology users will take up and use or reject as they see fit. Played sociality (Simons *et al.* 2009) is important for online social life. Different games and Internet applications will therefore afford different social behaviours at the same time as the users make use of game structures to suit their own needs and wants.

Gaming together in previous research

The early history of digital games took place almost entirely in arcades where games, more often than not, could be engaged in with more than one gamer. Later, technology became a home product and in the 1970's gaming started to move into the home¹⁴ Since then the question of whether gaming fosters or hinders social relationships has been an issue and continues to be so through the development of game technology. Gaming in the home was early on described as a bedroom culture where isolated children sat alone (Pasquier *et al.* 1998). However, research has indicated that in families with children gaming platforms are often placed in communal areas of the home, so that gaming as a home endeavour can still be a collective one (Aarsand and Aronsson, 2007).

¹³ The original terminology of Simon *et al.* (2009) has here been maintained. While creating a discrepancy through using the notion of 'play' it was believed that due to transparency and repeatability it would be more advantageous to keep the original terminology.

¹⁴ However, it did not become truly popular as a home product until the late 1970's (Haddon, 1988).

Still, early on digital games were perceived as being solitary activities, in contrast to analogue games (Zagal *et al.* 2000). At the same time, social aspects of gaming were also highlighted and focused on and especially online gaming is a well researched field of social gaming. Here the development started with the text-based multi-user dungeon games (MUDs) which date back to the early 1980s. These collaborative adventure games were developed and spread through university computer networks as this technology was not available in many other locations. MUDs, although entirely text based, got people together to engage in games and later also text based chat rooms emerged (MOOs). MUDs, while popular, were not mainstream activities and were mostly populated by early adopters of Internet and computer technology. As the Internet became more widely available and technological advances increased computational power, online games gained graphics and larger user bases and today massive online games are giant 3D worlds engaged in from all over the world. For example, at its peak *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004) had 12 million active subscribers from all continents across the world (Blizzard, 2008).

Digital games are games mediated by computer technology, which in itself has some inbuilt opportunities, via the Internet, for social interaction. Simon *et al.* (2009) write in their study of *EverQuest* (Sony, 1999): “*Indeed, playing this game depends on social interaction no less (and perhaps no more) than other aspects of a player's everyday life.*” (p. 1). Gaming over the Internet is a prevalent pastime today and while many forms of online gaming now exist, from *Wordfeud* (Hbwares, 2010) on Smart phones to Facebook games such as *Farmville* (Zynga, 2009); it is the large-scale MMOs that have received the most attention from the research community.

MMOs constitute social spaces with inbuilt possibilities for social interaction where individuals together take part in different adventures (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004). The social interaction is the key attraction and the unique selling point of these games (Williams, 2006b; Cole & Griffiths, 2007) and the design for interaction between gamers is a basic condition. ‘Gamer interdependency’, guilds, grouping and other social engineering features of games are ways in which developers foster a social engagement within the game and support interaction (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Ducheneaut *et al.* 2006). In online games, communication between gamers takes place partly through written messages and sometimes through the use of voice chat programs that give access to private channels where gamers can talk to each other in real time. In MMOs gamers can compete against others, work together and have the opportunity to build lasting relationships (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004; Kolo & Bauer, 2004). Jakobsson and Taylor state that, “*The production of social networks and the circulation of social capital prove to be one of the most important aspects in EQ [Sony, 1999].*” (2003: 88). In order to function, gameplay is dependent on high levels of trust and cooperation (Chen, 2008).

Research on offline gaming contexts often focus on different meeting places for game users such as game/Internet cafés (Lin, 2005; Sjöblom, 2008; Jonsson, 2010), LAN-parties¹⁵ (Jansz & Marten 2005; Taylor & Witkowski, 2010) or game clubs (Jakobsson, 2007). These places are specific gathering places for gamers with a focus on the shared physical space and collaborative practices. These public game locations tend to cater to a relatively homogenous group of young men, and homophobic and sexist tendencies often permeate the social interaction (Jonsson, 2012), even if the presence of women seems to be on the increase (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). These masculine structures, even if not yet researched as such, are not something exclusive to digital gaming but are part of a general culture of male pastimes, see e.g. football (soccer) (Renolds, 1997).

Putnam suggests that “*The technological transformation of leisure*” (2000: 74) is one possible reason for a decline in civic society; that media isolate us from one another. In addition, Oldenburg (1999) argues that modern media are one of the roots of an abandonment of the so-called ‘third places’, e.g. pubs, hairdressers or local cafés, venues where people have unique opportunities for social interaction, making them part of a community and offering the chance of relaxation. Since then research has shown that this is not the case with online media (e.g. Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006); that MMOs can be considered third places (Ducheneaut *et al.* 2007), spaces for informal sociability that give the opportunity for bridging social capital (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006), and that these social properties are the main reason why we should study digital games (Williams, 2006b). Even instrumentally focused gamers are ‘forced’ to be social in these types of games, since collaboration most often is the only way to progress (Taylor, 2003). In her dissertation Jonsson (2012) further shows that game cafés can be considered third places, for although limited to a certain clientele of young men, they still offer a sense of ‘home away from home’.

Online and offline

Today we live our daily lives surrounded by digital media with computer mediated communication (CMC) in common use (Findahl, 2011). People’s social networks are complemented by the Internet, mobile phones and other such technologies. The Internet, one of the most widespread of these systems, has in the past decade grown exponentially from roughly 360 million users in 2000 to 2.4 billion in 2012 (Internet World Stats, 2012). In Sweden the percentage of home-based Internet users is high—nationwide 89 percent;

¹⁵ A LAN party can be anything from a few friends gathering with computers to game together to Dreamhack, the largest LAN party in the world with 20000 visitors in 2010. Dreamhack takes place in Sweden each year over a couple of days and calls itself a digital festival.

in the ages 12-64 over 95 percent (Findahl, 2012)—and in the last eight years the percentage of people using the Internet on an everyday basis has increased from 25 to 69 percent (Findahl, 2011).

The Internet and other digital technologies have changed our access to information, and the Internet's capabilities for person to person connectivity have had a deep impact on many aspects of life. Online gaming is a substantial part of digital gaming and Internet technology is an integral part of digital gaming, not only to game but also to search for game information and to connect with other gamers. In this thesis both online and offline gaming has been of interest and perhaps nothing has been more prominent in the debate about digital technologies and social relationships than the division between online and offline. The debate often focuses on the argument that offline is the same as 'real life' and that online is virtual and therefore less real. Much research has focused on the virtual aspects of online life and early game and Internet studies often spoke of the disconnections of the virtual and the fluidity of identity that these spaces afforded due to the separation from the physical (Turkle, 1997; Filiciak, 2003). This division has been both criticised and defended, but in studies on digital gaming the dominant tradition has been to separate the virtual from the physical; that is, digital games as purely digital spaces with no connection to offline place (Crawford 2012). There is also a more general tendency in studying digital technologies to overstress the separation of the virtual from the material (Williams 2006b), as well as the deterritorialisation process of these technologies (Morely 2011). Central to this division is the issue of sociality and whether these technologies limit or enhance users' social lives (Williams 2006b).

All cultures are based on communication processes, the production and consumption of signs. We are experiencing and always have seen our reality through symbols or metaphors; all representation is symbolic and should therefore be considered virtual (Castells, 1996). Reality has always been virtual because it is perceived through the symbolic representation of language. As Slater (2002) has argued in relation to the Internet, virtuality is not a property owned by digital technology. We can see virtuality not as something inherent in digital games, but rather as something relational, a social accomplishment of people engaging with games. New media are often given a unique status as they first arrive, only to soon be incorporated into everyday life. Slater (2002) also notes that new forms of mediation in general have been experienced as virtual because at the time they seemed to be replacing earlier forms of interaction which had been seen as 'real'. As Morely (2003) suggests, communicative actions must be contextualized, they are social practices among other social practices of which gaming together is one. When studying social interaction and digital technology we need to pay more attention to the social circumstances if we are to understand how the social situation is created and its social meaning. Electronic media are no different; its symbols represent as real a reality as any that has existed be-

fore. This line of thought is prevalent today in Internet research (e.g. Benkler, 2006) and is also seen in how Internet users make sense of their experiences. We should therefore connect online and offline and study effects and influences in both areas at the same time as they are linked in everyday life (Williams, 2006b).

Instead of talking about online and offline as distinct places, therefore, it would be better to differentiate between space and place; the separation of physical locations (place) and digital social worlds (space) (Giddens, 1990). Digital game worlds are social spaces that do not coincide with physical space; yet they are inexorably linked through the people using and making these spaces. Online social spaces are not disconnected from the physical; we cannot leave our 'meat' behind as in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984), where he coined the term Cyberspace subsequently used by Internet researchers. We can game with people not located in the same place as ourselves and we can engage in asynchronous (non-simultaneous) gaming, yet gamers are not disconnected from their offline social context. Norms and values are brought online and shape online social spaces and interaction. This thesis argues that instead of focusing on the online/offline division as such, we should see any such barrier as highly contingent on the practices engaged in.

The online/offline symbiosis is important for the focus of this thesis and the separation or coalescence of the two is explored in all of the studies. In game studies there are a few examples of research that connect online and offline, e.g. Taylor (2006), in her research on *EQ* (Sony, 1999), connected online and offline in method as well as in results, showing among other things how people often game with friends and family. Another example is Orleans and Laney (2000), who argue that virtual and real communities reflexively construct each other; and while relations in each can exist separately, in practice they rarely do. In their study, children brought their everyday life experience to bear on their online communication and the opposite, that their online experiences were integrated into day-to-day, offline, talk.

Digital gamers

Digital games are games mediated by technology. We engage in them on a screen; they take electricity to run and perhaps most important, the computer upholds the rules (Juul, 2005). Juul (2005) suggests that this is why games have adapted so well to our new technologies. Today computers have the capacity to uphold complex rules as well as convoluted fictional worlds, and as the computer frees us from the onus of ourselves keeping track of the rules and maintaining the narrative, they can escalate in complexity. There is no need to remember it all; if a move is not permitted the computer will not allow it. From early arcade games like *Space Invaders* (Atari, 1976), to

modern MMOs like *Star Wars–The old republic* (Bioware, 2011) built around the rich and intricate Star Wars universe, games have changed in form as well as gained in complexity; but as digital gaming developed so did the gamers.

Early digital games were not aimed at any specific market. Rather, anyone could and did engage in these games and game consoles were marketed as family entertainment. The first commercial digital games were adult activities, as arcade games first made their appearance in pubs (Williams, 2006a). But in the market collapse of the early 1980's the leading American company, Atari, went under; the medium was declared dead and the video games hype seemed over. This lasted until Japanese Nintendo released their Famicom console in 1983—known as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in the West—which revived the game medium. To find a market segment Nintendo aimed their product at children and foremost boys, and so started a trend that is still visible in advertising and game development today. Krotoski (2005) shows that before this, the gaming industry at the time aimed games at everyone—men and women, old and young alike. The shift of focus towards young men changed ideas about who the consumers of digital games were. This strategy in production and marketing that still prevails has largely excluded a female audience. During the 1980's and early 1990's, digital games were seen as boys' toys and game developers were/are almost solely men (Haddon, 1988), as in many technical industries. Since then we can identify three major waves of social and technological changes that have affected the uses of the game medium. The following short exposé is not meant to give a full or in-depth historical review of the development of digital games, but rather is meant to offer the reader the historical context.

In the mid-1990's the first 'pink games' wave hit the game industry in the wake of the very successful *Barbie Fashion Designer* (Mattel, 1996). Game companies making games for girls cropped up, some aiming to make more money by broadening the audience and some trying to encourage female gaming, as it was argued that it provided important technological knowledge (Beavis, 2005; Hayes 2005). Pink games are still flourishing, although they have been heavily criticised for polarising the market into girl and boy games and also ignoring adult women (Kafai *et al.* 2008). Gender stereotypes and female inclusion in game culture is still a controversial and hotly debated topic as will be discussed further on. During the 1990's another change came with the spread and growth of the Internet, and a whole new genre of games that could be engaged in together with others online. These MMO games attracted an older and more mixed user group (Griffiths *et al.* 2003), and some have argued that they also opened up the game medium further for women (Taylor, 2006).

A third major change peaked around 2005 and has been called *A Casual Revolution* (Juul, 2010). Due to technological advances and a more mature industry, digital games were being developed that attracted an audience pre-

viously not familiar with the medium. Digital games run on a web browser became popular, as well as such party games as *Guitar Hero* (Harmonix, 2005) and *SingStar* (London Studio, 2004). In 2006 the Nintendo Wii, advertised as a family entertainment machine, was released. Digital gaming today comprises more than the classical Super Mario or First-Person-Shooter games that often get to symbolise this medium. There are now so-called social media games, e.g. Facebook games, casual games like the puzzle game *Bejeweled* (PopCap, 2001) or online Scrabble, MMO games, *Nintendo Wii Fit* (Nintendo, 2007). Smart phone games like *Angry Birds* (Rovio Entertainment, 2009), touchpad games, and much more are genres and platforms for digital games that have expanded the medium. In contrast to the digital games one used to buy from a retailer in a box, there are a multitude of, quite often free, web browser based games available online or as apps for mobile phones.

The question of who engages in digital games has been posed many times and resulted in different answers. Juul's (2010) view is that in the casual revolution digital games became more diverse and also less stigmatized. Dividing gamers into hardcore and casual has been one of the bases for understanding different gaming styles, where hardcore implies spending a lot of time on games and taking gaming seriously as a hobby, while casual implies that gaming rather is considered a way to pass the time. Often these 'identities' intersect with ideas of gender in gaming, where casual gamers tend to be designated as women and hardcore gamers as men, highlighting a persisting gender hierarchy in regard to digital gaming. Casual is, moreover, a label often pinned on games that are easy to learn and to engage in.

Kerr (2006) uses the terms hardcore and mass-market to describe a similar division, where Royse *et al.* (2007) use the terms power gamers and moderate gamers. Juul (2010), even though using both terms, questions several assumptions that this division rests on, showing, for example, that casual and hardcore gamers can spend similar amounts of time on games. Kallio *et al.* (2011), analysing interview data, argue for a set of gamer mentalities that users have towards games and of which a gamer may possess several. These are divided into nine ways of gaming, split up by intensity of gaming, sociability of gaming, and what games are engaged in. They do, however, subdivide their nine mentalities into dedicated and casual, sidestepping the hardcore. These mentalities are not categories of gamers but rather a dynamic ebb and flow of attitudes, experiences and practices (Kallio *et al.* 2011). In a similar vein, Juul (2010) points out that during her career a gamer will pass back and forth between hardcore and casual along with life changes.

While many of the distinctions between different types of gamers are highly arbitrary and sometimes build on false assumptions, there is at least one difference between gamers that have gaming as a genuine interest and gamers that game to relax or pass time (see e.g. Royse *et al.* 2007). In this dissertation, when it is necessary to distinguish between gaming as a hobby

or foremost a casual activity, the terms dedicated and casual are used rather than the more common casual/hardcore division. These are also considered game styles rather than identities and gamers can and do move between them. As Juul (2010) shows, the division into casual and hardcore builds more on preconceptions than on descriptions of practice. Hardcore also draws on notions of authenticity, where hardcore gamers, in contrast to casual gamers, are seen as the 'original', real gamers, highlighting aspects of power and access.

Number of gamers

It is difficult to know how many engage in digital games, yet there are some figures to be found, both from the industry and from research. The statistics are predominantly West oriented. Statistics from other parts of the world, such as Asia and Latin American, are scarce and the producers and audiences themselves are in many cases quite distinct. The fast rate of expansion and technological development also makes numbers rapidly outdated. The following are some examples which therefore should be taken with some caution.

In 2005, the BBC ordered a major survey of the British digital game market. The report showed that in the UK 37 percent of 16-49 year olds were active gamers, defined as engaging in a digital game at the moment on either a console (stationary or portable) or a computer (Pratchett, 2005). In North America, every year the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) releases a report on U.S. consumers where there is, however, scant information on methodology. In 2012 the ESA reported that 49 percent of households owned a dedicated gaming console, that the average U.S. game user was 30 years old, that 37 percent were over 36 and that 47 percent of gamers were women (ESA, 2012). The European equivalent to ESA is the Interactive Software Federation Europe (ISFE). In 2010 ISFE released new figures suggesting that one in three European men engaged in digital gaming and one in five women. A research report from the University of Tampere reported in 2007 that 53 percent of the Finnish population engaged in digital games (Kallio *et al.* 2007). In Sweden, survey data from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs showed that in 2006 75 percent of Swedish adolescents (13-20 year olds) engaged in digital games at least a few times per month. Even though the numbers vary, they nevertheless indicate that digital gaming is becoming an activity that many people participate in, old as well as young.

Gender and gaming

Women constitute a growing group of gamers, estimated at approximately one-third or even half of the current market (ISFE, 2010; ESA, 2012; Findahl, 2011). Yet digital gaming has traditionally been seen as a male activity

(Hayes, 2005) and men are still the expected gamers (Yee, 2008; Williams *et al.* 2009). Female inclusion has therefore been hard won, making gender and gaming still important issues (Kafai *et al.* 2008), as there continue to exist social structures surrounding gaming that limit women's participation (Taylor, 2008; Yee, 2008). Women who do engage in games are often considered the odd one out in comparison with male gamers who are seen as the core of gaming culture, while women are considered casual Facebook-game users (Juul, 2010). Market research geared at uncovering what 'special' games women want (asking only women not engaged in gaming) reinforces this trend (Jenkins & Cassell, 1998). Often games for women are either seen as specialised products compared with 'real' games, for example the digital game *Desperate Housewives: The Game* (Liquid Entertainment, 2006), which was hailed by some for its close connection to the TV series and scorned by others for its simplistic game mechanics and product placement (metacritics.com, 2012). When it comes to online gaming, women also tend to systematically underreport their gaming habits, even in anonymous surveys (Williams *et al.* 2009), making it difficult to estimate how many and how much women do engage in digital gaming.

Research on women and games is wide-ranging. Some studies have looked at what games women engage in and how women game, and in what way this differs from male gaming (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998; Schott & Horrell, 2000; Carr, 2005; Jenson & Castell, 2005). Studies on how women are stereotypically represented in games are also frequent (Kennedy, 2002; Beasley & Standley, 2002), showing how traditional ideas about women as passive and men as active permeate game characters. Often these gendered structures intersect with how race or ethnicity is represented (Pace *et al.* 2009), where whiteness is often the default setting and black depicted as hypermasculinity (Higgin, 2009).

It has often been argued that it is these representations that have slowed or hampered women's engagement in games. However, research has shown that social context is of utmost importance for understanding gaming habits. A study of female gamers by Schott and Horrell (2000) shows how household duties often came in the way for female gamers and how access to gaming equipment was subject to negotiations in the family (*ibid.*). Crawford and Gosling (2005) show that although gaming still is considered a predominantly male pastime, women do game, but often find alternative settings such as gaming on mobile phones. Carr (2005) also showed that many gender differences disappeared when taking previous knowledge of games into account.

It has been pointed out that women are not one unified group but have different gaming patterns and motives for gaming (Royse *et al.* 2007). Jansz *et al.* (2010) suggest that the gender differences in gaming patterns might be much smaller than the in-group differences (women/women and men/men). In game studies, the issue of gender is often passed over or ignored, or when

debated often reinforce stereotypical ideas about men, women, and technology (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). In this vein, we still know very little about women that do engage in digital gaming (Taylor, 2008) or indeed the relations between masculinity and gaming (Searle & Kafai, 2012). Research on gender and gaming often searches for differences between men and women as two distinct groups (Jenson & de Castell, 2010), segmenting ideas about differences between male and female gamers.

To avoid reproducing tropes about men/women and technology, a distinction between gender and sex is necessary. Gender, in Butler's work, is not a stable identity, but rather performative (1990). By acting out gender on our bodies we create it. Gender, therefore, not *is* but rather *becomes*. Gender is always a process of actions, but one where there is no subject prior to the actions; we create ourselves through actions as intelligible subjects to ourselves and others. "*Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being*" (Butler, 1990: 43-44). Through our acting out of gender on our bodies we create the illusion that sex is ontological. This Butler (1988) calls 'essence fabrication'. However, she says, we need only to look at the regulatory system that surrounds gender performances and how 'doing wrong' is punished to realize that gender isn't pre-discursive (Butler, 1988). By claiming that gender is performative, Butler does not mean that gender is an everyday choice; she emphasizes repetition in performativity using the term iterability, which she defines as "*a regularized and constrained repetition of norms*" (Butler, 1993: 95). Iterability implies that gender is not a single act or acts to be performed separately but rather a ritualized series of acts under restraint (Butler, 1993).

A necessity in the binary gender division is that you are your gender by virtue of *not being* the other gender. The polarity of the sexes makes heterosexuality into a grounding factor for the binary division of gender and a forced discourse on heterosexuality. Sexuality and gender both constitute the essence of our gender identity. For our gendered acts to be intelligible they need to take place within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

Butler argues that the historical context and time are critical for understanding how gender and sexuality are made. Halberstam (2005) shows how time and space can be used to escape the heterosexual matrix and therefore the restrictions of the binary gender division in what she calls queer practices. Halberstam's terms, queer time and queer space, show that in queer practices there is room for alternative performances. In a queer subculture where time and space create new possibilities, our body—or idea of the body—as focus for the identity can express itself differently (Halberstam, 2005). In different locations—different historical specific contexts (and according to Halberstam there are many such subcultures)—people can find ways of performing 'wrongly' where they are not punished for it. Halber-

stam, like Butler, sees resistance in doing wrong; in performing acts that challenge notions of femininity and masculinity in different bodies.

In the early research on gender and the Internet, online spaces such as game worlds were said to feature some of the practices that Halberstam argues are defining for queer practices; especially the possibilities for deconstruction, new performances, and use of different bodies. Yet contemporary research has shown how offline ideas and structures affect us online and that norms of sex permeate online identity constructions. Norms of gender, heterosexuality and race become clear in a place where users are interpreted against a male, white, heterosexual model (Sundén, 2002).

However, an approach focusing on the performance of gender in relation to technology can avoid segmenting traditional stereotypes as gender expressions become disconnected from sex. Masculine and feminine acts can be performed disregarding sexual identity. This allow us to see when norms are being broken and conflicted at the same time, as for most people in their everyday practice, gender and sex appear to be the same even if they themselves break the link between gender and sex. Gender is a social construction, yet, like institutionalised social constructions in general, it is experienced as objective and natural in day-to-day life.

Part 3: Methodology

A mixed methods approach

Different research methods often have different theoretical backgrounds, which impose certain perspectives on reality (Berg, 2009: 5). Each method therefore gives a slightly different insight into the piece of reality studied. The act of combining several methodological approaches to coalesce these different insights is often called triangulation or a mixed methods approach. In Brannen (2005), what distinguishes the two is that in triangulation the goal is to corroborate the results, while in mixed methods this is only one of four possible outcomes; corroboration, elaboration, complementarity, and contradiction (Brannen, 2005). Although a common way of utilizing the mixed methods approach is to combine some type of qualitative analysis with e.g. a quantitative survey, this simplification of the approach has been criticised by Small (2011), who suggests that we should instead divide our methodological approach into three phases: 1) What data has been collected? 2) How has it been collected (what methods have been used)? 3) How has the data been analysed? He then separates mixed data-collection studies, the first two, from mixed data-analysis studies, as in the third category. This he proposes as a way to avoid simplification in using the terms qualitative and quantitative, as these can be defined in so many ways and as such are not enough to determine a mixed method approach. When and how to implement mixed methods depends on what goals one wishes to achieve. Yet, if we want to call it mixed methods, we must at some point integrate the results from our different methods and analyses. While one study can follow on another we must at least interpret the results together (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

In the work on this thesis it was early on realized that using only one method would not be enough to explore the phenomena at hand. Instead, several different methodological approaches were deemed necessary to fully answer the research questions. The thesis project as a whole was therefore constructed with a mixed methods approach, with studies following each other and results interpreted as a whole in the thesis. A mixed data-collection approach was used as both data and methods were mixed. Different analytical approaches have been used, however, each data set has been analysed using only one analytical method. The different data and methods used have yielded different viewing points into the phenomenon of social gaming. The

benefits of mixed methods are many and as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 15) express it: “*Taking a non-purist or compatabilist or mixed position allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research questions.*” For this thesis, different data were collected with different methods in order to corroborate, elaborate, complement and possibly contradict each other as well as to offer different insights into the issue of social gaming.

The fact that many questions remained unanswered by research at the initiation of the thesis project made it necessary to start broadly and open-mindedly, with an explorative interview project in Study I. A survey followed in Study II with questions developed from the first study and the data analysed using quantitative multivariate models. This allowed the preliminary results from Study I to be transformed into survey questions in an attempt at generalisation and so to corroborate, complement and contradict the interview results. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative analyses allowed the results in Study I to be compared in a sample that could be generalised. Brannen (2005) suggests that when using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, “*Typically we found that the two types of data analysis were broadly complementary, providing different insights into the different aspects of the social phenomena which constituted our field of interest.*” (p. 180).

Study III was added to answer issues raised in Study I, which those data due to their nature were unable to answer, and to study the influence of the structure for social interaction, here the design structures of games. Study III complemented the thesis project with interaction data collected in a game to further study what happens in the actual moment of gaming, something not possible with the other methods. Interaction analysis allows us to investigate when people interact with each other and the surrounding structure (Jordan & Hendersson, 1995). By using video recording technology we can identify regularities in interaction and understand the complex social and material worlds actors operate in (*ibid.*). Study IV, while also utilizing interviews, had a distinct analytical focus on female gamers, the more detailed analysis of gender constructions and gaming adding to the fuller picture of the thesis. These interviews took place before the data gatherings of the other studies and explore a theme of importance in the data used in both Studies I and II, but that could only be partially explored in Study II, due to gender not being an explicit focus in the data gatherings. The analyses of this data, however, took place partly at the same time as analyses for Study I and III and themes between all the three studies were worked back and forth together.

In the thesis the data collected do not map exactly on to each other, the different methods are too dissimilar in their basic form; nor was this the aim of the data gatherings. The purpose of using a mixed methods approach was to be able to explore social gaming in different ways and so enhance our understanding of the theme at the heart of this work; different methods offer-

ing different views of the subject. Brannen (2005) furthermore argues that drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data can be done in all stages of the research from shaping the concepts and ideas at the start of the inquiry, influencing the process of analysis and finally in the last stage to draw conclusions.

The mixed methods approach has been a great asset for this work and has provided insights not possible with only one method. Denzin (1978) describes methods as a kaleidoscope. Depending on what method we choose; and how we turn the kaleidoscope we will see different realities. This has been clear in the present work, as each data set has offered its own way of looking at and understanding the research focus. The different sub-studies have followed and built on results from the previous ones and can, as previous research, be allowed to build on each other and in this extended introduction be brought together and analysed as a whole, something that otherwise only possible in Study III. The process has been difficult at times—the necessity to familiarise oneself with different analytical techniques taking a great deal of energy and time—and has also depended on some amount of luck, not least being able to find collaborators for the survey, which would have been difficult or perhaps even impossible to carry through without assistance in its execution.

A phenomenological perspective

This thesis has been explorative in nature from the start. Digital gaming as such is still expanding and changing its form and this has necessitated the keeping of an open mind towards the subject matter. The results and structures of the thesis have therefore grown in an organic way throughout the research process. Some things have changed, the mixed methods approach was added partway into the process; some have remained the same, foremost the data driven approach which has been key in the work from the beginning. The methodological perspective that has guided this thesis and worked as a guiding light throughout the explorative process is the idea of the social construction of knowledge. A phenomenological understanding and approach was assumed that aided the explorative nature of the project and focus on the everyday. This means that the subject at hand is social reality and that our understanding of this social reality is based on the people we are studying and their experience of this reality (Bryman, 1995). This perspective has guided the work in all of the sub-studies.

Schütz (1967: 9) argues that we must study social action with the terms and interpretations that the agents themselves use. We still assume that social reality exists when we study society, but it can only be understood from this perspective, which has been called the ‘first order of construction’ (As-

pers, 2001: 304-306). In this thesis the phenomenological approach implies a focus on the participants' understanding and experiences of a social reality that is a human product, but still is seen as an objective reality. The symbolic universe (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 110-122) and institutionalisation of experiences creates an order that in appearance goes beyond the individual. It also puts focus on the everyday aspects of social life.

To study how gamers make sense of their own gaming experiences and actions, interviews focused on understanding gamers' interpretations of their lived reality. This constitutes Study I as well as Study IV. Due to this, the interviews for Study I had the same structure independent of their form (group or individual), broad open questions asked in the style of in-depth interviewing or open structure interviewing (Hayes, 2000: 122-127). As a picture of this symbolic universe emerged as told by the gamers themselves, a 'second order of construction' was created (Aspers, 2001: 306-308). In this construction the original interpretations and experiences of individuals are abstracted and understood in a research context. This analytical system created a second order of construction through a thematic qualitative analysis (TQA). In TQA the aim is to see patterns in the seemingly random information that often meets the researcher at the start of the analytical process (Boyatzis, 1998). Boyatzis (1998: 3) states that there are three stages in a TQA. First, we observe and recognize an important moment (seeing), we then encode it (see it as something), and lastly we interpret it. In the phenomenological perspective used here, the three stages correspond to how the data was worked through and understood. These stages in many ways come naturally, yet they are useful for understanding how we can transform first order of construction knowledge into relevant scientific knowledge.

Analyses

In Studies I and IV, initially a first order of construction was created based on the gamers own experiences, in an attempt to understand what was important for gamers; what was valued and how. The second stage of TQA in this work was not a clearly delimited stage, but rather a fluid movement back and forth between the first and second order as the gamers' experiences were being interpreted. Recognizing what was important, seeing and coding the data the data, was only the first stage in interpreting it. Encoding the data, seeing as something and analysing it with the aid of theories, was a necessary step that in reality was taken many times over; in an attempt at keeping close to the data. In Study IV the analysis was performed in several steps. Initially, transcriptions gave an overall feel for the data; secondly, a sentence categorization (Kvale, 1997) was used and a structure was created from the interview guide, which in turn was created from previous research and gender theories as well as from shared and interesting phenomena emerging from the data. These analytical categories can be found as headlines in the results section of Study IV.

In Study I the analysis was initiated during the data gathering. This gave the opportunity to work inductively with the thematic qualitative analysis (TQA) and the theme of the interviews that, while being the same during the time of data gathering, became more focused as the interviewing continued. Final analyses, in Study I, explored issues surrounding social gaming which emerged from the data and were then interpreted with the help of previous research and theory, the analytical categories allowed to structure result presentation in the study. In Study III, the same data set was used in part, but analysed using themes constructed from the interaction data, as can be seen in Study III.

A drawback of TQA is that in focusing on themes that are general in the data we are sometimes forced to leave behind the informants' own interpretations and personal situations. We then run the risk of losing sight of the original first level of construction, as only themes are extracted in the analytical process, and occurrences only relevant to any one individual are generally not included. The individual lives of people—where details and circumstances can often be quite unique when the researcher first encounters them—have to give way to common patterns in the analysis, simply because this is what is of most vital interest. The aim of analysis to increase understanding of social structures relevant for the specific sample outweigh this danger, however, as long as we remain aware of the two levels of knowledge and their different structures, we can continue being conscious of our sample, its uniqueness, strengths, and limitations.

Study II followed from Study I, survey questions building upon the Study I first order of construction; certain previous knowledge therefore is implied from the start. However, to allow for both contradiction and corroboration in the quantitative analysis, the second order of construction in Study II was arrived at in an explorative approach drawing not only on Study I but on previous research in general. Logistic multivariate models were used to explore social gaming, first between social gamers and non-social gamers and also for different social gaming contexts, family/friends/online strangers. These three social contexts were derived from results in Study I and tested in Study II.

In Study III a multi-method approach was chosen where interaction analysis of gameplay patterns was complemented with statements from gamers from the Study I data. Kjastrup (2008) contends that in order to understand the experience of the game world we need to look at the relationship between design, meaning-making, and culturalization. To do so we need to analyze specific and prominent game world features. This phenomenological way of understanding gaming was used to comprehend the studied phenomena, collaborative gaming. Not only was interaction analysed (looking at design), but also gamers' experiences of these interactions (meaning-making), with the views of the community on the design (culturalization)

taken into account. From these sources a secondary order of construction was created in conjunction with theoretical assumptions.

Sampling and methodological considerations

In the different sub-studies different sampling strategies were used. These are presented here in the interests of added clarity.

Study I

The data collected for Study I utilized individual as well as pair and focus group interviews. Focus group interviews can consist either of ‘naturally’ occurring clusters of people or of groups put together by the researcher. Lunt and Livingstone (1993) argue for using naturally existing groups, something opted for in this study, also with reference to Blumer (1970), who writes that we should study the empirical social world as it is, not in categories or through experiments created by the researcher. The focus groups in this study were all made up of participants who knew one another in some way: e.g. from the same class at school, from engaging in an MMO together, or who were friends. Since the research focuses on people with a particular hobby, there are of course some similarities between the participants, beyond this, they are all gamers. The fact that a group like this shares at least something, for example an interest in the subject at hand, is important and can help to create a good climate for discussion.

Individual interviews and pair interviews were added to the sampling as a validation strategy (Creswell, 2007) and for within-method triangulation (Denzin, 1978: 301). This was meant to counter the argument that the data received in focus group interviews is biased, as participants may lack the courage to express their true opinions in a group situation (another reason for the use of pre-existing groups). Research has shown that this may not be the case (Wilkinson, 1998), but in this way ideas and concepts expressed by informants in the focus groups could be tried in the individual interviews and the other way around, as all interviews followed the same setup and theme regardless of type of interview. A problem with focus groups is that you can never assure that all members of the group will keep what is said to themselves (Berg, 2009). This becomes especially important when discussing sensitive issues; one of the reasons why Morgan (1996) suggests that focus group interviewing is unsuitable for such studies. Gibbs (1997) emphasises that participants need to be encouraged to keep in confidence what is said and, moreover, that you should never pressure participants to speak. Informants should know beforehand what will be expected of them and the purpose of the research (Gibbs, 1997). While it was not deemed likely that the subject for the interviews would be considered a sensitive topic it is yet in-

advisable in this type of open interview situation to take this for granted. One can never know what will be raised during the interview. To insure a good interview climate an 'informed consent' has been strived for (Kvale, 1997: 107-110). Before all interviews participants were informed that they would be anonymous, the topic of the group, and the fact that the interview would be recorded and transcribed. To ensure confidentiality none of the interviewee's names are used. The focus groups seldom entered into sensitive personal stories, however, past experiences of more personal nature, both positive and negative, were often brought up in the individual interviews. It would however be presumptuous to assume that it is only the interview situation which creates this pattern; it is as likely that we are seeing a selection effect where informants with more sensitive stories choose to do an individual interview rather than participate in a group interview. Besides this pattern, results from the different interview forms largely corresponded.

The structure of all interviews was the same, broad, open questions asked in the style of in-depth or open structure interviewing (Hayes, 2000: 122-127). Themes were also the same in all interviews even if specific questions varied and some themes were more or less to the fore. All interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed in full. In conjunction with all the interviews—group, pair and individual—a short questionnaire was handed out beforehand to gather additional information and ask about gaming habits. This gave the opportunity to access background information in an unobtrusive way and save time for all participants during the interviews. Also, the argument went, these could be used later, for example, to compare how much time people spent on gaming or for how many years informants had engaged in digital games.

Comparative sampling was the method chosen, based on an idea of data triangulation that interviewing several different groups would offer a more nuanced insight into the subject (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denzin, 1972). The sample was constructed with previous research in mind and especially the changes in categories of gamers, e.g. the higher ages and increasing female participation. The aim was to gain contested views as well as to be able to validate the results by widening the range of informants. Initial sampling was carried out through contact with Sixth Form pupils (in Sweden typically 17-19 year olds) in an upper secondary school catering to the local Stockholm area. To gain contact with adult gamers, advertisements were posted at Stockholm University (informant ages 24-39). To achieve the pre-defined sample, an advertisement was also put up on the project website which yielded one interview with two participants (aged 17 and 49). All calls for informants were formulated in the same open way, asking for interested persons to be part of a study about digital gaming. In the second step of contact, the themes of the interviews were communicated and that the focus was on social gaming, along with more detailed information about the interviewing process.

Table 1: Informants

Interview form	Gender: Female/Male (age)
F.G 1: <i>Mixed adult</i>	F (24) M (25) M (29) M (25) M (34) F (24)
F.G 2: <i>Young women</i>	F (19) F (19) F (19) F (18)
F.G 3: <i>Young men</i>	M (17) M (17) M (17)
F.G 4: <i>WoW gamers</i>	F (29) F (27) F (28) F (23) M (32) M (34)
F.G 5: <i>WoW gamers</i>	M (22) M (24) M (26)
D.I 1: <i>Mother and Daughter</i>	F (49) F (17)
D.I 2: <i>Couple 1</i>	F (29) M (29)
D.I 3: <i>Couple 2</i>	F (36) M (39)
I. 1, 2: <i>Young men</i>	M (20) M (17)
I. 3, 4, 5: <i>Young women</i>	F (17) F (24) F (24)

Note: F.G = Focus Group Interview; D.I = Pair Interview, I= individual Interview

A total of 33 participants (see Table 1) were interviewed in five focus group interviews, the groups consisting of: mixed gender adult gamers (aged 24-33); adolescent girls (aged 18-19); adolescent boys (aged 18-19); mixed gender *WoW*-gamers (aged 23-36); and male *WoW*-gamers (aged 22-26). The first pair interview consisted of a mother and daughter (aged 18 and 49) and the second and third of two heterosexual couples (aged 39/36 and 28/28). Two of the individual interviewees were teenage boys aged 18, the third was a teenage girl aged 18 and the fourth and fifth women both aged 24. The data gathering took place from the autumn of 2008 up to the spring of 2011. An additional focus group with male *WoW*-gamers was added at the end to broaden the picture of online gaming.

Study II

Following the interview data collection, a battery of questions was designed in collaboration with .SE (The Internet Infrastructure Foundation), which manages the Swedish contribution to the World Internet Project (WIP). Data for this sub-study come from the 2011 survey *Swedes and the Internet* (Findah, 2011). In Sweden these surveys on Internet use in the form of a revolving panel study have been carried out almost annually since the year 2000. Respondents were interviewed via telephone or the web (respondents' choice) in a mix-mode survey (Dillman, 2007). The survey uses a representative random sample based on age, gender, and residence, from age 12 upwards (the oldest respondent was 100). However, in the analyses the total sample was not used. As focus was on social gamers, only gamers were in-

cluded. The introductory question of the follow-up series was of special consideration therefore. From the data in Studies I and IV it became apparent that identification with games and defining oneself as a gamer was highly problematic. In certain groups such as women and older game users respondents found this label difficult to relate to due to preconceptions about what a gamer represents. Who is a gamer? The screening question intended to distinguish between gamers and non-gamers therefore asked, “*How often, if ever, do you play any sort of digital game?*” A scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘several times a day’ was used for responses with five scale steps. To avoid any misconceptions of what exactly was meant by digital games an introduction explained that all sorts of digital games engaged in on a screen—whether computer, TV, or other portable device—were included, as well as both on- and offline gaming, but that gambling for money was not. The structure of the initial survey question and introductory text was formulated so as to avoid many preconceptions about video or computer games; therefore, as in the interview studies, the term digital games was used.

Table 2: Game genres included in the survey and examples of games from respective genre

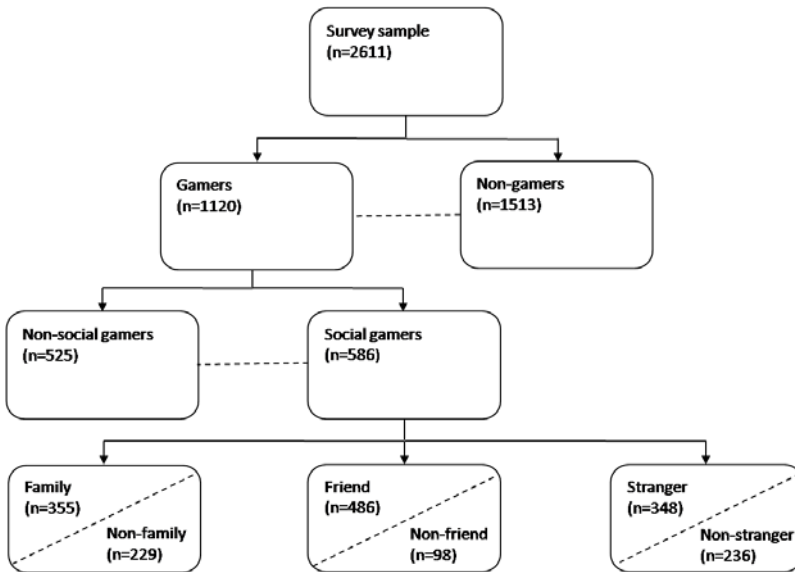
Game genre	Example games
Classical games	chess, bridge, poker
Social network games	Farmville, Mafia Wars
Casual games	Bejewelled, Minesweeper
Web browser games	Travian, Piratequest
Massive Multiplayer Online games	World of Warcraft, Lord of the Rings
Strategy games	Starcraft, DotA, Age of Empires
Point and Click and Puzzle games	Sam and Max, Agatha Christie
Role-Playing games	Dragon Age, Final Fantasy
First-Person Shooter games	CounterStrike, Left4Dead
Simulation games	Farming simulation, The Sims
Learning games	Learn to drive, Brain trainer
Racing and sports games	Need for Speed, Mario Cart, FIFA
Adventure games	Assassins Creed, Tomb Raider, LEGO
Party games	Singstar, Guitar Hero
Other games	n/a

Thereafter, respondents answering that they did indeed engage in some sort of digital game were asked to pick as many game genres as were relevant for them from a list of fifteen different ones. It is notoriously difficult to

sort games into genres and there are no accepted standards (Mortensen, 2009: 35-40). The fifteen chosen genres were aimed at capturing as many types of games as possible and there may be some overlap as well as exclusions. To make up for any potential genres left out, an 'other' category was added with a free text option. These were manually coded into corresponding genre when applicable. The genres chosen are displayed in Table 2.

A question about time spent on games followed to mimic the layout of the rest of the survey and also a question about gaming online. Thereafter followed the question, "*When you play digital games do you ever play together with other people?*" A scale ranging from 'never' to 'several times a day' was used for responses, with five scale steps. In the qualitative interview analysis three separate groups were identified as game partners: family members, friends, and online strangers or acquaintances. Therefore, three questions asking whether the respondent ever gamed with these groups, and how often, followed. These were only asked of the respondents who had earlier reported gaming with other people. The same response scale ranging from 'never' to 'several times a day' was used with five scale steps. The gaming companion groups had been identified in Study I; it was now decided to test the relationship between them in the survey. Figure 1 further shows how the data were split into different groups of social gamers, then used as sub-samples for the different analyses. Additionally, six questions were included concerning attitudes towards gaming; these attitudes were also taken from early Study I results.

Figure 1: Total sample and subsamples used for analyses. Comparison groups for analyses are shown by dotted lines



1

Note: Missing values excluded

Study III

To follow up on the question of the importance of design discovered in Study I, another type of data were necessary, based on participant observation in an online game. The focus of data gathering was a specific type of game situation in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004); these are called ‘dungeons’ and are cooperative challenges built into the game and limited to 5 gamers with no room for outsiders to quietly observe what is happening. In order to study in-game behaviour it was necessary to be involved in the game. “*The nature of computer games breaks down the boundary between observation and participation as observation is impossible without participation,*” writes Mortensen (2009: 121). The nature of gaming is such that outside observation cannot be achieved due to technical limitations.

In playing the *Wrath of the Lich King* (Blizzard, 2008) expansion, an updated version of the original *WoW* game, initially twenty-four dungeons randomly chosen (by an in-game tool) were engaged in. The sessions were distributed over weekdays/weekends and divided over the two opposing factions that exist in the game—Horde and Alliance—making a total of 24 dungeons completed on a European English language server (see Table 4).

To further complement these data, six random dungeons were engaged in after the *Cataclysm* expansion (Blizzard, 2010), totalling 30 dungeons completed (see Table 4). Each dungeon varied in time from approximately 15 minutes to 1.5 hours. A total estimate of over 20 hours of actual gameplay was recorded, not including waiting time to enter a dungeon, which varied between 10 seconds and 40 minutes per dungeon.

Table 4: Total spread of dungeons recorded and analysed divided up on: game expansion, faction, and time of the week.

Day	Expansion		Faction
	Wrath of the Lich King	Cataclysm	
Weekday	6	1	Alliance
Weekend	6	2	Alliance
Weekday	6	1	Horde
Weekend	6	2	Horde
<i>Total dungeons</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>30</i>

All random groups were filmed and then partly transcribed. All chat (including emotes: Chat describing what the gamer does, e.g. *Legolas laughs*, say-channel and party-channel) was recorded using a *WoW* add-on called *WoWScribe* (all chat was text based). Only game characters with more passive roles in the encounters were chosen by the researcher to avoid ending up in a position of leadership and in control of the group. However, a complete participation was opted for with the researcher fully engaged in the game situation, participating in all interaction, but careful not to provoke situations. Conversations necessary for the progress of the game (e.g. asking for time to regenerate resources) were not avoided, being a part of what is expected of a gamer and in line with the participant observation method (Bryman, 1995; Patel & Davidson, 1994). Before the data gathering, several dungeons had been engaged in outside the scope of this project, allowing a familiarity with the situation. This was necessary as it takes several months of gameplay to be able to participate in one of these sessions. Any potential analytical biases because of this were dealt with through involving a secondary researcher. To use a second gamer for data gathering was deemed too complex since the process of gathering data and keeping content logs took both time and effort to master and handle.

As a complement to the interaction data, web forum data were gathered and interview data from Study I were also included. The forum data were collected from Blizzard's online *WoW* forum and analysed using content

analysis (Berg, 2009). These data contain three main threads: a poll and discussion about whether the gamers ‘have tried the dungeon finder tool yet?’; a thread ‘the dungeon finder tool needs to go’, and last a poll and following discussion asking gamers what they do during a dungeon. These threads were chosen based on relevance to the research focus and are not meant to give a full description, but rather to illustrate the different views in the community as well as the analytical categories.

Study IV

In Study IV a snowball sample was initiated to find female informants for the interviews. It has elsewhere been suggested that as women participate less in the wider gaming culture than men do (Schott & Horrell, 2000) they are more isolated in this activity compared with male gamers (Taylor, 2008), they seldom know of other women who game and this in turn makes snowball sampling of this group difficult. This was found to be true. Several starting points were used, as most led to dead ends; but from these different starting points eight female gamers were contacted and interviewed. The interviews took place at the participant’s homes, except for one telephone interview. The informants all lived in Svealand in central Sweden and were 20-30 years old. All except one held a university degree or were currently university students.

Concluding remarks

All data gathered and analysed in the thesis had their own benefits and drawbacks, yet together they have given depth to the investigation of social gaming. While interviews in many forms allow for exploration of the life world of informants in an in-depth manner, they will always be sensitive to the specific sample groups used. Survey data on the other hand do not allow us the insights into everyday practice that interviews allow, we are also bound to miss out on all information we have not beforehand imagined, as our questions will determine what we are told. Yet with surveys we can study more general patterns and attempt generalisations. Interaction data in turn allow us to study how people interrelate as it happens, and in ways of which they may not even be aware. All in all, these methods complement each other and offer a richer image of the phenomena studied.

Study I explores the nature of social gaming through interviews with dedicated gamers, where it became apparent that additional focus on mainstream gaming would be needed, as the interviews showed that the activity of gaming today is widely practised. Gaming on a wider scale is therefore the focus of Study II. Study II also has an additional purpose of exploring the generalisability of the social gaming practices explored in Study I. Working

on Study I, it also soon became clear that the issue of design was important for the social experience of online gaming and so prevalent that it merited a study of its own. Interaction analysis was thought best to capture how gamers and design interacted in specific gaming encounters. Study IV focuses on gender issues in gaming and data for this study were the first to be gathered; several of the issues dealt with in subsequent interviews were originally raised here. The importance of gender for understanding how gaming was practised and understood was clear from the Study I data, but could not be fitted into that study due to limitations in the data. Gendered issues are also part of Study II.

Part 4: The studies

Study I: Mapping the landscape of social gaming: Social interaction in, through, and around digital games

This study examines social digital gaming from a relational perspective focusing on how the social world comes to be through relations (Emirbayer, 1997). Taking an explorative approach, social gaming habits are investigated among dedicated gamers. Thirty-three gamers were interviewed—individually, in pairs or in groups—about their gaming habits and experiences of social gaming. Analyses initially showed that the nature of the relationship with gaming companions is of key importance for understanding experiences of social gaming. The informants separated gaming with family and friends from gaming with strangers, leading to different gaming experiences

Firstly, gaming with friends and family was considered a more valuable leisure time experience. Secondly, gaming with significant others was perceived as facilitating the gaming encounter. Gaming with strangers, on the other hand, was experienced as sometimes difficult, with gaming encounters prone to breakdown. Informants showed a tendency to organise themselves in guilds with others sharing certain mutual ‘offline’ characteristics, on both the macro level (such as country and language) and the micro level (such as life stage), indicating that gaming identity is not enough for forming coherent social groups in online gaming.

The relational perspective allows reconciliation between the understanding of games as rule based structures with seeing (social) gaming as a process created in the relations between gamers/ games/gaming companions.

Study II: Investigating social gaming: Digital gameplay patterns

The bulk of research on gaming to date has been performed with self-selected samples, incurring the risk of forgetting to investigate mainstream gaming and focusing instead on more visible sub-groups. The aim and contribution of this study is examination of social digital gaming (DG) using survey data based on a random sample. A batch of questions was included in a national survey of Internet use in Sweden from 2011 (n=2685). An everyday perspective on gaming is applied and data analysed using logistic regres-

sion. Results show that social gaming is a common part of digital gaming. Gaming companions were mostly friends, followed by family and online strangers. Results also indicate that gaming online with strangers is not considered a social activity on a par with gaming with family and friends. As gamers grow older they continue to game, but find other social contexts for gaming. Gaming as a social activity has not reached the highest age groups. Men were shown to be more social gamers than women (except for family gaming). In conclusion, social gaming is here shown to be a multifaceted activity which random samples are a good way of studying. An everyday perspective also aids in understanding how people interact in and around digital gaming.

Study III: Played and designed sociality in a massive multiplayer online game.

This study focuses on social interaction in temporary group formations in the massive online game *World of Warcraft*. The aim of this study was to analyse a specific type of social gaming, namely pick-up-groups (PUGs). These often short lived temporary groups are a prominent element in many MMOs. Studying this feature can give important insight into the social worlds of MMOs and how designed sociality (the social architecture/structure of the game) and played sociality (what gamers do within this structure) are connected. The phenomenon is analysed using video recordings from in-game participant observation of 30 randomly selected (by an in-game tool) PUGs complemented with a study of design, official forum data relevant to the research question, and interview data consisting of one focus group interview with six Swedish *WoW*-gamers (Blizzard, 2004).

Two main types of interaction were found, sociable and instrumental, yet investment in the social aspect was exceedingly little. The study concludes that the low levels of social interaction observed are the result of a game design that makes the cost of social gaming high and restricts the available space for gamers to act within the designed architecture of the game, thus limiting the possibilities for played sociality. The connection between designed and played sociality shapes the social world of the game and therefore, gamers' experiences within this social context.

Study IV: Doing Gender in Cyberspace - the performance of gender by female World of Warcraft players.

This study focuses on the performance of gender and sexuality by women in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004), following Butler's (1990) performance theory. Through interviews with Swedish female *WoW* gamers, the meaning of gender and sexuality in the game context is analysed.

The women interviewed created gendered and sexualised identities both constrained and empowered by the structure of the game. Although a heterosexual norm rules, there are possibilities for queer performance within the gendered role-play in *WoW* and the game offers the possibility of multiple and alternative performances of the self. The social context of gaming is shown to be of great importance; many of the women came in contact with the game through male partners who act as 'gate-keepers' and shape interaction with the game. Social context is in many instances more important than the game itself; to advance women's equal participation in digital gaming we would then gain the most by actively discussing the premises for acceptance in the gaming culture.

To conclude, *WoW* and games in general are not spaces disconnected from the 'real world'. Rather, the two spaces are quite interconnected. Women who game bring with them online their offline gender and social contexts and there create themselves as gendered and sexual beings. Lastly, we cannot study gender online without also looking at sexuality and how these are interwoven and give each other meaning.

Part 5: Concluding remarks

Digital gaming today has a prominent presence in our digitalized world. As became apparent in Studies I and II, digital gaming has shifted from the periphery to becoming a conventional activity among many others, taking a place in the mainstream consciousness and even among dedicated users is now considered a hobby rather than a subculture. As Study II showed, gaming today is a common pastime and the wide range of individuals engaging in a similarly wide variety of games is the reason digital gaming constitutes such a complex phenomenon. Previously, gaming was—or was perceived as—an activity mainly for children and adolescents (Griffiths, 1991), and acquiring games into the home were driven by children (Hall *et al.* 1995). However, many gamers today have grown up with the activity and are now passing it on to their children, as was indicated by Study I as well as Study II results. This is more than likely to change the common view on games as well as stratifying its use into much more diverse patterns.

Digital gaming is an established leisure activity and very much a part of the everyday social life of gamers. Gaming adapts to the needs and wants of users in much the same way as other communication technologies and media have done before. However, the specifics of gaming—the game itself—makes digital gaming something besides a medium or communication aid. While it is clear, as some have argued (e.g. Crawford, 2012), that games indeed share many things with other media forms, at the same time it is apparent that what makes gaming special is that it allows *doing together*. This does not mean that digital games constitute completely new forms of sociality; rather, they are leisure activities embedded in digital technology that gain meaning from the social context of their use.

One important result of this thesis is that how social gaming comes to be and what it means is dependent on the relations between gamers, be they family members, real life friends, Internet friends or strangers. Both Studies I and II show how social gaming becomes something different depending on whom we game with. Looking at the static properties of different social gaming situations (mediation or size of group as allowed by the technology) is not enough to understand the activity. The social gaming encounter plays out differently in different relations. Gaming with strangers, especially as seen in Study III, can be fragile encounters prone to quick breakdown, as technical limitations make the social gaming situation (game frame) brittle. When gaming with individuals sharing an offline context or certain demo-

graphic characteristics, social interaction is anchored in common sets of norms and expectations which facilitate gaming, as shown in Study I. It is also clear, from Study IV, how issues of gender and sexuality come to be in certain ways in relations between female gamers and other individuals, in their physical proximity or online, both known and unknown. In these interactions gender and sexual identity are realized.

While gaming in Sweden is becoming a mainstream activity involving a large portion of the population, gendered expectations still limit actions and identities, foremost those of female gamers, as observed in Studies II and IV. Gaming is still considered a male pastime with women struggling to take place as gamers. . Gaming, like many other activities, is deeply connected to social expectations concerning gender and sexuality. Study IV also shows how the online and offline are so closely connected that it becomes problematic to consider them separate spheres. Relating Slater's (2002) discussion on the Internet virtuality to digital games, we see that virtuality is not a property of games *per se*, but rather a social accomplishment of the people engaging in games. We *do virtuality* in different ways, depending on the context, the communication platform and the purpose of its use. As Morely (2003) has argued, communicative actions always must be contextualized. It is in the discrepancies between the different people that we engage with that queer potentials come to the fore. The interlinking of both off-line and on-line relations that digital gaming allows is something that deserves further attention; it is clear that a relational perspective is useful for grasping the new social situations that digital technology in general afford. Space and place matter, especially in our digital society; and as the virtual and the physical do link together; gaming can be considered an offline-situated activity.

A relational perspective taking process into account unveils how the social world comes to be through interaction, where the process also is dependent on underlying structures. In this way we can reconcile the position of the social constructivists that (social) gaming is created in the relations between gamers with the more formalist approach that games are rule based structures. Games are designed platforms with certain affordances for social behaviour, as shown in Studies I, III and IV. These platforms create a base for interaction and so for the creation or maintenance of relationships as well as the creation of identity. It seems clear that the proposed relational perspective could be an aid in reconciling the process with the material aspects of (social) gaming. The perspective also holds potential for studying single player gaming, as the relationship between gamer and game can also be seen as constituting a process.

How design affords social actions in gaming is important, as it is the basis for how sociality in a game can develop and be realised, and moreover, who we can game with and how. In this context, design highlights the ever present sociological problem of structure and agency, and as becomes apparent in this thesis, we must understand both the structure and the possibilities for

agency in the actual structure. Case studies of digital technology applications need to look at concrete examples and realize that online interaction will have different affordances and structures depending on which applications we use and what resources we have to utilize them.

Svensk sammanfattning

Att spela spel tillsammans har en lång tradition inom mänsklig historia och när vi spelar med andra så skapar vi en social värld. Genom att tillsammans engagera oss i ett spel så skapar vi de specifika förutsättningarna och den specifika sociala händelsen där varje spelomgång blir unik. Idag gäller detta även för den stora mängd digitala dator- och TV-spel, som finns. I dessa flerspelarspel så är den delade spelupplevelsen och den sociala interaktionen en stor del av själva upplevelsen. Förr ansågs digitala spel främst vara en aktivitet för barn och unga, men under det senaste decenniet har denna fritidssyssla öppnats upp för en större målgrupp, både unga och äldre, män och kvinnor spelar idag en uppsjö utav digitala spel. Denna avhandling är en undersökning av användningen av digitala spel. Syftet är att undersöka hur individer använder digitala spel för att interagera med andra spelare både över Internet och offline.

Avhandlingen är uppbyggd utav fyra olika delstudier, vilka tillsammans kompletterar varandra och ger en mer komplett bild utav socialt spelande. Huvudteman är förekomsten av socialt spelande, betydelsen av spelares erfarenheter av socialt spelande och de underliggande strukturer som begränsar eller stödjer socialt spelande, både materiella och sociala. I avhandlingen tillämpas ett perspektiv där fokus ligger på spelares vardagliga liv och praxis, hur man spelar med andra och använder sig av den digitala tekniken i en vardagskontext. Dessutom appliceras även ett genusperspektiv för att studera eventuella skillnader i förutsättningar för manliga och kvinnliga spelare.

Studie I fokuserar på den relationella aspekten av socialt spelande, det vill säga, hur socialt spelande tar sig olika uttryck inom olika relationer till medspelare. Studien bygger på intervjumaterial med svenska spelare, både fokusgrupper och enskilda intervjuer.

Studie II undersöker mer generella strukturer och mönster kring socialt spelande. Särskilt fokus ligger på vem eller vilka spelare interagerar med då de spelar digitala spel. Studien bygger på svensk enkätdata.

Studie III undersöker sambandet mellan speldesign och spelares handlingsutrymme, samt dess betydelse för social interaktion med främlingar. Hur spelare hanterar den sociala situationen undersöks med hjälp utav interaktionsanalys av inspelade speltillfällen, med ytterligare stöd utav både intervjudata och textanalys utav spelforum.

Slutligen i Studie IV, som bygger på intervjuer, så studeras svenska, kvinnliga spelare och deras konstruktion av genus och sexualitet i ett online-

spel. Studien syftar till att förstå hur dessa konstrueras i denna specifika miljö samt även att se hur online och offline hänger samman genom människors agerande och de sociala normer och relationer som sträcker sig mellan dessa utrymmen.

Avhandlingen visar att i Sverige spelar idag över 40 procent av befolkningen från tolv år och uppåt digitala spel av någon sort och av dessa spelar över hälften tillsammans med andra. Av speldeltagare är vänner de vanligaste medspelarna följt utav familjemedlemmar och främlingar över Internet. Att spela digitala spel tillsammans med familjemedlemmar är idag med andra ord en vanlig aktivitet som får oss att ifrågasätta den bild som vanligen möter oss i media av ensamma ungdomar som spelar över Internet. Föräldrar, barn, syskon och romantiska partners visas som exempel på medspelare.

Det viktigaste resultatet som avhandlingen visar är hur socialt spelande blir till på olika sätt inom olika sociala relationer. Hur spelsituationen skapas, vad den innebär, är beroende av relationer spelare emellan, vare sig dessa spelare är familjemedlemmar, vänner, Internetvänner eller främlingar. Spelare upplever sitt digitala spelande på olika sätt beroende på vem de spelar med. Familjemedlemmar och vänner ses som mer värdefulla att spendera sin fritid tillsammans med, samt även enklare att samarbeta med än främlingar. Svårigheten att bygga upp stabila normsystem online gör att spel med främlingar kan vara svårare att organisera och praktisera då man inte har gemensamma regler och normer kring hur spelet ska gå till, trots att digitala spel delvis styrs av förprogrammerade regler. Detta leder i sin tur till att de studerade spelarna grupperar sig tillsammans med andra spelare som på olika sätt är lika dem själva, pratar samma språk eller också har småbarn för att ge några exempel. Detta för att förenkla det sociala.

I interaktionen mellan spelare så realiseras även genus och sexualitet i vad som kan anses vara traditionella mönster. Däremot tillåter den relativa anonymiteten en viss frihet för olika typer av alternativt agerande. Dock visas kvinnor vara en marginaliserad grupp som har svårt att få agera på samma villkor som manliga spelare. Genus och sexuell identitet reproduceras i relationer mellan spelare som kan vara fysiskt nära eller interageras med via Internet och det blir tydligt att man inte kan särkoppla offline och online, utan att de snarare är sidor av samma mynt. Virtualitet visar sig slutligen vara en social egenskap som de människor som spelar digitala spel skapar tillsammans, snarare än en inneboende egenskap hos själva spelen. Med andra ord, hur offline och online går in i varandra eller skiljer sig åt varierar beroende på de involverade spelarna och deras behov och agerande. Som andra medier innan spel så blir denna teknik en del av det vardagliga livet och anpassas utifrån des förutsättningar och människors önskemål om en meningsfull fritid.

Ett relationsbaserat perspektiv som tar processer i beaktan avslöjar hur den sociala världen blir till i interaktioner. Däremot ska vi inte glömma att dessa processer är beroende av underliggande strukturer. På detta sätt kan vi

förena den socialkonstruktivistiska positionen, där (sociala)-spel skapas i relationer spelare emellan, med det mer strukturella synsättet där spel utgör regelbaserade strukturer. I avhandlingen visas att spel är designade plattformar som erbjuder vissa möjligheter för sociala handlingar. Dessa plattformar skapar en bas för samverkan och för skapandet alternativt bevarandet av relationer och identiteter. Det föreslagna relationella perspektivet kan vara till stor hjälp genom att förena de relationella aspekterna av spelande med de materiella. Perspektivet har även potential för att studera singel spelande, då interaktionen mellan spelare och spel i sig utgör en process.

Speldesignen är fundamental för det sociala handlingsutrymmet och hur sociala relationer kan utvecklas och förverkligas. Dock är relationerna mellan spelare av lika stor vikt för att förstå spelandet som aktivitet. I detta sammanhang aktualiserar speldesign det ständigt närvarande sociologiska problemet med struktur och aktör, samt, vilket blir uppenbart i denna avhandling, behovet av att förstå både struktur och möjligheterna till handlande för att förstå socialt spelande. Fallstudier utav digitala applikationer behöver titta på konkreta exempel och inse att online-interaktion ger olika möjligheter till socialitet beroende på vilka plattformar vi använder, samt vilka resurser vi har att utnyttja dessa.

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Not that long ago, on an island far, far away....

I am gazing out over the temporarily deserted island of Fårö. In the summer a place filled to the breaking point by tourists, but now in the middle of October my company consists only of gulls and the ghost of Ingmar Bergman. Outside is a place where sky and sea meet and the grey horizon is seemingly endless; I have come here, out in the middle of the Baltic Sea, far from people and distractions to finish my thesis.

Right here and now still one distraction remains; a foreboding sense of an ending drawing near, leading me to contemplate the road so far. The last strands that need to be tied up, the people I have met, where this will take me and what it all came down to in the end?

While no answers seem immediately apparent, and Ingmar is keeping an uncharacteristically low profile, I realize that writing an acknowledgement is the perfect way to reach closure. Giving me the opportunity to thank all the people who have been at my side on this eventful and fascinating expedition into the unknown; and you are so many!

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