Audio-visions: domestic videogame play

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
I acknowledge three important women in the life of this project: My late mother, Maud, who would have wanted to see the work’s conclusion; my supervisor, Virginia, who intelligently saw me through the work; and Lois, who wanted to see the end of the work. I am indebted to each one.
I, Geoffrey Walter Denham, declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

signed

this.............. day of ......... 1998.
Abstract

An examination of the domestic playing of videogames proceeds through a consideration of the popular literature on the subject, a critical review of the research literature, and the setting up of a series of extended dialogues (the research) with seven young male adolescents as the key respondents. These dialogues were recorded over a 17 month period and appear in transcribed form as an appendix to this work. The research process itself was grounded in a theorisation of audience activity in communication studies which sees meanings emerging from the boys' engagements with kinetic texts in terms of refigurative activity (Ricoeur). This audience refiguration encapsulates both reading and interpretation, and a cultural productivity whereby the kinetic text is returned to the everyday world of its readers, primarily through a relation of mimicry. The cultural fertility of videogames is traced through this mimicry to reveal a series of themes: a destabilising of the distinction between work and play spaces (Lefebvre); the further fragmentation of domestic audiences of the small screen in the home through the establishment of gendered playspaces; the instilling of competitive relations within male community; and the melding of fantasy and discipline. An investigation of the significance of soundtrack to videogame play leads to the conclusion that in videogame playing a new cultural competency is taking shape in the form of a postmodern literacy, which lays stress on a continuous circumlocution, a destabilising of narrative time (Genette), and middles rather than beginnings or endings. The research findings contradict many ideas regarding videogame playing in popular currency: that players are addicts, that videogame play is mindless, or that players are fickle. On the contrary, videogame playing is here implicated in an identity-making discursive project considered central to the business of being a male adolescent in the late twentieth century.
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Moreover, any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69).

The subject matter of poetry is not that ‘collection of solid static objects extended in space’ but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes. Wallace Stevens.
1. Computer and videogame beginnings

*Introduction.*

My research explores the quotidian and the ludic by investigating the domestic playing of computer games. A generation has been brought up with a range of electronic playthings, ranging from hand-held video toys - remember Mickey trying to catch those eggs in his basket? - to sophisticated arcade video games machines and the games available for the ubiquitous personal computer. The youth in question are predominantly, though not exclusively, male. One thing struck me about their engagement - its wholeheartedness. Young male players in particular have responded to the machine’s offers with zest and enthusiasm. Popular writers speak of game playing as ‘a quest for mastery’ or ‘a rising to a challenge’. My study revealed a quality of willingness which admits no easy characterisation: an enthusiastic apprenticeship, a persistent practice, a quest for mastery, desire for control, a symbiotic relationship, an intense relation, are all suggestive phrases for my inquiry.

My interest in this phenomenon began, in so far as I can remember it, by looking over the shoulder of my two teenage sons playing computer games on the family’s *Atari 1040* computer, five or more years ago. What struck me in the exploratory stages was the disparity between the notions of computer game playing I began to develop, and the accounts of game playing I found in the literature, both academic and popular.

A popular account of game playing is particularly salient to the task of introducing my research. It recounts the story of an 18 year old boy, Tom, who spent many hours ‘role playing’ on the Internet. He was subsequently killed in a motor vehicle accident. His father sought an explanation for his death in his computer obsession. He entertained the idea that his son’s death was a result of his excessive playing on the Internet. Later, he came to the realisation that his son’s playing was highly creative and gave him access to a social world that he did not have in his face-to-face life. The article is tantalising in raising but not answering many questions about intense engagements with the computer.

The article related how the family paid for counselling sessions for Tom ‘with a therapist skilled in treating addiction’, which of course implied that Tom had a problem, and that this problem should be understood in terms which the ‘addiction’ metaphor suggests. The article also hinted something of the father’s growing understanding of Tom’s life, after his death. There were admissions that at the time both parents were deeply worried about ‘their son’s fantasy life’, a rather puzzling statement in the light of information provided elsewhere in the article that Tom’s father was “a respected filmmaker specialising in bringing hard-edged versions of fairy tales to the screen”. The reporter made these comments on the father’s Internet-based search for his son:

And in the end he came to believe three things: that computers did not kill his son. *That he had not known his son*. And that his son had been a bold and gifted pioneer in something exciting and creative and scary and cool, a still-furtive revolution in art and expression that is barrelling towards us on the information superhighway. (my italics)

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Though I do not share the enthusiasm for the information 'revolution' suggested by the reporter's hyperbole, this excerpt raises questions around a theme of male community, inter-generational male relationships, and relationships engendered by the much touted connections which computer mediated communication offers. These are questions my research addresses. From the father's perspective Tom's world was an alien one, made familiar only through an Internet-mediated exploration of its territory after the son's death. This newspaper story spoke with some poignancy of the relationship made possible by computer connection, but also paradoxically of a disconnection, manifest in the father's search for the son he had lost, perhaps even before his death. The father finds his son, not in the familiar and reassuring diary where thoughts are made manifest in the written word, but in a series of dialogues which find representation in screen after screen.

The article introduces my research through metaphor by first articulating a series of figurations: the suggestion that game playing is an addiction; and the attribution of blame on new media for causing calamitous events and de-stabilising existing patterns of relationship. It then moves beyond these in describing a further investigation manifest in the father's seeking out of his son's Internet correspondents.

Weizenbaum (1976, p. 121) offered an early analysis of relations between computer and user. He characterised the intensity of the relation in psychopathological terms. For him, the long hours programmers spent constantly improving their creations was a form of compulsion. He likened the computer user to the compulsive gambler. Over a decade later, Kinder's (1991) account of the user/game relation and Sofia's (1993) exploration of the mythical dimensions of computer culture attempted to explain boys' dedication in oedipal terms. On the other hand, Neumark (1993) characterised the relation by invoking a medical metaphor assuming players to be addicted, infected, or technophiliacs.

The popular literature² established a controversy around the issue of addiction. Anthropologist Surrey's early article (1982) on video parlours, Sheff's (1993) book on Nintendo (provocatively entitled 'Game over: How Nintendo zapped an industry captured your money and enslaved your children'), and recent newspaper articles exemplify this trend³.

Typically, attempts at addressing the user's relation to the computer share a tendency to construct a fanaticism, an aberrated state, or at the very least a gendered alterity which, once discursively constituted, is made to require remediation or at the very least, explanation or qualification. In various ways these writers set the user's relation with the computer apart from the relations the rest of us have with the computer. In some senses the players/users are depicted as abnormal and are constructed as alien others. The intimations arising from these accounts are that authors/observers have immunity from the dis-ease they portray, to carry on with Neumark's medical metaphor. For Weizenbaum 'normal' activity became pathological when conventional Western diurnal rhythms were upset. In attempting a deeper analysis of the Nintendo fad which swept the US in the late eighties, Kinder (1991), constructed a gender-based differentiation. Her ambiguous handling of oedipal explanatory constructs moved between the biological/natural on the one hand and the textual/cultural on the other without the conviction that these crossings were understood or fully articulated. Neumark, like Kinder, did not acknowledge her own position as player/user. Neumark's infected users suffered from impairments to their five senses which inevitably led to identity crises. In her view players had lost 'paradise' conceived of as healthy sensuality.

² I take this to be television, radio, newspaper, popular magazine and books by journalists.
³ See Technobrats. (1993, April 26). Sydney Morning Herald, p. 35. See also the article cited above in footnote 1.
These authors have offered an explication of using/playing along these lines: players (not including myself) in their relations with machines suffer from or show evidence of conditions from which I am removed. What if, on the other hand, players (you and I) are neither infected or addicted, abnormal or obsessed, compulsive or impaired, or driven by an oedipal motor? What if our (ordinary) playing/using is merely an attenuated form of their (fanatical) playing/using? Suppose that the extremes, which are presumed noteworthy, are noteworthy only because they show us what we all are doing in this relation, when we become more or less willingly computer players. The intensity of the players’ relations with computers provides a window through which to scrutinise the workings of wider cultural processes. In investigating the players’ relations with computer games, one is inevitably investigating one’s own relations with a growing number of ‘things-with-textual-features-inscribed-in-their-algorithms’.

It is ‘relations’ rather than ‘use’ that my research takes as a focus. Central to my analysis is a critique of what have been called ‘artefactual approaches’ to new media. As Marvin (1988, p. 4) put it:

[A]rtefactual approaches foster the belief that social processes connected to media logically and historically begin with the instrument, then new media are presumed to fashion new social groups called audiences from voiceless collectivities and to inspire new uses based on novel technical properties.

Such approaches deny the salience of the social milieu in which a new practice emerges and the manner in which this social milieu is transformed by the new practice. The new practice I am referring to is the playing of computer or videogames. This practice is thoroughly relational. Not only is there a relation between the player and the game, but a relation among players, a relation with non-players and relations in ever widening contexts which implicate legal, moral and economic issues. Thus specific modes of use in various public and private spaces, when studied in sufficient detail, can reveal how negotiations are prompted by the new media’s use. Players were aware of the controversies surrounding their activities, and with a little encouragement made reference to them. Even a cursory reading of the relevant print-media articles provides numerous examples of new contests around the widespread practice of playing. They range from the controversies surrounding the establishment of new videogame parlours in public spaces, through the bitterly fought legal battles over the control of the software which makes them possible, to substantial differences of opinion concerning the value of their use in the home.

Computer game playing takes place on personal computers which have been ostensibly purchased for reasons other than the playing of games. Word processing, database and email uses are now common. What I shall call videogame playing on the other hand, either takes place in video parlours or on machines dedicated to that purpose, or in domestic situations where the player connects a module such as a SuperNintendo, or Sega console to a television set.

In domestic locations, computer/videogame playing takes place in a context of asymmetric relations between adults and children which are significant for initial purchase, the deployment of the hardware within the home, and the manner in which the hardware is used. ‘Use’ studies typically take the introduction of the hardware itself as a given. Instead of taking the ownership of a videogame console or personal computer as a taken-for-granted starting point for an investigation of its use, this inquiry invokes a family drama in which the purchasing, using, and disposal of consoles is implicated. For example,
negotiations are required for players to acquire the necessary hardware in the first instance, to play the games at home. Parents are typically the full or partial purchasers of this hardware. Somewhat delicate negotiations often take place among families around the introduction of these new media, as will be seen.

These are ‘new media’. ‘New media’ are introduced in the lifetime of several generations. Differential relations with new media can be meaningfully laid out across generational contours. Very approximately, the two groups in question are a generation brought up on computer/ videogames and their elders who were not. Departure from an artefactual –based investigation requires a sensitivity to a range of issues which are canvassed precipitously in the following summary:

Here, the focus of communication is shifted from the instrument to the drama in which existing groups perpetually negotiate power, authority, representation, and knowledge with whatever resources are available. New media intrude on these negotiations by providing new platforms on which old groups confront one another. Old habits of transacting between groups are projected onto new technologies that alter, or seem to alter, critical social distances. (Marvin, 1988, p. 5).

How computer/ videogame playing might alter social distances, how it might be implicated in family relations, how it might construct a new generation and distinguish it from the previous one, how it might upset existing understandings of one’s place in the order of things, and how old habits of conducting transactions are improvised to deal with the new situations they construct, are all profoundly disturbing but important questions which fall within the compass of this investigation.

A brief history of computer and video games.

The development of computer games and the ushering in of the cottage industry phase of computer game production in the United States spanned the period from the late fifties to the mid seventies. With the emergence of the personal computer as distinct from the mainframe an ongoing debate has occurred around the issue of whether information should be treated as a commodity with a price or whether it should be freely available. Contrasting practices of software distribution and development have revealed deep divisions on this question. Some software is freely distributed in the first instance, on the proviso that users will forward a small amount of money to the producer of the software, if they find it useful and want to continue using it. A young Bill Gates developed the BASIC program for the emerging personal computer at the beginning of his career. He challenged the idea of shareware, as it has become known, by insisting that the copying of software constituted ‘theft’ (Levy, 1984, p. 230).

At the time Gates first made this accusation in public, vast sums of US military funding continued to support the fledgling personal computer industry in the US. There were some who saw this as an investment producing wider benefits for the general public, and for whom the idea of amassing personal profits was an anathema. Thus two issues are raised: the role of the public purse in producing private wealth and secondly, the issue of the commodification of information. Both notions infiltrate the several accounts of the computer game’s early history and development.
Price (1985, p. 112) explained that William Higinbotham designed a working model of a tennis game which operated on a cathode ray tube connected to an analogue computer, to amuse visitors at the annual open day of the Brookhaven National Laboratory in Long Island, New York in 1958. He suggested that this was probably the first computer ‘game’, but Higinbotham didn’t bother to take out copyright on the game because the idea seemed so obvious to him. I suggest that what was ‘obvious’ at that time was that scientists employed in publicly owned facilities invented things whose applications were largely unknown and unforeseen. Furthermore, the commodification of knowledge in the form of ubiquitous cultural products was well below current levels. Commercially produced compact discs, videocassettes, and games cartridges were not yet on the horizon. In addition, Higinbotham’s comment suggests the general notion that not all producers of knowledge want to see that knowledge being sold for profit, and those working in institutions are often not in a position to profit from their inventions. Price inflects this as a lost commercial opportunity. This computer ‘game’ appeared 17 years before the advent of the personal computer and the markets which have formed around it. Higinbotham produced the ‘game’ in a public domain, for an appreciative public, who were asked to do little more than admire his achievement.

Prior to the advent of the personal computer, early ‘games’ were produced and distributed freely to institutions with computer facilities. Steve Russell’s Spacewar was a case in point. It was demonstrated at MIT’s open day in May 1962, and quickly found its way around university computer departments.

First with a dot on the screen that was later shaped into a spacecraft in a field of stars. By February they had two space crafts, each controlled by separate boxes with two levers for left-right and up-down and one “torpedo button”, which sent a line of light across the screen from the craft’s nose that would destroy the other craft if it hit it. The background stars were then rearranged into actual constellations. A heavy star with a gravity field that affected the flight of the spacecraft was then incorporated into the program. (Price, 1985, p. 113)

The first commercial videogame was probably Nolan Bushnell’s adaptation of Spacewar for the video arcade market. He used silicon circuitry to manufacture stand-alone units which were sold to video parlours as Computer Space in 1970. The videogame was judged to be too complex and difficult to play. Bushnell went on to establish the Atari computer company which produced the game Pong, the first widely successful arcade game in 1972. A version of Pong released for the personal computer sold 13 million units in the 1975 to 1978 period.

By the mid-seventies a market for both videogames and computer games had been established in the US. Videogames were taking their place alongside pin-ball and pool tables in amusement arcades. At the same time an alternative platform for the playing of games - the personal computer - was beginning to make its appearance. Together with the video console it makes possible the phenomena of this study - the playing of computer or video games in domestic spaces.

The corporate takeover of successful games producers in the eighties brought with it attempts to tighten control over the production and distribution of games. Computer games can be easily copied; videogames cannot. In either of their locations at home or in the video arcade, videogames are specifically tailored to the task of maintaining markets for their software. This corporate response to the problem minimises opportunities for copying and piracy. Prior to extensive marketing of the Internet itself, attempts to establish and
maintain markets for computer games have produced two courses of action: on the one hand the manufacturing of relatively expensive platforms for game playing (arcade videogames), which can be sold or rented by amusement parlour operators who then hire these machines to players on a pay-for-play basis; or, on the other hand, the manufacturing and marketing of inexpensive platforms (videogame consoles) without a copying facility.4

Arcade videogames give the manufacturer assured control over the distribution of the game software because they require an expensive platform. Maintenance of profits is then turned into the problem of ensuring continuing patronage of the arcades. Since different platforms compete for the player’s dollar, the games industry has had a roller coaster ride since the mid seventies, with a string of spectacular failures as well as much publicised successes. Arcades went through a substantial shake out in 1983, which saw the Time-Warner owned Atari drag its parent company down until Time-Warner divested itself of the organisation in 1984. Time-Warner’s share price plummeted from $US63 to $US19 at this time.5

On the other hand, some spectacular successes have also received considerable publicity including Nintendo’s SuperNES (Super Nintendo Entertainment System) and Sega’s Megadrive, the latter being the dominant videogame console system at the time I conducted my research. Also at this time, Sonic the Hedgehog was enjoying a world-wide popularity. After early indications of its likely success, the full resources of a multinational company (Sony) were employed in massive promotion in the US. Sony’s subsidiary, Sega, spent $US 10 million promoting Sonic 2 in the US over a two month blitz period in 1992. In 1993 their total advertising budget was $US 93 million. (Mediaweek 1992 and 1993). Such expenditure followed the enormous profits made by Nintendo and Sega in the US in 1992.6 Americans spent $US 6.8 billion on videogames in that year, a figure which overshadowed the $US 5 billion spent on movies. In Australia Sonic the Hedgehog was featured in magazine articles, newspaper reports, current affairs television, computer games reviews, and press releases.7

This economic success was predicated on both a strategy for providing a cheap platform on which cartridges could operate (without providing a copying facility), and on a series of legal decisions which ensured that computer/ videogames software was protected under copyright (US and Australia), or patent law (France) (Hemmes, 1982; Crisp, 1986; Desjeux, 1986; Frow, 1988; Gilbert and Lyman, 1989; Puri, 1991; Ricketson, 1992; Bainbridge, 1993). The consoles themselves were offered for sale at a small profit, while the game cartridges were initially priced for ‘healthy’ margins (commonly referred to as the ‘razor blades’ marketing strategy). A local manager of a software distribution company explained to me that 50% of earnings for a particular game were accumulated in the first 3 months of its release. At this time the premium price was charged. The next marketing strategy was to package the game with two or more others at about the same pricing level. Later the same game would be included in a package with the hardware purchase. Research

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4 In a similar way, corporations have preferred to support CD technology rather than the tape (DAT) alternative, because the former platform has no built-in recording or reproducing capability.
6 A survey conducted in 1994 found that Mario the Plumber was a more recognised figure among children than Mickey Mouse. Nintendo’s Super Mario Brothers had grossed more than $US 500 million worldwide. The entire industry outgrossed the movie box office industry and was nearly equalling the gross earnings of the movie industry (All in the game. (1994, May 2). Computer Letter 10, 14, p. 94).
7 Only a few examples are noted here: Supersonic. (1993, May). Juice, pp.82-5; Open slather in the battle of the videogames. (1993, November 13). Sydney Morning Herald, p. 40; A segment on ‘A Current Affair’ broadcast on Channel 9 on 9.7.93 consisted of an interview with Mr Miamoto who was characterised as the ‘inventor’ of Super Mario Brothers. Further articles are discussed later in this work.
on videogame consoles established that players would buy (on average) three of four games in the first year, two or three in the second year and perhaps one in the third year, at the peak of their popularity in 1993 and 1994.\footnote{Personal communication with Ian Mackay at the Office of Film and Literature Classification Conference 1994.}

By 1994 the games industry was dominated by 5 major publishers with the smaller successful publishers being gobbled up by multinationals. The game market worldwide was estimated at $US5 billion per year, and was made up of games on cartridges, CD-ROM, arcade games, and interactive television. Two genres of domestic playing had emerged: play on PC’s and play on television sets. The industry had organised itself into three types of companies:

1. Contract development companies whose core business was to provide a service and who issued contracts for game development.
2. Title development companies who were solely focused on the production of games using the latest technology.
3. Publishing companies who had access to worldwide marketing capacities.\footnote{Interactive games. (1994, April 1). The Computer Conference Analysis Newsletter, 339, p. 9.}

The meaning of ‘playing computer games’ is thus qualified by the transformation of the computer in these years of its emergence. The activities of hackers in the early years of the Model Tech Railroad Club at MIT bears some resemblance to the modern playing of computer games, as does the experimental activities of hobbyists who bought their first personal computer in the mid-seventies. What should be noted however, is that the activities of modern players of videogames are far removed from this early occupation, because the console provides little opportunity to alter the fundamental algorithms which determine its operation. These players are using a cultural product which has become commodified and largely resistant to any manipulation not sanctioned or envisaged by its producers. In one sense, information has been successfully commodified and fixed in the shell of the cartridge permitting only a small range of modification.

My study is therefore not a study of computer enthusiasts or ‘nerds’ though some of my players showed inclinations to pursue careers in computing. It is rather a study of the relations around these new cultural commodities called video or computer games. This volatile history of the computer as cultural product contextualises the praxis I investigate.

\textit{Into the field}

My early research forays took me to videogame parlours and milk bars in search of what was at that time, an elusive research object. In retrospect, the elusiveness of the object was as much a product of my changing conceptions of computer/ videogame playing as it was a response to venturing into an unfamiliar domain. In an early report on one of these experiences I wrote:
Field Notes. 5.6.93

Certain unremarkable practices, the playing of videogames in a cafe/milk bar located in a small suburban/rural village, by a group of half a dozen teenage boys, would remain an unremarkable practice, but for the intrusion of two middle aged men, with the status of 'post-graduate students/researchers', video camera underarm, making a morning raid on the 'Village Kitchen' in Watervale.

How do the natives deal with this intrusion of their space? ...We are natives of the same tribe, or so I assume - (white, anglo-saxon or do we say white-celtic?) What are the local conventions of language usage? 'White celtic teenage male' may be acceptable in academic discourse, but marks the speaker out as alien amongst videogame players. Better: "What other kids hang out here?" Still a problem. Who wants to know? What are these middle aged males doing in this milk bar? Zane and Bluetop have been given an account of our presence. They know we are from the university, that we are conducting some research. Ginger and Ponytail, we presume have worked out some account of our presence, though we have not explicitly given them one. The camera speaks on behalf of its holder. What does it say? 'I authorise this person to intrude into your everyday affairs.' 'I am telling you that you should want to be on film. You know, everyone wants to be a film star.' And decisions, decisions. Once in the flow, should we interrupt to announce ourselves to the newcomers (Ginger and Ponytail). What difference would our account of ourselves make to their account of themselves? ...

As researchers ...we make our enquiries and are met by various tactics: Zane, our most cooperative 'native' (and don't researchers like cooperative natives! a possible collaborator?) deals with us in a manner that he articulates when discussing how he conducts himself when playing against 'a bomber'; he lets them win to avoid a fight. Is he employing a similar tactic with us? He 'cooperates' but what history of coercion is presumed? Can we say he cooperates willingly? How do you respond to bigger males than yourself? His serious approach to study (He doesn't play computer games at home because they might interfere with his study for Year 10 exams this year) belies a valuing of education; does our status as postgraduate researchers impress him? Ginger and Ponytail, engage in a different conversation with us: Ponytail the non-talking participant ('who are these guys anyway?') Ginger- coaxed and coerced to reveal something but always giving the appearance of being pre-occupied: 'better not to say too much'; resistant to the intruders, impassive for the most part, not showing much to the camera. Karen, the female visitor, finds herself in a male domain; feigns interest but appears to want to be somewhere else. The girl's absence from these places is brought into conversation: Zane as always accommodating, Ponytail and Ginger guarding the male domain? Who can tell?

At this stage of the research I was looking to the players themselves for two reasons: to examine what they may have been willing to reveal in their talk, and to scrutinise their behaviour. In the first instance I imagined that what I was seeking lay beyond the psychological defences of a group of adolescent boys, in what they could reveal to me. I assumed they could reveal to me the secrets of videogame playing given the right kind of prompting, while almost painfully aware of the difficulties in establishing the rapport required to facilitate this process. In the second instance, I imagined there would be something evident in their behaviour which the video camera would capture.

10 'Bomber' is a slang term which describes youth who are known to be graffiti artists.
In this sense I was constructing the problem of researching video game playing as a specific kind of psychological problem. At that time, my research dilemma could be expressed as follows: find out what the boys were thinking; observe them closely; analyse their thoughts and responses; gauge the effects of this new medium. In this sense, psychology's familiar research object appeared: the person. I was following a trail well worn by researchers in the 'media effects' tradition, which failed to recognise the relational nature of engagements with audio-visual media. Pursuing this holy grail was like seeking to understand a dyad by continually interrogating one of the partners only. At this stage I was beginning to realise that there was something of the nature of a partnership or relation that I wished to investigate. This was a peculiar hybrid—half boy, and half videogame.

The extensive psychological research on computer/ videogame playing was helpful in a negative sense. It was preoccupied with 'perceptual' and 'cognitive' aspects. The focus was on an examination of the player and player attributes. The key questions examined were 'How does the game assist the players' thinking?' 'How does the game alter the player's perception?' It was imagined that this was all there was to find in the players' engagement with this new medium (Greenfield, 1984; Larose, 1989; Brown and Brown, 1992; Provenzo, 1992). The concepts of social science here suggest universal qualities of mind uncontaminated by culture, because culture was made to pass through them - they were understood as universal structures of mind, partitioned off from materiality. In a sense, this focus on a process of 'perceiving' subtly elides the content of that perception: the object of the seeing or listening. Thus what I came to understand as the textuality of games themselves, seemed to pass through the structures which 'perception' or 'cognition' posited, without lodging anywhere. Not only does psychologically-inspired research focus on the player and the player's psychology, but it does so in such a way that the textual qualities of this engagement are disregarded.

In the review of the research literature which follows the absence of textual analyses is evident. It is one of the characteristics of a substantial social science research literature on computer/ videogame playing.
2. A critical evaluation of research on computer/ videogame playing

Introduction

This review and critical analysis of research on computer/videogame playing is set against the backdrop of popular writing on the topic. Researchers’ preoccupations have never been far removed from the agendas established by popular discourse. Much of the early writing on computer games was enthusiastic about the pedagogical value of the new medium.¹ There was also a contrasting view which saw computer game playing as antithetical to achieving high grades in school.

In general, research has appeared in response to ‘moral panics’.² At the height of these outpourings in the popular media all kinds of harmful consequences were claimed for computer/videogame playing. Like ocean waves these outpourings reached a peak then subsided with each wave peculiarly inflected with contemporary ‘concerns’. There have been two clearly identifiable waves of moral panic in computer/videogames’ short history, I have called respectively, ‘the crime wave thesis’ ‘the cyberpunk thesis’.

‘The crime wave thesis’ reached its apogee in the ‘Pac Man’ period in the early 1980’s when Pac Man achieved unprecedented commercial success. Its rise was made evident in this country by Van Moorst’s (1980) response to allegations made against amusement parlours in several Melbourne suburbs which he researched between 1974 and 1980.³ He partitioned the allegations made by ‘the authorities’ as follows:

1. That videoarcades produced ‘misbehaviour’ and ‘bad language’.
2. That videoarcades encouraged truancy.
3. That money spent in videoarcades was stolen money.
4. That crime were planned in videoarcades.
5. That ‘undesirables’ congregated in videoarcades.
6. That videoarcades had destructive effects in terms of making players more violent after play (Van Moorst, 1980, pp.6-8).

The popularity of games in video parlours met with occasional vitriolic outbursts from various among the city fathers both here and overseas. I refer only to a local example though there are many similar examples from spokespersons in other countries at this time. Fiske and Watts (1985) quoted the now discredited Western Australian Premier, Brian Burke, as saying: “I’d axe video parlours” echoing a popular sentiment of the early eighties. Two senior members of the then Labor government described parlour game playing as “detrimental and addictive”. These outbursts were generally extensively reported, and form part of a larger problematic concerning youth and the media. The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (1992, p. 46) suggested that negative portrayal of youth in print media perpetuated a process of marginalisation which continues to create problems for youth. The popular accounts of video parlour activities invoked

² Stanley Cohen’s (1967) evocative phrase.
³ The suburbs were Sunshine, Springvale, and Fitzroy.
aggression, crime and gambling, addiction and a perjorative view of fantasy as "losing one's grip on reality".

Both Van Moorst's research and the work of Surrey (1982) in the US, responded to this thesis in a very direct and transparent fashion, unlike many of the studies considered later in this review. Both investigated video parlours at first hand and both interviewed players. Neither found evidence supporting the allegations. Surrey found that video parlours were not hotbeds of crime, gambling and drug trafficking. Van Moorst found that the allegations were simply not true. He concluded that amusement parlours were being used as scapegoats to explain complex social issues which revolved around issues of family breakdown, economic disadvantage, and the lack of community facilities for young people.

This wave subsided with a period of contraction in the computer/videogame industry around 1982. Markers of this period of decline were Time-Warner's sale of the Atari company and the closure of a large number of videoarcades. Little was written in the popular literature on videogames between 1987 and 1991 in the English-speaking world. Meanwhile, Nintendo was busy launching its new consoles on the domestic Japanese market in preparation for what was to follow.

The second wave - 'the cyberpunk thesis' - was a response to the success of Nintendo and Sega in promoting their videogame consoles worldwide in the late 1980's. Importantly, the new moral panic was centred around domestic and private use of videogames, rather than their institutional and public usage in video parlours, which had been a salient feature of the 'crime wave thesis'. Now 'the devil was in domestic spaces'. In Australia, as elsewhere, this wave found consolidation around the issue of families, censorship, and control, and culminated in the introduction of censorship categories in April 1994. Articles with this new moral panic theme appeared in a number of newspapers and popular magazines. For example, Time magazine shrieked 'Cyberpunk' in an article which widely circulated the term, and an aspiration to unify what it characterised as a 'counter culture'. The sub-title of the article managed to include 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll' in its 20 or so words. The article proposed that unspoken concerns and hidden workings of strange new activities among rebellious youth, supported by a series of computer-generated images. Disappointingly, the article itself was simply an unacknowledged reworking of material from Levy's (1984) book on the early days of computer development at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the early 1960's.

4 From time to time this theme reappeared in newspaper stories. For example an reported a decision to refuse a videop生产 application in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Marrickville. The article reported 'evidence' which suggested the players were "children already under-motivated and low in self-esteem. They tend to share their disillusion, to engage in activities of a mindless and fantastical nature and generally to become susceptible to behaviour that borders or transgresses the legal". The 'evidence' was in fact opinions expressed by community leaders. City country in video battle. (1993, April 6). The Sydney Morning Herald, pp. 1, 16.

5 National Times, 16 Nov, 1994.


8 The 'attitudes' identified by the author can be found in Levy's (1984) book, there called 'the platform of the hacker ethic', which in turn were a set of loosely agreed on, but largely unpublished principles which served as dogma for the early software developers at MIT in the early 1960's. Levy's 'All information should be free' (p.40) became in the journalist's account 'Information wants to be free' (p.48). 'Always yield to the hands-on imperative' (p.40) remains unchanged though unacknowledged. 'Mistrust authority-
Articles similar in tone appeared in the local press. 'Technocrats' warned parents against the excessive use of computers by children. It quoted comments by psychiatrist, Dr Brent Waters:

The computer has gone beyond an educational and entertainment interest and has become an escape from an ordinary pattern of teenage life... Kids who become really obsessed often don't feel very confident in social relationships. A computer is something they can master and it doesn't cause them any emotional pain to interact with it.

'The cyberpunk thesis' alleged social isolation caused by persistent engagements with videogames and highlighted the danger in "fingertip" access to sexually or violently explicit images. The computer/videogame connection brought with it an unwanted (by whom?) infiltration of children's domestic and personal spaces. The thesis was both a response to videogame playing via console, and to the opportunities which the Internet opened for both play and connection to all kinds of combinations of image and text.

Although not exhaustive this brief account serves to contextualise the academic study of computer/videogame playing. I have grouped my review of this literature under four headings:

(a) Surveys of game playing

(b) Surveys of game playing in video parlours and the 'needs' thesis

(c) Uses, gratifications and motivational research employing non-survey methods

(d) Studies which recognised talk as central to playing

(a) Surveys of game playing

Survey approaches to computer/videogame play were typically based on questionnaires filled out by young people. The first four of these studies were brief investigations largely informed by the 'crime wave thesis', though this was unacknowledged in the researchers' accounts.

Dominick's (1984) survey of tenth and eleventh graders in north-east Georgia asked about the relation between videogame playing, television watching, and aggressive behaviour. He

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Promote Decentralisation' (p. 41) was transformed into the much watered down 'Promote Decentralisation', once again without acknowledgement. The 'Hacker ethic' was repackaged by the journalist as 'Cyberpunk attitudes' with the addition of the imperative: 'surf the edges'.


10 Waters has since published a book on children and computers. He continues to write a column in the Sydney Morning Herald which is far less strident in tone than the quoted piece.


12 I have excluded a literature best described as 'production histories' from the present account: Levy 1984; Price 1985; Haddon 1988, 1993; Rose 1989; Press 1993. They inform my introductory remarks on the productiveness of games.
relied on questionnaire responses alone, performing correlational analysis of the coded information. His research appears to have been driven by the 'evergreen' violent media effects thesis, which in this variant attempted to answer the question: 'Is there a relation between high videogame usage and violent behaviour?' As there was no attempt at direct observation of any of the behaviours framed by such a question, the study produced equivocal findings with respect to its major thesis. Furthermore it did not provide a basis for directly comparing domestic videogame playing with arcade-based playing though it is clear that more time was spent by both girls and boys playing videogames at home compared with playing them in arcades. In spite of Dominick’s perverse reporting of findings the main outcome of his research was that

Home videogame playing generally occupies a small part of the sample’s time, with 62% of the girls and 55% of the boys spending less than an hour per day on their home video systems... For both sexes, the modal amount of time spent playing arcade videogames was small-less than an hour per week" (pp.141-2)

Kestenbaum and Weinstein (1985) administered a series of questionnaires to 447 junior high school students in "an urban middle-class neighbourhood" (p.331). The researchers appeared to be responding to claims that 'high users' of video games were more aggressive as a consequence of their play. The series was made up of 30 questions relating to videogame use, 30 general personality questions from Eysenck's (1958) short form extraversion and neuroticism scales, and Singer and Antrobus's (1970) "acceptance of daydreaming scale". Two unexplained decisions to exclude some of the data of this study were puzzling. The responses of the 239 girls were not considered, neither were the responses of non-playing boys. The researchers reported on the questionnaire responses of 'high-video' players, ambiguously defined as "spending at least 5 hours or 5 dollars a week on pay video games", and those spending less than that amount, described as the 'low-video group'. There were no differences between these two groups on the extraversion, neuroticism, or daydreaming scales. "High-video players reported liking to play video games when wound up and tense more than did the low-video group" (p. 331). Other differences between the high and low users were:

(a) the high users preferred to play against others

(b) it was more important for high users to be good at their play

(c) high users tended to agree more with the statement: "I am annoyed by people who get in my way"

The statement: "I get very impatient when I have to wait for something that I want badly" did not discriminate between groups.

The researchers saw videogames as providing for the "discharge of pent-up energies and particularly of aggressive energies" (p.330), a thesis derived from Freud's notion of catharsis.

McLure and Mears (1986) surveyed 290 students in Grades 9-12, in a public high school in the south-west of the USA. The personality measures of videogame players showed no pathological tendencies. The expectation of finding pathological tendencies suggested a link with the 'crime wave thesis', though the researchers made no such acknowledgment in their writing. 'High-rate' videogame players were found to be less achievement-oriented than low-rate players, and more extraverted as defined by Eysenck's Personality Inventory.
The following two studies explored themes apparently relevant to the marketing of computer games, though this connection was not made explicit in either of the accounts.

Mehrabian and Wixen (1986) asked university undergraduates to rate games on a number of scales, based on Osgood’s semantic differential, which they suggested gave evidence of the games’ “emotional impact”. They claimed that games ‘elicit’ particular emotional responses in players which they ‘measured’ by getting players to create a visual image of the game in their ‘mind’s eye’, and then asking the player to rate the imagined game on a set of response categories which they called ‘total pleasure’, ‘arousal’, and ‘dominance’. The manner of determining how these dimensions were established as salient was not explained. Thus their determination that a particular game produced an emotion of ‘dominance’ (sic) in the player, appears puzzling in the context of a research practice which obscured its workings. Neither the questionnaire itself nor any items from it were published in the article. The study illustrates the malleability of the concept of ‘motivation’ in the hands of social science researchers, where a term (dominance), more appropriate to political science or the analysis of power relations, became a motivational explanation for computer game play. The researchers appeared to be using ‘dominance’ in the sense of ‘being in control’.

The obscure manner in which Mehrabian and Wixen’s findings are reported begins to make sense when the historical moment of the study is considered as a salient feature. Their finding that games’ emotional impact was “highly unpleasant, moderately arousing, and moderately dominance-inducing” (p. 8) addressed concerns then present in the industry, which had just suffered a disastrous downturn driving several companies into liquidation. Mehrabian and Wixen’s study can be seen as addressing a commercial problem facing the industry: how to make games more attractive to players. Its opacity may well be explained by a combination of motivations: the desire to improve game design, and a determination to obscure the details of the conduct of the research. This was evident in the following words from their conclusion: “The emotional reaction-preference relationships identified in both studies suggest a rationale for alternative designs which would generate feelings of excitement, elation, or vigour... without necessarily generating displeasure.” (p. 14). The guardedness of the authors’ comments is made more intelligible when seen in such a commercial/academic nexus.

A brief Japanese study appeared to be an attempt to assess the commercial significance of the videogame craze. Shimai, Yamada, Masuda, and Tada (1993) surveyed families in 9 cities in Japan, discovering that 87% of the boys and 68% of the girls had computer games machines in their homes. A quarter of the boys but only 4% of the girls reported daily playing. No information was provided as to whether the 68% of girls having computer games in the home also had brothers.

The remaining studies were driven by a functionalist replacement thesis on computer/ videogame playing. Here, researchers posed one or more variants of the following basic question: ‘What activities have computer game playing replaced?’ Some simply considered computer/videogame playing in contrast to other forms of electronic media use; some contrasted time spent playing with time spent on a broader range of ‘leisure’ activities, and some included non-leisure activities such as school studies. These works emphasised the uses to which new media were put, and so can be considered as part of a tradition in media studies known as ‘uses and gratifications’ studies (Blumler and Katz, 1974). In this view members of the audience are seen as actively processing media content according to their own needs.
A hierarchy of leisure activities was established in the work of Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe (1986), who extensively surveyed the media habits of Swedish 15 and 16 year olds across city, town, and country areas. They selected the city of Malmö (with one class taken from every secondary school in the district), a middle-sized town, Kristianstad (where all 9th graders were surveyed), and the country areas of Sjöbo, Höör, and Hörsby. Questionnaires were distributed and administered in the classroom during 1984. Relevant to this study was their reporting of Swedish government research, which found that the 9-14 year old age group had the greatest ‘access’ to new media, defined then as colour TV, Text-TV, video recorders, video cameras, video games, home computers, stereocassette radios, and walkmans. Twenty-three percent of their respondents had access to videogames at home. They found 50% of their sample had not played videogames at all - 68% of girls but only 31% of boys. Boys reported heavier usage of games than girls. There was a tendency for heavier users to be members of families with relatively highly educated parents. The authors suggested this finding could be explained in terms of higher parental income levels, coupled with an increased likelihood that professionals would have computers at home.

The researchers found the most common site for playing was the player’s home, or the home of a friend. Over 80% of their respondents indicated they played games at home. No girls in the sample reported playing in arcades, while the figure for boys ranged from 5% in the country, to 15% in the city. Two-thirds of respondents indicated they mostly played games with a friend, in contrast to the other categories: with parents, siblings, or alone.

Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe conceived of their task as a ‘descriptive’ one.

In this report we shall not be directly concerned with “effects” but with description. This is not because we altogether abdicate the quest for effects but because, following Jassem and Desmond, we believe it is essential first to have some idea of the social map of the phenomenon we are attempting to analyse (p. 51).

Their use of the phrase ‘social map’ suggests the researchers appeared to recognise the role of theorisation in constructing different kinds of data. However, they went on to claim that they had produced an unsullied set of “data” upon which their analysis was based. They noted gender differences, and although they recognised the need for an explanation the best they could offer was to suggest gender as a ‘factor’. Their concern about gender-differentiated enthusiasm for computer game playing stopped well short of offering a cultural critique, although they noted that the likely result was that few girls were likely to enter the computer industry. Furthermore, a substantial unacknowledged theorising was implicit in the form of the ‘data’ categories they employed in framing their questionnaires eg. socio-economic class, rural vs city, and gender.

They discussed the alleged harmful consequences of playing videogames in the following:

To the student of the history of television, and more recently video... research [], all of this will have a familiar ring. Not only the television media have been subjected to such overheated debates either (sic), in their turn the cinema and rock music have also been cast into the roles of “folk devils”, as indeed have some types of printed media such as horror comics (see Barker, 1984). The problem for serious research is to avoid the emotionally overcharged atmosphere of these debates; which in fact revolve around cultural criticism, and especially the nature
A critical evaluation of research on computer/ videogame playing

and effects of popular culture; and to concentrate on social analysis of the phenomenon and its place and role in the social structure (p. 44).

Their attempt to summarise a range of writing on popular culture at least acknowledged it, in contrast to the ignorance of any kind of cultural critique displayed by most researchers of computer/videogaming. However, their characterisation of cultural critique as ‘overheated’ and ‘overcharged’ was an attempt to ‘naturalise’ and claim ‘seriousness’ for their own position. There were no ‘overheated debates’ for Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe because they consistently avoided entering any debate at all on these issues. Apart from the above excerpt there was no discussion in their work of the cultural meanings emerging from computer/ videogame play.

Like most surveys of computer/ videogame playing, Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe appeared to be responding to a public agenda on new media which was constructed around anxieties about new media habits. They failed to recognise the auspices of their own research practice and the social milieu in which it was conducted, instead clinging to the notion that their research was atheoretical. In a sense they imagined that data ‘spoke’ in some unambiguous fashion, a notion that I wish to challenge.

Creasey and Myers (1986) investigated the persistence of videogame playing following the purchase of consoles, and the relation between videogame use and the use of other electronic media in the home. They found that total amounts of domestic usage of videogames, as reported in questionnaires, fell from an initial high of around 15 hours per week 3 weeks after purchase, to approximately 6 hours per week, 3 months after purchase, and around 2 hours per week, 12 months after purchase. Videogame playing time appeared to erode the amount of time the children, aged 9 to 16, had available to watch television or go to video parlours, but this state of affairs was short-lived, with the time spent on videogames declining and the time spent on other electronic media activities almost returning to their initial levels. Their study appears to have been prompted by concerns of parents and educators that videogame playing was adversely affecting study habits, school grades, and time spent socialising with peers, because measurements of all three formed part of the study. They found no adverse effect on children’s study habits or school performance. They concluded that time spent playing videogames slightly eroded the amount of time children spent watching television in the long-term.

Lin and Lepper (1987) surveyed 234 fourth to sixth graders on their computer/ videogame use through questionnaires administered by their teachers. Boys reported using computers at a friend’s house more often than girls, and boys were heavier users of computers than girls. In attempting to discover whether computer/ videogame playing had ‘replaced’ other activities, their research was clearly located in a functionalist tradition. The playing of computer/videogames was found to supplement, rather than replace, the playing of non-computerised board games and team sport, or the watching of television, though there was some suggestion that boys, who were heavy users of computer/ videogames, did not read very much. Interestingly, girls’ computer/ videogame use was correlated with teachers’ ratings of academic competence, but this relation did not hold for boys.

The functionalist replacement thesis resonates with marketing approaches to audiences. It is a small step from such studies to the kind of studies which ‘measure’ audiences to indicate gains or losses in viewership for those with an investment in attracting and maintaining audiences. Those with commercial interests in kids’ media use such research for the assistance it might offer in a highly competitive market for kids as media audiences. As several authors have noted, however, audience-hood tends to be reduced to a commodity which can be traded between program makers, media owners, advertisers and advertising
agencies (Mellencamp, 1990; Ang, 1991). Interestingly, a recent study by Grey Advertising has charted an 8 to 10% decline in kids' viewership of traditional television shows in the US over the past 5 years. This decline has been attributed to greater media choice, including videogames.\(^{13}\)

The following research focused on this very issue of the changing media habits of young media users. Kubey and Larson (1990) explored usage of 'new media' among 9 to 15 year olds in Chicago. Their 483 respondents filled out reporting sheets, in response to regular calls from an electronic pager which they carried for the week they were surveyed, all surveys being completed between May 1985 and March 1987. The new media were defined as MTV, VCRs, and video games. It was estimated that 35% of the households surveyed had been receiving cable television programs for up to 3 years, 85% possessed VCR's, and 39% had computers accessible to the respondents. The table reporting media use is reproduced below:

Table 1. Frequency of media use (Kubey and Larson, 1990, p.117).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of reports</th>
<th>% of all media time</th>
<th>% of all time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>traditional media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>2355</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>new media material</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music video</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCR</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video games</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other media</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No reporting was demanded between 9.30 pm and 7.30am. Significantly, it was established that 80% of videogame play was by boys, and that 77% of videogame play took place in the home. Furthermore, 46% of the reported play was solitary, while 17.8% was with other family members, and 35.6% was with friends. (see Table 2).

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Table 2. Percentage of media use by social context (simplified), (Kubey and Larson, 1990, p. 119).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>no. of reports</th>
<th>alone</th>
<th>family</th>
<th>friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>traditional media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>2262</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music video</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCR</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video games</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kubey and Larson summarised their findings in the following manner:

Video games were frequently played alone (46.5%), and infrequently played with the family (17.8%), but they were played with friends (35.6%) more than twice as often as engagements in any other media activity (p. 118).

They recognised a growing independence from family in adolescents' media practices, not only in relation to videogame playing but also with respect to their watching of music videos.

[As] children grow older, they spend less media time supervised by their parents. In this regard, particularly negative affective states were associated with the small handful ... of occasions when a few respondents watched music videos with parents... As suggested elsewhere, part of the function of music listening is differentiation from one’s parents (p.125-5).
Table 3. Social Interaction (Percentage of time spent by children and teenagers) (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996, p. 28).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electronic entertainment activity</th>
<th>Alone %</th>
<th>With other children and teenagers %</th>
<th>With an adult present %</th>
<th>Not specified %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>watching television</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to the radio</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to CD's, cassettes</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watching videos</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing video games</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing games on computer</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing handheld games</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going to the movies (cinema)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing games at arcades</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cupitt and Stockbridge’s (1996) research produced a similar finding based on children’s questionnaire responses. A sample of 743 parents with children between 8 and 17 across Australia, were interviewed employing a written questionnaire as a prepared ‘script’, a practice not uncommon in marketing research. The ‘interview’ was conducted face-to-face, and time-use diaries covering a three day consecutive period were left for the kids to complete. Thirty-four per cent of their play was solitary, 40% of their playing was with peers, while 8% of the time an adult was present.

Given a rather high proportion of non-responses to this question, there was remarkable consistency across these two studies on the question of who played videogames and what company they kept while playing. The findings of both studies supported the following assertion: *around 80% of domestic videogame playing took place without parents or guardians present in the room.*

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14 Kubey and Larson’s figure here was 82.1%; Cupitt and Stockbridge’s figure was 74% but was an underestimate because of the 19% in the ‘not-specified’ category; on a three way distribution of this residue the figures would become: alone - 42%, peers - 49%, and with parents - 10%, on the assumption that non-
However, Cupitt and Stockbridge offered a perverse reading of their own findings in the following comment:

Children and teenagers said they liked to watch television alone, when in fact they spent most of their time watching television with an adult or with another child present (69 per cent). Playing video games also turned out to be more a social activity than was suggested by children and teenagers in the questionnaires. 48 per cent of the time another child or adult was present (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996, p. 28).

The second sentence, in particular, is misleading. By aggregating two categories of response (‘peers present’ and ‘parents present’) the authors insisted that playing videogames was a social activity. In the next metaphoric breath they suggested this was in some way contrary to young people’s views, apparently denying that these findings themselves were produced by young people’s questionnaire responses.

Their failure to acknowledge that around 80% of domestic videogame playing took place without parents or guardians present, can be partially explained by the manner in which their particular research investigation was framed. The study explored parents ‘rule-making’ around ‘electronic entertainment leisure pursuits’ (p. xviii). Cupitt and Stockbridge acknowledged this agenda in their introduction by noting that their research “commences with the identification of parental concerns across a spectrum of social issues” (p. ix). It is evident that the agenda of ‘concerns’ about videogame playing contributed to the difficulties they had in acknowledging an important finding of their study.

If Cupitt and Stockbridge had acknowledged the centrality of this finding in the same manner as Kubey and Larson, then the very edifice of their study would be seen to be in need of repair. Their notions of ‘parental concern’ and ‘rule making’ remain useful only to the extent that it can be demonstrated that the ‘concern’ had a substantial knowledge base, and that ‘rules’ were enforceable. I am not as confident as Cupitt and Stockbridge seem to have been that parents have detailed knowledge of their children’s computer/videogame playing, in the face of their findings and my own work which both suggest that parents were rarely present in the room while the child was playing. Furthermore, while their study demonstrated some consensus on ‘rules around use’, no evidence was produced on the matter of whether rules were enforced or even as to whether they were enforceable, given a substantial parental absence from the domain of playing.

(b) Surveys of game playing in video parlours and the ‘needs’ thesis.

Popular print-media accounts of computer/videogame playing have typically focused on the highly visible games parlours, and before them pinball parlours. There have been a number of attempts to survey the users of these public commercial centres.

The aim of Van Moorst’s (1980) study was to provide a statistical profile of users of an inner-Melbourne amusement parlour, based on the work of Erica Winter. In the introduction to the report he espoused libertarian ideas, characterised ‘planners’ as the respondents would distribute evenly. This gives a massive 91% of playing occurring without parents or guardians present!
enemy of youth (particularly idle youth), and generally offered criticisms of the Town Planning Appeal Tribunal’s decision to ban amusement parlours in December 1979. 322 children, between the ages of 8 and 14 were interviewed as part of a study of youth recreation. Only 10% of those interviewed said that they played pinball; 81% of the girls reported never playing, compared with 59% of the boys. Pinball playing was correlated with a range of other activities, including playing sport, watching sport, watching television, and visiting friends. There was no apparent correlation between pinball playing and reading, or listening to the radio. It is evident from this study that the precursors to fully electronic amusement parlours found themselves to be the object of ‘moral panic’ campaigns, to which Van Moorst’s research was a response. All kinds of social ills have been imagined to emanate from their doors.

Selnow (1984) devised a questionnaire which he administered to 244 children between the ages of 10 and 14 attending a summer sports camp. Though he restricted his inquiry to arcade videogame playing, his research questions pursued a functionalist agenda which presumed that videogame playing, and television watching, met the ‘needs’ of the individual in some way. Heavy users of videogames/television were thus presumed to have “a more compelling need to get away from things” (p. 153). In constructing his investigation in this way, he supported the familiar North American thesis that ‘consumers get what they want’, and failed to recognise his part in the process of ‘making them appear to want what they get’. This needs-based explanation resulted in a tautology: use implies ‘needs’ and ‘needs’ explain use. Such research explanation sustains an ideological and individualistic way of talking, which fails to recognise the ways the researchers have framed their findings. The researchers found that 83% of the children reported playing videogames ‘at least sometimes’.

Wigand, Borstelmann, and Boster (1984), also used a needs analysis in surveying players exiting from dedicated video arcades, in the greater Phoenix (Arizona) area. Of the 447 respondents, 226 were college students, 171 were high school students, and 50 were described uninformatively as ‘arcade patrons’. The ethnic proportions were noted: 95% Whites, 3% Hispanics, and 2% Blacks. Like Selnow, these researchers forced their respondents to choose from pre-determined categories, in answering a series of questions. The first question was “why do you go to video arcades?”. The response categories offered were: "(A) To release tension and frustration. (B) For fun and entertainment. (C) To escape and get away from it all.” The second question was “how do you feel when you leave the video arcade? The response categories were: (A) I feel really good. (B) I feel relaxed and calm. (C) I feel fulfilled. (p. 284). A factor analysis of the responses to the questionnaire gave three factors which the authors labelled as the ‘excitement’, ‘satisfaction’ and ‘tension-reduction’ factors. The authors appear unaware of the symmetry of this procedure, which produced findings echoing the researchers’ presuppositions embodied in their categories. There was no possibility for the researchers to be surprised by these ‘findings’ because their investigative procedure precluded the possibility of respondents contributing anything other than the answers already prepared for them.

Playing was again conceived as 'meeting a need'. These so-called 'needs' show themselves to be particularly serviceable; they can be invoked to explain human occupation of various kinds, and presumably are satiated when the occupation ceases. By this invocation, the needs for video games rose sharply in the early 1980's, flattened out, and then declined in 1983, and then, rose up again in the late 80's with the 'Nintendo need', and fell back again in the 90's. The insularity of these disciplinary understandings of usage is such that the commercial activities of promotion and marketing are rendered invisible. This genre, which could be called 'psycho-needs' research, sustains the notion of the sovereign consumer. If the American people get what they want, they are certainly seen by 'psycho-needs' researchers, to be wanting what they get.
Michaels (1993) surveyed video parlor use, appearing to specifically address matters of interest to commercial operators of parlours. He interviewed parlour managers who described four types of players: so-called 'addicts', who came in almost every day and spent two to three hours a day playing, at a cost of between $10 - $20 per day; 'regulars', who came in three to five times a week for an hour or so, and spent between $5 - $10 a visit; 'occasional players', who attended once or twice a week, with similar patterns to 'regulars'; 'strangers', who came in infrequently. This researcher examined four mall-situated video parlours, finding consistently that females constituted about 6% of all users, that busy periods were tied to movie starting and finishing times, and that special mall attractions increased passing traffic, and hence patronage, as did bad weather. Michaels further noted that he observed no altercations between players during his observations, apparently responding to the popular assumption that parlours were hotbeds of discontent and crime. An earlier finding by Trinkaus (1983) gave a ratio of 8 males to every 3 female players in a parlour adjacent to a New York Railroad station.

The surveys of video parlour use provide some useful information. In summary, they indicated that patronage has been dominated by males of school to university age. Furthermore, Van Moorst alerts us to the 'moral panic' agendas which have established themselves around amusement parlours, and which are certainly found in popular contemporary discussions of videoarcades. I have noted the circularity of attempts to 'explain' videogame activity in 'needs-analysis' terms. In the following section I extend my critique to questionnaire-based methods, which remain the mainstay of survey research.

Critical analysis of questionnaire-based methods

I'll start by noting some aspects of psychology's traditional research forms. In a recently published article John (1998, p. 27) has noted:

A psychological experiment usually takes the form of an encounter between a docile, compliant and not infrequently coerced subject who does the bidding of a detached and socially distant experimenter. Face-to-face interaction between experimenter and subject ... is minimised, and in the case of computer controlled, automated experiments, is often completely eliminated. The questionnaire, which is a refinement of the official bureaucratic form, is another equally impersonal method widely used in the conduct of psychological inquiry. Even the remote and asymmetric social relationships that these methods entail are still further attenuated, and individuals are ultimately completely lost sight of when the numbers to which they have been reduced are aggregated, and expressed in still more generalised abstractions.

Surveys are responses to prior discourse and a continuation of such discourse. In many of the studies reviewed here, the manner in which a pre-existing discourse plays its role in the construction of the research object must be inferred, for such links are seldom discussed by researchers working in these social science traditions. In their accounts certain issues have been marked out for attention through processes which are rarely transparent. I shall use a recent monograph authored by Cupitt and Stockbridge and published by the Australian Broadcasting Authority to illustrate several points here.

Cupitt and Stockbridge's agenda for research, was established through their work for the Australian Broadcasting Authority and its response to 'community concerns' about videogame playing. In establishing the ABA, the Australian Government charged it with
the responsibility of investigating these ‘community concerns’ on media issues. The ‘community concerns’ expressed in submissions to the Office of Film and Literature Classification were varied but commonly described videogames as “socially destructive, offensive or dangerous, harmful, encourage violence and capable of corrupting and depraving” (OFLC Report, 1994, p. 16). Many of the organisations making submissions claimed the high moral ground in suggesting that they spoke on behalf of large sections of the wider community. This claim of broad representation clearly appears in the very titles of these organisations (‘The National Viewers and Listeners Association’, ‘The Australian Family Association’, ‘The Country Women’s Association’, ‘The National Council of Women of Australia’). It is difficult to ascertain what interests are represented by these organisations, and how wide-ranging their support is. In fulfilling its charter the ABA must respond to these concerns which for the most part take the form of unsubstantiated allegations.

In this sense, there is an institutionalised dialogic underpinning of research activity. Widely disseminated views on computer and videogame playing in the electronic and print media are influential in the shaping of agendas for research. Typically these are portrayals of computer/ videogame playing which are unfavourable and suggest that players are not in control of their play or that games have harmful but largely unspecified ‘effects’ on players. The ABA work on computer games is useful in illustrating how the framing assumptions which guide researchers are predicated upon popular agendas which can be established by nothing more than a substantial allegation of media effects.

The situation is exacerbated by the tendency of researchers to leave unstated the processes involved in the establishment of research agendas. That survey researchers are implicated in controversies over new media practices is evidenced by their choice of focus despite the claims made by some that they are removed from such controversies. Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe (1986) made such a claim when they entertained the idea of ‘pure description’ as a ‘theory- less’ and ‘position-less’ activity. The questions that researchers have focussed on - ‘Are games addictive?’ - ‘Do they make players more aggressive?’ - ‘Do they cause children to ignore their homework?’ - clearly demonstrate that research practice responds to community ‘concerns’ whether researchers wish to acknowledge that or not.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin addresses these epistemological questions and provides theorisation of the relation between knower and the object of knowledge. Bakhtin argued that the ‘position’ of the knower was pivotal in the knowledge relation.

[He] argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies). In Bakhtin’s thought experiments, as in Einstein’s, the position of the observer is fundamental. If motion is to have meaning, not only must there be two different bodies in a relation with each other, but there must as well be someone to grasp the nature of such a relation: the non-centredness of the bodies themselves requires the centre constituted by an observer. But unlike the passive stick figures who are positioned at a point equidistant between two railway trains in the cartoons often used to illustrate Einsteinian motion, Bakhtin’s observer is also, simultaneously, an active participant in the relation of

15 The NVLA, for example, is a Perth-based organisation which sent circulars to all the members of the Australian Psychological Society in late 1993 making allegations similar in tone to the quoted summary above. National Viewers and Listeners Association. (1993, August 24). [Newsletter].

16 Cupitt and Stockbridge (1996) are the exceptions.
Simultaneity. Conceiving being dialogically means that reality is always experienced from a particular position. Bakhtin conceives the position in kinetic terms as a situation, an event, the event of being a self. (Holquist, 1990, pp. 20-1)

Surveys are constructed around questions which in themselves define a relation between researcher and subject. The auspices of such work are rarely examined. By interrogating the notion of a neutral [value-free] position we begin to acknowledge the dialogic character of [social] research.

The work of both Bakhtin and Michel de Certeau (1984) is immensely thought-provoking in relation to the enormous authority the written word has accumulated in the last couple of centuries in the western world. The power of the written word is such that it establishes for itself a primacy and, in the case of the survey or questionnaire, ascientific authority. de Certeau’s work characterises this as the ascendancy of the written, while Bakhtin issues a challenge to the authority of inscription.

My approach to social research is inflected with the Bakhtinian notion of the primacy of speech or talk. Thus, the specificity of speech and writing genres is acknowledged but not given undue emphasis, because Bakhtin continued to recognise the fundamental character of speech. For him, written forms were conceived as spoken forms which had undergone a series of transformations in order to become writing. Rather than idealising the opposition of talking and writing, for Bakhtin their differentiation presupposes a simultaneous resemblance and difference.

Secondary (complex) speech genres - novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth - arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organised cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical and so on. During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. There, primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation ...to the real utterances of others. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.62).

This loss of relation to the ‘real utterances of others’ anticipates much of my criticism of the survey method. However, it must be noted that all writing transforms speech, if only by placing it in another context with another presumed audience/readership. Here the concern is with a particular transformational process, which places particular restrictions on social research, and the possibilities of being surprised by ‘findings’.

Questionnaires have an established credibility in social research. They permit responses to be aggregated, encoded and represented in summary form. They have become so much a part of research practices that the losses they entail are barely noticed. From a dialogic perspective the losses associated with the use of questionnaires are especially significant and therefore worth considering in detail in relation to the survey research work which has attempted to assess the impact of computer/videogame playing.

1. Surveys do not attempt to engage players in spontaneous talk. The few studies which mentioned any kind of ‘free’ or ‘spontaneous’ talk between researchers and players, accorded such talk a special status by calling it ‘focus group’ or ‘qualitative stage’ of the research process. In Cupitt and Stockbridge’s account for example, this part of the research
was summarised in two pages which focused on the process of establishing these groups, rather than discussing the issues raised (p.xxii- xxiv). Some of the other surveys mentioned pilot stages of their surveying but failed to describe them in any detail. There was a clear valuation of research activity which accorded greater worth to 'quantitative' than to 'qualitative' material.

2. *Surveys or questionnaires are typically one step removed from the phenomena they claim to investigate*. Few researchers of videogames have entered the gameworld of players, in the sense of engaging with players in moments of their playing. In the few studies where researchers have entered video parlours the talk of players has not been recorded or examined.

A consideration of spontaneous talk with players 'on location' produces some sense of the issues *as defined by the players* in conversation. Such investigation reveals that players can offer a critique of popular public perceptions of videogame playing. This approach allows for an exploration of the relations around computer and videogame play.

3. *Survey procedures value commensurable responses tending to ignore those which cannot be easily aggregated*. Questionnaires were employed by these researchers in one of two ways: in the first, respondents were required to fill out the questionnaires themselves; in the second, respondents answered questions read to them from a standardised printed questionnaire, with responses recorded in schematic form.

In these methods respondents were subjected to a particular form of research, which forced them to 'speak' through a grid of pre-determined, statistically analysable categories embedded in the researcher's written questions and determined by research agendas. The subjects spoke through printed words already supplied or through phrases already placed in hierarchical order. Only one portion of the engagement between researcher and researched was reported: that which was readily quantifiable.

By contrast, a closer and deeper study of the particular reveals out-of-the-ordinary understandings, ruptures in the mundane, and special moments.

4. *Questionnaires here have been administered in a communication context where 'dialogue' has taken place within severe time constraints and where the opportunity for respondents to comment on the manner in which their 'talk' has been received and understood have rarely been provided*. In many of the instances of questionnaire investigation of videogame playing large groups of students have been simultaneously responding to written items. This provides little opportunity for either researcher to interrogate the answers provided, or for the respondents to interrogate the meanings of the researcher's questions. Conventional pedagogy through essay writing provides greater opportunity for dialogue (both written and spoken) between student and marker. Questionnaires close off dialogic possibility by making responses to them the final contribution of respondents to the matter in question. The opportunity provided in some questionnaires for any additional comments is rarely taken up, and even more rarely are such comments reported as 'findings'.

5. *It is impossible when relying on questionnaire answers alone to gauge each respondent's level of interest in the research topic*. Levels of interest in research topics among respondents are likely to vary. Typical survey research seldom addresses this issue. Some global indication of respondents' interest can be gleaned from their willingness to participate in the studies, though this is qualified by the method of recruiting participants. For example, some of these studies were conducted in primary schools by teachers. In this
situation there appears little opportunity for students to decline requests to fill out questionnaires.

Students are a familiar captive population for researchers. Conversational partners, by contrast, have numerous ways of showing declining interest in matters being discussed: falling asleep, not answering questions, changing the subject, making sarcastic comments etc. There is a sense in which questionnaires force their respondents to address the issues which the questionnaire lays out before them. How can we know whether subjects itch where questionnaires scratch?

6. Questionnaire and surveys provide little opportunity for respondents to participate in the establishment of research agenda. Cupitt and Stockbridge’s work is one of the few to employ a qualitative research phase, with the potential to provide an opportunity for participants to influence the research agenda. However, in their account of this process, this possibility was precluded. In reporting on the qualitative phase they mentioned that there was “a loosely structured discussion on the topic of electronic entertainment, guided by the research objectives and a list of topic areas identified prior to the conduct of the groups” (p. xxiii, my emphasis). I think this statement illustrates that ‘qualitative phases’ do not guarantee respondents a say in the determination of research agendas. Cupitt and Stockbridge’s agendas seem to have been well established even at this preliminary stage.

7. Researchers who are committed to a survey research paradigm cannot be surprised by findings. In establishing research agendas, and rigorously planning the questionnaire, survey researchers remove the possibility of unexpected findings. The range of answers is pre-determined by the compass of the questions.

In summary, certain kinds of knowledges are generated by such procedures. Questionnaires reduce the talk between researcher and subjects to discrete, final, and commensurable units which are in marked contrast to the open-ended and continuing quality of everyday conversation. In the last phase of a familiar process of knowledge production, this reduced information is interpreted by the researcher. It is expanded, quizzed, and interrogated.

It is as if the respondent has first to be elided in order to privilege the writing of the researcher and to make sure that the respondents are gagged or fall silent.

(c) Uses, gratifications and motivational research employing non-survey methods.

The research considered in this section investigated computer videogame playing using constructs which privileged uses, gratifications and motives.

My analysis moves progressively towards research with most salience for my work.

Greenfield (1984) reviewed the early research on computer game playing. She analysed the games’ attractiveness in terms of the rewards they offered the player, and the opportunities for social encounters they presented, extending the ‘uses and gratifications’ analysis of popular media forms such as television to the new media of computer games. Greenfield suggested that children’s responses to computer games were informed by their experience
of television. She interviewed four players who explained their preference for computer games over television:

One nine-year-old girl said, "In TV, if you want to make someone die, you can't. In Pac-Man, if you want to run into a ghost you can. Another girl of the same age said, "On TV you can't say 'shoot now' or, with Popeye, 'eat your spinach now'." She went on to say she would get frustrated sometimes watching Popeye and wanting him to eat his spinach at a certain time when he didn't. (Greenfield, 1984 pp. 90-1)

She drew a comparison between Pac-Man (an extremely popular computer game of the time) and board games by noting:

(a) that computer games facilitated a concurrent playing and learning of the rules

(b) that computer games had 'real-time' movement in them requiring players to develop a sense of timing in their execution of the game

Greenfield's adoption of an enthusiastic commentary position led her to an uncritical acceptance of children's assertions, in seeking to explain the popularity of games. She cited one child's statement: "It's no fun unless it moves" (1984, p.22) as support for a 'motivational' explanation which she failed to develop.

Her indebtedness to a uses and gratifications approach is revealed in the following quote which constructs the reader as a worried parent.

My own opinion is that the damaging effects the electronic media can have on children are not intrinsic to the media but grow out of the ways the media are used. Much of the content of commercial TV shows may have a negative effect on children's social attitudes... And television watching [and computer game playing] can become a passive, deadening activity if adults do not guide their children's viewing and teach children to watch critically and to learn from what they watch. (p. 2)

'Uses and gratifications' approaches fail to acknowledge the productive nature of all engagements with media. In Greenfield's explication the 'uses and gratifications' thesis 'good' use is imagined to leave the user unaffected, whereas 'bad' use is generated by a passive viewing. Some activity on the part of the viewer is putatively the antidote to 'negative effects', though the specifics of how the negative effects are to be avoided are not elaborated. Greenfield suggested that the negative effects could be found in 'children's social attitudes' though she did not suggest a mode of investigating these effects.

Myers (1984) observed players in a computer rental store in Austin, Texas. He reported on what appeared to be the retailers' categories for their clients: 'gamers' were males in their early to mid twenties who were students or graduates of the University of Texas, and who had an interest in computers outside of gaming; 'kids' were boys from 8 to 14 who came to the store most frequently on Saturday mornings whose parents paid for their play; 'customers' who were similar to 'gamers', but not involved in store based social activities. His research had the stated aim of aiding designers of instructional simulations. (p. 80).
Myers noticed that when a new game was introduced there was more discussion than usual, focused on comparing the game's features to other games, assisting players in determining how the game works. He quoted one player's comments as follows:

You learn by trial and error, that's what's fun to me. You can make mistakes and your characters die from it. But at least you learn something. It's not like it's the Hand of God or something. There's a reason. You just have to discover what it is. (p. 171)

Myers understood the motivation for playing as a seeking for control "through his software skills... logic and belief structures" (p. 173), as well as a seeking for predictability.

Enjoyment of a game comes from both player and game acting and reacting in a predictable manner. For instance, a player enters a well-known dungeon in Castle of Doom, a text adventure game, and predicts he will encounter five rats. He does so. The player's characters are well equipped to handle this rat attack, and he quickly sends them into the fray. As the rats die in the manner predicted and desired by the player, he is able to divert his attention from the game mechanics to an emotional description of the game experience: "Rats coming up! Where are you rats? Ah! There you are! Die, rats, die!" (p. 173-4)

The players' definition of good games were games that were not unnecessarily capricious in deciding the player's fate. Myers noted that players did not want complete control: "The best games continually pose problems for the players to overcome and further goals for which the players continue to strive." (p. 177).

Myers' work provided an opening on players' talk by acknowledging and quoting it, and prefigures work considered in section (d).

Two books worth noting for their discussion of videogame playing are Kinder (1991) and Provenzo (1991). Both works missed the opportunity to contribute greatly to knowledge of videogame playing because they lacked an adequate theorising of the research issues and the research object. Kinder (1991) devoted a substantial portion of her book to videogames. Quotations from Kinder's 8 year old son, to whom she dedicated the book, figured prominently in the text. Kinder reported her research on videogame playing in an appendix to the book, which she failed to cite in her chapter on videogames. Twelve interviews were conducted with children at Playland Arcade, on the Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles. Six of the respondents were seven or under, and Kinder confessed that she doubted whether they understood several of the questions in the interview schedule. The interview was structured around their answers to 39 questions, such as: "Have you ever played Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles video game?", "Which turtle do you like to be?" "Why?". Some of the more intelligent answers she received to the latter question were: "He's cool" "He's a party dude" "He's funny" (Kinder, 1991, p. 194)

Her chapter on videogames consisted of a pastiche of newspaper articles, a description of the story line in the motion picture 'The Wizard' (a box-office flop with a videogame playing hero), quotes from Greenfield (1984), Papert (1980), and loose theorising around the theme 'the oedipalisation of videogames', which remains undeveloped. Kinder's narrative on games combined an explication of the relation between videogames and cinema with a derivative account of Nintendo's rise to prominence in the commercial world (for
which see Sheff 1993). Kinder, unaccountably, made no reference to the much earlier
work of Turkle (1984) who devoted a chapter of her book to computer/videogame playing.

Two fragments of Kinder's chapter are worth quoting because they echo well-circulated
psychological theorising which has attempted to explain the popularity of videogames
among young boys. Kinder construed this popularity as a combination of clever marketing
strategies and psychological weaknesses of young males which she described in a section
entitled 'The oedipalisation of video games' (p.101). She stated that videogames 'provide
an appealing surrogate against which a son can test his powers' (p.103) and suggested that
videogames' popularity might be linked to the lack of fathers in the home. This thesis
however was not developed or supported by research. Later in the same chapter she
suggested that interest in videogames started around 7 or 8 years of age and was perhaps
linked to the development of 'operational groupings of thought' hypothesised by Piaget,
once again with no empirical material in support of her argument.

Kinder provided on the one hand, a speculative theorising, and on the other, a fragment of
research which was not linked to any of the theorising she considered in the body of her
book.

The second book on videogame playing is Provenzo's (1991) uneven, disjointed, and
erratic account of the Nintendo phenomena. He cited C. A. Bowers, a British educationist,
as providing an inspirational thesis for the writing of the book.

One of the things I hope to demonstrate in this book is that from a social and cultural
point of view, video games are neither a neutral nor a trivial technology. Instead, like
other media, they represent important intellectual and social systems that are
redefining the symbolic underpinnings of our culture ( p. 33).

Provenzo's aspiration never quite finds realisation. His account vacillates between
descriptions which owe much to contemporary North American, empirical positivist
theorising, and the desire for their hermeneutic transformation into criticism:

To begin with, most video games are not educational, only goal oriented: Mario
rescues the Princess and Pac Man gobbles the dots. The goals pursued and achieved
have no particular significance prior to the invention of the game. They are not
necessarily connected to a larger culture. (p. 33)

His assertion that most games were 'not educational' is curiously at odds with the assertion
that games were fundamentally re-defining 'symbolic underpinnings of culture'. Many of
his comments assumed that players were 'taken over' by the 'content' of the cultural
product. e.g. "The extent to which a child can be shaped by the content of the games can be
seen in an interview conducted with a six-year-old boy" (p. 91). Provenzo characterised the
boy's relation with the game as "incorporat[ing] the world of Nintendo" (p. 92). He was
concerned that the language register of the game provided the boy with a language for
describing everyday life. For example he related how this boy described the school's
principal as 'Big Boss Wart.' He then described this in mystifying fashion as part of the
'cultural configuration' of the children. A little later he offered the following comment:

17 'Big Boss Wart' was one of the Nintendo characters.
Video games such as Nintendo, with their preprogrammed characters and their media-saturated images, present almost no opportunity to experiment or toy with ideas...The games do little or nothing to help the child develop an inner culture[?].

Compared to the worlds of imagination provided by play with dolls and blocks, games such as those reviewed in this chapter ultimately represent impoverished cultural and sensory environments for the child. (pp. 95-7).

Both Kinder and Provenzo begin to examine computer/ videogame playing as a significant cultural activity, but they labour under the yoke of a theorising which cannot recognise the full significance of the content of these games for their users. Neither present a coherent theory of the relation between cultural products and their users. Provenzo imagined that videogames 'took over' their users denying them individual freedom or action; he described the relation as one of 'incorporation'. In this tendency his views resonated with widely disseminated and long held ideas which posit the passive reception of mass media programs, and direct 'media effects'.

In contrast to these works, Malone (1981) provided a more rigorous examination of players' preferences for features of early versions of computer games, and attempted to account for player preferences in motivational terms. I consider Malone's work at some length because of his detailed empirical work and his substantial attempt at expanding the motivational account into a coherent theory of computer game playing. Compared with the previously mentioned works, Malone employed psychological theorising on motivation and attempted to work through the implications of this theorising in his research practice. He invoked 'curiosity', 'an increase in self-esteem', and 'the enriching of fantasy life' as motives. He argued against the focus on extrinsic rewards in the work of Skinner (1953) and Bandura (1969), preferring an account which posited 'intrinsic motivation' as an explanatory concept.

Malone's object was to isolate features of games which had maximum appeal for the elementary school students he studied. He made the large conceptual step from 'intrinsic motivation' to 'intrinsically motivating environments' in his explanations without realising the import of the move. On the one hand, this move was obfuscatory, for it reworked the signified of 'extrinsic reward' as 'intrinsically motivating environments' without recognising such a transformation. The effect was to allow Malone to maintain his allegiance to the 'intrinsic motivation' theorists, while appearing to reject learning theory's tenets. On the other hand, Malone was grappling with a difficulty inherent in motivational theory, and more widely, psychological theory, particularly when applied to the explanation of a textual relation.

His use of 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' was further compounded by linking them both with 'fantasy'. He employed these terms to talk about the relation between on-screen representation and its link with the mental work required of players (p.350). These were the terms he used for describing the on-screen animation at an abstract level. Thus in Malone's work there was an acknowledgment of the relation between game and player, and an attempt to describe this relation. Furthermore, in his work there was the beginnings of a conceptualising which attempts to extend the psychological account to incorporate text and textual engagement.

Malone's research was made up of several studies, including an investigation of players' preferences for particular games, (using paper and pencil Likert-type rating scales) and of

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18 See for example Postman (1987).
the popularity of different versions of the same game, one of which I shall consider here. The computer game Darts was introduced in this way:

[A] game called Darts that was designed to teach elementary students about fractions ... In the version of the game used, three balloons appear at random places on a number line on the screen, and players try to guess the positions of the balloons ... They guess by typing in mixed numbers (whole numbers and/or fractions), and after each guess, an arrow shoots across the screen to the position specified. If the guess is right, the arrow pops the balloon. If wrong, the arrow remains on the screen and the player gets to keep shooting until all the balloons are popped. Circus music is played at the beginning of the game and if all three balloons in a round are popped in four tries or fewer, a short song is played after the round. (Malone, 1981, p.349).

Malone presented 8 different versions of Darts each of which gave varying levels of feedback, to each of 8 different groups of students. There were 10 students in each group.

Malone’s three methods of assessing which versions were most attractive to the 5th grade students were:

(a) the time spent playing the game in comparison with an alternative game of Hangman, offered on the same computer, and measured within a range from 0 to 40 minutes;

(b) statements of liking for Darts indicated on a five-point scale;

(c) a stated preference for either Darts or Hangman.

His most unambiguous finding was that boys played the full version of Darts for most of the time available (an average of 34.5 minutes of the 40 minutes available), whereas girls shared the time equally between the two games (19.8 minutes of the 40 minutes available). Several interpretations of this finding are possible. Girls may prefer variety in computer games, whereas boys may prefer to persevere with the one game. Interpretation is made complex by the subsequent findings of Malone’s experiment.
Table 4. Malone's eight feedback versions of *darts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No feedback offered for students' estimates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Feedback given in text form. eg. &quot;1 is wrong&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Feedback given as in No. 2. In addition cumulative feedback given. eg. &quot;Round 2; 3 tries; 1 right.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feedback given as in No. 3. Almost the same feedback as previous condition, but with minor change. eg &quot;1 is too high.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Feedback similar to No. 4, but in addition a representation of a 'balloon' on screen. This 'balloon' is 'popped' by a moving arrow elsewhere on screen when there is a correct estimate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Feedback similar to No. 5. Music added at beginning of game and in response to a successful round of estimates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Feedback similar to No. 6. An addition of immediate visual depiction on number line of all estimates by means of an arrow which traverses the screen only if an estimate is a correct one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Feedback similar to No. 7. An addition of: (1) an arrow traversing screen for all estimates, and (2) a popping of 'balloons' on the number line by 'arrows' where estimate is the correct one.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Feedback in form of text as in "1 is too high", plus the playing of music after a successful round (No.6) produced the longest average playing for the girls (30.0 minutes), which was very similar to a version which also provided immediate graphical representation of all guesses (No. 7) - 29.8 minutes. The removal of the music was associated with reduced time of playing to around half the available time for girls in every other version - (No. 1 - 15.5 minutes, No. 2 - 20.2 minutes, No.3 - 19.8 minutes, No. 4 - 22.2 minutes, No. 5-20.8 minutes) with one exception. The full version of the game was played by girls for only approximately half of the allotted time. Malone canvassed a couple of explanations:

The girls might have preferred Condition 7 because they were more impulsive or achievement oriented than the boys, and did not like having to wait for the arrow to travel across the screen to find out if their guesses were right or wrong. Or the girls might have preferred Condition 7 because they disliked the fantasy of arrows and balloons in the first place, and the fantasy was more salient in Condition 8. (Malone, 1984, p.354)
He leaned toward the second explanation. Greenfield provided the following interpretation of Malone's work:

Indeed, some children are actually alienated from arcade games because of the aggressive themes. Malone analysed the appeal of Darts, a game designed to teach fractions to elementary school children. The left side of Figure 4 shows the basic display on the screen. The child must try to guess the position of the balloons by typing in a mixed number (whole number and fraction) specifying each balloon's position on the number line. If the answer is right, an arrow comes shooting across the screen and pops the balloon. If it is wrong, the arrow shoots across to the number line and remains there as permanent feedback about the error. Thus, the game has a mildly aggressive theme... Adding the aggressive fantasy ... to a version without a theme increased its popularity among boys but decreased it among girls. In short, the aggressive fantasy was a turn-on for the boys but a turn-off for the girls. (Greenfield, 1984, p.94- my italics)

I suggest that as graphic depiction of balloon popping was present in conditions No.5 through to No. 8, Greenfield’s reading of the results must be in error. Balloon popping, when peripheral to the game, as in Nos. 5, 6, and 7, did not make the game more attractive to girls, but when made a central aspect of the feedback process, as in No.8, reduced the attractiveness of the game for them. This was consonant with Malone’s second explanation, in terms of the ‘salience’ of this feature in condition No. 8. Forms of ‘feedback’ to signify correct choice, would appear, on the basis of Malone's experiment, to be gender specific in their appeal. However, Malone did not make much of the girls’ demonstration of a clear preference.

Generalising from the results of the experiment, girls preferred more subtle feedback, particularly music, whereas boys’ preference was for highly specific, grid-like, visual feedback. The addition of music, for boys, diminished the game’s appeal, or at best was a feature of the game which they ignored. Likewise for girls, the addition of a specific mode of feedback (such as balloon popping), was a feature of the game that they ignored, unless it occupied a central place in the delivery of feedback to player as in No.8. The girls’ preference for musical feedback remained unnoticed in both Malone's and Greenfield’s account.

Both Malone and Greenfield offered explanations of the gender differences in the games’ appeal which employed ‘aggressiveness’ as an explanatory construct. Greenfield interpreted ‘balloon popping’ as a ‘mildly aggressive theme’. Malone used the construct in the following: "Thus to the extent that the fantasy of destroying balloons with weapon-like objects is aggressive, this may explain the sex differences in preference." (p. 354-5). Malone made this animated schematic an aggressive performance by his use of the phrases ‘destroying balloons’, and ‘weapon-like objects’. Since this game was placed within a discourse of mathematics education, it is also possible to read an ‘arrow’ as pointing to a feature of Euclidean space. The ubiquitous mouse-controlled ‘point and click’ method of manipulating computer programs could similarly be described. It could be said that the ‘help balloons’ in a Macintosh environment are ‘destroyed’ by pointing arrows at them!

‘Aggressiveness’ is frequently deployed in motivation-based accounts of kids’ relations to audio-visual media. The two prevalent strategies have been either to suggest an underlying reason for differential engagements with media in terms of levels of ‘aggressiveness’, or to posit ‘aggressiveness’ as a consequence of persistent engagements with media representations of violence (Eron, Huesmann and Lagerspetz, 1984). Both Greenfield and
Malone have adopted the former strategy. If ‘aggressiveness’ as motive differentiates on gendered lines, a series of vexing questions are then raised as to how this differentiation occurs - questions avoided by both Malone and Greenfield. The ‘aggressiveness’ thesis in either of its variants leads to the fundamental question of whether boys differ from girls in their levels of ‘aggressiveness’. If they do, what is the process by which ‘aggressiveness’ is instilled in them?

The return of the repressed: audio visual textuality

Both Malone and Greenfield’s work did suggest a manner of articulating reasons for a gendered differentiation, by showing that engagements with media could be examined in a detailed fashion. In their work the examination was constrained by the range of terms motivational theory offered. The theory of aggressive motivation put forward by these authors ended in circumlocution or tautology. Boys were attracted to ‘aggressive’ games because they were more ‘aggressive’. Boys were more ‘aggressive’ as a consequence of playing ‘aggressive’ games.

Malone’s and Greenfield’s attempts at reading the results of this research, illustrate the difficulties of using motivational theory to explain encounters with the texts of popular culture. In his idiosyncratic use of ‘extrinsic and intrinsic fantasy’, Malone struggled with a relation between mental representations and poesis, a realised artistic form. ‘Fantasy’ is part of a vocabulary of the imagination which extends from noetic activity to poesis. ‘Extrinsic fantasy’ was an attempt by Malone to conceptualise ‘poesis’ with constructs from motivational theory. ‘Graphic depiction’, ‘animation’, or more generally, ‘poesis’, would probably have expressed what Malone was trying to say. However, such usage would have taken him into an extended theorising which would have required an extensive interdisciplinary knowledge.

The structure of Malone’s experiment suggested that ‘gender’ is an unproblematic given. Malone’s data appeared to suggest that, though his reductionist ‘data’ didn’t provide a means of exploring particular readings. In general, different features of the game appear to have attained salience in the boys’ and girls’ readings. For boys the salient features were grid-like visual depiction of the success. For girls the salient features were music, and more subtle indications of their success rate.

In conceiving of the game playing as a textual relation, we could say that boys and girls bring different schemata to bear on their interpretation of popular audio-visual texts (Sless, 1981, p.19). Differential readings of texts are themselves connected to previous readings of a range of texts, and therefore to a history of textual engagement. Thus an alternative to the motivational thesis can be proposed which abandons the notion that gendered differences in readings must be attributed to intrinsic motivational differences between boys and girls. The study is then recast as an examination of a particular textual engagement which itself may produce difference along gendered lines.

The three ‘intrinsic’ motives Malone put forward at the beginning of his work- ‘curiosity’, ‘increasing self-esteem’ and ‘enriching fantasy life’ - remained unexplored at its end. Had Malone approached these motivations armed with a theory which posited games as some kind of text, he may have been able to explore the ways in which computer game playing differentially acted to stimulate curiosity, increase self-esteem and enrich fantasies. Despite these shortcomings his study was a substantial attempt at both investigating computer game play, and theorising its significance.
Turtle's (1984) early work on computer games made a largely unwarranted claim to 'doing ethnography' (p. 11). She stated her work was based on 100 hours of player interviews (p.60). Her analysis of the relations between player and 'machine' was heavily indebted to the work of Seymour Papert\textsuperscript{19}, who in turn was influenced by Jean Piaget. Turtle identified three stages in children's relations with computers based on the work of Piaget:

(a) The 'metaphysics' stage: very young children are interested in whether the machines are alive, in the sense that they might think or feel. This is based on Piaget's 'animistic' period.

(b) The 'mastery' stage: the second stage from approximately 7 or 8 years of age, is one in which children attempt to 'master' the computer, usually via games. This period was described by Piaget as the 'concrete operations' stage of development.

(c) The 'identity' stage: the third stage in which the engagement with the computer sheds light on 'the self', and coincides with adolescence. This was described by Piaget as the formal operations stage, so called to draw attention to the individual's capacity to reflect on her own thought processes.

In the chapter on videogames Turtle provided a description of three male players, Jarish - a 12-year-old, Marty - a 29-year-old economist, and David - a lawyer in his mid-thirties. She challenged the popular notion that players were mindless addicts, and characterised the playing as a 'meeting of the minds' - the mind of the player and 'the mind' of the programmer (p.62). The chapter is dominated by her account of Jarish, an enthusiastic player of pinball who 'moved up' to video games, and who by Turtle's account was expected to 'move up' to computer programming. Jarish dreamed of someday designing computer games.

Turtle's account characterised the relations between players and computer as one-to-one encounters, and, I suspect, in her interviewing strategies she was active in encouraging that kind of encounter. Turtle provided no transcripts of her 'interviews' so her contributions to the dialogues remain opaque. There were several passages in the book which clearly suggested a group of children playing together (a play group at the beach p. 19 or children in classrooms with computers p. 93). Turtle's account emptied the sociality of these occasions by constructing them as solitary relations between the player and the computer. This was also her strategy for presenting her informants' opinions. Her writing figuratively marched each of the players/users before the reader, rather like a procession of witnesses called to give evidence. The only instance of a dialogue being reported between a number of users occurs in the opening pages of her book (p. 19). In adopting this procedure she remained faithful to a Piagetian standpoint.

In terms of his general theory, Piaget cannot be criticised for having neglected the role of the environment, social or otherwise, in the cognitive development of the child. He stressed that intelligence developed through the child's progressive adaptation to the environment, and in the theory of equilibration he outlined a general mechanism subserving this adaptation. But at the same time Piaget largely neglected the specific aspects of this process, and his writings offer little insight into particular cognitive sequelae of particular kinds of experience. His indifference to these issues arguably reflects his preoccupation with epistemological rather than psychological questions...

In addition to this general lack of concern with environmental influences on cognition, however, there is an apparent bias towards consideration of the child's material rather than his personal environment. Piaget's experimental work over the

\textsuperscript{19} Papert (1993) has been an enthusiastic promoter of the computer's value in teaching mathematics in junior school. He reportedly received a $US 4 million grant from Nintendo to continue his research (see Kinder, 1991).
last forty years has focused on the individual child in constructive interaction with the impersonal, physical environment. Meanwhile the socio-cultural environment of the child has been largely ignored (Light, 1983, p.69, my emphasis).

In following Piaget's path in this respect, Turkle failed to open her inquiry to include the 'social playing' which Kubey and Larson found amounted to over 30% of all videogame play. While she employed the term 'culture' in 'computer culture', 'the child's culture', 'culture of simulation', 'from cult to culture', 'young people are building their generation's culture now', (p.88) her method consistently worked against an examination of cultural processes. The 'culture' envisaged by Turkle was an aggregation of the reports of individual's engagements with the computer, which privileged a naive introspectionism. If she had examined the child's 'personal environment' (to use Light's phrase), as well as the child's 'material environment', she may have paid more attention to the children's dialogues with each other, and she may have recognised that her statements also participated in that 'personal environment'.

Similar criticisms have been levelled at Piaget's empiricism. Although he characterised his findings as referring to the child's relations with the material world, they can also be read in terms unanticipated by Piaget, that is, as example of children's talk with adults. Children's talk with adults is extremely context sensitive and takes place in asymmetric relations of power. One must ask questions about the range of possible utterances available to the interlocutors, and relate this to the specific social conditions in which talk is produced (Fairclough, 1989, p.21). So the dialogues themselves are indices of the 'socio-cultural occasion' or can be read in such a manner. If Turkle's work had fulfilled her claim of 'doing ethnography', we might be in a position to examine how her dialogues with players formed a part of the social-cultural occasion. In constructing hermetic categories of culture ("young people are building their generations culture now"), and in taking as her focus the Piagetian notion of the child's relation with the 'material environment', Turkle was able to imagine herself as being 'outside' the 'socio-cultural environment' in which she was positioned.

Turkle's research failed to provide an ethnography. She continued to refer to the computer as 'machine', positioning it in the familiar world of 'real' objects, and ignored its status as a text-handling device. The children mentioned in her first chapter revealed considerable fascination for the very feature of the computer we might call its text-handling facility, but their talk was summoned up by Turkle to illustrate Piaget's thesis of infant's animistic relations with the material world.

Nonetheless, Turkle did show a willingness to encounter players engaged in their pastime, and she also dismissed the mindless addiction thesis. She wrote:

Using analogies with television or with drugs, the popular debate about video games is filled with images of game players caught in 'mindless addiction'. Half of this description is certainly wrong. There is nothing mindless about mastering a video game. The games demand skills that are complex and differentiated (Turkle, 1984, p. 61).
(d) Studies which recognised talk as central to playing.

Turkle's work demonstrated a propensity for separating game playing from talk about games, and a refusal to acknowledge the sociality of the playing context. I noted earlier the tendency of questionnaire-based research to give a reductionist version of computer/ videogame playing. Such accounts failed to recognise the significance of talk itself in the playing context. A number of researchers have moved a step closer to the praxis of computer/ videogame playing and its associated talk, by quoting at least some of the talk they encountered. These researchers articulated a substantially different epistemological basis for their work, by recognising that playing computer / videogames is more adequately investigated by considering either the players' explanations of their play or their spontaneous utterances in the course of their play.

Grundy (1991) employed an ethnomethodological methodology in her study of Year 3/4 and Year 6 students' playing of the computer game Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego? Her purpose was to assess the value of the game playing as an educational experience. The talk of players and teachers was recorded on videotape, together with the screen action of the game. The value of this transcription was evident in the quotes of 'talk' she provided which offered a clear contextualising of the talk in dialogue. For example she provided the following vignette to illustrate a teacher's involvement:

Student 1: We're getting closer!
Teacher: Do you have a warrant?
Students 1 and 2: No
Teacher: If you catch up with the suspect and you haven't got a warrant...
S1: How do we get one? (p. 48).

Grundy examined the educational value of the classroom videogame playing of Carmen. She noted that 'the computer offers the ideal medium for learning through error. There were no consequences outside of the game for making an error, not even a waste of paper' (Grundy, 1991, p.48).

She found however that the game did not encourage problem solving processes because it was 'outcome oriented'. Success in completing the game was all that was acknowledged; she argued that the means of achieving that success may or may not implicate learning skills. She further noted that in much of the students' play, reading was avoided as it was not in fact necessary to the successful achieving of the objectives the game specified. Furthermore, she found that students were employing rational decision making strategies at moments in the game when trial-and-error strategies were all that were required. She recognised the software as too limited to provide the students with further challenge. She concluded by noting the limitations of the game as an educational experience.

Scheibe and Erwin (1979) focused on the spontaneous utterances of players. The players they studied were playing an early computer game called Guess, which could be described
as an electronic version of *Two Up*. Their interest grew out of a commitment to 'role theory' in social psychology, which followed the work of George Herbert Mead. Mead considered the self as progressively differentiated through the development of the idea of a 'generalised other'. The 'generalised other' provides a vantage point from which to perceive a unity of the self for which Mead reserved the term 'me', in contra-distinction to 'I'. Scheibe and Erwin's research was therefore located within a symbolic interactionist framework, which treated the computer as a 'pseudo-other' and potential conversational partner. They noted a special feature of the computer is its capacity to 'respond to the person as if it were human' (p. 103) making an oblique reference to the work of Weizenbaum (1976) which was notorious at that time.21

The researchers suggested the computer was 'temporarily personified', and that players became 'highly involved in playing.' They suggested the computer was not "a neutral agent in socialisation" (p.108), and went on to speculate that "the computer will be recognised as psychologically more powerful than any other machine, including the automobile and the television set." (p. 109) The authors recognised the computer's ability to "simulate human conversation" (p. 103).

Scheibe and Erwin tape-recorded the comments of players as they sat at the keyboard playing *Guess*. They found that 39 of the 40 players made comments during the playing of the game, which took up about 4 seconds in every minute of playing time. They quoted the comments of one female player who lost the entire seven games she played. It is not clear, from their account, whether her comments were addressed to anyone in particular.

1. Hey I'm winning. Ha! Oh rats, it got a point.

2. Oh God. Stupid thing!

3. How does it do this?...


5. I'm losing by 28. Crap! I'm losing by 28. Crap! I'm losing by a lot anyway.

6. It's just waiting for me to do it. There. There must be some way in which people ... people change their mind in the exact same pattern.

7. I'm doing better.

8. Oh come on.

9. Ooooh! 5 points.

10. Come on. Oh!

11. Ha, ha, ha. I think I've got it fooled. No.

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20 *Two up* is a popular game among returned soldiers in Australia. Two coins are thrown into the air with participants laying bets on whether they fall down 'odds' or 'evens'.

21 He wrote the program *ELIZA* which generated on-screen textual responses to the anguish column entries of keyboard 'clients'.

12. This is fun. I like this! But I'm winning.

13. You mean there's something to figure? I think there is something to figure, but I'm not going to. I'm too impatient.

14. his stupid machine. It's so dumb.

15. I'm not so bad... comparatively. There we go. It looks at men's names. It's trying to con us into believing it knows what it's doing. Oh, come on ... oops.

16. Aha. It doesn't...I think I do better when I slow down.

17. Does it record my patterns from the other games so that it knows what I do? I bet it does. I bet it knows what goes on my head.

18. It's winning. I keep looking at the scores. I suppose that's healthy, huh? I wonder if that means I'm a non-competitive person, however I feel about the score.

19. The eyes get to be glazed.

20. Ha! Yes, indeed, ladies and gentlemen. Oooh!

21. I'm catching up. Oh.

22. I've been expecting a change.

23. It has a little mind.

24. Weird game.

25. Come on. I'm going to beat you. This can be very devastating, thinking I'm losing to this machine. Think what it'll do to me.

26. I'm losing terribly at this one. I think my mind is beginning to wander. That could make life difficult.

27. Ah well.

28. Fuck you.

(Scheibe and Erwin, 1979, pp. 107-8)

Unfortunately the researchers' commitment to a Meadian analysis wavered, and instead of providing more details which would assist in contextualising the above comments, their account trailed off into a statistical collation. They noted a total of 358 pronomial references to the computer, the most common being 'it' (68%), followed by 'he' and 'you' (both approximately 16%). 'She' was never used. Slightly more talk was recorded where players were isolated in a room, as opposed to playing in the company of other users.

The resulting 'talk' of players was not examined in any detailed way, except as examples of presumed communalities, considered under the following categories:

(a) gendered ascription to the computer

(b) 'direct remarks'
(c) exclamations

(d) commentary or

(e) questions.

Comment 17 is particularly interesting, in its attribution of communicative intent to the functioning of the program, and in supporting the notion that human interlocutors ascribe intent not only in their face-to-face encounters, but also in their engagements with machines of various kinds. If these comments were directed to the computer (or tape recorder), then they have demonstrated an anthropomorphic manner of engaging with a machine ‘other’.

Like previous researchers their analysis was hampered by a failure to recognize the computer’s uniqueness as text handling machine, and the textual nature of the relation with user that this implies. With such recognition the conversational nature of the exchange could have been more closely examined. If growing numbers of encounters with others are encounters with ‘pseudo-others’ (the authors’ term) what are the implications for the formation of ‘self’? This interesting question was raised by the authors but remained unexplored at the study’s conclusion.

In contrast, Smith and Stander (1981) conducted research which focused on the explanations students offered of their strategies in playing a computer game, NOGERO, a text-based ecology simulation. The game placed undergraduate anthropology students in the roles of stewards whose task was to make decisions which promoted the survival of the NOGERO people, an imaginary fishing community.

The NOGERO simulation is based on behaviors observed among such societies as the Tasaday, Yanomamo, Tsembaga, Eskimo, Wape, Dani, Bushmen, and fishing peoples of the northwest coast of North America. The model illustrates the interdependence between human cultures and their natural resource base, and it shows how cultural values affect decisions made in promoting NOGERO survival. Stewards have the objective of promoting continued existence of the newly discovered NOGERO society. After each time step, stewards decide whether or not to change NOGERO village location or size, and/or resource dependence. Time is figured in generations which are 15 years long (Smith and Stander, 1981, p. 347).

Like Grundy, their interest in computer gaming was directed at improving computer games as educational resources. The aims of their study were to evaluate the effectiveness of this game as a learning experience. They noted that “part of the problem with evaluation is asking the right questions. A typical approach is to survey simulation users about their experiences. This approach assumes that the important characteristics of user interaction with the simulation are known” (p.346 my italics). This comment resonates with the criticisms I have already made of survey research. The researchers described their research practice as ethnographic.

The evaluation strategy is essentially ethnographic in that simulation users are observed much as another culture may be observed by an ethnographer. In this situation each student group using the simulation is observed. From these observations several hypotheses emerged regarding human interaction with computers (p. 346).
The program was set up to provide information that could be used to track the progress of each playing group. These varied in their composition; there were 86 groups in all, comprising between two and six members, with some all male, some all female, and some mixed groups. There were two distinct sets of findings: the first concerned learning strategies, and the second focused on gender difference in interpreting the simulation.

Smith and Stander identified three different learning strategies. ‘Aural learners’ relied on the verbal directions they received from the instructors. They tended to become dependant on the instructor to the extent that some became incapable of imagining their own solutions to the dilemmas the simulation posed. A second group were identified as ‘visual learners’. They wanted a clear picture of the total program before beginning, and wanted to read as much information as possible. The third group, ‘the experimental learners’, adopted trial and error strategies. They tended to try things to see what would happen. They wanted, above all, to see the simulation running. The authors related each of these learning styles to four motivations to learn suggested in the work of Orbach (1979). Thus they suggest that ‘aural learners’ were driven by an affiliation motive; ‘visual learners’ by an achievement motive; and ‘experimental learners’ by a motive of curiosity.

The researchers noted a distinctive mode of engagement with the simulation which differentiated men and women.

Men took the simulation more as a game. Males were observed making calculations from the data provided in the information reported to users. Women showed much more concern when calamity beset their NOGERO villages.

Typical women’s comments were:

“When disasters would hit most of the time they hit hard. About halfway through the program, I had Village Two located too close to the shore and a hurricane came along and completely wiped it out. I actually felt bad!”

“Running the NOGERO made me feel like I was actually working with them, helping them survive. I felt involved with them enough that when they died because of some fate, it was really discouraging to me.”

The comments of men reflected their more experimental and game like approach to the simulation.

“I established no intimate identity with the prosperity or suffering of the NOGERO as a people. The project remained a game-like challenge, similar to the manipulation of an object through an obstacle course.”

“I seemed to think bigger is better, plus this would increase the chance of the NOGERO surviving 15 generations so I would, in my mind ‘win’.” (pp. 356-7)

An interesting consequence of these differences was that all-female groups attained larger population levels at the games end than all-male groups. Even larger population levels were achieved by mixed groups of men and women, which the authors explain in terms of the adaptive advantage of interpreting the games in diverse ways.

This study has special significance for my work. Firstly, it was one of the few research works to acknowledge in a specific way the range of interpretations made in engaging with a game. It would be an overstatement to say games were conceptualised as some kind of text, nonetheless, the obvious textual form of the interface itself, and the locating of the
study within an ethnographic tradition supported the researchers' mode of investigation which emphasised interpretations and meanings emerging from the engagements between players and game.

Secondly, it was the only study apart from Grundy's which had a legitimate claim to ethnographic process.

Summary

In this chapter I have challenged the contention that research on computer/video game playing produces 'facts' which are independent of the knowledge constructing practices of researchers. I have shown that researchers have been influenced by public agendas which address computer/video game playing. I have shown survey-equipped researchers, in particular, to be responding to 'moral panics'. I have identified two waves of these panics as the crime wave thesis and the cyberpunk thesis. The questions brought to such research efforts have been largely informed by these widely circulated theses about what computer/video game playing might mean. With few exceptions, survey researchers have tended to obscure the auspices of their own research. Many of the investigations of computer/video game playing have assumed an objectivist stance in relation to what they claimed was the 'data' of their studies, and most of them failed to acknowledge the significant part played by public agendas in establishing the auspices of their work.

Despite this, surveys have revealed important information about playing computer/video games. Pertinent to this study is the finding that around 80% of domestic playing takes place without parents or guardians present in the room, suggesting that the practices of playing are largely unknown to a generation of the players' elders.

In the latter part of this chapter I have traced the emergence of two lines of research: one which attempts a motivational accounts of computer/video game play, and the other which stresses the importance of players' talk. All the studies reviewed here have stopped short of recognising computer/video games as some kind of text. Despite this, productive questions about the engagements which take place between the players and the computer/video game have been formulated. The studies which have recognised the importance players' talk have turned to sources of theorising outside of empirical/positivist paradigms, namely symbolic interactionism and ethnography.

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22 The facts do not speak for themselves, as the objectivist thesis would have it. “Objectivity refers to the belief that the experimenter can be separated theoretically and methodologically from the matter being investigated” (Roffey, 1980, p.15).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5. An outline of work reviewed in this chapter (in sequence)</th>
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<td><strong>(d) Studies which recognise talk as central to playing.</strong> Grundy 1991; Scheibe and Erwin 1979; Smith and Standen 1981.</td>
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3. Audience refugigation of the kinetic text.

We understand the subject matter of the text that addresses us when we locate its question; in our attempt to gain this question we are in our own questioning, continually transcending the historical horizon of the text and fusing it with our own horizon. To locate the question of the text is not simply to leave it, but to put it again... (Linge, 1977, p. xxi).

[What is interpreted in a text is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers...making a narrative signifies the world in its temporal dimension, to the extent that narrating, telling, reciting is to remake action following the poem's invitation. (Ricoeur 1984, p. 81, my italics).

**Audience talk and kinetic text**

Here I recommend three steps constituting an act of recognition:

1. Taking computer/ videogame players to be a ‘new audience’.

2. Treating computer/ videogames as ‘texts’.

3. Treating players’ talk as a significant object of scrutiny for the researching of computer/ videogame playing.

My purpose in taking these three steps is to situate the present study within a tradition of audience research in the first instance, but also to acknowledge a communication studies research literature on television audiences which is salient for my work. The third step provides for a theorising of audience talk which construes it as part of refugigation, following Ricoeur’s development of a general theory of mimesis which encompassed both the authors’ and readers’ relations with text.

The new audience for computer screens

The research reviewed in Chapter 2 failed to acknowledge that players of computer/ videogames constituted a new audience. Cupitt and Stockbridge (1996) almost recognised this in using the terms ‘television watching’ and ‘use of electronic media’ but stopped short of employing the term ‘audience’ in their account. Over a decade ago Nightingale and Webster (1985, p.6) recognised that the growth in sales of personal computers was creating a new medium of communication around which an audience was forming. They further recognised the new textual possibilities enabled by these text-handling machines.

More recently, at an institutional level, there has been acknowledgment that new audiences have been forming around cultural products which computer technologies have facilitated. Several authors have noted a convergence of the previously separate telecommunications, broadcast television, and computer industries, in providing services for domestic consumption which extend the familiar application of ‘audience’ in its typical mass media reference to the listeners and viewers of broadcasting (Mulgan, 1991; Browne, 1994). In the US, a 10% decline in the audience for children’s broadcast television has been
attributed to a growing range of other audience activities for children including videogame playing and activities on the Internet.¹

The classification guidelines for computer/ videogames announced in draft form by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (1994), tacitly recognised the existence of these new 'audiences'. The institutional location of Cupitt and Stockbridge's research ² implied that users of electronic media were 'audiences'.

Such 'new audiences' remain unacknowledged in the research projects I have reviewed, because most researchers have drawn on psychologically-inflected social science paradigms. The unity of these approaches is most easily stated negatively: these paradigms do not invoke communication models in attempting to construct and explain their findings. Nor do they draw on an extensive literature on audiences in media studies.

As I noted in the last chapter, psychologically-inflected social science has found it difficult to theorise players' relations with videogames, because such research does not admit the terms 'text', 'audience', 'textuality', and 'reading' into its discursive register. The employment of these terms facilitates a recognition of the textuality of the relations around playing: for example, players' talk, the videogame as text. Towards the end of the review I drew attention to a small number of researchers who had noticed a substantial 'talk' or conversation occurring around computer/videogame playing.

Ryle suggested that the founding fathers of psychology fled from "the visible deeds and the audible words" of the subjects of its study. He set out a paradigm for what could be called a philological psychology which would share with other disciplines (such as history, philology, anthropology and sociology) a focus on human behaviour as found in the "deeds and words, opinions and projects" of humankind.

Those human actions and reactions, those spoken and unspoken utterances, those tones of voice, facial expressions and gestures, which have always been the data of all the other students of men, have, after all, been the right and the only manifestation to study (Ryle, 1949, p. 302).

Communication studies opens up the possibility of investigating these textual relations, by suggesting that relations with media can be understood and explained in terms such as 'audience-text' (Nightingale, 1994) or 'audience-message' and 'author-message' (Sless, 1981). Though there are significant differences in these conceptions, the important point to note is that these authors firstly, place research on the interpretation of cultural products in the realm of audience studies, and secondly, recognise the textual quality of the engagement that audiences have with these cultural products.

²It was jointly produced by the OFLC and the Australian Broadcasting Authority.
Computer games as (kinetic) texts

Are computer/ videogames merely a form of ‘electronic entertainment’ as Cupitt and Stockbridge (1996) suggested, or should they be considered a new form of media? The shortcoming of the entertainment thesis is that it conflates a whole range of specific engagement practices. The entertainment thesis suggests all content is equivalent; all that it notes is time spent agreeably with an emphasis on an almost wanton engagement. Furthermore it obscures an aesthetic process which I aim to explore.

The motivational accounts of computer/ videogame play reviewed in the previous chapter tacitly recognised arelation between player and game; the game was seen to be meeting the player’s need. Of the other studies reviewed, Smith and Stander’s (1981) came closest to giving recognition to computer/ videogames as some kind of text, discussing the game’s textual qualities through the use of the term ‘simulation’. The use of this term was somewhat perverse considering that these early games offered none of the sophisticated graphics of the current generation of games, instead offering screen upon screen of computer generated text. Similarly, the early adventure games\(^3\) were screens full of text and little else. It is puzzling that researchers did not recognise them as texts. The failure to acknowledge the textual highlights the strength of the researchers’ theoretical commitments, which led them away from the textual and towards reductionist statistical ‘accounts’ of the phenomena of social life.

In recognition of the unique qualities which computer/ videogames possess, I shall call them ‘kinetic texts’. This usage recognises both text and movement which co-exist in contemporary games. There is juxtaposition of static image and text (as found in print-media), moving image and text (as found in silent cinema), and moving image and sound (as found in animation). Current generations of games still make use of screens (or windows) of text which variously inform players of their progress, explain the consequences of their selections, or announce new levels of game. Thus, there is a literality of this depiction of computer/ videogames as kinetic texts in that elements of the games are textual in obvious ways, and there is a movement of on-screen textual elements which was first seen in the captions of silent cinema, and later in the development of captions in newsreel, cinema and television.

Computer/ videogames considered under the auspices of communication theory are a new medium. The engagement between computer/ videogame and player is taken to be a communication event. Communication theory encompasses both unmediated and mediated forms of communication. In communication theory text refers to familiar media such as books, comics and magazines, and newer media including radio and television broadcasts, films and animated features. Some communication theorists have gone as far as asserting that text has a central place in the theorising of all communication. For example, Sless argued that communication does not occur because a message is sent; communication is rather a result of the interpretive work of readers who are implicated in the production of texts. As Sless and Schrensky (1995, p.37) put it: “a person constructs an author, and sees themselves as a reader of a text, a participant in a communicative activity”.

The recognition of games’ textuality is crucial. Once computer/ videogames are conceived of as some kind of text, the players’ relation with them can be explored through a theorising of textual engagement. I shall argue that players’ talk is central to such research.

\(^3\) These games were known as MUDS (Multi User Domain Systems).
Player's talk as a research focus

Players' talk forms the core around which my research was constructed. I noted earlier a tendency for survey researchers (with a few notable exceptions) to attribute little significance to players' talk of in conducting research on computer/videogame playing. It would be a mistake to interpret this reluctance to engage with players' talk as an unwillingness, or as a personal predilection, for such a persistent gap in research reveals the strength of an allegiance to a tradition of practice. Researchers were not simply being capricious; they were revealing the effectiveness of their training in particular research paradigms and their commitment to such paradigms.

Empirical-positivist paradigms still exercise considerable influence over the conduct of a wide range of research activities. Within these paradigms language is conceived as having little more than a referential function. In discussing objectivist materialism and positivism Williams (1977, p.29) noted "the world' or 'reality' or 'social reality' is categorically projected as the pre-existent formation to which language is simply a response." The talk of respondents is typically characterised as 'a report' or a 'self-report'. In this usage it is imagined that words refer to pre-existing affairs. Language is above all a tool for reckoning with the horizon of expectations which 'world' or 'reality' posits. Paradoxically, 'world' or 'reality' constitutes a world already known.

Within this view the function of sentences is to express propositions, preferably true ones, about the world. Eminently commonsensical and yet possessed of a lengthy and comforting philosophical pedigree, this essentially pre-Wittgensteinian view of language has remained a tacit assumption for generations of social scientists (Heritage, 1992, p. 137, my italics).

Of course, talk is not the limited vehicle for 'reports' that some social researchers imagine it to be. Talk brings about states of affairs, rather than simply reporting on them. In this sense, talk is constitutive and has potency. As Williams (1977, p. 31) stated: "Language has then to be seen as a persistent kind of creation and re-creation: a dynamic presence and a constant regenerative process." This constitutive and creative function of talk and more generally language has been recognised in the writings of J. L. Austin (1975), Wittgenstein (1968), Williams (1977), Todorov (1977), and Gadamer (1976).

Utterances are attempts at accomplishing something, of 'doing things with words', to borrow from the title of J. L. Austin's famous book. He pointed out (1975, p.2) that the notion that statements ought to be verifiable has run into insurmountable difficulties, at least since Kant's systematic treatment of the production of grammatical nonsense. Austin drew attention to broad categories of talk which cannot be meaningfully understood as

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4 Such paradigms incorporate two fundamental epistomologies of truth known as the correspondence theory and the coherence theory. The first argues that the truth of a proposition depends on its correspondence with an object; the second that a proposition is true if it is consistent with experience. In a post-ethnometicological world, empirical-positivism runs into difficulties because it is "unable to formulate for us how we could observe positivism [as a research method] to have been done." (McHugh, 1973, p.321). Work on the sociology of science (Mulkay, 1991; Latour, 1991) also exposes positivism's deficiencies by focusing on the social production of scientific knowledge.
'describing a state of affairs', or as subject to verification. One of these categories he described as 'performatives'. He gave several examples:

I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) - as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony

I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth - as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stern

I give and bequeath my watch to my brother - as occurring in a will

I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow

(Austin, 1975, p. 5)

In naming these utterances performatives, Austin was underlining the idea that "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action - it is not normally thought of as just saying something" (p.6-7).

The cultural theorist, Raymond Williams, traced what he called the 'decisive' separation of 'language' and 'reality' which underpins much of the disciplinary divisions in the academy. Williams argued that analogous distinctions between 'consciousness' and 'the material world', 'mental' and 'physical' activity, and 'language' and 'reality' have proved fateful for the subsequent deployment of intellectual resources in establishing and maintaining divisions between the disciplines.

On the one hand there was the highly productive application of modes of systematic observation, classification, and analysis. On the other hand there was the largely unnoticed consequence of the privileged situation of the observer: that he was observing (of course scientifically) within a differential mode of contact with alien material: in texts the records of a past history; in speech, the activity of an alien people in subordinate (colonialist) relations to the whole activity of the dominant people within which the observer gained his privilege. This defining situation inevitably reduced any sense of language as actively and presently constitutive (Williams, 1977, p. 26).

He noted that the emphasis on the regenerative aspect of talk, and more generally, language production, was always in danger of being incorporated into idealist forms.

[E]ither the 'nation', based on an abstract version of the 'folk-mind' or the (ahistorical) 'collective consciousness'; or the 'collective spirit' the abstract creative capacity - self creative but prior to, and separate from material social practice, as in Hegel; or, persuasively, the 'individual', abstracted and defined as 'creative subjectivity', the starting point of meaning (Williams, 1977, p.31).

In discussing the 'work' of speech in a poetic context, Todorov came to similar conclusions about the two faces of speech.
Audience talk as refiguration of the kinetic text

The possibility of considering any speech as, above all, a communication concerning reality or as a subjective speech act leads us to another important observation. We can see in it not only the characteristics of two types of speech, but also two complementary aspects of speech, literary or not. In any utterance, we can temporarily separate these two aspects - which are on one hand an action on the part of the speaker, a linguistic manipulation; and on the other, the evocation of a certain reality (Todorov, 1977, p.26)

Gadamer also rejected the positing of the oppositions suggested by ‘language’ and ‘reality’. In addition, his comment below points to the fruitfulness of talk to the research process, as there is nothing, potentially, that cannot be revealed in language.

Language is not a delimited realm of the speakable, over against which other realms that are unspeakable might stand. Rather, language is all encompassing. There is nothing that is fundamentally excluded from being said, to the extent that our act of meaning intends it (Gadamer, 1976, p. 67).

Talk, and specifically players’ talk is accomplishing something in the moments of its utterance which goes well beyond the notion of ‘reporting’ on something that they are doing. Research on gaming proposes an answer to the question: ‘What is computer or videogame playing?’ There are several answers to the question. The implicit answer to this question in most, but not all, of the research I have reviewed is all that button pushing, joystick controlling, and screen watching. That is a neo-behaviourist’s answer, in the sense that it presumes a split between ‘language’ and ‘reality’ of which Williams spoke. Following Williams, Gadamer, Wittgenstein, Todorov and Austin, talk must be considered as a form of action, as a means, among others, of defining and redefining the social, of transforming the ‘what is’, and the ‘what can be’. Attention is then directed to talk in the first instance, and to the constitutive possibilities of talk, in the second.

A neo-behaviourist might concede that talk is worth recognising but accord to talk a peculiar status by calling it a ‘report’ or a ‘self-report’. In this move, talk is considered to be some kind of ‘tool’ for conveying meanings which refer to an independent and unambiguous ‘reality’. ‘Self-report’ even attempts a containment where ‘talk’ is refused entry into a social process which implicates the researcher. Talk is then taken to be referring to an inner state of affairs but at the same time is considered incapable of opening horizons on to an imagined world. Of course, these ‘openings’ should be the focus of researchers’ attention.

If researchers want to know how computer/ videogames are understood by players, they must remain open to possibilities emerging from the meanings which are created by players’ talk. Such talk might confirm or challenge a researcher’s notions; it might upset the ‘conventional wisdom’; it might reveal something hitherto unconsidered, or indeed it may do all three. Most of the research paradigms employed in studying computer/ videogame playing have not acknowledged the significance of talk and therefore have not paid attention to it. In the few cases where it has been acknowledged, there has been an adequate theorising of its significance. Once talk is recognised as an avenue for discovering meanings produced in computer/ videogame playing, a different kind of research project emerges.

My research object is a hybrid. I focus upon episodic talk and silence, cycles of concentration and relief, moments of tension and release, periods of engagement and
detachment - in brief a whole range of activity of which talk is a vital and necessary component. For the present, I shall refer to this research object as 'playtalk'.

Refiguration

To introduce the concept of 'refiguration' I must first introduce two of Paul Ricoeur's works: The Rule of Metaphor (1977) and Time and Narrative (1985). In the earlier work he argued that the poetic function of language was not to be understood solely as a celebration of language for its own sake, because such an explanation ignored the manner in which poetic language could be considered referential. Poetic language created the possibility of better worlds; poetic language invited inhabitation, and in this sense it described a potential return to the world. For Ricoeur, the suspension in metaphor of descriptive language, with its obvious referential qualities, lead to a new form of reference which only poetic language could achieve. Such language allowed one to speak of different worlds and evoked different experiences and meanings resistant to descriptive methods. Thus, Ricoeur spoke not only of metaphoric sense but also of metaphoric reference.

In the second of these works Ricoeur suggested the mimetic function of narrative posed a problem of similar scope to that posed by the notion of metaphorical reference. However, whereas metaphor's domain could be described as the sensory, the emotional and the aesthetic, the mimetic function of plots pertained to the domain of action and temporality. Metaphorical reference in the case of poesis, and refiguration in the case of narrative, both signalled 'a return of the work'.

Thus refiguration is one of the senses of mimesis which Ricoeur articulated: not the world pre-understood as action - not the poetic making or composition - but a re-making or refiguration which implicates these other two aspects of mimesis (prefiguration and configuration), and in itself, constitutes another aspect of mimetic activity. The scope of this refiguration process is extensive. Below I shall illustrate this by noting how Ricoeur explicated the concept and by applying these notions to an examination of audience studies within communication theory.

Refiguration as reading

We imagine games occurring without players and texts being actualised without readers. Indeed, prevalent conceptions of reading accord to it a passivity which can seduce one into thinking that nothing productive is taking place. That reading is seen primarily as a passive process derives in part from the contrast between reading and writing or inscription. de Certeau employed the phrase 'scriptural imperialism' to refer to what he saw as a process in train for the last three centuries which increasingly marginalised speech. The authorial voice reading the word of scripture; the speech of ordinary persons; everyday narrations; all these are seen by de Certeau as being displaced by a hegemony of the written.

In spite of the work that has uncovered an autonomy of the practice of reading underneath scriptural imperialism, a de facto situation has been created by more than three centuries of history. The social and technical functioning of contemporary culture hierarchizes these two activities. To write is to produce the text; to read is to
receive it from someone else without putting one's own mark on it, without remaking it. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 169)

He saw that 'something spoken' was replaced by 'something made' (the text). He argued that modern societies attempted to redefine themselves without the authority of the voice, and that the scriptural economy confirmed the credibility of both author and book.

While de Certeau drew attention to reading as 'clamorous production' he was committed to a polemic which opposed the obviousness of textual production with the invisible activities of users of texts. For him, users "circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order." He suggested that audiences, readers, listeners and consumers were "unrecognised producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality" (1984, p.34)

While I am grateful to de Certeau for his celebration of practices which escape textuality ("the lack of traces left behind by a practice that slips through all sorts of 'writings'" 1982, p. 170), it must be noted that he adopted an ironic position for one who so obviously enjoyed the challenge of writing, and the meanings it created. Frow, in his discussion of de Certeau, recognised reading as refiguration and acknowledged its potential for inscription. "There are no codes of reading to which there will not correspond (at least potentially) a set of codes of writing. The appeal to a pristine (and invisible) experience of the text is both unwarranted and in principle dangerous." (Frow, 1991, p. 59) Frow specified this danger in terms of a reconstruction (the writer's) of a text in the presumed absence of the reader's text.

Refiguration, as a first approximation, can be conceived as referring to a process of reading or interpretation of texts. Ricoeur built on the work of three 'reader-response' theorists, Iser, Ingarden, and Jauss, who made significant inroads into the problem of examining refiguration.

Iser argued against the classical idea of interpretation: in short the reduction of a fictional text to a single, 'hidden' meaning. He outlined developments in art, as well as literature, which rejected the notion that the work should be read only as an expression of the prevailing norms of the time, or as an indication of the neurosis of the author. Iser went on to argue that the text provided different starting points, such as narrator, or a particular character, which overlapped and shaded into one another, but which also met at some place. This meeting place was the meaning of the text for Iser. This meaning emerges from the reading process, so it requires a reader; furthermore it requires the reader to 'visualise from a standpoint' (Iser, 1978, p.35). The text invites the reader to occupy various vantage points.

Thus, the reader's role is prestructured by three basic components: the different perspectives represented in the text, the vantage point from which he joins them together, and the meeting place where they converge. (p.36)

Iser criticised Booth's statement:
It is only as I read that I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the author's. Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement (Booth, 1963, p 137).

Without tension between reader and text there is no processing or comprehension. This tension is characterised as that between the role the text offers and the reader's 'dispositions'. This disposition may be overshadowed by the text but it remains both the background to, and the frame of reference for this comprehension.

Ingarden saw the poetic work as incomplete offering only "schematic views" which readers were forced to actualise. The work is a sketch for a reading. The work of the reader is to picture the events to which the text alludes, and to construct the events the text reports, much as a composer constructs a performance from the ‘sketch’ of a musical score. The work is incomplete in a second sense in that,

[Each sentence points beyond itself, indicates something to be done, opens up a perspective... This play of retentions and protentions functions in the text only if it is taken in hand by readers who welcome it into the play of their own expectations. Unlike the perceived object, however, the literary object does not intuitively "fulfil" these expectations; it can only modify them. This shifting process of the modification of expectations constitutes the image-building concretization mentioned above. It consists in travelling the length of the text, in allowing all the modifications performed to "sink" into memory, while compacting them, and in opening ourselves up to new expectations entailing new modifications. This process alone makes the text a work. So this work may be said to result from the interaction between text and reader. (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 168)

The "wandering viewpoint" of the reader (Iser) suggested to Ricoeur both the notion of travelling with the text on the one hand, and on the other, the idea that "the whole of the text can never be perceived at once" (p. 168). Ricoeur explicated this using the Husserlian terms of protention and retention, and paraphrased Iser in this way:

Throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories... In addition, this concept incorporates into the phenomenology of reading the synthetic process by which a text constitutes itself sentence by sentence, through what might be called an interplay of sentential retentions and protentions. (p. 168)

The modern reader, for Ricoeur, is left with the task of making the sense of the work confronted with the author’s strategies of deception, and with an 'excess of meaning' which reading produces. In searching for coherence, readers are in danger of losing themselves completely in the work, where the 'unfamiliar becomes familiar', or alternatively, failing to attain a threshold, so that the work remains foreign, and the reader remains "on the doorstep of the work", "The right distance from the work is the one in which the illusion is, by turns, irresistible and untenable. As for a balance between these two impulses, it is never achieved." (p. 169)
Ricoeur saw one of Iser's achievements as taking discussion of the reader beyond the concepts articulated in Tompkin's (1980) account - eg. ideal reader, implied reader, mock reader, implied author - to a recognition of a 'flesh-and-blood' reader on which the phenomenology of reading is premised - the 'real reader' in Tompkin's terms.

In Jauss, Ricoeur found a theorist of 'the public reception of a work', or what we might call a readership, a term Hartley has recently suggested is in urgent need of theorising for the exploration of newspaper audiences (Hartley, 1995). Jauss (1982) conducted what he called 'an experiment', in an attempt to elaborate three stages of the reading of a poetic work, using a theory of the hermeneutic process which apprehended "a unity of the three moments of understanding (intelligere), interpretation (interpretare) and application (applicare)." Hans-Georg Gadamer deserves the credit for having brought the significance of this triadic unity back to life " (Jauss, 1982, p. 139).

In explicating Jauss's theorising, Ricoeur suggested 'explanation' as a translation of interpretare. Jauss pointed out that the doctrine of the three moments of interpretation (the substitutates) as formalised during the Enlightenment, receded with the rise in prominence of historicist and positivist ideals of scholarship.

The obvious backwardness of literary hermeneutics is explainable by the facts that here the hermeneutic process reduces to interpretation alone, that no theory of understanding has been developed for texts of an aesthetic character, and that the question of "application" has been relegated to book reviewers' criticism as an unscholarly one. Gadamer's suggestion "to redefine the hermeneutics of the human studies from the perspective of the hermeneutics of jurisprudence and theology " is thus an opportunity for literary hermeneutics (Jauss, 1982, p. 140).

Jauss argued to substantiate a moment of reading which following in a hermeneutic tradition he called 'understanding'. We may think of this as equivalent to a first reading.

To recognise how the poetic text, thanks to its aesthetic character, allows us to initially perceive and understand something, the analysis cannot begin with the question of the significance of the particular within the achieved forms of the whole; rather, it must pursue the significance still left open in the process of perception that the text, like a "score", indicates for a reader. (p. 141)

For Jauss "the horizon of expectations of the first reading" is a critical conception which may not be capable of formulation until its significance emerges through repeated readings. The notion of comprehending a text is premised on a movement away from that understanding to an 'interpretation'. Conversely, "the interpretation of a poetic text always presupposes aesthetic perception as its pre-understanding..." (p. 142) He suggested the term aesthesia which works to "rejuvenate cognitive vision or visual recognition". That reduction in the first reading has not yet occurred, whereby the surplus of meaning is reduced to one of its possible utterances. Interpretation, or a second moment of reading, then assumes this 'first' reading and adds to it the idea of returning from the end of the work to a re-reading.

Accordingly, the change of horizons between the first and the second readings may be described as follows: the reader - who performs the "score" of the text in the course
of the reception of verse after verse, and who is led toward the ending in a perceptual act of anticipation, from the particular toward the possible whole of form and meaning becomes aware of the fulfilled form of the poem, but not yet of its fulfilled significance, let alone of its "whole meaning." Whoever acknowledges the hermeneutic premise that the meaningful whole of a lyric work is no longer to be understood as if substantial, as if its meaning were pregiven and timeless; rather it is to be understood as a meaning to be performed— whoever acknowledges this premise awaits from the reader the recognition that from now on he may, in the act of interpretive understanding, hypothesize one among other possible significations of the poem, the relevance of which for him does not exclude the worth of the others for discussion. From now on the reader will seek and establish the still unfulfilled significance retrospectively, through a new reading, from the perspective of the fulfilled form, in a return from the end to the beginning, from the whole to the particular (Jauss, 1982, pp. 145 - 146, my emphasis).

The work of Iser, Ingarden, Jauss and de Certeau opens the reading of texts to scrutiny. Audiences of texts can be seen to be engaged in interpretive work of great complexity. There is however a hint in Jauss that an understanding of refugation which stops at an investigation of reading processes is incomplete. This hint appears in Jauss’s suggestion that textual meaning is performed by ‘readers’. To perform is to go beyond the work, to extemporise, and to improvise. It also suggests reading as a further act of configuration which takes the Barthean ‘work’ as a sketch.

Thus, a phenomenology of reading is mute on one point which is significant for my work yet present in the plenitude suggested by ‘refugation’. Reading is the beginning of a process of refugation whereby the work is ‘returned to the world’ and plays a part in cultural production. Further senses of refugation need to be explored to make this clear.

Refugation considered as part of larger processes of mimetic activity.

Ricoeur addressed refugation in a broader context than that of a phenomenology of reading. For him narrative and poetic activity was posited as a response to the aporia of time. He used Augustine’s Confessions to shift his object of scrutiny from the readers, and the reading process, to something broader, which may be conceived as cultural productivity, though this was not his phrase. Refugation can then be located in a cycle of mimetic activity which Ricoeur (1984) linked through the terms prefiguration—configuration-refugation.

Ricoeur noted that Aristotle approached the poetic work through the pair mimesis and muthos. Mimesis or mimetic activity is an encompassing concept. Mimesis is the "imitation of representation of action", though Aristotle stressed the active sense of the making, in distinction to the idea of a completed system - 'imitating' and 'representing' capture this idea. The poet is a maker of plots (muthos) which imitate action. Mimesis is not a copy of a pre-existent reality but a making of unity. For Aristotle the muthos was

[Entire... that which has a beginning, a middle and an end... but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty consists in magnitude and order... a certain magnitude is requisite, but that magnitude must be such as to present a whole easily comprehended by the eye: so in the fable a certain length is requisite, but that the length must be such as to present a whole easily comprehended by memory ... [it] should be an imitation of an action that is one and entire, the parts of it being so
connected that if any one of them be either transposed or taken away, the whole will
be destroyed or changed; for whatever may be either retained or omitted, without
making any sensible difference, is not properly a part. (Jowett and Twining, 1957,
pp. 233–4).

The organisation of the narrative gives concordance to the discordant, the random and the
chaotic. In configuration there is the making of something which is at once distinct from the
world as evident in ritual and action, yet enters into a relation with such a world. The act of
configuration is pivotal in that the world as evident in ritual and action (prefiguration)
undergoes a metamorphosis and presents itself to a reader who enters a relation with such a
text (refiguration). The complexity and scope of this relation is evoked in Ricoeur’s
theorising of the triplet preconfiguration-configuration-refiguration (mimesis₁ - mimesis₂ -
mimesis₃).

Ricoeur (1984, pp. 68 - 82) invoked ‘two categories of interaction ‘ between the reading
and writing process: schematization and traditionality. The first operates through the noetic
activity of the reader by blending intellectual and intuitive notions. In addition, it operates
through emplotment itself, connecting theme, characters, episodes and denouement. When
Sless (1981, p.28) explains schema “as a particular set of questions which are used by the
audience to interrogate the environment” he intensifies a portion of this spectrum of noetic
activity - specifically the conscious (rather than unconscious), the articulate (rather than the
inchoate) and the interrogative (rather than the reflective). Ricoeur, however, refused a
twofold reduction which sees schematization as merely the framing of questions and
exclusively located in the individual. In its guise as noetic activity it encompasses
imagining, constructing, re-constructing and make-believing. Thus he posited
schematization as a process with both textual and noetic qualities.

“Schematization and traditionality are thus from the start categories of the interaction
between the operations of writing and reading” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 76).

For Barthes the Text was distinguishable from the work. The work resides in libraries, is
tangible, and appears substantial. The Text by way of contrast is described as a
“methodological field” such that “the Text is experienced only in the activity of production”
(Barthes, 1977, p. 157). The work is considered to act as a general sign, whereas the Text
“practices the infinite deferment of the signified” (p.158) invoking the hermeneutic moment
of intelligere, discussed earlier. Barthes conveys the sense of the Text as a traversal or
passage, though he is vague about the significance this might bear on the important third
aspect of refiguration: its relation to the everyday.

Refiguration as return to the everyday

⁵ A longer account of his understanding of schema is given as follows, though the force of his argument
remains unchanged: “Thus the locus of definition shifts from the object [text] itself to the relation between
that object and its user. In a sense one can describe the schema as a particular set of questions which are
used by the audience to interrogate the environment, and only when these questions are asked can we
describe the process as communication with respect to the audience/message relation ... Meaning is a
relational term, not a property of an object” (Sless 1981, p. 28, 31).
Refuguration extends beyond the understanding which a phenomenology of reading offers. Having established its implication in larger processes of movement from prefiguration through configuration, there is a further aspect of refuguration which underscores its pertinence to a theorising of processes of cultural production, and is particularly salient to that productive process as it takes place at the micro level. What I am referring to here is the cultural productivity of everyday engagements between users and texts, and kinetic texts in particular.

In general terms, this aspect of refuguration concerns the description of how the kinetic text is implicated in the practice of everyday life. Thus, what I am seeking here is a broad conception for theorising how our textual engagements can be said to ‘spill over’ into everyday life. Ricoeur took up the problem of ‘fictional reference’ which, as I shall demonstrate, has an important bearing on this question. Thus my task here is to:

- develop a critique of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction as it motivates research on audience refuguration.
- establish the salience of the idea of fictional reference as it is elaborated by Ricoeur.
- demonstrate how this aspect of refuguration is critical to an analysis of audience talk about engagements with kinetic texts.

Iser’s deconstructive project challenged the distinction between fictional and non-fictional work, and showed how it often forms the basis of theories of differential engagements with texts. This distinction has found its way into communication studies work on audiences. Hodge and Tripp (1986), for example, presumed differential interpretations of ‘fictional’ and ‘non-fictional’ kinetic texts based on a prior theorising of their ‘modality’. These preconceptions prevented the authors from adequately examining the transcribed material they presented. At a general level this research myopia continues to hamper the investigation of processes of refuguration which demonstrate the text’s insertion into everyday practices (see also my discussion of Buckingham’s work below).

Iser argued that ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’ were often used as a dichotomy, a practice which led to confusion. These words are not antonyms. Literature is generally thought of as fiction - suggesting that the words are not meant to denote a ‘given’ but rather something which is ‘not given’. Iser’s suggestion that the focus should be on what literature does, not what it means in a functional sense, links together ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’ in a relation of a different kind.

Once we are released from this obligation, the question inevitably arises as to what actually constitutes fiction. If it is not reality, this is not because it lacks the attributes of reality, but because it tells us something about reality, and the conveyor cannot be identical to the conveyed. Furthermore, once the time-honoured opposition has been replaced by the concept of communication, attention must be paid to the hitherto neglected recipient of the message. Now if the reader and the literary text are partners in a process of communication, and what is communicated is to be of any value, our prime concern will no longer be the meaning of that text (the hobbyhorse ridden by critics of yore) but its effect. Herein lies the function of literature, and herein lies the justification for approaching literature from a functionalist standpoint (Iser, 1978, pp. 53-54, my italics).

Putting aside for the moment Iser’s unfortunate commitment to a ‘reality’ set adrift from its discursive moorings, we can see him preparing the way for a framing of textual
engagement as a communication event. Ricoeur sought to extend the *muthos* of Aristotle’s tragedy to serve as a paradigm, through extension and transformation, for all narrative activity, including both fictional and historical narrative. Ricoeur argued that what distinguished historical narrative from fictional narrative was its ambition to establish truth. As concept *muthos* reminds us that all representational practices are artifice, for in all narrative there is emplotment, the bringing together of disparate elements into a nexus.

Furthermore, Ricoeur insisted that "language is oriented beyond itself" (Ricoeur, 1985, p.78). Thus something is said about something else. For Ricoeur there was "an intention oriented toward the extra-linguistic" (p.78). In Ricoeur then the notion of ‘fictional reference’ takes on the quality of an axiom of communication, which he contrasted with the fundamental axioms of both semiotics and linguistics.

This ontological attestation would remain an irrational leap if the externalisation it required were not counterpart of a prior and more originary notion, starting from our experience of being in the world and in time, and proceeding from this ontological condition towards its expression in language. (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 78).

The work of fiction makes reference to the world of action and ritual in a manner which cannot be grasped without an understanding of processes of refiguration. In other words, the way that fictional works refer is bound up with their manner of apprehension by readers. *Fictional reference to the world works in and through the reader*. When Ricoeur argued that “Reading appears by turns as an interruption in the course of action and as a new impetus to action” (1985, p. 179), it is ‘the new impetus to action’ which highlights the referential work of the text, irrespective of whether the work is designated fiction or non-fiction.

Here there is a consideration of the manner in which refiguration is inflected with overtones of the everyday: a nexus formed by the imaginary world of the text, on the one hand, and the actual world of readers, on the other, conjures up the necessary interplay.

To the extent that readers subordinate their expectations to those developed by the text, they themselves become unreal to a degree comparable to the unreality of the fictive world toward which they emigrate. Reading then becomes a place, itself unreal, where reflection takes a pause. On the other hand, inasmuch as readers incorporate - little matter whether consciously or unconsciously - into their vision of the world the lessons of their readings, in order to increase the prior readability of their vision, then reading is for them something other than a place where they come to rest: it is a medium they cross through (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 179).

Thus refiguration conveys the important sense that text can be seen to return to the world of action and find application in that world through its readers.

*Communication oriented studies of the audience.*

Although Ricoeur developed the notion of refiguration as it applies in the field of poetics or narratology, it is to the wider application of these formulations that I now turn. The task here is to demonstrate how the many senses of refiguration contribute to a renewed and
revitalised researching of the relation between audiences and kinetic texts. The audience relation with kinetic texts is extensive and refuguration provides a window on that relation, and a means for a reframing of research practice. The problem of researching audiences can be productively formulated in a series of questions: ‘How does the audience engagement become relevant to their horizon of expectation concerning their everyday world?’ ‘How is it (as an everyday practice) transformed into a resource (for everyday practice)?’ ‘How is audience engagement implicated in cultural productivity?’

In communication studies research on television audiences, exploration of these questions has been hampered by at least three reductionist tendencies.

One has been the tendency to reduce refuguration to a process which stresses interpretation of texts and excludes the everyday. This is typically achieved by dwelling on the distinction between fiction and non-fiction and their (presumed) differential efficacy for the audience. The popular notion that television’s fictional genres provide ‘an escape’ underpins the idea (found in academic work on audiences) that whereas non-fictional genres (news, current affairs) produce interpretations of significance for the everyday world of their audiences, fictional genres (soaps, cartoons) do not. Researchers adhering to this representative realist thesis have made special efforts to determine whether audiences ‘read programs as real’ or not (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Buckingham, 1987). This approach fails to acknowledge the substantial cultural work performed by fictions of all kinds, and must separate into discrete categories a proliferation of hybrid television genres: the re-created documentary, the fictional current affairs program (e.g. Frontline, Drop the Dead Donkey), and the ‘infotainment’ news broadcast, all of which could be expected to have significance for their audiences.

Another tendency has been to reduce audience refuguration to that of a purely cognitive process apparent only at the moment of engagement with the kinetic text. Refuguration points to a range of imaginative activity which transcends the moment of engagement with the kinetic text. Interpretation and reading, though necessary, are only points of departure for many activities including improvisation, impersonation and mimicry which have been explored in recent writing on fan audiences in particular (Nightingale, 1994; Jenkins, 1992). Such work has demonstrated that fictional texts have infiltrated everyday life providing a language register, a sense of community, and an opportunity to claim difference amongst cultural homogeneity.

A further reductionist tendency has stressed ‘consumption’ rather than ‘use’ in relations with kinetic texts. In the terms posed by Ricoeur, the interconnectedness of the hermeneutic circle (refuguration, configuration, refuguration) whereby audience refuguration merges with a further act of production (configuration) is lost. Thus refuguration is seen as an end point rather than a beginning of a further configuration produced by audience members. The cultural potency of repeating remembered phrases or imitating aspects of a televi- sional performance is not recognised in this reduction. The connections between the refugured, the configured, and the refugured are therefore not investigated.

On the other hand, communication studies of the television audience have acknowledged the textual nature of the engagement and perhaps, unwittingly at times, have constructed research situations which produced audience ‘performances’ of the kinetic texts examined. They mark a departure from the motivational and personality-based accounts of (unrecognised) audiences found in social science literature and reviewed in the previous chapter.

These ‘textual’ accounts of audience were generated by the debates around television audience research begun in the late 1970s. The review of the communication studies
research on television audiences, which follows, considers the work in the light of the understanding of the refiguration process developed so far.

Morley (1980) worked with tertiary students' readings of a current affairs television program in institutions of further education. The half-hour or so of discussion with each group was tape recorded following the screening of the program (Morley, 1980, p.36). In seeking to explicate 'reading positions' he employed Parkin's (1972) idealised typology: 'dominant' 'negotiated' and 'oppositional'. His work stands against the 'uses and gratifications' approaches in insisting that programs such as Nationwide contain a preferred reading (dominant) while remaining polysemic. (p.10) The lack of dynamics in his model (text-as-container of messages with readers occupying fixed positions in a class-based schema) creates difficulties. Nonetheless it is Morley's consideration of the activity of reading media texts via his numerous group interviews and his insistence that such readings ought not be reduced to those of an 'atomised mass of individuals' (p.13) which underlines the significance of this early work. He described it as

[A]n approach which links differential interpretations back to the socio-economic structure of society, showing how members of different groups and classes, sharing different 'cultural codes' will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal, idiosyncratic level, but in a way 'systematically related' to their socio-economic position. (pp.14-15)

One of the difficulties with this framework was that Morley saw 'socio-economic structures' as independent of, or outside the manner in which texts were interpreted or read. In this sense, his socio-economic categories were ideal ones. The particular readings of the televusal text can thus be taken to be replying to these idealised categories, as is suggested in his interviews with the various groups of students. Morley's analysis reduced readings to the status of examples of the three reading positions his work adopted from the outset. His theoretical underpinnings make the examination of readings an exercise in demonstrating particular theoretically pre-determined and prior reading positions.

The value of Morley's work for my undertaking is in its consideration of audience readings, via their discussion of televusal texts, and the willingness of Morley to consider them in his writing. Morley's work offers one of the first examples of an examination of audience from the perspective of communication studies where audience talk is solicited and discussed. However, the convention adopted by Morley of eliding the researcher's comments from the transcripts produced a one-sided account of an essentially dialogic process. The presence of researcher's voice in inscribed form may have revealed more clearly the kinds of questions which were pursued, and the researcher's part in establishing the agenda for discussion.

Hobson (1982) for the most part wrote about the production of a television soap opera, Crossroads, which was first aired in the UK in 1964. She provided an account of viewers' readings of the televusal text in one of the concluding chapters of the book. She drew attention to the way in which televusal texts were refigured by audience members in the following comment:

Extracts from transcripts of interviews can appear very bland and unexciting. To listen to tapes is an entirely different experience from reading short extracts which lose, above all, the intonation and laughter of the speakers... the enthusiasm which some of the viewers have shown ... If this aspect of the viewing experience is lost in
my own storytelling... I can only signal that this is an area which is important when considering the way that people watch television (Hobson, 1982, p. 106)

Hobson's study explored women's understanding of Crossroads as a repetitive part of their daily routine of domestic work; as providing a sense of mediated-community (when face-to-face community was difficult or impossible), and as providing a sense of expectation. Hobson's viewers took up the narrative of Crossroads for its familiarity, because they liked the stories, and because the program provoked conversation and thought in relation to their lived experience.

Hobson's collaborative manner of research is exemplary for this study in two important respects:

- she viewed the programs with her respondents, entering into their routine as guest, friend, or acquaintance.
- she included her own comments in the vignettes of quoted talk with these viewers

Palmer (1986) investigated the viewing practices of Australian children in a study which responded to the accusation that children were passive viewers of television. She described the focus of her work as "the description of television in children's lives, and the nature of their relationship to it" (p. 11). Her method of investigation combined questionnaires, self-descriptive drawings by children depicting their television viewing, and notebook observations conducted while children were watching television in their homes. The children who took part in this study were from two age groups: 8-9 year olds or 11-12 year olds. Her study revealed a range of expressive forms of interaction with television which can be understood as figurative activity. These included singing along with television content, making comments about the progress of a program, talking to oneself while a program was in progress, and engaging in program-inspired talk and play away from the viewing context.

Having demonstrated that these child audiences were indeed 'lively' in their engagement with television programs, she had this to say in her conclusion:

Interviews with children are only able to provide a partial understanding of their television activities, and what purposes they fulfil. Systematic observation of children's play is needed to fully understand the nature and function of their television-inspired talk and play (Palmer, 1986, p. 113)

Her work is one of the few communication studies of the television audience which drew attention to the imaginative aspects of children's activities around television and which took the trouble to explore the meanings of television for children in a range of ways which facilitated their expression. Furthermore, Palmer recognised that an adequate exploration of the meanings of television required an investigation of 'television-inspired talk and play' in their everyday life.

Tulloch and Moran (1986), as part of their researching of the production and reception of A Country Practice, a long-running Australian soap opera, sat with 9 families watching a particular set of episodes. Their account concerned itself with the different genres of program, and particular family members' preferences for 'information/education' genres over 'entertainment' genres (p. 238, p. 242) invoking the notion of representative realism. Tulloch and Moran explored the family audience's readings of a number of intimate vignettes and suggested that males 'refusal to be open in their emotions' might explain
their public avowals of distaste for 'soaps'. Their account suggested a gap between viewers' accounts and their practices - a man crying in response to a screen death - which deserved further investigation.

The researchers also examined a group of TAFE teachers' readings of videotaped copies of the program screened at their workplace, using a different set of episodes which focused on unemployment. Most of this group of 10 were not regular watchers of the program. They used the discussion time to characterise themselves as more discerning viewers than the fans of ACP (p.252-3). From the few vignettes it is difficult to form a picture of their refiguration of the text, although taken together with the researchers' account, there is a suggestion of a more distant, but less critical reading, despite their affirmations of being 'discriminating ABC viewers'. The authors pointed out that despite the teachers' involvement in providing vocational training for students, they failed to notice that two of the unemployed characters in the series did have qualifications, focusing instead on the one character who was unemployed and didn't have qualifications. Thus the readings offered by this group failed to recognise the challenge in the program to the idea that qualifications provided immunity from unemployment, a belief which this audience group maintained in spite of a disruptive narrative.

In constructing the viewing situation by choosing both the kinetic text and determining its location of viewing, Tulloch and Moran created an audience-text relation which was altered on both sides of the relation. Small wonder that the researcher encountered difficulties in accessing the audience's refiguration of a text which was effectively thrust upon them. Morley also encountered this problem which was a function of the respective research methods, both of which attempted to construct a reader/text relation where none existed apart from the 'demand characteristics' of the research situation. The difficulty of this method is that some, or possibly all, of the readers remain on the threshold of the text, in the sense that they have minimal engagement with it. These authors failed to address the question of whether the members of the audience, constellated in this fashion, would be part of the audience for this program in the circumstances of their everyday domestic viewing practices.

Both works appropriated a television text and showed it in a new context - an educational institution - thereby upsetting the familiar domestic context of viewing such programs. Ellis (1982) noted the contrasting contexts of cinema and television watching. He argued for the serial or soap opera as the dominant genre in television programming because, its form responded to the domestic location of viewing and the weekly routines of everyday life. In transposing these programs into new settings for newly constituted audiences, the researchers created an audience-text relation which resonated strongly with the experience of viewing cinema, and was removed from the familiar domestic regime of television watching.

In studying the school audience of A Country Practice, tape recordings of interviews conducted with Year 8 students in their school classroom were analysed by the authors, who do not appear to have been present for the interviews (p. 260). They compared the producers' readings of the particular series of programs 'Health Hazard' with students' readings of these programs. Different readings of the programs were explained by a veiled notion of social class in the comparison of students from Normanhurst Boys High with Wiley Park Girls. The authors recognised that the context of conducting the interviews might encourage 'official', or teacher-sympathetic readings of the text. They did not explore different readings in terms of gender, nor did they consider the role of the interviewer in producing the discussion. The brief vignettes have her saying "Did you like the show?" (p.263, p.268) "Did you like this kind of story in ACP?" (p.264). These might be understood as the kind of questions market researchers ask. Students not only
must read or interpret the program, but they must interpret the interviewer's questions. While the above questions set up the possibility of inquiry into various readings of the program, the following can be seen as an attempt to direct the respondents into a particular discursive frame:

"Do you know other people that are unemployed, and do you think that's what they're like?" "What about Des? Now that's an older man, and normally you think of unemployed people being young. What did you think of him?" (p.265) "Is there anything else you want to say about the show? Or about unemployment as it was presented on the show?" (p.266) "So you thought it was realistic or not?" "Do you think unemployment is like it seemed to be on the show?" (p.268) "Is there anything else you want to say about the show or about the way it showed unemployment?" (p.270)

This is the discursive frame of 'representative realism' which the researchers discussed at various moments in their commentary (p.265, 267). This line of questioning led the audience to evaluate the episodes in a familiar manner which posited a 'real world experience' with which the program portrayal was compared. Apart from the philosophical difficulties which the realism thesis encounters\(^*\) this analysis failed to explore the audience relation with the program in terms of its cultural productivity, allowing statements such as 'but this is only entertainment' or 'this is only a fictional work' to stand unopposed and unexamined. This failure to offer a critique of 'realism' is found also in the work of one of the few communication studies of children as audiences which I consider next.

Hodge and Tripp (1986) positioned their work in relation to what they characterised as extreme views about television's alleged effects. They suggested that television watching had been poorly theorised. Their guiding model was one which laid emphasis on the interpretations of messages (p. 2). They argued that if media effects were evident they would be known through changed "meanings, beliefs and values" (p. 3). They researched primary school children's reading of a cartoon called Fangface. Most of the 42 children were aged 8 or 9 and took part in group discussion in the classroom. Central to their inquiry was the distinction between fiction and non-fiction in the televisual form. They found that children could make distinctions between televisual fiction and non-fiction on the basis of modality markers. They explained these as semiotic characteristics of the televisual text which make them more or less likely to be read as real. In illustrating children's understanding of this distinction they provided a series of excerpts, one of which is reproduced below:

**VIGNETTE 1**

1. Marnie: When I was two, um, I washed my hair and I got away with watching 'Cop Shop', and that night I stabbed my Teddy! [laughs. Two other children laugh.]

2. Interviewer: Did you really?

3. Marnie: Mm

4. Interviewer: Why did you do that?

\(^*\)This is discussed early in this chapter.
5 Marnie: I don’t know. I think there was, there was pretty scary things on for a 2-year-old, and . . .

6 Interviewer: Mm

7 Marnie: . . . so I went and got a knife and stabbed my Teddy. [Laughs. All the other children laugh or smile.]

8 Interviewer: How did you feel when you did that?

9 Marnie: Um . . . [pauses] . . . it’s pretty hard to explain really.

10 Interviewer: Try. Think about it and we’ll come back.

11 Angela: I watched, I watched a television programme and . . . it was a movie, and they chopped somebody’s head off, it was this old, um, ’slike people at Amadale and things, and went in there one night and I was in bed, and I just got my doll, and I just pulled the head straight off. [Demonstrates. Marnie and Steven smile.]

12 Interviewer: Did you? And how did you feel when you did that?

13 Angela: I felt pretty good when I did it! [Laughs. Other children laugh.]

14 Interviewer: Mm. And why do you think you did that?

15 Angela: [Pause.] Most probably just to feel what it was like . . .

16 Marnie: Yeah.

17 Angela: To actually do it yourself. you wanted to know how, how it was done, and how you would feel, if you did it. (Hodge and Tripp. 1986, pp. 112-3)

Hodge and Tripp discussed this as illustrating children’s understanding of modality issues. They argued that children could distinguish between cruelty to humans and cruelty to dolls for example (p.115). Their explication of modality ultimately rested on a signal-message-receiver thesis which they explained as follows:

The greater the transformational distance between message and reality (i.e. the weaker its modality), the weaker will be the relation between receiver and message, both cognitively and emotionally. A less strong response, and less learning will take place. For example, cartoons are massively transformed in comparison to, say, the news. (p.116)
Appearing on the same page was the following diagram:

**DIAGRAM 1**

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Reality <-> 'Modal fit' ----> Message (version of world plus modality clues)
                                   |
                                   v
Receiver
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There are several difficulties with their analysis.

(1). They posited 'reality' as some independently established entity outside of discursive formulation (see previous section). This contrasts with the notion that representation provides openings on to worlds. In short there is no 'reality' which can be communicated save through some mimetic activity.

(2). The authors presumed that it was always possible to make a distinction between a 'fictional' text and a 'non-fictional' one. In practice this is not always an easy task. For example, Ricoeur's search for the distinguishing features of fictional and historical narrative led him only to the conclusion that the strongest differentiating feature was that non-fiction had a greater ambition than fiction in laying claims to truth.

(3). Modality was proposed as a quality of text, but also as a type of reading. At the risk of oversimplifying, Hodge and Tripp presented a popular theory in somewhat disguised form which claimed that 'fictional' texts, or texts read as 'fictional', had weaker 'connection' with their readers, and therefore provoked 'less strong response, and less learning'. Hodge and Tripp's claim regarding modality was contradicted by the evidence of their own transcripts, including the one quoted above, which demonstrated a strong response and strong learning in audience refuguration of a fictional televisual text, to use their phrases.

My reading of the 'Marnie and Angela' transcript, quoted above, suggests a quite different interpretation to that offered by Hodge and Tripp. Rather than downplaying the significance of these enactments, as I think Hodge and Tripp do (perhaps because they cling to the notion of modality as an important theoretical construct), I see them as pivotal. Hodge and Tripp made hard work of describing 'the knifing of Teddy' as modally different from stabbing, or beheading, as shown on television. The point that needs making is that such enactment demonstrates the refuguring of text which audiences routinely carry out. Whether or not Marnie's account is fiction or non-fiction is of no consequence to a theorising which recognises the fullness and richness of refuguration as a process of audience engagement with the televisual. The above transcript conveys the sense of an enactment of a televisual
text, performed before an audience of other children and one adult. If we take this as a faithful account, there is a further enactment of text which it reports: that which took place in Marnie's bedroom, witnessed by Teddy! For all we know, Marnie may have spoken of this act of killing Teddy, before, with her friends or with her parents. The 'Marnie and Angela' vignette speaks of a powerful refiguration of televisual texts. Notice that 'refiguration' encompasses this action whereas 'reading' does not, for it is important to recognise that this engagement with the televisual text is incorporated into Marnie's everyday life.

If the account is not faithful, it can be noted that Marnie's account is also a performance in relation to a text and a research process in which she is participant. She could be 'setting up' this interviewer, if we assume that her knowledge of modality issues is far greater than the authors suspect. Could she be exploiting the knowledge she holds about the motivation for the research effort? Perhaps she realised that there was a media agenda on 'media effects' which suggested that children slavishly enact what they see on television. Perhaps her statements were a mischievous parody of this thesis.

This vignette illustrates a further point in relation to knowledge production in interview situations, especially when there are power asymmetries created by relations between adults and children. In asking what it felt like (line 12) the interviewer contributed to the answer received at line 15: 'just to feel what it was like' which is almost an anagram of the interviewer's word sequence in line 12. In between the question and answer the children have had a laugh about an enactment of an extreme power relation: killing a defenceless Teddy. (Is this a disguised comment on the power relations of the interview situation?) Though Hodge and Tripp read laughter in structuralist terms (a weakening of modality) other readings are equally plausible. Laughter relieves the tension of having to answer big people's questions. The interviewer may have realised that she had lost control at this point. The asking of 'why' question, to my mind, is the way she reasserts control over the interview, for no matter how it was said (and it would be interesting to hear it from tape), it is the kind of question parents and teachers direct at children whom they consider have been misbehaving. It calls the child to give an account of herself. The response in this case gives support to this interpretation, for it is simply a rearrangement of the words of the earlier question. This is a fairly safe response for a child to such a line of questioning, for it gives back to the adult what the child may think the adult wants to hear.

Rosaldo (1986, p. 77-9) dealt with this theme in ethnographic writing, pointing out the difficulties of relying on 'direct testimony' in his discussion of Le Roy Ladurie's historical work on a fourteenth century French village. The 'direct testimony' in question was evidence recorded on the inquisition register of Jacques Fournier, a bishop stationed in southern France. Rosaldo's point was that such witness was peculiarly inflected with the demands of the reporting situation, in terms of the participants to the 'direct testimony' and their respective purposes. To treat it as unambiguous evidence, as he alleged Le Roy Ladurie did, denies the salience of the circumstances and context of its production.

Fairclough provided a general systemic account of the problem posed by the examination of talk which can be used to analyse the problems Hodge and Tripp encounter in the Marnie vignette. Fairclough (1989, p.24) pointed out that there is a larger process in which the text is implicated, that being discourse. Discourse includes both the text (eg the Marnie vignette), the process of its production, the process of its interpretation, and the social conditions within which the conversational event takes place.

Hodge and Tripp's female interviewer pursued a closed line of questioning which appeared to be informed by a popular psychology (line 15: "yes but why do you think you did that?") which in my view, the children resisted. The whole language event was
contextualised by the research task, and by the entry into the classroom of a stranger who was charged with the task of discussing a videotape with the children. These are elements of the social conditions which make the talk possible in the first place. Hodge and Tripp overlooked the impact of such elements on the ensuing dialogue. If the social conditions which made the dialogue possible are examined, different interpretations can be formulated. In my view, the persistence of the interviewer’s line of questioning was met by a resistance on the part of Marnie. The children’s laughter can then be seen as their acknowledgment (by way of discomfort or perhaps veiled approval) for the confrontational perlocutionary effects which Marnie’s comments produced in the interviewer.

There are a number of points arising from this consideration of the Marnie transcript which inform my own research method discussed in the following chapter. In summary form they are:

- The relation between the child-researcher interaction and the social context in which it takes place is pertinent to the explanation of a language event (and research is a language event).
- Power asymmetries between children and adult researchers need to be closely examined.
- Researchers contribute to the construction of knowledge by posing and attempting to answer particular questions.

A second work privileging realism, was Buckingham’s study of the audience of the BBC produced *EastEnders*. Early in the introduction to the study of this television soap opera Buckingham stated: "In analysing the popularity of *EastEnders* I shall be centrally concerned with investigating the relationship between the programme and its audience." (Buckingham, 1987, pp. 4-5). Buckingham considered the comments of his audience (60 students from the London area between the ages of 7 and 18) in the last quarter of the book. After characterising the extremes of analysis- in textual analysis there is no audience only a text; in the multiplicities of audience readings there is no text- he conceived of ‘soaps’ as ‘open’ texts which allowed for a multiplicity of readings. For Buckingham, evidence of their openness was to be found in their lack of a hero, the diverse make-up of characters, the notion of ‘soap opera’ as unfinished text, and the opportunity which the genre provided for speculation and prediction on the part of the audience prior to the denouement. It is hard to imagine a narrative that does not qualify for Buckingham’s descriptor ‘open narrative’. Surely narratives are available for various modes of realisation through reading/performance. Mistakenly, in my view, Buckingham saw certain characteristics in the text which he thought led to the possibility of a range of interpretations. Of course, the characteristics he saw were part of his reading, so that he was prey to the difficulties to which the conceptualising of ‘text as object’ lead.

In giving accounts of audience readings of *EastEnders* he provided illustrations of the manner in which these texts are refigured, but none more productive for analysis than the following:

Lisa, the eleven-year-old whose fixation on the character of Kathy Beale was briefly mentioned above, was perhaps the most extreme example of this. At the beginning of our discussion, she produced a bulging scrapbook containing an assortment of press cuttings about the program and a number of detailed accounts of past events within it which she had written. She proceeded to read her own version of Kathy Beale’s ‘confession’ to her husband Pete, in which she told of how she had been raped, and of the subsequent birth and adoption of her child. What was remarkable about this
account was not merely its detailed accuracy - Lisa assured me that she had not transcribed the scene from videotape, but had recalled it from her viewing of the episode- but also the mixture of sincerity and hilarity with which it was both read and received by other members of the group. If the 'sheer detail of Lisa's obsession' suggested a strong degree of identification with the character, the melodramatic and satirical way in which she imitated her pretending to break down in tears indicated an equally strong degree of distancing. Her other remarks about Kathy suggested that it was precisely her ordinariness as a character which Lisa valued (Buckingham, 1987, pp.164-5).

Buckingham failed to see this as part of a refiguration process, yet there were clues in his account which suggested such an interpretation. First of all, Buckingham's research method provided an audience for each participant: the other participants. Lisa's scrapbook entered the group like a script awaiting a public reading. All that it required was an appropriate setting, which Buckingham provided: an interested audience. I can't help wondering whether Buckingham's obsession with the issue of participation/distance, which he began to articulate in this excerpt, was also an unwitting comment on his own involvement in the research process - on the one hand distant as the writer of the chapter, on the other, involved audience member swept along by Lisa's performance. Lisa enacted this fragment of an episode in her re-telling which clearly was a captivating performance. Lisa moved in and out of role; so do actors. A focus on the fictional/real dimension of Lisa's performance - Buckingham continues with a discussion of how Lisa can distinguish between the character 'Kathy Beale' and the actress who played her (p. 165) - took him away from considering the significance of this improvisory enactment. Lisa, the eleven year old, seized the opportunity to enact an adult drama, to take on an adult role, to imagine what it would be like to have an unwanted pregnancy, and conducted this exploration via performance to an audience where she was protected by the ambiguities which theatre sustains: after all this was only make-believe. Buckingham was implicated in a substantial refiguration which clearly demonstrated the return of the work to the everyday world of Lisa. He appeared to position himself ambivalently in relation to it.

He therefore continued his focus on fiction, understood in opposition to the real (pp. 171-2, 180-1). His commentary on a substantial excerpt, where a number of 17-year-olds were discussing one of the character's (Michelle) shortcomings in her role as soon-to-be unmarried mother, sets up a perspective from 'outside the fictional world', as opposed to 'inside it'. Buckingham's dichotomised categories made it hard for him to see the ease with which audiences re-worked popular representations, such as EastEnders, as part of the texture of their everyday life. The account given by Buckingham of this performance did not lead me to his conclusion. Rather I see that, like Lisa, these 17 year olds have an opportunity to negotiate moral dilemmas in the relative safety of familiar theatrical precincts, which soap operas provide.

Of the vignettes Buckingham supplied I would give one a prominent place.

Norma (17) Not everybody knows what it really is like. Some of us ain't been picked on by coppers. We don't know what it's like. But if you watch it on EastEnders you get an idea of what it's like, and you're more sympathetic to the people. It puts over a more realistic view of what's going on (Buckingham, 1989, p. 179)

Buckingham gave this excerpt a one sentence explanation. For me it demands more because it encapsulates salient aspects of the televisual refiguring process. First and foremost,
representation assumes and extends our knowledge and experience of the world of ritual and action. In order to get an idea of what something you have never experienced is like, you turn to re-presentation in some form eg books, television, film or visual art. Norma's comment recognised that *EastEnders* extended her understanding in some way, even though this was a media(ted) experience. She further claimed that she does conduct her life differently as a result of her engagement with the televisual program, a claim that deserves to be investigated or at least given credence.

Second, the excerpt illustrates the ambiguities which surround the use of 'really' and 'realistic' in everyday conversation. Buckingham's introductory comment here is "Certainly for the older children, it was the program's realism which was the most significant aspect of its educational role." (p. 179) Buckingham read Norma's ascription as a quality of the program itself, rather than seeing in her comment an illustration of the way that she comes to know what she takes to be real. Her opening statement speaks of the importance of representation as a way of knowing. One can excuse Norma for splitting 'language' and 'reality' in this way, but Buckingham should have known better. For a 17-year-old who had no direct experience of 'being picked on by coppers', the program was judged to be convincing. I read her 'realistic' in that sense, for she had had no direct experience upon which to base such a judgement. Even if she had had a 'direct experience', it would not stand apart from narrative constructions in such representation. The relation between 'direct experience' and 'fiction' is far more complicated than the representational realism thesis suggests. The relation was thoughtfully stated by the poet Wallace Stevens, who conveyed something of its ambiguity in the following aphorism: "The subject matter of poetry is not that 'collection of solid static objects extended in space' but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes" The world we inhabit is one that is made habitable by representation.

In my reading it is the rhetorical or persuasive aspect of the text which was important for Norma at this point. Norma was convinced by the *EastEnders* representation of an event she described as 'being picked on by coppers'; she found the portrayal it offered persuasive; its convincingness, in part, derived from its adherence to narrative conventions and production values. Without direct experience of this situation, the re-presentation became a part of a repertoire or resource available to her should a similar situation have arisen in her life. However, in contrast to the explication of 'identification' as supplying a role to a passive recipient to act out, her own performance of 'being picked on by police', should that happen to her in the future, was not restricted to a faithful enactment of what she had seen for three reasons:

- she had already re-worked the salient features of the scene in imagining it and recalling it (her own act of configuration); in other words, refiguration is a process which works at the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader.

- any 'real life' 'being picked on by the coppers' is certain to have different contextual features to the representation (new players, new audience, new situation etc etc) and thus is a 'new situation'.

- representation is not the same as lived experience; as Ricoeur puts it, "language has as its other the world of ritual and action".

Through the lens which refiguration offers, Norma's performance of the text can be recognised as uniting her knowledge and experience and the text, thus allowing her to
interrogate her notions of law and order through this textual episode. This leads towards a
new position of tension between representation and lived experience.

In Buckingham's reading of 'his' audience, artifice became awareness of the 'artificial',
which in one sense he had to guard against by reminding himself, and his readers (like our
parents once did), that this was 'just a story'. In raising his guard constantly in this way,
and discounting fiction in the process, the notion that 'just stories' do substantial cultural
work for their readers, is missed, along with the opportunity to consider the interpretive
complexity in 'his' audience's refiguration of EastEnders. This other aspect of artifice
might have been noticed: that which sees a substantial audience 'making' occurring in and
through repeated refiguration.

Nightingale's (1992) work marks a departure from the emphasis on representative realism
in communication-based studies of audiences. She investigated accounts of the watching of
rugby league football on television, based on a series of interviews conducted by her
research students. Her analysis emphasized the nexus of watching rugby on television, the
playing of rugby in childhood, family and gendered identity, and the implication of routines
of everyday life. She examined a tendency in her collaborators' accounts of television
watching to not notice females' comments and interjections in the football viewing
'discursive space'. This brief work is significant because it provides an exemplar (in
schematic form) for an approach to audience studies which acknowledges:

- audience talk as producing discursive spaces around television.
- the participant-observer's contribution to this discursive construction
- the gendered and contested nature of the domestic space of television watching.

Communication-based studies of the television audience - a summary

Audiences can be made to speak by researchers interested in exploring the refiguration
process whereby texts are read or watched, interpreted, and made over to the everyday
world of the audience. Morley's work was pioneering in demonstrating the feasibility of
such research. The researchers considered here have acknowledged that television
audiences are engaged in textual relations and have begun to explore the significance of
these relations.

However communication researchers, have stumbled down some blind alleys which should
be avoided by researchers of audiences in the future. One blind alley has been constructed
by a representative realist thesis, which assumes differential significance for audiences of
fictional texts as distinct from non-fictional texts. This argument, which can be found in
several of the research works using communication theory (Hodge and Tripp,
Buckingham, Tulloch and Moran), is restrictive in the sense that it has prevented
researchers from recognising the scope of the process of refiguration. These apriori
notions have produced a myopia which has prevented researchers noticing substantial
cultural production taking place both around 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' texts. I have
demonstrated that this cultural production emerges when all texts (both fiction and non-
fiction) are seen as participating in a broad process of refiguration.
Another blind alley is created by the construction of non-naturalistic locations for research activity (Tulloch and Moran, Hodge and Tripp, Buckingham, Morley). In contrast, Hobson’s and Nightingale’s research found the television audience in its most familiar location: the home. Although both Nightingale’s and Hobson’s domestic locations were altered by the researcher’s presence neither researcher altered the research object by disturbing its familiar domesticity. If talk is to be seen as both discourse and social practice (Fairclough, 1989) then talk cannot be analysed independently of the conditions of its production and social context. To change any of these, whether for the sake of researching convenience or for any other reason, is to change the nature of an inquiry, and as a consequence, the nature of findings.

A further blind alley has been produced and explored by the manufacturing of a new audience-text to suit researchers’ requirements. Typically, an unfamiliar program has been offered to uncommitted viewers (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Tulloch and Moran, 1986; Morley, 1980). This increases the likelihood of uncommitted readings of programs where the audience simply fails to cross the threshold of the text. It is unlikely that uncommitted viewers will demonstrate the connection of the text to their everyday life. Such connection is premised on the notion of viewer choice and detailed viewer knowledge of the chosen text. Such work contrasts markedly with the work on fans (Jenkins, 1992; Nightingale, 1994) which explored meanings of devotees’ textual engagement with a revered audio-visual text.

Another blind alley has been established and examined by the creation of an unfamiliar location of viewing (Tulloch and Moran, 1986; Morley, 1980; Hodge and Tripp, 1986). Viewing practices in domestic locations are likely to be markedly different to viewing practices in institutional settings. These latter contexts of viewing resonate with the aggregated circumstances of cinema viewing. These authors have failed to acknowledge that meanings of engagements with the kinetic text are context-dependent.

Lastly, the talk produced by discussions between interviewers and audience members should be subjected to an analysis which considers not only the talk itself but the context of its production, its ongoing interpretation at the time of its production, and the normative notions which guide its production. Such analysis is facilitated when the talk of researcher is not elided from the transcribed material (Morley, 1980) because such talk gives valuable clues to researcher’s formulation of questions and their participation in the process of knowledge construction. A commitment to greater transparency in transcription facilitates re-interpretation of the work by later researchers/readers.

Summary

In this chapter I have positioned my own research work in a communication studies tradition of audience research which to this point has focused exclusively on popular television programs. Like Nightingale and Webster (1985) I recognise players of computer/ videogames as audiences of ‘new media’.

I have argued for a research practice which focuses on audience talk as a substantial part of refigurative activity. I have demonstrated the importance of refiguration as providing a framework for understanding the work of audiences in their engagement with kinetic texts. Audience refiguration makes the Text (“the Text is experienced only in the activity of production” – Barthes, 1977, p.157) which is distinguishable from ‘the work’ in its materiality. The Text is a ‘methodological field’ in which the audience is busy with a range
of activity which includes improvisational talk, impersonation, mimicry, and enactment. Audiences imagine possible worlds and project themselves into these worlds. If these activities are to be studied the scope and extent of audience refiguration needs to be recognised.

Communication studies researchers of audiences have made a step in this direction but too often have been unable to recognise processes of audience refiguration taking place. These studies have been hampered by overly schematic transcription practices, a penchant for conducting studies in the laboratory rather than in domestic locations, and a tenacious loyalty to disguised variants of a representative realist thesis.

Recent work on fans in cultural studies (Nightingale, 1992; Jenkins, 1992) has begun to overcome these problems by recognising the importance of studying kinetic texts which audiences enthusiastically engage with, rather than those deemed worthy of study by researchers themselves. Furthermore these audience researchers have been prepared to venture outside the laboratory or familiar institutional setting, into domestic spaces and have been prepared to acknowledge their own involvement as participants (Jenkins, 1992, p. 4). Such work has provided the impetus for my research into computer/video game playing.
4. The research

The text is the primary given ... and the point of departure for any discipline in the human sciences... The real object is social (public) man, who speaks and expresses himself through other means. Is it possible to find any other approach to him and his life (work, struggle, and so forth) than through the signifying text that he has created or is creating? Is it possible to observe and study him as a phenomenon of nature, as a thing? Man's physical action should be understood as a deed, but it is impossible to understand the deed outside its potential (that is, re-created by us) signifying expression (motives, goals, stimuli, degree of awareness, and so forth). It is as though we are causing man to speak (we construct his important testimonies, explanations, confessions, admissions, and we complete the development of possible or actual inner speech, and so forth). Everywhere the actual or possible text and its understanding. Research becomes inquiry and conversation, that is dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 113).

Research processes

This research draws on an ethnographic method whose salient features were outlined by Hammersley as being naturalistic, relying on detailed observation, being open to the possibility of 'surprise', focusing on a small number of protagonists, and laying stress on interpretation and meaning.

(a) People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher.

(b) Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

(c) The approach to data collection in 'unstructured' in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan for setting up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say or do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected in a raw form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.

(d) The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale. In life history research the focus may even be a single individual.

(e) The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (Hammersley, 1990, pp. 1-2)

My research can be considered in the context of the television audience research reviewed in the last chapter. Unlike this research, where 'ethnography' has been conducted via post-program interviews (Morley, 1980; Hobson, 1982; Hodge and Tripp, 1986), my research method produced a 'voice over' articulation of audience-text in progress. This was facilitated by the relative absence of simulated voice in the videogames I encountered which made little use of synthesized 'voice' on their soundtracks. This near absence of 'soundtrack voice' facilitated a contemporaneous exploration of audience-text meanings. In
my research it was the players themselves who ‘talk me through’ the text. In particular this ‘voiceover’ or more aptly ‘voices over’ method - mine and the players’ - allowed for a context sensitive and temporally sensitive exploration of the meanings emerging from videogame play. As a consequence the transcripts provide an account of the unfolding relation between the kinetic text, player and researcher.

My method most clearly resembled Hobson’s (1982) work on television audiences in her manner of watching programs with the viewers she interviewed. In both Hobson’s and my research, investigators were present as participant-researchers and in both, researchers’ talk was recorded in the transcribed material. While her interviews were conducted after the textual engagement, mine for the most part, were extensions of the practice of engaging with the kinetic text. By this I mean that players talk while playing, even in the absence of conversational partners as Scheibe and Erwin’s (1979) work has shown. In the case of ‘solo’ \(^1\) playing my presence provided a conversational partner.

I am indebted to Thompson’s (1990) outlining of a method which analyses ‘culture and ideology’ (p. 272) in relation to mass communication he called ‘depth hermeneutics’. He used the phrase to underline a number of important issues for the conduct of social research. For example, depth hermeneutics recognises that the social-historical world consists both of objects, and subjects who are caught in the business of making their own sense of their everyday world. Further, depth hermeneutics recognises the historical specificity of people’s actions and utterances. The framework which Thompson described serves to introduce and contextualise my research method.

He argued that it was imperative for social research to engage with the manner in which subjects interpreted and understood symbolic forms (or what I would call texts). This research ‘object’ in its entirety was referred to by Thompson as doxa, thus the social researcher’s task was to interpret doxa.

Hence the depth-hermeneutical approach must be based, as far as possible, upon an elucidation of the ways in which symbolic forms are interpreted and understood by the individuals who produce and receive them in the course of their everyday lives: this ethnographic moment is an indispensable preliminary to the depth-hermeneutical approach. By means of interview, participant observation and other kinds of ethnographic research, we can construct the ways in which symbolic forms are interpreted and understood in the varied contexts of social life (Thompson, 1990, p. 279).

In a crucial move, Thompson pointed out that the examination of doxa provided a starting point (but not an ending point) for analysis. He emphasised that ‘symbolic forms’ were structured in particular ways in relation to the specificity of social and historical conditions. He envisaged ‘depth hermeneutics’ as comprising three procedures which he outlined in the diagram reproduced below in Figure 1.

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\(^1\) Of course this is no longer a ‘solo’ playing because of my presence. Only objectivism claims that the researcher’s presence makes no difference.
Figure 1

Thompson argued for the application of these various procedures to the task of establishing a hermeneutics of everyday life. He neither suggested that there was a necessary sequence to these procedures, nor that they had to be applied in an exhaustive fashion. However, he did set out in a programmatic way the tasks appropriate to such an analysis which describes the approach of my own research work. For that reason I have summarised its main features below.

Included in a *socio-historical analysis* is an examination of the *spatio-temporal settings* in which engagement with symbolic forms occurs. These are the places of activity and research which I describe below under ‘Research sites - playspaces’. Such analysis is also concerned with the *resources available to individuals* in form of fluid schemata which help to guide their action. These are discussed at length in the following chapters. Furthermore, a socio-historical analysis is cognisant of the *social institutions* relevant to the inquiry, be they producers of media, or regulatory bodies. The research conducted by regulatory bodies relevant to videogames such as the Australian Broadcasting Authority, has already been discussed in Chapter 2. Further discussion of the institutional nexus of my work is provided in the ensuing chapters. An acknowledgment of *social structures* informed my critique of Hodge and Tripp’s (1986) audience research in the last chapter. Typically, engagement with electronic symbolic forms are social events and cannot be fully understood without recourse to the social structures which inform the participants sense of propriety in participating in these activities. Lastly the technical qualities of the media themselves are implicated in communication processes and need to be examined. For example, the soundtrack of videogames as a salient feature of the playing engagement is discussed at some length in Chapter 7.

*A formal analysis* is required because symbolic forms and meaningful expressions circulate in a social field. Relevant to this task is *semiotic analysis* which examines the
relation between elements of the text with each other, and their participation in codes. A discursive (or conversational) analysis is relevant to the task of examining the actual occurrences of everyday communication in terms of its relational and structural features. In my work such conversational analysis is not oriented to the making of generalised points in relation to conversation, nor are the examples selected with such idealised notions in mind. On the contrary, I have employed the techniques of conversational analysis to examine something extra-textual: the what it is that the participants might be talking about. In other words, the methodologies which Thompson grouped together here (semiotic analysis, conversational analysis, syntactic analysis, narrative analysis, and argumentative analysis) all share a tendency to become focused exclusively on the text itself (whether conceived in the moment of analysis as kinetic text, player’s conversation, or discussion between researcher and players). My focus of interest is on what the text achieves, or what I described in the previous chapter as the return of the text to the everyday world of its readers. Thompson makes a similar point by asserting that “Symbolic forms are contextualised products and something more, for they are products which, by virtue of the their structural features, are able to, and claim to, say something about something” (p. 284).

Thompson pointed out that both syntactic analysis, and analysis of narrative structure are essential to the task of sustaining a formal analysis. He cited the work of Hodge and Kress as exemplifying the first method of analysis where particular attention is paid to the operations of everyday discourse through the analysis of grammatical forms. The second relies heavily on the work of Propp, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Todorov and Genette, whose ideas inform my work at various points.

The final procedure of a depth hermeneutic approach for Thompson was what he called interpretation/reinterpretation. In this phase the work generated by formal analysis and social historical contextualisation is used to support a new meaning-making.

However rigorous and systematic the methods of formal or discursive analysis may be, they cannot abolish the need for a creative construction of meaning, that is, for an interpretative explication of what is represented of what is said. Symbolic of discursive forms have what I have described as a ‘referential aspect’: they are constructions which typically represent something, refer to something, say something about something. It is this referential aspect that we seek to grasp in the process of interpretation (Thompson, 1990, p. 289).

The participants

In talking with players I suppressed, as much as possible, my inclination to communicate that I knew what they were talking about. On the other hand in order for ‘talk’ to be productive the approach of participants must be charitable. Acts of communication are premised on trust and generosity; without them there is no communication. If it came to a choice between feigning ignorance or feigning knowledge, it was the former which assisted the players to construct an account through dialogue. In not assuming I knew what they meant, a feat that usually required no pretence on my part, I fostered articulate constructions. Thus the uncertainties and ignorance of some of my statements contributed in some small way to the richness of the players’ accounts.

My initial request, once players had agreed to my coming to their house, was for players to ‘show me their games’. They did this with apparent pleasure in all cases. They were all
given a letter which explained my research activity, told them what the videotapes would be used for, and provided a contact address and phone number.²

The seven major participants in this study were adolescent³ boys living in the Blue Mountains 100 kilometres west of the centre of Sydney, Australia. The region is a popular tourist destination for overseas travellers as well as a residential centre. It attracts retirees as well as local workers and those who commute to various parts of Sydney, like myself. I encountered 26 players at first hand. The seven major participants were Austin, James (a school friend of Austin’s), Corbett (a school friend of Austin and James), Ben, David (a school friend of Ben), Jason, and Simon.

The group of players I studied were constituted through a personal and local network.⁴ Both Ben and Austin are sons of longstanding friends of our family whose fathers are medical practitioners. Ben’s mother is an artist. Austin’s mother works as a diversional therapist in a geriatric hospital. I met Ben’s friend David on my first visit to Ben’s house. All my encounters at Ben’s house found David present, not by design, but because they were very close friends and spent a lot of their spare time together. Ben and David turned out to be inseparable game playing buddies. It was not uncommon for David to ‘sleep over’ at Ben’s house. At one stage Ben’s father told me that David had been temporarily ‘thrown out’ of his house and was living with them. My first session with Austin found him as lone player. In negotiating a second session with his mother she asked if I would mind if two of Austin’s friends were also present, as the boys commonly played videogames together. I welcomed the opportunity to speak with Austin’s school friends, and in the second session at Austin’s house met James and Corbett.

Table 1: The major participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Associates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Rebecca/ Austin’s sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>David/ schoolfriend at local public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ben/ schoolfriend at local public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Austin/ Corbett/ schoolfriends; Sally and Anna sisters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corbett</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Austin/ James/ schoolfriends at local private school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>none observed or spoken about; attended local public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>none observed or spoken about; attended local private school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² A copy of the standard letter I used is included in the appendix.
³ Current journals of adolescence define their interest as children between the ages of 10 and 20. I used that definition of adolescence.
⁴ ‘Snowball sampling’ is a phrase employed to describe the selection procedure.
I subsequently asked James, who owned a Sega console, if I could come to his place to observe his videogame play. In the session at James’s house I met his sisters Sally, who played videogames, and Anna, who didn’t, and James’s father who was minding the children on that particular day in the school holidays. I made contact with Jason who was known to me through professional referral, and went to his house on one occasion. His father is a school teacher while his mother is a librarian. Simon was an old school friend of one of my sons. I also went to his house on one occasion. His father is a medical practitioner, his step-father is a gardener and his mother is a social worker.

I followed up on players or contexts of play which generated dialogue both between myself and the players but also between the players themselves. I have relied on Ben as a key respondent because of his capacity to articulate with a degree of subtlety. Ben’s videogame playing career was also marked by shifts and realignments which I found thought provoking and so I followed Ben in his engagement with videogames over a 16 month period.

I also included sessions which invoked solitary play. For example both Jason and Simon appeared to habitually play alone and neither spoke of a shared experience of videogame play.

Austin thought quite deeply about videogames and computer animation. Though reserved and restrained in his comments he was enlivened in his association with James who was loquacious and extraverted. Their interchanges proved particularly productive. Corbett was the almost totally silent member in the session where the three boys were present. Austin’s 22 year old sister, Rebecca, willingly talked about her interest in videogames.

Research sites - playspaces.

My study addressed players’ engagements with computer/ videogames in domestic spaces. Several studies have demonstrated that the majority of computer/ videogame play takes place in the home (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996; Kubey and Larson, 1990) rather than the public spaces of play which have been much discussed and demonised. In this sense my study continues a tradition of naturalistic domestic audience research on the small screen exemplified by Hobson (1982) and Nightingale (1992) who have explored these familiar but largely unstudied domestic spaces of viewing. I wanted to avoid the transformations of the naturalistic research object I noted in the last chapter.

Furthermore, as the literature suggested videogame playing did not readily meet with approval from school, I sought a research location distant from educational institutions. Several researchers have unwittingly or unwittingly inserted accounts of computer/ videogame play in an educational discourse by asking students at school, and sometimes even in school time, to give accounts of domestic computer game playing (Dominick, 1984; Johnson-Smaragdi and Roe, 1986; Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996). Researchers working in schools must rely on the cooperation of school authorities to carry out their work. Locating the production of accounts in educational institutions increases the likelihood that

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5 I am a consultant psychologist.

4 My interest in following Ben meant also following David because they usually played together. My commitment to naturalistic research guided me in this action.

7 Briefly these were a series of transformations produced by the demand characteristics of research: from domestic to institutional location of viewing; from domestic group or individual viewing to larger group viewing; and from the familiar kinetic text to an unfamiliar substitute.
students might report what they think school authorities want to hear, a problem described in the psychological literature as subjects responding to 'demand characteristics' of the research situation. None of the researchers mentioned above have given an account of how they were identified to students, or whether there was any attempt to negotiate the distinctions between the role expectancies of researcher, teacher, and school administrator.

Not only did I want to explore the domestic playspace, I also wanted to encounter players at the console in a manner suggested by the work of Schelbe and Erwin (1979) and Smith and Stander (1981). Their work pointed to the possibility that players would anthropomorphise the computer/ videogame itself, and address it in their talk. I therefore constellated my research object as the habitual domestic engagement of players with the computer/ videogame in its contemporaneity and fullness. I envisaged that this plenitude would include an account of the domestic playing space in its familiarity and everydayness, the acts of the players, the talk of players with each other and with me, and the talk apparently directed at no one in particular. This approach also allowed me to compare players' account with their practices which proved to be particularly fruitful for articulating contradictions.

I have bracketed ‘research site’ and ‘playspace’ above, for the purpose of leading from one concept to the other. Both belong to what Lefebvre called ‘representations of space’ and both attempt to give an account of what he called “Representational spaces: space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre, 1984, p.40). His triad, “perceived-conceived-lived” recognised the relation between representation and praxis and further emphasized that these spaces were not the neutral and evacuated territory imagined by laboratory scientists, but rather terrains invested with character by those who inhabit them. Thus the term ‘playspace’ points to the special character of the spaces the players inhabited.

The research sites/playspaces pertinent to my study are described below:

**Austin’s house** was a spacious, modernised century-old house set in several acres of bushland. Though the house itself was set several hundred metres away from the street frontage, visitors to the house were well announced by the barking of the family’s two dogs, Sonia and Webster as they approached via a long winding car track through virgin bushland. Austin’s habitual playspace was a loungeroom which opened on to a kitchen/dining room adjacent to the front door of the house. From this room the comings and goings of visitors to the house were readily visible. I set the videocamera up in a corner of the loungeroom in a position which provided a vista of the television screen, the leather lounge on which the players sat, and through an open archway, the kitchen in a longer range shot. As I have been a frequent visitor to the household (particularly in the period when Austin’s parents were still living together) I felt comfortable in this house with its personal history, for me, of conviviality and lived-in clutter.

**Ben’s house** was located on a busy main road in the Blue Mountains with houses around on three sides, a short walk away from a village shopping centre. Though the videotaping in Ben’s house took place in three different rooms, they were similar in the sense that they were private spaces, like conventional bedrooms, with one door by which entry was gained. Movements of others in the house were not noticeable for this playspace offered no external vistas. The players remained unaware of events occurring elsewhere in the house, unless specifically told about them. In this sense the playspaces was constructed as private, and was infrequently entered by other members of the household. For example, in one of the recording sessions Ben’s mother knocked on the door and entered the room to ask the boys if they wanted some lunch. On another occasion a thunderstorm attracted our attention through the sheer intensity of the sound of thunder and downpour. Apart from
these intrusions the playspace had a decidedly private and secluded feel. I count both of Ben’s parents as friends, and the boys of both our families were school friends in their pre-adolescent years.

**Jason’s house** was located in a mountains village with other houses close by, and a substantial shopping centre and railway station within 10 minutes walking distance. It was an old style weatherboard house furnished in a nostalgic manner. There were many old ornaments and artefacts in the loungeroom. The recording session with Jason was conducted somewhat differently to the others. I took a signal directly off the back of Jason’s television, so that this recording shows screen action only with a soundtrack obtained from a microphone placed in the room. As a consequence of this procedure there were no videorecordings depicting Jason’s room or the participants, who in this case were Jason and myself. Videotaping took place in the privacy of Jason’s bedroom. We were interrupted only once by Jason’s father who inquired if there was anything we needed. It seemed that Jason’s habitual engagement with videogames was solitary and private. While our recording session took place the family (Jason’s father, mother and elder sister) were making preparations to go away for a one-week beach holiday.

**Simon’s house** was surrounded by others in a small mountain village and was about 15 minutes walk from the village shopping centre and railway station. It was a weatherboard house probably built in the post-war period. The recording session with Simon was conducted when both his mother and step-father were at work on a weekday in the summer school holiday period. The recording session began in the loungeroom of his home with his console connected to the family television, and ended in his mother’s bedroom where Simon demonstrated the games which were resident on the hard drive of his mother’s PC. During the recording session there was a violent electrical storm which called a halt to our recording for a period of time because of the possibility of lightning damage to the computer and recording equipment. Though we had the run of the house the playspace was once again secluded and private though the physical boundaries associated with that experience of space extended to the front door of the house. Apart from the thunderstorm there were no other interruptions during this occasion of recording.

**James’s house** was located in a small mountains village about 15 minutes walk from the railway station, with other dwellings close by. The house was a small fibro-constructed one probably originally built as a week-ender. The recording session with James turned out to be a session in which all the members of his present family participated. His mother was at work. James’s father welcomed me and was interested in my account of the research process. I gave him a copy of one of my conference papers which he read in another room while I was making the recording. In this household there was a strong sense of ‘household business as usual’ despite my presence and participation. During the recording the phone rang several times, visitors came and went, social arrangements were made, and family business was negotiated. Cups of teas were readily forthcoming and the onus was on the guest (me) to clear a space on the table to place the cup. There was a sense of activity, welcome and clutter in this household which I found appealing. Videogame playing here figured as a media event inextricably bound into, and to some extent subsidiary to, other household routines. Action and ritual of other kinds featured in this videotaping session: for example, Sally performed on the piano and various of the family pets were offered as suitable subjects for videotaping.
Table 2: The audio-visual recording sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/source</th>
<th>Present in room/ others at home</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.9.93 videotape</td>
<td>Ben and David/ Ben’s parents, brothers.</td>
<td>A winter’s Saturday night. The console is connected to an old television set located in Ben’s bedroom. The sounds of a television can be dimly heard from several rooms away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.1.94 videotape</td>
<td>Austin / Austin’s mother.</td>
<td>The console was connected to the family television set in the loungeroom area of Austin’s home. A Saturday toward the end of the long summer holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.94 videotape</td>
<td>Austin, James, Corbett/ Austin’s mother.</td>
<td>Same location as above. A rainy Saturday afternoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.94 videotape</td>
<td>Austin / Austin’s mother.</td>
<td>Same location. Austin showed me a new videogame and a videotape he had made of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7.94 audiotape</td>
<td>Austin and his sister Rebecca.</td>
<td>Austin showed me and his sister Rebecca a number of videogames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.7.94 videotape</td>
<td>James, Sally and Anna/ James’s father.</td>
<td>The console was connected to the family television set in the loungeroom of the family home. A day in the school holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10.94 videotape</td>
<td>Jason/ the rest of Jason’s family: mother, father, and sister.</td>
<td>The console was connected to a television set located in Jason’s bedroom. A day in the school holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.12.94 audiotape</td>
<td>Ben and David/ Ben’s mother.</td>
<td>Ben was without console. Ben and David discussed material presented to them on videotape of the session recorded on 12.9.93 in a TV room in Ben’s home. A day at the beginning of the summer school holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.95 videotape</td>
<td>Ben and David/ Ben’s mother.</td>
<td>Ben’s newly acquired console was connected to a television set in his relocated bedroom. A day in the long summer school holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.95 videotape</td>
<td>Simon/</td>
<td>The console was connected to the TV set in the loungeroom of the family house. It was summer school holiday time. Both Simon’s mother and stepfather are at work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Audiovisual recording

I made arrangements to attend the respective homes on particular days, and equipped with recording equipment, did my best to fit in with the situations as they presented themselves. In all but one of the sessions (see Table 2 below) I videotaped proceedings with a videocamera which was either hand-held or mounted on a tripod. I participated as both interviewer and cameraman - a far from easy task. I refined my camera technique toward the latter sessions, finding it easier to estimate what was in the viewfinder rather than look through it, allowing me to present my face more openly to the boys.

The three exceptions to my typical routine of recording were the sessions on 21.12.94 (Ben and David) and 8.7.94 (Austin and Rebecca) which were tape-recorded, and the session with Jason on 3.10.94 which was recorded using a direct link to his television set, with an auxiliary microphone placed in the room to record our conversation. Consequently, only the screen action of the videogame is available in this recording together with a full soundtrack of the game and our conversation. In the other exceptional case, Ben and David talked about videogame playing in the absence of a console on which to play.

Transcription processes and transcribed material

As my research object was playtalk - a contemporaneous play and talk - I needed an approach which allowed me to participate in the playtalk and also record it. My engagement with players and the recording of our interactions was a significant part of this research, in that it provided relevant screen action of the game. This was important in providing a sufficiently contextualised account for later analysis and interpretation. However I am not suggesting that an ongoing and immediate interpretation was not taking place on the part of all the participants in the research process - these were all hermeneutic moments.

Transcripts of interviews were prepared from the taped material and form an Appendix to this work. Transcription was a lengthy process. For example, the 14,500 words of the last interview with Ben and David took 25 hours and 40 minutes to transcribe on paper. However, I was committed to this process because it appeared to me that few researchers in this area had considered 'playtalk' as a research object. Not only was it important to convey a sense of the playtalk in and around computer game playing, it was also important to retain as much of the contextual meanings of such playtalk as possible in the written account. Because I wish to convey some of the extra-verbal moments of face-to-face communication I have attempted an inscription which draws on the conventions found in published plays: bracketed interpretations, instances of the talker's movements, comments on the manner of speaking and the like. While scripts in plays provide a starting point for the actor's performance, my 'scripts' are designed to facilitate interpretation or readings. I used them as an adjunct to repeat viewing of the videotapes. There can, however, be no complete or exhaustive inscription of practice. Language stands in relief to a world of ritual and action. Language has action and ritual as its 'other' as Ricoeur has noted. The videocamera was valuable to my study in the way it enriched memory and provided for interpretive possibility. It further allowed for a wider witnessing of what would otherwise be a localised and largely private practice.

While the machines of inscription - tape recorders, videorecorders and cameras - make possible an extended re-searching, they enter the research site and alter it by their presence. Unlike humans, tape recorders do not orient themselves to meaningful sound. Videocameras are blind to movements - both gross and fine - taking place outside their
scope and therefore increase the indeterminacy of meanings compared with the meanings that participants produce as they create structure from uncertainty as a practical requirement of negotiating dialogic encounters to satisfactory conclusions. The existence of such electronic inscription, in contrary movements, both extends and compresses the field of interpretive possibility. My researching was amplified and extended by the machine’s mute witness. Meanings not apparent to me then, became apparent in the refigurative work of viewing the tapes. However the losses are scarcely less important. Meanings stabilised by the context of dialogue and its familiarity may have disappeared or been forgotten in the absence of the conversational partner and collective living memory.

In establishing a suitable transcription procedure I considered those suggested by ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1984; Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Liberman, 1985) and Fairclough (1989), the discourse analyst. Transcription necessarily produces a plethora of problems which can be considered hermeneutic. Co-present interlocutors negotiate these hermeneutic problems by making interpretations ‘on the run’. They have the benefit of witnessing the talk in its delivered form with the richness of qualifying inflection, tone, rhythm, and intensity: in summary, all the paralinguistic features that speakers employ in creating subtleties of meaning. Transcription unavoidably produces a reductionist account of speech.8

The conventions I adopted were ultimately a compromise between the idealised versions of speech as presented in most novels (Stibbs, 1991, p.21), and the painstaking transcription favoured by conversational analysts (for which see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). Idealised forms of talk presume that speakers wait for one another to finish before taking their turn, an idea thoroughly discounted by the work on ‘turn-taking’ in conversational analysis (see Jefferson). The extremely detailed accounts of speech in conversational analysis, on the other hand, have not been used on the large volumes of dialogue which my research method produced. In the end, the transcripts ran in excess of 80,000 words. The application of such rigorous procedures would have made my task even more lengthy without conceivable gain. A further justification for the compromise I effected came from the finished form of conversational analysis which to my untrained eye, appeared to reduce the readability of the written form.

The notations used in the transcripts (and indicated in the table below) have been adapted from two sources: Atkinson and Heritage (1984, pp.ix - xvi) and Hopper (1990, pp.169 - 170). They provided a written account of the conversations between myself and the players which facilitates interpretation and (I hope) re-interpretation.

I have included some supplementary material. One of my students videotaped computer game playing of her sister and mother, which I have transcribed. The texts of two television interviews relevant to computer/ videogame playing were also obtained. Two of my videotaping sessions remain untranscribed: an interview with Matthew on 26.1.95 and an interview with George, Mark, and John which had a faulty soundtrack. The interview with Matthew is intact but as yet is unexamined. A further videotaping session was produced as a pilot study. It was made in a local milkbar on Saturday morning 5.6.93. In it four male players around the ages of 15-16 were interviewed while playing arcade style videogames. This videotape has not been transcribed in full, though some of the field notes made on that occasion serve as an introduction to the work and are quoted in Chapter 1.

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8 For example, the participants in a live encounter know when they are being addressed or when others are excluding them from their conversation. Transcripts require annotation to indicate such details.
Table 3: The transcription code.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>{}</td>
<td>descriptions of the operation of transcription devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[]</td>
<td>interpretations or contextual information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= or +</td>
<td>markers to indicate coincident starting points of parallel utterances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>marker indicating coincident ending points of utterances following = or +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>()</td>
<td>unable to provide any written account of what sounds like human speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>less certain transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&gt;</td>
<td>utterance appears to be taking place within another speaker’s turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEY</td>
<td>capitalised utterance is used to indicate words spoken with unusual emphasis perhaps because the utterances are slower, louder or more clearly articulated than the speaker’s habitual pattern of delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>pause relative to the speaker’s characteristic delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>longer pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>periods in which conversation lapses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sega, Sonic the Hedgehog</td>
<td>Names of games, game characters and tradenames are italicised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Carmen Sandiego’</td>
<td>Text read from the screen is shown with single inverted commas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k_a_n_g</td>
<td>the speaker is spelling out the letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[fx]</td>
<td>a neologism immediately follows which is an attempt to convey the sound uttered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Videogames encountered

Following is a list of videogames shown to me by players:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Videogames encountered.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey Kong (for 32 bit Nintendo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Madden 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemmings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortal Kombat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperboy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puggsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaq Fu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonic 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonic the Hedgehog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets of Rage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Mario Brothers 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Vikings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where in the world in Carmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandiego?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelda 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Follow-up

Whenever possible I have kept the players informed of developments in my research. On September 28th 1995 I invited all of the players and their parents to my home to discuss the research progress and show an edited version of the videotaping I had made. 9 Two of the major participants came to that session (Jason and James) with their mothers. I recorded the following in my notebook at the time:

29.9.95 Jason is more enthusiastic than before with respect to computer games. He had come back today from Penrith where he watched Waterworld - the movie - with some friends. After the movie he and his friends played some games in Timezone. He won a prize and arrived here with a plastic Timezone carrybag with his 'prize' inside.

Jason's mum is a librarian and father is a school teacher. There was a discussion of the violence issue, and later the concept of mind and the print media's obsession with sex/violence issues.

James can no longer play videogames at home because their television set has been fixed and he couldn't be bothered trying to make them work on the modified TV. He arrived here carrying an electric guitar - his latest interest is in MIDI (Music Information Digital Interface - in short musical sounds managed by computer programs). He wants to set up a system for managing MIDI signals (sequencer, interface) for his guitar playing.

We had a discussion about Bill Gates largely initiated by James. How Bill Gates can determine what kind of software is released; the built-in obsolescence of Microsoft; James talked about how there were better DOS systems than Microsoft's. We then had a substantial discussion about MIDI and the hardware possibilities. James had an awareness of the "natural" world as opposed to the computer "unnatural world".

James' mum is now a lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University.

I also circulated a questionnaire 10 among the players and received 4 completed forms back from Corbett, Austin, James and Jason. The findings are summarised in Table 5 below.

---

9 A copy of the letter is included in the appendix.
10 A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.
Table 5: Summary of questionnaire responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions asked</th>
<th>Jason</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Corbett</th>
<th>Austin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age now</td>
<td>13yr3m 3.10.94</td>
<td>14yr3m 11.7.94</td>
<td>15yr3m 5.2.94</td>
<td>15yr3m 5.2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last time we spoke was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of playing</td>
<td>much more</td>
<td>less</td>
<td>about same</td>
<td>less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I talked to you last you were playing...</td>
<td>Super Mario; Zelda 2.</td>
<td>Mortal Kombat;</td>
<td>Mortal Kombat;</td>
<td>Sonic 2; Flashback;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carmen Sandiego;</td>
<td>Paperboy; Hero</td>
<td>Mortal Kombat;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Columns;</td>
<td>Turtles; Columns.</td>
<td>Puggsy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you still play the above games?</td>
<td>Sold Zelda; replaced</td>
<td>yes/no/no/yes/no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Super Mario with newer version.</td>
<td>yes but mum does.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What new games have you played since then?</td>
<td>Mario 1, 2 and 3; Mario lost levels; Donkey Kong Country.</td>
<td>Earth Worm; Jim; Doom 1 and 2; Alien; Micro Machines 2.</td>
<td>Mortal Kombat; Buried in Time; Myst.</td>
<td>“Hundreds - I’ll just say the more interesting ones”. Doom 1 and 2; Sam and Max; Syndicate; Rise of the Triads; Rebel Assault; X wing; Myst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games you own?</td>
<td>Civilisation; Overkill;</td>
<td>Columns; Simon Kid;</td>
<td>Simon Kid.</td>
<td>Sam and Max; Indiana Jones; Day of the Tentacle; Rebel Assault; Doom 1 and 2; Terminal Velocity; Syndicate; Xwing; Mortal Kombat; Ride of the Triad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cannon; Fodder; Solitaire; X29; Retaliator; Pinball.</td>
<td>Simon Kid;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use a computer? What for?</td>
<td>word processing</td>
<td>word processing;</td>
<td>typing etc.</td>
<td>graphics and homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>programming;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sequencing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The beginnings of a transition to more serious computer applications can be seen in the snapshot this questionnaire provided. Both James and Austin were developing interests which required the use of sophisticated hardware and software combinations. As discussed above, James was investigating the use of MIDI programs to modify sounds produced in
his guitar playing. Austin, on the other hand, was beginning to master CAD (computer-aided design).

The other notable feature here is the number of games owned by each player. Austin was clearly the owner of the most games, whereas Corbett owned only one game. All of the players at various times rented videogames from local video stores, sometimes with a view to purchase, but at other times simply as a way of providing a variety of videogame experience. At the time of writing, new release videogames cost around $A70, which made them a relatively expensive purchase for the average young Australian adolescent.

The research experience and critical overview

What kinds of relationships existed between the boys and myself? I can find no easy answer to this question. Having stressed the connections between us, I was well aware of the generational, research-generated, and personal divide which separated us. I was old enough to be the boys' father. I was participating in these conversations as a researcher 'from the university'. And for some of the boys I was a complete stranger. The differences between us seemed less in my relations with Ben, Austin and James. The relations with Simon, Jason, and Corbett were more distant. I encountered Corbett on only one occasion. David, Ben's friend, certainly had more to say on the latter occasions of my visits.  

Why did the boys agree to my requests to investigate their playing? There are a number of answers to this question. I certainly did suggest to them that there was a negative stereotype of computer/ videogame playing with which I did not agree. I treated the boys as knowledgeable, and I showed interest in both their knowledge and the sources of that knowledge. For example, James recounted his reading of a newspaper article on computer/ videogame playing for my benefit. In requesting permission to show some videotaped vignettes of their playing to an Office of Film and Literature Classification sponsored conference, Austin in particular was very pleased and excited about the idea of dispelling some of the erroneous notions about computer/ videogame playing that were circulating in the newspapers.  

Another answer can be couched in terms of my development as a counselling psychologist. I have developed skills and proficiencies as a professional who has worked extensively with children, adolescents and adults over a period of twenty years. The work of Milton Erickson has had a profound influence on my counselling practice which therefore found

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11 I must say I particular enjoyed the opportunity to enter a childhood vicariously with these boys. This participation allowed me to remember events long pushed to the rear cupboards of memory. At various times I remembered the colour comics that the boys next door got direct from the USA; the games of Snakes and Ladders, the sand-pit play, the Davy Crockett hat, the Cowboy and Indian impersonations, and the Sunday night card games with my grandfather.

12 Our dialogue went like this: James: did I tell you about that article that aw yeah I told you both about that one that computer games are in and I read this article anyway Geoff: what was the article saying James: it was saying how um - instead of taking instead of taking after our fathers and listening to music <Austin: ohhh> with long hair and you know head banging we play computers <Geoff: aw right - where did you read that> oh it was in the newspaper - the article was called 'Johnny B Goodbye' <Geoff: aw right - and did you agree with what they said> James: yeah sort of...

13 This was reported to me by Austin's mother in one of our conversations about arranging a return visit.
its way into my interviewing approach. Erickson has been recognised as a skilled communicator in his own therapeutic practice. Aspects of his virtuosity have been documented by several authors (Haley, 1967; Rossi, Rossi and Erickson, 1976; Zeig, 1980). Here I can do little more than note the diversity of Erickson’s contribution to knowledge about ‘inducing’ conversational partners to discuss or consider particular topics.

• Erickson developed the anecdote as a form of communication with his patients. In a sense, he legitimated the anecdote as an important communication tool which spoke not only of an episode (real or imagined) but was also subtly influential when salient for the listener (Zeig, 1980, pp. 3-14). For example, the discussion of vertigo in Chapter 5, Vignette 17, was promoted by my anecdote about riding on ‘whirley gigs’ as a child, prompted by my experience of screen-induced vertigo. It produced an animated discussion between Ben and myself, which focused attention on the experience of vertigo and its connection with videogame playing. Thus a conversational partner can be directed to address a particular issue by the asking of a question, but also issues can be addressed by this oblique ‘method’.

• He articulated the value of artful ambiguity and vagueness as a means of provoking completion in the thought of a conversational partner on a particular matter (Rossi, 1976, p. 38). For example, in my discussion with Simon I said: “some game you can play in...” [A-127]. Simon responded by taking up the invitation to complete the sentence. Elsewhere I said “so you’re collecting something there” [A-126]. Simon followed this comment by contradicting my account and providing his own.

• He suggested that dialogues between conversational partners were unique events and that skilled interviewers needed to invent forms of communication appropriate to each person they encountered (Zeig, 1980, p.46). Three examples come immediately to mind: I contributed far less to the conversation when more than one player was present; many of my replies to Jason echoed his own and the character of our interaction was continuous with infrequent pauses; my conversations with Austin were marked by longer pauses, partly achieved by a long-lasting inter-family relationship, and in my view, a high degree of comfort and security in our relationship.

The role of play as a form of communication is central to my present work, an idea pioneered in the work of Margaret Lowenfeld (Bowyer, 1970) and extended by more recent writings in playtherapy (see particularly Kalff, 1980). I was aware that the task of engaging in conversations with boys playing videogames required both the establishment of a relation where their talk was acknowledged and their play was unimpeded, for I have considered both as forms of communication.

A further answer addresses a sense of shared community. To some extent with Ben and Austin, I traded on a friendship which has extended over many years between his parents and myself. I have had both a personal and professional association with the fathers of both these boys. On the other hand, I have only spoken to David’s father once. I met James’s father on the occasion of our videotaping, and both the fathers of Simon and Corbett remain unknown to me. I met Jason’s father on the occasion of our videotaping, though his mother had consulted me in my professional capacity as a psychologist. To the extent that communication is made possible by an act of sharing, this accumulated ‘good will’ sustained my research effort.
On the other hand, I was constantly aware that the research situation could be understood in performance terms. In other words, my presence with camera constituted the playspace as a theatrical precinct. The boys responded to this situation as actors to audience, and therefore their acts can be considered in terms which the theatrical metaphor suggests. The move to a terminology of social inquiry which calls acts of communication 'responses' deadens, but does not completely obliterate the sense in which any research situation calls for performances on the part of its participants. I have explored this theme in some detail in my re-reading of Buckingham’s work on the audience of *EastEnders*. My analysis of the transcripts never strays too far from recognising the centrality of this theatrical metaphor and the value of seeing 'responses' as performances for real or imagined audiences. Thus, if sites obtain their character as spaces through the practices of those who inhabit them, then the research sites here are endowed with the character of two different practices: the videogame playing which the boys engage in without my presence, and the research practice which my presence implicates. How these are reconciled or accommodated is a continuing question which underpins the research endeavour and is revealed in the interchanges which the transcripts and videotapes attempt to record. An exploration of these themes follows.
5. The cultural fertility of videogame playing.

Indeed, we consider that games and play would be the most apt subject for scientific inquiry, that the ludic aspect of social life should not be left to the philosophers (Lefebvre, 1971, pp. 76-7).

Play is simultaneously liberty and invention, fantasy and discipline (Caillois, 1961, p. 58)

Introduction

This chapter scrutinises the cultural productivity of audience refiguration of the videogame. To re-iterate, audience refiguration invokes not only hermeneutic processes, but a range of performances of, or playful encounters with the kinetic text, which signal the return of the kinetic text to the everyday world of those who engage with it. This chapter traces the productivity of this ‘return’ through play.

Production of a game such as Sonic the Hedgehog can take over a year and require contributions from as many as 40 people, such as artists, computer programmers, financiers, soundtrack engineers and many others (Eisenstodt, 1993). In this respect, games production houses and animation studios are presently on a convergence course, for both are producing kinetic texts displaying characters (figure) with respect to a moving background, and both attempt to induce a relation of mimicry between audience and character. As Cholodenko (1991, p. 15) noted, “animation means both endowing with life and endowing with movement.” Of course, the commercial success of this institutional configuration is dependent on players embracing these works.

I am examining one form of videogames known to players as ‘platform games’, because on the one hand, examples of this genre are among the most popular and ubiquitous games, (eg. Sonic the Hedgehog, Super Mario Brothers, Donkey Kong), and on the other, the features of other genres of games can be derived from them. A platform game is made up of a number of elements which are combined to produce a work. The elements of a platform game are separable in terms of the specialised activities required to produce them. One of the visual elements can be thought of as a two dimensional scroll in which the scenery of the game is depicted. Like a theatrical stage various devices can be employed for enhancing a sense of three dimensions. For example, in Donkey Kong, a platform game for the Nintendo console, two scrolls move relative to one another, as well as moving relative to the character’s motion.1

Another of the visual elements is the character(s). The character remains unchanged (same character/figure different ground) facilitating an audience relation of mimicry. The character or protagonist of a videogame provides a point from which the action of the game can be understood by the players. The character’s apparent motion in a platform game is a

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1 The problem of creating a sense of movement and perspective has been encountered before in the animator’s studio, and has produced several solutions. Langer (1992, pp. 343-6) outlined the Disney and Fleischer solutions to the problem. Fleischer employed a two dimensional set mounted on a huge turntable which move behind the characters, and whose vanishing point was the centre of the turntable. The Disney solution was a vertically mounted camera with a series of planes below it, each providing two dimensional detail. The camera could be moved towards, or away from these planes, to create a sense of depth in the visual field.
The cultural fertility of videogame playing

consequence of the player’s joystick operation, though Sonic lies down and waves his fingers, if the player does not operate the joystick for a short period of time. At other times players’ button-pushing controls Sonic’s velocity and acceleration in two dimensions. The character may also change appearance as a consequence of these controlling manipulations, such that it seems to run, climb, lay down, or jump.

Although I have described character and scenery as if they are independent of one another, a further element of the visual brings these two elements into juxtaposition. Characters operated by players are not the only visual elements (figures) which move relative to the scenery (ground). Other figures act like ‘intelligent missiles’ seeking the character out as target. Potent scenery icons activated by the character’s proximity, explode into displays of animated energy. These visual elements can be thought of as overlaid on one another.

A further important feature of platform games is the different ‘acts’. The theatrical metaphor is instructive in implying change of scenery, or what players variously referred to as different screens, zones, or levels. These descriptions are contingent rather than generic, depending in part on the on-screen descriptive text. In Sonic the Hedgehog for example, an entirely different scenery or scroll is labelled specifically as a new zone e.g. Green Hill Zone, Marble Zone, or Spring Yard. On other occasions players used the word ‘level’ as a synonym of zone. ‘Screen’ is a generic term employed to refer to ‘level’ and ‘zone’ but also to the current visible display. In Sonic the Hedgehog it is also used to specify that which is not a zone, as in ‘Bonus Screen’.

The cultural productivity of players’ engagements with videogames is revealed through a theorising of the importance of play to culture in the broadest sense, and the videogames implication in the players’ maturation and development. It is to a contextualising theory of play that I now turn.

*Play as culture*

Several major works have drawn attention to the cultural fertility of play. Huizinga (1949) saw an almost inverse relation between the play element and the advance of ‘civilisation’. Though his investigation was hampered by a tendency to equate ‘culture’ with an Eurocentric view of ‘civilisation’, he was one of the first writers to take play seriously. He conceived the competitive element in play as its major figure, which he saw as a natural and ideal aspect of play. His project was by no means focused, consistently pursued, or capable of cogent expression, though his work was rich in its suggestion of connections between ideas, some of which were taken up by Cailliois.

Cailliois extended Huizinga’s work in his recognition of the quotidian potency of play through its “civilising role” and its connection with the “laws of modern life” (1961, pp. 46 - 50).

This freedom and intensity, the fact that the behaviour that is so exalting develops in a separate, ideal world, sheltered from any fatal consequence, explains in my view the cultural fertility of games and makes it understandable how the choice to which they attest itself reveals the character, pattern, and values of every society. (1961, p. 66)

Of course, shifting relations between play and work force a reconsideration of Cailliois’s statement. The boundaries between play and work have moved in cultures where full-time
work has been scarce and play has been exploited by monopoly capitalism’s drive to profit from a proliferation of cultural products such as books, tapes, software, CD’s, videotapes, and not least, videogames. The presumption of a special place for play has been overtaken by the development of the computer’s uses evident in the videogame: play and work are but a screen change away.² It is important to recognise that places are infused with practices. Thus the same (physical) place is transformed by the practices taking place in it. Using de Certeau’s (1984, p.117) notion of space (espace) as a practised place I have coined the word playspace to describe this place of engagement in front of the small videogame screen. In bringing together two spheres which have been clearly demarcated work and play are brought into a new relation. Thus workspaces and playspaces are but a toggle switch away. Children play on ‘computers’ the same ‘tools’ with which the ‘control economy’ (Mulgan, 1991) is managed.

Furthermore, it would be misleading to regard computer/ videogames as only toys, and players as solely engaged in using up leisure time. To trivialise play as non-serious disconnects it from its liminal quality as training and preparation for adult work, for it is a play which mimics the work of adults. As Freud said "it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time- the wish to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do" (Freud, 1961, p.11). To accentuate 'pretence' or 'fantasy' takes play away from the central place it occupies as media culture: the flickering screen on which performances are ever present in this cinematic century. To assume a ready distinction between fiction and non-fiction is to neglect an important question: how does the audience relation with cartoon characters impinge on everyday life?

Caillois (1961) recognised games as culturally productive and it is to his analysis that I now turn. He provided a sustained analysis of the ludic element in culture. In the following passage he identified four ‘fundamental categories’ of play which serve as a framework for my analysis.

I am proposing a division into four main rubrics, depending upon whether, in the games under consideration, the role of competition, chance, simulation, or vertigo is dominant. I call these agôn, alea, mimicry, and ilinx, respectively. All four belong to the domain of play. One plays football, billiards or chess (agôn); roulette or lottery (alea); pirate, Nero, or Hamlet (mimicry); or one produces in oneself, by a rapid whirling or falling movement, a state of dizziness of disorder (ilinx) (Caillois, 1961, p. 12).

He argued that games were a part of everyday life and gave cultures “their most characteristic customs and institutions” (p. 41). His allusions to culturally-valued behaviours make for interesting reading because their historical specificity becomes apparent. For example, games featuring contests required participants “to contemplate with objectivity, detachment, and at least an appearance of calm, the unlucky results of even the most sustained effort” (p. 46). Similarly in games of luck, the player must 'respect chance'. The historical specificity of these observations, however, does not detract from the value of his work. His analytical schema provides a powerful lens through which to view the activities of videogame players, and central to this schema is mimicry.

² See for example PC fun flourishes at work. (1994). Los Angeles Times, 4 July, 113, p.1
Mimicry

The essential aspect of mimicry for Caillois (1961, p. 19), was

"[T]he temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed the last word means nothing less than beginning a game: in lusio), then, at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe... One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another.

As a cultural accomplishment mimicry builds on imitation. Imitation has been observed in very young infants, most likely having a phylogenetic character. Piaget (1962, pp. 8-9) suggested that month-old infants ‘imitate’ the crying of other infants, and that two-month-old infants can ‘imitate’ copies of their own sounds. Piaget was careful, however, to describe these reactions as ‘sporadic imitation’. Imitation borne of culture occurs when babies’ babbling comes to resemble the intonation patterns of adult speech at around 9 months-of-age, at which point their capacity to imitate facial expressions and gestures also emerges. Piaget called this ‘imitation stage 4’ and offered the following explanation:

It is therefore this two-fold character of resemblance and opposition which seems to be the incentive for imitation. In this sense, imitation of new situations is a continuation of imitation of what is familiar, both involving previous assimilation, which is of course obvious, since accommodation is only possible when there are schemas capable of being accommodated, and the use of these schemas implies assimilation... All circular reactions follow the same pattern: interest in a new result discovered by chance, when it is reminiscent of others which are already familiar, followed by attempts to reproduce the result (p. 51)

From the age of 12 months onwards children commonly imitate the last part of an utterance directed at them (Tharp and Burns, in Speidel and Nelson, 1989, p. 242). There is evidence that the imitation of speech is a significant aspect of the language relation between mothers and infants in the second year of life (Uzgiris, Broome and Kruper, in Speidel and Nelson, 1989).

An account of a relation of mimicry is found in Freud. His discussion of the ‘fort’ ‘da’ game of an 18 month old boy related the game to the boy’s brief separations from his mother and revealed a profound mimicry, though Freud’s focus was on other matters. He asserted child’s play to be a relevant resource to the problem of dealing with absent mothers, and more generally to the development and differentiation of the ego. Freud noticed a little boy engaging in an apparently strange ritual: he threw away his toys and then searched for them, often uttering ‘o-o-o’ upon finding them again. A later variant of the game was for the boy to throw away a reel of cotton and haul it in uttering the word ‘da’ [there]. Freud’s reconstruction of the game as ‘fort - da’ emphasized the child’s achievement in allowing his mother to leave without protest, at the same time as “staging the disappearance and return of objects within his reach” (Freud, 1961, p.9). Freud considered two explanations which are not mutually exclusive: The child may have been enacting an actual event to gain control over it; further the child may have been exacting revenge on the mother by saying in effect “I don’t need you. I’m sending you away myself” (p. 10). Freud continued:
Nor shall we be helped in our hesitation between these two views by further considering children’s play. It is clear that in their play *children repeat everything* that has made a very strong impression on them in real life, and that in doing so they abreast the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation (pp. 10-11, my emphasis).

Freud’s phrase ‘children repeat everything’ points to a substantial mimicry in negotiating an adult world. Furthermore, the scope of mimicry encapsulates both action and word. Freud can here be seen extending an argument about the potency of language in assisting children to negotiate life’s vicissitudes, because it is a languaged mimicry coupled with the assertion of control over familiar objects that achieves a relation with an unruly world.

A last example demonstrating mimicry as a culturally fertile play process comes from Taussig (1993). In re-reading an ethnography of Cuna Indians, he seized upon an account of their carving of wooden figurines (*nuchukana*) in the likenesses of European colonials. Having established this as a practice begun in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, and having described the use of such figurines in curing rituals, he posed some difficult questions which highlight the efficacy of mimicry.

What magic lies in this, my wooden self, sung to power in a language I cannot understand? Who is this self, objectified without my knowledge, that I am hell-bent on analysing as object-over-there fanned by sea breezes and the smoke of burning cocoa nibs enchanting the shaman’s singing?

Something trembles in the whole enterprise of analysis and knowledge-making here: the whole anthropological trip starts to eviscerate. And about time, too. For if I take these figurines seriously, it seems that I am honour bound to respond to the mimicry of my-self in ways other than the defensive manoeuvre of the powerful by subjecting it to scrutiny as yet another primitive artefact, grist to the analytic machinery of Euroamerican anthropology. The very mimicry corrodes the alterity by which my science is nourished. For now I too am part of the object of study. The Indians have made alter to myself (Taussig, 1993, p.8).

Both Taussig and Freud recognised mimicry as a cultural practice which redressed the balance of power between two agents, nominated in Freud’s account as infant and mother, and in Taussig’s as Indian and White.

The child engages in a range of play situations such as doll’s house play, and various simulations of adult relations in popular games (‘mothers and fathers’, ‘doctors and nurses’) which illustrate the cultural fecundity of mimicry. These childhood examples of make-believe through mimicry gradually become aligned with a range of disciplining practices through theatre, puppet shows, cinema, and television, which codify and institutionalise the operations of mimicry. My point is that these pervasive institutions are fundamentally premised on mimicry.

Caillois’s understanding of mimicry was distinctively relational. His description of mimicry distinguished it from imitation with the idea of ‘make-believe’ and was constellated by the bringing together of a phenomenology which stressed awareness of self, and an audience response to a performance. In this sense, the concept of audience-text is invoked along with the associated notion of performance. In Caillois’s writing there were signs of an
attempt to move mimicry into a central position as a figure for understanding a whole range of playful elements in culture. In summary:

- Sporting events were construed as occasions when mimicry was practised: 
  “[S]imulation is now transferred from the participants to the audience. It is not the athletes who mimic, but the spectators. Identification with the champion in itself constitutes mimicry related to that of the reader with the hero of the novel and that of the moviegoer with the film star” (Caillios, 1961, p. 22). In these spectacles “a physical contagion leads them [the audience] to assume the position of the men and the animals in order to help them, just as the bowler is known to unconsciously incline his body in the direction that he would like the bowling ball to take at the end of its course” (p. 22).³

- Mimicry was seen as finding expression through simulation in children’s play with construction sets, doll’s houses and model construction. Obviously, children imitate adults in acts of play from an early age and the accessories to such play are often figurines and miniatures, which are more or less faithful copies of adult paraphernalia. Children play with figurines in the doll’s house and construct battle scenes using miniatures in sandplay to mimic human action.

- Lastly, the relation of audience members with sporting heroes and movie stars, was seen as a ‘degraded and diluted’ version of mimicry which Caillios described as ‘identification’.

A continuous osmosis exists between these seasonal divinities and their multitude of admirers. The latter are kept informed with regard to the tastes, manias, superstitions, and even the most trivial details of the lives of the stars. They imitate them, copying their coiffures, adopting their manners, clothing, preferences, cosmetics and diets. They live by them and in them, even to the extent that some are inconsolable when the stars die and refuse to survive them (p. 122).

Caillios, however, didn’t recognise the full force of his own argument, ultimately failing to rehabilitate mimicry by recognising it as a substantial feature of modernity. He moved off in other directions which privileged a ‘civilising’ play (primarily agon and alea ), over more ‘primitive’ elements (primarily lign and mimicry ), and was somewhat dismissive of the substantial audience relation with cinema, as revealed in his construction of it as a ‘degraded and diluted’.

**Mimicry in videogame play**

I want instead to recuperate ‘mimicry’ as a substantial figure for illuminating the relation with kinetic texts generally, and specifically for the audience relation with videogames. Mimicry, in the form of impersonation, has been discussed in relation to the audience activities of fans (Nightingale, 1994). Here I suggest a new application in articulating a relation between player and on-screen protagonist. My research produced the following salient encounters between the players and myself:

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³ My assumption is that he is referring to lawn bowls.
Vignette 1

Geoff: How would you explain a platform game to somebody that didn't that never played games <Austin: um> never never seen them the screen

Austin: platform games are usually just- like you are usually a cartoon character- and ah -- you just move your sideways like it's completely two dimensional you just go left or right or up and down um - and- it's probably called a platform game cause you're on a platform and you're jumping from platform to platform and - um - that's all <Geoff: yeah- yeah> [A.25]

Austin's comment "like you are usually a cartoon character" speaks at the one time of the familiarity and everydayness of the relation between 'cartoon character' and viewer, and of its strangeness, suggested by his use of the qualifier, "like". The relation between viewer/player and character suggests an impersonation borne of mimicry. Austin was discussing the game in an interview conducted immediately after a session of playing Sonic the Hedgehog. Eleven-year-old Ben, on the other hand, was engaged in playing the game at the time of the following vignette. My first encounter with Ben found him in an enthusiastic relation with the recently acquired game. He offered many unsolicited comments on playing, such as the following one in which he characterised his very slippery relation of impersonation with the character Sonic.

Vignette 2

Ben: ...he's not being patient enough - oh oh -- this is a pretty hard bit- as long as you know how to do it... now I've fallen down and I have to do it all over again [A.7]

A close examination of this vignette reveals a significant switch in personal pronoun use by Ben in the space of just over two lines. The opening 'he's' refers to the on-screen character Sonic the Hedgehog. A little later Ben says 'now I've fallen down' referring once again to the character Sonic the Hedgehog, and finally 'and I have to do it' an ambiguous reference which points to himself as player and/or to Sonic the Hedgehog once more. This third to first person pronoun switching conveys a sense of the momentary connection between

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4 The bracketed reference is to the page number of the Appendix where each vignette can be found.
5 Sonic has no simulated voice, so a mimicry based on utterance is impossible. The presence of voice provides an ingredient for mimicry, but it is not necessary for voice to be present. Adept mimicry can convey a sense of person or character with the adoption of a certain posture and bearing without any vocalisation at all. Furthermore although donning of the garb of Sonic the Hedgehog would establish a visible marker of an attempt at mimicry it is not an essential ingredient when mimicry is understood in relational terms.
6 He lived at home with his parents and two elder brothers. He had an interesting history of engagement and disengagement with the game Sonic the Hedgehog, which I had followed for over 18 months.
7 When Sonic has run out of lives he falls down and off the screen. This denouement is found in a number of platform games to signify the loss of a ‘life’. 
player and on-screen protagonist. Furthermore the first person references appear to be split between references to the speaker on the one hand, and references to the cartoon character on the other. I call it a toggle connection after the toggle switch which facilitates rapid connection and disconnection of electrical circuits. The relation suggested is quite complex in that players are able to rapidly move from an impersonating position to a more distant one in a matter of moments. The awareness that one has forgotten ‘who one is’, of course, belies the truth of the reverse proposition: that one returns to a sense of one’s separation from the screen character.

A third illustration of mimicry from my recording session with James, Sally and Anna, is a more obvious one. During the session James encouraged his younger sister to do a Radon for me. Radon is a character in Mortal Kombat whom Sally impersonated by running and jumping into the family lounge suite, in a manner which simulated his on-screen actions. James also performed a Radon for me.

There is a further relation between player and character which invokes mimicry. In videogame play there is a connection provided by the joystick to the character’s movements. The on-screen character is manipulated by the player, in a manner similar to a puppeteer’s relation to a puppet. This management by player is not unlike doll’s house play, where figurines are used to construct a domestic narrative, or play with toy soldiers where the child simulates a battle. This mimicry is a central figure to the understanding of videogame playing.

The central feature of Caillios’s mimicry was “that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself”. In these moments of dialogue between the players and myself there is a justification for thinking that players succeed in this make believe project. Mimicry provides for a productive analysis of screen protagonist/player encounters which emphasize and hold in balance both phenomenological and social understandings of such relations. I use Caillios’s other categories of play to build on this first important figure of mimicry in explicating the audience relation with kinetic text.

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8 One of my students, Evan Steer, reported a very similar statement made by an eleven-year-old fan of Sonic the Hedgehog, who said: “Most of my notice goes to Sonic and where I’m going” (my italics; recorded 1994). There are numerous other examples in the transcripts.

9 It stands in contrast to the Freudian notion of identification. Interestingly, Freud’s explication of the concept of identification is not greatly removed from ‘mimicry’, though there are important differences. In explaining melancholia Freud proposed that an ‘object-cathexis’ was replaced by an ‘identification’. ‘At the very beginning, in the individual’s primitive oral phase, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other. We can only suppose that later on object-cathexis proceeds from the id, which feels erotic trends as needs. The ego, which to begin with is still feeble, becomes aware of the object-cathexis, and either acquiesces in them or tries to fend them off by the process of repression” (Freud, 1962, p.19). Freud’s argument was that the lost object found its way back into the structure of the personality through its re-establishment in the ego as an identification. Thus the ego took on the appearance and quality of the relinquished object in these ‘object-identifications’ which were central to the formation of the idealised ego (superego). He noted that these identifications could “seize hold of consciousness in turn” resulting in ‘multiple personality’ (p. 20-1). The structures of ‘id’, ‘superego’, and ‘ego’ largely obscure the processes of mimicry on which Freud’s argument depends. In other words, without invoking the tripartite structure, the argument can be re-cast: relations with love objects can be transformed through a profound impersonation which asserts the loved object as part of oneself in response to some sense of lack. Freud’s account favours a statement of ‘internal’ dynamics over the transparent aspects of mimicry which are evident in the child’s actions and which can be derived from the employment of particular phrases. In this respect, mimicry has the advantage of being more readily detectable without recourse to an elaborate theory of mental dynamics.
Videogames offer competition within community (agon)

Caillios pointed out that the construction of competition in games was based on the idea of balancing the skills of opponents to ensure even contests. Such arrangements are found in various forms in western culture: handicapping by the addition of weight in horse racing; granting of starts to professional athletes in footraces; and handicaps employed in golf. In addition to these formalised mechanisms there are the ad-hoc arrangements made by players in impromptu sporting events, such as the favourable 'umpiring' decisions made in 'backyard cricket', and the creation of handicaps for players in social tennis. These tactics are attempts to ensure even contests in spite of unequal distribution of skills among players.

Caillios distilled the character of competitive games in the following way:

[Agôn is] like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that the adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph. (Caillios, 1961, p. 14)

The stress on competitive relations in the play I witnessed was not unbounded, but occurred within a range of constraints evident in the videogame playspace. This competition was structured in three distinctive relations:

- **a mimicking agon**- between players as they entered a relation of mimicry with the screen adversary and invested themselves in the role of the character they were playing

- **virtual agon** - players against themselves, where they attempted to better their previous performances

- **real agon** - between players as they negotiated the conditions under which the game was to be interpreted and played

*Mimicking and Real Agôn*

Competitive games provide a context in which competitive relations are organised and regulated. The following series of vignettes of James, Austin and Corbett illustrate both the first and the last of the relations outlined above: mimicking and real agon. Here a series of highly complex and finely balanced relations of competition within community are revealed, as the three boys played Mortal Kombat:

**Vignette 3**

Geoff: how many time do you have to play this game before you're good at it

James: a fair few you've just got to learn the rules=

Austin: =doesn't really take that long
Geoff: =how do you learn the rules
James: read them out of a magazine + <Corbett:+ [laughs]
Geoff:+[laughs]> or you get someone to tell you where it's = how its all meant to go
Austin: =doesn't take that long [A.32-33]

Although, videogame rules can be found in written form vignette 3 illustrated that players for the most part relied on oral accounts of the workings of games from other players, and on a trial-and-error exploration of the text. In contrast to traditional board games\textsuperscript{10} there is not the same opportunity for cheating as 'rules' are embedded in the workings of the game via the silicone chip 'referee'. On the other hand how the game is to be played on any one occasion can be subject to negotiation, thus invoking 'rules' of practice or engagement. In the following vignette James found himself in control of knowledge sought by Austin, who was pleading for a suspension of on-screen hostilities to allow him time to try a new joystick technique which he had not fully mastered.

Vignette 4

1 Austin: how do you freeze can I just try freezing
2 James: low get low
3 Austin: low and you can do thing - you can do the ( ) and square so just let me do it can I just
4 Austin: you can block it - just let me do a freeze - [appealingly] I don't know how to
5 Corbett: now down towards ( )
6 ( )
7 Austin: rowww you should've just let me man - can you just let me try=
8 James:= stop whingeing
9 Austin: I'm not whingeing I'm just= <James: =laughs> asking you to stay away from me + <James:+no > why not/
10 James: you exen? [parody of Austin] doey doey just stay away from me
11 ----
12 James: I don't want to stay away from you for a second
13 Corbett: [laughs] [Austin hands over controller to Corbett]
14 Austin: you could have let me it's really unfair < Corbett: ( ) > I'm trying to practice

\textsuperscript{10} Ludo, Snakes and Ladders, and Monopoly could serve as examples.
Corbett: if you practice you'll win

Austin: I wouldn't win [A.37]

James appeared to be the most skilled player on this occasion of playing Mortal Kombat which pits two characters, each chosen by the players, against one another in combat. Each character performs various kicks, punches, and evasive actions, with the game proceeding for a number of scenes until one character is vanquished.

Austin's appeal was reciprocated by Corbett starting in line 5 with the advice "Now down towards" but by line 10 Austin has been defeated by James's character - Corbett was the non-player at this point. In line 8 James characterised Austin's appealing as 'whingeing' in a gambit which attempted to position Austin's talk as being outside the parameters of 'play', as commonly understood. Whingeing is defined as play outside the spirit of the rules, pleas for special favours, and a refusal of the 'objectivity' of the silicone chip referee. Cailloi's (1961, 1958, p. 27) opposition of free play and convention-bound play is useful here. His polar concept moved from free improvisation (paidia) to the harnessing of exuberance by "arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions" (ludus).

James attempted to define Austin's persistent requests as diverging from ludus. Austin's appeal stressed improvisation. He wanted to explore the possibilities of control by joystick with the cooperative suspension of 'on-screen' conflict for the moment. James gained support from Corbett, who in line 15 characterised Austin's appeal for time to practice as consistent with a desire to compete. But as Cailloi suggested, pre-determined outcomes or lop-sided tennis matches undermine the kind of competition which sustains interest among participants. James and Corbett sought to avoid the situation where Austin was uncompetitive in the extreme, and, as a consequence, they both dropped tantalising clues to the required joystick movements. (see lines 2 and 5).

The cooperative nature of the play between Austin, James and Corbett was further exemplified in the macro features of their play. For some 3 hours or more they shared two joysticks on a turnabout basis with hardly an instance of disagreement about whose turn it was. This demonstrated a highly regulated arrangement of playing which cannot, in this instance, be explained in terms of my presence, as this regulation persisted throughout a 20 minute period when I was absent from the room with both players and myself believing the videotape was switched off.

The gameworld clearly provided for a complex set of relations which invoked competition within community. This finding stands in stark contrast to the popular accusations made of 'violent' videogames that they produce violent behaviour in children. 11 Whereas spontaneous play has been valued in the past in Austin's family 12, the videogame here provided for a disciplining of free play (paidia) which forced the players, and Austin in particular, into a relation which stressed a regulated playing in accordance with the parameters proposed by the videogame (ludus). However, the cultural work was effected through relations between players and videogame, and between players themselves, which permitted tactical moves and responses, in the knowledge of the convivial domestic safety this particular playspace offered.

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12 I have had contact with the family for over 20 years.
Virtual agon

A number of characteristics of videogame production and marketing work to sustain virtual agon. Popular platform games\textsuperscript{13} offer the solo player\textsuperscript{14} a controlling hand in a contest despite the absence of participating human competitors. This is achieved by a careful arrangement which attempts to sustain an equal competition between the player and the game algorithm, and echoes the comments of players noted by Myers (1984) as ingredients of a good game.\textsuperscript{15} In most videogames players have the opportunity to choose levels (of difficulty), whereby the player can match skill level with the speed and difficulty of the game’s operation. Platform games, such as Sonic the Hedgehog, construct a temporally inflected competition as a race against time, or as a contest for the player against his personal best score. Most platform games provide a screen in which best performances can be entered for subsequent display, enabling the player to make comparisons with real or simulated others. The ideal game of virtual agon should have incremental levels of difficulty so that the player can improve his performance in small steps according to principles espoused by B. F. Skinner, the behaviourist.\textsuperscript{16} If a game is too hard, it may not encourage a potential player to cross its threshold. On the other hand, if it is too easy, it is likely to provide no challenge to players, causing them to lose interest.

This characteristic of virtual agon is illustrated in the following accounts of Sonic the Hedgehog by Ben.

Vignette 5

Ben: ...so this is quite a full on level-- it takes a lot of skill ... oh I think I'll go the skilled way the challenge way see- go this way and it's a lot harder. [A.5]

Not only do the game makers construct an equality of competition, but Ben himself, ensured that the level of difficulty of the play extended his current skill level. He therefore shunned the easy way in favour of what he called ‘the challenge way’ so that this sense of virtual agon was attenuated. This idea is echoed in his comment below:

Vignette 6

Ben: yeah- it takes a lot of skill 'cause you have to sorta you have to learn the controls- and like you slide and you have to to have a lot of practice to

\textsuperscript{13} Sonic the Hedgehog was the most popular of this genre at the time of my field work. There are many other examples, with Super Mario Brothers and Donkey Kong probably the most well-known.

\textsuperscript{14} Five of my interviews encountered solo playing and made it answerable to my questions.

\textsuperscript{15} The failure to notice this aspect of agon' was evident in Sutton-Smith’s (1986, p.75) chapter on videogames in which he claimed that ‘the role of the toy in modern history ... is ... to induce solitary activity on the part of the player. The toy is a concrete isolable and with the player becomes an isolate; in this way an immense change is served upon civilisation.” In conflating the players’ relation with object and relation to text, he failed to examine the latter. Furthermore he neglected the competition built-in to games of that time.

\textsuperscript{16} Skinner’s behavioural paradigms are well-known. His work on ‘operant conditioning’ in animals greatly expanded a learning theory account of human behaviour (See Skinner 1953).
actually get through this game- most people use um use cheats to get through this level eh [A.146]

Ben was implying here that he didn’t use ‘cheats’, which are the highly formalised keystroke procedures for selecting particular levels of the videogame, distributed by the game’s producers to make the game easier for players who find it too difficult. ‘Cheats’ are often supplied through fan magazines and Internet discussion groups, to sustain the ‘right’ matching of computer algorithm operation and player skill, and to maintain interest in the game by providing easy access to the diverse screens of the game.

The maintenance of a continuous and enthusiastic relation of player to videogame depends on a sustaining of ‘virtual agon’, well illustrated in Ben’s case. In these early engagements with Sonic the Hedgehog, hardly a screen went by without him insisting “this is hard”, “it's much harder”, “that's probably the hardest”, “this is the hard part”, “look at this this is hard”, “it’s fun - a challenge”, and “these are mines - they're really hard”. Ben’s persistence and preparedness to make the game a challenge sustained ‘virtual agon’. The videogame offers a range of choices which facilitate this relation over and above the obvious ones of level selection. For example, Ben chose a mode of textual engagement which preferred novelty and surprise to the known, and challenge to ease of performance.

**Vignette 7**

Ben: I'll finish this game right and what you can do is try different ways and find out what's there and try and do different things [A.9]

At this stage, his mode of engagement, plus his attained level of skill, sustained ‘virtual agon’, but as will be seen, this is a fragile and transitory relation. Fifteen months later I talked again to Ben about Sonic. I took the videotape of Ben and David’s play, and showed it to Ben and David, audiotaping our discussion. Ben told me he had sold his Megadrive console and games. Ben related the story as follows:

**Vignette 8**

Ben: yeah sometimes all my brothers say that I'm an idiot and stuff I made a bet with dad that 'cause I'm getting one for this Christmas as well I made a bet that- that that the winner would get 10 dollars and the bet was that I'd sell it in 6 months

Geoff: oh right because you sold your other one

Ben: yep and I think I'M GONNA WIN

Geoff: [laughs] so if you sell this one within six months you lose

Ben: yep [A.141]
This interview was conducted just 4 days before Christmas. Both Ben and his friend David, who was also present, were looking forward to once again renewing their acquaintance with Sonic the Hedgehog, albeit in Sonic 2 version. Unwittingly my videotape whetted their appetite, but also provided for another reading of the game after a voluntary absence of some months.

**Vignette 9**

Geoff: so this game must be pretty good if you still reckon that it's interesting <Ben: yep> after all this time

Ben: yeah cause I haven't played it for so long

Geoff: so if you haven't played it for so long it's more attractive <Ben: yeah way [implied "way more attractive"]> than if you've been playing it all the time <Ben: mmhm+ it's because> + what happens when you've played it all the time

Ben: you just get real bored and you sell it like I did [A.142-143]

In a tangible and highly visible fashion Ben enacted his disengagement with the videogame console by selling it. His statement above 'you just get real bored .." contrasted with a statement he made 15 months earlier recorded in Vignette 10.

**Vignette 10**

Ben: so its just really entertaining IT DOESN'T GET BORING <Geoff: whereas TV does> yeah-- I mean yeah it's not- I don't if people can sit down the whole time and play but you don't ( ) they have to get some exercise and keep fit -but it's really - when you're sick of something the next day and not only is it really good to have a few entertaining <Geoff: yeah> it's very () AND IT LASTS HEAPS AND HEAPS OF YEARS [A.9]

The game was interesting to Ben for the reason that he hadn't played it recently. Such a return is full of portent, for it raises a series of questions germane to re-encounters with favourite texts: How has his reading of the kinetic text changed, and by implication how had he changed?

**Vignette 11**

Geoff: right so we're on page seven of our transcript somewhere I think -- and that's a it's a bit of a scrappy old sound track here but the rabbits have just got out of Dr Robotnik's - machine I think

Ben: yep <M:yeah> I just freed them from the machine there the one's of 'Marble zone' this is a hard one used to be now I find it easy well I did anyway

David: I never get past it I've only ever been past it about- 5 times or something=

Ben: = yeah usually you got me to get past it to () to play the animals [A.141]
The italicised portion of this vignette is worthy of particular scrutiny. Implied in Ben's comment is a movement from the reading of challenge and the sustaining of *virtualagôn*, to the dissolving of challenge through mastery and the collapse of *virtualagôn*, to the anticipation of a renewal of challenge. The use of tense here is interesting. In watching a videotape of himself playing Sonic the Hedgehog 15 months previously Ben recognised:

(a) the difficulty he had with Marble Zone when the videotape was filmed (‘this is a hard one’).

(b) the ease with which he negotiated this zone after constant practice (‘used to be now I find it easy’).

(c) the anticipation that now he has not played the game for some time this zone might once again prove difficult (‘well I did anyway’).

David's 'I never get past it' articulated another way in which the player can lose interest in the game by never being able to progress to the next level, except by the use of cheats. Conversely, Ben's encounter demonstrated that loss of interest could come with total familiarity where all the challenges of the game have been dissolved through mastery, as he explained.

**Vignette 12**

Geoff: so how do you know when you're bored - with the game

Ben: oh I ( ) um- you know everything and - you know where everything is - and - the same things sort of happen < Geoff: mmhm hmm - no surprises > yeah no surprises 'cause you got a special route and everything like and - to to finish with it and you just know everything -

Geoff: so it's predictable < Ben: yeah > [A.204]

*Virtualagôn* is not only sustained by mensuration of various kinds, it is also sustained by the pitting of the player's character against another screen character. In *Sonic the Hedgehog* there are several characters who are defined, in the players' accounts, as adversaries of *Sonic*. This competition is central to the game's 'idea' in Ben's refiguration.

**Vignette 13**

Ben: the idea of this game is you have to you have to rescue the animals from an evil scientist < Geoff: right> - who's capturing them all and making them into bad things and polluting < Geoff: right> the animal life and you're kind of the hedgehog - ( ) very weird - see once you kill the animals the little birds come out and they're like the animals that are captured inside [A.3]

Ben was committed through his mimicry of *Sonic* to an allegiance with the 'little birds' against the 'evil scientist' (later identified by Ben as male), and the powers of alchemy which render animals into 'bad things'. A figure of culture (evil scientist) is opposed by a
figure of nature (*Sonic* helping the little birds to escape from kinetic mechanical traps). The “evil scientist’s” power to distort nature is resisted by *Sonic*. *Sonic’s* success in restoring a natural world inhabited by furry creatures, coincides with the evil scientist’s provisional demise. This is ‘provisional’ because a successful completion of the game returns the figures to their original positions for another engagement. Thus a repetitive playing suggests a reworking, replaying or repeated enactment of this oedipal theme.

The themes was also present in Austin’s account of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, illustrated by the following 3 vignettes.

**Vignette 14**

Geoff: what happens when ah all those rings um go everywhere

Austin: that’s when you get hit everytime you get hit by enemies you lose all your rings <Geoff: aw right>

Geoff: so who are the enemy

Austin: umm all the- creatures that Dr Robotnik has - he makes the robots <Geoff: right> [A.15]

**Vignette 15**

Geoff: oh dear oh me what’s happening here/

Austin: this is the person who is here to stop you ( ) umm he’s captured umm all the animals <Geoff: right> that are *Sonic’s* friends so to stop him ( )

Geoff: he’s captured all the animals has he/ - and what’s *Sonic* trying to do here/

Austin: just break the machine

Geoff: right -- and have you succeeded in breaking this machine / -ohh and all the animals get out <Austin: yep> [A.13]

**Vignette 16**

Geoff: is there a special place where you've got to hit him

Austin: yeah it's very small and if you touch him anywhere else you die so it's not very easy

Geoff: and where do you have to hit him

Austin: just under his belly

Geoff: just under his belly <Austin: yeah> in the groin

Austin: a bit higher

Geoff: a bit higher [A.20-21]
The penultimate screen in *Sonic* is one in which *Sonic* encounters *Dr Robotnik*, his 'enemy', and is required to hit the 'evil' Doctor 13 times in the area of his anatomy described above. If this task is successfully completed *Dr Robotnik* floats skyward off the screen and the next screen shows *Sonic* astride an aeroplane flying through space with his furry friends as the credits roll in cinematic fashion.

*Dr Robotnik*’s power to transform the creatures of the natural world into robots was resisted by these players in their mimicry of *Sonic*. This aspect of the game figures importantly in the official descriptions of the game provided by representatives of *Sega* in Australia.17

The concept of *virtual agon* demonstrates that videogames’ transitory appeal can to some extent be prolonged if there is opportunity to sustain the competitive relation which the game offers. The thesis that game players move rapidly from game to game because they are essentially fickle18, I think should be challenged for the condescending view it offers of players. I propose an alternative thesis which does not rest on imputation of player whimsy, because it is quite difficult to sustain long-term interest in a game offering a competitive relation with a textual algorithm. Players do tire of the game’s offerings, particular if the opportunity to extend *virtual agon* reaches limits, as it does if the videogame provides a step from one level to another which is too hard to climb (which appeared to be David’s problem), or when the player has become so thoroughly competent in performance that *virtual agon* has become ‘virtual mastery’, as in Ben’s case.

*Virtual agon* allows for the recognition of a range of competitive relations. These have been taken up enthusiastically by the boys I studied. I have not had the opportunity to research girls’ playing in any detail, but there is some suggestion that the ‘*virtual agon*’ which holds considerable attraction for males, holds little for females. The distinctions offered here between ‘mimicking’, ‘real’, and ‘virtual’ agon, might provide a fertile ground for further investigation of differential gendered engagements with the videogame.

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17 The manager of Sega-Ozisoft, the Australian distributors for Sega, described Sonic as follows: “He embodies the value of cyberculture and the acceptance of technology, but not technology for technology’s sake. In Sonic’s case he accepts it because it can help the environment” (Juice, May 1993, p.85).

18 “Game companies often launch products in arcades to generate excitement among the *mall rats* [my italics] before making home versions available” (Tetzeli, R. 1993. Videogames: Serious Fun. *Fortune*, 128, 16, Dec 27, p.110). This is a portion of text from an industry magazine article.
Vertigo

Ilinx. The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness (Cailllois, 1961, p. 23).

In general terms vertigo can be experienced in a range of leisure activities, including fair ground rides such as the roller coaster and dodgem cars; driving vehicles in motor sports; engaging in outdoor sports such as high jumping, bungee jumping, hang gliding; flying aeroplanes and riding horses or trialbikes. Young adolescents are prevented from legally taking part in many of these activities, and as Ben noted in Vignette 17, in their wisdom the civic fathers in Australia have removed much of the outdoor equipment that used to provide an opportunity for the pursuit of vertigo.

Vignette 17

Ben: yeah- but which this this is why it's heaps popular - doing that <Geoff: yeah> and doing this-

Geoff: you like that <Ben: yeah - = it's ( ) >= it's like spinning around on a whirley gig <Ben: yeah>

Geoff: I don't think they put them in playgrounds anymore but when I was a kid they used to have those things that um +

Ben: +oh roundabout things <Geoff: yeah> I love them I used to love them so much <David: oh yeah they were= alw> =they thought they were dangerous or something didn't they

Geoff: yeah I think that's why you don't see them but I can remember when I was about your age used to go around to the local park

David: yeah there was one in Watervale

Geoff: they had - it was round < Ben: I used to love turns> +and it had a big axle in the middle and had kind of floorboards all across it <Ben: yeah> and it had these railings that came out <David: oh no > that you hung on to <David: jump it jump it> and um you used to kind of run = < Ben: =yeah everyone*> on the outside* of it and get it going really fast and then jump on

Ben: that was so fun they reckon peop people broke their arms and stuff on them <Geoff: yeah> cause they fell off [A.199-200]

Ben, David, and I discussed in a nostalgic way our respective childhood experiences of riding on a device which was frequently encountered in public parks in this country. The videogame provides a readily accessible alternative. The possibility of encountering vertigo
in a textual relation is one of the appeals of a generation of video games\textsuperscript{19}, and of Sonic the Hedgehog in particular.

A moment of watching the bonus screen in Sonic produced a sense of vertigo in me. The screen rotated gently while a pinball scored points in the familiar way by bouncing off apparent obstacles, while sounds borrowed from the mechanical progenitor, the pinball machine, announced these productive contacts. The soundtrack supported this on-screen activity with a slow, dreamy musical theme. A bonus screen in Sonic 2 has both Sonic and Tails aboard a bobsled careering around a course which invoked the televised event at the winter olympics. Accompanied by a determined, fast-paced musical soundtrack I again fell through space, or so it seemed. I became disoriented; I said to myself ‘You are a researcher. You must pay attention.’ Sonic the Hedgehog spun at velocity- and I spun with ‘him’ in a moment of mimicry.

Vertigo is here induced in a relation of mimicry. If the videogame’s invitation is accepted, there are moments in which one feels one is Sonic, hurtling through space, and so the experience of vertigo follows moments of mimicry or impersonation, or should I say im-sonic-ation? When a sustained impersonation takes place, the experience of vertigo is highly likely, given the prolonged contacts players have with the screen, especially in school holiday time or on weekends when most of my research sessions took place.\textsuperscript{20}

The connection between mimicry and vertigo is made manifest in the playing position offered to players of grand prix and motorcycle games currently featured in videogame parlours. Players are offered a seat in a mock vehicle which simulates the cockpit position of a fighter plane, motorcycle or racing car. However, it is important to recognise that mimicry and vertigo can work in tandem without these stage props.

\textit{Games of chance (alea)}

Caillios (1961, p. 17) suggested that games of chance stress the ‘favour of destiny’. Player skill does not come into the calculus by which the player’s fate is determined. Many contemporary examples can be given: eg. lotteries, roulette, lotto, and various dice games. Caillios noted that such games “negate... work, patience, experience, and qualifications” (p. 17).

There is a 'bonus screen' in Sonic accessible to players who have captured at least 50 rings. In this screen the player's task is to manipulate a ball around a slowly rotating pinball-like field. The pinball allusion was established in the following talk between Ben and myself:

\textbf{Vignette 18}

\textsuperscript{19} Various simulations of car and motorbike racing would also be relevant to this inducement of vertiginous pleasure. Austin did show me one motorbike racing game. None of the players had anything like Flight Simulator which I have played.

\textsuperscript{20} Interestingly Cupitt and Stockbridge’s (1996) surveying occurred in school -term time, no doubt increasing the likelihood that one of the framing assumptions of their inquiry - that families constructed rules around computer and video game activities - could be shown to have some salience.
Geoff: right so what are we up to now/

Ben: now we're up to spring yard - <Geoff: oh spring yard> pinball now <Geoff: pinball one> -- watch this is your ( ) down <Geoff: [laughs]> see how - told you it was like a pinball <Geoff: it is isn't it - and that's the spring - right-- it is like a pinball> see this time... [A.7]

There is a randomness in this bonus screen which simulates chance events. Though I have no doubt skilful players negotiate with intent and precision, for me it introduced this further element of random reward into the game. In *Sonic* 2 there is a simulation of poker machines. In a sense, the designers were leaving nothing to chance, in introducing as many elemental features of play as they could.

*Fantasy and discipline*

So far, this account has provided ample illustration of Caillois’s assertion that games produce ‘liberty and invention’, and some evidence of their disciplining function, through the movement from free play (*paidia*) to ordered play (*ludus*). The conclusion of this chapter is guided by the thought that games correlate ‘fantasy and discipline’. Here I build on the players’ notions.

In watching the screenplay\(^{21}\) of *Sonic the Hedgehog* for the first time, Mikiko, a Japanese female undergraduate described it as ‘golf’. Of course, golf takes place against the backdrop of an outdoor ‘natural’ world, whereas *Sonic* appears in a world of representation. Nonetheless the analogy is productive. The *Sonic* /ball\(^{22}\) negotiates hazards (water/bunkers; trees/evil creatures); the action takes place in a setting where the ‘natural’ world is defined in adversarial terms. Sand is no longer for lying or relaxing on; it is constructed as a trap which must be avoided, or failing that, negotiated. On a golf course, trees are nothing but obstacles which thwart the free path of the ball. With a buggy or motorbike, golf becomes a motorised tour of a tamed and manicured natural world. The ball traverses a trajectory across nature as (back)ground, as scene for play, as mute witness to the culture of the rolling sphere. Both games presume a mastery of the variable conditions of nature, as the hallmark of success. Both games specify progress within the game in terms of quantification and measurement: strokes or points lost or gained; penalties or bonuses.

The player’s work in *Sonic the Hedgehog* is to control the trajectory of a ball/*Sonic* around a maze. Negotiating a maze is a highly valued cultural achievement, as indicated by its use in operationally constructing and defining ‘intelligence’ in the form of psychological tests.\(^{23}\) This particular maze does not take the form of a paper and pencil test, but scrolls two-dimensionally across a screen in the form of background which is traversed: uniform slopes, planes, shutes, and tunnels; an animated mechanical ground constructed of machine-like components: moving mechanical floors or platforms, pendulums with defined

\(^{21}\) I had shown one of my classes a videotape of the screen action of *Sonic the Hedgehog* similar to that shown by retailers ‘demonstrating’ a new videogame. There was therefore no opportunity at this moment for Mikiko ‘to play’ *Sonic the Hedgehog* because there was no console to play on.

\(^{22}\) In fast motion *Sonic the Hedgehog* undergoes a metamorphosis to take on the appearance of a whirring ball.

\(^{23}\) The Porteus maze is one example.
and regular orbits, lifts, gates, and ramps. Even the animated creatures describe motions as regular as clockwork. The control of the ball by managing its velocity, and the timing of its elevation, the speed of approach and the hitting of targets suggests both Pinball and Pachinko, the Japanese coin rolling game. The player is learning to manipulate a figure, and himself (this body/this ball) against a kinetic ground— the latter quality of 'moving ground' signifying its distinctiveness. Ball movement is constrained within these parameters so that to play is to inhabit a Newtonian universe where motion is obedient to the laws of mechanics.

Drawing on the impetus of mechanics, which affirms the predictability of motion, the player is invited through a mimicry relation to make himself as a steel ball flying through a machine-like world of repetitive and regular motion, with gratifications apparently reduced to an accumulation of rings, points and bonuses achieved by engaging in virtual agon: jostling with Dr Robotnik, and Caterkiller. A bodily renunciation is involved. Success in the terms the game proposes depends on this player, his flesh, his blood, taking on an identity which is recorded in familiar reductionist details: accumulated points, rings and time bonuses, of which Frederick Taylor, the father of 'time and motion' study, would be proud.

As Sonic runs through the acts and levels he collects rings which earn credits of various kinds. Collisions with various attacking creatures or with certain traps or hazards result in Sonic 'dropping' in a rather spectacular fashion all the rings he has accumulated so far. Thus progression is defined through attaining new levels in the game, but also through the accumulation of time bonuses, points, extra 'lives' or rings. It is a representation which proposes the accumulation of credits as a goal and motivating agent. Accumulation as a culturally valued accomplishment is consonant with some forms of culture (Western) but not others (Aboriginal or Sioux Indian).

The correlation of fantasy and discipline conceives of a relation riddled with meanings which locate it in contemporary culture and give it cultural potency. In videogames this potency derives not from their much discussed 'interactivity' but from a much more ordinary feature of videogame playing which has been greatly overlooked: the constant practice required to achieve the levels of virtuosity I witnessed. The successful completions of levels is predicated upon just the right combination of movement and speed to guide the character within the narrow parameters the game demands. In order to achieve such virtuosity players must put in hours of practice, as Ben reminded us in vignette 6 above.

The opportunity for prolonged moments of mimicry emerge in these playing conditions for this is not an engagement with text that has any direct parallel in the world of readers' relation with books. Readers may return to a favourite novel, but their readings of the same work are few, even among academics. Two or perhaps three readings of the same text occur on occasions relatively close together. This is a far cry from 22 or 23 playings of Sonic the Hedgehog of Super Mario occurring on the same night. The only textual engagements with this same level of repetition that come to mind, are the musician with the musical text or score on the one hand, and the actor learning his/her lines in a film or play on the other. Both, like videogames, provide opportunities to enter a relation with the text over and over again, and all three achieve a symbiotic relation of text and player.

These players crossed the threshold of the text and became immersed in a fictional regime closer to our dominant cultural ethos than many have imagined, stressing as it does, subordination to the rhythm of animated machinery, and the reduction of gratifications to an economic symbolism of progress. Perhaps Sonic the Hedgehog's worldwide popularity is premised on its capacity to profoundly mimic the values of a global commercial culture, of which it is also a part. This culture marginalises nature and privileges artifice, finds few
spaces for representation of the female, values clock-based regulation of activity, and posits motorised flight as the ultimate reward, represented in the closing screens of Sonic the Hedgehog where we see Sonic sitting astride an aeroplane flying into a blue horizon. Through this persistent practice, fantasy and discipline are melded, describing a trajectory of machinic and robotic domination of nature (the audience-text) against an uncertain economic and ecological future (the extra-textual).
6. The ‘playspace’ of domestic videogame playing

‘Playspace’ is a word coined to convey a sense of the domain or milieu established around videogame playing. It builds on de Certeau’s notion of space as a ‘practised place’. A place (lieu) refers to a distribution of elements which cannot occupy the same location. A place is a location on a grid which, in a sense excludes consideration of human action which might take place in it. On the other hand a space (espace) takes into consideration the movement of elements within it, particularly as they collectively lead to a definition of place. “Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 117). ‘Playspace’ builds on the notion of space (espace) in suggesting that the practices of videogame playing create a territory which has peculiar qualities judged by the actions of those who pass through it or remain in it. Thus ‘playspace’ is a place of human activity, specifically play, but even more generally it can be regarded as a place of performance, which achieves its character through this human infiltration.

Recent Australian writings have had some difficulty in acknowledging the kind of ‘playspace’ engendered by videogame playing, preferring notions of ‘family spaces’ to what my research reveals are specifically generation-differentiated and gender-differentiated spaces.

The problem of acknowledging multiple hearths and fragmented audiences

Broadcasting means the rediscovery of the home. In these days when house and hearth have been largely given up in favour of a multitude of other interests and activities outside, with the consequent disintegration of family ties and affections, it appears that this new persuasion may to some extent reinstate the parental roof in its old accustomed place, for all will admit that this is, or should be, one of the greatest and best influences on life. (C. A. Lewis, 1942, cited in Frith, 1983, p.110)

Before we just had one lounge room and we just had one TV, then we got extensions and Mum and Dad usually watch the news and things like that and we might be in the other room watching ‘The Simpsons’. 12-14 year old, Tamworth [N.S.W.] (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996, p. 12).

Domestic videogame playing establishes a ‘playspace’ which has a particular character. In Australia, public discussion of this character has been hampered by the circulation of the idea that domestic videogame playing is a family based activity. The accepted notion is that children play videogames under the watchful eye of their seniors. This notion is sustained more by nostalgia than evidence. Hartley (1992) noted how the position occupied by the television as material object in the Australian home, was one of centrality and family significance. His history featured a series of photographs of family television sets bedecked with framed photographs of family members, of the bride taken in front of the family television, and the like. With the introduction of television, there was a sense in which it became ‘hearth’ in its location in lounge rooms. It was a focus of family activity; it no longer is. Though this phase has passed the nostalgia for family television lingers and finds its way into various discourses, one of which is the researching of videogame playing.

In 1995 fifty-four percent of Australian homes had two or more television sets. The average number of TV sets per home in 1995 was 1.7 (Nielsen, 1995); in 1997 it was 2.3 (Macken, 1997); the average number of people living in each home was 2.9 in 1995.
(Nielsen, 1995). In Australian households with children or teenagers, 76% have two or more television sets and 47% have a personal computer. Thirty one percent of boys and 19% of girls have a television in their bedroom; the figures for video consoles is respectively 17% (boys) and 8% (girls). Furthermore the comment of the Tamworth youth speaks of a ‘dual watching’ with parent(s) in one room and children in the other. (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996, pp. 10-13). A range of media compete with broadcast television for audience attention, and a number of screens in various parts of the household invite that attention. Videogames are the most recent addition to a list of alternative screens which includes the Internet, Pay TV, ‘serious’ computing, and video rental.

What are we to make of statements which circulate in popular media which continue to characterise screen engagement (and videogame playing in particular) as a family hearth activity? Consider a recent example from broadcast news in this country. An early study by Mitchell (1985) which explored family computer game playing in North California, was invoked on radio news in 1995 as supporting and reinforcing the idea of a family playing.¹ The program failed to draw attention to the historical specificity of 1981 (the year of Mitchell’s study) as a moment when domestic computer games were a novelty, even in California’s Silicon Valley. Such new cultural products inevitably attract media attention for a brief period and Mitchell was one of the early scholars to investigate the phenomenon at first hand.

To invoke the study ten years on produces another set of meanings, particularly at a time when the Australian Government had recently enacted legislation on censorship classification for videogames. The former Attorney General, Michael Lavarch, who was responsible for drafting the legislation, stated that he played computer/ videogames at home with his son, but did not reveal how often his son played in his absence. Lavarch’s statement was significant in its manner of supporting the ‘family playing together’ thesis. In November 1993 he was embroiled in the contentious political issue of drafting videogame classification legislation in conjunction with his State-based counterparts. Circulation of his statement in the popular press contributed to a discourse which insisted that though these media of communication were new, old-time ‘family’ values prevailed.

Other voices were attacking computer/ videogames (as well as other media forms) for their depiction of violent acts and the alleged harmful effects of these images on young children. National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVLA) Newsletters were prominent in these attacks. The computer games industry and Sega Ozisoft in particular, did not challenge this view of playing as a family based activity after the adverse publicity around the release of the Sega game Night Trap which the NVLA seized upon after it was featured in mass circulation news magazines as an example of a particularly inappropriate game for young children. Perhaps the publicity did some damage to Sega Ozisoft’s reputation they wanted to repair. The game was targeted by the NVLA as an example of a game which would adversely affect children because of its explicitly violent acts against women.² Sega subsequently withdrew the game from the Australian market. A range of community and activist groups (e.g. the Country Women’s Association, the National Council of Women of Australia, The Australian Family Association, the National Council of Jewish Women), made submissions to the Office of Film and Literature Classification. They claimed to speak for ‘family values’ and wanted to ensure that alleged ‘video nasties’ (both videogames and videos for hire) would not find their way into domestic spaces and become readily accessible to children (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1994). Though opposed on many issues the community groups and the industry groups made odd

¹ Dr Nicola Yeland, a Brisbane psychologist, cited the Mitchell study in her interview on ABC radio in 1995.
bedfellows in their allegiance to the notion that videogame playing was a family-based activity. Neither camp appeared to be interested in finding out what was actually happening.

Not only has this construction of family videogame playing found its way into the public record on computer/video game playing, through the comments of prominent people and the work of vocal minorities, it has also infiltrated reports of official research findings. The Australian Broadcasting Authority-sponsored research on ‘electronic entertainment’ for example (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996), had difficulty countenancing its own finding that 80% of domestic videogame play took place without parents or guardians present. Nostalgia appears to have pervaded the research agenda for this study and found expression in the monograph’s title: Families and Electronic Entertainment. In failing to acknowledge a fragmentation of the family audience, Cupitt and Stockbridge asserted that parents were still in control of children’s viewing/video game play, and that rules were firmly in place, despite the contradictions that a reinterpretation of their findings highlights. If most play occurs in the absence of parental supervision, the efficacy of rules regarding videogame use must surely be questioned. As Cupitt and Stockbridge’s research suggests, rules can appear to exist but they may not actually be enforced. Their study demonstrated that children had considerable opportunities for unsupervised access to a whole range of audio-visual materials.

Despite this demonstration of further shifts in the domestic audience terrain, only partial recognition of its significance has occurred in public discourse and publicly sponsored research. The NVLÀ’s long expressed concern about unsupervised access (National Viewers and Listeners Association, 1993) is pertinent, though their ‘intuitions’ are not linked to any systematic account or observation. Re-readings of Cupitt and Stockbridge’s work and consideration of the results of my own work place these issues firmly on the public agenda.

Differentiated Playspaces

In its technical requirements domestic videogame play is made possible by the availability of ‘spare’ television sets in the home. The extraordinary commercial success of Nintendo and Sega is one based on keeping the price of consoles under certain limits. The achievement of that objective has been made possible by the design of a console capable of using an already purchased television set. Three of the players I studied made use of second household television sets to play videogames, three others used a lounge room-located set and one played games on a domestic computer.

The computer/video game playing I witnessed created a new and gendered space in front of television sets. It further disturbed notions of hearth, for there was no evidence from my research that playing computer/video games was an inclusive family-based activity. None of the seven households I entered, contained even a hint of the family playing computer games together. As an activity, it divided families around generational and gender lines. Children played more than parents and usually without their participation. Boys played more than girls and generally without their participation. The domestic playing I witnessed

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3 Price levels determine the success or otherwise of games consoles. In the US in 1993 $100 was considered a price barrier for consoles which few purchasers were prepared to exceed. Dvorak, J.C., (1993). Game machines: Trend or fiasco. PC magazine, 12, 19, Nov 9, p.93.

4 This finding is consistent with my re-interpretation of Cupitt and Stockbridge’s (1996) work though they masked these findings with perverse interpretations of the ‘data’ of their study.
presupposed and perpetuated a differentiated playspace. It was a means by which adolescent male solidarity and adolescent male ‘community’ challenged the unity of the home.

All of the consoles were owned by boys in the respective families. In two households game playing habitually took place in the boys' bedrooms, where the game console was connected to a television set (Jason and Ben). A gendered and relatively permanent playspace was established in these households synonymous with the haven and sanctuary that exclusive use of a bedroom offers young adolescents. For some time the bedroom has been recognised by researchers as a site for the creation of 'identities' (McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Brown, Dykers, Steele and White 1994). In the other households, though only temporarily defined personal spaces were established, there was a sense of exclusivity established along gender lines. Computer/ videogames were considered to be the kinds of activities that ‘boys do’, as much by other members of the family (notably parents), as the boys themselves.

In her study of audiences of Rugby League football Nightingale (1992, p. 163) noted that “The discursive space constructed around televised football is then gender coded ‘male’ “. She drew attention to the denial of rights of female viewers to speak or be heard in the domestic space of viewing. I found considerable evidence of a similarly ‘gendered discourse and playspace’ being established around videogames. My major findings on gender and videogames are listed below together with illustration taken from my interviews and observations.

A gendered playspace around videogames is defined by differential patterns of access through and within the domain of playing, and by differential patterns in the accounts offered by actors of their presence in such a space.

Scene 1: Three school friends, Austin, James and Corbett, occupied the loungeroom of Austin's home for most of a rainy Saturday afternoon. Apart from my presence for most of the time, there were no others present in the room, though Austin's mother was in an adjacent room for some of the time. She did not enter the loungeroom at all during the videotaping of the play, though I was invited out for a cup of tea during the videotaping session. I had a vague sense that we were involved in a male ritual.

Scene 2: Two inseparable buddies, Ben and David were playing videogames in Ben’s bedroom. Apart from my presence there were only two interruptions to our proceedings: one when Ben’s mother asked the boys whether they would like an egg for lunch, and another when Ben was called to the phone. Ben’s mother was quite tentative in entering the playspace, despite my encouragement and appeared to offer the beginnings of an apology in line 3 with 'you sure', which was inflected as a question (see Vignette 1 below). Ben’s mother was neither in awe of me as researcher (she is highly educated and has been highly articulate in other occasions of our meeting) or friend (we have often participated in stimulating conversations).
Vignette 1

[knock at door of Ben's bedroom]

Geoff: [to Ben's mum] it's alright come in

Ben's mum: you sure

Geoff: yeah yeah this is real life [both boys laugh]

Ben's mum: oh it's just I'm boiling some eggs for Joe do you want interested in a boiled egg

Tom: ok hard no um medium

Ben's mum: medium - do you want one David

David: yes please

Ben's mum: two medium boiled eggs do you want one

Geoff: [laughs] no thanks

[Ben's mum leaves room]

David: [laughs]

Tom: watch this if he if he if he would have caught that that might have been a touchdown [A.165]

I can think of two explanations for Ben’s mum thinking that she had ‘violated’ this space: either she was aware that proceedings were being recorded and did not want to intrude on the ‘recording’ or she recognised that she was entering a gendered space. These scenes considered together build support for the second explanation.

Scene 3: By way of contrast David's father entered the room during taping of our first session, watched silently for several minutes and took part in a discussion about the research work at the conclusion of videotaping. Though he spoke very briefly during the recording, he did say 'Hi' and asked his son how he was going.

Scene 4: Jason’s father also entered the playspace, as recorded in Vignette 2 below.

Vignette 2

Jason: now- now I think here the easiest way is to stand on the cactuses -- so now all you do is retry

Geoff: that's right - I see [laughs] Supermario

[Jason’s father enters room]
Jason’s father: we all right + yeah everybody happy

Jason: + yeah

Geoff: + yeah yeah -we’re having fun

Jason’s father: you’re not not cold in here

Geoff: no no no

[Jason’s father departs]

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For analytic purposes there are two aspects of communication I want to focus on here: the manner in which the playspace is entered, avoided, and/or traversed by parents in these two examples and the two which follow, and secondly, the character of the accounts offered for such entry. Austin’s mother did not enter the playspace at all but offered me an invitation to afternoon tea from the next room. This distant invitation was possible because of the open-plan architecture of the house. Ben’s mother, on the other hand, negotiated a shut door in the conventional way, by first knocking and then entering. Her entry was tentative and her offer of the boiled egg to the boys was couched as a justification\(^2\) for her intrusion. Jason’s father also offered a justification for his entry (the door was not shut) in terms of parental concern for our well-being. David’s father entered a shut door without knocking and without offering a justifying account for his entry. Ben greeted him with “Hi how are you”. He participated as observer with little comment through several minutes of videogame playing. In my pilot study of videogame playing in a local milkbar, Karen, the partner of my co-researcher, entered the milk bar some time after our videotaping session had begun and remarked afterwards how she felt she was intruding on a male domain. She said she felt distinctly uncomfortable and ‘out of place’.

These examples illustrate a different mode of traversing the playspace for women and men which suggests both a recognition and maintenance of a gendered playspace, and a sense that ‘secret men’s business’ was being conducted, which of course it was, to the extent that there were no challenges to, or comments about such practices.

*In the playspace there is a gendered positioning with boys implicated in a different mode of engagement compared with girls.*

Scene 1: One of my students, Evan Steer, interviewed three girls while Becky aged 11 was playing *Sonic the Hedgehog*. The other participants were Sue and Mia, both aged 7. His transcript of the conversation follows.

**Vignette 3**

Evan: So do you like playing *Sonic*?

Becky: Yeah

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\(^2\) Scott and Lyman (1968) argue that “justifications are socially approved vocabularies that neutralise an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question.” (p. 51). I would add that justifications anticipate the likelihood that the act or its consequences may be called into question.
Evan: So who plays it more - boys or girls?
Becky: It’s about the same
Evan: When the boys are here, do the girls play before them?
Becky: A boy always plays first
Sue: The boys do
Evan: Why is that?
Becky: Because they think they’re the best in the whole wide world... they think they rule everything
Sue: It they let someone have a go, maybe they think they won’t get a go at all
Mia: They don’t ask us
Evan: So why don’t you ask if you can go first?
Becky: Because the answer will be ‘no’
Evan: And how do you feel about that?
Becky: It’s unfair
Evan: So the boys are bossy when the Sega’s on
Sue: Yes - very!
Becky: When there’s boys around we hardly ever get a go
Evan: Who’s better at playing Sega - boys or girls?
All: Both
Becky: The boys are noisy ... it means more to them if they lose... they might get a bad reputation or something
Evan: So you don’t care as much about Sega?
Becky: We’ve got other things to do ... they don’t think they can do other things
Sue: We just play for fun ... but if they don’t win they get angry
Evan: So the games make the boys mad do they?
Mia: Yes. Girls are much quieter

Evan noticed that boys exercised a right to be the first to play videogames though it is not clear from his account how this right had been established. From the girls’ statements there is a suggestion of a substantially different mode of their engagement with the videogame. For boys ‘winning’ was important, and the consequences of failing drastic. ‘Winning’ translated into the videogame’s idiom meant successfully completing levels, and avoiding
the ignominy of ‘game over’. Becky’s suggestion that boys’ videogame playing is linked to a notion of self she described as ‘bad reputation or something’ is prescient. A more intense relation of mimicry with the screen protagonists seems to be central to boys’ mode of engagement with games when compared with that of girls. For boys, loss of game appears to be equated with loss of face.

Videogames have proposed boys as their audience, both in their marketing strategies, and the textual aspects of gameplay. Boys have responded to these invitations in laying claims to videogames as their domain. Girls find themselves positioned as secondary players, but also reciprocally define themselves as having better things to do with their time, as Becky suggests. This state of affairs could change: Significant movement could occur through a combination of events which would need to include a substantial addressing of girls as audiences for videogames through marketing avenues; further opening of videogames’ basic structures to cater for different modes of engagement; and the exploration of videogames potential for offering different sensory connection to the player.

The next vignette is a rather special one. It illustrates vividly the value of doing research which holds open the possibility of being surprised by a finding, for this discussion was certainly not something I expected or anticipated. The following vignette reveals a remarkably complex set of gendered relations. In it the three school friends, Austin, James and Corbett, were playing videogames in the loungeroom of Austin’s home.

**Vignette 4: The sandwich shop episode**

James: did you hear that story about the sandwich shop affair <(Corbett: sandwich shop affair > not affair but <Austin: ohh did you hear about> = no but affair doesn’t necessarily mean [Austin and Corbett playing] someone who’s not married <Austin: I just went did you hear about that computer? ( ) OK that sandwich shop thing we went into the sandwich shop to buy something and this girl she was only about 17 <Corbett: don’t begin again> she called us girls

Geoff: so what did you do

James: we walked away

Austin: [feigning interest in story]ohh yeah woee that was horrible

Geoff: called you girls <James: yeah> why did= she <Corbett: = people in the toilet> call you a girl [A.41]

Salient information, available to viewers of the video, is that all of the boys, Austin aged 13y 4mo, James 12y 11mo, and Corbett 13y 11mo, are on the threshold of sexual maturity, and all have long shoulder-length hair. Of the three, only Corbett’s voice has ‘broken’ and certainly both James and Austin have clear skin and a boyish appearance.

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6 This is particularly evident in television advertising. An advertisement for Sega shows a male in a reclining barber’s chair with his eyes closed while cuts are made to screen action from various Sega games.

7 I discuss the auditory dimension of videogame playing in the following chapter. Malone’s (1984) work was the first to suggest in a specific manner a gender differentiated mode of engagement.

8 At the time of this recording Australian papers were reporting another ‘sandwich shop affair’ which implicated a federal member of the Australian Parliament in suspected fraud. He was using Parliamentary expense accounts to support a member of his family in a sandwich shop business.
The first point of interest is that the excerpt does not appear to have any specific or immediate bearing on the game playing at this moment illustrating a seamlessness between everyday life and textual engagement. (The boys were playing Mortal Kombat.) The text is not directly implicated in their discussion, for it brings in a shared experience of social life of which audience-text is simply one part. The storytelling is punctuated by continued videogame playing, by the giving of advice on continuing strategy ("don't begin again"), and the "yeah's"."

James' narrative in this vignette also is performative in the sense that it makes an appeal to its audience which in the immediate situation is me, as researcher, and the two boys. Its perlocutionary force could be summarised in the statement 'we are not girls'. The story told by James establishes first a problem (being mistakenly identified as a girl by a member of the opposite sex somewhat older than himself), and then a resolution of that problem ('we walked away'). In this, my first meeting with James, it worked to persuade me that James was not a girl. The two events- the encounter with the girl and the encounter with me that Saturday afternoon- have a common theme of 'encounters with strangers'. As a ploy, James' performance was an attempt to convince his audience and particularly me, of his credibility as a male person. He could not rely however on the obvious markers of biological gender which work implicitly on strangers: facial hair, deep voice, the unmistakable bodily appearance of a sexually mature male. His telling of the sandwich shop affair illustrates the difficulty of negotiating one's gendered identity with strangers when evident signifiers of it are not available. Had the girl in the sandwich shop seen him playing Mortal Kombat she would have known he was a long-haired boy. He did with me what he might have wished to have done with the girl in the sandwich shop: establish his male gender discursively by his telling of an anecdote or by demonstrating his virtuosity as videogame player.

By contrast, Austin was aware of a long-standing family friendship between myself and his family. He would realise that his gendered identity was not under challenge from me. His apparent dismissal of James' performance through his feigned sympathy admits a number of explanations; perhaps the issue of solidarity with me as a male was not a concern; or perhaps the demonstration of the thesis 'we are not girls' was one which caused him discomfort and which he didn't want to talk or think about at this moment. James' narrative made an appeal to his friends to establish a sense of solidarity which met with a lack of response from Corbett, who was rarely animated in this session, and a mocking articulated reaction from Austin. The sub-text of this talk, however, is that 'we are all boys together' for this is clearly the meaning of their companionship on this Saturday afternoon and on many other occasions of camaraderie at home and school. This is the ontological presupposition which makes it possible for them to communicate and to play videogames together.

Davies and Harré (1990, p. 47) have outlined a set of processes applicable to the development of gendered selves which are germane to this discussion.

1. Learning of the categories which include some people and exclude others, e.g. male/female, father/daughter;

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Corbett's comment "people in the toilet" appears to be a reference to the incident described by James. My guess is that James may have been mistakenly identified as a girl when entering a public toilet and Corbett was reminding him of that event.
The ‘playspace’ of domestic videogame playing

2. Participating in the various discursive practices through which meanings are allocated to those categories. These include the story lines through which different subject positions are elaborated;

3. Positioning of self in terms of the categories and story lines. This involves imaginatively positioning oneself as if one belongs in one category and not in the other (e.g. as girl and not boy, or good girl and not bad girl);

4. Recognition of oneself as having the characteristics that locate oneself as a member of various sub classes of dichotomous categories and not of others - i.e. the development of a sense of oneself as belonging in the world in certain ways and thus seeing the world from the perspective of one so positioned. This recognition entails an emotional commitment to the category membership and the development of a moral system organised around the belonging.

Davies and Harré describe a cognitive model for gendered positioning. This vignette suggests a nexus of the textual and the world of action and ritual; in this nexus gendered subject positions are established and maintained. The boys’ playing of this particular game, *Mortal Kombat*, establishes their gendered identity through their participation in an activity that ‘boys do’ and which girls are less committed to. Furthermore, the *Mortal Kombat* videogame proposes a world of mostly male contestants fighting to death as its primary narrative. In participating in this play and entering relations of mimicry with the kinetic text, the boys participate in “discursive practices through which meanings are allocated” to the categories boy/girl. The relation of mimicry allows them to take on the character of the on-screen protagonists who, in the case of *Mortal Kombat*, happen to be unequivocal and exaggerated caricatures of male and female, overdetermined by their names - *Raiden*, *Johnny Cage*, *Sub Zero* - their official descriptions - *an American martial arts movie star, a demon monk from the underworld* - and their iconography - *bulging muscles, bare chests and ferocious looks for the males, veiled faces for the females*. In mimicry a transposition is achieved which moves from difficult ontologically-grounded social relations negotiated from a position of liminality in male life-span development to an anticipation borne of mimicry of the mature position, through the apparent strength, prowess, skill, and dexterity invested in the protagonists of videogames.

Conclusion

The differentiated playspace of computer/ videogame playing takes its character through the practices and talk of those who inhabit these places. The places I investigated through my research were almost exclusively occupied by males, and not females. Females’ occupation of these places appeared more transitory, more fleeting, and less committed than males. Furthermore, these spaces were inhabited by the young, and not by their parents. This state of affairs may not endure.

Two crucial questions which I have begun to address here are:

- What gives the playspace its current character?
- What might make it a different playspace?

The findings of my study are that boys’ mode of engagement with videogames is substantially different in character to that of girls’. I have not set out to make a direct
comparison so my research is suggestive rather than definitive on this point. Whereas males readily take up the invitation to occupy a ‘cockpit seat’ from which to control a symbolic universe, girls’ response to that invitation is less committed. Males frequently take up the challenge the game offers in terms of time bonuses, possibilities of a personal best score, and avoiding ‘deaths’. Girls appear to have a different mode of engagement. They seem able to enjoy portions of gameplay without necessarily linking them to finishing levels, or reaching the game’s end. In examining the particulars of this engagement, Malone’s (1984) work suggests that girls pay attention to different features of videogames such as the musicality of the soundtrack, and are less impressed with visual screen action. Recent research has suggested that girls prefer games with character and relationship development whereas boys prefer fast action.10 Becky’s comment above suggests a less intense mimicry relation for girls with action games.

The cockpit metaphor is supported by elements of the playing situation: the ‘joystick’ so named; the common occurrence of solo playing/flying; the convention of on screen ‘deaths’ recorded visually as a falling out of a grid location to an unspecified ‘below’. The ‘symbolic universe’ so experienced is bounded or framed by the screen and its perimeter. It is not characterised by the same ambiguities a young adolescent confronts in daily social life, or even in television programs. Within the videogame universe the adversaries are known, the odds are measured, and the outcomes defined. The sandwich shop episode featured in Vignette 4 illustrates powerfully the ambiguities of social life for one group of adolescent boys, and their social impotence in the face of such an episode (‘so what did you do?’ ‘We walked away.’) By way of contrast, videogames offer the experienced ‘pilot’ a profound experience of potency and control in negotiating a symbolic universe which can be predicted, anticipated, and with a degree of manipulative fluency, controlled, at the same time as it anticipates the adoption of (albeit exaggerated) adult characteristics.

Yet, once a level of virtuosity is achieved which begins to exhaust the game’s possibilities, the seeds are sown for the videogame’s demise for the individual player. As so clearly demonstrated in Ben’s case11 a mastery relation is not a steady state, but the beginning of a period of decline in player interest, because ultimately the very ingredients which make videogames attractive to young adolescents, also make them ephemeral.

An important clue to these differential gendered and generational relations with videogames can be found in Wilden’s distinction between analog and digital communication. Wilden (1984, pp. 156-7) first distinguished between analogic and digital ‘computers’. Analogic computing devices operate by means of analogy. For example, the length of mercury in a thermometer is an analogue of temperature, because the mercury expands when heat is applied to it. Such devices provide for a continuous measurement. On the other hand, ‘digital computers’ employ discrete elements and discontinuous scales, the abacus providing a primitive example. In clarifying the distinction between analogic and digital communication Wilden suggested that whereas digital communication can only be clear about boundaries, analog communication maps continuums and is unable to deny or negate. Analog communication asserts a continuum and range. Digital communication asserts distinction and demarcation.

The joystick connection to the computer offers a primarily digital interface. Button-pushing selects options which are discrete (either up or sideways, or an additive combination). The only analogic operation in the controls is effected by joystick movements where greater movement of the controls produces faster screen movement of the protagonist. In terms of analogic operations the game controls are an instrument of limited scope similar to the

11 Discussed in the previous chapter.
controls of motorised vehicles such as planes, boats or cars. The ‘instrument’ can only be played in a severely constrained range of ways, compared with a traditional musical instrument (such as a saxophone, piano, trumpet or guitar) which can be ‘played’ in a way that exploits and creates an analogic ‘interface’. Such musical instruments can be thought of as analogic extensions of particular muscles brought into play in the musical engagement. Musical instruments offer a greater scope for the development of a subtlety in muscular control than that offered by the joystick of a videogame, because of an extended range of analogy between player-initiated action and its linking to a difference in the quality of sound produced. Thus acoustic musical instruments (and some very sophisticated electronic instruments) respond to a manner of playing in terms of the pronunciation of musical phrases, the articulation of the note, the phrasing of a sequence of notes – in short a whole range of analogic relations.

In comparison with an artist’s materials (paints, paper, clay) the videogame offers a ‘canvas’ already drawn, character already created, and colours already fixed. The player is not able to enter an analogic relation with this ‘canvas’ by creating forms with brush strokes or by producing varying intensities of colour, nor is the player able to produce varying qualities of sound through an analogic relation, for there is none. Like its predecessor, Pinball, the (pre-determined) sound is emitted when ‘contact’ is made and is added to an already existent soundtrack not produced by the player. The joystick as an instrument of creation offers less than a tin whistle, a brush with a palette of colours, or therapeutic sandplay, in terms of analogic communication.

Players’ involvement in the medium entails a series of gains and losses. In bringing to mind again the notion of social potency, computer/ videogames offer the certainty of known outcomes against the ambiguity of full creative expression; the digital interface ensures the replicability of action against the production of a unique work or genuinely artistic creation; the medium allows for only absence or presence of action against continuous and finely graduated nuance; the feedback offered is in form of the digital ‘yes/no’ against the ambiguities of conversation. The losses chronicled here are offset by a social context where the fullness and richness of face-to-face communication comes (literally) into play in all but solo playing.

The indications from my research are that girls become bored with computer/ videogames earlier than boys and move on more rapidly to other interests. It is clear too, that boys move on, suggesting the addiction thesis is at best misguided, at worst simply wrong.

A task for further research in exploring gender and generational asymmetries provoked by videogames is to investigate them with reference to the notions of analog and digital communication. Of course such investigation must recognise that videogame playing often enters the realm of the social where the richness of interpersonal communication is ever present, as vignette 4 so poignantly demonstrates. Perhaps the limited scope for analog communication in the interfaces of the current crop of videogames guarantees their lack of appeal to large numbers of adolescents who want something more elastic and responsive. Paradoxically, this very same feature of videogames may explain their attraction to players who find them free of the kind of ambiguity they encounter in face-to-face encounters.
7. Audio visions: Modes of engagement

We begin to hear before we are born, four and a half months after conception. From then on, we develop in a continuous and luxurious bath of sounds: the song of our mother’s voice, the swash of her breathing, the trumpeting of her intestines, the timpani of her heart. Throughout the second four-and-a-half months, Sound rules as solitary Queen of our senses: the close and liquid world of uterine darkness makes Sight and Smell impossible, Taste monochromatic, and Touch a dim and generalised hint of what is to come.

Birth brings with it the sudden and simultaneous ignition of the other four senses, and an intense competition for the throne that Sound had claimed as hers. The most notable pretender is the darting and insistent Sight, who dubs himself King as if the throne had been standing vacant, waiting for him.

Ever discreet, Sound pulls a veil of oblivion across her reign and withdraws into the shadows, keeping a watchful eye on the braggart Sight. If she gives up her throne, it is doubtful that she gives up her crown (Murch, cited in Chion 1994, p.vii-viii)

James can be seen gently rocking with the rhythm of the joystick manipulations and the soundtrack of the games on numerous occasions in the videotapes. He, like the kinetic text, is also (literally) in motion. There is a sympathetic, resonant oscillation between James and kinetic text which is manifest for all to see, evident in the motions of his body. From his tongue to his toes there is responsive movement in apparent fusion between videogame and player.

The quotation above provides several productive metaphors of the sound relation in “trumpeting of her intestines, the timpani of her heart”. A fundamental, visceral human relation to sound itself is raised in this writing, an idea found elaborated in the following discussion of Mendelssohn’s famous quote by Leppert (1995). First the quote by Mendelssohn:

People usually complain that music is so ambiguous; that they are doubtful as to what they should think when they hear it, whereas everyone understands words. For me, it is just the reverse. And that is so not only for whole speeches, but for single words also: they too seem to me so ambiguous, so indefinite, so open to misunderstanding in comparison with real music which fills one’s soul with a thousand things better than words. To me, the music I love does not express thoughts too indefinite to be put into words, but too definite. If you ask me what I thought, I must say: the song itself as it stands. (Mendelssohn in “Lieder ohne Worte”)

Leppert’s development of Mendelssohn’s idea follows:
Language is to mind as music is to mind-body. Language is ambiguous precisely because it is radically abstract, and because it operates, as it were, divorced from the body. Music, which for most philosopher-aestheticians is peculiarly, totally abstract, is for Mendelssohn concrete ("definite") and hence unspeakable because its impact is sensual/emotional, embodied and physical - but not separate from cognition (Leppert, 1993, p. 214).  

It is here that some extension of Murch's discussion is required. Though it is a truism to say that Sound and Sight are fundamentally different, the quality of that difference is important. Fundamentally, the sensation of sound is by way of vibration and oscillation of air particles. I will never forget the experience of sitting on the stage of the Sydney Town Hall, and feeling the weight of air being pushed by the huge bass pipes of the pipe organ. Sound has an immediate and inescapable physical contingency. Sound is kinaesthetic. It is felt. Sight is fleeting, capable of rapid disconnection or disintegration in our media saturated world, less visceral, and certainly able to be controlled by direction of gaze, depth of focus, and the opening and closing of the eyelids.

There is something more going on in these encounters with videogames than the players' accounts reveal. Not only did these boys take up the cockpit seat the game offered, they also found themselves a captive to the soundtrack the game provided. At no time in the many hours of playing I witnessed did players turn off the soundtrack of the game. It was always present.

Sonic the Hedgehog has a sophisticated, but structurally simple soundtrack, consisting of several readily recognisable phrases produced by MIDI processes. These phrases are repeated throughout the playing of the game and correspond to various levels in the game. A four-bar patch of sound of the nature of a jingle is the basic building block. Added to it are modulated patches (often simple arpeggios); distinctive jingles as signifiers of end of levels or announcing new levels; the sounds accompanying Sonic’s on-screen actions (bells ringing, pure pitch glissandos). Several musical devices are employed: simple modulation of soundtrack to signify some struggle or difficult moment of play; an acceleration or deceleration of tempo; an abrupt change of tempo signifying the end of a level. These simple musical motifs are patched together to form a continuous soundtrack during the playing of the game. The soundtrack can be analysed into a series of jingles or tunes: ascending arpeggios are heard as a link between one level and another; a musical jingle made up of a distinctive four-bar motif linked with a modulated four bar resolution; a two-bar end-of-level musical signifier; etc. In summary, the soundtrack maintains a sound accompaniment to the game with a series of simple musical ideas.

The soundtrack of Sonic the Hedgehog assumes nothing more than musical experience obtained from watching television or listening to radio in its popular commercial forms. The aural terrain of Sonic the Hedgehog is derivative of television in the sense that it employs jingles (short simple musical pieces with uncomplicated melodies and simple

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1 Leppert's argument is unconvincing to the extent that he uses 'language' as a basis for his comparison. Language is experienced in different forms. In its written form it is radically abstracted from the body to the extent that it is read and not heard or uttered, for here the differences between the senses of hearing and vision come into play. His work leads to the proposition that the experience of reading facilitates a radical sensory abstraction from the body whereas the experience of listening (to music or speech) does not, because the music or speech is kinaesthetically contingent.

2 The acronym stands for 'Musical Information Digital Interface'.
rhythms), frequent repetition, and relatively short development of musical themes, with frequent changes of aural pace, and the employment of aural cues as signifiers of altered screen action. Like television, the soundtrack of Sonic the Hedgehog provides a continuous wall-to-wall sound. Unlike television, the soundtrack of Sonic the Hedgehog has no simulated voice and makes little use of silence or pause. Like cinema the soundtrack has a peculiar unity of narrative sequences. Unlike cinema there is a further unity produced by the sameness of the soundtrack in terms of the limited range of 'orchestral' voices, none of which are produced by acoustic instruments.

Through the incessant repetition of these jingles the player is located in a familiar aural terrain. I have already mentioned that 20 or more repetitions of playing the same game in the same playing session were not uncommon among the players I studied, a practice similar to a repeated playing of a single vinyl record (a practice of my youth).

The aural space is generally not recognised by players. In the case of Sonic the Hedgehog, it commits the player to listening to a soundtrack which is incessant, persistent and musically uncomplicated. For those who wish to develop their musical experience it is uninspiring. More varied musical experience could be obtained by watching television. The music of Sonic the Hedgehog puts the player in a sound space where the nuances of analogic musical expression are absent; all that is heard is defined digitally asrote performance. This is pure sound engineer's music straight from the studio. There is here no connection to the world of human voice or the virtuoso instrumentalist. This is music by rote algorithms: the springs and mechanisms of piano rolls and music boxes replaced by the silicon chip. It is a cyborg's music.

The music of games locates the listener in a grid of rational 'music' which the musically-inclined players found boring. Of the players I studied, James was the most interested in music, and significantly, he was not an active player of videogames at the time of the follow up session I arranged with the players and parents in 1995. James was the most active in singing along with the soundtrack producing his own renditions of jingles and thus returning them to the world of analogic sound.

Apart from Malone's (1981) work, there has been little attempt to compare the aural appeal of videogames amongst girls and boys. I think the character of the soundtrack is important in establishing a gendered space of videogame play, though I have not specifically explored girls' lack of interest in these games in terms of their soundtrack. This is a project for further research.

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3 Considered here because it is one of the most musically interesting soundtracks of videogames I have encountered - faint praise indeed!
4 In the Japanese pavilion at World Expo, Brisbane 1988, a guitar was 'played' by a computer controlled 'hand'. It produced an unerring but musically uninteresting performance.
5 Ogden Nash's aphorism 'the song of canaries never varies' provides an odd ironic juxtaposition. Bird songs in their infinite variation would seem to provide a welcome contrast to the monotonous repetition of the digitalised simple phrases I encountered.
Voice

Unlike animation, the videogames I encountered\(^6\) presented few examples of simulated voice. Some have no voice at all (Sonic the Hedgehog, Sonic 2, Super Mario Brothers\(^7\)). Others presented simulated voices which were heard infrequently over the course of hours of playing. The simulated utterances I heard were a combatant in Mortal Kombat saying “Get over here” to his opponent (as discussed in the following vignette), and a simulated voiceover in Johnny Madden 95 saying “three point play”, “touchdown”, or “firstdown”.

Vignette 1

Geoff: have you got a favourite character in this one [shakes his head] what does this person keep saying ‘get over here’

James: so that he can keep - so that he can punch you

Sally: like he’s got this little string

James: you he’s got a hook on the end of a rope and he throws it at your neck and like a spear on the end of a rope he winds you in and whacks you [soundtrack: ‘get over here get over here’] [A.107]

Videogames made few demands on players to recognise speech. This can be taken to be a shortcoming of the present crop of videogames, to be remedied by an increasingly sophisticated technological ambition, or it can be viewed as one of the attractions of videogames. In other words, it may be an instance of ‘less is more’.\(^7\) For most videogames, the relation between screen action and soundtrack is uncomplicated in comparison with cinematic and televsional animation. In the videogames I encountered there were no off-screen sounds, and few narrative voiceovers. On the rare occasions when voice was simulated it was not synchronised in the manner of cinema to character’s mouth movements. It rather had the character of an unseen narrator’s voice announcing certain moments in the game.

The relative absence of simulated voice allowed players to concentrate on one kind of listening: that which identified sound effects as indicators of game events. The distinctive sounds became part of a code, which once assimilated, acted as a guide to performance. Interestingly, the simulated voice appeared to be emptied of semantic content by the players because it was not part of any acoustic interactive encounter and didn’t require them to

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\(^6\) The games the players showed me are listed in Chapter 4.
\(^7\) There is a constant push for more ‘realism’ in videogames which the producers, investors, and distributors imagine will guarantee the next success. In my view, the notion of greater ‘realism’ is faultily conceptualised from the start and does little to account for videogame successes and failures. Ben described Sonic the Hedgehog as “unrealistic” in a moment of praise of the game’s attributes. [Ben: and you can drown < Geoff: right > -- ‘cause it’s sort of - it’s unrealistic this game that’s why people like it so much I like um how ‘tails’ does loops he he put s his legs together - watch - ...]
respond with utterance\(^8\). Simulated voice and sound effects appear to be reduced to the same status for players: signifiers of their progress through various stages of the game. This might explain part of videogames differential appeal for boys and girls. Face-to-face conversational encounters are both more enriching and more ambiguous than simulated speech encounters, and videogames do not even provide a sense of ‘encounter’, because they are not programmed to develop conversation in the manner of ELIZA and SHRDLU (Boden, 1987). Given girls’ generally more sophisticated language skills in early adolescence it is perhaps unsurprising that they find the simulated speech of videogames unexciting and unchallenging for it lacks the appeal of real conversation. ELIZA on the other hand found a ready response from Weizenbaum’s female secretary, who conversed with it for some considerable time.\(^9\)

**Interconnections: sight and sound.**

In considering the audience engagement with videogames it is important to avoid conflating listening and viewing. The concept of *audience-text* does much useful work in conceptualising the relation between players and videogames, by focusing attention on an engagement which is not reducible to either textual or psychological qualities considered discretely. However, continuing to think of videogame playing in terms of this couplet hails a strange ‘object’ as a familiar one, as we might do in waving to someone we take to be a friend, only to discover our error when they turn their face in our direction. Though ‘audience’ as a term makes reference etymologically to the audio, and through allusion to its conjunction with ‘radio’, it loses significance as ‘listening’ in the couplet *audience-text*. The effect of its juxtaposition with ‘text’ is to stress the visual and to attenuate the aural modality. Nested in *audience-text* is a *listener-sound* relation. To listen is to pay attention to particular sound sources and to ignore others.

In *Sonic the Hedgehog*, Sonic’s contingency with various screen objects is coincident with a unique digital sound effect above and beyond that provided by the wall-to-wall soundtrack. *Sonic the Hedgehog* provides the player with a specific coupling of soundtrack and visual events: the nexus of sound and image provide important information for negotiating the ‘hazards’ the game proposes as part of its construction. This is derivative of the parlour game, pinball, which provided a conjunction of pins lighting up and ringing when struck by the ball. In this manner the player progressed through the game.

I pursued a number of questions related to listening. I wanted to know how players listened and what they listened for as they played. I wanted to know of their reactions to soundtrack elements, including its musicality and its voice. However, my inquiries were often met with a lack of response. It seemed the boys could only talk partially about an evident relation, an idea to which I will return in the latter part of the chapter.

My forays by way of direct inquiry returned a range of responses illustrated in the following vignettes. In vignette 2, Austin and I discussed the music of *Flashback*.

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\(^8\) In this respect, simulated speech has the same status as the simulated voices of automatic teller machines; one’s sanity might be called into question if you were observed in ‘conversation’ with such speech simulation.

\(^9\) ELIZA sustained a therapeutic conversation in the manner of a lonely hearts columnist through the medium of typed text on computer screen. In the context of such a relation, ELIZA could pass itself off as a real conversational partner though it failed dismally when the topic turned to the weather. (See Boden, 1987).
Vignette 2

[soundtrack: music plays]

Geoff: it’s got rather interesting music in it um

Austin: yeah just sometimes it shows a bit of music for some reason <Geoff: mmm> not quite sure

Geoff: this music um does it remind you of anything - it reminds me of something

Austin: um I can’t think of anything

Geoff: well- compare it with the music in um- Sonic the Hedgehog or

Austin: it’s sort of more serious I suppose

Geoff: mmmm- what it reminds ME of is ah some of the music some of the television background music that you have in drama

[soundtrack: white noise blasts]

Austin: yeah it’s more like a movie actually -- [soundtrack octave notes:] these little bits ( ) [A.67]

Austin’s opening statement in this stanza is tantalising. The game ‘shows’ music ‘for some reason’. Music is not ordinarily thought of as being ‘shown’ in the sense that the term ‘show’ belongs to a visual register. Perhaps for Austin, the music does ‘show’ what is happening on the screen in a denotative sense, by drawing his attention to various features of the moving images. Distinctive musical sounds become signifiers of a particular part of the screen action. Music and sound effects thus denote screen incident; screen incident denotes musical action; each turns in on the other.\(^{10}\)

In explaining the game Tetris to me James had this to say:

\(^{10}\) There was a significant audio development in the history of computer game/videogame production which has been given scant attention by writers of production histories (Levy 1984; Price 1985; Haddon 1988, 1993; Press 1993). In ‘primitive’ computer games sound was used as incidental to the screen action. Pong was an early example. It was released for the home market in the US in 1975 with what I would call ‘sound effects’ (Haddon 1988, p.65). Price (1985) noted that early games had these sound effects, mimicking, for example, the sound of a racing car hitting an obstacle, or the sound of a ball hitting a puddle. The introduction of the Atari 2600 in 1977 saw an extension of sound to include ‘game play sound effects and psychological music’ (p. 116). I take this ‘psychological music’ to refer to the emergence of ‘wall-to-wall’ soundtracks in videogames well known to current generations of players.
Vignette 3

James: everytime it makes that mmmm really weird sound that means I’ve finished a level

Geoff: right

James: see it usually goes [makes sound] and that means I’ve finished a level [A.105]

Here James recognised the distinctive sound as a signifier of the end of a level. Music can ‘show’ or signify because of the intertextuality established by the seamlessness of the audio-visual text which is known intimately by these enthusiasts through an incessant playing.

I take the phrase audio-vision (Chion, 1994) as encapsulating the relevant aesthetic for enlarging the understanding of audience refugation to include their orientation and attentiveness to sound. Chion suggested categories of listening which can be productively interrogated.

Causal listening, the most common, consists of listening to a sound in order to gather information about its cause (or source). When the cause is visible, sound can provide supplementary information about it; for example, the sound produced by an enclosed container when you tap it indicates how full it is. When we cannot see the sound’s cause, sound can constitute our principal source of information about it... I call semantic listening that which refers to a code or a language to interpret a message: spoken language, of course, as well as Morse and other such codes. This mode of listening, which functions in an extremely complex way, has been the object of linguistic research and has been the most widely studied... Pierre Schaeffer gave the name reduced listening to the listening mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning. Reduced listening takes the sound - verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever - as itself the object to be observed instead of the vehicle for something else.

A session of reduced listening is quite an instructive experience. Participants quickly realise that in speaking about sounds they shuttle constantly between a sound’s actual content, its source, and its meaning (Chion 1994, pp. 25-29; my italics).

In Vignette 2, James explained a semantic listening where the elements of distinctive sound were employed through a code which allowed him to negotiate the game. He interpreted the sound element as an acoustic marker of the end of a level. On the other hand, Austin’s comment in Vignette 1 suggested an attempt at a semantic listening still very much in initial process. The hermeneutic moment of understanding (intelligere) is suggested.

On another occasion Austin and I had the following discussion:

11 Ricoeur suggested ‘aesthesis’ to restore the meaning of the Greek aisthesis: (being affected), as including both ‘reception’ of a text and the action of reading it (Ricoeur 1984, v3, p. 167).

He noted that in theories of rhetoric, the reader is considered a victim of the author’s strategies. A ‘phenomenology’ or ‘aesthesis’ of reading provides for a theorising of readers’ responses to the author’s strategies (p. 164-6).
Vignette 4

Geoff: -- um -- now I'm just thinking if there's anything else I need to ask you about them oh yeah when you were playing umm Sonic before I was at some stage I talked about the sound on the Sonic and you were saying - that the main thing with the sound was that it wasn't too annoying <Austin: yeah> umm and you didn't mind - you know the sound on Sonic but are there games that the sound really puts you off = you know <Austin: =yeah>

Austin: some games the sound's really good but- <Geoff: mmmhm> it's not like you know some it makes you want to listen to the sound instead of play the game so that's a bit annoying <Geoff: right> and sometimes the sound's really bad <Geoff: mmmhm> and just it's really annoying and it's hard to play the game <Geoff: mmmhm> [A.24]

Austin acknowledged that a particular kind of soundtrack enhanced his enjoyment of videogames. His comment suggests that two types of soundtrack distract from his playing: extremely ‘good’ or extremely ‘bad’. Austin imagined an ideal soundtrack as one which didn’t demand focused attention; one which was woven seamlessly into the fabric of the videogame playing. It could be that extremely ‘good’ sound for Austin, demands a reduced listening which he was not prepared to give it because this would draw his attention away from the ‘main game’. Perhaps Austin cannot say much about ideal videogame sound because for him it must be unobtrusive, not extreme. Austin accorded sound a secondary status to image. There is support for this idea in his comments considered collectively: sound ‘shows’ things, that is sound leads to images; ‘best’ sound is unobtrusive in the sense that it is not noticed and is regarded by him as subsidiary to images.

James experienced sound quite differently in his encounters with videogames. Thumbing through the transcripts I found numerous examples of him singing along with the music of various games in contrast to Austin who rarely sang. I know that James had begun to pursue musical interests by learning guitar. I also know that Austin has continued to pursue his interests in sculpture, drawing and the construction of computer generated images. There is then a suggestion in their contrasting interests that they may orient themselves quite differently to the kinetic text. Whereas Austin was primarily interested in the images and accorded the soundtrack a secondary and supportive status, James was much more attuned to the videogame’s sounds and could talk explicitly about their meanings.

Austin’s refiguration of videogames appears to emphasize their iconicity: his mother informed me some time after these recorded encounters that he was designing/drawing his own characters which he could import into his videogames. On the other hand, James’s refiguration lays stress on the aural through his frequent singing or humming of soundtrack melodies. These differences were prefigured in Smith and Stander’s (1981) research which identified 3 different learning strategies in relation to computer games, two of which they identified as ‘aural learners’ and ‘visual learners’. 12

These contrasting refigurations of the audio-visual are also found in the history of the production of cartoon animation. Curtis (1992) has provided an account of the dilemma of

12 Their work is reviewed on pages 41-2.
combining sound and image both at Disney and Warner Brothers studios. He explained the early Disney solution as follows:

But, finally, Walt worked out a thing with Carl [his first musical director]. He said, “Look, let’s work it out this way. We’ll make two series. On the Mickey Mouse pictures you make your music fit my action the very best you can. But we’ll make another series, and they’ll be musical shorts. And in them music will take precedence and we’ll adjust our action the best we can to what you think is the right music” (Barrier, in Curtis, 1992, p. 194).

A similar strategy was adopted by Warner Brothers in their production of *Loonie Tunes* where action took precedence, and *Merrie Melodies* where music guided action (p. 194-5). Chuck Jones, an animator at Warner Brothers, explained the process of producing *Loonie Tunes* in the following manner:

The dialogue lines were transposed on music sheets and on exposure sheets... I did the final timing for the entire picture frame by frame... there are 24 frames a second in a motion picture... Fortunately for us in animation, the human eye responds to something like a tenth of a second... so you shoot each frame twice... except when the action is very fast... So the dialogue would be laid out on the exposure sheets corresponding to each frame (Jones, in Cholodenko, 1991, pp. 53-54).

Jones went on to describe adding the sound to the film through a process of manipulating sound effects, music, and actor’s speaking parts while running the feature in the studio. Some animators conceived and constructed the configuration process as music ‘added to’ motion pictures; others, as motion pictures illustrating music. Both animators and players illustrate these refigurations of the kinetic text.

I have only one recorded session of players exploring a totally new game. The three school friends, James, Austin and Corbett, were attempting to learn a new game called *Puggsy*. They spent a considerable amount of time exploring and speculating on how the game worked until finally they came to a point of discovery captured in the following exchanges.

**Vignette 5**

_Austin: that’s =
Corbett: = what’s that
James: oh it’s just like + it
Corbett: + watch the demo man
James: ohh hi ()
Corbett: just watch the demo for a sec
James: oh look at the little
Austin: oh it’s telling you how to control [with pleasure]_
James: ohh yeah ohhh ( )

Corbett: it tells you what to do - to do that and we spent all that time and could have watched the demonstration [A.59-60]

As they hadn’t watched the game demonstration they appear to be involved in a ‘causal watching and listening’ in an attempt to discover the game’s secrets. I say “appear to be” because I remain unconvinced of the existence of ‘causal listening’, as outlined by Chion. I would argue, that the players in Vignette 5 were employing code or schemata developed in their encounters with other videogames. This is evident in James’ capacity to identify genre [James (in exploring Puggy ) : = this is a mind kind of game isn’t it Austin’s puzzle game], and therefore to draw on a tradition of playing which projects working hypotheses of certain kinds of links between videogame images and sounds. The very existence of ‘causal listening’ as conceptualised by Chion must be called into question because he has failed to satisfactorily demonstrate that there is such a listening which is devoid of code, schemata, or languaged cultural meetings. His account of such listening is inflected with a particular psychological theory of perception which imagines a tabularasa on which sensory input is etched.

This investigative process conducted by the players seeks links between image and sound, and occurs in an exploratory moment of engagement with the game which involves a substantial interlinking of various textual elements driven by a knowledge of, and a further articulation of, a code. At one and the same time it is part of the process of schemata development and its implementation.

A further vignette from the playing of James, Austin and Corbett, demonstrates the complexities of these relations between sight and sound.

Vignette 6

[James with controls]

James: whoa [Austin covers James's eyes with his hands]

Corbett: does he know what he does? James James ( ) into your head now it's this ( ) <James: man > look man

James: I couldn't see it Austin's hands over my eyes [parody] you're so stupid James [Austin places his hands over James's eyes again]

Austin: [laughs] get? jump- [giving instructions to James] jump again- yeah and again forwards now hold just one more time = jump

Corbett:=jump down

Austin: no press down down down down Ok now down and sort of forward sort of forward yeah - OK now just keep on going no- no put down this+

Corbett:+push up
Austin: push up OK now just go = <Corbett: =forward> forward forward yeah you finished the level

[soundtrack tempo change]

[Corbett laughs then James?]

James: did I really or do I die

Corbett: you finished the level

James: OK

Corbett?: ohh [yawns] i'm tired

James: [James sings along with soundtrack] OK press yeah now shoot shoot shoot <Corbett: ?> OK now move forward press 'A' press 'A' again yeah and one more time <Corbett: yeah> [victoriously?] ahhh no <Corbett: ( ) > you were so close OK press ( ) [laughing] <Corbett( ) > 'B' 'B' move forward just a tiny bit press 'B' no 'B' - <Corbett: [laughs]- jump> yeah jump <Corbett; put it up> down down down and sort of forward forward [laughs] he's level press <Corbett: up> up - now just forward- yeah [A.60-61]

Austin playfully covered James's eyes as he was controlling an on-screen character; he then removed them and covered them a second time, calling out instructions to James for manipulating the joystick. My initial response to this 'play' was to see it as an illustration of the players' creativity. I also thought of it as illustrating the cooperative relations between these friends in their playing. On reflection however, I began to realise that the boys had set up a spontaneous experiment, which drew attention to the experience of playing games with respect to audience activities of viewing and listening. James's sensory experience of the videogames for the duration of this spontaneous improvisation simulates that of a blind person, invoking the party game 'blind man's buff' and 'pin the tail on the donkey' as specific cultural resources. He heard the 'sound-on-screen' simultaneously with Austin's spoken instructions which in turn were based on Austin's 'interpreting' of the screen movements in reporting the consequences of James's joystick movements.

This experiment would not have been sustained if the players had been working with a spare or sparse soundtrack. The plenitude of the music and sound effects were being used by James, in conjunction with Austin's instructions, as guides to his joystick actions. The richness of signifying potential in the sound, anchored as it is in screen action, made such an experiment possible. This signifying potential is underpinned by a persistent personal history of engagement which implies both viewing and listening, and the development of interpretive codes or schemata which act as guides to player performance.

James listened for sounds which, through his knowledge of a particular code, informed him of on-screen progress. For example, he knew when he had been successful in depleting the resources of his opponent, or when his opponent had depleted his character's resources by listening to the sounds which signify such events. These codes are internalised schemata which facilitate his negotiations with the phenomena of his senses, by providing organising principles. There is no particular reason why these organising principles need to be other than hybrids, which contribute to the harmonising or reconciling of sound and sight. In other words players' memories could be described as made up of image/sound relations. To suggest that memories are like computer files is to privilege the
visual over the sound, whereas to suggest memory as being made up of conversations inverts the relation.

James’s memory of the contingent relation between image and sound suggests an anticipatory listening and viewing, not only relevant to the task of playing ‘videogame blind man’s buff’, but to the task of playing videogames in ordinary circumstances. This anticipation is made possible by the assimilation of codes or schemata. The kinetic text is not ever-present like a still photograph or painting—it is forever in motion. The player must remember, ‘where he is’ in the game, what has gone before, what is going on now, and what is about to happen. These are the operations of schemata. This knowledge distinguishes the veteran player from the novice. The expert player has well-developed schemata relevant to the task at hand. James’s ‘blind’ listening then illustrates ordinary listening, whereby the listener can only make sense of the present moment in terms of what has gone before, and what is expected or anticipated.\(^{13}\) The kinetic text must be traversed, and through this traversal both memory and anticipation are called into play.

**New modes of engagement**

The organising principles relevant to the audience engagement with videogames can be found in narrative conventions, for such conventions admit the possibility of organisation which acknowledges both present and remembered sights and sounds. Thus the further deficiency in Chion’s account of listening is that he failed to recognise that schemata for kinetic texts must implicate a whole range of narrative conventions. The videogame soundtrack is implicated in the development of a disrupted and disjointed linear temporality and the construction of a peculiar narrative, as will be seen.

Essential to the argument that follows are two paradigms of the refiguration process which are informed by, and inform players’ engagements with videogames. The first paradigm of refiguration draws heavily on communication theory.

As I have argued, from the standpoint of communication theory, games are kinetic texts and players are involved in readerly relations with them.\(^{14}\) In an act of textual recognition, the cataloguers of the Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature called the early eighties computer games ‘computer novels’. The treatment of videogames as some kind of novel or narrative, has interesting implications. Links can be forged between these ‘new narratives’ and old narrative forms, between new forms of reading and old ones, between new and old literacy. First I shall pursue this nexus, and then present a contrasting paradigm of refiguration.

For Genette (1980, p.27), narrative is an oral or inscribed account “that undertakes to tell of an event or series of events ... refer[ring] to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition.” He identified a “doubly temporal sequence” in narrative: “the time of the thing told and time of the narrative” or what Ricoeur (1984, v.2, p. 77) described as the “time of

\(^{13}\) Michael Ondaatje’s lines from *Coming through Slaughter* convey the joy of such listening. “John Rubicam! Playing his waltzes. And I hate to admit it but I enjoyed listening to the clear forms. Every note part of a large curve, so carefully patterned that for the first time I appreciated the possibilities of a mind moving ahead of the instruments in time and waiting with pleasure for them to catch up. I had never been aware of that mechanistic pleasure, that trust.”

\(^{14}\) See pages 51-55.
narrating” and “narrated time”. Of course both Genette and Ricoeur’s explicit object is the text in its familiar book form. Are these relations sustained around kinetic texts, in particular videogames?

I have heard of a girl, who in her playing of Sonic the Hedgehog, never bothered to complete ‘the telling’ and so never reaching the end-of-the-text deemed so important to this modernist quest for literacy. The time of telling is therefore ‘controlled’ by the player, in the sense that the player chooses which level, chapter, or passage to enter and moves through it in a manner contingent upon joystick performance. Furthermore the time of telling is, of necessity, repetitive, with many failed attempts at reaching the end of a level, chapter, or passage. Kermode (1987) suggested that the end of the novel was the point from which its parts could be meaningfully related to one another, emphasizing the hermeneutic moment of application (applicare). In his view, the end of the text provided a position of critical distance from which to view the text as a whole. The girl mentioned above, however, never came to the end of this particular ‘computer novel’, suggesting this hermeneutic moment was suspended by her mode of engagement.

Furthermore, videogames are different from novels in the sense that they fail to sustain the development of character. For Genette (1980) narrated time was supported by the existence of characters connected by the plot (muthos). In the games I watched the ‘plots’ lacked ontological temporality because there was no character development to support it, and the capacity to randomise the time of telling disrupted a temporal sequence for the game/narrative considered as a whole. The narrated time of the novel refers to a set of events constructed by the reader during the time of narration. The novel uses characters and their development to support this sense of narrated time. The sense of narrated time in videogames is further disturbed by the unchanging appearance of the characters who reappear after the screen ‘deaths’ the same as before. The constructors of videogames have yet to develop an equivalent simulation of development of character available to cinematographers: for example the productive collaboration of the makeup department and the actors who supply the visible evidence of aging in such things as facial lines, grey hair, and hunched gait.

The second paradigm of audience refiguration draws on a musical metaphor, and specifically an understanding of the practice of improvisation in jazz. In this paradigm the salient features are improvisation and extemporisation. At the beginning of a live jazz piece certain aspects of the performance remain unknown and in most jazz playing, indeterminate. For example, the length of the performance, the number of repetitions of musical passages, the exact ending point, the character of the tempo changes and the tempo itself, are all determined in performance. The process in jazz improvisation (configuration) is one where motifs, or musical fragments, are worked over in performance at times producing pleasing conjunctions or harmonies for the performers which are seized upon and developed. If jazz players are working with a chart of a standard tune, they already have a sketch to elaborate, or a framework to hang their notes on. The sketch however is typically metaphorical, with the choice of the word sketch suggesting an incomplete literary project, the beginnings of a completed work, or the fluidity of a work to which one is not yet totally committed. Thus the perlocutionary force of sketch is to suggest a weak connection to literacy.

This paradigm not only illuminates configuration, but also refiguration, in the case of computer/ videogames. I shall give examples of each of these in turn. In the early eighties a legal battle was fought between two games-producing companies, On-line Services and

15 The familiar novel in printed and bound form.
16 Sonic the Hedgehog
Atari over an infringement of copyright issue. Atari's lawyers assumed that 'writing' programs was a literate activity as can be seen in the following exchange. William's response illustrates this second paradigm.

Atari Lawyer: (to Ken): Isn't it a fact that typically the programmer who's designing these games at least produces a flow chart and then writes out the source code manually prior to punching it in?

Ken Williams: No.

Atari Lawyer: Do they simply sit down at the keyboard and punch in the program?

Ken Williams: My programmers are typically too lazy to make up any sort of flow chart. In most cases they don't even know where they're going when they start a program. They try to get a routine working to put in a background, and from that move toward some game (Levy, 1984, p. 329).

The following vignette echoes this paradigm of extemporisation in players' refrigurative activity.

Vignette 7

Geoff: = why does it say 'audible' on the screen

Ben: 'audible' that means everyone stays in their positions- no one moves until the - until the play starts -- you press 'A' to for audible you- it's complicated you've got to read the rules and everything to learn to

David: we didn't do that did we

Ben: no we just figure it out half the time

Geoff: you didn't bother reading the rules

Ben: we just knew about grid iron

Geoff: so how come how come you told me you gotta read all the rules when you didn't do it

Ben: um um < Geoff: [laughs] > well see we used I used to get this out and I didn't know how to play it at all and then um - - like I don't know I just -

Geoff: David helped you

Ben: yeah we all just - we sort of +figured it out a little bit *

David: +no I didn't know anything about it *

Ben: none of us knew anything but then < David: we all > we learnt how to play gridiron like we like gridiron so we got this out again - and now we know all the rules and everything < Geoff: oh right > so it's just like if you know how to play the rules then you know how to play this- you've just got to figure out these little- things here
Videogame player’s figurative work is revealed as an improvisation. There is a sense in which their play is an unrehearsed performance in similar manner to the programmer’s method of patching together the early computer games described by Williams. This extemporising was also evident in the play recorded in Vignette 5 above, where the players realised that they could have found out how to play the particular game by watching the ‘demo’ and saved themselves much ‘trial and error’ learning as a result.

Unlike jazz improvisation however, the elements of this performance are already known and largely preformed. The performance of the game is contingent upon the players’ manipulation of an icon (figure) around a visual field (ground), rather than the production of musical notes in harmonic (vertical) and sequential (horizontal) relations. The game invites a performance which prefigures this visual negotiation, and whose centrality is merely accentuated by the players’ spontaneous experiment described in Vignette 6. The reason James was able to continue playing was that his substantial history of playing allowed him to draw on well-developed schemata of the absent visual information.

This is then a cutting and pasting improvisational refiguration - various sections of the kinetic text are melded through play to form a sequence. Although any one playing sequence is not known in advance, its unity is stabilised through a sustained playing where the unknown and unexplored becomes familiar terrain, and through a musical soundtrack which takes little time to become familiar, known, and to musically inclined players, tedious.

This second paradigm of refiguration challenges the privileging of sight over sound, the static over the kinetic, and the textual over the iconographic in relations with symbolic forms. This paradigm allows us to recognise important features of a new mode of engagement with what I once described as things-with-textual-features-inscribed-in-their-algorithms.

1. The interpellation of player/reader by the kinetic text. Sound is significant in addressing players, though its significance is under theorised and largely unexplored. It is clearly important in establishing textual proficiencies and holding the player’s attention, as I have argued.

2. The existence of narrative loops with their multiple points of entry and exit. In videogames the starting point is arbitrary. Videogames can be entered and exited at different levels. Completing a videogame in the sense of working through it to its final level, is itself a project inflected with notions derived from book literacy. There was little evidence from my research that videogames had endings, and ample evidence of their ‘middles’. I saw the credit screens roll by in Sonic the Hedgehog once in the course of my many hours of observation. The videogame expands the opportunities already present in other forms of small screen engagement for entering and exiting such narrative loops.

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17 This vignette also illustrates at least two other points: First, the advantages of having two respondents instead of one. Note how David’s first comment in this exchange works to undermine Ben’s formal response to my question, by pointing out their method of ‘discovering’ the rules. Second, the unexpected yield of a naive question. I didn’t ask them to explain the mode of their engagement with the game. I rather asked them to explain the meaning of a fragment of text appearing on screen at that moment.

18 This event coincided with a report from Austin’s mother that he had finally managed to work through all the levels of Sonic the Hedgehog. The value of this achievement was presumably established in the talk between mother and son.
3. **Continuity with circumlocution.** Invoking beginnings and endings to describe videogame playing seems peculiarly inappropriate, and perhaps locates the observer in a bookish literacy tradition. The character of soundtrack in videogames underscores the notion that videogames have no endings, only middles. Each musical motif in *Sonic the Hedgehog* can be placed in many different sequences without undermining continuity, because each motif is musically simple, itself a simple building block of unremarkable quality, similar to a domino tile. In cinema, the sequence of a film’s unfolding matters because it supports and sustains the narrative, in short, it makes it work or not. The sequence of a videogame’s unfolding does not matter, because, like the domino game, many arrangements can be countenanced which produce continuity, because the building blocks are constructed to allow any contingencies to produce ‘flow’ to borrow a term used by Williams to describe the seamlessness of television’s programming.

4. **A de-stabilising of narrative time.** Textual indeterminancy is extended by the possibility and likelihood of partial readings/playings. The various modes of telling cannot sustain a unanimous and uncontested narrative. There is no stable story behind the telling, because the mode of playing is *cut-and-paste*. You begin where you want and there’s no telling where and when you might exit. *Sonic the Hedgehog* is variously in ‘narrated time’ a cute and lovable creature asserting ecological values, a cyborg in a mechanical world, or an iconic anthropomorph speeding through television-remote-control-land, or one of many other figures.

The second paradigm of refiguration sits uneasily beside the first.
8. Conclusion


In the introduction I expressed interest in broad relations around computer/ videogame playing rather than in a narrow investigation of ‘media use’ or ‘media effects’. Psychologically-inflected social science has had great difficulty in adequately conceptualising relations with audio-visual media (or what I have termed kinetic texts) typically resorting to the notion of ‘media effects’ conceived as some kind of reflex action to audio-visual media. Put crudely - and in this discourse the level of sophistication of theorising is low - audio-visual media preoccupations (typically the depiction of violence) express themselves in the actions of some viewers. In popular accounts there is little further theorising of this process although many claims have been made as to the efficacy of audio-visual media for producing these largely unspecified effects on viewers, particularly young ones.

I have given an account of popular writing on computer/ videogames to demonstrate the extent to which academic research has been driven by unsubstantiated but widely circulated accounts of computer/ videogame playing which characterises it perjoratively as addictive and mindless, suggests that it is antagonistic to academic excellence, and that it produces violent behaviour in players. I have pointed out how a large part of the research effort has addressed but failed to support such theses, without adequately acknowledging its own auspices, grounded as it has been in popular allegation of negative media effects.

1993 saw the development of a classification system for videogames in Australia which was applied in April 1994.1 After hearing many submissions to the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply Utilising Electronic Technologies (CSRSSUET), its chair, Senator Margaret Reynolds, gave the following summary:

The Committee emphasizes the sensory impact of computer and video games. Because they are interactive, intensive and repetitive these games have profound psychological effects which may be dramatic on immature minds (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1994, p. 23).

Here it is assumed that games have ‘psychological effects’ but not cultural consequences. Print media accounts of videogame playing insisted on these harmful effects despite the absence of substantiating research. In the 12 months prior to enactment of legislation there was little doubt as to the perceptions of games engendered2 by popular print-media articles

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1 The new scheme was described publicly in February 1994. (Crackdown on (X-rated) video games. (1994, February 18). Sydney Morning Herald, pp. 1,3.)
2 Frontline is a popular Australian television satire depicting the behind-the-scenes machinations of a fictional current affairs production team. I am reminded of an exchange from one episode focused on the negative stereotyping of unemployed youth: Em [the team’s researcher]: “Prowsey, shouldn’t we correct the
Conclusion

entitled: Technobrats, Orgies on line, Hardcore software, Computer porn: sex and violence at your fingertips, and Nintendo Rules, OK! They all exploited the ‘moral panic’ theme in various ways and were prominently displayed in the respective newspapers or magazines. The National Viewers and Listeners of Australia (1993) used a mixture of newspaper material and parliamentary papers in their circular which was delivered to all psychiatrists and psychologists in Australia. The NVLA urged its readers to ‘remove personal violence from home entertainment’. Central to its argument was the assumption of ‘the damaging effects on children of violent and sexually explicit material in the media’. There was little attempt to substantiate this claim.  

The cultural workings of videogame playing have remained largely unexamined despite an extensive survey of ‘electronic entertainment’ in Australia (Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996). These cultural workings deserve to be more closely scrutinised but they can only be recognised through the prior step of acknowledging that it is communication processes, or more specifically mediated communication processes which should be the focus of research. In other words, research needs to acknowledge the textual qualities of the relation being investigated, and furthermore, that these are audience relations.

I have drawn attention to audiences’ refigurative work. Refiguration in its expanded form is capable of providing a window on a whole range of performance (both textual interpretation and extra-textual performance), which is implicated through videogame playing, in the construction of subjectivity, the differentiation of gender, and the demarcation of generational difference. I have suggested that there is a substantial audience refiguration of kinetic texts which encompasses the familiar notion of textual interpretation and reading, processes of schematization and cultural sedimentation, fictional and non-fictional reference, and most importantly a substantial relation of mimicry with elements of the kinetic text, which contributes to an understanding of current constructions of liminality in youth.

My focus has not been on explaining computer/ videogame play in terms of player motivations though I have interrogated the accounts players gave of their practices, nor has my focus been on the kinetic texts themselves although semiotic analyses of some of the kinetic texts I encountered have contributed to my research project. I have rather considered that a unity of talk and action constellates videogame playing and that by paying attention to this unity some of the meanings of videogame playing are revealed and other meanings can be inferred.

My project has thus been emic rather than etic, with its broad scope enabling various hybrid forms of research object to emerge.

perception.” Prowse [the team’s executive producer]: “No, no. Feed the perception.” Do popular newspaper editors agree with the (fictional) Prowse?

3 The six pages of text included: a brief description of the videogame Night Trap, subsequently removed from the Australian market by Sega Ocisoft but readily available in the UK; screen maps from a game called Sea Battle; extracts from parliamentary papers on the censorship issue produced by CSRSSUET; a clipping of a newspaper article which appeared in the West Australian on 8 August entitled ‘Film Board Attacked over Salo’; an explicit description of acts depicted in the film Salo; the Attorney General’s press release of 24 June entitled ‘Govermnens act on videogame concerns’; and an extract from an Australian Broadcasting Tribunal publication showing the proportion of adolescents and children making up the television audience at different times of night and day. I am aware of two other newsletter circulated by the NVLA (1992, 1994) similar in tone, if not in content, to this one.

4 Sedimentation works at a cultural level to establish working theories of genre which inform schemata.
One form is a particular production of gendered space (LeFebvre, 1984) which sets up masculine domains of play acting to exclude girls and women. These domains of playing are both palpable and unstable. The substantiality of this gendered space is sustained in part by the assumptions and practices of those moving through them who take them to be inviolable, and in part by textual forms of address which assume male gaze and male participation. I described this production of space as unstable, because a less gender-differentiated playspace can be imagined and could indeed be produced. A number of ideas about how such a playspace could be made and sustained have emerged from my research. In brief, interfaces which place more importance on musicality, employment, and character development would encourage greater female presence in the ranks of players. My research suggested that a more highly structured language interface would increase the appeal of games for girls who appear to rapidly lose interest in games that lack such language sophistication. I have further suggested that Wilden’s (1984) distinction between analogic and digital communication could prove useful in exploring these gender-differentiated modes of engagement.

Furthermore, I witnessed the production of a generation-differentiated space which tended to exclude parents in favour of a generation that advertisers and marketers have dubbed the Nintendo generation. My initial discomfort in entering such spaces can be inferred from the tone of my field notes quoted in the introduction to this work.⁵ There I referred to my ‘intrusion’ into the playspace of videogames. Cultural products in the late twentieth century are crucial in generational demarcation for their audiences, a point well understood by Doctorow:

> When people say “our song” they mean they and the song exist together as some sort of generational truth. They are met to make a common destiny. The song names them, it rescues from the accident of ahistorical genetic existence. They are located in cultural time (Doctorow, in Sontag, 1992, p. 57).

My initial discomfort in entering these playspaces can be understood in terms of this potential for cultural products to mark out the generations as different. The marketing labels recognise these groupings (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Nintendo Generation), if not the operations of the cultural enterprise which makes them possible and stabilises them. Thus the portrayal of videogame playing as a family hearth activity (e.g. Cupitt and Stockbridge, 1996) is simply wrong-headed. The research literature and my own work have indicated that families for the most part do not play videogames together.⁶ The domestic playing I observed further disturbed notions of hearth and family. A new, young, and mainly male audience has formed around videogames, contributing further to a fragmentation of audiences made possible by the multiple domestic screens of the household, and the work they do in defining and demarcating generations.

Another important social form emerging in my research is the construction of subjectivity. My work has been motivated by an interest in the way that frequently used kinetic texts are implicated in the project of becoming, such as becoming an adult, or becoming a gendered being. Since the turn to language in the social sciences and humanities, questions around identity, subjectivity, selves, and speaking subjects have been inflected with a consideration of the importance of language practices to such topics.

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⁵ Field notes recorded on 5.6.93.
⁶ Interestingly, Cupitt and Stockbridge’s work revealed that they don’t often watch television together either.
Voloshinov placed the textual in its deservedly central place for social research by suggesting something of the productivity of the sign, and therefore, through a process of transposition, the text. There are hints in his writing of what a 'philological psychology' - a phrase I suggested earlier - might investigate. Voloshinov conceived of an identity largely constructed through a semiotic practice and inextricably connected to the production of meaning and ideology through language.

Idealism and psychologism alike overlook the fact that understanding itself can come about only within some kind of semiotic material (eg. inner speech), that sign bears upon sign, that consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs... this ideological chain stretches from individual consciousness and another. And the individual consciousness itself if filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction (Voloshinov, 1973, p.11).

'Sign bearing upon sign' (and text on text) suggests to me a way of thinking about relations between players and videogames. 'A consciousness replete with signs' is one way of talking about a textual making of the person. Voloshinov's work can be extended to a consideration of relations between audiences and texts. Thus, sign bears upon sign not only in interpersonal encounters as Voloshinov argued, but also in human encounters with texts of all kinds including kinetic texts.

The inspirational notion I found in Voloshinov's thought was his suggestion of a malleable consciousness constructed through textual encounter. Instead of the insinuation that in some sense we know beforehand the result of encounter between text and audience; instead of imagining the text to be deposited somewhere; instead of imagining that substantial domains of knowledge of consciousness inhere to the mechanisms which the psychological sub-disciplines of perception and cognition posit, Voloshinov pointed to the instability of such engagements, where identity is not assured. Textual encounter is ongoing. In this view, the achievement of a (un)stable identity is predicated on textual encounter. Identity is profoundly textual and vulnerable to its engagements with a proliferation of texts. On the other hand, resonances established by previous textual encounters ensure that new textual engagements do not echo through empty corridors.

Bergson's (1913) articulation of two different forms of memory is particularly salient to the construction of identity, and furthermore provides a link between the textual/discursive theories of identity and media effects theorising. He related past, present, and future to action, rather than existence and stressed the co-existence of past and present. For Bergson the past survived in two distinct forms of memory: 'motor mechanism' and 'independent recollection' (p.87). Lloyd gave this account of Bergson:

The first form of memory consists in a set of intelligently constructed mechanisms which ensure the appropriate reply to immediate practical demands - a 'habit' memory which allows us to adapt ourselves to the present situation. This is a form of memory which resides in sensori-motor response. It 'acts' our past experience but does not call up its image. The second kind of memory is, in contrast, a 'recollection' memory - summoning up specific images. This 'pure' memory, however, cannot function without the more basic habit memory (1993, p. 103).
Conclusion

For effective action in the present both forms of memory are called into play. “Habit memory is associated with the life of action, recollection memory with the life of dreams. And good sense is poised between the two” (p.103).

‘Media effects’ theses typically elide ‘independent memory’ in their accounts, and in so doing create an evacuated territory which is the very territory explored by those who want to take up the challenge of the textual, the discursive, the iconographic, and its implication in identity. Media effects theses then work with the remnants of memory - habit memory - so that all that can be seen is an enactment (say) of violent action (in the videogame) and an enactment of violent action in (real) life. Similarly, the capacity to see ‘violence’ everywhere (in media and in life) also relies on distilling the habit memory from the recollection memory, so that the context of the violent action which is evident in the image or the situation, is lost, as is the difference between the image (in representation) and the image of the extra-textual (life).

The exploration of textual and discursive identities can be seen as a rehabilitation of Bergson’s ‘independent memory’ and an assertion of the importance of such memory in the continuing practices of everyday life.

A growing theorising and research practice in social psychology, confronts ‘independent memory’ in suggesting identity, subjectivity, selves, or speaking subjects are discursively produced7 (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Shotter and Parker, 1990; Potter, 1996). Furthermore, central aspects of subjectivity, such as masculinity, have been recognised as accomplishments gained through social engagements of various kinds (Wetherell and Edley, 1998). The vignette I entitled The sandwich shop episode8 is a poignant example of such engagements both in its reference to the encounter it reports and also to its performative function in the conversation to which I was a party.

I have shown that mimicry provides a figure for understanding videogames’ involvement in the identity-making discursive project, while avoiding foreclosure on the outcome of such a project. Mimicry is to temporarily assume another identity and to forget who you are. Relations with sought after objects (such as cartoon characters) are transformed through a profound mimicry which asserts the loved object as part of oneself. This mode of engagement with text is fleeting and momentary, yet it seems from my study, it is also substantial and profound. It is not necessary to posit psychoanalytic dynamics for this relation because it can be observed in play through the lens which the concept of mimicry provides. Players can be seen imitating their favourite characters (James’ flying leaps into the family couch provided a vivid illustration), singing along with the soundtrack, and vicariously enjoying characters’ agility, strength, or speed as they play.

When relations with kinetic texts are understood in mimicry terms, a course can be steered between the assertion of unreflective enactment of what is seen on the one hand, and on the other, the foreclosure of the Lacanian account which asserts the primacy of the Symbolic

7 My investigation of discursively constructed identity stands in stark contrast to psychological theories of adolescence put forward by Collins in his presidential address to the Australian Psychological Society (Collins, 1991, p.7). He summarised interactions among research areas on adolescence in five distinct constellations entitled ‘psychobiology’, ‘peers’, ‘self’, ‘home’, and ‘community’. He failed to mention textual engagement as a significant element in the world of the adolescent. The closest reference to textual engagement came in the cluster of three items around ‘community’: ‘school’, ‘literacy’, and ‘numeracy’. The hybrid forms I investigated (reader-text, audience-text, audience reconfiguration of kinetic text) are rendered invisible by his schema.

8 Discussed in Chapter 6.
(MacCannell, 1986). Although there is little doubt players enter a mimicry relation with kinetic texts, the particulars of what they mimic and how this relation enters everyday practices is the kind of knowledge that can be only derived from research practices which investigate relations between kinetic texts and their users in the typical everyday situations of textual engagement.

For example, my research has indicated that boys' engagements with videogames are not the constant and consistent relations which the addiction thesis assumes. One of the players (Ben) showed me his relation with the game was inconsistent, and spasmodic. His disengagement from the game was as interesting as his engagement, and suggested that postmodern cultural products (such as videogames) have uncertain futures, despite the $15 billion income they currently provide worldwide. The attempts by marketers to shore up this 'future' are both expensive and risky, not because, as is often claimed, players are fickle and choosy, but because the landscape of cultural products in the late twentieth century is rapidly changing.

A further hybrid form addressed in my research is audience-text (Nightingale, 1994). Players' relations with videogames need to be seen in the context of audience relations with kinetic texts generally. What I found interesting was the challenge that videogame playing provided to a theorising of audience relations with cinema, and with kinetic texts in general. Videogame playing makes connection with other forms of engagement with kinetic text such as television and cinema, but is also distinguishable from them.

The most sophisticated theorising I have encountered on the significance of sound for audiences of kinetic texts (Chion, 1994), is deficient in terms of its capacity to grasp the interrelations of sound and image and their implication for the development of schemata in the audience, for the transformation of narrative conventions, or for their involvement in modifying expectations and transforming memories. I have argued for the primacy of the soundtrack in audience refiguration, and for a theorising which recognises that engagements with kinetic texts implicate memory and anticipation in the form of hybrids—both remembered images and sounds. In the previous chapter I suggested videogames implication in a new paradigm of refiguration which stressed the importance of the soundtrack, the text's kinetic qualities, narrative loops, the text's invitation to enter and exit at various points, continuity, circumlocution, and a de-stabilising of narrative time.

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The future

Videogame playing is a substantial occupation which has been little explored in the context of postmodernity.

One exploration I have begun follows a contour which straddles a fault line, with traditional narrative on one side (beginning, middle, end, denouement, right proportion) and on the other videogames, MTV, televisual flow and the Internet (connection, circumlocution, endless flow, middles). The implications of these disruptions to textual form have been investigated in relation to television programming (Williams, 1974; Browne, 1994), although empirical examination of the implications of these textual qualities for audiences has barely begun. Thus a postmodern identity is one in which encounters with narrative take place in many and often attenuated forms barely recognisable as the narratives of old.

Another exploration starts with the notion of the ‘routinisation of everyday life’. Leidner (1993) studied the routinisation of work in organisations such as McDonalds, where the ambiguity of live human encounters is minimised by the regulation which scripted conversation, ordered and careful layout of workspaces, and advertising achieves. Videogames invite a routine negotiation of their represented spaces, and in this sense add to the substantial number of textual machines which invite such encounters (automatic teller machine, ticket vending machines, personal computers, EFTPOS). I have begun to identify the players’ implication in routines of play which of course provide something of their appeal. At the same time I have noted a resistance to routine performances, particularly in the context of creative group-videogame play. Yet, as I have pointed out, routines have a seductive appeal in avoiding embarrassing ambiguity in the individual and social body. How routinisation of textual form is negotiated is a matter for an expanded research effort.

A further exploration is suggested by the phrase ‘computer as rattle’. Like its predecessor, television, computer and videogames can be considered ‘transitional objects’ (Winnicott, 1974). The encroachment of the computer on the cradle is continuing at a rapid pace, evident in a proliferation of computer playthings (Tamagotchi, virtual dogs, virtual cats, Tamago -a virtual egg ) added daily to the array of hand-held games. These transitional objects are different from teddy bears and bunny rugs in the sense that they are textual objects. Research is needed to trace the significance of this difference for an audience much younger than the one I encountered.
References


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To protect players’ anonymity both their names and place names that might identify their residences have been changed.

A key to the conventions used in transcription notation also appears in Table 3 on page 84. The context of each recording session is described in Table 2 on page 81.
The transcription code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>{}</td>
<td>descriptions of the operation of transcription devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>interpretations or contextual information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= or +</td>
<td>markers to indicate coincident starting points of parallel utterances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>marker indicating coincident ending points of utterances following = or +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>unable to provide any written account of what sounds like human speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>less certain transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; &gt;</td>
<td>utterance appears to be taking place within another speaker’s turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEY</td>
<td>capitalised utterance is used to indicate words spoken with unusual emphasis perhaps because the utterances are slower, louder or more clearly articulated than the speaker’s habitual pattern of delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>pause relative to the speaker’s characteristic delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>longer pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>periods in which conversation lapses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sega, Sonic the Hedgehog</td>
<td>Names of games, game characters and tradenames are italicised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Carmen Sandiego’</td>
<td>Text read from the screen is shown with single inverted commas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ben & David playing videogames 12.9.93

[It is a cold winter's Saturday evening. Ben and his school friend, David, are playing videogames in Ben's bedroom with a Sega system linked up to an old television set. The family television can be faintly heard from a distant room. Ben's parents are home in other parts of the house. Ben has two elder brothers (at home) and a step-sister who no longer lives at home.]

Ben: now I'll show you another game now Sonic the Hedgehog

Geoff: what game are you showing us?

Ben: Sonic the Hedgehog it's not - you can't play two player you wanna play <David: () > okay [soundtrack: hedgehog sung] <Geoff: right> the idea of this game is you have to - you have to rescue the animals from an evil scientist <Geoff: right> - who's capturing them all and making them into bad things and polluting <Geoff: right> the animal life and you're kind of the hedgehog - ( ) very weird - see once you kill the animals the little birds come out and they're like the animals that are captured inside these <Geoff: right> are the rings the rings protect you against like when you get hit by the enemies then all your rings - come out of you and you don't die but if you don't have any rings and you get hit by the enemy then you're dead these stars - they make you invincible - but you can go off the screen- and die\

Geoff: you can go off the screen

Ben: yeah - at certain levels you can fall between spikes and things at the bottom of the screen- that means you're dead but ( )

Geoff: so what happens if you fall in the water

Ben: nothing that's well in further levels up ahead it's called 'labyrinth zone' and you can drown - in the water and you have to get out of the water and get air bubbles - see the stars are really good they help a lot - see I can walk through the enemies - and kill them without being killed myself

Geoff: which ones are the enemies/

Ben: well they're the ones that - there's the buzz bombs up there and they bomb you with little fireballs - and there's the - the ones that drive along the ground - the humbug - you see - see that one there and then - ( ) all little birds are trapped inside() the thing come out and you rescue them - and that's a force field and that's where you get hit and that goes away - and it means - that's an extra man - and you can get to special zones/ - or you can get 'continues' / - and you get chaos emblems and when you and if you finish <Geoff: what's a special zone again/> well- at the end of a level if you have 50 rings then there'll be a big urn there'll be a big ring there - and if you and if you jump through it then you get into a special zone and that and that can get you two 'continues' ( ) - and you see it can run upside down- ( ) it's a real good game <Geoff: gee it goes fast> yeah - that's why a lot of people have been - having fits and that - epileptic people/ - because there's so much flashing on the screen- <Geoff: aw right - not recommended for epileptic people>
Ben: yeah - definitely not - especially the second one of this - that's even worse -- it's fun to play when you're not [chuckle] -- and here's the end of the act act see and then you jump in that big ring and there's all my score points <Geoff: right> there's a score a time bonus and a ring bonus the ah a time the a the time doesn't go down -- it goes up {faulty recording}

Ben: so it's another way to get up [coughs] this is the hard part -- jump on the ( ) and if you fall in between these things that's how you fall off the screen / and you die whether you got the invincible bility or not <Geoff: arh> and we can finish this game like and like we might do cause it's quite easy once you once you know where all the rings are and all the extra men <Geoff: probably wouldn't be very easy for me though> no no probably not when you first play <Geoff: ( ) game over after about 6 seconds> -- {intermittent sounds; faulty recording}

Geoff: looks pretty good on the screen - want a go of the camera Ben/ <Ben: ( ) > [Geoff explains camera operation to Ben] put your hand down there and hold it probably be a good idea to ( ) just put it through there -- hold it the best way that suits you -- if you want to do a zoom you've got to place your finger just there and push that to the right or to the left -- just push that across <Ben: ( )> yeah if you go the opposite way it's far away do some shots of your room to show everybody what's here -- pan it slow -- you can do it as slow as you like -- it's going through faster -- {faster music on soundtrack} it gets faster and faster doesn't it/

{faulty sound recording}

[dreamy music on soundtrack of Sonic]

Ben: ( ) once you've finished this game there are six countdowns then you actually and once you've finished this game and ( ) six then you actually ( ) one because just finished if the evil scientists still got the remaining chaos emeralds? and that's what you gotta try and get -- and like that's where you have to get them you have to get over 50 - 50 rings or over / to get in the special states so that's -- and at the end of the zone if you don't have that many that many rings then you can't get into it and also you have to jump jump in that hoop that I've shown you <Geoff: right> and that's -- if you miss that then you can't get in again -- so altogether pretty hard -- shoot us again <Geoff: you're going real fast here> yep -- <Geoff: that Sonic turns into a ball> yeah gone out the shoes ( ) -- this is the hardest bit of all ( ) you have to walk get the spikes right-

Geoff: right

{faulty sound recording}

Ben: you wanna play something/

Geoff: ( )

Ben: ( )

Geoff: zoom - zooms in and out

Ben: [to David who is having a turn at operating the videocamera] that one gets more -- and the other one ( ) <Geoff: it's just a little slider> ()
{faulty sound recording}

Ben: ( ) see the end of that ball- I've got the stars so it doesn't matter you have to hit them eight times- then you get past ( ) level- you have to ( ) this game- ( ) and it beat me- beat me <Geoff: beat me ( ) yep- and it gets harder as you go along

{faulty sound recording}

Geoff: something ( ) that tree

Ben: mnhm

Geoff: well that's pretty good

Ben: and this ( ) a marble zone- a whole new new zone comes along -- see it's big red balls of lara everywhere- and it's much much much harder- and it introduces you to a new enemy that that's called Caterkiller and you can only get it then <Geoff: a caterkiller/> yep-- and you have to you have to- you can't hit it's back you can only hit it's head - it's right <Geoff: right> and these are hard too all the ( ) spurt out so this is quite a full-on level-- it takes a lot of skill-- see what happens with this it they catch on fire/- there he is he died--

Geoff: what's that ( ) looks like a TV you drop on

Ben: oh they're they're the monitor screens and they give you <David: I got squashed> <Geoff: oh you got squashed> big pillar-- they um they give you all the - well it depends- they're different monitor screens- like you can sometimes they give you the stars which make you invincible or sometimes they give you forcefields - and sometimes they give you just plain rings and sometimes they give you just an extra man- and- you'll see- next time- they're the pictures of and it shows-

Geoff: oh- so the picture on the screen actually shows you what they are

Ben: yup- see these rings in the circle <Geoff: aw I see yeah> and and you have ten/- in each of them <Geoff: right/> and these are just little ones ( )

{faulty sound recording} Ben: that was a force field-- I got hit I'll just get the rings ( ) want to save you just like you get squashed or something-and you die <Geoff: right> -- see and that- you have to figure that out you push the block on to the button

{faulty sound recording}

and fire rings- whoa got them

Geoff: wow

Ben: special zone

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'Sonic has passed act one' - you got lots of points there

Ben: mnhm- this game- this game practically goes on forever- goes for ages <Geoff: how many levels are there/> ah well- there's -- level is there's 'Green Hill 'Marble Zone' which I'm doing now- and after that there's 'Spring Yard' and then there's - oh yeah Spring Yard's like a pinball machine- like a spring everywhere all kinds of
things that you hit and bounce off and <Geoff: oh I'd like to see that> yeah that's the 'Chaos Emerald' you have to try and hit the diamond a certain amount of times and then they go away after I've hit it up and it kills you <Geoff: mmmmn it is a bit like pinball> yeah -- this is hard- it keeps going in different directions- see it locks you with them red things- which are- which are not one of ( )

Geoff: that changes the background of something changes in the background <Ben: yeah> something changes that

Ben: turn to fish or something- parrots-- mmmmn <Geoff: this is weird> it is- and I got the chaos emeralds so I go out of there

Geoff: right

Ben: see an <Geoff: chaos emerald> right one- what's there ( ) the picture up there- <Geoff: ( ) can ya/> you just press the start button

Geoff: aw that's what you've done <Ben: mmmn> how're you going there camera man [addressing David] <David: mmmn> good eh/ -- come up here and see if you can go - go from the screen over to Ben- and you can show what he's doing- can you manage you got a couple of cords to come down

{faulty sound recording}

sit on the corner of his bed

{faulty sound recording} things out of the way- so what's this level now Ben/

Ben: 'Marble Zone Act II' <Geoff: 'Marble Zone Act II'> look at this this is hard- the larva chases you- have to get out of there- ( ) these spikes- I like playing around with them like like this- cause you wait for it-- and it jumps around ( ) <Geoff: [chuckle]> it's fun- a challenge <Geoff: a challenge> oww-- now this time- this this is really really cool- there are these things and they swing <Geoff: aw right you just gotta get your timing right> or else you fall in the larva- ooh <Geoff: like that/> yeah <Geoff: [chuckle] - - how come> ooh <Geoff: how come you didn't ground the up a bit> because once you get hit you start flashing - about 4 seconds or 5 seconds after the time you can get out ( ) or something and these are

{faulty sound recording}

but we found our secret thing if you don't {faulty sound recording} -- <Geoff: yeah - you get behind the wall> yep <Geoff: ohh> and there are all kinds of secret passages- <Geoff: so how did you find that out/> aw I don't know {faulty sound recording} coincidence - so now I'm on my way <Geoff: jump on their heads> or we can roll on their heads <Geoff: mmmmn> it's better to jump on --them things- when you die you start fr from there from way back to the Act- of the beginning of it so them things are real good <Geoff: ( )> umm- well I've got nine lives and when nine lives runs out then <Geoff: aw right> it's game over <Geoff: like the cat> yeah but it's too easy to finish it off- I've still got two 'continues'- one 'continue'- so- it's quite a lot- I've practically got- and you get three men <Geoff: hi [to David's father] what's these bits> they just give you points <Geoff: right>

?: are you getting there/
Ben: oh - spike hit me- oh- got hit by a spike - and there the stars so the spikes ( ) between them ( ) and the larva/ <Geoff: aw so the stars protect you/> yeah -- see I can jump on the spikes- <Geoff: uh> nothing happen to me {faulty recording} -- [Ben coughs] no- the place is closed off- it's the same place but it's been closed off <Geoff: ( ) } {faulty sound recording} something came- oh I think I'll go the skilled way the challenge way see- go this way and it's a lot harder-- five or something- whoa-- ohh- oh no rings- so if- I've got no rings so if I die now then I'm dead and - [sneezes] then I go down eight lives-- no- I'm one over head of course-- there's two different ways to go in that fret? <Geoff: ()> --

Ben: see and see- down there is is -there's ten rings over there so what I'll do is-- you push this block into the larva- you stand here for a while- and then you go back and this- and this big pillar thing is gone and you get the rings just something you work out <Geoff: right-- doesn't the fly space? --whoa

Geoff: what happened there/

Ben: a spike I just missed it by an inch- now this part-- <David: think you're gonna get squashed up here look-- it's another secret passage and you get an extra man-- whoa- ohh- ohh- he's not being patient enough oh oh -- this is a pretty hard bit- as long as you know how to do it it's now I've fallen down and I have to do it all over again-- whooa whooa--

Geoff: ( )

David: now now I'm up to the Bad Scientist again either--

Ben: see what he does is he sets the ground alight-- now these guys ( ) see he chickened off again <Geoff: [laughs] > he flies off- see you rescue different animals now the squirrels and also sometimes the seals <Geoff: squirrels and the seals come out now/ --right so what are we up to now/> now we're up to Spring Yard- <Geoff: oh Spring Yard > pinball now <Geoff: pinball one > -- watch this- this is your your ( ) down <Geoff: [laughs] > see how- told you it was like pinball> see this time the pigs are coming- little piglets- now this you have to - it may repeat anything without getting lost in here and getting squashed see there's several ways of getting squashed -- and now you see this enemy- come up on me- you see and that- is probably the deadliest- it mightn't be the deadliest because it- it's got - when it's gold it's it's invincible nothing can kill it <Geoff: mmmmm> like when it it coesup in its actual form- and it's- it's all out of it see - and now it turns into another ball- now these mines they're really hard- have to try and dodge them-- the best way to go is the {faulty recording} low you may be right-- the idea of this is you have to - press the button and jump on that ledge before - <Geoff: () yeah >-- oh--

Geoff: this is like going up in a lift

Ben: look at this --oh --whoaa-- just up the stairs <Geoff: [laughs] I like the sound > and then you get 10 point -- whooa- yuh now I'm invincible --just get a few more rings-- [coughs]- now this is a lot harder -- you have to run around it before it gets you -- whooa -- <Geoff: being? ( ) > this is another secret ( ) going in--

Geoff: and you jumped into the moon

Ben: yep
Geoff: how about that

Ben: you want a go

Geoff: oohh I'll think I'll have a go- what've I got to do though you tell me what to do

Ben: this is in the special zone- just tilt and try to get there

Geoff: how do I tilt

Ben: all three of these buttons jump <Geoff: yeah> and ( ) and just move it try the control way you want to go

Geoff: now you can't go wrong- you just can't get eaten up or anything <Ben: no> -- not getting many rings though am I -- I'm just going into free fall here

[knock at the front door of Ben's house which is adjacent to the door to his bedroom]

Ben: Hi how are you

Geoff: does this just go on and on Ben <Ben: yep> what for ever and ever

Ben: no - after a while ( )

Geoff: after what

Ben: ( )

Geoff: the which which

Ben: ( ) --

Geoff: where do you have to get them Ben

Ben: go up there-- keep going down--

David: you go back

Geoff: I'll have to get you guys to take over here- ( )

David's dad: [to David] how are you

David: the hedgehog ()

Geoff: yeah the thing that's running round in a circle- when he stops it's a hedgehog- he hasn't stopped for a while has he -- sound effects very good aren't they ( ) a lot of games don't have much sound at all- apart from - explosions and such like-- so how do you get out of this

David: keep going [laughter]

Geoff: this music puts you to sleep-- who do you find
David: ( )

( )

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'Springyard zone two' is there another zone after Springyard Ben

Ben: then there's Labrynth <Geoff: Labrynth> and then there's Starlight then there's ( ) then there's ( ) much harder-- ( )

Geoff: are you - we're still going-- we've got a pretty good idea-- [to David's dad] awaw- I'm actually studying computer games ( )

David: you get like that

Ben: they'll they'll get lower as they get more unpopular like- what happens is - you buy it and it's not just like one of one of them plastic toys you get for Christmas or stuff they just break it lasts a long time and you get - well i got these offer for three hundred dollars Megadrive and three games <Geoff: yeah> and that's really good because usually the Megadrive costs two hundred and most of the games cost about seven seventy dollars <Geoff: yeah> so it's really good <Geoff: yeah well that sounds good> and like yeah you get bored with no game and the more the more you playing the more bored you get ( ) but as you but as like your birthday and stuff or you save up and you go for something like about thirty dollars of things so you can get all different games and - so its just really entertaining it doesn't get boring <Geoff: whereas TV does> yeah-- I mean yeah it's not- I don't if people can sit down the whole time and play but you don't ( ) they have to get some exercise and keep fit -but it's really - when you're sick of something the next day and not only is it really good to have a few entertaining <Geoff: yeah> it's very ( ) and it lasts heaps and heaps of years

Geoff: there's also so many levels isn't there

Ben: yeah you can go through in these games once you can - like- I'll finish this game right and what you can do is try diff different ways and find out what's what's there and try and do different things <Geoff: yeah-- so what level are we up to now>

Labrynth zone up to in this yayou can drown

Geoff: you can drown in this one

Ben: yep

Geoff: ohh good

Ben: it's heaps hard-- so the water

Geoff: so that was water that I saw= <Ben:= yep> going up there

Ben: that is the murky stuff you can drown in see you have to get the - air bubbles <Geoff: yeah> and these things are traps see ( ) goes up you're standing () and these air bubbles - big ones see- he takes in a big breath <Geoff: right> and gets air

Geoff: he's got this magic spell again <Ben: yep the stars> is that to protect him from drowning
Ben: no -- no it protects him from enemies and spikes- and fireballs - and larva

David: I didn't tell David about what I was going to do with this film did I Ben < Ben: no> I'd better tell him about it - we're going down to the university in the next month or probably in the next couple of months and doing some editing - that means cutting bit of film out not cutting bits of film- selecting particular pieces of film that other people () and back to show it to you <Ben: cool> so you can see yourself

Ben: that's a really good camera

Geoff: you'll probably see some other- you'll probably see some other people playing too so - one of the things you need to know is that whenever you get filmed by anybody- one of the things they should do which I'm doing now is ask you if it's OK to be filmed--ask their permission to be filmed and if they're young guys like you guys ask your dad and explain to you what it's going to be used for

Ben: [to David] ()

Geoff: so I'll explain to you what it's going to be used for- it's going to be used for studying computer games and if that's ok by you guys it's only be shown to people at universities <Ben: yep> it won't actually be used on television or anything like that <Ben: yeah> it'll just be shown to other people that are interested in this (') computer games- so is that alright <Ben: yeah> but anyway I'll show you what we make and bring it back and show you and if you don't like it <David's dad: [laughs]> you can say I won't that shown to anybody- or don't show that little bit and I'll chop it out - ok

Ben: it's hard doing this ( )

{videotape stopped}
Austin playing videogames 25.1.94

[It is Saturday 5th February, towards the end of the long summer school holidays for students like Austin, 13, who lives in semi-rural Watervale, on the outskirts of Sydney, Australia.]

Geoff: ... actually having just put those up [referring to the tripod's feet] I might put them down again.

Austin's mum: I was going ( ) say and I'll be back as quick as I can.

Austin: OK

Austin: ( ) = ( )

Geoff: = Yeah I think so -- um - put those up ( ) make up the screen ( ) [tripod noises] yeah I think that's better. Now I can get that screen. Now what's it say-
Backup recording- oh - [blank screen to blurred image] now it's a good idea to take that off. [referring to lens cap] (laughs) Now - I'll get you - where are you --

Austin: here

Geoff: come in please Austin where are you-- funny - arr there you are - I'll tell you why cause it's on the zoom I think - yeah- {zooms in to Austin} you know why I couldn't see you - it must have been focusing on your ear lobe or something (laughs) -right-that's better- ok - we're in business alright well what I might just ask you is a - what games you have

Austin: Oh I have Sonic the Hedgehog 2  <Geoff: right > and Paintwork
<Geoff:yeah>

Geoff: didn't you ( ) the console

Austin: oh for Christmas

Geoff: so its just this Christmas that's just gone by

Austin: yeah

Geoff: right ( Master ) and so your Mum was telling me this morning that you've just got right through all the levels in Sonic

Austin: yeah [nods head]

Geoff: well that's quite an achievement isn't it -- alright would you like to show me some of the some of the games you've got which one would you like to show me

Austin: I'll show you Sonic  [opening screen of Sonic 2 ]

Geoff: OK

[SEGA (sung)]

[soundtrack] [title screen 'emerald ...']
Geoff: and how does this game work Austin

Austin: umm- well these things change into these rings- <Geoff: right> um <Geoff: those round things> yeah ( ) --

Geoff: and what's the purpose of getting all these rings

Austin: I don't know I've never. ( ) --

Geoff: Is this Sonic 2

Austin: yeah

Geoff: right - I don't think I've ever seen that screen before

Austin: this is the bonus zone ( )

Geoff: so you don't always umm manage to succeed at getting ( )

Austin: usually you can the fur the further you go through the game the harder it is to ( get to this screen ) <Geoff: right > and the there are lots of these levels so that they're progressive difficulty

Geoff: right - so one of the aims of the game is to get to the bonus level is it < Austin: yeah > and that way you can score more points

Austin: yep and- at the end of the level you get one of these chaos emeralds-<Geoff: right> if you get all of them umm you complete the game <Geoff: right> umm in a different way

Geoff: so it's important to get these emeralds <Austin: yeah> these chaos emeralds

Austin: (nods)

Austin's mum: Sonia sonia [calling the dog]

Geoff: what's this 'Emerald - Hill' [reading screen]

Austin: zone yeah

----

Geoff: and what's that fox ah like creature behind Sonic

Austin: that's Sonic's - side kick ( = )

Geoff: =Sonic's side kick <Austin: yeah he follows Sonic on the ( Geoffs: orright and what's his name

Austin: he's called Tails because he has two tails with for some reason

Geoff:(chuckles) right - Tails

----
Geoff: so he just follows Sonic around all the time does he
Austin: yeah
Geoff: he seems to have trouble keeping up with Sonic
Austin: yeah he's not quite as fast <Geoff: right>
Geoff: what's that helicopter thing
Austin: that's Tails - <Geoff: aww right> he's spinning around his heels <Geoff: aww right> to get back on the screen

---

Geoff: so this is the bonus level again
Austin: yep this is the second bonus level it's slightly harder <Geoff: right>
[sound of door closing]

---

Geoff: [reading from screen display] 'Sonic got a chaos emerald' -- ohh so you've managed to collect one is that right
Austin: I've collected two = so far
Geoff: = ohh collected two - right-- so this is a new level
Austin: umm it's the same level actually <Geoff: right> it's almost finished <Geoff: right> is this still Emerald Hill is it> yeah it's the second part of the second level <Geoff: right>
Geoff: oh dear oh me what's happening here
Austin: this is the person who is here to stop you ( ) umm he's captured umm all the animals <Geoff: right> that are Sonic's friends so to stop him ( )
Geoff: he's captured all the animals has he - and what's Sonic trying to do here
Austin: just break the machine
Geoff: right -- and have you succeeded in breaking this machine -ohh and all the animals get out <Austin: yep>
[dog barks]
'Sonic got through Act II' [reads from screen] ----
Geoff: so this is a different level
Austin: yeah ( )
Geoff: what's this one called
Austin: Chemical Plant Zone
Geoff: *Chemical Plant Zone*  (chuckle) right

-----

Geoff: so that's Act I *Chemical*  umm *Chemical Plant Zone*

Austin: yeah

Geoff: right did you get a bonus here

Austin: yeah I just got umm an extra life or something

Geoff: right an extra life <Austin: yeah> right so you can get an extra life

Austin: when you finish - when you finish each zone you can

Geoff: right-- does it take you long to work out what to do

Austin: umm - not really there aren't many puzzles in this game there's more-- just (shakes head) different you're just supposed to go quickly and as fast as you can  

<Geoff: right>

Geoff: so perhaps it's learning to do it fast

Austin: yeah (nods head)

Geoff: seems like your timings very important

Austin: yeah (nods head)

Geoff: ohh the screen's gone pink

Austin: yeah I'm in - I'm in the edge of the water

Geoff: ohh right

-----

Geoff: does that happen in this zone does it

Austin: yeah ( ) it's in the future so there's lots of chemicals

Geoff: right- this is set in the future <Austin: yeah this level > just this level

Austin: yeah

Geoff: of this zone -- the zone's in this are made up of a number of acts aren't they

Austin: yeah each zone has two acts <Geoff: right>

-----

Geoff: now what's happening here

Austin: just got *Robotnik* again
Geoff: it's Robotnik is it <Austin: yeah> right--

Geoff: seems like the animals have been freed again

Austin: yep

Geoff: 'Sonic got through Act II' he said reading the screen Aquatic <Austin: ( ) Zone >

-----

Geoff: Do some of your friends have Sonic

Austin: umm yeah one of my friends does

Geoff: do your talk with - it's a - do you talk with him about how to play the game and <Austin: yeah > do you exchange tips <Austin: yep > I suppose sometimes you find it difficult to work out what to do at a certain point

Austin: yeah (nods)

-----

Geoff: what happens when ah all those rings um go everywhere

Austin: that's when you get hit everytime you get hit by enemies you lose all your rings <Geoff: aw right>

Geoff: so who are the enemy

Austin: umm all the - creatures that Dr Robotnik has - he makes the robots <Geoff: right>

Geoff: so robotic like creatures

Austin: yes

-----

Geoff: the friendly ones seem to be the furry ones

Austin: (nods) yeah

-----

Geoff: how does Sonic develop that extreme thrust that I just saw

Austin: ummm he spins around very fast <Geoff: right> and rolls along

Geoff: and you seem to be in water again

Austin: that just ( )

-----

Geoff: this is Robotnik again <Austin: yep>

-----
Geoff: with a very large hammer it would appear to me
Austin: = yep
Geoff: and once again the planet has been populated with little birds- are we about to see a new level <Austin: yes> *Casino Nights* [reading from screen ]

----
Geoff: and can you play this game with two players
Austin: ( )
Geoff: so what happens is - with two players
Austin: one player is *Sonic* and the other one is *Tails* Umm ummm you do basically the same things except you're ( ) the hedgehog <Geoff: aw right> or you can do two players a different way - you do the same thing except you're racing against each other
Geoff: right so you kinda take it in turns that way do you
Austin: no at the same time you're just racing each other
Geoff: aw right one person plays *Tails* and the other person plays *Sonic* <Austin: yep> right

----
Geoff: OK I'm just going to stop that for a moment
{tape stopped}
{taping resumed 5-10 min later}
[voices can be heard from next room in next section]
Geoff: is this the same level you're on now
Austin: it's sort of the same level but ( )
Geoff: still on the same level
Austin: yep

----
Geoff: there's a lot of animals getting out again-- so we're on to a new level now
Austin: yeah
Geoff: what's this one called
Austin: I don't know ( )
Rebecca: stay stay (to dog)
Geoff: you have to balance things very carefully on that one don't you
Austin: yeah

Geoff: aww he lost all his rings again- and I remember in Sonic 1 there's a part where you become invincible do you have any=thing <Austin:=yeah=like =<Austin: =yep= that here
Austin: umm you get- if you break open the TV- then you become invincible<Geoff: ye> it depends what sort of TV it is
Geoff: right  if you break open a TV
Austin: it's only a TV screen <Geoff: right> on the ground and some of them make you go really fast umm make you some of them give you extra lives or extra rings- they all do different things
Geoff: 'Hilltop Zone 2 ' [reading from screen] that's what it's called- 'Hilltop'

Austin: now I'm invincible
Geoff: you're invincible now <Austin: yeah> right
Austin: but not for very long

Geoff: 'Mystic Cave' [reading from screen]

[door shuts]

[door shuts]

Geoff: right so you're through act I of that
Austin: yeah
Geoff: how many levels are there is there another umm zone after this one
Austin: there are two
Geoff: two more- there's lots of zones
Austin: there're nine <Geoff: nine> yeah

---

Geoff: what's this called Austin

Austin: *Oil Ocean Zone*

Geoff: right

---

Geoff: what do you think of the music in these Austin

Austin: umm - it's usually well done but umm ( )

Geoff: but its subsidiary to the to the screen action you = think <Austin:=yeah>

Austin: this is annoying if its really bad its annoying this isn't ( )

Geoff: right so that it is annoying - doesn't- distract from the game <Austin: yeah> it's OK

---

Geoff: what on earth was that thing that just came up

Austin: umm I don't know - some sort of aquatic spike ( )

Geoff: an aquatic spike -- a robotic worm-- maybe a video camera

---

Geoff: 'Metropolis Zone One' [reading from screen] -- How many zones are there left

Austin: I don't know

Geoff: must be about six

Austin: ( )

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Geoff: [laughs] what's that

X: [points to screen] what's on television --ever tried to get feedback with those

Geoff: visual feedback like this - show itself- point your camera at yourself - I don't know what would you do here

X: ( ) say you played it back thru the camera <Geoff: yeah> so instead of just playing it back you record it as it comes out of the television <Geoff: oh yeah> can't see any effects bright colours will come out ( ) as they amplify themselves
and put things like around the screen they'll hang over the screen and you get them - the () of infinity behind it all () camera will spin around and the psychedelics

Geoff: catching up with its own image

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Geoff: eh

Austin: umm giant sort of aeroplane

Geoff: giant sort of what

Austin: aeroplane

Geoff: aww giant aeroplane <Austin: yeah> right

---

Geoff: this is meant to be stirring patriotic music is it

Austin:

Geoff: serious music- ponderous music - majestic so this is about level 10 is it

Austin: aw not quite it's probably about level 9 <Geoff: about level nine>

---

Geoff: and when you get right through all the levels is that - is that good

Austin: yeah

Geoff: some sense of achievement in that <Austin: yeah ohh>

---

Geoff: are you going to tell me something Austin <Austin: no I just keep on dying<= ()> = just keep on going liv= ing- <Austin: ( )> what's that

Austin: I just keep on dying

Geoff: living [dog barks] 'Living Fortress Zone' =what [dog barks]

<Austin:=winged> Winged Fortress Zone - shut up 'Oxford', 'Cambridge' 'Webster' whatever your name is

[dog whines]

---

[door opens]

Austin's mum: how'd you go
Austin: still doing it
Austin's mum: you're still doing it ( = )
Geoff: =[laughs] hello [Austin's mum][laughs]
Austin's mum: did you get introduced
Geoff: um - no we've talked but we haven't been introduced.
[voices in kitchen: Austin's mum introduces me to X]
Geoff: we got to that point didn't we
Geoff: I figured that -- what you were saying- about pulling games inside out- and seeing how they work

Geoff: what have you got to do here Austin
Austin: you have to smash that ( )
[voices from kitchen]
Geoff: what's this all about
Austin: umm this is showing your hole in the spaceship
Geoff: what you're linking up with some rocketship or something = here
Austin: =yeah you're just joining the spaceship
Geoff: where are you going
Austin: [shrugs]

Geoff: *Death Egg Zone*
Austin: this is pretty much the last zone
Geoff: *Death Egg*

Geoff: and who is that- person with the red shirt and= the black <Austin: that is Dr - Robotnik > Dr Robotnik
Austin: yeah and - I have just have to be ( )
Austin: yeah it's very small and if you touch him anywhere else you die so it's not very easy

Geoff: and where do you have to hit him

Austin: just under his belly

Geoff: just under his belly <Austin:yeah> in the groin

Austin: a bit higher

Geoff: a bit higher

-----

Geoff: so what happened then

Austin: I jumped into the sparks <Geoff: you jumped into the sparks and so = you die> = yeah - yeah

-----

Geoff: has he got a head

Austin: yeah

-----

Geoff: did you pick up any rings in this zone

Austin: no no it's a - when you have rings um you get hit you can survive but you don't have any rings you die cause you just get hit

Geoff: right

-----

Geoff: I suppose you have to hit him in that spot several times do you

Austin: yeah about 13 times

Geoff: about 13 -- [chuckles] ----

Geoff: sonic seems to have a traction problem

Austin: yeah

X: ( )

Geoff: and that's a safe place to stay is it <Austin: yeah> over to the right there - yeah

Austin: then you have to go off to the left

Geoff: why do you have to go to the left

Austin: because if you don't he - falls down and tramples you
Geoff: he tramples you <Austin: yeah> dear oh me

Geoff: [to X] this is reminiscent of the um of some of the eastern myths where you have to pass the test I suppose they're western myths- the test or the trial

----

Geoff: huh

----

[kitchen noises in background]

----

----

Austin: I got him

Geoff: so you have succeeded

Austin: I have succeeded

Geoff: so that's game over is it

Austin: well it's not game over i=t's finished <Geoff: =it's not>

Geoff: finished -- so they're - they're rolling the credits now are they

Austin: yeah  

----

[telephone rings]

----

[dog barks]

Geoff: so that's just like the end of a movie isn't it Austin Austin: [talking to camera] yeah  

----

Austin's mum: want some toast Geoff

Geoff: yeah thanks [Austin's mum]

Austin's mum:  

Geoff: aw no I'll come out

----

Geoff: the end  {videotaping stopped for lunch}

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED SOME 20 MINUTES LATER:
Geoff: what I'd like to ask you at first- is whether - you -- how you were introduced to computer games-I mean how - did you have friends that had games or how did that happen <Austin: umm>

Austin: I'm not completely sure it just - suddenly-- I just started - um looking at computer games magazines and umm <Geoff: right>

Geoff: I remember your mum saying that David of course was very= <Austin: =yeah> your elder brother= <Austin: =yeah>, was very interested in computers and - games and things, how much older than you is he

Austin: umm [sighs?] -- probably about 10 years older <Geoff: yeah that's ri >

Geoff: so you looked at magazines and - and you became interested that way

Austin: yeah umm I mean - my friends became interested so I just became - more interested <Geoff: mmhm mmhm>

Geoff: and so - some of your friends actually had um Segas or they had kind of games like it <Austin: a few of them> or had Amigas or

Austin: some of them umm but - - not many of my friends then had - any sort of - games like that at all umm but then umm more recently umm they've been starting to get starting to get umm video games and things <Geoff: mmhm> [dog whines until *]

Geoff: and ahh you- I know you got this ah- console for umm christmas umm was that something you had actually asked for= ( )

Austin: = yeah

Geoff: and umm had you played any games before you played with the Sega had you played on other friend's machines

Austin: yeah I'd had a few goes - umm <Geoff: so what had you had a go of- the same the same=> = yeah and umm-- normal like IBM's and ah- and I'd had lots of goes of Apples and things like that <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: and what made you decide on the Sega

Austin: umm -- mainly the games that were that had =

Geoff: = thought the games were very good- very high class <Austin:mmhm> - right and ahh are there any umm- do you, did you buy it did you get it because you could swap with friends like is that a = <Austin: = that was part of it> consideration

Austin: like at the same time one of my friends got the same console the Sega so we could swap games like- instead of each of us having to buy <Geoff: mmhm> =lots of games <Geoff: =they're expensive aren't they> yeah <Geoff: I think they're over 70 bucks or something for each game> mmhm- so we can each just swap around games and lend games to each other <Geoff: mmhm> which is - really good <Geoff: mmhm>
Geoff: I think in some umm video shops now you can you can actually hire
Austin: yeah in two places- you can hire yeah> how much does that cost do you know

Austin: about 3 dollars overnight

Geoff: aww right so it's like a hiring a video in= <Austin: =mmhm> in a lot of ways yeah - yeah right I did I mean I've noticed around the place there's quite a lot of umm computer magazines so do you <Austin: yeah I get them> do you read them a lot to =get <Austin:= yeah> to find out about games and which are the best and all that = kind <Austin: yep> of stuff- umm do you regularly get any magazines <Austin: umm> is there special 'Sega' magazine

Austin: umm not regularly just one magazine like-<Geoff: mmhm> just whichever magazine is talking about the sort of games I'm interested in <Geoff: right> at the time <Geoff: right- yeah>

Geoff: and- is that the only way you find out about new games or do you have = other ways

Austin: friends can tell me about games um -- that's pretty much = ( ) <Geoff:= mmhm>

Geoff: and I heard your mum say that sometimes you you talk on the phone with friends and you- and you swap ideas about <Austin: yeah> umm tips in relation to games <Austin: yeah> like how to- how to get to the next level and that type of thing -- um -- now I'm just thinking if there's _anything else I need to ask you- about them oh yeah when you were playing umm Sonic before I was at some stage I talked about the sound on the Sonic and you were saying - that the main thing with the sound was that it wasn't too annoying
<Austin:yeah> umm and you didn't mind - you know the sound on Sonic but is are there games that the sound really puts you off = you know <Austin: =yeah>

Austin: some games the sound's really good but- <Geoff: mmmhm> it's not like you know some it makes you want to listen to the sound instead of play the game so that's a bit annoying <Geoff: right> and sometimes the sound's really bad <Geoff: mmmhm> and just it's really annoying and it's hard to play the game <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: what ahh- what games have you actually got for the Sega at this stage you've got Sonic II  <Austin: yeah>

Austin: i've got a game called Flashback and I've got Paperboy

Geoff: and what's Flashback about

Austin: umm - well it's basically the same story as a movie called Total Recall <Geoff: right>now which was new <Geoff: right so it's based on the movie> it isn't really but- most of the ideas are the same <Geoff: mmmhm mmhm > um <Geoff: it's a kind of action game> yeah- and its sort of a strategy like you have to- work out lots of puzzles as well

Geoff: and what about Paperboy  <Austin: umm> what's it like

Austin: it's OK umm -- ah - <Geoff: does it have sound as well> yeah it has very good sound like <Geoff:mmhm) ah- everytime you die you die you ( ) umm pretty
much everytime you die it says something different <Geoff: mmhm mmhm>
and its all ( ) good quality sound

Geoff: and what other games have have you played you know what are some of
the other ones= <Austin: um> you've played

Austin: before that console umm I played a game called 'Strider' - <Geoff:
mmhm> and Tasmania [small chuckle] and um-- um - there are just heaps and
heaps of games that I've hired before

Geoff: so you hire them to try them out <Austin: yeah> and then if they're very
good you might be considered you might consider saving up to buy them <Austin:
yeah> -- mmhm -yeah- have you got a favourite game

Austin: that I own

Geoff: just a favourite game

Austin: aw just a favourite game - um -- not really I've got a few favourite
games <Geoff: mmhm> I like I really like Flashback I really like Sonic II
and um I really like Aladdin

Geoff: I know that you can call er Sonic II a platform games a platform game
are those other games platform games

Austin: Aladdin is a platform game and Flashback - umm - it's really different
to most games it's pretty original it's a- a mixture between a platform sort of
game and a sort of strategy game and a sort of action game like you just ( ) a
man running along pushing in things and -um <Geoff: and jumping up
things=> =yes

Geoff: How would you explain a platform game to somebody that didn't that
never played games <Austin: umm> never never seen them the screen

Austin: platform games are usually just- like you are usually a cartoon character-
and ah -- you just move your sideways like it's completely two dimensional you
just go left or right or up and down um- and- it's probably called a platform
game cause you're on a platform and you're jumping from platform to platform
and - um - that's all <Geoff: yeah- yeah>

Geoff: um in these - in these games y o u you talk about 'deaths' - um - what do
deaths mean in these games

Austin: it depends what sort of game really

Geoff: well take Sonic 2 for example - what does death mean in Sonic 2

Austin: it usually doesn't mean that you've completely died it usually just
means - you've - been hurt and you have to go back to the beginning <Geoff:
mmhm> there isn't really any death at all <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: so it's kind of umm go back to the start= <Austin:=yeah> do not pass go
do not collect 200= <Austin:=yeah> go to gaol

====
Geoff: yeah - ok alright I think we might stop at that point <Austin: OK> thank you for - for taking part in all this and in a few months time you might see an edited version or you will see an edited version of it all -you can have a giggle OK thanks Austin

{tape stopped}
Austin, James & Corbett playing videogames 5.2.94

[It is Saturday afternoon, 5th February. We are in the lounge room of a house in Watervale, set on several acres of bushland. Austin's mother has picked up his two school friends at the local railway station and they have been playing computer games for a short while. Although I am a long standing friend of Austin's family I have not previously encountered Austin's friends, James & Corbett]

{videotape started}

Austin: ohh what ohh I don't believe that <?: what> I don't believe that = <James: = what> I had you in danger = ( )

James: = and you still had <Austin:( )> and you had three quarters of your energy Austin that's how much you had

[music of game masks conversation]

James: so anyway ( )

Corbett: ( )

James: Let's play Cato

[this is a suggestion to the others to start playing Mortal Kombat. The game has a facility for two players to play against one another referred to as 'two player mode'.]

---- [soundtrack of game]

( )

( )

Geoff: hey Austin Austin come and introduce me - to your friends

( )

Austin: ( ) this is Corbett
Geoff: hi Corbett and this is =
Austin: = James
James: = James
Geoff: James James I'm Geoff
James: hi Geoff
[dogs bark]
Geoff: OK now what are we watching here
Austin: = Mortal Kombat
James: = Mortal Kombat
James: see that one sink?
Geoff: this looks like uh Street Fighter 2
James: yeah it's a take off of it
Geoff: it's a take off
James: that's what all the magazines say
Geoff: so you read the magazines do you James
James: no Austin tells me it's what Austin says <Geoff:(laughs) aw right>
Geoff: Austin reads them
James: I probably know much about them but he just reads them <Geoff: right so he's the reader and then he tells you> = yeah <Austin: = yeah> <Geoff: I get it>
James: yeah
Geoff: so this is a take off of -um - <James: Street Fighter = 2 > = Street Fighter 2 so=
Austin: = not really =( )
James: ohh rip out his heart- watch this
Corbett: ( )
[screen display: the ripping out of the heart]
James: this bits dumb [referring to 'choose fighter' screen]
[screen display: Subzero vs Scorpion]
Corbett: you ( )
----
----
Geoff: so what's that red stuff's blood is it
James: yeah think so
Geoff: you're not too sure [laughs]
James: ah if you put on a special code you get ( )
Geoff: you put on a special code
James: yeah makes it makes it more = bloody
Austin: = usually there's no blood but
Geoff: right so you try and get into debugging mode or something do you Austin
Austin: [nods]
Geoff: so has this been um has this one had added blood
James: yep [nods]
Geoff: aw right
James: and also like with the blue bade? you rip off their head and when it says release them and its just ( ) <Geoff: oh right>
Corbett?: this guy does =
James: = blood
Geoff: what's this guy do
Corbett: he burns them
Geoff: he burns them aw right so he's the sweet one is he
[restart music: James & Austin commence playing]
James: [hums along with soundtrack]
Geoff: and this is two player mode
James: yeah we both are Cato ()
Austin: this is such a ( )
James: ( ) and we should punch him up a bit ( ) I'm the one that ( ) Austin
Corbett: ( )
James: yeah ok I will
----
Austin: watch this =
[screen display: figure falls down and blood spurts out of victim]
[restart music]

James: I want to do spikes select a person ( ) *Johnny Cage vs Johnny Cage* I thought *Johnny Cage* was fast

Geoff: what's that all about - 'test your might' [reads from screen]

Corbett: ( )

James: doesn't matter

----

Austin: how do you do Cage's kick

James: 'B' sames as kick with 'D'

Austin: how do you do it on Arkela?

James: wouldn't have a clue

----

Austin: how do ( )

----

James: that was a double KO then

Austin: yeah it would've been good if you did

James: it happens that every ( ) you haven't seen it before <Geoff: no> it just looks really should do it again in front of the camera

[restart music]

----

???: could you do it again?

James: ( )

Corbett: ( )

James: you know what it is that's? running like that?

Austin: what

James: you're just doing that ( ) it's my worst character though ( )

----
James: if you beat me that means my first ( ) kick back

Austin: let me? beat you

James: yeeah [victoriously]

Austin: ohh what - ohh [passes control to Corbett]

James: I was just on ya

Austin: oh man

[re-start music]

??: ya reckon

??: yep

James: I can't believe that I beat you

----

Geoff: now who are these guys in wet suits

James: they're not wet suits - they're just they're like ninjas = <Geoff:=[chuckles] oh right they're not wetsuits> no a lot of them is like like supposed to be all wet and cold and frozen and stuff <Geoff:= oh right> <Austin: = no he's not> just supposed to be his feelings - I think it's supposed to be his feelings sub zero <Austin: where do you get that> I know that he's named that because umm - his feeling for that cold - you know that's what <Austin: I know = ( )

Corbett: = now ( )

James: aww rip off his head - aw just ripped off his head

Austin: my turn [to Corbett; Austin & James with joysticks]

[re-start music; choosing characters from 'character screen']

Austin: be someone different

James: OK press( )

Austin: aw I can't do this ( )

James: nuh it's not ( )

Austin: wait a minute what ( )

James: ( )
Austin: ( ) confused
James: ( )
Austin: ()
James: what
Austin: ()
James: they need you at the same time .
Austin: ()
James: blind ( )
Geoff: and who are these guys in the Roman togas
James: they're are ( ) aw I completed with ko I forgot to tell you = and um he didn't exactly the blue pen? he () to be a bloodthirsty guy - and he got all these black dragon dudes to come and fight with him
Austin: what did the () do
James: he fought? Cato
Austin: ( )
James: yeah -- aww what I was ( ) my spinner thing and he () me
Austin: what is it
James: a block a lay up and a punch a block a lay up and a punch
Corbett: ( )
[re-start music]
----
All: oooohh
Geoff: how long does it take to get proficient at this game
James: what
Geoff: how many time do you have to play this game before you're good at it
James: a fair few you've just got to learn the rules =
Austin: = doesn't really take that long
Geoff: = how do you learn the rules>
James: read them out of a magazine = <Corbett: = [laughs]
Geoff:=[laughs]> or you get someone to tell you where it's + how its all meant to go
Austin: + doesn't take that long
Geoff: OK
Austin: doesn't take that long to =
James: = and if you just see what's ( ) or actually ()
Geoff: I had a go of Street Fighter II and I was hopeless
James: yeah - I ( )

() All: oooooohhhhhhhh
James?: oooohhh shit- look how close you went to
Austin: so close

James: so incredibly amazing [deadpan]-- did I tell you about that article that aw yeah I told you both about that one that computer games are in and I read this article anymore
Geoff: what was the article saying
James: it was saying how um - instead of taking instead of taking after our fathers and listening to music <Austin: ohhh> with long hair and you know head banging we play computers <Geoff: aw right - where did you read that> oh it was in a newspaper - the article was called Johnny be goodbye <Geoff: aw right - and did you agree with what they said>

[Austin & James with joysticks ]
James: yeah sort of ()
[restart music]
James: YES
Austin: how do you do it
James: oh yeah Johnny Cage is the best animation for that I reckon <Austin: ( )> you said you can't divide at into anything but levels <Austin: I was thinking you could do it> you can divide a game into screens - you said [turning to Corbett for support?] - I said this would be the hardest part of the thing you said you can't divide a game up into anything but levels <Austin: I think you can do it> you can divide the game into screens like in platforms while you're walking along - don't worry
Austin: I didn't say anything about you can't divide it up into screens <James: ()> I didn't say that

James: you did

Austin: I didn't

James: [emphatically] you did Austin>

James: let's take it out here now

Austin: OK drop me off boring boring

James: [hums along with music] oh no Johnny Cage offering choice? or anticipating? Corbett's choice of protagonist] <Corbett: no> Scorpion [re-start music] Radon eh <Corbett: ( )> I'm in there now who does Radon look like he looks like the black knight like in the pictures - sort of

Corbett: what's that <James: mmhmm> he looks like what

James: he looks like Radon basically <Austin: it's got good graphics on it> yeah

Austin: ( )

James: ( ) you played on hard

Geoff: so who are these two dudes - these samurai guys or something are they

James: no they're gods

Geoff: they're gods

James: yeah they're both - gods like there's a turtle? <Geoff: aw right> and they're the ( )

Geoff: hey it lights up a bit at the end there

James: they all have like a finishing special thing that they do -

Austin: his finishing move is that he does a really powerful electric shocks out there and so ( )<Geoff: right>

James: I intercepted? at the back leg? = that was what you do to me

Austin: = ( )

James: I will- I can usually do it towards the way

Austin: watch this screen watch this

[re-start screen: Austin & Corbett with joysticks]

James: are you going to () all this on the screen
Geoff: usually long shots like all I'm gonna do -what I think I'll do is I'll get Austin to come up to my place sometime and we'll just try to tape it straight off the telly- because it looks better = <James: = tape this> if you take the screen straight off you know what I mean just plug your wires in the back and take it off like on a VCR- just capture the screen and then you can do the players <James: yeah> the players and the screen you know like an interview <James: yeah> that type of thing

--

Geoff: aww here's the guy in the wetsuit again

James: and he's a disturb?

Geoff: yeah well he should take his wetsuit off

James: he's probably too hot

Austin: he's not too hot he's Sub Zero

James: yeah there's a special suit umm for - scrapers? and leapers? <Austin: ( )> that's what I read <Austin: yeah I know => = he's a ( ) before he's a Scorpion

Austin: awww ( ) = scores

Geoff: Sub Zero is that his name

Austin: yeah =

James: = yeah

Austin: = ( )

James: = think it's his real name because he swims

All: [laughter]

James: it's ( )

Austin: what's Sub Zero got to do with () swimming

Geoff: oh probably he wants to make Sub Zero a cold fish

( )

Geoff: he just had some red socks stuffed knocked out of him

Austin: ohh no

James: rip his head off

Geoff: ohh that's his trick at the end is it <Austin: yeah> what's he do
James: = rips off your head <Austin: and your spine> oh he sort of rips your spine and your head comes off as well = <Geoff:= I see> <Austin: = no - oh I suppose yes> [Corbett & Geoff chuckle]

[James & Corbett with joysticks]

James: do? am I playing one or two

----


Austin: () teach you [to James]

James: what happens if what do you think should happen if they get ( ) in the air- do you reckon they should defy the laws of gravity or ( ) <Corbett: they should ( )> they should they should fall? down maybe <Austin: yeah> fall down and shatter into a million pieces = <Austin: = (enthusiastically) yeah- no they should just fall down ( )>[to James]

Austin: ()

James: ( )

Austin: you should freeze them and then they fall down and get a bit of energy loss and the ice shatters off with them

James: yeah sure - it doesn't lose any energy

Austin: they should they should lose ( ) energy ( )

exactly ( ) ( )

James: then you could ()

Austin: ( )

James: exactly as ( ) I reckon

Austin: it wasn't ( )

Corbett: aww ( )

James: hey he had a new? first life he can ( )

Corbett: ( )

James: but I am? = my spiritual things running on like he doesn't win the day

Austin: = awesome

James: guess what the record always jumps out before Shantusie's performing

Austin: () says?
James: who ( ) hey the opposite way around <Austin: yeah>

Corbett: ( )

James: we were the opposite way around he's always Scorpion and I'm always ( )

Austin: awwwwhhh

James: ( ) so slippery? strong in there?

Austin: () I don't believe you

James: it happened

Corbett: what is?

James: oh yeah well in the free say anyway if you do three ( ) get them and freeze it you get out with it

Austin: how do you freeze can I just try freezing

James: low get low

Austin: low and you can do thing - you can do the ( ) and square so just let me do it can I just =

Austin: you can block it - just let me do a freeze - [appealingly] I don't know how to

Corbett: now down towards ( )

( )

Austin: rorrow you should've just let me man - can you just let me try =

James: = stop whingeing

Austin: I'm not whingeing I'm just = <James: =[laughs]> asking you to stay away from me = <James: = no > why not

James: you exen? [parody of Austin?] doey doey just stay away from me-- I don't want to stay away from you for a second

Corbett: [laughs]

[Austin hands over controller to Corbett; Corbett & James playing]

Austin: you could have let me it's really unfair <Corbett: ( )> I'm trying to practice

Corbett: if you practice you'll win

Austin: I wouldn't win
James: you know why Subzero wins =
Austin: = [emphatically] I didn't know any of them
James: exactly and I didn't know any of the
[restart screen: Liu Kang vs Liu Kang]
James: back to ruby? back to ruby? pretty well
Corbett: ( )
James: ( ) hey I did ( ) and I couldn't do before? ( )
Corbett: ( )
-----
James: ( )
Austin?: ( )
James: one of them one of them's more sunburnt cause it's more red on the brow ( )
Corbett: I won
James: did you
Corbett: yeah
??: aww whoops [laughter] [Austin & Corbett with joysticks ]
James: I thought I was the person who ( )
Corbett: no
James: [to Corbett] that's what didn't you even realise I didn't punch once or do anything in that whole game
{tape stopped}
{tape re-started}
James: are you going to knock off the edge
Austin: yeah [of course]
-----
James: I saw a movie last night called atomic Atomic man or something it was a comedy and it was an atom thing
James: [to Geoff] watch this - how bloodthirsty
Geoff: what's good about that

James: you punch them off the edge of this bridge and they fall down

Geoff: right and they land on something

James: yeah a spike

Austin: you better let me do this or ( )

James: yeah this was this guy right or he'll get angry

Corbett: He's trying to do it

Austin: but I don't know what it is

Corbett: down down = towards and punch it James: = towards

Austin: just stay away from me for a second ( )

James: are you trying to ( ) me and that's it see you obviously don't really care

Austin: I do not [exasperated] James

James: you're in second round if there is one ( )

Austin: just let me do it James

James: oh Sonia's my worst person =

Austin: = that's because I was so annoyed that you wouldn't let me do it

James: No you were [turning to Corbett] whingeing man ok freeze me

Austin: what is it

Corbett: down down towards and punch at the same time

James: there you got me down ( )

Austin: ( )

James: do you know how to do S- S- =<Austin:= yeah yeah yeah> Sonia's on the move one time but I can't remember it anymore yeah how she flies across the screen <Corbett: oh yeah> I don't remember how to = do it <Austin: I don't know how to do it> <Corbett: = I think it's it's backwards towards away from it> towards away from it <Corbett: yeah and and - yeah that's it>

----

Austin: ( )

James: I don't know ( )
[starting screen] [Austin & Corbett with joysticks]

James: ( )

Corbett: I don't know why you said ( ) was crap

James: ( ) I'm not going to be boring and be Sonia next time and then get aggravated and try another character ['get over here'-soundtrack] hopefully when I'm beating Sonia I'll be so aggravated he'll try another character-- that's towards away ( )

Corbett: what

James: I tid? the boot

Corbett: ( ) towards oh yeah ( ) you were saying away towards then

James: ( )

Corbett: and you're going

James: no no no [emphatically]

Austin: someone use it here with you

Corbett: ( )

James: no no I don't want to listen to it I really don't want to listen to it man oh my god

James: [parody of Austin] be easy on me James

Austin: ()

James: now your sweetly? oh princess

Austin: = beat me

James: = to easy on me

James: I wasn't and you were beating me

Austin: [laughs] I took - a third or a quarter off

James: ( )

Austin: yeah for a few seconds ()

James: like that and like that and like that ()

Austin: [to James, tapping him on the shoulder] that's what you get for not being nice to me
James: no it's just because girls can't fight girls are wimpy

Corbett: hey you girls?

[Corbett has a copy of the book 'Song for a Dark Queen' in his hand]

[laughter]

James: did you hear that story about the sandwich shop affair <;Corbett: sandwich shop affair > not affair but <Austin: ohh did you hear about => no but affair doesn't necessarily mean [Austin & Corbett playing] someone who's not married <Austin: I just went did you hear about that computer? ( ) OK that sandwich shop thing we went into the sandwich shop to buy something and this girl she was only about 17 <Corbett: don't begin again> she called us girls

Geoff: so what did you do

James: we walked away

Austin: [feigning interest in story] ohh yeah wooee that was horrible

Geoff: called you girls <James: yeah> why did = she <Corbett: = people in the toilet> call you a girl

James: yeah diners?

Austin: I did it yeah ( )

James: how possible's that

Austin: not very possible-- hey am I playing '2' or playing '1'

Corbett: you're playing '1'

Austin: ( )

----

Austin: how easy was that

Corbett: what

Austin: that was as easy as anything

Corbett: and I was beating you

Austin: ( )

James: you're coming second - was a power packed 10 seconds

Corbett: you beat me

Austin: can I just try something special
Corbett: no [emphatically]

Austin: why can't I do it then

Corbett: = you're beating me you're beating me

James: ( ) crunch it towards ( ) - you're beating him and you're not using any specially

Corbett: you did Austin? <James: you did> [telephone rings]

Austin: no I didn't I didn't use any special moves

Austin: Hello - James it's for you

Corbett: [laughs] hang? in

James: hello - hi mum - not really- no - ( )

Corbett: who did he choose for me - mmmhm bastard

James: yeah I can hear it - what - how am I talking down to you you're getting louder or softer- ooh - ( ) [hangs up phone] yeah I did it- [excitedly] hey man that was the best thing I've ( ) anybody to work you know my loud you know my loud so thing <Corbett: yeah> I I I pulled one that I didn't want to get struck by lightning so going 'you're getting louder and softer' and is going 'I thought I was just imagining it' 'we might get struck by lightning soon' cause I was putting my hand half over the phone and then taking it off

Corbett: what is there a storm up there or something

James:[animated and excited] yeah it's raining heavily I can hear it from the phone I'm going like this and putting my hand over like that so it's going soft and loud soft and loud <Austin: that's really mean> hee hee hee who who who

Corbett: hey do you wanna stay down here tonight <James: no> or do you wanna go home

James: no I'm going home- should come

Corbett: what are you doing tomorrow

James: absolutely zero I'll try my game? tomorrow after I've got up man good work who's Subzero? <Austin: Corbett that's ? take up? of the scenes> yeah- ( ) Lim too ooh good work forwards forwards forwards forwards ( )

[Austin & James playing]

Austin: I didn't know

James: sorry well I told you it now

Austin: yeah well it was a bit late
James: [gruff parody] ohh I'm sorry
Austin: [parody of James's delivery] ohh are you

Corbett: so is your dad on his way home

[Geoff on screen]

James: umm- hey - six have you won six times then let's put an end to that Austin- I meant to do that by the way- ohh didn't work - uh huh - that was Scorpion and I'm Johnny Cage hang on - you've gotta keep up

Austin: I tried to

James: I don't know why you know it it's my first ( ey) thing uh huh it feels frightening-- oh who - in the nuts wouldn't that hurt - I'll show you it - <Geoff: [chuckles]> that's hilarious isn't it - imagine all the imagine all the sick people out there who would take after this game

Corbett: = [slight chuckle]

Austin: = ( )

Corbett: who go and bite someone's head off

James: hey

[Austin & James start playing]

Austin: ohh I need to put mine in

James: oh yeah you got more than my four winning streaks you must of

Austin: no

Corbett: six winnings in a row you've mastered

Austin: = whoops I did it wrong James: = G - O - T

Austin: I was gonna go as well

James: hopefully we'll get to fight Shadow this time

Austin: not this time not for a while

James: hey where am I = ohh yeah

Austin: = ( ) what we did the diamond

James: aww about - three ago I think - three or four -two or three- two or three or four

Corbett: two or three or four
James: [parody] or four or five or six- () maybe not maybe that's ( ) maybe that dishwasher started again <Austin: yeah> oh what happened then <Austin: he came the screen> he came back in the other side and hit me <Austin: () that's so weird- yeah huh it's like *Subzero* man do *Subzero* turns- do *Subzero* turns with *Raidon*

[James & Corbett start playing]

Austin: no he just-it's because you both went different ways and you went right on that side of the screen and he went- he did that = James: = let's do it oh he can't so=

Austin: = try and do it again try and do it again

James: but he's going to kill me

Austin: do 'up' 'down'

James: believe me it isn't a move see - aww - this is - he's pissing me off now

ahh err [Austin laughs]

James: err yourself- err err yourself man

Austin: imagine- if you just go up to the shadow thing you know it just went bijet when you saw something really mean

James: no cause it was lightning- cause of the lightning or some = thing or lightning shot the TV and it exploded

Austin: = aww no just something really amazing

Corbett: anyway let's hope it doesn't

[Austin & James start playing]

James: we're thinking happy thoughts today - aren't we - aren't we Austin can I just try no I suppose I never let you so am I playing 'l' yeah I am

Austin: yeah you are

James: oh no- that's it you die now boy

Austin: oh can I play 'l'

James: I'm the green one that's firing at you - see- I know how to do that now - press the ( ) once on the 'A'.

Austin: ohh what

James: you fooled me for the first like couple of hits

Austin: yeah
Austin: ohh ooooo - what that's impossible - he was down
Corbett: no you weren't
James: did you see that even when I was like -
Corbett: ()
James: [imitates sound effects] huh huh huh
Austin: it's ( )
James: ohh did you see that Greenslade? I never actually realised that before
Austin: I did
James: didja
Corbett: I did really? - are you gonna come down here tomorrow
James: [to video camera] hullo [-to Corbett] come down here yeah [parodying sincerity] I don't really want to come down with you press start first
Corbett: I mean- come down- Watervale
James: yeah I'll come down to Watervale
Austin: ()
James: ( ) why? just why tell me the truth
[Geoff leaves room]
Corbett: ()
James: ohm how aggravating is that
Corbett: aww that sucks [Austin laughs at Corbett]
James: [parody bass voice] you get to fight the Shadow
Austin: [to Corbett] you moron =
Corbett: =that's why<austin:get to fight the Shadow - wow> you have people on - aww <James: I don't believe it> well it says it in the book
James: a Supernes [Super Nintendo Entertainment System]
Austin: = I think you made a mistake in reading
James: in Supernes does it say that in the - says
Corbett: [assertively] I didn't make a mistake in reading? but yeah it says ahh it says you have to fight the Shadow umm but others ( ) having to fight you <James: well how> I think you only

[Geoff enters room]

James: how do people- how do you umm how would two people fight both fight 'the Shadow'

Corbett: I don't know I don't know now it was meant to be

Austin: ( )

James: was that on is that what happens on

Corbett: Super Nintendo is different <James: that's much better> the person doesn't ( ) he doesn't actually do it - he doesn't - like he doesn't ( ) can't move on = so <James:( ) the other person ( ) would be doing so can't be done <James:[to Austin] look at that> so one <Austin:[to James] that's very different> so one person look like 'the Shadow' and the other person's still <James:[to Austin?] Austin's down> so good

[Austin & James start playing]

James: he believes he can beat me

Austin: I believe I can beat you

James: as Sonia , yeah- Sonia's my best person - AS IF man

Corbett: ( ) money

James: [parody] realistic - she has Streets of Rage II we heard you were gonna get one of those =

Corbett: = it's so boring

James: I don't think so =

Corbett: yeah but - I =

James: = oh Street Fighter II we could've hired - that would be heaps different

Austin: they don't have it

James: I thought they might have it at the shop or something you know the umm other shop [Geoff leaves room] whatever you call it <Corbett: newsagent> newsagent that's the one

Austin: it's so hard it's I saw a big mistake in this game

James: = what

Corbett: = what
Austin: when you drop Sonia's rings it still hits you
Corbett: really

[Austin & Corbett start playing]

Austin: you can tell before it hits you - you go beery [Austin throws himself against the couch]

James: [sings along with soundtrack]

Austin: I'm getting bored with games
Corbett: play one more game

James: what pisses me off so much with the back to wood?
Corbett: ()

[Geoff re-enters room]

James: () who's having a see?

Austin: see, it's falling into it I don't believe it

James: if it was blocked you can jump it -- I bet you can block it

Austin: you can't [emphatically]

James: it wouldn't take up as much energy

Austin: [emphatically] it does - it takes up full energy

James: well keep on doing it then

Geoff: you guys haven't seen my glasses have you can you just hop up for a sec James I think they might <James: is that it> no

James: maybe they fell down () television

Geoff: just black a black glasses case

James: maybe they fell down the back here- I'm not fighting against you ()

[James & Corbett start playing]

Corbett: let's change now

[Austin & James get up from couch]

James: you're positive you can't have two plays with Puggsy can you
Austin: yep
James: what a shame
Corbett: who's go was it
[loading new game in console]
Corbett:[to Austin?] you don't have to turn the television off ( )
Geoff: yeah OK
James: did you leave the camera on the whole time
Geoff: no I switched it off for a while
[title screen of new game: ‘Puggsy’ ]

----

James: watch this this is it - down -aw this is so amazing
[bouncy musical soundtrack]

----

[Corbett playing: one player mode]
Corbett: oh man beijing?
Austin: oh yeah

----

Geoff: what's this game about James
James: umm just an aliens that's crashed on earth and has to do something <Geoff: right - what's the something> I don't know Austin what's the something
Austin: umm I think he needs to find a spaceship which gets stolen
James: but why does he get away from his spaceship in the first place
Austin: I don't know

----

James: ( )

----

James: it doesn't look look much different from seven thousand ( )
James: move over that side ohh ( ) oh no
Austin: where do you go

James: and then you have to climb up there and they're see where the barrel is

Austin: go there first

James: yeah

Austin: what's happening

James: ohh cool there's another entrance

['well done' screen; change to 24 tempo followed by dreamy soundtrack in quick succession]

James: ( ) of that one -- hidden my ball?

Corbett: what's that

James: I said they're hitting my ball - aww look at all the balloons? aww

Austin: what's up there ( )

James: ( ) see I can't even look on the outside of spaces?

Austin: what

James: ( )

Austin: what is that one working

James: aww that's just the answer Austin you've got the answer that's what you do try Austin it is <Austin: I've been trying to get the camera?>

James: get the camera just there that camera was on the right ( )

Austin: ( ) yeah just get one of the coins

James: I'll get the two with it they are coins

Austin: ( ) awww what's down there

James: try to go down there yourself

Corbett: (

James: maybe you could do something with the coin machine

Austin: yeah

James: you probably going that way the opposite way to the arrow and see what happens <Austin: no ( )>
James: I don't ( ) so much ( )

Corbett & James: [with extreme exasperation] aww

James: ( ) should just save them you can carry a few at a time - put one on top of the other and then you can grab them both it's easier anyway - I wonder what happens when it's full

Corbett: ( )

James: ( ) he doesn't believe me- I wonder what happens when you go in the opposite way to the arrow and keep on going -- if you go this way that coin to the other side of the machine ( ) what are you supposed to do this ( ) for nothing

--

Corbett: maybe I've got them

Austin: aww that's it let me try [Austin takes over playing standing in front of screen]

James: good? boy -- ohh is there a light over here -- maybe you throw that candle over the other candle you know how you do that special throw

Austin: ( )

James: maybe not - there you go

Austin: wow

James: there you go

----

James: hurl at that thing

Corbett: push start and um enter all three buttons at the same go

[a abrupt change of soundtrack]

James: [reads from screen] 'hidden level'

[bouncy soundtrack starts again]

Corbett: now you see ( )

[Geoff leaves room]

----

Corbett: go up to the other thing
Austin?: what

James: you shouldn’t to get
Corbett: ( )
James: ohh what’s that did you see that thing that fell down -- what is it

James: maybe that thing can let the thing ( )
Austin:()
Corbett: yeah
James: or maybe or maybe it’s why you get the coins
Austin: what

Corbett: maybe ( )

Austin: I don’t know maybe if you light things at the dips
Corbett: that’s what I was thinking
James: what’d you do with the ( )
Austin: ( ) off - I know ( )
Corbett: the what
Austin: listen
James: [without enthusiasm] what an exciting game - so Austin's good at that isn't he
Corbett: yeah
James: ohh it joins apart ohh how cool
Corbett: hey man give me
[Corbett takes over playing]
Austin: am I smart or am I smart
James: that's pretty smart I wouldn't think of that
Austin: light light maybe you press 'B' no 'A'
James: go and check if it lit the candle
Corbett: no
James: give it to Austin Austin can do something
Austin: yeah I know what to do I don't really but I ( ) press it press it where the thing is
James: wouldn't have a clue () does that help
Austin: yeah
---
??: oopps
James: press that one - mmmhm
Corbett: ooooo I see something
---
Corbett: let's see what that object is =
James: = I saw lightning
Corbett: hang on a sec ()
James: aww guess what man <Corbett: what> my parents said this morning and told me not to bring my jacket
??:[reaction?]
James: aww - [laughter?] oh just that I have to take a jacket [reporting and mimicking conversation] oh no you won't need it it'll be a brilliant hot day today there won't be any thunderstorms or <Corbett: laughs> miniature blackouts which only last for seconds I thought =
Austin: = he? looks on the bunsen burner
Corbett: = yeah
Austin: [pleading] work
James: maybe you've got to turn it on by not having a candle and then turning it on a second
Austin: [with frustration] how do you turn it on - turn on
James: maybe you need a coin
Austin: [excitedly] no - that's it you put a coin in the thing and it turns on the thing
James: yeah like a barbecue like a pay barbecue
Austin: there go whoo
Corbett: maybe = ()
James: = this is a mind kind of game isn't it Austin's puzzle game
Austin: see what ()
James: I thought that thing was just a thing that said? your coins before you eventually ()
Austin & Corbett: ohh yes
James?: ohh what
Corbett: maybe you have to put another three coins in quickly-- it puts you? into something use?
Austin: it says use?
James: no? I just? picked? up the issues?
Corbett: A isn't B isn't use
James: just because Corbett change it
Corbett: I didn't change it this is how it usually is
James: oh so you DIDNT change it
Corbett: you thought I changed it for you
Austin: two pieces picked up?
Corbett: yeah that's () A 2=
James: = aww what ()
Austin: that's ok
Corbett: give me a go [Corbett takes over playing]
Austin: there's nothing worse than? ()
James: it has to be the way to - ohh
Austin: ohh [with huge frustration] ahhhhhoohhh
James: however many is that
Austin: just go over and put the thing in the thing ( )

James: [excitedly and hurriedly] put the - handle grab near the bunsen and quickly turn on the fault? for the light [afterword] basically I think --

Austin?: this's stupid how's someone two years old supposed to work out a puzzle like that

James: hey can I have a chocolate now

Corbett: no it's not a bar

James: whatever you're eating what are you eating

Corbett: ( )

James: ( ) aw yeah how did you do that

Corbett: I just jumped it up a gear?

??: ( )

Corbett: I now know =

James: = throw it throw it

??:

Austin?: tilt it back move it away

James: and then do the diagonal =

Austin: = no the other side =

James: = and then do it diagonal up and 'A' isn't it

Austin: yeah- further back

[Geoff re-enters room]

James: yeah he'll do it now [incredulously] what are you doing diagonal up and 'A'

{camera movement after period of being stationary}

Corbett: it's not 'A' it's 'B'

James: ohhh 'B' then ( )

Corbett: that's you save the world?

James: ( )[sings along with soundtrack] hey you could do this thing with two times and get two lots of points
James: aww cool throw it straight up throw it straight up from underneath = it
Austin: = yeah
James: no up -aww cool -just do 'A' and see if it
all: ohhhh
James: is that a diagonal -maybe you have to get one of the things and stand on it
Austin: [sings along with soundtrack briefly] -- = yeah <Corbett: = ( )>
James: now get get two coins in your arms at each level that's why
Austin: no just level the candles
James: no ( ) [dog barks] () I bet it's worth 700
Corbett: no its only had two queens?
Austin: no don't ( )=
James: = you can if you only put one on top [dog continues to bark] of the other now
you can carry two out or maybe not
Austin: I know ( )
James: now now put your aim? down I think =
Austin: = yeah
Corbett: ( ) carry three
Austin: don't try
Corbett: I will
James: aww no aww it is?
Austin: take two up ()
Corbett: aww no
Austin: aww nooooo it's not going to work just take one up
James: now you're already up on the other side isn't there- this is the turning () Austin
Austin: [emphatically] yes
??: yes
[change in soundtrack tempo: 24 time. Screen change?]

Corbett: yes - that was good I could have done 4 man I could have done heaps

James: ( )

Corbett: I'm gonna do the hidden one again man

[Austin takes over playing]

James: aww this takes too long =

Austin: = let me do it

Corbett: = OK [laughs] that was a good level to =

Austin: = yeah

James: = [equivocally] mmhm

Corbett: ( ) my pizza bread?

James: mmhm ( )

Corbett: no but ( )

James: little kids

Corbett: don't try to put too much on -over - aw that's it

----

Austin?: how do you do it

James: just do what you were doing

Austin: no but you throw it up like that

Corbett: [explains to Austin] no- you stand- what I did - is I stood up - I jumped and pushed view? <Austin: right> to 'A'

----

Austin: mmhm what did I do ( )

Corbett: ( )

James: ()

Corbett: just leave it like that [rubs eyes] -- there's another one coming up

James: [advising Austin] ( )
Austin: ( )
Corbett: what
Austin: didn't work
[soundtrack change: ]
[back to main soundtrack: Corbett takes over playing]
James: ( )
Corbett: ( )
James: what
Corbett: ( )
James: ( )
Corbett: ( )
James: ( )
Austin: yeah
Corbett: what are there
James: ( ) what's Supersonic on
Austin: it's not there or is it
James: what's Supersonic called
----
James: ( ) look at this
----
----
James: are they going to be a part? of them [sings along with soundtrack]
----
Corbett: aww no
James: what does it do
Corbett: ( )
James: get the one up the top as well- you climb up the top you used to jump on
Corbett: oh yeah
Austin: = ohh no
James: = ohhh just press 'A' now go and get the other coin
Corbett: no I'm just going to go into this
[soundtrack change: 24 time]
James: told you ( ) [soundtrack change: interlude] stupid moron
Corbett: shut up
[main game soundtrack]
James: Do you want to do it again
Corbett: [exasperatedly] ohh no = I didn't mean to do that
[interlude soundtrack]
Corbett: now we can do it
James: ( )
Corbett: [laughs]
James: level two do level two =
Austin: = he's already done it
James: no I think he's only done level one
Corbett: no i've done level two ( ) levels
James: you just did level two
Corbett: no it isn't
James: it is look
Corbett: it's not -- <James: even> that's hidden level now you've moved to junior level one and junior level two
James: ( ) maybe there's only just one and you just have to die- junior- level two - let's do it
Austin: we've already done it =
Corbett: = we've already done level two +
James: + so what are you gonna do ( )
Austin?: maybe that's what it is with the other with normal one like jus slecting

Corbett: we'll see if it is

Austin: on normal you're not going to be able to finish normal

Corbett: what

Austin: na ohh

Corbett: no it's not umm great deal of difference on normal

Austin: no like that's how you finish it on normal it's just like - not doing anything

[opening screen]

James: ahh probably not- yeah but it's so good > yeah I probably? it looks so real- doesn't- like- looks comical - ohh god

Austin: just so incredibly cool just so real =

Corbett: = fancy being able to play that <Austin: yeah graph=ics that good> = being able to like bring it towards you and ( )

Austin: ohhh so good- besides you +

James: + coming down for a crash landing

Austin: yeah just like a sad? () you go in and out of the screen

James: ah that was-- [sings along] that was more impressive than ( )

Austin: yeah [of cause it was] it's no more impressive it's no more impressive um than ( ) um I s'pose it is um

James: Operation Combat or whatever like that aeroplane one

Austin: no the that's supe when we were in the car it's a sort of a cartoon

James: oh yeah you told me about that <Austin: = you've seen it [insistently]> ( ) Road Ranger ?

Austin: yeah - remember being the sequel to Road Avenger

James: aww fuck yeah

Austin: that's =

Corbett: = what's that

James: oh it's just like + it

Corbett: + watch the demo man
James: ohh hi ()

Corbett: just watch the demo for a sec

James: oh look at the little

Austin: oh it's telling you how to control [with pleasure]

James: ohh yeah ohhh ()

Corbett: it tells you what to do - to do that and we spent all that time and could have watched the demonstration

James: we could have just opened that box

??: ohh

[James with controls]

James: whoa [Austin covers James's eyes with his hands]

Corbett: does he know what he does? James James () into your head now it's this () <James: man> look man

James: I couldn't see it Austin's hands over my eyes [parody] you're so stupid James [Austin places his hands over James's eyes again]

Austin: [laughs] get? jump- [giving instructions to James] jump again- yeah and again forwards now hold just one more time = jump

Corbett: = jump down

Austin: no press down down down Ok now down and sort of forward sort of forward yeah - OK now just keep on going no- no put down this +

Corbett: + push up

Austin: push up OK now just go = <Corbett: = forward> forward forward yeah you finished the level

[soundtrack tempo change]

[Corbett laughs then James?]

James: did I really or do I die

Corbett: you finished the level

James: OK

Corbett?: ohh [yawns] i'm tired
James: [James sings along with soundtrack] OK press yeah now shoot shoot shoot shoot
<Corbett: J?> OK now move forward press 'A' press 'A' again yeah and one more time <Corbett: yeah> [victoriously?] ahhh no <Corbett: ()> you were so close
OK press ( ) [laughing] <Corbett( )> 'B' 'B' move forward just a tiny bit press 'B'
no 'B' - <Corbett: [laughs]- jump> yeah jump <Corbett: put it up> down down down and sort of forward down [laughs] he's level press <Corbett: up> up - now just forward- yeah

Corbett: now you gonna have a level that ( ) with your skip?

James: yeah I'll have to play the boss like this <Corbett: now> so <Corbett: ()> yeah

Corbett: there - now ya gonna have to

Austin: ya gonna have to go back

[Austin removes his hands from James's eyes]

James: aww I can't remember? ()

Corbett: [yawning] I have to go to ( ) place I think

??: beg ya pardon you gonna ring your parents

Corbett: yeah ( )

James: ( ) [hums along with soundtrack] hey ey ey [hums along again] that's ( )
[Austin picks up magazine] I didn't - did I die once when I was ( )

Austin: yeah once

James: ohh what a shame - ohhh

Austin: did I have Mickey Mouse bats

Corbett: oh yeah

Austin: that's OK

James: ( ) new lost?

Austin: I think the Masters system is a better game

James: why

Austin: because I do

James: what a Master sys game is better than a Megadrive game

Austin: no

Corbett: why = ( )

James: = why would you want to play a Master sys game if you had a Megadrive
Austin: because it's cheaper

James: oh yeah

Austin: it's heaps cheaper

Corbett: yeah but they =

James: = get the ( ) too ( )

Corbett: fall down into that level that -( )

James: hey ( ) sings secret level on hard

Corbett: ( ) to get there put push up - up - push up

James: uh oh- see ( ) other one ( ) [sings along with soundtrack]

[24 tempo soundtrack]

[change to slow tempo soundtrack]

James,Austin?: [in unison reading from screen] 'treasure trove'

???: look at this =

Corbett: = this is a different

James: [hums along with soundtrack] 'treasure trove' <Corbett: there's no secret stage this is just a new stage

Austin?: ( ) the sound difficult at all

James: yeah- just because I um - went into that secret passage way

Austin: get that thing

James: ( )

Corbett: = should have got it?

James: [hums along with soundtrack]

Corbett: you could've got one of those <James: I know -[mock obedience] yes Corbett yes Corbett> one of the BATTLE people

James: who of you =

Austin: = get on top of them - no - no put them down down - good boy- now get on top of it [falseito] ( )
James: bloody hell

Austin: ( ) go down

James: down down -I've already been down

Austin: that way that way to your ( )

??: ()

[soundtrack change 24 tempo]

James: it's the end of the level - but the thing is - is you were meant to of got all those treasure chests

[soundtrack change slow]

James: you weren't meant to

Corbett; now just go back to the beginnings?

James: ahh whoops we're we going - hen? why did that happen

Corbett: do the treasure trove thing

James: () I haven’t been there yet

Corbett: yes you have

James: no I haven’t

Corbett: this is -just that one you were on

James: ohh okey doke

[change of soundtrack: slow tempo]

James: but I haven’t fitted the boss yet- <Corbett: ()> it's because I went in that special thing [fast tempo soundtrack starts; hums with soundtrack]

Corbett: cause you haven’t got up to the boss yet

James: that's right that's right

[Corbett attempts to snatch joystick from James]

James: no I hate ohh don't -I () you

Austin: I wouldn't ( ) you

----

James: I nearly had it then
Austin: = put it back on there put it there
Corbett: put it back on there +
James: + yes
Austin?: pick it up hey pick it up
James: [humming along with soundtrack]
Austin: ohhh [frustratedly]
Corbett: ohh [empathically]
[voices from kitchen]
Austin: remember you go down
James: no I can't get down to it

James: special
[Austin takes turn in controlling joystick from James]
Geoff: [entering room] I just might shut this off - what's this guys
James: this is the one that we ( ) at the beginning ( )
Geoff: aww this is this- dopey kangaroo
James: yeah that's the one
Geoff: I might just shut this off
{videotape stopped}
Austin taking me through Flashback  5.7.94

[Austin has made a videotape of the screen action of an occasion of him playing Flashback, a game he obtained back in December 1993 with the purchase of his Sega system. This was Austin's idea in the sense that I had not asked him to do this; we had talked about the possibility of recording screen action directly on to videotape in the context of my research effort. The transcript which follows is a discussion of the videotape as we both watched it in the loungeroom of his home.]

Geoff: tell us about this tape Austin.

Austin: this is the tape I made on me playing computer games.

Geoff: right -- and this is obviously Sonic

Austin: yeah

Geoff: OK I think what I'm going to do is move the camera up over the other side because I think it's a better um spot to be-- I keep doing that I keep doing that I keep pushing this of the instead of doing that-- I'll never make a camera person -- now what are you telling me about this Austin

Austin: umm this is still a video this is a game called Flashback.

Geoff: right and what's Flashback about

Austin: it's a very complicated story <Geoff: right> it's umm about well in the beginning you just wake up - with no memory and there are these people around and you escape umm this blind ()and they shoot you down and find this cube that has information in it about- saying that you lost your memory <Geoff: well right- [laughs] so you don't know at the beginning of the game that you've lost your memory> no you just know that you don't have any memory

Geoff: aw you find that out do you

Austin: yeah

Geoff: ohh -- and so and so how does this black box help you

Austin: umm in a minute it will show [soundtrack octave notes:] - umm () a hologram sort of thing [soundtrack: music starts]

Geoff: that's this here is it <Austin: yeah> right

Geoff:[reading from screen text] 'comrade you must be - wondering' <Austin: ()> 'good question but it would take too long to explain you must contact your cod friend is it <Austin: no it's your old friend > oh your old friend- something about Washington
Austin: he gives you your memory back and you find out you're really a scientist? [soundtrack music stops] and umm - found at that there are lots of aliens disguised as [soundtrack octave notes:] [laughingly] people all over the planet [soundtrack: drum beats start] trying to take over the planet - and they found out that you know the people? in? the middle? <Geoff: right> [soundtrack: drum beats stop]

Geoff: ohh so they [soundtrack: drumbeats start] the aliens actually took away your memory <Austin: yeah> [soundtrack: drumbeats stop] -- and so what's happening in this bit

Austin: well you're just going around trying to get things placed? in Washington [soundtrack: slow eerie music starts] where your friend is - and to kill aliens -- [soundtrack: music stops]

Geoff: so this seems to have more of a story <Austin: yeah> than a lot of games like um [soundtrack: music starts] <Austin: Sonic the Hedgehog> really doesn't have any story> and umm and Mortal Kombat don't really have much of a story do they where as this one's actually got - it's all a bit like an adventure isn't it [soundtrack: two chords announcement]

Austin: yeah

Geoff: these ah - what are those little split screens that we're seeing what do you call them

Austin: split screens

Geoff: those those half screens or I don't know< Austin: aww> what to call them

Austin: I just call them close up things <Geoff: close ups> yeah

Geoff: mmhm+ they're interesting aren't they

Austin: + they're just when you pick up something <Geoff: mmhm> like um [soundtrack octave notes:] you can pick up rocks[soundtrack octave notes:] and things like that <Geoff: mmhm> and they give you a close up [soundtrack: jungle sounds?]

---

Geoff: gee the graphics are very clever aren't they - the way that he hauls himself up there

Austin: they actually filmed someone and umm - they um like -

Geoff: oh they digitised digitised the images I have read about this they get real live actors and then they film them <Austin: yeah> and then they transfer the images to +

Austin:[soundtrack: beginning or repeated note] that's what they do in Mortal Kombat as well <Geoff: right> wotoscope?[soundtrack octave notes:]

Geoff: right that's an interesting little bit and I missed it but perhaps I ah if I could borrow [soundtrack: beginning or repeated note] that tape <Austin: yeah> I can talk about it but it's these [soundtrack: beginning or repeated note finish] there was a screen that just went there it is again the hand actually goes out something umm quite
interesting strikes me there [soundtrack: eerie music] umm that ahh - it's as as if you're seeing your own hand going out I mean that's quite different to um Sonic or um or Mortal Kombat isn't it or Street Fighter you don't actually see something that appears to be your own hand [soundtrack: starts] it's a quite fascinating

---

Geoff: what do you take this to be - is it like a jungle or something like that
Austin: yeah it's a lot of angry planets? it's just a jungle sort of <Geoff: mmhm> thing
--- [soundtrack octave notes:]

Geoff: it says up the top wounded man does that have any special significance
Austin: well it just is wounded man that you found and pretty asked you to find his teleporter so he can get medical attention <Geoff: aw = right> = so you go off and find his teleporter <Geoff: aw right> ( ) teleporter <Geoff: aw right> and you need to be ( ) away and that's only his ID card which you can use later on --

[soundtrack: music plays]

Geoff: it's got rather interesting music in it um
Austin: yeah just sometimes it shows a bit of music for some reason <Geoff: mmhm> not quite sure
Geoff: this music um does it remind you of anything - it reminds me of something
Austin: um I can't think of anything
Geoff: well- compare it with the music in um Sonic the hedgehog or
Austin: it's sort of more serious I suppose
Geoff: mmhm- what it reminds ME of is ah some of the music some of the television background music that you have in drama

[soundtrack: white noise blasts]

Austin: yeah it's more like a movie actually -- [soundtrack octave notes:] these little bits ( )
Geoff: showing cartridge ( ) this bit here with the hand <Austin: yeah> oh yeah [soundtrack: drum roll]

--- [soundtrack: reminiscent of the theme music from Danger Man, a television series of the seventies]

Geoff: what's happening here it seems to run across a ray or something
Austin: it's a special shield sort of thing that you can run across you use a cartridge to make it -- [soundtrack: white noise blasts]
Geoff: you're shooting at somebody at some
Austin: it's just shooting at nothing
Geoff: uh just a bit of random shooting [laughs]

[soundtrack octave notes:]

Geoff: what are those little screens that flash up

Austin: there all the [ ] rooms that you own all the things you have [soundtrack: announcing music] he just picked up a teleporter <Geoff: right> I don't know what with
Geoff: so what's the thing about the teleporter could you explain that a bit more I'm not sure what
Austin: that wounded man <Geoff: mmhm> lost his teleporter somewhere so he's just going out to find it
Geoff: and what's the teleporter actually do
Austin: teleports you somewhere I suppose
Geoff: ohh

---- Geoff: so is it [soundtrack: Danger Man music starts] is does finding the teleporter have some significance in the game what kind of significance [soundtrack: Danger Man type music stops]

Austin: umm well just so you can give it to the man
Geoff: aw right

---- [soundtrack: Danger Man music starts]

Geoff: that's the music I was referring to <Austin: yeah> before- it's interesting you know how in Sonic you have this continuous music it's like wallpaper music what I call wallpaper music it goes on and on and on and [ ] certainly [ ] whereas this game - what's the name of this game again <Austin: Flashback > Flashback this game has - what you might call incidental music- it's not all the time and it's got lots of interesting [soundtrack octave notes:] natural sounds

Austin: oh yeah [soundtrack:] so you get () link it to the teleporter? <Geoff: right> and he gives the teleports? away-- [soundtrack: announcing music ]

Geoff: which you pick up -- very clever don't you think when did you first get this game

Austin: I got it at Christmas
Geoff: right did it take you long to um figure out how it worked
Austin: yeah it ( ) this is another level
[soundtrack: 'danger man' music starts]

Geoff: so this is the same game <Austin: yeah> this is still Flashback

Austin: just a new level

Geoff: aw right - maybe I should just get a bit of this on the ( ) screen so has this got a name this new level

Austin: um - I can't think of its name <Geoff: but it has got one> yeah

----

Austin: the police are your enemies in this game

Geoff: the police are your enemies

Austin: and the aliens <Geoff: oh> so [soundtrack: cacophony] ( )

Geoff: right

----

Austin: from here you're getting your memory back ( )

Geoff: right [up tempo music begins] [reading from screen] 'previously you had lost your memory' so what's this what's happening here

Austin: you're just getting your memory back

Geoff: aw right

Austin: it's a special machine and now you're remembering you're remembering that you're a scientist who made- this thing that can detect ( ) people who aren't some evil aliens <Geoff: aw right [reading from screen] 'individuals whose molecular density is a thousand times the norm?' ( )> ( )

Geoff: [reading from screen in the manner of Walter Winchell] 'aliens who ( ) the population my investigations have attracted their vengeance [Austin chuckles] I'm no longer safe' dorr

Austin: there is aware of the recording

Geoff: [reading from screen] I'm recording the hologram and I'm saving the contents of my memory and send it to IAN who is IAN

Austin: your friend you're getting your memory back from <Geoff: aw right right>

Geoff: it's very funky music isn't it <Austin: yeah> I think it's the best music of any game that I've heard so far [soundtrack music abruptly stops]

Austin: now you have your memory back you just saw it coming up there
Geoff: who was that that went running off
Austin: you
Geoff: aw that's you - oh - not Ian
Austin: no Ian's not there
Geoff: that's Ian there presumably
Austin: no that's you
Geoff: oh that's you - OK - you do a lot of climbing in this game- yeah
Austin: there's a [soundtrack octave notes:] fuse in this um- button thing and it's broken [soundtrack: cacophony] ( ) get a fuse like ( ) there's a fuse just down here
Geoff: right [soundtrack: announcing music] so this is finding the fuse or something ( ) what did he just pick up there [soundtrack octave notes:] <Austin: yeah the fuse> the fuse [soundtrack octave notes:]-- and he's climbing again climb climb climb- or jump a bit of a Tarzan character this fellow
Austin: yeah [soundtrack octave notes:] now you put the fuse in the switch so that you can [soundtrack: cacophony] make the lift come down and ( )
Geoff: right and so the lift is now working <Austin: yep> so that he jumps on the lift- [soundtrack: cacophony]
Austin: there are no steps going anywhere it's just sitting there ( ) so can climb? as well as him like you do
Geoff: right -- so now what is he up to
Austin: he's going down into the subway to catch a train
Geoff: uh
----- [soundtrack: repeated low to high frequency slides]
Geoff: and he's back on the lift again [walking away from watching position?] has a fascination for things and handle? this boy doesn't he
----- [soundtrack: music starts with a high to low frequency fall]
Geoff: oh dear he just fell- through through the atmosphere
Austin: ( ) [soundtrack music stops] he doesn't know ( ) now it's that was supposed to happen just before the level [soundtrack: Danger Man like] now I'm trying to get the password
Geoff: so the passwords give you entry to - to different levels =
Austin: = yeah so you don't have to fish on the cloud? you don't have to spend hours getting up the levels [white noise; shooting sounds]

-----

Geoff: is he shooting at someone here

Austin: he was shooting at someone just a minute ago he was shooting at just a special-flying robot sort of thing <Geoff: mmhm> [music soundtrack starts and stops] see - but - but at the moment [soundtrack noise] ( ) a special games show - place but like umm the movie the Rain Man sort of a violent game show <Geoff: mmhm>

-----

Geoff: so there's a screen telling us your score

Austin: ( ) that you've just died and that you can continue if you want so that you can just let the time ( ) completely die <Geoff: right>

[announcing soundtrack]

Austin: that ( ) meter ( ) <Geoff: mmhm>

[music on soundtrack followed by a regular beeping sound]

Geoff: oops a reunion?

Austin: ( ) from the that's what the ( ) look like <Geoff: right> ( ) spying on them - ( )

Geoff: in some ways that's like comic books <Austin: yeah> isn't it those little snatches those little scenes <Austin: things falling down> mmhm [beeping stops] can you see that connection between the screens and comics you know they're stills and they've got text underneath them <Austin: yeah> they're very much like a combined-like here's an action part with figures moving and umm <Austin: then the imagery part telling the story> [brief musical passage] -- but those other bits are like stills are very much [white noise; gunshots] the other interesting thing about is that the um compared with a game like sonic or Mortal Kombat they don't have music running all the time and they don't always use up the whole screen like just what we were = watching <Austin: = yeah> only a section of the screen

[white noise sounds from soundtrack; announcement soundtrack; soundtrack octave notes:]

Geoff: did you play this game much when you first got it

Austin: yeah I played it heaps actually

Geoff: what happens when you when your um when you're a novice player of the game um

Austin: um people who when you play for the first time you find it quite boring cause you can't get anywhere but the more you play it the better you get <Geoff: right> ( ) and it's more interesting <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: so how do you know what to do at various points
Austin: umm - you can just work it out but when I got really stuck I just tried this magazine that told you how to get through [laughingly] the game so through that

Geoff: so it gave you tips <Austin: yeah> about what to do

[soundtrack: music starts]

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'we have a winner allow me to present Conrad My dear Conrad Titan Travel is happy to award you this superb journey to Earth'

Austin: 'followed by () destination Earth'

Geoff: does that remind you of anything

Austin: movies I suppose

Geoff: it reminds me of game shows

Austin: yeah () game show but yeah the thing like the roman? that's what happens when he just finishes that thing

[soundtrack music starts]

Geoff: ( ) from hand to hand goes the ID - from one hand to the other [soundtrack: Dangerman-like theme]

Austin: you can actually sneak past some of these then they realise who you are and start shooting at you

[brief upbeat musical soundtrack]

[another section of musical soundtrack]

Geoff: and I presume at various points in this game if you don't - if you're not adept at controlling the player I mean I presume that this character is controlled by the joystick by the <Austin: yes> by the <Austin: () > if you're not adept enough at various points umm you you die you

Austin: yeah <Geoff: is that what happens> it's very hard to control it like to jump you have to hold A and press UP <Geoff: mmhm> now for different types of jumps and it's <Geoff: mmhm> ( )

[soundtrack: squeaking sounds; soundtrack octave notes:]

Geoff: is that a do you select something on that ( )

Austin: yeah you can select- what thing you want to use <Geoff: mmhm> which one of your objects ( )

[soundtrack: lift sounds; piercing sound begins]
Geoff: what is that object that thing that looks like a *Macdonald's* hamburger with electricity coming out of it

Austin: that's a umm umm robot they're fly around and try and electrocute you --

[soundtrack: piercing sound stops]

Austin: 

---

Geoff: so presumably you are successful this time

Austin: yeah I think so

[soundtrack: white noise]

Austin: shield

Geoff: 

Austin: 

[soundtrack: white noise stops]

Austin: 

[soundtrack: music starts and stops; single tone sounds]

---

[single tone sounds]

Geoff: now what's happening here

Austin: just the same thing to get out of here and start the beginning of that level

Geoff: oh I see so you're actually saving the game as player

[Austin: yeah]

[soundtrack: white noise]

Geoff: just a bit of random firing

Austin: yeah

[soundtrack: music starts and stops; piercing sounds]

Geoff: what happened there

Austin: I got hit by one of those
[soundtrack; white noise starts and stops]

Geoff: can you control the player so that - ah the um the - the hero here so that he walks in different fashions

Austin: you can make him run or you can ah just like make him walk <Geoff: right>
but um - ( )

[soundtrack: white noise]

Geoff: or so the way that he walks is dependent on whether he has his gun out or not

Austin: ( )

Geoff: ()

Austin: ( )

Geoff: and why does ()

Austin: I'm not actually sure

[soundtrack: white noise stops momentarily]

Geoff: does this strike you as a violent game?

Austin: umm not that violent but you do a lot of shooting but um <Geoff: ( )> I don't know
[soundtrack: white noise stops] it really is quite violent - <Geoff: ( )> it's not as violent as *Mortal Kombat* or *Street Fighter* <Geoff: no it's not>

[soundtrack music starts]

Austin: I ( ) doing anything so so you can do the password just to see the end of the sequence

Geoff: aw right- and so this is the ending sequence is it <Austin: it> coming up

Austin: not right now but it might be in a minute

Geoff: aw right I might film some of it or I can get it off the tape of this can't I - it'd be interesting to look at

Austin: aw ohh no I'm doing a different thing

Geoff: so you're selecting a password or something here aren't you <Austin: yeah> yeah-
oh I see so you select a password out of that alphabet <Austin: yeah> and

Austin: oh I'm doing a - um lake? scale? level <Geoff: right> () problem?

[soundtrack: brief music]

[soundtrack octave notes:]

[soundtrack: drum rhythms]
Austin: ( )

----

Austin: there's a good bit in this- ( ) then the- big- plane - and you shoot at it <Geoff: a big plane > yeah it's um sort of the leader of all these enemies and it's sort of hung up from the ceiling and you shoot at it <Geoff: right>

----

[soundtrack: Danger Man theme followed by mechanical sounds and sounds of nocturnal creatures]

----

Geoff: it's got ( ) lot of sounds it's got sounds of the night frogs and - whatever

----

[soundtrack octave notes: repeated]

Austin: ( 0

Geoff: what happened there

Austin: I fell off a sort of cliff thing

Geoff: ohh

Austin: see in a minute I think - I taped the ending sequence

Geoff: right

Austin: I'm sure I taped it

Geoff: mmhm - and what do you like about the ending sequence

Austin: umm it just leaves a bit to be like it doesn't completely end the story <Geoff: right>[soundtrack: crescendo begins on music] it's when um it has these special things that you sit in and they sort of freeze you put you into suspended animation <Geoff: ohh that's a> ( ) kind of ending that isn't an ending is it >yeah so it yeah I think that was it

Geoff: so you put in a password which was psych + psych something

Austin: + yeah - yeah you're just flying away from this planet and it explodes

[soundtrack: eerie music]

Austin: so he doesn't have the chance? in the galaxy he's in so he umm () so there's no way he can get back to earth

Geoff: [reading from screen?] 'I'll probably drift in space for a very long time'
[soundtrack: theme music accompanied by screen credits]

Geoff: the end

Austin: and now it just goes through the names of the people who made it and it shows you bits from the game <Geoff: right>

Geoff: once again umm like it does in the end of sonic or the credits and I remember I said to you then like the end of a movie <Austin: yeah> -- and this this falling through space - vertigo -- oh ()

---- [soundtrack continues]

Geoff: I think it's amazingly good music

Austin: there's another game like this actually but - it's a it's really similar but it's really different as well - <Geoff: mmhm> () <Geoff: mmhm> () <Geoff: mmhm> () <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: this sounds like a feature movie

Austin: yeah

Geoff: I wonder where it was made do you know

Austin: I don't know- but in the video in change it says language change ()

Geoff: ohh yeah that's the subject? it's probably made in France it's a Sega game is it - Sega have Sega make their game all over the world - it's just a name () ----

[soundtrack theme song continues]

Geoff: [reading from screen] () it must be French tasters oh testers I thought it said tasters [chuckles] testers - would you like that job - testing video games- well there's one two three four five of them six of them - and there's a woman in there --

Austin: ()are more interesting game that would be interesting for females making things like Barbie dressups () picture of Barbie and put clothes on her ()

Geoff: but doesn't Rebecca like games

Austin: yeah -

Geoff: does she like some of the games that you've got does = she have ( )

Austin: = she likes ()

Geoff: mmhm

Austin: she likes Sonic the Hedgehog

Geoff: the hedgehog Sonic the hedgehog yeah
Austin: she doesn't really like *Flashback* - she just finds it too boring

[soundtrack theme continues]

Geoff: I think that tape's going to run out soon if it hasn't already - oh no still going must be getting near the end though <Austin: mmhm> cause I might stop it for a while and then um put a new tape in

Geoff: *Paperboy*

Austin: cause the ending sequence of this game I hired - um - *Streets of Rage* Geoff: oh yeah> just a person going out and beating up hundreds of people <Geoff: yeah so what do you think of that> it was fun very violent <Geoff: yeah and it doesn't have ( )

Geoff: so what do you think about all this- stuff you read in the papers about violent games <Austin: umm> people + jumping up and down

Austin: + I really think that people get worried about are really looking at the wrong things I saw this game I forget what it was called um it was acted out and filmed people who put ratings on films and that said that if it was a movie it would only be PG but there was heaps and heaps of controversy about it <Geoff: yeah>

Geoff: and because it was a game you think they were a bit more severe [soundtrack to *Sonic the Hedgehog* is heard] in the ratings <Austin: yeah>

Austin: and and they really ( ) weren't really that violent ( ) games ( ) *Mortal Kombat*

Geoff: I suppose that we've had violent movies for a long time <Austin: yeah> and the news is very violent it shows wars and people getting shot <Austin: which is real> mmhm mmhm

----

Geoff: this is *Sonic* moving rather fast

[soundtrack briefly starts and stops]

[soundtrack restarts]

Geoff: I recognise that soundtrack I've heard it many times

---- Geoff: do you find that after a while that you don't um play games much anymore <Austin: yeah>

Austin: yeah I don't play *Sonic* that much anymore <Geoff: mmhm> I've finished that game it's boring now <Geoff: mmhm> I don't play *Flashback* much I don't really play? much either

Geoff: what do you think it is about like when you stop playing a game ( ) what do you think has happened

Austin: just when you've finished it there's nothing more to see <Geoff: mmhm> there's no use in playing it anymore I s'pose <Geoff: mmhm>
Geoff: is it like ah is it in anyway like similar to finishing a book

Austin: umm I s'pose- like there are some games that you can watch or play heaps of times even though you've finished them <Geoff: mmmh>

Geoff: now this is oh no this is 'Sonic' Streets of Rage Street of Rage is coming on -- so our blond headed hero dispatches people by punching them out is that basically it

Austin: he's got lots of moves like that uppercut and um ( ) over things

Geoff: who's that bored looking character sitting in the armchair with his legs + folded

Austin: he's the sort of major enemy like he's this big business man which tries to takeover the city ( ) and he ( ) with these thugs who try to takeover the city and you have to stop them

Geoff: ow right and he's patiently watching

[continuous up tempo musical soundtrack]

---- Geoff: who's this charming fellow at the front here

Austin: ()

Geoff: ohh is he the big boss guy

Austin: yeah

Geoff: oh right -he was sitting down before

Austin: because he is a business man he probably wouldn't be [soundtrack music abruptly stops] that good at fighting he uses a machine gun <Geoff: mmmh> pause

Geoff: and why is it pausing oh you've paused it for some reason <Austin: yeah> to go to the toilet

Austin: I think I was looking for a magazine that said how to beat him

Geoff: ohh I see [chuckles] so it was ahh an appropriate moment to pause

[soundtrack re-starts with sounds of machine gun]

----

Geoff: he says something at the end there doesn't he

Austin: he just screams

Geoff: ah ha

Austin: see this is the end

[soundtrack beeps and screeches and then into melodic theme]
Geoff: so once again we have the credits who made it and who designed it the whole production team- like you find with movies- now this is made in Japan I would say
\(<\text{Austin: I think so}>\) judging from those Japanese names

Austin: yeah it would have been re-done in America or something--

----

Geoff: I think the end scenes on this are better than the game--

Austin: () strange little things like you see on people's names like where it says ancient and sheldon?

{end of audiotape}
Interview with Rebecca & Austin 8.7.94

[The interview takes place in Austin's house with both Austin and his sister Rebecca present. The sounds of a game that Austin is playing can be heard at the beginning of the audiotape from which this transcript is derived]

Geoff: I'll just turn something on here is that alright I can hear something buzzing

Austin: yeah [soundtrack of game stops]

Geoff: it's not too () it's just something-- [laughs] well I know which one it is Austin [laughter] I just pulled two of the plugs out and it's not those two it's that one - there well done OK what's this game what's this game called again

Austin: umm Beck?

Geoff: Beck? yes OK he runs in a rather ungainly fashion doesn't he like he's got an injured leg [chuckles]

Rebecca: yeah ()

Austin: ( )

[all laugh]

Geoff: oh I see <Austin: ()<Rebecca: ohh no () [reading from screen text] caught by the cops= you're fined <Rebecca:= oh no> $400 --what's the cash at the bottom is that to do with your points or something

Austin: yeah you get

Rebecca: if you win money for each race you win like if you come first you get $100

Austin: you win thousands of dollars with some ( )

Geoff: oh Road Race - that's-that's interesting cause I've seen ones like the umm ahh what are they called Nigel Mansell you know those <Austin: yeah> car <Rebecca: yeah yeah that's right> and umm I've seen a motorbike one the boys have got a motor bike one- for for the Atari I forget what it's called

Rebecca:[discussion with Austin]() or do you want to talk to him first or =

Geoff: = oh no what I would? what I thought of doing Rebecca <Rebecca: yeah> is just umm is yeah welcome to join in Austin too if you want but what I thought I'd just talk to you about is umm ahh there's a program on the ABC called Computer Hackers and Cyberpunks - I don't know whether you saw it

Rebecca: was it a whole lot of episodes

Geoff: it was in the Attitude series remember they= have a series <Rebecca:= right - I think we saw some of it>
Geoff: yeah and I've actually got a transcript of the whole show <Rebecca: right> here I mean I just did this off the tape umm and I'll see if I can find the bit- I'm just interested in this this ahh - umm I mean somewhere in it of the interviewing of ahh some feminists that were going to write computer games for women <Rebecca: ooh right was it on just the other night> oh no no this is this was quite some time ago it was umm - the 8th of September <Rebecca: oh last year> yeah - 8th of September 93 <Rebecca: right> it was first broadcast <Rebecca: right> umm I'll see if I can find my glasses

Rebecca: I think I must have just seen I think there was a series or sort of thing a bit like Beyond 2000 on about computers=

Geoff: =yeah there is al know there is one that's happened recently <Rebecca: yeah> umm - but this one you know this one was quite a while ago now I don't know what the hell I've done with my glasses [walks away] oh anyway it doesn't matter I think I can read without them

Rebecca: do you want me to turn the light on + will that ( )

Geoff:+ that might make it easier -- umm see if I can find the bit- -- oh actually there's a couple of there's a couple of bits that I thought might interest you umm there's a bit where they're talking about umm - cyberpunk and ahh - you know and they say [reading from written transcript] 'cyberpunk is a nineties version of flower power what began as a fictional computer rebellion has developed into a legitimate counter-culture' umm - and - um and they start talking about and they start to talk about networks and <Rebecca: yeah> and whether people should pay for it or whether it should be free <Rebecca: yeah> um and that kind of thing umm- ahh this bit this bit here I thought was interesting 'Cyberdada isa group of young people experimenting with technology and using it to find new means of expression for the way they feel about life as it is today. Troy Innocent and Dale Mason are Cyberdada and unlike much of the fashion of the eighties they have successfully blended their art and a strong political statement. Cyberdada is an important art form because it is not recycling of old images or styles but a completely new style based on the aesthetic of the computer.' Umm and you know they showed lots of images on on ah that were accompanying this == <Rebecca: =yeah> kind of RAPID changing images <Rebecca: right> so that it was like a new art form in a sense that you know how we're used to static art <Rebecca: yeah> and paintings and so on and here what you have is MULTIPLE images [fx] chooka chooka twu going like 400 a minute or something like that <Rebecca: wow> and doing kind of transformations- and I thought umm -this is this is interesting to me because umm - you know the exposure to games and getting used to rapid image change <Rebecca: mmmhhmm> and actually having some control over the image change <Rebecca: mmmhhhmm> umm is umm is to me some kind of a training some kind of a preparation= <Rebecca: =yeah> for what I don't know <Rebecca: yeah> -- but I'm - having said all that -- I mean - I know you're interested in film and film making and imagery - what can you say about your experience of games--is I mean you have first you have second hand experience of games and you have first hand experience of games <Rebecca: yeah> I mean how did it happen initially did you kind of did you kind of look over Austin's shoulder and watch him playing or

Rebecca: no David and I got games when we were little <Geoff: right> and umm - like we actually got a thing it wasn't an Atari we got a thing like an Atari but they were much much better ( ) I know that but then with this with the Sega thing like when Austin first got the ( ) it took me awhile so it wasn't looking over Austin's shoulder and I um thought I'd really hate the violent games too I really used to hate the violent games and
think they were really bad but I don't anymore I get bored with them quite quickly they seem to get boring more quickly than the other games <Geoff: mmhm mmhm> but I don't think they're the cause of any evil thing

Geoff: so it's often suggested in the popular press for example that - ahh - there is a kind of an almost a knee jerk connection a causal connection between violence depicted on the screen and real life violence

Rebecca: I definitely don't believe that because +

Geoff: well I don't either it's interesting that umm it's such a perennial issue = because

Rebecca: = yeah because it happened with books and television <Geoff: and comics and tele and film> every new thing that people have these days <Geoff: yeah> like hierarchy? what ever it is trying to say this is bad this is evidence this is what is causing all the problems in the society <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: so what you're saying is that things like Mortal Kombat which no doubt you've seen Austin play is ultimately boring

Rebecca: no no no they're really good fun for a while <Geoff: oh for a while that's why I said ultimately <Rebecca: then ultimately> after a while they do get ()

Geoff: so what kind of games umm have you found I mean what are your favourites games that you've actually found <Rebecca: uh> nonboring if there's such a thing+

Rebecca: + well I was saying to Austin the other day well yesterday that I realised that I found umm - games with character like the less life-like looks the more fun I find it

Geoff: so you find =

Rebecca: =but I like that Road Race one

Geoff: well having just watched it for the first time it looks fascinating [laughs] umm

Rebecca: there was a game of Pinball - I think I like ones that were more like the first ones I had when I was little <Geoff: mmhm> like there's a game called Pinball which I really like it was really easy for me and there was a game um - I like some educational games but I get bored with them -

Geoff: have you seen some of those umm- games that have text and you have to kind of solve some=

Rebecca: = yeah I find those ones really boring

Geoff: what about the - Ben's got a game called Civilisation in which you have to develop a +

Rebecca: + I've heard of that I've never seen it but I've heard of it <Geoff: yeah> I don't know what I think of that; it looks very boring but everyone I know <Geoff: mmhm> who's played it says it's really amazing
Geoff: it has lots of screens on it, like umm umm split screens you know the screen comes up and in one corner it tells you ahh how your graineries <Rebecca: yeah> are going <Rebecca: yeah> and how your and how your wall building or = citywall building

Rebecca: =and you can do things like how much pollution there is

Geoff: yeah and there's a there's a lot of ( ) it's in a way it's like a stock exchange <Rebecca: yeah> game I think with all this information on <Rebecca: yeah> the screen while you have to manage it <Rebecca: yeah> and decide what to build next and where to what to explore next and all that type of thing <Rebecca: yeah> mmmh - yeah I was interested in watching Austin play the other day [to Austin] what was that game you were playing Austin - the other day - the one with the what <Austin: Flashback > Flashback - have you seen him playing Flashback

Rebecca: yep

Geoff: you know how it has scenes in it where you it's as if you see your hand <Rebecca: yeah> going out instead of having the instead of being a third person looking on a character on the screen it's as if it's you <Rebecca: mmmh > I thought that was ah that was quite interesting because it ah for me it connects up to what I understand virtual reality to be <Rebecca: yeah> you know in the sense it's like you have control of a robot hand <Rebecca: yeah> and so it's a kind of extension of your um limbs

Rebecca: yeah I was at [laughs] Time Zone and [dog barks] ( ) you could change the perspectives either watching or what else ( ) [dog continues barking] but it's quite hard to play a game like that if you're actually playing it because you're so unused to it [dog continues to whine] and it's more like [Rebecca opens the door for the dog] <Geoff: [to dog] sit down go on sit down come on> ooh I was going to say something about computers and dreams - I can't think what I think when they're like that they remind me more of dreams --

Geoff: mmmh- well one of the questions that's often put to people when they're recounting dreams is whether umm whether they see the themselves in the dream as a third person or whether they experience the dream in the first person as it were <Rebecca: yeah yeah> umm and I think perhaps people have preferences

Rebecca: I think mine changes I think sometimes= <Geoff:= yeah + well yeah well perhaps people swap>= yeah yeah + it's the third person but maybe it's more often --

[alternative transcription of last interchange follows]

Rebecca: I think mine changes I think sometimes <Geoff: yeah> its first per <Geoff: well> son <Geoff: yeah> and sometimes its third <Geoff: yeah well perhaps people swap> yeah yeah but maybe it's more often --

Geoff: what do you think about the I mean we've briefly touched on violence but what do you think about the um - I mean one of one of the obvious things to say about the computer industry umm itself and also the subsection of the industry which is now involved in the in the production and distribution of games it's that this is an industry which is dominated by men and umm - I've only come across one or two examples of games that have been designed by women <Rebecca: mmmh> one is umm one is actually one of those text games <Rebecca: right> that you described as being boring umm that was that was made by Roberta Williams who's the umm she and her husband
started *Sierra-on-line* which is a software company <Rebecca: right> but I think now writes games for *Nintendo* <Rebecca: right>  

Rebecca: and what was HER game ABOUT <Geoff:= her> = I'm sure that it could be interesting  

Geoff: her game was umm-it was a game where you got s I mean this was made a long time ago <Rebecca: right> so she's quite possibly made new games since <Rebecca: yeah> then this is the early eighties so this is just after the advent of the personal computer <Rebecca: yeah> umm just after the *Apple II* umm came out I think it came out in 1978 or something - umm and her game was one of these ones where there was a lot of text on the screen admittedly there wasn't the sophistication that there is today so you know you kept getting these screens <Rebecca: yeah> that there is today so you kept getting these screens of text and you had to make a choice you know like A B or C or you had to type something in <Rebecca: mmmh> and then you'd get another screen of text so I don't know it was solving a mystery <Rebecca: yeah> something like that umm and the screens were still <Rebecca: yeah> they weren't even animated screens umm but I mean I'm interested in this whole thing of in a sense we don't know what a game written by a woman and consumed by lots of women <Rebecca: mmmh> create that kind of scenario what that would be like <Rebecca: yeah> because it's never happened <Rebecca: yeah> and you know I wonder you know it's hard to know where to start ah with this - you know do you start with it I mean the quote I was trying to look up for you was a group of feminists who were writing games and who were saying that their games I mean I guess they were presuming that because they were women writing games that their games would be [laughing] popular with women <Rebecca: right> which is a dubious assumption <Rebecca: yeah yeah> because I mean one of the possibilities is that maybe no games will be popular with women umm because there's something about the whole format <Rebecca: mmmh> there's something about the whole the whole umm method of presentation that women don't like you know and that women faced with a choice between playing computer games and doing something else 9 times out of 10 opt for doing something else might <Rebecca: yeah yeah> now I don't know what do you think about that do you think that do you think there there is a problem umm with engaging with the world in this particular way umm  

Rebecca: I'm not sure like like there are lots of things about computer games that I just like I just don't know how to answer even for myself- like like um- when I try to imagine games written by women I think of really dumb things <Geoff: like what> let's dress Barbie [laughter] <Geoff: but that> but that wouldn't be a feminist would it what sort of games would they write  

Geoff: [laughs] I'm asking you  

Rebecca: umm <Geoff: no well you're thinking> there could be it just really depend on who wrote it whether they if they decided to use a typical format then they'd be using a man's format so that it wouldn't really be a feminist game something like blow away - male chauvinist men [laughter] or something like that like I'm sure men and women could both get into it and have a really good time  

Geoff: but I guess that's in a sense that's just the reverse of games like *Nighttrap* I mean I don't know whether you've heard about *Nighttrap* but it's a game that umm it was the one that was banned in Australia and it umm it depicts these women umm the purpose goal of the game is to protect women umm from these nasty *Ninja-turtle* looking attackers <Rebecca: alright> and if you're unsuccessful these turtles push out their little jabbers into the women's neck and drain them of blood <Rebecca: ow wow oh really>
Rebecca: I think it's really good that in games like *Mortal Kombat* they have women characters like I used to always get really annoyed that oh god that's so stupid as if a really good fighter would LOOK like that I'd get angry at the I don't know there'd be huge breasted women in little tiny leotards and that used to ( ) I think it's really good that there are women that are just as good just as good at fighting as the men so so males choose to play women cause they know that women can ( ) they know that ( ) it doesn't matter whether you're male or female in games like that I think that's really good <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: well I guess in most well in *Mortal Kombat* for example I think there is one female character <Rebecca: there's only one> and nine <Rebecca: and that's probably because the Japanese know that like only one in nine girls [laughs] will play it

Geoff: ohh most of the most of the research I've come across has suggested that men outnumber women in videogame parlours by about six to one <Rebecca: yeah right> that's equivocal because you're not quite sure whether they're actually playing or whether they're <Rebecca: participating> they're watching their boyfriend sort of thing - umm

Rebecca: ( )

Geoff: yeah yeah umm the couple of times I've been in --

Rebecca: I was in one recently and I saw umm there were lots of Asian girls there < Geoff: mmhm> so < Geoff: mmhm> it'd probably really be interesting to find out what it's like in Japan-- whether more girls most be () it's still less

Geoff: my suspicion would be that there would be women in the age groups before they're married <Rebecca: yeah > they would be more likely to umm to be playing then because I know once they're married () on a lot of expectations she takes on particularly the idea that probably even more so than in our society that she serves serves the man <Rebecca: yeah yeah > ----

Austin: () lots of

Geoff: I did come across a letter written by a Chinese girl who was thirteen who'd gone to one of the main cities in China for the first time I mean this is about 10 years ago how fascinated she was with *Space Wars* *Space Wars* was one of the first arcade <Rebecca: right> games

Rebecca: that's really interesting cause lots of females I know including myself are really interested in space and want to go to space and that's a real thing not a <Geoff: mmhm mmhm> not a - not a game <Geoff: mmhm> it's also a fantasy as well because only astronauts at the moment [laughingly] go to space

Geoff: well the group was saying tome the other day when we were looking at *Flashback* that what he really liked about the end of the game that he didn't finish victorious - that in that game I think you were preserved I think cryogenics comes into it <Rebecca: yeah yeah > you float through space <Rebecca: yeah > um until the next encounter

Rebecca: [animatedly] yeah which is I I don't know I only think things like that are really sneaky that they're just doing it so that you'll just buy number two when number two comes out <Geoff: mmhm> -- it's not really
Geoff: ah it's the marketing side of it <Rebecca: yeah> yeah I guess it's a con in that they persuade you - I talked to Melinda about umm games and at the time I was talking to her we came across an article in the paper about a guy who lecture in politics at Macquarie University and what he does and it's not exactly A GAME as such but it seems to me that it's connected with this whole activity and what they did there is they - they umm they're studying international relations and negotiations that take place internationally and they have managed to get a computer link across the world <Rebecca: yeah> courtesy of the united states defence department so they have a kind of satellite hookup and they have a computer lab at Macquarie a computer lab at somewhere in I think it was Israel and another computer lab somewhere in the states and they actually PLAY international diplomacy they have a they have a scenario for a potential conflict let's say in the middle east and then they have negotiation which take place via the computer screen <Rebecca: yeah> and he was saying that you know that the students had got so interested in the whole +( )

Rebecca: + what does he lecture in

Geoff: government <Rebecca: government> it's like politics <Rebecca: yeah> and um particularly international politics international conflict and ah he said that it's not it's not unusual for some of his students to be so fascinated with the whole process that they'll sit at the terminal for eight hours <Rebecca: YEAH yeah > waiting for messages to come back and then send a new message <Rebecca: wow> now this is a I don't see this as totally disconnected from <Rebecca: mmhm mmhm> from the kind of thing that computer games are doing I suppose one of the interesting things about it is that it's more real life in the sense that you know that the person there is a person<Rebecca: +mmhm mmhm> on the other end <Rebecca: yeah> and that the whole thing hasn't been predetermined in the <Rebecca: yeah> and the computer's just a - a -- fast way of getting the message across <Geoff: mmhm mmhm that's right> like the fastest available technology

Geoff: yeah yeah I would imagine that they're using an email ah facility <Rebecca: yeah> so they're able to you know how email works - oh well with email you umm you're sitting at your computer terminal and you write a letter basically =

Rebecca: = actually I do somewhere I worked once had it ( ) <Geoff: yeah yeah that's right>

Geoff: so you type the message in like you would on a word processor <Rebecca: yeah> but once you're happy with it you just simply click on the relevant button and the message is sent instantaneously <Rebecca: yeah> and there's a bit of provided everything works on the system it doesn't always work there might be something down somewhere or you know some problem <Rebecca: yeah> but provided everything works it gets there maybe within five minutes <Rebecca: right> maybe within a minute <Rebecca: wow> and your message is there but then it's it's effective in the person's mailbox and they have to actually look in their mailbox <Rebecca: yeah yeah> and they may not they may not be there <Rebecca: yeah > so it could just sit there until they come in until they check their mail <Rebecca: yeah> but as soon as they open up their the relevant bit of software ah they'll get a message to say they have new mail <Rebecca: right> and then they can and they can look at the various things
Geoff: yeah I'll see if I can find this bit that ah I thought might be of interest umm {tape stops; tape re-started} [looking at transcript] umm umm umm -- oh yeah that's just the interview still with the -with the artist [reading from transcript] 'Virginia Barrett is a cyberfeminist' you know you know cyberspace is this term that's been coined by William Gibson who wrote science fiction novels like 'Neuromancer' and 'VirtualLight' <Rebecca: right> two that he's written and Cyberspace is actually like we're talking about email cyberspace is like where communication happens <Rebecca: right> it's like nowhere in a sense <Rebecca: yeah> because the message is begun electronically umm [reading from transcript] Virginia Barrett is acyberspace feminist and performatrice artist. She thinks women must become more involved in taking control of computer technology' ah this is Virginia Barrett 'In the main I would say that mainstream software is about it's a testosterone zone' she says laughs umm 'Virginia believes the power of computer technology has been hijacked by software programmers who are mainly - young white American and male. This is Virginia Barrett again 'I think it's got a lot to do with just sort of a cultural construction. Like from you know school age up girls are not supposed to be good at science and maths. Computers are mostly seen as a logical site as women women are not seen to be logical = and rational

Rebecca: = and also I think computers are seen -by women as umm as something that would hold women DOWN as well because it's a keyboard and because women generally get jobs - men often become scientists and women often become receptionists <Geoff: yep yep> and so that keyboard has FOR ME the stigma of a typewriter and umm <Geoff: yeah yeah> and that sort of stuff

Geoff: well I think that that's absolutely right I think that ah you know a lot of women feel bound by it <Rebecca: yeah> in the sense that they've just got to use the thing and play by the rules you know <Rebecca: yeah> so they don't see it as a creative instrument <Rebecca: mmm> yeah

Geoff: [resumes reading] 'are seen to be logical and rational and therefore how could they deal with these logical and rational machines. You see the male domination of the computer industry um reflected a lot in computer games for example. You know you go into a video arcade and you know all the games are splatter-sim.' I like that description 'splatter sim' isn't that wonderful um - you know shoot em up games flight simulators. The interviewer says 'In 1991 Virginia and three other young feminists formed the Venus Matrix to attack the male domination of computer hardware and software.' It's very interesting that they used the word attack too. <Rebecca: yeah yeah> [continues reading] 'the four cyberfeminists who are involved in Venus Matrix have really just gotten JACK OF the boys toys and wanted to steal them for ourselves and use them because we think they're powerful and sexy and fun.' This is the commentator interviewer again 'Venus Matrix is developing a computer game of their own ah but All New Jen - that's what the game's called ah is probably as far away as you can get from what the major software giants think young women will <Rebecca: right> play

Rebecca: right [laughs] it will probably be good then [laughing] it'll probably be interesting

Geoff: yeah- this is Virginia Barrett again 'The market research that Nintendo has done to determine what sort of games young girls would like resulted in the development of a game a game called Barbie' [laughs] <Rebecca: [groans] ohh wow> that is and that is the adventures of Barbie on a day when she is to have a date with Ken [laughing] and she has to go to the Hypermart and find an outfit fight off a rival for her main squeeze's affections <Rebecca: ohh MY GOD > and you know eventually either gets to go on this
date with Ken or not' <Rebecca: OHH so if you LOST this other girl will get to go on the date with Ken - how horrible what a bad game> 'Virginia fears' <Rebecca: [disgust displayed] ohhhh> this is the commentator again 'Virginia fears that male domination of the games industry will discourage young women from using computer technology and enjoying the power it can bring' Virginia Barrett 'It's important that women are involved in technology so that they can have the chance to shape the future'

Rebecca: the really really bad thing is I think I think if I was little and that was advertised I probably would have wanted it. I cause I had BARBIE DOLLS <Geoff: mmhm> and umm and they way they advertise things like that is they say it's for GIRLS and so you think wow all these things are normally made for little boys this is just for girls and so you get it and then because it's so BORING as so DUMB that's things like that are probably what turn women off computers and have them and just have a mental - message in their heads that says no this is boring this is not interesting for me because the bits of it that are JUST FOR THEM truly are really boring and -not creative at all <Geoff: mmhm> to find out what is creative is really - but I don't know it could be quite hard for men as well as women to - to actually be creative with computers <Geoff: mmhm> just ( ) <Geoff: mmhm> cause that's the thing I don't I don't know if it IS HARDER for men like it's easier it's obviously it's obvious that more boys USE computer GAMES but I don't know if that means it's easier for them to - I guess there'd be more used to the [door closes] set up of computers --

Geoff: you know I think I think umm you know the word hegemony is often used to talk about a whole construction. you know you where you get a kind of interlocking of one thing with another so like with computer games for example they are about drawing on already existing um cultural products like comics like film <Rebecca: yeah> and so they're drawing on they're already drawing on cultural products <Rebecca: yeah> which are umm tend to put a male point of view <Rebecca: yeah> and so they're like shoot em up films like um comic strips and <Rebecca: mmhm> like violent comic strips and the action comics and so on - so - I suppose in order to change that what what we're talking about is ummis alternative constructions <Rebecca: mmhm> or oppositional constructions <Rebecca: mmhm> of a - of games to use the example that we're focusing on <Rebecca: yeah yeah> we're not saying -- you know I don't think I see it in terms of a - turning around the whole industry <Rebecca: no> I actually see it in terms of of uh - actually having some products there which are made umm from a different point of view <Rebecca: yeah yeah> which express a different a different view point <Rebecca: yeah> I don't I don't see much evidence of this happening <Rebecca: no> although I do having talked about that experiment at Macquarie Uni I see that as very promising because it's and it doesn't seem to from what I can gather I mean it's it's something I need to find out more about And Andrew Vincent is the name of the fellow who's Dr Andrew Vincent umm - it'd be interesting to go and talk to him <Rebecca: yeah> in fact I think I will <Rebecca: yeah> to umm - my suspicion is that both males and females kind of get hooked on it <Rebecca: yeah> it's not just a boys club there's something that you know both men and women enjoy -- but it certainly SEEMS to bethe case that ahh it's - it's boys that enjoy computer games <Rebecca:mmhm> I mean that brings me back to another thing can you remember from your you know when David and you were interested in computer games can you remember whether umm you got bored with them before David did or =

Rebecca:= yeah I did <Geoff: yeah> because umm we had a computer when we were young and David was really interested in learning the LANGUAGE <Geoff: mmhm> and making up games and I wasn't at all I just wanted to play them <Geoff:mmhm> --

Geoff: and you were younger than + how much younger than David
Rebecca: I was a little bit younger than David only a year.

Geoff: a year - yeah I see I have a little bit of a thesis about this and I don't know whether it makes sense to you but I suspect that the phone rings um I'll turn the tape off {tape restarted} what I was saying is that I have a bunch <Rebecca: [to her mother] hi > that women might and girls might actually exhaust their interest in games before the guys <Rebecca: mmmh> so that they might actually become interested younger umm become disinterested <Rebecca: oh right> earlier um

Rebecca: yeah - I used to get REALLY frustrated with David wanting to be in front of the computer all the time too <Geoff: mmmh> I just couldn't understand how he could sit there like he'd sit there ALL day and - before then he and I - like before OHH WOW before we got the computer you know we were really really close we ALWAYS played together and after that like - he just sat [laughingly] at the computer all day and played [laughingly] and so

Geoff: well I can remember you playing together you know when our families first met <Rebecca: yeah yeah> and how you used to love make believe and =

Rebecca: = yeah that's right and outdoor games I thought you meant playing computer games

Geoff: oh no no no I meant make believe play and making cubbies <Rebecca: yeah yeah> and all that kind of stuff <Rebecca: yeah> because I can remember times that you played with ah Melinda and <Rebecca: yeah> and that type of thing so I mean this I find this type of thing really fascinating and I find it fascinating because umm I'm not saying that playing computer games takes you right away from the social world because that would be stupid you know I mean Austin plays with James <Rebecca: yeah yeah> and with other friends but it seems to me that it CAN - I mean people can involve themselves in solitary play <Rebecca: mmmh> and that EXCLUDES you know the social world and I just wonder whether umm you know it it strikes me that the umm you know girls often ah are more interested in the social world and and=

Rebecca: = or maybe just need something more responsible for some reason like maybe if it was MORE interactive than it is <Geoff: mmmh mmmh yeah>

Geoff: like the game like the thing I was talking about at Macquarie Uni <Rebecca: yeah yeah> which is truly interactive +

Rebecca: + yeah right cause when I was saying interactive I was thinking of virtual reality and I just don't know what it is like I think the whole thing of virtual reality sounds really exciting but really frightening as well like - it could be REALLY BAD it could just like - be used to control people SO () but there are really amazing things about it as well <Geoff: mmmh>

Geoff: yeah well my understanding of it at the moment is that there is a lot of hype surrounding it so that - people are wanting to SELL new equipment and make more money <Rebecca: yeah> and ah yet um you know in some ways - even the even the phrase itself is problematic virtual reality I mean if you want true interaction go and talk to someone <Rebecca: yeah yeah> if you want um if you want exciting reality go outside [both laugh]
Rebecca: well yeah I was thinking in virtual reality maybe you can fly and but in real reality you can hang glide and parachute and things like that - so why not yeah

Geoff: it's a contradictory - there are contradictions in the use of the term and I think you're quite right in identifying control as an as an issue here because ah you know if you're talking about the visual aspect of umm virtual reality um that's what it's about it's about the controlling of imagery um and certainly a richness of imagery but nothing like the nothing like the real thing <Rebecca: yeah> you go outside there and as you say you hang glide and you watch the movement and feel the wind rushing past you <Rebecca: yeah> yeah OK alright I'm going to stop there

{tape stopped}
James, Anna and Sally playing videogames 11.7.94

[The following transcript was made from a videotaped recording which shows James and his sisters, Sally and Anna in the loungeroom of the family home, in a village on the Blue Mountains. The day was overcast and cold. James's mother was at her usual work as a pre-school supervisor. James's father was at home with the three children. James is the eldest child and the only boy in the family. The console player was connected to the family television located in the loungeroom of the house.]

Geoff: this is like Mortal Kombat

James: yeah it's more like Street Fighter 2 'cause it's a take off of Street Fighter 2
<Geoff: right> ( )

Geoff: what's the difference between Mortal Kombat and Street Fighter 2

James: slower fly kicks different moves- you usually Street Fighter 2 has basically the same moves to um Mortal Kombat has like three ( ) and so on Street Fighter 2 has just like fireballs and things <Geoff: right> and is not as imaginative <Geoff: right>

Geoff: so you reckon this one's better do you

James: what than Street Fighter 2 <Geoff: yeah> no I prefer Street Fighter 2 <Geoff: do you> yep it's still a lot more fun

---- [soundtrack utterance]

Geoff: what's he say there

James: cal a bonga?

Geoff: what

James: do you ever watch the turtles

Geoff: no

James: oh he it's an old turtles expression 'calabonga'

Geoff: calabonga

James: yeah

Geoff: and what's that mean

James: I don't know

Geoff: it's just what they say

James: yeah

Geoff: they don't mean anything in = particular
James: = just like *Bart Simpson's* 'ah curumba' if you ever watch *the Simpsons*  
<Geoff: curumba> aye curumba <Geoff:ah curumba> aye curumba <Geoff: aye curumba> yeah <Geoff: right>  

Geoff: I've watched *the Simpson's* a little bit  
James: that's more like *Bart's* +  
James's father: + you done much with your kids  
Geoff: sorry  
James's father: you done much with your kids  
Geoff: yeah - I've done some on um Ben - he's the youngest he's 15 but he seems to have got through his- um  
James' father: videogame stage  
Geoff: his videogame stage yeah he's into basketball and he's almost as tall as me  
James' father: oh really - it's a good start for basketball  
Geoff:[laughs] that's right it's basketball basketball or more basketball  
James' father: oh right well at least it's outside and exercise<Geoff: yeah> so I reckon it's good <Geoff: yeah>  

[beeping sound from screen]  
Geoff: so what's this say 'life life and bonus' what's the difference between life and bonus  
James: it's like um -- just bonus points you get at the end of the round  
Geoff: ohh right  

**[screen shot: girls watching]**  
Geoff: and do you girls play videogames  
Sally: sometimes  
James: she does sometimes  
Geoff: you don't  
James: she plays *Mortal Kombat* and *Paperboy*  
Anna: I have tried ()
James: you don't want to be good do you ( ) our TV's not very good at the moment - can't really see what's happening very well - see there they um - the story is that someone CLONED the turtles <Geoff: yeah> I can reset it so you can see the story -

Geoff: the story is sorry

James: the story is that um - the bad dudes made clones of all the turtles like heroes --

Geoff: and what do they make clones of the turtles for

James: so they can kill them basically I'll show you the story--

[screen titles]

Geoff: [reading from screen] (' ') meditates'

James: [reading from screen] 'peacefully? my sons you are not my sons you argue ha ha ha they kill me?'

Geoff: 'meanwhile in the sewers of Manhattan - ha- greetings turtles your master Splints? is ours now'

James: 'what why you are the only chance to save him is to place me in dimension x along with some of my friends my ( )'

Geoff: 'evil turtle = clones - is going to need some help on this one'

James: = alone

Geoff: 'you can count on us we're with you all the way' ullo we're on our way to dimension x'

James: now he's got the ( )

----

James: now I'm guiding the clone of Casey Jones - which is one of the turtles names

[shot of video screen pans to shot of Sally]

----

James: no way

[shot of dog in corner of room curled up on chair]

----

[soundtrack: round three]

Geoff: [reading from screen?] 'Clone Casey playing Raphael'

James: yeah
---

[James stamps on the floor]

Geoff: I see - <James: you have to do that occasionally> that stops the picture from disappearing completely does it +

James: + yeah - it disappears into a lot of dots -- he's bloody dynamite

James: ha ha ha watch this the instant replay - of me - kicking his scrawny little

Geoff: butt =

James: = butt

--

Geoff: oh so this is the + replay [shot of screen]

James: + I'll get this to rewind- yeah this is the replay

----

[pan to James]

James: now we're going to

[soundtrack: round one]

James: oh man - ( )

James: do you know anything about the turtles

Geoff: no tell me about the turtles

James: well obviously they're mutant they're like a cross between human and turtle - it's a cross between a rat and a human founded them right and he called them after his famous and his most favourite artists which were Raphael Michelangelo Leonardo and Donatello <Geoff: oh right> that's why they're all called like Raphael

Sally: and called and named them ( )

James: and he called the team? entry? the hero? turtles different teams for different countries

Geoff: so that's what they're called here is it

James: no what's they're called in um - the place where they made scams of this game wherever it is

Geoff: Japan perhaps

James: I suppose perhaps ( )
Geoff: and what's this little animal down here is this a cross between a rat and a
James: it's supposed to be a labrador cross but I don't think so it's called ( )
Geoff: it looks a bit small
James: I think it's sort of a chihuahua cross labrador
Geoff: right
James: we sorta just got her so he can have a friend
Geoff: right
James: [directed to dog] oh don't ( ) don't ( )
Geoff: oh why not he's just cleaning himself

James: watch this frame by frame
Geoff: so what's this a replay again is it
James: yeah and you can change the replay like you can rewind it you can fast forward
it you can show it frame by frame like that <Geoff: oh right so show me how + > + rewind it <Geoff: show me = > = look he's levitating
Geoff: yeah that's the rewind --
James: and that's the fast forward that's the rewind and this is the fast forward like that
Geoff: oh right so it's all stored there = and you can just play
James: = yeah like that's frame by frame that's faster that's rewind and that's fast forward whatever
Geoff: uh huh let me just bring the camera over and show me that again
[shot of joystick]
James: rewind- fast forward
Geoff: hang on where are we
James: slightly faster frame by frame
Geoff: wait a minute- I've just gotta come out a bit
James: can you see this is focus
Geoff: yep yep got it now  [shot of James's hand pointing to controls on the joystick]

James: that bottom is rewind on the instant replay that one is fast forward that one is slightly faster that's pause and that's to see it frame by frame

Geoff: oh right good

----

James: now this guy's hard

Sally: ( ) play it

James: ( )

----

James: did you see that disappeared completely from the screen

Geoff: I'm just gonna stop this at this point to make sure that we've got a picture have you got a VCR there

James: yeah

Geoff: can we just um- run this through just to see what +

James: + do I need to turn this off

Geoff: what

James: want me to turn this off

Geoff: no I don't think so

{tape stopped; brief viewing of tape to make sure that Camera was recording; tape re-started}

[television soundtrack of daytime show in addition to talk of kids]

Anna?() [the girls are paying attention to the cats and talking to them; what they are saying is unclear]

James: choose a game from the great range

Geoff: choose a game - um - what've we got here *Mortal Kombat* <James: um *Paperboy  Hero Turtles  Columns  Where in the world's Carmen San Diego

Sally: which one

James: it's not really actioney

Geoff: no but I'd like to see it <James: yeah> I've heard a lot about it
Sally: what is it

Geoff: um the *Carmen San Diego* one

James: um- dad- dad- dad payed 40 dollars for it it's definitely not going to get 40 dollars worth of play

Geoff: isn't it

James: no =

M?: = ( )

Geoff: do you reckon 40 dollars is what

Sally: ( )

Geoff: what it sucks does it +

James: + it's just like a computer game essay [theme music starts]

Geoff: a computer game essay

James: like a computer game exam- <Geoff: oh yeah> it's like you know Neopolitan's that dude that they named ice cream after

Geoff: neopolitan [laughs]

James: they ask you these questions about ( ) and right here I'm just walking around a building- I'll show you ( ) then I'm going to have a glass of coffee before I start the game see I can catch the cup or I can not catch it- sorta like a game - I got a ( )

Geoff: I'll tell you what

James: yeah

Geoff: umm - let's try- can you pause that

James: this is + paused like that

Sally: + kitty go away

Geoff: I've just got an idea here- I'm going to shut that thing off again cause I'm wondering whether we could stick <James: watch this it's a science experiment> the

Geoff: um- what I'm thinking is that we could - if we put that that um tape in the VCR we could record it straight off the screen couldn't we

James: can you do that

Geoff: is your VCR connected up to your television

James: yeah
Geoff: yeah - so we could record it straight off off the screen- has your um- - wait a minute- um -- yeah OK - we could record it straight off the screen now the next question IS

James: yeah

Geoff: have you got a- a microphone socket

James: see right now it's not tuned into the VCR it's tuned into the video will that be a problem

Geoff: what what this isn't tuned into the VCR

James: = when you you turn this dial to get it on the TV -and it's on and tune yourself to that which is hooked up to the aerial

Geoff: but this is still connected up to the tv isn't it

James: true might work

Geoff: so shouldn't it work

James: yeah

Geoff: well let's try it I mean we can we can give it a test - hang on - we'll stop this

{videorecording of brief passage of broadcast television}

{tape stopped; attempt to connect with screen was unsuccessful; tape restarted}

James: you gotta help me out with this but

Geoff: that's the Peter Gunn theme

James: what

Geoff: that's the Peter Gunn theme

James: Peter Gunn

Geoff: Peter Gunn yeah

James: haven't heard of him

Geoff: it's a little bit like Peter Gunn - a little bit like it

James: think it's a little bit loud

Sally: can you turn it down

James: no

-- [shot of videoscreen with elevator depicted]
James: if you walk out of them then it resets - like if you go straight to a proper place and start

Geoff: right

James: here we are

[shot of videoscreen with face-still alongside text]

---

Geoff: and why do you think you're not going to get your 40 dollars worth

James: um 'cause no one ever plays it

Geoff: why don't they play it

James: um good question

Geoff: umm

James: good question

Geoff: well what's the answer

James: oh - as I said it's just like a - a exam

Geoff: it's like an exam

James: except on the computer

Geoff: too much like school is it

[soundtrack: music]

James: by the way we're in a time machine <Geoff: mmhm> that's the name

Geoff: and it gives you all this text

James: 'you've just inserted a time control () rules' what [reading from screen sotto voce ()] oh great I have 35 hours to catch a crim -- travelling takes about 3 of the time--

Geoff: isn't this the game they play at school

James: yeah [reading from screen] he wanted to find out more about a political party the Kuomintang please light on the +

Geoff: Kuomintang oh sounds Chinese

James: yeah I'll do one more I'll get ( ) --

Geoff: seems to be a map of the long march?

James: is that Chinese
[soundtrack:]

Geoff: yep -- it's got weird sounds

James: yeah brip brip brip brip

Sally: you're stepping onto the cord

James: now this'll be weird this road- <Anna: you're stepping on the cord> you're stepping on the cord- must be on the right track - he was going to um liquidation sales - Dutch West Indies South Africa - Africa

Geoff: Dutch ah Holland

James: did the Dutch East India Company founded the first um settlement in South Africa <Geoff: mmm> it was just a refreshment station-- [reading from screen] 'now he planned to watch the ground breaking' do you know this one St Peter's Basilica

Geoff: umm in Rome --

James: which is

Geoff: Italy

[shot of player]

James: we'll probably catch him but we won't have a warrant so he'll escape [soundtrack: musical theme] it's that his destination but we don't have a warrant so we can't arrest him

Geoff: do you know a game that um- you can play with a number of players you have about three or four people

James: now we're just guessing

----- [screen : fixed picture with text on right hand side of screen]

----- [Anna is knitting; Sally is nursing the cat; Sally yawns]

Geoff: puts you to sleep does it

James: you've just got to guess-- this is my- this is my capture robot - capture robot activated - now I'll exit- oh I won't get this guy I'll find him- but I won't be able to get him

Geoff: how do you know

James: 'cause they never work for him unless I guessed right

-----

James: hey that's the crim - <Geoff: that's him> there's my capture robot
Geoff: you've done it [announcing soundtrack]

James: yes

Geoff: yes

James: we got him -- I guessed the right code for him <Geoff: well done>

Geoff: OK [reading from screen] 'this is your current security access code you will need it to continue your career so please write it down d-d-m-f-d-g ' +

James: + I will the codes I think the next time it's a bit harder

Geoff: uh huh- this is um training you to um use plastic cards isn't it- memorise your bankcard number

James' father: oh right yeah - I've just finished reading your paper there and I was just thinking that someone from Sony could take the exact results and take a totally different interpretation out of it

Geoff: mmmh mmmh <James' father: [laughs]> they would

James' father:oh for sure <Geoff: they would absolutely >

Geoff: well - they'd they would be asking different questions to me I suppose

James' father: yeah

James: should I play the game or play a different game

Geoff: oh play a different one

James' father: not an educational ones or pseudo educational one

Geoff: they do play that one at school

James: they do they used to play it at our school

James: choose a game

Geoff: what's Columns about

James: it's a - you have to match it's sort of a puzzle

James' father: it's a =

James: = one of these fifteen dollar games

Geoff: what's that supposed to mean

James: what
Geoff: what's that supposed to mean

James: oh it's not very valued Geoff: [laughs] I see- you can judge it by how much the game is can you

James: yeah

Geoff: sometimes you get bargains you know

James: um you'd have to be lucky

Geoff: [laughs] I've got an eleven =

James: = look at that isn't that beautiful

Geoff: I've got an 11 dollar word processor- that + <James: + really> I use <James’ dad: yep> it's the best word processor I think I've come across

James’ father: what is it

Geoff: oh we've got an Atari computer and it' it's just called um - what is it called a an Atari <James: see these blocks fall in a row> pro something or other what's it called - but a lot of the Atari software is <James: see that> you know you can get it cheaply <James: the idea is is to not let it and then get to the top and then match the three colours

Geoff: I think I've seen this I've seen Ben... playing this - I think it's the one he was playing can you play two player with it <James: yeah> or one player <James: it isn't working?> very similar is it the one where you don't want to get to many things accumulating down the bottom <James: yeah> it's the same game

Geoff: the music's boring [the musical soundtrack sounds like one of Bach's two part inventions; whilst the score might be interesting the actual sound production is far from distinct with droning organ sounds]

James: yeah

James’ father: this is one of the best computer games that came out you know when it first came out <Geoff: yeah> +

James: + for the PC not Austin's

--------

James: it's just basically telling me what to do here 'cause of the flashings where I can miss a line

Geoff: [laughs] () so what's the significance of when you get those box like there those green ones

James: oh that just means that with this piece you can make one disappear

Geoff: isn't this like um - is Tetris like this
James’ father: this is Tetris

Geoff: this is Tetris

James: no it is a fair bit different 'cause you have to make a line with no gaps in it this one you have to match colours but it's the same idea

Geoff: and it = gets progressively faster and faster

Anna: = why did

James: yeah- then it's fairly ( )

Anna: Dad why did grandpa go to Sydney -why did he

James’ father: why did ( ) go to Sydney to see about a house

James: REALLY - what that flat that he's been waiting for for ages

James’ father: well he doesn't know whether it's the one he's been waiting for but it's a flat

[Anna continues with her knitting; James’ father leaves room]

----

----

James: everytime it makes that mmmm really weird sound that means I've finished a level

Geoff: right

James: see it usually goes [makes sound] and that means I've finished a level

Geoff: right

---- [screen shot: close up of Anna knitting]

James: see like that now they're going super fast

---- [screen shot: close up of James's face then Sally's face]

[soundtrack change: pseudo xylophone]

James: 'game over game over' -- think of the jewel that's what happening like the ( ) is pouring jewels that's what's happening in the game <Geoff: right> jewels are like getting dropped <Geoff: right> do you want me to play this again

Geoff: umm- do either of you girls play this one

Sally: no

Geoff: what ones do you play
James: pick one you wanna play do you wanna + <Geoff: + can you> play 2 player
Paperboy Sal

Geoff: can you play one that you play

Sally: can I play Mortal Kombat

James: YEAH I'll put it on =

Geoff: = right- is that your favourite one ,

Sally: yeah

James: especially likes the ah bloodcurd on

Sally: ( )

James: yeah this's the bloodcurd one OK

Sally: yeah

Geoff: what's bloodcurd

James: well it just makes the fatalities more gruesome when you hit them blood spurts out instead of nothing <Geoff: oh right -you can select + > + oh basically means hold the curd <Geoff: mmhm> and in this one you can lift off their head and if you don't have a bloodcurd on you can't and so on <Geoff: right>

James: there's one- where you electrocute their head and it explodes but with the bloodcurd not on you just electrocute their head and they fall down

Anna: I can sort of play Paperboy

Geoff: you can sort of play Paperboy

Anna: yes <Geoff: right mmhm>

James: here you are Fluff then I'll put bloodcurd on

Sally: put it on ( )

[Mortal Kombat soundtrack starts]

James: I can tell you all the um all of the special character keys all of the what happens to all the different characters when you finish it <Geoff: right> and all these different things <Geoff: right- you can kinda go straight to them> yeah there's a special code <Geoff: right> I'll show you all of them

James: 'A' right down pow ( ) see that's like one of the guys

Geoff: that's Cage Johnny Cage
James: yeah - this is part of the finishing round or when you select? games for the next one - ( ) through all the different characters can do that you know Radon - hey what - oh - so that and you can have him doing it instead all the different things--

Geoff: and what's that telling us - oh you're just making selections there are you on the
James: I just ( ) - ( )

[soundtrack dominates recording; 'get over here' from soundtrack]

James' father: [to Anna] get off there

Anna: [talking to her father who is sitting on the microphone] dad move off there

Geoff: no it's alright I've got it

James' father: sorry

Geoff: that's alright no probs

James' father: sorry

Geoff: it's ok

Geoff: can you talk and play too <Sally: yep> you can

James' father: that's very skilled isn't it

Sally: not really

Geoff: have you got a favourite character in this one [shakes head] what does this person keep saying 'get over here'?

James: so that he can keep - so that he can punch you

Sally: like he's got this little string +

James: you he's got a hook on the end of a rope and he throws it at your neck and like a spear on the end of a rope he winds you in and whacks you [soundtrack: 'get over here' 'get over here']

Geoff: when did you first start playing this one

Sally: I don't know

Geoff: a long time ago [Sally shrugs her shoulders]

James: these are the two characters she rotates rotates in between

Geoff: what are they

James: one's a god and one's um a sort of a ghost <Geoff: mmm> and this one's a god that's why he's blind <Geoff: mmm> - that's because they're both got easy moves - fly Sally
Anna: I can play something but I always die

Geoff: you can play something but you always don't

Anna: I always die

Geoff: oh you always die [to other sister] you're not interested in games are you- I can see that - you're more interested in your knitting

James: she's more like a she's more of a Steiner kid after the

Geoff: more of a Steiner kid yeah- I can see that-good

James: towards away away away punch Sal

Sally: what is it towards away away away punch

James: yep - <Sally: ok> but you have to be right on them and go towards away away away punch

[phone rings]

Anna: I'll get it [Anna goes to answer the phone but it is answered by James’ father]

Sally: I will play it ( )

James: have you got much girls on that tape

Geoff: no

James: yeah - any at all

Geoff: no these two are the first

James: really

Geoff: this one's what's your sister's name

J: Sally which one

Geoff: this one

James: Sally S_A_L_L_Y

Geoff: right - how do you say that

James: um Sally - like a sall with an 'Y' on the end <Geoff: oh yeah>

Geoff: and what's your name

Anna: Anna

Geoff: Thea
Anna: Anna
Geoff: Anna
Anna: A_N_A
Geoff: Anna that simple
Anna: yes
Geoff: Anna Anna and Sally - right
James: did you win Fluff [Sally]
Sally: yep
James: GOOD on you
Geoff: what did you call her
James: what
Geoff: what did you call her
James: did you did you win Pips
Geoff: no you didn't you called her something else
James: no <Geoff: yeah> 'Fluff'
Geoff: 'Fluff' did you like being called 'Fluff'
James' father: [to Sally ] do you want to go to Erica's and play
Sally: mmmm OK
James: you should've uppercutted him off the bit like you uppercut him and he falls down into the slide? do it do it QUICK + - two outside one two outside ones - yeah you nearly you nearly quick - ohh [encouragingly] NEARLY don't worry Fluff
James' father: don't worry mate it's been about for a few days
James: don't worry
James' father: actually I've got ( )
[soundtrack becomes noisier]
James: what university do you go to
Geoff: University of Western Sydney - Nepean - just down off the plains <James' father: you ( ) oh god > she's a bit of a champion this one <[James' father laughs>
Anna: and she's seven
Geoff: she's seven - right
James: how's that she's only seven and she's already into 'kill'
Geoff: [laughs] she's already into kill
James: yeah
Geoff: so what do you think it means for the future
James: she's going to get you - I just think she's cute like at her
Sally: and James said he and I die =
James: Fluff do you want me to just beat this guy for you +
Geoff: + we might --
Anna: how did how did you get to know James
James: from Austin's
Geoff: um I met James at Austin's place. I went there one afternoon - or one Saturday
I think it was - when I was filming =
Anna: = yeah but how did Austin know you
Geoff: oh how did Austin know me - um because I've been a I've been friends with
Austin's mum and dad for years for a long time I used to work with Austin's dad - back
in um 1974
James: Austin's um step sisters all play one of them is about they both actually play
computer games they play Aladdin I think
Geoff: right
James: good on you Fluff - there's this really good game I was gonna get it's too
expensive five dollars overnight-
Geoff: fireballs
James: five dollars
Geoff: five dollars overnight what one is it +
James: + NBA Jam = it's a really good game*
Geoff: = oh that's the one they play at - the rec centre at - at Watervale =<James: do
they> - yeah there's a videogames machine + where they play it
James: yeah with four players
Geoff: mmhm

James: got four players on it

Geoff: I haven't looked at it really closely but

James: yeah I know it's almost exactly the same as *Megadrive* - it's got full motion video and all the slam dunks and things it's a good game

Geoff: my son Ben's played it so's Matt they've got a couple of them at the Rec centre

Anna: did you nearly ( )

James: really you're kidding

Anna: ()

James: why don't why don't you why don't you move on to the couch jump over there and do a *Radons* - ( ) now will do a *Radon* for you I've I've seen you do it you're very good you're very good at it do a *Radons* like that

Sally: I can't ( ) that

James: no just do that where you fly forward go on you can jump first up on the couch

Sally: OK I'll do what- *Radon* does

James: she's going to do a *Radon*

Geoff: OK

Sally: here we go

James: she's going to do a flying move

Geoff: ohh right

Anna: ( )--

[Anna executes two flying dives on to the couch]

James: look at me everybody I'm *Radon*

James: it's hard to jump when someone's in there isn't it

Sally: do you like the *Radon* move

Geoff: yeah I think that's great

James: she was getting pretty far isn't she- she's a good player- a GOOD PLAYER - A GOOD PLAYER she's a good player dooga dooga dooga dooga dooga dooga dooga

[soundtrack to *Mortal Kombat* recommences; screen shot pans to Sally]
James: jigga jigga jigga this game's really violent - wake up wake up wake up I didn't mean it wake up - GET UP GET UP get up get up

[commotion off screen between Anna & Sally]

[Anna starts to play the piano and later renders a version of 'Mary had a little lamb']

James: you betta let me do a ( ) Floss ----

Geoff: very good [responding to Anna's rendition on the piano of 'Mary had a little lamb']

Geoff: that's great

Anna: guess what that was

Geoff: 'Mary had a little lamb' <Anna: yep> I recognised it

Anna: I could play some other songs <James: really>

James: you're not kidding are you

[another musical rendition from Anna begins]

Anna: I can play

James: hey you can do it now can you 'Fluff'

Sally: yeah I don't know how I do it but

James: leave the recorder? on the do down up

Sally: poor James Davies?

Anna: can I play Sal

James: do you wanna play Anna

Anna: yeah

James: yeah 'cause when you die let me have a go -don't go you're meant to go up there ----

James: can we watch this through when you're finished

Geoff: what

James: can we watch this through when you've finished

Geoff: yeah would you like to

James: yeah I would
Geoff: well I'll put it on now if you like I've probably got enough

James: don't cut her off in the middle of a game- this is intense? [laughs] she's in Mega Zone here - she's zoned out

James: quick quick choose your game quick choose your game quick

Sally: ()

Sally: I want to put it in with ( )

James: and then you get play?- no you have to put your initials- or you just put A_Z

Sally: how do you get it in

James: just press V? - put A_Z - that's your initials A_Z --initials pretty snazzy initials eh

Geoff: reminds me of chewing gum =

James: = now just um now just press 'start'

Sally: I pressed it

James: oh- here give it to me [Sally passes control to James] I might be able to do something [giving it back] there you go

Anna: no it's mine + James: + who do you want

Anna: I want that = ()<Sally: = ()>

James: go down she knows it's 'away away punch'- go go you can do it you can do it away away away away punch - no kick away away down punch down punch down punch

Sally: what's stopping ()

James: down and 'A' now 'a' whoopoo yay -- yay that was a good one- ohhhh

Sally: I died

James: no you you've got another round you've got another round -- [James sings along with soundtrack] see they point the control panel the way they want to go - like this you go like this

Sally: I don't always <James: you go like this Sal > no I don't

James: you do

Sally: do not

Geoff: it's real style

James: it is-- huh uh
Sally: how do you do that

James: down punch down 'A' down 'A' 'A' ohh - she beat them oh hoo look she upercutted them off the pit - get down and fight - now watch this I'm out for revenge because they killed my sisters and I'm gonna get it too in a big way <Geoff: [chuckles]> I haven't played this for a while ( )

James: oh that's what you call a bodge - - bodge- are you gonna play the Paperboy - do you know the definition of a bodge

Geoff: no what's that

James: a series of moves that people can't do anything about- that's what this is - a total bodge-

Geoff: so you're invincible are you

James: pretty much- once you know all the moves

Geoff: so does that take the fun out of it

James: yeah- for sure - but when you put it on HARD- and the players get better and they just and they actually block your moves or jump over them and stuff

Geoff: so what happens when you can - do the game without any problem at all

James: well then you put it on to very hard and it's very hard

Geoff: what happens when you succeed at very hard

James: then you you let your sisters play it ()

Sally: and what happens if you don't any

James: well what about < ?: well then ( )>

Sally: well then you just have it around

Geoff: right

Anna: mum likes playing ( )

Geoff: does she

James: well she has done she says it takes her mind off being stressed she's in the middle of a nervous breakdown

Geoff: I see

James: sort of or she's about to have one--

Sally: ooo ahh
James: hey Sal we're seeing some blood here [feigning sinister laugh] ah ha haahhh [feigning non-sinister laugh] ha ha

?: see ( ) stands up on me <James' father: really> yeah ( )

Sally: are you allowed to stand up on there

[two conversations at once: one between James & Geoff other between one of the girls and]

James: Subzero opens like I suppose you would describe his emotions <Geoff: mmm> which are Subzero emotions—so he can lop people's heads without remorse see he's a Ninja -- this guy that I'm fighting is one of the goodies in Mortal Kombat like he ( ) have a peaceful tournament

Geoff: which guy's this

James: Liu Kang

Geoff: Blue tongue

James: Blue tongue no Liu Kang Liu Kang

Geoff: Liu Kang

James: Liu Kang

Geoff: right

James: Liu K_A_N_G kang

Geoff: oh Liu Kang [pronounced to rhyme with 'bang'] I see ( )

Sally: it's probably a ( ) Scorpion looks like

James’ father: pats on the head and on the side??

James: see that when they hit the ground there's blood goes everywhere

Geoff: those um stylised red um things that's meant to look like blood

James: it does sometimes watch this- see that looks like blood a little bit

Geoff: ohh [unconvinced]

James: watch it again - see how the blood spurts out of them

Geoff: I've never seen anybody um- spurt out blood like that

James: ( ) about five times as high as you can jump just by a punch to the face and you'd think they would
Geoff: what

James: I've seen Austin hit someone in the nose and they bled

Geoff: yeah

James: yeah at the Steiner school he was having a cow? 'come on Austin come on Austin I'll take you' and he punched him in the nose and he ran off

Geoff: ohh right

James: he was twice as big as Austin too and he still is and he won't admit it anymore to his friends

Geoff: right - well I can't imagine Austin hitting anybody unless he was provoked <James: mmhm> -- he's a fairly gentle character

James: only if he thinks it's necessary

Geoff: yeah that's what I mean - he was probably provoked

James: well if he says 'come on Austin' Austin has the right to punch him in the face

Geoff: [laughs] it's an invitation

James: yeah - punch me in the face OK [laughs]

Geoff: can you please punch me in the face [ both laugh] no

James: alrighty-[laughs] come on doesn't make much sense does it come on and hit me in the face - I'm going to take up martial arts because I'm very unfit my parents want me to take up a sport

Geoff: yeah do you think that would be good

James: in Sydney down in Sydney a fair bit and I've been told I could get mugged very easily

Geoff: yeah- so you think Martial Arts would be a good way to protect yourself

James: it's better than carrying a gun or something <Geoff: mmhm> or () all of it's illegal

Geoff: ()

Sally: aren't you lucky we're not at school today

Geoff: what's that it's direct-<James: didadadit didadididit> I think I'll stop it there <James: yeah> I think I've got plenty

Anna: could we see it

James: I've got a few other games but
{videotape stopped}
Jason playing videogames  3.10.94

[It is Monday afternoon of a long weekend. Jason is playing videogames in his bedroom in a township I shall call Watervale on the outskirts of suburban Sydney. Both his parents and sister are home. It is the second week of the school holidays and the family are preparing to depart for a week's beach holiday the following day. Prior to this contact I had 'brief' contact with Jason through a local school teacher and friend who considered that Jason had a learning problem. Jason's mother had brought Jason to see my wife in her professional capacity as an occupational therapist. Apart from that brief encounter I had not previously met or mixed with the family in any social setting.]

Geoff: ( ) this microphone

Jason: help for control pad

—-

[soundtrack of games music continues throughout this recording. Jason is playing Nintendo games.]

Geoff: that's got to go in there you're right OK all right well we should be on the air we'll be on the air with the recording if nothing else - um - what I might do is put this there-- now tell me about this one it's a Nintendo [question]

Jason: yeah it's um yeah I've got um another game in Kmart which is Mario 3 but it's on layby <Geoff: right> this is Mario brothers 2 <Geoff: right> that I hired from the the video shop <Geoff: right> so and there's um - like all the you can choose the characters at the beginning <Geoff: yeah> whichever you want and like this is the Princess Toadstool and she can hover in the air for about 10 seconds <Geoff: right> before she falls <Geoff: right> --

Geoff: so that's princess toadstool

Jason: yeah and there's um Toad - Mario - <Geoff: ahh> who's- and Luigi <Geoff: right> that's how she hovers <Geoff: mmhmm> this is called um where we are now it's Subcon- but um when you find the potion and go in the door it's Subspace- <Geoff: right> and the grass turns into coins <Geoff: right> you can use in a slot machine sort of thing afterwards <Geoff: oh right>

Geoff: and what do you hire this one out during the holidays or something like that do you

Jason: yeah I hired it just for today <Geoff: oh> that power thing whoops hit a heart <Geoff: yeah> - just makes you grow or- stuff like that =

Geoff: = what thing's that

Jason: pardon
Geoff: what thing are you talking to ah talking about

Jason: it's the heart um when you kill a certain oh I'm dead when you kill a certain number of um creatures the heart comes <Geoff: right> but restores one um bit on your life meter <Geoff: right> when you go through the door into Subspace

Geoff: where's your life meter

Jason: it's those -

Geoff: those three buttons up there <Jason: yeah> those three little spots

Jason: in Subspace every different potion um you'll find sometimes a mushroom which adds another light on to your life meter and fills up the REST <Geoff: right> and all the and you can pick up your enemies by landing on top of them and pressing button B <Geoff: right> and if you throw them at something else <Geoff: yeah> it'll kill it- <Geoff: I see so + you throw> and you can uproot that's a free life<Geoff: right> there's a power box thing <Geoff: right> and they um you can pick up different things here's a heart- <Geoff: right> () the BOMBS they explode and anything near them will blow up <Geoff: right> like if it's rock or an enemy or something like that <Geoff: right> you can pick up all sorts of different things- <Geoff: [choked off]> and you get this star that makes you invincible <Geoff: ah right so that's what that flashing is> yeah <Geoff: invincible > there are a lot of warp zones like worlds go one/one one/two one/three and then two/one two/two and two/three <Geoff: oh right> so that's the => and stuff like that <Geoff: that's the kind of the different levels of it is it> but you can warp -- somehow sometimes you can warp by -um finding a potion <Geoff: right> and a pot - it's a vase sort of thing <Geoff: mmmh what sort of + > + and there are a lot of short cuts

Geoff: what's warping

Jason: oh you go from one level straight to another

Geoff: uh huh

Jason: there's a short cut up here - um but you can't get there with Princess um those pieces of glass up there are BOMBS and you can blow away these bits of rock and <Geoff: oh right> and take a shortcut straight to the end

Geoff: oh so this is a little bit like um um Dungeons & Dragons isn't it

Jason: yeah stuff like that - but I have to go the long way because um- Princess um- isn't a very good jumper can't jump very high <Geoff: right> and this is the long way <Geoff: right> you uproot vegetables and stuff to throw at enemies

Geoff: YOU UPROOT VEGETABLES is that what you were just doing is it

Jason: yep pick up pigs and things - oh here's a heart I missed it- damn -- when you throw it in some places when you throw it off one side they'll come back the other side like that

Geoff: right- they might come back and hit you

Jason: yeah -
Geoff: like that

Jason: yeah like that--

Geoff: this is climbing up a beanstalk is it

Jason: yeah something like that - you can't climb up anything or go into doors if you're holding anything

Geoff: you gotta throw it away

Jason: before you climb up ladders or vines or anything else- there's a boss character at the end of every LEVEL you have to ju it spits eggs at you you have to land on the eggs and pick them up and throw them back at it <Geoff: right is this = the boss character here + > = three times + yes three times to kill it and then it's give you an egg sort of thing another one - which opens an eagle's beak at the end of the thing to go on to the next LEVEL there it is- pick this up turns into dust and away we go - here's the bonus chance thing <Geoff: right> what you do with the coins- um if you get cherries at the BEGINNING one cherry is one life two cherries is two life and three cherries is five lives

Geoff: mmhm so what have you got here

Jason: and or three of a kind it'll give you a free life as well- sometimes it works if you do it very quickly sometimes it doesn't <Geoff: mmhm this reminds me of poker machines> yeah <Geoff: is that what it's like> yeah aww what'll I get now - Mario's ah good all round things- TOAD is the worst jumper but ad um but they all slow down if they're carrying something all except Toad <Geoff: right> so Toad can carry as much as you like and he won't get slowed down <Geoff: mmhm> -- fine ( ) see this pots -if you find one of these OCCASIONALLY um you can go into a warp zone --

Geoff: so what have you gotta do with the pots oh you gotta find them

Jason: yeah and you can go in some - some you can go in <Geoff: mmhm> and you get prizes like a free life or a a key something to get through a locked door - here's a free life () - here um when you pick up the key one of those faces which is the top one ah um it's like a ghost that comes after you if you've got the key and you can make it go away by dropping the key <Geoff: right> -- and you collect enough cherries um it'll give you the thing the umm invincibility - <Geoff: uh huh> ah here here it is - <Geoff: so you => = an upward bombs sometimes it's vegetables sometimes it's a free life sometimes it's a bomb - and you blow away those bits of rock-- these things kill you this guy he's a really ( ) if you blow yourself UP - you die automatically- so and the bombs take about 20 seconds to explode

Geoff: 20 SECONDS

Jason: or 5 or = 7

Geoff: = well mmhm

Jason: maybe not 20 -- this route there - it's a it takes you into Subspace <Geoff: mmhm> but you need to blow away that wall first <Geoff: right> so you can get the surprise in Subspace <Geoff: right> --
Jason: the mushroom - when you pick it up it adds another - lo um bit on to your life meter <Geoff: right- LIFE METER> yeah that's what they call it in the book

Geoff: did you read the book before you played the game

Jason: yeah my aunty gave me the book when I got Nintendo

Geoff: right

Jason: up here you can get other stuff but it's a waste of life - here's the boss character at the other end - <Geoff: right> of this level <Geoff: mmmh> gotcha -

Geoff: he spits things out at ya

Jason: yeah they're ee eggs--

Geoff: [chuckles]

Jason: but as the levels go on <Geoff: yeah> they um go from spitting all the eggs to sometimes they're eggs and sometimes they're fireballs <Geoff: right> and then um they spit just fireBALLS and you have to pick up things like what they call mushroom blocks <Geoff: mmmh> and throw them throw them at it <Geoff: right> --

[Jason starts a new level]

Jason: this formed? ah Mario's good for this level

Geoff: So you're playing Mario here

Jason: yeah- I was playing Mario the last time as well -- there's a um thing there but ah sometimes if there's not many blocks at all <Geoff: mmmh> you can um if there's not much grass and then? that you find the Subspace potion <Geoff: mmmh> like this here if there's no grass <Geoff: yeah> so you carry it you can carry it to a place where there's a lot of grass <Geoff: yeah> -- like up here -- ŌK

Geoff: and what does that do

Jason: and all those bits of grass turn into coins which um and every for every coin um in Subspace that you get <Geoff: mmmh> it um fills up you get one go of the poker machine at the end

Geoff: oh I see so then you can get bonuses on the on the =

Jason: = free lives

Geoff: free lives that's right free + lives

Jason: + now here's another potion <Geoff: yeah> but I'm not going to use it here because um- there's a warp zone <Geoff: mmmh> so you can warp from world one/three to world four/one <Geoff: right> oop by going like this and going down the pot <Geoff: right> but - ( ) don't like warping much -

Geoff: oh so that missed out levels does it
Jason: yeah it misses out now here this is very hard that’s why it’s easier to warp on this one - these are the mushroom blocks <Geoff: right> that you have to throw at some things <Geoff: right> and you can’t get up there so -- I have to pick up the mushroom blocks and carry them till you can

Geoff: can you carry more than one

Jason: no you can only carry one thing at a time--

Geoff: and you press a special button for picking things up do you

Jason: you have to be on top of them <Geoff: yeah> to pick them up --

Geoff: like that

Jason: yeah- now here’s the door that we’ve been that I’ve been trying to get the whole way <Geoff: mmhm> and there’s that key <Geoff: mmhm> when um you get the uh oh that thing comes -

Geoff: and you come out this door- where are you taking the key

Jason: to a locked door SOMEWHERE - I had to throw the key because if I didn’t throw it <Geoff: uh huh> I would have um that spirit would’ve killed me - spirit thing -- now that thing there is a real pain it shoots things at you <Geoff: oh right> which way do we go oh there it is -

Geoff: did the key unlock that door did it

Jason: yep and here’s an invincibility thing which is very handy because there’re lot of spikes there that kill you if you land on them <Geoff: right> -- oh yuh yuh yeah I’d better get it-- this bit’s fairly hard [pauses after this bit’s and inflects ‘fairly hard’ to qualify ie lessen it’s force] <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: what are those things

Jason: um I’m not sure what they’re called but they um ah HERES THE EGG sometimes at the end of each level there isn’t a boss character <Geoff: right> it’s just the egg there

Geoff: and this time there wasn’t a boss character ah hah

Jason: now THIS BIT is HARD - very hard actually

Geoff: very hard

Jason: ohhh I nearly blew myself up there -- this thing here it’s a big rat sort of thing and it and it throws bombs at you and you have to catch them before they explode <Geoff: mmhm> and throw them back <Geoff: goodness> here it is here’s one -- uh oh -- <Geoff: [chuckles] oh that’ll blow it up - got it once you have to get every boss character three times <Geoff: mmhm> -- damn it has to be close to it ahh - so that killed me because I held on to the bomb for too long <Geoff: [chuckles]> that blew my head off <Geoff: ooh + so how come you’re back here again = > + I want to see what I = oh because I’ve still got a few lives to go <Geoff: aw right>
Jason: got 'im once-- got 'im twice-- going-- going-- gone eh heh heh

Geoff: you killed him

Jason: and then a door please - you can't go there until the music stopped - I got six coins so I'll just play them all- ON THE POKIES- <Geoff: [chuckles]> - if you get a cherry in the first square <Geoff: yeah> if you get a cherry in the first and the second square you get two lives and if you get a cherry in the in all squares you get five lives- <Geoff: + that was close> + that was a waste <Geoff: oh well>

[Jason begins playing a new level]

Jason: I forget which one is good for this level- I'll just take Mario- Mario's good all round-- I haven't seen this level for ages those snakes that jump out they shoot things at you <Geoff: mmmh> there's a pot - I'm going to get him for that - I'm not sure what's in this one but it must be pretty good if they gave me such a hard animal to kill- ah perfect got him yeah - that was a waste then of coming down in this tunnel

Geoff: why was it a waste

Jason: because um - you can't win anything <Geoff: mmmh> phew -- I bet it's

Geoff: you're down there again

Jason: yeah it's a different one though-- ohh- Subspace

Geoff: that was down underground -

Jason: I'm sick of this guy I threw a carrot at it uh oh that's quicksand see how the sand's moving THERE <Geoff: oh yeah> look what happens if I throw something into it <Geoff: [chuckles]> it goes squirming down to the bottom- uh oh that thing throws fireballs at you <Geoff: mmmh> uh oh here comes a snake jumping out of the quicksand- thank you - sometimes they give you a- BOOST <Geoff: [reading from screen] = () = and here this sand here you have and you dig through it by picking up

Geoff: picking up what do you mean by picking up

Jason: oh the button that you use to pick up things

Geoff: oh right and that digs the sand up-- what are those creatures following you

Jason: um they're - I don't know what they're called but I just call them pigs because that's what they look like

Geoff: PIGS- and what do they do

Jason: they follow you everywhere

Geoff: uh huh they attack you
Jason: oh no they just if you touch them [attending to screen intently] <Geoff: mmmhm> -- this is how fast you can go down the ladder <Geoff: mmmhm> but you go up very slowly - get the boss creature um I don't think it spits exactly () -- if you land on them for too long <Geoff: mmmhm> see what they do they carry you off <Geoff: right>

----

Jason: sometimes it's a long way to the equal? like that sometimes it's right next to you see I got two cherries but nothing happened because they weren't in the first and second squares <Geoff: right>

Geoff: you got two cherries there - now who are you selecting now

Jason: the Princess

Geoff: the Princess

Jason: oh no <Geoff: what> -- um <Geoff: what happened> in the book this is world two/two in the book I saw something that said you should choose Luigi 'cause he's the best jumper in <Geoff: yeah> world two/two = 'cause you have to <Geoff: but you've chosen> you have to jump over the this cactus man thingie <Geoff: right> -- and if you if you're not a very good jumper <Geoff: mmmhm> () as the Princess -- blast--

Geoff: so when you +

Jason: + ahh killed me

Geoff: so when did you first start playing videogames

Jason: when I first got the Nintendo - it was um - in was in June I think it was

Geoff: June

Jason: yeah

Geoff: ohh so that's =

Jason: = there was a sale on at Kmart <Geoff: right> so it was only 60 dollars <Geoff: right> I thought I'd get it while I had the chance <Geoff: mmmhm> --

Geoff: game over +

Jason: + yeah well on Mario2 you only continue- TWICE and then it's just the last -- the () is () when you continue you go to the first level <Geoff: mmmhm> on that particular world <Geoff: mmmhm> look how- how long it takes for him to come down - he's the best jumper but he's the slowest <Geoff: mmmhm> -- now when he jumps <Geoff: mmmhm>

Geoff: he jumps the + highest

Jason: + so he can jump he can jump straight straight over most things- <Geoff: yep> like - oh this is hopeless--this is about to be this is my last life also <Geoff: yep> - I think I'm definitely get Mario next?time
Geoff: was that Mario

Jason: no that was Luigi = it takes a long time to come down

Geoff: = oh that was Luigi

Geoff: right- so you need Mario here do you that's Mario there on the + left

Jason: + it says yeah it said Luigi it says Luigi is the best choice for this level but I don't think I believe it anymore

Geoff: you think Mario might be better

Jason: yeah

----

Geoff: so when = do you come

Jason: = it says that the Princess is good for this level - for all levels with quicksand in them 'cause um she can HOVER a long WAY so she can jump twice as far as any of them

----

Geoff: oh he starts off at the pyramids again

Jason: yep -- next time I do this I think I'll warp straight to level four- it's a whole lot easier- ahh - pick up the pig <Geoff: [chuckle] - and throw it in the quicksand> - a pig in quicksand is better than a person in quicksand <Geoff: mmhm the pig mightn't see it like that> - here we go thank you here we go [sings along with soundtrack]

Geoff: now you're digging in the sand

Jason: digging in the dirt--if you need to get away from something quickly that's not a very good idea to jump 'cause you have to do a whole lot more digging <Geoff: oh right>

---- Geoff: so you're collecting something there

Jason: no it's just um like <Geoff: just dropping things> yeah - to dig it's just like to pick up the sand but you don't you don't hold it

Geoff: right - um here's this um + the boss

Jason: + the () again- it's very dangerous to stand that close

Geoff: mmhm I can see that's a better distance

Jason: it's a better distance but it's not a very safe place to go because when you pick it up you fall into the hole <Geoff: oh right>

Geoff: so you've just gotta time it right
Jason: I'm hopeless at this bit - yes one life - zero

Geoff: but that's just chance isn't it that bit

Jason: I s'pose so - on on = the <Geoff: just luck> on the Supernintendo they go they go - slower so it's not really chance

Geoff: oh right so you can see what's running past

Jason: here we go - I should have chosen the Princess for but I won't do that -- I'm sick of him

Geoff: do you ever play games with friends

Jason: no not really

Geoff: some game you can play in

Jason: two player

Geoff: two player can't you

Jason: yeah - this one you can as well I think but um you don't play at the same time you play at different time

Geoff: oh right it's like um taking it in turns

Jason: yeah when you die - or when you lose a life <Geoff: mmhm> now here I think is - the best tunnel to go down - no I was wrong - ahh perfect just what I wanted - no - here we go - this is the good pot to go down you need something in it something or other

Geoff: what do you need

Jason: well - doesn't have what I thought

Geoff: how can you tell when the best time to go down is

Jason: um you can't really - oh no - oh I'm seriously sick of this - here is where the cactus men come <Geoff: mmhm> and there's a BIG problem here

Geoff: there's a big problem

Jason: yeah a very big problem

Geoff: what's the + big problem Jason: + because usually there's a log or actually they're those skeleton things <Geoff: mmhm> oh - that you can STAND ON <Geoff: right> but you have to get them when they that they float down and you have to get them when they're just on the top

Geoff: oh right 'cause that's all quicksand
Jason: YEP -- home sweet home not anymore-- ( ) --

Geoff: [chuckles] you're having trouble throwing that one away

Jason: yes

Geoff: that pig must be very heavy

Jason: must be-- but I like this-- looks so funny you just looks like you're picking up something microscopic and you pull out a giant thing

Geoff: a giant snake

Jason: now-- now I think here the easiest way is to stand on the cactuses-- so now all you do is retry

Geoff: that's right - I see [laughs] Supermario

[Jason's father enters room]

MF: we all right + yeah everybody happy

Jason: + yeah

Geoff: + yeah yeah we're having fun

MF: you're not not cold in here

Geoff: no no no

[Jason's father departs]

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Jason: you can uproot sometimes the tiny things like that and sometimes they're massive turnips and <Geoff: mhm> on level six there are pumpkins <Geoff: pumpkins> so on every level there's a different sort of vegetable or a different range of vegetables

Geoff: and you can throw these vegetables at people

Jason: or things

Geoff: or things or characters

Jason: mhm <Geoff: mhm> the only thing you can carry through a doorway though is a key <Geoff: right> got it -- you usually get a heart about here <Geoff: mhm>

Geoff: oh there's the heart - it's coming up to you - it's floating up Jason: they float up but if you miss them <Geoff: mhm> it's too late <Geoff: oh>

Geoff: so you're timing just has to be right
Jason: yep - but sometimes on certain levels you miss like you don't see the heart coming up at you- by the time you realise it's too late <Geoff: mmhm>

Geoff: and now you're invincible

Jason: yep - oh I can do the shortcut this time- oh here's another heart- this time I'm going to warp to level four <Geoff: right> from four/two I can warp to level six/one

Geoff: four/two to six/one- goodness

Jason: and one/three to four/two

Geoff: that reminds me of an old fashioned game

Jason: what is it

Geoff: Snakes and Ladders

Jason: oh that yeah

Geoff: you kind of warp in Snakes and Ladders don't = you

Jason: = yeah- the only difference is you can't go around the snakes you don't go backwards <Geoff: right> down the ladders now here's the short cut - that um in this short cut it's IMPOSSIBLE- actually is impossible <Geoff: mmhm> oh no I don't think so- but you can't - um win you can't get past this ( ) unless you lose a life off your life meter unless you do that-

Geoff: unless you do what

Jason: unless you throw it from the top- or you can hang on to it down the bottom

Geoff: what were you talking about the bomb

Jason: yeah you can hang on to the bomb it's down there and when you think the timing's right you jump there like that and um and if the timing's right you'll blow away the bricks and if it's not - it's your problem <Geoff: right> - so you go instead of all those um vines up there now - you warp you shortcut like that <Geoff: mmhm> and now you're straight here

-----

Jason: I love holding the egg until it's mouth's open and coming right in and smashing it right in its mouth <Geoff: [chuckles] only sometimes you have to turn around 'cause it's coming at you <Geoff: yeah> when you throw the egg you're facing the wrong way <Geoff: right>

----- Geoff: FIVE this time

Jason: yep you can get stuff like 14 coins <Geoff: wow> if you get them - oh - damn-even if you do it fast enough after you've done it you can get another in the pat? -- thinks this is good for this one you have to hold the a fair way

Geoff: right so what were oh one/two - one/two we're on =
Jason: = I think you have to catch the flying cart

Geoff: oh that's the flying cart +

Jason: + I'm waiting 'til it swoops at you and jump in - you knock the driver off that's the way you get out <Geoff: right> --

Geoff: and what would happen if you didn't jump there when those things were coming at you

Jason: you'd shrink and then die

====

Jason: so I've only got one coin so far out of - now here is a full life -- sometimes you think all right you have to jump really long distances the Princess will be the best for this <Geoff: mmmh> yet there's something at the other end-- so that you have to have have someone who can jump - because it's impossible-- phew

Geoff: and you picked up the key

Jason: yep - got the star

Geoff: what's the star do

Jason: makes you invincible [sotto voce] remember <Geoff: oh that's right yeah> but you can only die if you fall in the water or fall down a hole like that <Geoff: yeah> -- here's a bomb -uh oh-- I'm gonna? blow up the vegie garden--oh--the only thing is there's something here oh uh -- <Geoff: [chuckles]> i blew up

Geoff: you blew yourself up<Jason: yep> as well as blowing up the other creature-- and where do these bombs come from they just suddenly = appear

Jason: = they just come out of the ground when you pick up the root sometimes they're bombs you get but the thing is you get vegetables when you don't need bombs and you get bombs <Geoff: huh huh> only when you need them <Geoff: right> up and then rock to blow up you'll get a bomb <Geoff: right> yes got it- heh heh- ohh he got me too -- the the good part about THAT- IS-- that now um here just here <Geoff: mmmh> there's a door going into Subspace

Geoff: right- aw so that's Subspace where you go is that what it's called

Jason: yeah-- when you- find the potion <Geoff: mmmh> ofrow? above here but the thing is I've found out the hard way if um- you NEVER - this is a warning? you NEVER um put it on top on a ladder NEVER EVER put the thing on a ladder

Geoff: a bomb

Jason: not no the door

Geoff: ohh right why what + happens
Jason: + 'cause um then you can't get in you just go through up the ladder when you press 'in' - oh no now I can't get in - 'cause the Princess can't do anything here that's what I mean there are trap sort of things - and the good thing is - huh it didn't work - I'll wait 'til I'm up here now that'll be gone they'll come back here and there -- thank you now when they jump up here I'll get him yeah because you just need that little bit of an extra boost

Geoff: oh I see you just needed them to jump off - I see

Jason: but only if you're Princess ( ) OH over the whole way

Geoff: oh here's the boss man again

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Jason: mmmhm ah you can catch them until you don't want anymore

Geoff: [laughs]

Jason: but you can't hold on to them for too long 'cause it will shoot again and you won't have time to fall back <Geoff: yeah> [Jason sings along with soundtrack] <Geoff: you've gotta get rid of them quickly> get rid of him quickly as well-- so when it opens its mouth WIDE it's about to shoot <Geoff: right-- I see> like that - now HERE WE GO - now there might be a heart here - sometimes when you kill the boss creature a heart comes <Geoff: mmmhm> --

Geoff: times nought - that's not many

Jason: I only got one coin <Geoff: oh> [Jason sings along with soundtrack ]

Geoff: [reading from screen] world one point three

Jason: at the end of this one um you can walk to - four one <Geoff: right-- so you can skip out> yeah <two levels + > + should I walk four one - may as well-- here's a go =

Geoff: = what happened

Jason: I got sandwiched between the two things and they both shot me at the same time <Geoff: right> -- I won't bother about the star this time- [sound of Jason expelling air] those fish have very big eyes

Geoff: they certainly do

--

Jason: so much for that idea

Geoff: so which character is this one

Jason: that I'm playing with <Geoff: yeah - that's Luigi isn't it> Mario <Geoff: oh it's Mario> Luigi um once he jumps just goes he goes takes a LONG time to go down <Geoff: mmmhm> get the POTION- so I can go into Subspace whenever I want to <Geoff: mmmhm>
A.132

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Jason: and I'll go into Subspace HERE so I can go down that = pot

Geoff: = so when you dropped when you dropped the potion +

Jason: + the only way to warp is if you um see I warped twelve/four by going in the Subspace and going down the right pot

Geoff: right- you've got to know the right pot to go down

Jason: yeah - boy - so here it's um world four/one - which is - somewhere very icy-- and it's very slippery 'cause like you stop and you keep going <Geoff: mmhm> if you stop you'll keep going <Geoff: oh right> like if you want to stop this is how you stop -- see you can't stop-- you slide backwards when you rise when you =

Geoff: = it's like being on ice

Jason: so yeah so like this is ice that I'm standing on <Geoff: right> oh a carrot - I didn't know carrots grew in the arctic - the antarctic or whatever <Geoff: mmhm it is unusual> but the thing I found out you um this is so this is the dead end you can't go any further than this but - on here- pulled a rocket ship out of the ground

Geoff: and where does the rocket ship take you

Jason: like that you fall on it and it explodes- now here are the they're sort of robot things with pigs driving them <Geoff: [chuckles]> like you can jump on its head rip its head off and its a robot <Geoff: mmhm> - but it can't shoot at you unless it's got its piggy head <Geoff: mmhm>

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Jason: get him- ( )-

Geoff: there's another one

Jason: but - if you - if you pick up one of these things- - if you pick up something like that and you get THE BASE - like the actual robot bit <Geoff: mmhm> like this- <Geoff: yeah> the whole free go at the same time oh here's a heart-- and this just happens to be a level where there is no boss character <Geoff: oh - - there isn't a boss character> there is NO boss character <Geoff: no boss> so it's just lying there

Geoff: you just pick it up and off you go

Jason: yep - damn - YEAH <Geoff: oh what did you get there> -- oh so here- if it's like here I won't get anything at the end-- here it's you don't get Luigi because you have to jump over birds that are flying everywhere <Geoff: right> and he takes too long to come down <Geoff: right> you have to be a good jumper so you can't get Toad- <Geoff: mmhm> OH NO wait a second oh yeah I was right it's the same level as I was on - on four/two after after these birds go past -- so you have to jump over - when you're small it's easy on this level- 'cause you can duck under those ones you only have to on ( ) - - but you can duck those <Geoff: right> it's VERY hard - after those birds it's whales
Geoff: it's what

Jason: it you jump all over whales <Geoff: whales> and they pick you up with the water and stuff - but if you rub if you run into their water and you're not on the top it'll kill you

Geoff: oh right

Jason: I've never been any good at this bit--

Geoff: done again

Jason: yep it's very hard

Geoff: it all looks very hard to me--

Jason: this is the hardest -- if you jump over the ones you don't need to it can be VERY dangerous <Geoff: mmhm> 'cause if you don't need to jump over something and you jump over it you always hit something at the top <Geoff: something else> yeah - those things just fall off now HERE you have to JUMP and get up to that door <Geoff: right> and it's just like you stay where you are - with WHALES there's a Subspace potion here -- but I realised you can still die if it's Subspace <Geoff: mmhm> and it'll take a life off you but I didn't realise that so like - I didn't realise that until I found out the hard way <Geoff: mmhm- oh this is the whale> so if I ran into that water it would kill me <Geoff: right-not very friendly whales then> -- but they give you a lift now here if I want to walk to level six to get this potion I can go down to another pot - do I - should I walk

Geoff: I don't know - do = you

Jason: = no may as well not - mmhm don't worry?

Geoff: this is the Subspace ( )

Jason: yep -- ho so I've got six - there- 'cause - so you can pick up your enemy it's hard- it's hard to warp 'cause you gotta ( ) then go backwards <Geoff: right> and up here- blast--here's an INVINCIBILITY for me

Geoff: oh it's a star coming up

Jason: yep- once you get up to there it always comes 'cause you've collected the right amount of cherries - [sings along with soundtrack]

Geoff: do you like the music

Jason: uh oh- yeah -he just killed me then <Geoff: huh huh> so - in some bits - you can- do um by just hopping from one rail to another and not using these bits of ice at the top <Geoff: right> sometimes if you do that- sometimes when you do that- <Geoff: mmhm> um- you don't 'cause there isn't a whale after it <Geoff: right> or there is but it's too far <Geoff: mmhm>
Jason: that killed me then - those creatures um - nearly every creature lets you know - like if it shoots like if it sometimes shoots <Geoff: mmhm> it'll it's got a way of letting you when it's going to shoot <Geoff: right> does it kind of a sign just before it shoots + > + it's a like this um up in the ones that the pink and blue ones - that shoot you- <Geoff: mmhm> they um like that one there <Geoff: mmhm> it stops and SHAKES <Geoff: right> before it shoots <Geoff: right> --

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'GAME OVER'

Jason: yeah -- so now I have to start the whole thing again - <Geoff: mmhm> -from the arctic bit

Geoff: oh yeah from four + level

Jason: + arctic circle

Geoff: you don't have to go right back to one

Jason: only if you press retry <Geoff: right> uh oh - another thing is you can't run fast on the ice and if you need to stop that's how you stop <Geoff: you got to run the other way> it takes a long time to get speed and it takes a long time to stop-- <Geoff: huh huh > still don't know how you can pull a rocket ship out of the ground

Geoff: that's just a carrot or something you pull out isn't it- turns into a rocket ship--

Jason: gotcha

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Jason: I nearly've - nearly got all four - you can't pick up those they're the only things you can't pick up <Geoff: mmhm> but you can jump on your enemies <Geoff: mmhm> and um they CARRY YOU to - say if there's a - part that you can't pass like it's pretty impossible -- um you stand on your creature's head and it'll take you to impassable areas - <Geoff: right> like you can land on birds and go through the sky - over massive gorges - and you can um - walk just - like on SPIKES- it doesn't hurt the pigs <Geoff: yep> to ride on spikes - so you just stand on their back <Geoff: oh so the the = creatures * can help you > = yeah that happens * yeah yeah enemies help you

Geoff: so they're not really enemies all the time are they

Jason: they are most of the time

Geoff: sometimes they're friends

Jason: like they give like if you're really a rotten jumper- they give you a BOOST UP - but if you're a um - ah just sided? the spikes there <Geoff: right> like if the like those creatures you can't kill them - unless you jump on their head and rip their head off heh and throw their head at their body <Geoff: yeah> but you can't kill them like you pick up- you pick up the um one of your enemies and throw them <Geoff: mmhm> and there ( ) friendly enemies <Geoff: mmhm>

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Jason: gotcha you can just wait here and soon as it comes it's gone <Geoff: and hit it> ohh - I nearly missed-- BINGO

Geoff: bingo

Jason: oh

Geoff: NO BONUSES

Jason: 'cause I didn't pick up any coins <Geoff: oh well > [Jason sings along with soundtrack]

Geoff: it's Mario =

Jason: = it's my last life too

Geoff: you're last life

Jason: this time when I die I'm a goner - and I have to start from the very beginning -- if you go slow <Geoff: mmhm> they come with a lot of space between them but if you like to sprint your heart out see how close they come <Geoff: mmhm> if you just go like this how far away they are -- sick of those two -- now I got to the whale bit - if anything touches me now that could kill me a bit like that water <Geoff: yep> it's game over <Geoff: right> 'cause I've only got one bit left of my life- hopefully yes it's () -- oh oh - couldn't be bothered to go up there so you just fly across the TOP -- I think I'd better warp no don't want to warp - forget him -- just wait here 'cause um if you try to get back to the door sometimes you get killed -- I'm a bum? [Geoff laughs]

Jason: like I've continued twice oh no I've only continued once

Geoff: continue one oh so you still have another continue

Jason: yeah this is my last one though

Geoff: right I thought that was your last one <Jason: yeah> it wasn't

Jason: I thought I'd continued twice already

Geoff: but you had another one

Jason: yep Geoff: so you're back to the ice

Jason: -- damn -- [sucks in breath] whoa ----oh I forgot whoa

Geoff: well I guess um

Jason: like if you want to kill yourself yeah when you find out your jump again- and it'll blow you up with the rocket-- if I get the next heart I get I'll grow

Geoff: right you'll grow

Jason: yeah but if I die this time I'm a goner -
Geoff: so what do you mean you'll grow

Jason: it's like I'm little at the moment when you've only got one bit left on yer on yer life meter <Geoff: yeah> you shrink so you're very little

Geoff: right but then if you get your life meter up to two again you get bigger

Jason: yeah

Geoff: I see - and dose that mean you're stronger

Jason: no um in Mario 1 and 3 when you're little if you jump underneath a block it'll BUMP IT and you can get a prize out of it and stuff but if you um - but you can smash rocks with your head and all that - in Mario 1 and 3 but I don't know what's the difference with this

Geoff: so what's this is Mario 2 is it

Jason: yeah <Geoff: yeah> Super Mario Brothers 2

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Jason: so I didn't have to jump over that one otherwise I'd get killed at the other end- I did but I got killed <Geoff: uh huh> so like I was going TOÔ FAST - when I go really slow I love this

Geoff: so does your sister ever play this game

Jason: mmmhm no - I hardly ever play it as well-

Geoff: what Mario Brothers 2

Jason: yeah it's a really good game it's probably my favourite of all the Nintendo games <Geoff: mmmhm it's not> probably IS my favourite but like um - I can't afford it - or when I can afford it it's not out in the shops

Geoff: oh right

Jason: like whenever I go into Kmart it's always there I can buy it but I don't have enough money and as soon as there's a sale on it's not there it's sold out

Geoff: [laughs] ah so

Jason: it always happens to me [expels breath]

Geoff: you'd like to have it all the time would you <Jason: yeah> to play -- but then you'd probably get sick of it wouldn't you

Jason: I doubt that like every time I do it I find out a new WARP zone and stuff like that so I never knew until yesterday that you could warp to level SIX <Geoff: right> uhh I have to start again now

Geoff: aw they don't tell you that in the manual
powers so that he will be strong enough to face the difficult challenges that lie in wait for him' = <Jason: oh no>( ) the game

Jason: this is terrible this

Geoff: what's the problem here

Jason: they get you badly - you know those things flying through the air and the only way to get them is with the shield - like -

Geoff: oh

Jason: now here's the big palace --you know here there are heaps and heaps of tunnels - if you haven't played it before um this now you have to go left- but if you have like me you go right and um there are other tunnels where you have to go to get KEYS and other stuff<Geoff: mmm> this is like the only Nintendo game that you can save

Geoff: oh right so you can save the game where you're up to

Jason: yep-- uh oh- oh this is hopeless I'm not very good at this game I can get up to the very end of it oh not well the very end of this PALACE<Geoff: mmm> but I can't defeat that last guy - these here you have to stay low - and um get down - now down there all that's there is a key you have to get<Geoff: mmm> sometimes when you kill things they give you potions and stuff - ahh - rotten thing- this guy will probably give you a potion or a heart or something - - or points uh he didn't - now - here is a ferry and you hit it and it blocks gives all your life back<Geoff: that's handy> yep it down -- these guys are really annoying -- they go up and down and you have to you have to look where their swords going -- or they'll get you badly- aw--now my life's beeping so I'm about to die if he gets me one or two more times

Geoff: ohhhhh [feigned horror] and that's that's it <Jason: yep> Jason times two

Jason: yep like you can save all your things on IT save everything you've won and stuff

Geoff: oh I see so you can just pick up where you left off before

Jason: yeah from the very beginning to pick up-- sick of this guy that's better

Geoff: you got rid of him

Jason: yep - oh the next one's going to drop a red potion- I hope- oh points<Geoff: two hundred> that's good this guy's easy to get because he doesn't have a shield or anything- but he does throw those things -- OH YES another life- [hums along with soundtrack]

Geoff: you like singing along

Jason: sometimes it's got the oh no not another one of these- this is VERY annoying ----
Jason: ohh no now this is the end- once I get hit it's the very end and I can't get past it

Geoff: oh this is your bad guy<Jason: yeah>looks like a wolf

Jason: something like that - you can't get it though- doesn't even take a tiny bit off your life off his life to stab him you can't even get close because he knocks you out with his club

Geoff: maybe you've got to jump on him

Jason: I've tried that too I've tried everything- except going down low - got him once-

Geoff: hit him in the kneecap

Jason: when it makes that noise it means it's - it's blocking it off <Geoff: what> the shield's blocking it off- so it's game over

Geoff: uh huh - ohh so that's where you get to with that one he

Jason: yep

Geoff: well I think we might stop hey +

Jason: + pretty hopeless that game

Geoff: it's very good taking me through all that- Jason - very good indeed

Jason: you can keep that in for later

Geoff: we don't really know whether we've got a film here or not do we

Jason: hope we do

Geoff: hoping we have

Jason: what happens if we haven't

Geoff: oh well we've got the sound we have the sound I think we'll probably have the film I'll have another look at that

Jason: it's still recording

Geoff: I know - you can stop it

{videotape stopped}
Jason: - no

Geoff: or in the book <Jason: no this = is> = can I look at the book

Jason: I'm gonna try a new game- will that stuff up the - <Geoff: nuh> the video <Geoff: nuh> com <Geoff: nuh>

{Jason inserts new game in console}

Jason: this is this is Mario Brothers / <Geoff: right> I've had it for yonks

Geoff: yonks and yonks

Jason: yeah one player game- could put it on two player do you wanna play [laughs]

Geoff: two player

Jason: yeah could- I've got two joysticks here too

Geoff: what and play two together

Jason: no mot together but in turns

Geoff: oh I'll probably just stuff up all the time

Jason: mmhm but here like from level one/two you can warp to from OHH NO I MISSED IT <Geoff: you missed = it> = free life <Geoff: you missed the free life> I'm not ( ) through this - um on level one/two you can warp to um well to two three or four <Geoff: mmhm> and from level- four you can- you can um warp to- either five in one spot you can warp to five and in another spot three - five - six seven or eight <Geoff: right> -- that's a brick like 13 coins or something in it- it's like you can chase a turtle shell <Geoff: mmhm> and it'll shoot and it'll kill every thing in its way but if like it hit the brick or a PIPE <Geoff: mmhm> it'll ricochet back at you

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Jason: this game's a really expensive one

Geoff: what's that one

Jason: it's Zelda 2 the adventure of Link <Geoff: right> and I don't know why I got it because I haven't played Zelda I yet <Geoff: right> that was but Zelda is like 80 dollars

Geoff: goodness

Jason: it's pretty good graphics

Geoff: yeah - so this is Zelda

Jason: [Jason sings along with the soundtrack theme]

Geoff: [reading from screen text] welcome to the adventure of Link
Jason: that's in the book as well
Geoff: right -gives you tips on it
M: yeah hints and tips and secret strategies- that's Mario 2 that one
Geoff: I'll read about it
Jason: - oh there it is

Geoff: [reading from?] 'this game continues the escapades of the daring and well-loved adventurer WINK his new quest takes him through the palaces towns deserts and forests of Hyrule-<Jason: mmhm> where he encounters all the monsters he must dispatch with his EVER READY SWORD the farther Wink goes the more powerful he becomes increasing his magic powers as well as his physical strength' is this right

Jason: yeah I think so I haven't been too far on it but um- aw god- if you stray off the path <Geoff: yeah> um and go into the forest those boogey monsters will come-those boogey monster thingies <Geoff: mmhm> every time you visit a village <Geoff: yeah> they can restore your life and give you things like magic <Geoff: right> and people coming out of their houses always give you the best advice-- there it is [in falsetto voice] 'please let me help you' uh she restores your life I think

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'I can
Jason: 'restore your life' () <Geoff: restore your life> -- there she is

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'talk with
Jason: 'my father he can help you' oh no - I think I've already spoken with her father and he said 'I cannot help you any longer' because um he can give you magic once <Geoff: right> this disc it's something - oh

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'in Parappa desert use this magic to survive'
Jason: oh yeah cool -

Geoff: something about a shield

Jason: but um but like you can't go anywhere but you can you can't go many places at all-if you stay on the path <Geoff: right> -- it's hard to get the Parrapa desert <Geoff: yeah> you have to come off the PATH in the desert it's WORSE it's like i ran into a big monster thingie but I can throw myself forward- as long as I haven't been touched yet - and my life is still perfect I can throw swords and I don't die back <Geoff: yeah> yes - that's full magic I just picked up another thing of magic- <Geoff: right> sometimes you can kill two things with one sword <Geoff: right> - and in Parrapa desert if you run into anything the bad ones are terrible - the big ones - but the little blobs aren't that bad <Geoff: mmhm>

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Geoff: [reading from screen] 'before setting out for parts unknown you should first explore the region close to your starting point this way you will build up Link's
Interview with Ben & David sans videogames 21.12.94

[The following is a transcription of a taperecording with Ben in his home a few days before Christmas 1994. I am showing Ben & David a videogerecording of their playing of Sonic the Hedgehog (transcript no.1 in this series) For Ben, Christmas is significant because he is being given a second hand Megadrive, the second Ben will have owned, having sold his first Megadrive earlier in the year.]

Geoff: I just did

Ben: did ya

Geoff: yeah this is ( )

Ben: yeah

Geoff: yeah anyway I'll put it on

David: oh sounds ( )

Ben: yeah sometimes all my brothers say that I'm an idiot and stuff I made a bet with dad that 'cause I'm getting one for this Christmas as well I made a bet that- that that the winner would get 10 dollars and the bet was that I'd sell it in 6 months

Geoff: oh right because you sold your other one

Ben: yep and I think I'M GONNA WIN

Geoff: [laughs] so if you sell this one within six months you lose

Ben: yep

Geoff: right so we're on page seven of our transcript somewhere I think -- and that's a it's a bit of a scrappy old sound track here but the rabbits have just got out of Dr Robotnik's - machine I think

Ben: yep < M:yeah > I just freed them from the machine there the one's of Marble Zone this is a hard one used to be now I find it easy well I did anyway

David: I never get passed it I've only ever been past it about 5 times or something=

Ben: = yeah usually you got me to get past it to ( ) to play the animals

Geoff: so this is a real difficult one

Ben: yeah pretty it's got all larva and stuff

Geoff: you were saying before that you that the were bits that you'd forgotten about -what were they again
Ben: well the ACTS and where all the things are

Geoff: and that there was a transformation < Ben: yeah > um

Ben: when ya see there's a meant Dr Robotnik the mad scientist he's supposed to ah he turned all the good animals all the bunnies and the chickens and everything like that they he turned them into ROBOTS evil robots < Geoff: oh right > and that's the things you're trying to fight < Geoff: oh right > and you have to hit them and when you hit them they blow up and the little animal goes free and runs off

Geoff: and you'd just forgotten the bit where the animal < Ben: yeah > actually gets free

Ben: yeah I'd forgotten lots of it [laughs] died

[soundtrack of videotape: Ben: they um give you all the well it depends there are different monitor screens ... sometimes they give you the stars...]

Geoff: you're explaining something here

Ben: the TV things

Geoff: when you hit the TV

Ben: and you get the special things

Geoff: yeah

[soundtrack of videotape: ...]

Ben: [laughs]

David: that's cool how the grass lights up < Ben: mmhm >

Geoff: what's cool

Ben: how the grass lights up when you hit they - hit them all the fire comes up and you have to jump out of the way quick and these are the bounders and if you hit them no matter you got you're dead

Geoff: they're pounders

Ben: yep now they're little squirrels and little chickens

Geoff: so this game must be pretty good if you still reckon that it's interesting < Ben: yep > after all this time

Ben: yeah cause I haven't played it for so long

Geoff: so if you haven't played it for so long it's more attractive < Ben: yeah way [implied "way more attractive"] > than if you've been playing it all the time < Ben: mmhm+ it's because > + what happens when you've played it all the time
Ben: you just get real bored and you sell it like I did < Geoff: [laughs] > [laughs] - he lost his force field come off your mong

Geoff: so what did you do with your money that you got from selling it

Ben: dunno

David: it just disappeared eh

Geoff: [laughs]

Ben: ( ) the bank money with me - but yeah I think I'm really going to keep this one 'cause < Geoff: mmhm > I'm just going to get new games for it I've got a job now and stuff and I earn money < Geoff: right > so yeah

Geoff: so who're you working for

Ben: I'm working at the fruit shop over there < Geoff: ohright > for Val - get 20 dollars I work every Saturday get 20 dollars for it

Geoff: that's pretty good

Ben: yeah it's not bad money

Geoff: and this is where we ran into a faulty soundtrack again- I think

David: yeah we just passed ( )

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Ben: yeah and - it's also like sports you can play too like you can play favourite sports on a game [chuckles] like your favourite sports on a game

Geoff: what do you mean by < Ben: gridiron > your favourite sports

Ben: like I like gridiron heaps and if you've got like you can actually get gridiron games < G : oh yeah I see what you mean > yeah you can play them and stuff like that and it makes it more fun 'cause you really like the game

Geoff: yeah - so it's like computer game versions of real-life games

Ben: yeah sport sports are real good ones- but um yeah some games are good - like cartoon games character games like this - then there's the Mortal Kombat and stuff < Geoff: yep > and the're alright

Geoff: I've got some film of kids playing Mortal Kombat

Ben: yeah did you go to the arcade did ya

Geoff: no no no < Ben: people that have it > do you know James=

Ben: = mmhm +

David: +James who
Geoff: Austin's friend

Ben: yep I know him James Wilson

Geoff: yeah well he he's got Mortal Kombat

Ben: has he - hope I get that I'd rather get Mortal Kombat II now

Geoff: yeah - I've got some shots of his sister playing Mortal Kombat she's seven <
Ben: yeah yeah >

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Ben: [to M] best to get three on Marble and um the that one 'cause then you've got
heaps because the other one real hard-- yeah I'm getting um different games getting
Altered Beast which is one where you are < Geoff: Altered Beast > yep that's a real
good one < Geoff: never heard of it > it's a classic one it's one where you um you're
a guy the story line is actually Greek it's supposed to be this um old wizards his
DAUGHTER- has been captured and you're actually and you're a dead guy in it and
you're in your grave and then he says 'rise from your grave and save my daughter' and
so you get up and you're dead and then you're alive again and you go and you beat up
all the zombies [chuckles]--you beat up all the zombies and you can get the and these little
piggies come along < Geoff: heh > [laughs]

Geoff: this guy's hamming it up

Ben: and you ah < Geoff: heheh > and you and you kick the pigs and you get little
bubbles and you turn real big and stuff and you can turn into a weirwolf - and then you
can be into a weir dragon and you can fly and stuff it's a real good game-- but I'm
I'm I'm not getting this one but- sometimes I wish that I did

Geoff: yeah - actually I've seen one called - Flashback have you seen that =

Ben: = yep * that's EXCELLENT

David: = oh yeah *

Geoff: it reminded of the what you just described reminded me of it < T:yeah > it started
off with no memory and you have to figure out who you are < Ben: yeah Flashback is
excellent

David: I know all the cheats for it

Geoff: mmm

David: I know all the cheats

Ben: all the cheats to the levels < Geoff: you know all the cheats for it > because you
you can buy them in magazines - that's where most of the you know the kids that like
computer games money goes in the magazines < David: yeah >

Geoff: did I tell you that I went down to the Office of Film & Literature Classification
conference it's like the censor < Ben: yeah > that puts all those labels on videogames
and videos and um I actually showed some video of players to them um -- and they had a bit of a discussion going on videogames 'cause the censors are the ones that decide what categories to put games in whether they're 15 plus or 18 plus or whatever categories are <David: yeah> usually depend on how violent they are or how much blood is shown <David: yeah>

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David: is mine stuffed up yet

Geoff: Ben just returns from talking to Wayne -yeah I was saying to David that um when I went down to the Office of Film and Literature Classification conference I showed some video but it was actually video of Austin and James um playing and I showed it to about 100 people at this conference and they were talking about videogames +

Ben: + and what effect they have on kids and all that

Geoff: oh-yeah- they were starting to ask questions like that

Ben: put em down

Geoff: but em a lot of people talk a lot about violence and <Ben: yeah that's what I thought > and maybe it makes people violent I don't think it does

Ben: yeah and really if the parents are concerned you know they should just I don't know they should just limit the games that they should get 'cause there are really happy joy games an all the really with no violence <Geoff: mmhm I + just think* people like > + ( ) * yeah

Geoff: lots of violence on film when you look at films <Ben: yeah > and shown on television

Ben: but this is like you're actually controlling someone like you don't have to do it in real life you just - yeah it's not a <Geoff: yeah well it's not real life is it > it's not real life it's just a thing where you get away from real life and you- you imagine yourself fighting

Geoff: yeah that's right - [referring to videotape] the sound's breaking up here - it's a pity - this is one of the problems when you use taperecorders and videotapes - like I just had today [referring to the difficulty of getting a videotape to work with microphone input only; after several failed attempts at making a recording I resorted to using a tape recorder to record the session of which this is an annotated transcript] I'll probably take that home and it will work you know - I don't know what's wrong with it

Ben: yeah so - 'cause there are really no violent games at all if that's what you like there's a choice - there's sport games and they're not violent - they're just sport - and they're making real high tech games - movies - we went to the movies and saw Frankenstein last night and um they got this ad for a Megadrive it's um they've added some real hightech you know um what's that thing called um um - where you're in the where you actually put on the mask

Geoff: what virtual reality
Ben: yeah virtual reality and - like it's got this real weird ad going on and there's a guy sitting there saying 'don't get into it it's addictive and also violent' and there's a guy saying 'revolution' and it's just <Geoff: yep> it's quite a good ad though get a lot of people in it would <Geoff: yep> it costs about a thousand dollars though

Geoff: yep it's expensive I know - there was a guy at the conference that spoke in the afternoon and he was from a company in australia that's producing virtual reality - um set systems but they're not all for games like some of them are being used in industry like one of the uses is for security you know so people can look down corridors in building oh I know assessing fire risk actually was one of the one of the uses they had for it that they set up a kind of virtual building which shows you what the building looks like without actually going into it and then fire risk assessors can look they can go through the building without having to walk through it and they can say 'there's a fire risk here or there's a fire risk here' 'there's no fire risk here' <Ben: ummm> I didn't realise that was going to be like that was one of the applications that they thought would flow from it - but he hadn't around this headset that everybody tried on he didn't have it operating and he said 'be really careful of it' <Ben: yea> 'cause it was worth 10,000 dollars

Ben: sheee Mike was telling you know that ad when we went and saw Frankenstein last night <David: yea> you know that ad <David: yea> it was they're making high tech systems now like virtual reality eh <David: yea>

----

[soundtrack of videotape : Ben: ...now this part ... going to get squashed up here...]

David: who's on there

Ben: me I think I'm not sure- oh one of us cause we looked up and we saw up there remember <David: oh yea> when we were down there

David: hate it when that comes on

----

Ben: yea this is the hard bit eh this is the part that no one can get past

David: I always used to stuff up on that

Ben: yep - oop

----

Ben: oop

David: ( )

Geoff: this would have to be one of the best platform games wouldn't it

Ben: yeah- it takes a lot of skill 'cause you have to sorta you have to learn the controls- and like you slide and you have to you have to have a lot of practice to actually get through this game- most people use um use cheats to get through this level eh
David: yeah

Geoff: yeah so they don't work their way up < David: yeah > they find out how

Ben: this game takes hours to play but it's real fun - - this level's real easy -- hmm you zoomed in there

-----

Ben: pig's come out in- not in Marble < David: no > what's that < David: Casino > no that's not it [soundtrack: ...Springyard] Springyard

-----

Ben: this is the best level --whoa-- [telephone rings] huh yeah I think there's supposed to be real good Sonics out now --

David: now this is where there were pigs

Ben: there were the pigs

Geoff: the pigs

Ben: yeah the little pigs come out

David: you just ( ) on that

[soundtrack: Ben: ...now this you have to ...now you see these come along ... and that .. he's invincible...]

-----

Ben: yeah I'm getting um yeah I'm getting Thunder Force IV as well

Geoff: Thunder Force IV what on earth is Thunder first force four

Ben: it's a it's a um you're in a sort of spaceship it's like a space thing but you're actually flying past mountains and you're shooting planes and stuff like side-screen goes from the side but you can go I I found it real fun like it's a fast game like Sonic but faster 'cause like when you go- you can+

Geoff: +where did you play it

Ben: um well we went to this - there was a secondhand one um they advertised it and we went up to Watervale and when we went to the house and I got to play with just a demonstration like to have a go but um you get I also got with it a Turbo control pad' it's a six button < Geoff: right > and um yeah and so they're they're for playing games on Mortal Kombat and that - it's likd the arcade you've got six buttons instead of just three < Geoff: :oh right I see yep > and um yeah with that with Thunderforce IV you can actually you can play it two player but you don't but you don't have two spaceships you have um - one person can use one control pad to shoot and the other person steers < Geoff: right > and like- I found it real good when ya when ya when ya go down instead of crashing into the ground you go into the SEA- and
you're like a SUBMARINE- going under the WATER - there's just no end to the levels
you know there's no end to the sky and everything

Geoff: yep - yeah so that seems pretty important doesn't it <Ben: yeah> if you
can find a game that - has a - neverending levels

Ben: you never get bored with it you just keep playing

Geoff: yep there's always something new to - explore

Ben: mmhm I guess you're ( ) by now aren't you - the ring

David: see this one is super ( )

Ben: yes that's right?

---

Ben: but Sonic's sort of - Sonic I's gone gone out of fashion now like all of the
games like everything Mortal Kombat and everything is going out too Mortal Kombat I
'cause there's Mortal Kombat II now <Geoff: mmhm> even Sonic II's gone out
and now Sonic III's in <Geoff: right>

David: and that's gone out ( )

Ben: call me old fashioned but I still like it

Geoff: yep

Ben: probably because I haven't played it for so long

Geoff: so what makes it go out of fashion

Ben: just the new and the better levels and the <Geoff: the newer> yeah the more
more high tech ones

Geoff: but does it ever happen that the new one's not as good as the old one

Ben: um not regularly - I think it might

Geoff: = it happens in movies sometimes

Ben: yeah movies all the time all the not all but the original ones are usually the best

Geoff: yeah I mean Back to the Future II was not as good as Back to the Future I

Ben: one number one is always the best of them all

Geoff: what about Aliens II was that as good as Aliens I

Ben: I like it better - I think Aliens I was more boring nothing more happened -
adults film I think Aliens II is more so is my mum and stuff they think it's better -
better done
G: sometimes it can be better

Ben: not mostly though - it's just like books - the movies aren't as good as the books - in some cases they are - like Last of the Mohicans I got that out and I read the book and that wasn't very good at all < Geoff: mmm > it was very old fashioned and - and the characters in it were completely different --

Geoff: well sometimes books are made into films what's happened I don't know whether you've realised whether you've noticed with computer games is that sometimes computer games are made into movies

Ben: yeah < G: um > like um < G: I think there's about + >

David: + Mortal Kombat

Ben: Street Fighter II that's come out that's been made into a movie

Geoff: have you seen any of these movies

Ben: no not yet

Geoff: 'cause what I've heard from some people is that there not very good you know that the computer game is better than the movie based on the computer game

Ben: yeah - would be it's just that

Geoff: you get in the picture theatre and you want to [laughingly] control all the characters < Ben: yeah > instead of = just having

Ben: = you wanna - yeah - you wanna make them do what you want < Geoff: yeah > and um there just you don't it doesn't sound sort of it just won't it'll never feel right because they're supposed to be computer games not movies - and they're not supposed to act like however they act in movies - so you act how you want

Geoff: but there's been a lot of books that have been made into very successful movies < Ben: mmm > a lot- so it seems that um books can be made into good movies but computer games can't

Ben: different thing sort of

Geoff: movie a different form isn't it

Ben: yeah

----

Geoff: so the new one that you're getting is that a sixteen bit one like what you had < Ben: yep yep >

Ben: it's a it's a Megadrive II < Geoff: yep > cause they have only Megadrive II and MegaCD and all the high tech ones

David: and they have ( ) 32 ( )
Ben: is that double it or it's ( ) I think it's- I think it's around what is it or maybe they're less because mostly it's mostly just like it but um it's got 'cause the games are the same you stick the same games in < David: yeah > it's just got it's more compact and you can do more things with it sort of < Geoff: yeah > it's real small < Geoff: that's probably still 16 bit > yeah yeah I think I think it is

Geoff: it's 16 bit the early Nintendos were 8 bit

Ben: yeah

Geoff: in fact I've filmed a guy that's got a Nintendo 8 bit and the graphics are really um boring

Ben: yeah the same and everything+

Geoff: +and a blue sky or green sky or something but nothing really happening in the background

Ben: it's just the same- in the background

Geoff: the backgrounds in these are much more =( ( )

Ben: = they move and stuff

Geoff: yeah much more I mean that background there as we're watching what is it

Ben: it's the 'Special Level'

Geoff: ( )

Ben: yeah 'Bonus level Sonic' < David: ( ) > yeah but the MegaCD has got double - about 32 bits I think- almost double

Geoff: mmhm - getting a marvellous shot of the floor here [chuckles] oh it's me playing - no wonder I'm not getting anywhere --

Ben: [ha ha ha] it's me using the camera - filming the ground

Geoff: I think your dad had arrived at that stage David - I think that's who I'm talking to here

----

Ben: yeah I'm glad I'm getting another one 'cause you know you can go over to the shops and just hire one out < Geoff: yeah > for quite cheap

Geoff: oh yeah you can hire them now can't you that's changed since we made this film

Ben: yeah it's just like movies you can hire them out < Geoff: yeah > and you don't have to pay a lot

Geoff: so you can try them out and if you really think they're good you can buy= them
Ben: =buy them yeah it's like try < Geoff: yeah > try 'em first

Geoff: if you don't want to you don't have to

Ben: and like - they got a pretty small range here in Hightown and like when you try all them then you just go to Watervale 'cause they've got a mass range of them < Geoff: yeah > 'cause they're doing it everywhere now to get a lot more money tons of people have got Megadrives

----

Geoff: I think what happened is the producers of games found they weren't selling as many and that's when they decided to rent them

Ben: mmhm 'cause it's so expensive

Geoff: and they thought this is the way of um continuing to get money -- 'cause they weren't selling as well as - they sold phenomenally well for a while and then a whole lot of companies wanted to produce computer games and I think what's going to happen is that there's too many - going to come on the market - and some of these companies are going to go broke

----

David: ( )

Ben: yup

Geoff: what level's this

Ben: Spring - Springfield

David: yeah

T:no it's not- it's not Springfield- isn't it - is it- it's something different

David: ( )

Geoff: something different

Ben: it's spring something

Geoff: Springyard

Ben: yeah Springyard

David: yeah ( )

Geoff: that's right that's the bit we just did - ( ) so we're up to about page eleven

----

David: which is the um - the level with water
Geoff: with water

David: um that

G:ah -- [reading from transcript] 'games cost about 70 dollars'

[soundtrack: ... you get bored with no game and the ...your birthday or something...]

David: oh this is ah -- it's not -- it isn't there

Ben: you're a lot younger

Geoff: David [asks a question] --you're getting older that's what's happening guys

David: ( ) your watch eh

Ben: what sort of watch is it

Geoff: [referring to screen action] David's getting stuck into the magazine there -- 'Labyrinth' that's what it's called - the one you can drown in -- this is getting near the end

Ben: yeah it turned out quite well though all things considered

Geoff: oh yeah

T: yeah

Geoff: didn't lose too much of the soundtrack- it's pretty good around here it's just that early bit - 'cause I didn't move the camera so much

[sound of the toy the boys were playing with which was a device I can best describe as follows: a hand sized cube made up of nail look pieces which are fixed closely together so that they follow the contour of an object by the nail heads resting on it and show the contour shape on thereverse face by virtue of the nail like projections being of uniform size and length]

Ben: ( )

David: yeah

Ben: [laughs]

[both boys laugh together]

Geoff: what's funny guys

Ben: he's just staring in the camera

Geoff: he looks like he's half asleep
David: I probably am

Geoff: yeah it was a Saturday night I think it was fairly late at this stage probably half past ten or something

Ben’s dad: hi Geoff

Geoff: hi

Ben: what’d your dad say?

David: ( )

Geoff: well I’d like to come around some time when you get your new game Ben

Ben: yeah ( )

Geoff: that’d be good maybe some time in the New Year

Ben: yep I'll know it all by then

Geoff: yeah - I think ( ) you’re going to be away between Christmas and New Year when you come back half way through January <Ben: ok> some time like that I’ll just ( ) today I won’t try to make a time with you <Ben: yep> I still haven’t done any editing of all this it’s a huge job - what I can show you if you want if you’re interested wait till I look what I’ve got here I brought along another tape

David: ( )

Geoff: well I don’t know what’s on it yet - I’ll tell you have you ever seen a program it was on TV actually it was just a little bit on the news on Channel 10 about videoparlours - alright stick it on oh what’s in here- oh this is Ben playing Civilisation

David: cool it’s a good game

Geoff: this is an Atari game

Ben: it’s good

Geoff: [reading from screen] your civilisation makes us laugh we will argue you reject our generous offer your insolence you’ve gotta to keep changing discs on it - that’s what this is about- oh it’s a map of the world - and you gotta all the black bits are the territory that you’ve got to explore and he’s attacking somebody here - his troops are coming in to some town

Ben’s mum: [Ben’s Mum comes in room] I’m just going to the paper shop I’ll be back in a little while ok

Ben: mmhm ok

----

Geoff: um ( ) and he’s decided to have some settlers
[sound of door shutting]

--- it's a very complicated game actually - you've got to plan a civilisation and decide what to build - um and decide how many =forces < Ben: = ( ) > to invest in military units and ships < Ben: yeah > ah and how much and how many fortifications to build - like city walls houses and things like that

?: ( ) Monopoly

Geoff: yeah it is a little bit like Monopoly .

David: ( )

Geoff: ( ) -- and see that stage you've got part of the world that you're looking at - at the top left hand corner- and there's a time line up here on the left it's sixteen ten in the year 1610 AD - and that then suggests there's riots --

David: ( )

---

Ben: there's not much talking

Geoff: it has a little bit of sound - not very much - occasionally it had a sound track--

---

Ben: ( )

Geoff: there's the sound

Ben: it's a pretty good game though

Geoff: yeah ok what about putting that in

Ben: this one

Geoff: you might have to wind it back

Ben: is it this one

[soundtrack from daytime television briefly]

Geoff: oh you can just leave that one where it is -- that one I gave you might need rewinding - no definitely not this one

[soundtrack from ?? Qantas ad]

[soundtrack from videotape, Channel 10 news item on plans for video arcades in Australia: Male newsreader: "both companies have announced plans to spend a total of 350 million dollars over the next five years. Massive theme parks and state-of-the-art video arcades will be coming to every capital city in the country."
Female reporter: 'Fancy a spot of fishing or what about boxing. If you love cars then how about a spin in a Formula one. Welcome to the entertainment park of the future. This is Japan’s version of Sega world which opens in ( ) tomorrow. And it’s a carbon copy of what Australians will witness in less than two years. Sega is planning to spend over 250 million dollars over the next five years opening up over half a dozen theme parks like these in most capital cities. Also under development are twenty large scale videoarcades with the main drawcard virtual reality'.]

Ben: [to dog] sit this is them - that's the ad that we saw

Geoff: it's Kevin Bermeister talking

[soundtrack: KB: '... that one could never experience in the real world environment um and that is our strength.

Female reporter: 'Battling it out for the entertainment dollar is also Village Roadshow media magnate Kerry Packer. They'll spend 100 million dollars transforming the current movie houses of Westfield shopping centres around the country into family entertainment centres, featuring state of the art indoor sports facilities. The first online will be Westfield in Hurstville in western Sydney’].

Geoff: this is Gary ( ) speaking

[Gary: '...in the old stand alone cinemas or the twins and someone introduced the multiplex'.

Female reporter: 'While these concepts are quite bold for Australia both companies are confident they will be a success. In the United States alone, this sort of industry generates around 6 billion dollars a year. Sega believes it may double even treble their business here. Village also has in the pipeline two other concepts: one is called 'world live' aimed at the 22 to 40 year old market and an adventure playground called 'hide and seek' for 1 to 8 year olds. Melbourne's 'Jam Factory' will combine all three concepts; Brisbane's Queen St Mall will concentrate on the adult market. Sandra Sully Ten news'.]

David: hey

Ben: ( )

Geoff: what

Ben: how long ago was this news that you taped

Geoff: aw <T:like> how long ago was it- um quite a while ago- it was um - whan was it -it's on the packet-- it's on the it's on the tape I'd say earlier this year probably about two months ago two and a half months ago-- yeah that's all I want to show you - ok

Ben: yeah

Geoff: alright guys - thanks for that

Ben: you can come along anytime with my Mega drive

Geoff: ok- see this guy here he got the sack
Ben: did he
Geoff: yeah
Ben: what for
Geoff: for - pinching other people's writing and claiming it was his own - he used to get access to writing on the Internet like the um you know how you can send email
Ben: yeah
Geoff: well he got access to other people's writing and then he published under his name in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and he was found out and he got the sack
{tape stopped}
Ben & David playing videogames 5.1.95

[This is a transcript of a videorecording which was made in Ben's bedroom. Ben and his schoolfriend David are playing videogames with Ben's newly acquired second-hand Megadrive the second Megadrive that Ben has owned. It is summer school holiday time.]

{videotape starts}

David: I kicked you and I'm beating you--for once--what player was that that was good <Ben: 35> no I mean what play

Ben: oh- that was a handathon? - like

David: tackled the wrong guy

Geoff: ( )

Ben: I thought you did

David: my guy could never catch that simple catch

----

David: ohh [with dismay]

Ben: ha ha ha

Geoff: so this is based on the rules of Gridiron is it

Ben: yep [confidently] <David: [softly] yeah > this is an old one it's - 1992 <Geoff: =1992 *> =the rules are a* the rules are a little bit changed

David: oh

Geoff: changed from what

Ben: um - I mean they're- they're different to 94 they made some new rules <Geoff: oh right > he's going good [to David] 64 yard

David: best I've ever done

Geoff: what I might do- here is just um - film you for a little bit and just make sure it's working <Ben: yep> <David: yep> 'cause I'd hate to go for two hours and then find out that it was a dud

David: yeah -- yeah you+ lost me* then

Ben: +see that* I know

Geoff: so I might just check it now actually
David: replay

Geoff: the videoplayer's in the next room isn't it <David: yeah> stop it
{videotape stopped to check that recording is working; videotape restarted}

David: I thought that was me that was down? I mean you that was down for me

Ben: touchdown()

David: two two 79 yards for two plays,
[soundtrack: 'hoy hoy hoy hoy hoy hoy']

David: yeah heh

Ben: your goal? [reading from screen] 'it's good'

-----

Ben: hey - oh you have you have to be () eh

David: no you just run back in and dive on the ground wh- as long as you're in there

Ben: I moved him myself though()

Geoff: so how does this game work

Ben: well um what you do is you pick your players like different ways he's defence he's trying to stop me from getting a t a goal and I'm trying to get a goal and like you pick your plays you can have a throwing play where you throw it to your people <Geoff: yeah> or a running play <Geoff: right>-- now - it's pretty complicated - oh

David: oh so+() the * team

Ben: + knocked it out * should be

Geoff: so is it a throwing play or a running play

Ben: yeah I threw it

Geoff: a throwing play

Ben: it was incomplete 'cause 'cause the guy guy didn't catch it - he like he dropped it again - I'm going to do another throwing play - see him throw the ball there -- oh not again

Geoff: intercept

Ben: yep - it means -he took my throw

David: ohhh 21 yard gain -- not doing too well
Ben: that's why I hit your mark - ( ) you're mess messing me around here

Geoff: what's he go 'ha ha ha ha ha ha' for

David: = [laughs]

Ben: = it's just David?

Ben: + and < David: + oh no* > even* with this game you can have like instant replay - slow motion watch this

Geoff: oh this is an instant replay

David: yep=

Ben: = yep

Geoff: right so you see+

Ben: he he throws and then on the red guy watch him- he just = he jumps < David: = he dives in front of him > in front of him and he catches it and then he- and it switches ways and then he runs and gets tackled

Geoff: so this is a replay

Ben: yeah and then you can rewind it < Geoff: right > and you do it in normal

Geoff: oh so rewind it and do it normal

Ben: yeah or you can --

David: my guy dived the wrong way

Geoff: so this is an instant replay is it

Ben: yeah this- < David: now > anyone would think this game is pretty boring unless um-unless you know you knew how to play it-- it's fun actually we play it all night [laughs] < Geoff: all night > - all night until the morning

Geoff: is that why you didn't get up until 12 o'clock or something today < Ben: yeah >

David: before we stayed up at till=

Ben: = 6.30

Geoff: 6.30 [chuckles]

David: yeah 6.30 in the morning

Geoff: [chuckles]- what happened did you finally fall asleep at the joystick did you

Ben: ah we just went to sleep
T& David: [in disappointment] ohhhh

Ben: now I'll do an instant- see now he's doing his little dance 'cause he got =

Geoff: = so he? does his little dance

Ben: and then he's pushing me- and now he can do it and basicl it's not going to show you the whole play 'cause it was too long - I'll just do it normal < Geoff: yeah > he's running - now David David - this guy dies just makes it that was twenty three- was it - it's eighty three-- see now I'm going for the field goal < Geoff: mhmhm > I've got to kick it through the posts just like in proper & everything? -- < Geoff: oh right >

David: I'm trying to block it < > I don't know oh there I am

[soundtrack: hoy hoy hoy hoy]

Geoff: there he goes again [both boys laugh] he stutters or something

David: [emphatically] yes knocked back

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'no good' < David: replay >= says the screen* < Ben: he knocked that*>

Ben: look he knocks it back - and - and it hits his hands < Geoff: right > that's the second+ down

David: +second down

----

Geoff: so what's this game called

Ben: um um =John Madden* 92 < David: =John Madden *> 

Geoff: John Madden 92

Ben: he's a football some football fanatic

Geoff: oh right must be American

Ben: yeah he is [laughs] and he made and he makes like 94 he makes one each year I think -- yeah

Geoff: he makes what

Ben: he make um like he does he make a like John Madden 95 John Madden 94 John Madden= < Geoff: =oh right > 93 he makes one each year

Geoff: like um+ < Ben: +'cause it's > Jaws 1 Jaws 2 =

Ben: = yeah they're all real popular they're real popular games

----
Ben: catch it?
David: so did I

---- [soundtrack: ?]
David: oh nearly sacked me -- oh
Ben: if you hadn't dodged that tackle

( )
Geoff: he's got the hiccups again [both boys laugh]

----
David: knocked back
Ben: is it
David: yeah - well your guy put his hands up?
Ben: I was I was trying to catch it

----
David: your guy runs out and goes- push- oh no it didn't touch =him*
Ben: = didn't * touch I was trying to catch it - I never noticed till? you were pressing all the buttons [David laughs]

----
Geoff: the last time I come here your um I filmed you two guys you were in that room over by the front door
Ben: were we < David: yeah > oh that's right
Geoff: was that your room then Ben
Ben: it was now I've moved - I moved TWICE since then - I moved up there and then down here
Geoff: twice
Ben: yeah
David: oh no
Geoff: this is the third room you've had in this house is it
Ben: yep - I think so yep - [to David sotto voce] I knocked you back heaps of times in that game
Geoff: and I noticed + <Ben: +() > you got some American footballers up
= <Ben: [sotto voce: chatter of the confidente ] = hey look like? > there on the wall
Ben: [the public assertive? voice]yep - = <Geoff: = I'll > I'm right into that sport
Geoff: I'll have to get a shot of them
Ben: [sotto voce to David] hey look like I knocked you back heaps of times
David: I know I did- I got knocked back at least five yards <David: yeah > I go
Ben: it it's only a two yard loss

David: yeah
Ben: 'you're going for a field goal are you
David: yeah mate
Ben: fake
David: yeah mate
[soundtrack: 'hoy hoy hoy' etc]

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Ben: aww
David: touchdown no is that enough
Ben: yes [soundtrack: 'firstdown']

----

[soundtrack: 'hoy hoy']
Ben: hoh hoh ho so close+
David: +It's the first yards

----

David: huh huh
Ben: that was me
David: neat one yard loss
Ben: 'cause I fell on the ground watch this= <David: =I jumped > oh watch watch 'cause he goes +
David: +I ( ) jumped over you - no - no I jumped
Ben: Joey? well you must have hit me = ( )

Geoff: = why does it say 'audible' on the screen

Ben: 'audible' that means everyone stays in their positions- no one moves until the - until the play starts - you press 'A' to for audible you- it's complicated you've got to read the rules and everything to learn to

David: we didn't do that did we

Ben: no we just figure it out half the time

Geoff: you didn't bother reading the rules

Ben: we just knew about grid iron

Geoff: so how come how come you told me you gotta read all the rules when you didn't do it

Ben: um um <Geoff: [laughs] > well see we used I used to get this out and I didn't know how to play it at all and then um -- like I don't know I just -

Geoff: David helped you

Ben: yeah we all just - we sort of figured it out a little bit *

David: +no I didn't know anything about it *

Ben: none of us knew anything but then <David: we all > we learnt how to play gridiron like we like gridiron so we got this out again - and now we know all the rules and everything <Geoff: oh right > so it's just like if you know how to play the rules then you know how to play this- you've just got to figure out these little- things here

David: all we knew about was =passing

Geoff: = [reading from screen ] what 'full' 'near' and 'run and shoot' and all that stuff + <Ben: + yeah run and > up book?= 

Ben: = I'm going to do 'run and shoot' now I'm going to do 'deep out'

Geoff: on you do the different moves

Ben: yeah I'm just telling him my stuff my player's move?

David: I'm doing 'goal line defence'

Ben: throws it up --oh he catches it

David: he's running

Ben: ohh tackled - forty two yard gain

Geoff: that's good is it
Ben: yeah and that's* my crab? <David: = I* I just tackled him again > unsportsman like conduct because he tackled me after the play ended <Geoff: [chuckles] > he got angry

----

Ben: ohh two yard loss
David: ha ha
Ben: I knocked you back heaps far not far

----

Ben: this is good because two people can play it
Geoff: yep- do you prefer
Ben: yes
David: knocked back - I got it
Geoff: do you prefer a two player game to a one player game
Ben: yeah
David: yeah
Geoff: why
Ben: 'cause like - just say you've got- a friend over or something or they're are lots of people in instead of instead of everyone having to wait you can just verse each other- but sometimes there's heaps of lives there 'cause everyone's - you know you really you really want to beat each other <David: yeah> but we just mess around have fun <Geoff: yep> there's no real tension in the game <Geoff: yeah> it's more fun
Geoff: but some sometimes people take it real seriously
Ben: yeah that's a problem
David: mmhm
Geoff: probably when your father plays huh
Ben: yeah [laughs] ohh= <David: =ohh> he jumped and he caught it but he landed out of bounds <Geoff: oh> otherwise that would've been like a touchdown <Geoff: right>

David: do you want to take the field goal - oh no field goal
Ben: [sotto voce] oh I forgotten about that - oh well I'm gonna take a risk here
David: I'll be junt?-- Dars? () 'Kansas City' < Ben: no they're not > yeah turn everyone downs

----

Ben: you're flogging me-- () I'll just ( )

-- oh you just got a

Geoff: he just got an intercept and he got an unsportsmanlike conduct < Ben: yep > what was that for

Ben: 'cause David < David: he got the ball < Ben: I > he got an interception > I got I got an interception I picked up his throw I caught it when- and got an interception and so he ( ) and tackled me

David: ooops [laughs]

Ben: I just got an offside < Geoff: yeah >

Geoff: that's rain [it begins to rain heavily outside and can be heard through the open window of Ben's bedroom]

David: rain < Geoff: yeah >

Ben: crazy weather

David: oh that's you I thought that was me

Ben: crazy weather rain one day burning hot- and we're down the lake < David: yeah > -- catch it

David: I ( ) dived I pressed the wrong button - supposed to tackle yours ( ) [sound of rain ]

----

David: touchdown - I'll kill you- I just want to=

Ben: =hey just () window [Ben gets up to shut the window in his room]

David: I'll block this field goal again- heh heh heh- easy uh uh- out on the bounce? straight away

Ben: [reading from screen text] 'it's good'

David: ha ha still beating ya - by one just

----

Ben: yes - on the 10 yeard line [soundtrack : touchdown] I got one interception in this game

David: I know- 'bout six
Ben: about tons

David: oh yeah it's going cool

Ben: oh hoh hoh hoh

David: come back here

Ben: now watch this play and see this is um- he's throwing to his guy and my guy's covering him < Geoff: right > - these two up here watch my guy he sticks up his hands- see look - and he catches it < Geoff: yeah > and an interception again < David: and i'm out again > see i'm getting tons * of interceptions here < David: =and i tackle him*>

David: oh my guy didn't even move he just stood there and watched

Geoff: has he got lead in his boots or something

Ben: [laughs] yeah- he can't - and it and get his hands dirty he can't lift his hands up and catch -- whoa - pretty close then -- i should've let you knock me over

David: why

Ben: [laughs]

David: oh you- no you gained 2A?

Geoff: so when did you first- start playing this game

Ben: ages ago when I had the Megadrive before and then - I didn't really like it then much - oh we thought it was alright but we didn't know then I liked gridiron I got a Megadrive so I like gridiron again < Geoff: oh right > so it goes - =yeah

David: =oh yes what an interception

Ben: oh a touchdown

David: uh uh you're beating me - NO +

Ben: + what a comeback

David: you've got to kick to me again

Ben: I gotta kick to you and kick to you- 'cause it's almost the end = < David: = my guys can't attack > it's almost half time- my blokes can get good interceptions eh

David: yeah

T: uh uh

David: () =
Ben: = what we do is we um we have fun we throw it up on the roof and the
[soundtrack suddenly drops several decibels in intensity; Ben is here referring to
a lump of sticky wonderputty that they have been playing with whilst also playing
computer games]

[inaudible for a few seconds]

Ben: oh what a tackle- watch this guy - number twenty was it - < David: I don't
know > yep 20 - watch him watch him go- see ’cause his guys can screen him so they
can't get through they can stop him from getting through

Geoff: so this is the replay

Ben: he makes it straight past them all- hits his feet and knocks him over -- hmmm a
pretty close game - almost second quarter time

David: you nearly kicked em straight after this < Ben: I know [laughs] > after
the -- ( ) INTERCEPTION

Ben: oh - almost lost

David: oh this can't be auto?

Ben: [laughs; referring to camera panning ] filming my posters

----

David: always do that- it goes POWW

Ben: he always catches it and then I jump and knock it- and what

David: my guys have got butterfingers < Geoff: right > yeah

Ben: [laughs] it's somewhere over it's um- I think it's this guy - yeah see watch this he
jumps - < David: ohhh > and then < David: = it's a big fumble!* = he hits the wall*
yeah I know ( ) ’cause he caught it and then he got knocked out but it says he never
caught it

David: ’cause there's [sound fx] pshh ohhhhhhhh it's like a Bruce Lee movie

Geoff: a Bruce Lee movie

David: c'mon tackle me-- knocked back oh I got it

[both laugh]

David: ( ) I just stopped- say I go

Ben: I just left them the more they did nothing

David: so did I-- I go [sound fx]

[knock at door of Ben's bedroom]
Geoff: [to Ben's mum] it's alright come in

Ben's mum: you sure

Geoff: yeah yeah this is real life [both boys laugh]

Ben's mum: oh it's just I'm boiling some eggs for Joe do you want interested in a boiled egg

Ben: ok hard no um medium

Ben's mum: medium - do you want one David

David: yes please

Ben's mum: two medium boiled eggs do you want one

Geoff: [laughs] no thanks

[Ben's mum leaves room]

David: [laughs]

Ben: watch this if he if he if he would have caught that that might have been a touchdown

David: it would've been a touchdown put it that way

Ben: =watch this -- massive throw all the way downfield- that guy was wide open - and he misses it - he walks too far and now David's gonna cry

David: ha ha ha mmhm

Ben: but he's moving up the field pretty fast

David: yeah that's me

-----

David: mmhm I see -- INTERCEPTION HEY you caught that again - I caught that again and- time out - look at this one second left

Ben: oh yeah the field goal <David: yep> EKK I get it too heh heh heh- I still like you () pal?

David: then you gotta kick to me again

Ben: uhheh heh heh

-----

David: yahay
Ben: this is the one that stuck up your arms I got your watch?

David: no when you stick up your arms it doesn't do anything - 'cause yer - 'cause they're kicking upwards.

Ben: yeah but if you're close it does.

David: just.

Ben: just.

David: then you gotta kick to me - heh heh.

Ben: oh well I'll still win heh heh [laughs].

David: then I'll be winning heh heh -- five plays six=(

Ben: =after this we'll continue the playoffs.

David: [sotto voce] yeah ok.

Ben: 'cause ah we got into the playoffs and we got real far and this one team that just kept knocking us out <David: Philadelphia> um but we got a code - we found out we got the code so um- so now we can just keep going back and playing it again and again until we win - we +haven't <Geoff: + ohh> had much luck lately.

Geoff: the code to keep going <Ben: yeah> into the semifinal.

Ben: yep -ohh=

David: =it just sucked down on a lot of shit - keep.

Ben: wasn't very good.

David: field goal.

Ben: I mean +punt*

David: + punt*

---- [soundtrack: 'firstdown']

T: oh it's already on the 34 yard.

David: whoa.

Ben: hee hee.

----

David: what about that other game how I thought I caught it on the - touchdown line- and um - <Ben: oh no> - what a pass - how much yards 42 cool.

Ben: no - that wasn't very good.
David: remember that game how I thought I caught it in the endzone- and I dived on the ground and you tackled me and a safety < Ben: oh yeah > and got the two extra points and I had to punt

----

T & David: [in unison] ohhh

David: ohh slowmo

Geoff: what happened then

Ben: watch this - see there - there's the quarterback and ( ) he throws < David: I took a while to make this decision > he threw it straight up there - this guy caught it and then I tackled him < David: ==and I jumped* == and he dived* and he fell forward and got a +touchdown < David: +just > just made it in < Geoff: right > made fair < David: mmmh > oh well you gotta kick to me next time

David: so I'm still winning

Ben: yeah but I will be [almost an afterthought] if I get a touchdown

David: just

Ben: you'll be on 24 or something about 27 eh something like that

David: yeah something like that -- no you'll be winning by three points < Ben: mmmh > what about your [fx] dowwww < Ben: oh yeah > you hit the side of the um - post and it goes [fx] dowww

Ben: and it bounces off

----

Geoff: I noticed that little power graph < Ben: yep that's that's > over there that decides your kick

Ben: that's - yeah straight under youse all - I slid under ya

David: yeah I dove dived dived over < Ben: dove > the top [laughs] I dove over you

----

Geoff: if you can't dive over him you might as well dive over him

David: [laughs] --

Ben: oh yes when you laugh I missed that and I =

David: =STRAIGHT IN

Ben & David: [in unison] ohhhh
Ben: a 60 yard gain

David: oh [sotto voce] uh uh uh uh uh -- now I'll get you mate

----

Ben: oh yes=

David: =no -- I'm going to get you now - I'm gonna tackle the ref

Ben: watch this - film this bit - watch this see this is this is the runner <David: I say hopeless > he's my best running back now watch this - he runs- quarterback gives the ball to him - watch this that guy misses <Geoff: mmhm > that guy misses- that guy misses( ) <Geoff: mmhm > and then he's free-- there's no way anyone can get him now - so says? whop

Geoff: he's a bit of a hero

Ben: [proudly ] 23's my best player

David: [fx] zzzz oh I want one of my guys to do here [fx] aww-- 16 yards is that all two players 78 yards that's cool

Ben: that's - excellent

David: it's ( ) good good

Ben: bad

David: bad

Ben: good

David: good

----

David: oh your go

Ben: see him jump 'cause he's jumped and knocked into my guy

David: I need a field goal and I'm tying with you mate and I'll beat ya <Ben: + you won't get one > I'll get a touchdown that's why

Ben: oh no you won't

David: yeah I will

Ben: no you won't

David: i'll beat you - easy to ( )

Ben: i'll get another interception
David: easier done than said - ha ha ha=
Ben: = oh I keep doing those kicks- oh it wasn't too bad
David: heh heh I dove down +
Ben: + I could have made it heaps better
David: no because you would've tackled me then
Ben: yeah but you could've made it further than that
David: no
Ben: mmmhm- not sother?
David: yeah but there was a - you you would've tackled me
Ben: yeah but you still would've made it further- than you did then

----

David: oh yes what a pass
Ben: uh oh -- ohh
David: touchdown no - [laughs] 69 yards
Ben: ohh

[soundtrack: first down] ----

David: my guys are slow runners -- oh you knocked me+ <Ben: + oh yeah > back mega- one yard+ - you knocked me more* than that =
Ben: + it cheats a bit* = a cheater
David: used to chea cheat with you
Ben: oh it's the skill
David: it's the cheat
Geoff: what's 'normal' mean
Ben: he's just going to do a normal play he's not going to field goal or anything
David: ohhh BLOW ohh
Ben: you're a goner now
David: no I'm gonna tackle you in the safety
Ben: no = <David: = ( ) in safety > you won't

David: yeah I will

Ben: nuh uh

David: you try passing it I'll sack ya

Ben: no way I'm out of there

David: oh man - if you get a touchdown you're winning - that's not fair - I'm supposed to win = <Ben: =YIKES > they're coming up <Ben: aww > hard to () feeling [laughs] ha I tackled ya - hmmm

Ben: aha ha ( )

David: who cares at least I tackled you - how much yards is that

Ben: quite a bit

[someone farts]

[prolonged laughter from both the boys particularly David]

Ben: I think that's going to be on it too

Geoff: it's good the smell doesn't come across isn't it

[both laugh]

Geoff: I'll have to edit that bit out

[both laugh]

Ben: ohh

David: ohh it was an interception not fair

Ben: yeah ( )

Ben: [Ben laughs] leave it on [David laughs] it'll give it a nice touch

David: yeah no not fair+

Geoff: +bit of real life you reckon

Ben: yep

David: oh good this is only the third quarter -- ba ba [laughs] -- this time I gotcha - get out of the way - oops - ohh--

Ben: ha ha - now I got now I got just as much - as before
David: not fair

T & David: ohhh

Ben: 23 again my best player the same one I got last time

Geoff: 23 is the hero again

Ben: yeah -- see that screen work my people did then- watch this - = they all went that way *

David: = my guy's weren't even in yet *

Ben: I've got three guys off that tackle ( ) and that guy was screening

David: I should've just dived on you and got pass interference < Ben: [laughs] > -- you got 94 yards for for passing and minus minus nine [infectious giggle?] [Ben laughs] oh DIVE AWAY

Ben: you ( ) me - he dived the wrong way-if he hadn't of =

David: =you're beating me by ten - not fair- cheat- that's what you're doing you're cheating

Ben: uh uh - I'm just skilled

David: skilled uh uh [dyad] uh uh uh [triad; rhythmically speaking]

Ben: hey you were winning at first remember= < David: =yeah that's because+ > +you weren't complaining then

David: yeah because that's because I was winning

Ben: oh nice kick - full power- oh not touched? back --lucky otherwise that would've been - safety < [David's breathing ? ] > [laughingly] what did you do that for

David: I thought it was on the um line thing- < David: oh > so I dived on the ground

Ben: I wish you'd stay there [laughs; David laughs] I would have got safety [sotto voce] and got the ball down and two points - [usually intensity] then you would have been - then you would have been gone? you still are gone though

David: ohh see that - I was on the line there

Ben: [incredulously] YOU WERE OUT

David: I know
Ben: [emphatically] YOU WERE OUT = < David: =I was out > look- you ran out - no no < David: you're one foot out > yeah you had your foot out - hah no and you reckon they cheat you+ < David: + heh heh= heh > =not with? me- that's what's called megacheat -- what about that quarterback that was crazy [David laughs] he always thought that there was there was some visual [David laughs] guy 'cause he used to run backwards and spin around like someone was trying to tackle him - and then suddenly one time something happened to the computer

David: CHEATING 'CEPTION [laughs] < Ben: I got a half intercept and um =what happened was* > = I tackle you just get up* < Ben: he handled? it and he got the ball and suddenly he turned into the ref - like he changed form and he was the REF- and then turned back again - it looked real funny 'cause 'cause something happened to the computer eh

David: [deadpan] we were cracking ourselves

Geoff: it stuffed up eh

Ben: yep- it was so fun=ny

David: =I tackled you again -- [without enthusiasm] yeah aye INTERCEPTION- < Ben: huh huh > that's the second one - I've got so many of them eh -- I thought I had an automatic thing=

Ben: [to Geoff]= can we have a go of the camera soon

Geoff: yeah - sure can

David: oh it's the hero

Ben: it's the hero Geoff 23 look+

David: + oh look tape it

Geoff: 23 again

Ben: here I'll show you- so so you can film it

Geoff: just=

David: = it's hopeless that's what I say it runs

Ben: cause - he's a running back -- totally misses- and then he goes- HUH? AND DIVES 'cause that that hit his leg then watch < David: no it didn't > oh it looked like it did look- see because he sub- oh looked like ( ) alright --

David: no- missed I got to tackle you- no + ()* < Ben: +yes he didn't touch me *- 11 yards it's number 23 again

Geoff: 23 again

David: he's a cheat

Ben: yeah he's done practically all my touchdowns eh
David: =cheat

Geoff: =ah well --

David: get out of the way - some guy was blocking me I want that again

Ben: [laughs] no way

David: watch this watch this my guy was blocking me- watch this oh it doesn't show it+

Ben: + that's why I did it real quick - 'cause I saw [laughingly] your guy 'cause he always gets through=

David: =he's a cheat uh oh

Ben: I don't think you're gonna win < David: yeah I will + easy > +24 41

David: easy I'll just play real good

Ben: you were playing good at the beginning 'cause I wasn't paying much attention < David: =until you cheated > 'cause I kept going da da da da

David: then you then you typed in the cheat bet ya

Ben: what cheat I didn't cheat - oh that kick < David: hopeless > - do I run backwards or forwards or jump on the ground

David: I did

Ben: no-jump on the ground in the in the end zone

David: why

Ben: 'cause it'll = ( ) safety < David: =ok > you didn't do it - idiot [David laughs] + ooh I stacked him < David: + yeah oop > watch this - see that - that's his line that's me number 27 - STRAIGHT THROUGH - BANG= < David: =not fair >

Geoff: what's sack 'sack' mean

Ben: it means when - when they throw- it's just about to throw and then he he gets that's sacked and that's real good- like they they get put put on your records and stuff - how many sacks you get- and that's and that like- that's a good thing a thing to be proud of

David: interception

Ben: knocked back

David: pass interference that's what I say

Ben: was not yeah it was he knocked it back- because he got creamed

David: 27
Ben: yeah -- dahl a lose arm? it hit the foot?

David: yeah it did

Ben: look see

David: it hit the ground -no here's some= it hit the ref < Ben: =I don't think he's > ()

Geoff: so you like these instant replays do you

Ben: yeah they're fun- they're good

David: oh wrong play

[soundtrack: ]

Ben: ohh

David: OH - he missed it

Geoff: so can you replay any part of the game

Ben: um

David: no it's just the last play

Ben: yeah it's it's just the last play that you do < Geoff: oh > that's a pity 'cause you hafta you don't want to let one go - 'cause it's so good

Geoff: you just keep playing it back < Ben: yeah > over and over

Ben: until? you get bored

David: what a hopeless punt - I'm going to get that ball=

Ben: =wasn't too bad < David: get out of the way+ > +that's the fifty [yard line]

David: some guy was screening me - you're cheating

Ben: ha ha

David: you didn't even get up

Ben: [playfully] yeah I did - you're a goner got the ball again

David: it's only in the third quarter anything could happen

Ben: that's seven seconds left - [sotto voce] in the third quarter

David: well I could still win this game easy

[soundtrack: whistle]
Ben: [makes nasal vowel sound]
David: ha ha ha ha
Ben: what what's so funny
David: thank you
Ben: thank you
David: I was? so more? - what why are you saying thank you for
Ben: 'cause it gives me more time to get a touchdown
David: no it doesn't 'cause I'm just=
Ben: =I'm just wasting your time ()
David: YAY- they cheered - oh I get a record
Ben: [public voice] it wasn't 23 this time it was 83
David: 83's got two now
Geoff: 83
David: ( )
Ben: Geoff you want to take over- I'll have a go of the camera
David: yeah ok [laughs in anticipation of winning?]
Ben: you won't come back David
David: yes I will easily +
Ben: + doesn't matter with Geoff=
Geoff: = stick your hand in there <Ben: yep >
David: where are the buttons <Geoff: there >
Ben: and what's the zoom
Geoff: zoom's just that one there- do you want to zoom in there out there <David: now [choked off]> ( ) the camera steady+
David: +I'll show you the buttons Geoff: ok you're going to show me how to do this
David: ok <Geoff: what do I > now um push 'c' and then push it when it gets to the top again
Geoff: which is 'c' oh that one - yeah ok

M: when you're ready

Geoff: push 'c' - yeah what'll I do now

David: oh you got a field goal [Ben? laughs]

Geoff: how'd I do that

David: I don't know [laughs] - you just pushed the buttons- now um -

Ben: () in that ()

Geoff: [in answer to Ben] yeah - x_y_z_a_b_c

David: only the three bottom ones you push um =

Geoff: =what about this one here

David: push 'c' and when 'c' when this thing reaches the top push 'c' again

Geoff: yeah come in

Ben's mum: oh your eggs are ready

Geoff: yeah

Ben's mum: yep

Geoff: you're right - come in

Ben's mum: what

Geoff: come in

Ben's mum: in

Geoff: yeah - push 'c'

David: when that yellow um

Geoff: oh I didn't- ki kick it soon enough did I - I'm +stuffing up am I

David: +now um what would um you pick plays

Geoff: oh players how do you pick them

David: you pick the- ones along there I'm not sure < Geoff: a b & c > yeah ok-no not that one push 'up'

Geoff: 'up' what's up

David: just push it 'cause not you don't want field goal=
Geoff: =what's 'up' 
David: it takes you back 
Geoff: where's 'up' 
Ben: the 'd' pad the move thing that thing there 
Geoff: is that 'up' 
Ben: yep that's the moving thing 
Geoff: +alright 
David: + um - use nickel or dime or something < Geoff: ok > not special team? 
Geoff: and - read cover or read - what do I pick here 
David: any 
Geoff: ok -- and now what've I gotta do pick 'c' push 'c' 
David: um- what you gotta- oh oh no - what're all the buttons again 
Ben: 'a' is dive < Geoff: yeah > 'c' no yeah 'a' is dive - 'c' is you stick your hand up to block or to catch = < David: =and > and 'b' is um um- what is 'b' < David: change it changes you > yeah it changes you different people+ 
David: + to the closest person to the ball 
Geoff: yeah ok - now what do I do here 
David: just try run at me- oo 
Ben: said? nothing then - do you what me to - I was trying to keep up 
Geoff: now what do I do push 'c' again 
David: oh yeah pick pick them 
Geoff: oh pick something < David: yep > - um -- 
David: you're in punt something - 'punt rush' no 'punt return' 

David: oh ( ) sweep with him- YAY < Geoff: oh what is happening > there was pass interference something happened 
Geoff: am I still going here 
David: yeah you're still there
Geoff: what do I do - pick < David: yeah pick again > something - ah --

----

Ben: hey Geoff's doing alright [Geoff laughs] without me

Geoff: I don't know what I'm doing this is the whole trouble

Ben: but that usually works with people with computer games [Geoff laughs] they don't know what they're doing and they press all the buttons and they win or something -that happens in Mortal Kombat

Geoff: totally unpredictable

David: what a catch - ohh [in breath] YES oh no - who was injured yes that's my NO NO that's my good quarterback [Geoff laughs] < Ben: Troy Edmond Troy Edmond is + injured > + NO NO NO NO not fair

Geoff: ok

Ben: you injured his quarterback Geoff

Geoff: [laughs] is that good

Ben: for you it is -- now you're going to pay - I'm gonna get a touchdown [laughs] not fair- by now I'll just field goal it - yeah [determined laugh]

Geoff: now we got to push anything here- have I

David: uh any buttons - you gotta zoom it- watch this watch this - noo - it's a hand over on downs - someone's earring- Ben

Ben: is that mine - nuh

David: punt - I am not

----

Ben: where are you Geoff I can't find you

David: you punted - cool [contrived laugh followed by unaffected laugh] hey where's my guy

Geoff: come on pick it up you dundehed

Ben: it's not a touchback

David: you steal? it from there and like it

Geoff: is he selecting or me is David selecting or me

Ben: you both are

David: you you select down the bottom < Geoff: aw right >
Ben: you always select

Geoff: right that's my defensive line or something is it

Ben: yeah that's your defensive selector and bits < Geoff: right ok >

Geoff: I don't understand what I'm doing but anyway

David: hey what are you doing all the way up - what's he doing all the way up there--
golly you're homo - you're home team - your hole down the back -- I'm 'b' come on 'b'

Ben: jeez where are you

David: you gotta zoom it you gotta do the zoom - zoom out I think it is - just like that -

Ben: uh huh -- smile David

David: yes yes yes c'mon - YAY - I'm gonna tackle the ref--

[soundtrack: firstdown]

----

Ben: caught touchdown [G laughs]

David: tackle me

Ben: cool - I zoomed in < M: mad not so > I zoomed in when he was doing his little
dance

David: [fx] ch ch ch -17 yard oh 4 plays six oh how hopeless --

Ben: it's good- < David: [fx] boww boww > Dallas is 31- Kansas city is 48

David: not for long [mimics sinister laugh] heh heh heh

Ben: Geoff [M laughs]

Geoff: now what have I got to do now < Ben: um > anything

Ben: you catch it and just run -run up just press upwards all the time

Geoff: oh right press upwards all the time

Ben: and 'c' - 'c' when someone tries to tackle ya

Geoff: and 'c' when =someone tries

Ben: =don't run out

[everyone laughs]
David: he ran out -- you got the ball now

Geoff: right ok what do i do now

David: pick a play <Geoff: ah > any of them ones <Geoff: yeah > any of them and any of them <Geoff: yeah > and - push 'c' to hard it

Ben: it's from David's view here - gooday ( )

Geoff: 'c' yeah

David: when you're ready push 'c' <Geoff: yeah > and then push it again or something

Geoff: oh that wasn't good

Ben: you didn't do a throwing play then you did a running play

Geoff: oh right ok so this time I'll do a um - ah - a normal - now what's a running play

Ben: um <Geoff: a pro form > a pro form <Geoff: yeah > and go to - <Geoff: ah > you have to do it all again now

David: field goal

Geoff: ah what

David: you're going for a field goal Geoff [both laugh] ah quick start

Geoff: what's start

David: it's the one it's the little one

Ben: you know press 'a'

Geoff: yeah

Ben: time out now do ridge hand? go to normal 'b' <Geoff: 'b' > 'a' <Geoff: yeah > and <Geoff: and do an uphook > alright 'a' and now press 'c' to hold the ball and press 'e' again <David: =and the screen comes up > and = then all the things come up ok and then throw it to any one of them

Geoff: 'c'

Ben: throw it to

David: yes he's through - oh no

Ben: caught

Geoff: oh right is that good

Ben: yeah that's good
Geoff: now I'll do a special - I don't want to - I want to do a normal

David: no more instant replays < Geoff: and > I mean not instant replays time outs

Geoff: and I'll do a far-and I'll do a - a - one of them - now I go 'c' and 'c' again <

David: yeah > 'c' 'c'

David: yes he caught it

Ben: half () two yard gain

Geoff: oh what have I gotta do I've got to choose again- a big - far oh I don't know

< David: any > a big < Ben: that means you're going to do a big throw > and a far

I'll do an HB option whatever that's supposed to mean < Ben: it's just your throw

again- the halfback will throw it instead of the quarterback >

David: ha ha ha now I've got the ball= < Ben: = he's going to sack you > no it

doesn't matter about that- RUN - YES turnover - heh heh heh heh

Ben: have you got a score yet- are you gonna win if you < David: no > ( )

Geoff: now what have I gotta do - have I got to select anything when I'm in defence

< David: yep > oh right a goal line and I'll do a cover- ok - and then what've I got to do-

anything

Ben: try sacking

David: oh

Geoff: he got a touchdown

David: [fx] ch ch ch chch

Geoff: [laughs] I think I'd better hand it back to you Ben

Ben: do you want to have a go < David: yeah ok > Geoff you take over David's >

David: no not fair you take over mine Ben

Geoff: no I'll take over David's [chuckles]

Ben: ok now you're ready for a field goal -remember how you did before just press

'c' - 'c' that's the way - 'it's good'

David: yee ha

Geoff: yee ha

Ben: =I like zooming in on < David: = ( ) > I like zooming in on the players' mound? - you zoom in on the + < Geoff: + now who's choosing now > and you zoom in on the person who got a touchdown and when they do a dance - now you
got to kick again remember how you did before
'c' and < Ben: 'c' > 'c' < Ben: and then 'c' when the power goes up top - press 'c' - oh good kick that was full power > good - now what do I do now anything

Ben: just try and get me -- ohh - nailed me
Geoff: now have I got to do anything now
Ben: yep you're you're on the de_fence
Geoff: oh right so I;ve got to decide what kind- < Ben: yeah > of de_fence
Ben: try and get the person with the ball'
Geoff: yeah ok
Ben: try and tackle them
Geoff: and how do I tackle them- how do I tackle them
Ben: oh it's 'a'- that dives < Geoff: alright ok > but you can just tackle them you just run into them and it tackles -- oh it was almost an interception then < Geoff: right > went down
David: what a shame
Ben: keep quiet you- never tackled me
Geoff: um now I'll do a cover um- I think -
Ben: why you dirty
Geoff: dirty rat
David: oh you dirty rat- they have a look at the score- yay Dallas Dallas
Ben: they're losing < David: boo - shut up you >

---
Ben: uh oh
David: INTERCEPTION
Ben: PASS INTERFERENCE
David: what- big [playfully] big
Ben: I have to punt here now
David: you gotta fake it
Ben: no I'm not -- you film --
David: probably = ( = ) < David: = catch it catch it - ah yes+ yes yay < Ben: + damn - I ( ) like - give it back to Mike [Geoff laughs]

Geoff: now I'm doing something I've gotta choose now I'll have a - I'll have a fast < Ben: you're not gonna - you've only got 9 seconds left > and I'll have a 'pro-form' - right here we go

David: when you touchdown ohh

Ben: you can't win

David: yeah easy money

----

David: push start - call time out

David: =nuh

Ben: =nuh too late- game over

Geoff: ohh < David: boo > what a fizzer

Ben: you want to play any other games

Geoff: yeah yeah yeah- put on another game

Ben: how about Shaq 2 I mean Shaq foo?

Geoff: why don't you have you got Sonic

Ben: yeah So=nic 2 < David: = Sonic 2 >

Geoff: Sonic Sonic 2 - what's Shaq

Ben: Shaq's a fighting game like Mortal Kombat

Geoff: oh yeah yeah < David: shaq foo > very good to film < Geoff: yeah > excellent to film < Geoff: yeah ok we'll do them both >

Ben: alright we'll do Sonic 2 first

David: what are we gonna do um

Geoff: hang on I'll go under- you'll go over- do you guys want to have something to eat < Ben: um > [soundtrack intro sung: 'Sega'] is your food ready

Ben: we'll be right we'll just- play? for a little while < Geoff: you sure I think you're mother cooked something didn't she > [David sings a tune] oh yeah I suppose we better eh

Geoff: yeah I'll switch it off for a while < Ben: ok >
videotape stopped; the boys eat their boiled eggs; videotape started about 20 minutes later

Geoff: ( ) < David: ( ) Cody [Ben's dog] > flashing light

David: yep

Ben: yep

Geoff: ok what am I doing - are you going to film from there < Ben: yep > well I'll tell you what - if you're going to film from that side - we might just move all this stuff over < Ben: alright > 'cause we'll need a decent

Ben: could I put this on standby or anything

Geoff: no don't worry

Ben: this is a cool film

Geoff: still going - just make sure that I've got that - I think I have

David: oh ( ) on me?

Geoff: yep - come on Cody move you're in the way- come on

Ben: Cody come on Cody come on -over here Cody < Geoff: good on ya > - sit <

Geoff: right > sit stay

-----

Geoff: right now what've I gotta do here

Ben: just want to watch for a minute ( ) it's heaps hard to keep it on - I'm gonna have to

Geoff: what's this game

Ben: um Shaq Fu the one I was telling you about - it's like Mortal Kombat sort of thing

Geoff: shaq fu

Ben: yep - it's got Shaquil O'Neill in it -- it's weird--

Geoff: looks like they're fighting on the edge of the mountains

-----

Geoff: I presume you've got to try and avoid falling in that blue bit

David: no

Ben: no it doesn't really matter 'cause its just scenery < Geoff: oh right > but you've got to avoid trying to get beaten by her
Geoff: oh right - who's she

Ben: um I don't know <David: oh just beat her > she's her name's <David: I don't know some > something

David: she's a cat

Ben: yeah she ( ) a cat woman

Geoff: cat woman <Ben: yeah > is that how come she's got a tail

[Ben laughs]

David: hey that's ( ) now you're dead--you can't block that move -- oh

Ben: hmmm

Geoff: so what's the name of that character that looks like a walking skeleton

Ben: um Set

Geoff: Set

Ben: Set - he's sorta like a big bad guy <Geoff: a big= bad what > = () like <David: oh no > a big boss <Geoff: a bigboss > but you can beat him as well

Geoff: oh right

Ben: 'cause we're having a duel now but there's a scoring and you're Shaq and you've got to fight all these people - and he's the last guy <Geoff: oh right >( )

----

David: oh - that's game over

Geoff: [reading from screen] 'you lose'

----

T & David: [reading from screen in unison] 'I slapped you around like a ball of yarn'

Geoff: [reading from screen: 'continue' - 'game over'= <David: = oh yay > a_b_c_d_e_f_g_h_i_j_k_l_m_n_o_p - he can't decide what his name starts with - oh I see if runs them through and you've got to stop them have you

[errie music on soundtrack]

Geoff: m_s

David: yeah - what's this - 4 down back 'b'

Ben: try the special moves now
Geoff: 4 down back plus 'b' - what's forward - is that forward up there+

David: + oh no = < Geoff: =forward+ down >+it depends =

Ben: =oh great shot of them I zoomed it straight in on them+

David: +if oh - just say you were on this side < Geoff: yeah > tha that's forward < Geoff: yeah > that's back that's up and that's down = up is jump

Geoff: =forward that's back that's up and that's down +

David: +and diagonal like that way < Geoff: yeah > lets you flip that way no jump jump sort of back diagonal < Geoff: oh right so that's= >=and

Geoff: =forward- back- up- down

David: yep and all the buttons you just keep pushing them that's all I do

Geoff: what's all the buttons < David: I don't know > Geoff: flicks and jumps and kicks and all that

David: yeah something like that

Geoff: I see you just work that out as you go along

David: [responding to screen information] oh just got to decide - don't want to do the Shaq Fus

Geoff: back up down

David: but it could be the other way like forward or that could be forward

Geoff: oh it could be west could be east and +east < David: +yeah > could be west

David: just say just say you're that side and the enemies that side < Geoff: right > that ways 'forward' and that < Geoff: yeah ok >

Geoff: but the 'up' and 'down' stays the same

David: yeah push 'start'

Geoff: whoo where's start =oh up there

Ben: =it depends which character < David: on - I a > just ( ) yeah play each other

David: yeah we'll play each other

Geoff: alright

David: ok um- you push start and then you pick which character you want

Geoff: right - do I push 'start' first < David: um > or do you push 'start'

David: I'll tell you when
Geoff: ok
David: push 'start' now
Geoff: yep
David: so do you wanna be Shaq
Geoff: yeah why not
Ben & David: [in unison] push start
Geoff: Shaq looks alright is he good at basketball
David: he's s'posed to be
Ben: he's the best he's
Geoff: he looks like a basketball player doesn't he
David: oh it's heaps funny there's this old guy - and when you go come up to him he goes 'I'm gonna rock your- chair grandpa'
Ben: +( )
Geoff: + right right -- i should play the old guy - oh I see so - I can go forward - whoops why does he do that for - what he jumps - ok - and how does he punch and stuff- oh I see- it's kick righto - right-- oh good --hey
Ben: and you can press down and kick as well <Geoff: alright ok > like go down and then kick kick and he trips them over <Geoff: right ok >
Geoff: oh 'a' doesn't seem to do anything - oh yeah

-----
Geoff: c'mon Shaq- I see yeah right
David: ohh-- 'forward' 'back' 'down' 'b'

-----
[Geoff chuckles]
David: yay
Geoff: you won [feigning incredulity] how did that ha=ppen* <Ben: = time ran out* >
Ben: time ran out and you had more energy off than he did
Geoff: oh right
David: what's that thing for 'down' 'back' 'b' 'a' or 'back' 'forward'

David: 'down' 'back' 'down' 'b' oh yeah that's right 'down' 'back' 'down' 'c'

[sound of telephone ringing]

Geoff: oh I got killed [reading from screen] 'I am the centre of attention around here.'

Ben: never heard that one

Geoff: 'select your fighter' um - ok I'll be Shaq

Ben: ( ) this is the same it's a rematch

Geoff: it's a rematch yep <David: yeah > it's a rematch - what's 'a' do

David: I don't know why um

Ben: it's a force field and you go and you say 'come here' - you do the thing

David: whoo

Geoff: hit 'im in the ankles

Geoff: mmhm [fx] he hir--

David: oh no

David: oh- no

Geoff: set? whizz? - not doing=

David: = and if you push 'start' it swaps it to the other side <Geoff: oh right > like it+ <Ben: + just punches - should give Geoff the control pad that is easier>

David: yeah ok swap swap control oh wait do this

David: I got that that move now it's heaps easy - 'back' 'down' 't' I think
Geoff: ohh- you beat me again [Ben laughs]  

David: now - the first thing we'll swap control pads [Ben laughs] -now- hang on -now change again  

Geoff: this one's got more controls on it  

David: yeah so now now that that you don't ( ) like that and that=  

Geoff: =don't use these do you  

David: yeah you can use all them < Geoff: right > every one  

Geoff: right - now I gotta press 'start'  

David: wait you can pick you can pick a different person besides 'Shaq'  

Geoff: how do I pick them  

David: move across < Geoff: how > push that way < Geoff: which > um like you can go across that way < Geoff: oh I see > see you go  

Geoff: oh i see i see ok I'll pick this girl- ( ) - is that right  

David: yep  

Geoff: so which guy oh this funny looking guy with the basketball hat is that is that the baseball hat  

David: yeah  

Geoff: c'mon c'mon get on with it -- oh so that's him there  

----  

Geoff: wow [laughs] I'm dead again  

David: bodged ya= < Ben: =cheated >  

David: I 'm not cheating- 'down' 'back' - it was 'down' 'back' 'c' wasn't it  

Ben: ( )  

----  

Geoff: ahh-- he's cleaning me up here Ben  

Ben: I've got some good shots of the dog in it  

Geoff: go back and train with the others  

Ben: () the boss
Geoff: oh um alright - um - I'll be um - I'll be this ugly fella here

David: you can be a little kid in it < Geoff: can yer > oh it was there

Geoff: I'll be this ugly broom dude

David: I think you push 'down' 'back' and then =()

Geoff: = 'down' 'back' - 'down' 'back'

Geoff: i've just had the stuffing knocked out of me

David: mmhm yeah -- yeah you're old ( ) and the crate fell down

Geoff: ah here we go

Ben: ( ) push the green? stuff?

David: yes that's what I was doing

Geoff: I'm getting better aren't I

David: yeah- well you were doing well there you were dodging me all the time - jumping over so I couldn't do my moves moves all the time

Geoff: oh ok ah let's see I'll be um -

David: you can be the old man that's him he's good you push down and 'z' and he and he pulls < Ben: 'b' > out a - 'b' and you just smack 'em with stars - with a staff < Ben: staff >

Geoff: alright I'll be him - 'down' and 'b'

Ben: yeah just hold down 'b' < Geoff: yeah > I mean hold hold down 'down' < Geoff: yeah > hold 'down' and just keep pressing 'b' < Geoff: ok > so your sort of ducking < Geoff: yeah > ( )

Ben: hold down - that's it that's it

David: oh no

Ben: you can press 'c' as well - when when? ( ) down
David: you beat me
Geoff: I won [whistles] I won
Ben: it's Geoff's first win [Geoff laughs]
David: press 'down' and 'b' or something
Geoff: whoops
David: ohh
David: oh I was so lucky I had a corner then
David: I'm getting heaps better now
David: ow oh
David: 4 seconds left
Geoff: oh well= ok* - want to have a go
Ben: =do you want to turn the computer off*
Geoff: I've gotta have a rest from all this- my thumb's wearing out
Ben: ()
Geoff: I'll come over there- and do a bit of filming - I'll give David a go
David: do you do you want a six button or the other
Ben: I don't care
David: here you can use that if you want
Ben: hey well turn on Sonic 2
David: oh yeah Sonic 2

Geoff: Sonic 2 the ( ) [David hums a tune]

David: is that the one

Ben: yep I got- I got some great shots of the dog

Geoff: great shots of the dog eh

Ben: yep

[soundtrack sung: 'Sega']

David: [sings] =Sega *

Ben: = you* want to be Tails

David: yeah that's first- I'll follow ya

Ben: alright

David: [sings] [fx] dow dow

Ben: he starts off just like just like the first one < Geoff: right > hey

David: I kill

Ben: what's going on how come I can't jump here -- umm it's gone- won't work-

David: push harder -- did you try the other button - oh it's auto that's why

Ben: ta

----

David: ( ) comes- flying somewhere- there I am

----

Geoff: oh so this is the one with Tails in

Ben: yep

Geoff: so -- I think Austin showed me this one-- so you're playing two player here

David: =no*

Ben: =yep* oh sort of see 'cause he's um he's Tails but he's not really - see if he gets left behind then he's- he has to fly to me < Geoff: right > he can get left behind heaps easy < Geoff: yep > -- right up you go --
David: is that enough rings - yeah jump up jump up over that thing < Ben: ( ) >
jump in the - made it

Ben: that's right that's how you do it isn't it

David: ( ) cool [David sings along with soundtrack]

Ben: you stay behind me tails -- I'm the hotshot around here

----

Ben: oh missed it [David singing with soundtrack] three rings to go - got it -- stop it --
( ) front -- [David sings] ohh

David: I'll stay in the middle

Ben: no because if you get hit - won't we lose all our rings

David: yeah I mean < Ben: yes > I'll lose all mine

< Ben: ohh- yeah and we need 'em - 'cause they're the total- 'cause we add it on - ( )
get a hundred and forty ( )

David: here you go in front < Ben: ok > 'cause I'll I'll catch the ones you miss - if I can

----

David: made it

Ben: easy

David: yeah- and you know = what there's a cheat do you want to do a cheat - so you can
get all six animals at the start < Ben: how's that > what you do um - wait just pause it
for a minute

Ben: ( )

David: what happened is um you reset it now- and then you do it again and you just
keep doing it again and again -

Ben: no it's just - it'll just explode? - 'cause we can do it - all your rings go away
that's the only problem- but it doesn't matter eh 'cause you don't have like get a certain
amount down to get to some hoop everything? like that personally?

David: you can do it just you can do it next time you get fifty rings you cna go all the
way back to the start and get rings

Ben: whoa whoa - I've got enouugh stars - yeah I will now I +

David: + just keep going - go know < Ben: I will >

---- [Ben sings along with soundtrack]
Geoff: so what's it like playing playing Sonic again after all this time Ben

Ben: it's good - except this is a different one but it's better - it's just as good isn't it < David: yep > it's better I reckon - but I like em I like em 'cause I haven't played the first one in so long - I probably probably like the first one as well

Geoff: you'd probably like the first one

Ben: yep I'd probably like the first one heaps

Geoff: 'cause you haven't played it for a while

Ben: yeah - but like you get bored with it - if ya if ya if ya playing it

Geoff: so you need a break from it do you

Ben: yeah

David: that's been used- go back to another one

Ben: nuh you go ( ) we go -- [fx]wu hoo

David: Tills got stuffed

Ben: () - it's up here - try to go over the spring-- ohhh what -- there's one-- yay

[both boys singing with soundtrack]

Geoff: so what's this bit called

Ben: this is the special zone this is where you get the chaos emeraldz - and the and they're it's real spun out

David: and you loop the loops

----

Geoff: it's real spun out

Ben: yeah < M; yeah > it's excellent

David: and there's these bomb mine things you gotta jump

Ben: and dodge and stuff- there's a lot of them

Geoff: is that those um yellow bits

David: yeah they're the rings =

Ben: =they're the rings but they're are these bombs - there weren't any on that were there

Geoff: where's the bombs - haven't seen them
Ben: =there*

David: =they're* the black things+ < Ben: +there >

Geoff: oh there -- oh so you gotta dodge the bombs < Ben: yeah > what happens if you hit a bomb

David: you lose all your < Ben: you lose all your rings >

Geoff: so avoid all the =

Ben: = ohh

Geoff: ooo ooo someone ran into one didn't they < Ben: me >

Geoff: ohh there goes Tails [laughs]

Ben: again nuh we're goners now - oh we had two rings to go < David: oh >

David: oh you don't lose them 'casue look you had 80- and you got hit

Ben: really -- I must 've had 98 =some of it* < David: = no continues* >

[David makes sound fx ]

David: let's go back and get +

Ben: + no don't -- whoa watch this

David: there's there's another one up here isn't there

Ben: yeah I think so -- Cody [the dog] get off the cord -- off < David: ok get off= some more rings* > =it's on* it's up here - that's that's how you get to earlier? more rings

David: I got some more rings --

Ben: oh what happened - what did I hit < David: the bullet > oh < David: it's a bullet > I see --now

Geoff: so why do you think this is such a popular game

Ben: it used to be - um I don't know

David: Sonic 3 's better now

Ben: yep- ohh

Geoff: do you know it made more money than Gone with the wind

Ben: it did

Geoff: yeah - it made over 400 million dollars
Ben: I s'pose because it's so sort of - I s'pose because it's so sort of fast and - there's a lot to it you know <Geoff: yeah- pretty complicated> yeah <Geoff: complex> but not really once you get the hang of it it's just fun doing - like going upside down and doing stuff like that <Geoff: mmmh>

David: like in those loops that go right round

Ben: and then paths that spin round <Geoff: yep> that's probably why 'cause it's got all them sort of stuff - and it's nice sort of friendly and easy game <Geoff: yeah> not not too hard

David: but not not gun shooting and that'

Ben: yeah yeah that's probably why 'cause little kids like it heaps as well - and like that parents let them play it 'cause it's not so - <Geoff: yeah> 'cause it's it's not gory or anything

Geoff: hasn't got blood and guts in it

Ben: yeah that's that's - they're probably the most popular games <Geoff: mmmh> but I s'pose for for arcade popularity then there's Mortal Kombat stuff like that - where all the kids go to see blood and guts <G; mmmh>

David: go and get the rings here

Ben: it's alright I've got enough anyway

Geoff: the other thing I noticed about it is that it's got um - um snappy music

Ben: yeah- but watch this this is why it's heaps popular - doing that <Geoff: yeah> and doing this -

Geoff: you like that <Ben: yeah - = it's'( )> = it's like spinning around on a whirley gig <Ben: yeah>

Geoff: I don't think they put them in playgrounds anymore but when I was a kid they used to have those things that um +

David: +oh roundabout things <Geoff: yeah> I love them I used to love them so much <David: oh yeah they were= alw > =they thought they were dangerous or something didn't they

Geoff: yeah I think that's why you don't see them but I can rememeber when I was about your age used to go around to the local park

David: yeah there was one in Watervale

Geoff: they had - it was round <Ben: I used to love turns+ > + and it had a big axle in the middle and had kind of floorboards all across it <Ben: yeah > and it had these railings that came out <David: oh no > that you hung on to <David: jump it jump it > and um you used to kind of run = <Ben: = yeah everyone* > on the outside*f of it and get it going really fast and then jump on
Ben: that was so fun they reckon peop people broke their arms and stuff on them
Geoff: yeah > 'cause they fell off

Geoff: and if you didn't want to spin too much - you didn't want too much vertigo - you
used to go to the middle < Ben: yeah > and sit on the middle and if you want to go
really fast you got right on the outside part
Ben: yeah that was so fun - I remember them when I was heaps littler < Geoff:
yeah >

David: two rings to go
Ben: no we got some

David: we got plenty
Ben: more than enough - way more? enough- this is where we stuffed up before

Geoff: when they jump up they turn into balls or something do they
Ben: yeah - little spin balls
Geoff: so < David: ohh >
Ben: almost got hit
David: ohh

Ben: don't get hit - yes yes we did it - keep going < Geoff: successful > get
140 rings
David: oh that's easy we need 4 to get
Ben: no you'll have to start all over again
David: we got a hundred and - look we've already
Ben: you gotta start all over again
David: what do you mean
Ben: you've got to start and you've got to get 140 again now
David: no we got 60 rings now
Ben: whoa- now we don't [Geoff laughs]
David: [fx] dah yam [damn]
Geoff: you win some you lose some
Ben: that's right <Geoff: can ya > yep - zero rings to go-yep you're right - just
  don't get hit - yes we did it <David: yeah - terminus?> we got an emerald= we've
  now got two* <David: = this is the first *stage eh >

Ben: yeah

David: you've got a chance of getting three eh

Ben: no this is the second no it is this is Act 1 <David: act one > you can get all
  six of them - yes continues <David: yeah+ man >+ ( )

David: you nearly got one - out if you had jumped that thing with- oh I got you that's
  alright

Ben: () OHH - oh well 'cause there's no more things is there

David: don't think so just make sure

Ben: well if there is I won't hit it - I'll try not to anyway

David: oooo

Ben: ohh

David: hate those little things - oh it was such a gap when I did it before um what
  happened was - crap <Ben: ( ) that's what it sounds like> um I kept jumping
  them [fx] booo and then um somehow a bullet comes from nowhere and hits me [Ben
  laughs] and so a coconut goes [fx] buk

Ben: you give me a footrest Cody [the dog] - now that you came in - we've got a
  place to keep the Megadrive

Geoff: yeah except when it drops down

David: () oh the wrong way huh-- I just died [laughs]

Ben: oh I hate when that happens - oh well there's plenty of rings eh -- ( )

David: how do you do that again

Ben: just press down and spin then hold the button down - there's only one button in
  this eh I mean <David: one th > one thing you <David: jump > use

David: wouldn't it be funny if you could have coconuts eh

Ben: d'you could have what

David: like the wings yer at you chuck you chuck 'em at it and you= =beat ya ha ha
  [laughs]

Ben: ( )

David: [fx] heh heh
Ben: it's just staying there <David: no it's wait > oh

Geoff: so when you're playing Tails in this one do you have to play different to when you're playing Sonic

Ben: 'cause you have to keep up you don't just <David: no you don't have to > yeah you don't have to but then you won't like do anything <David: ohhh> no ----

Geoff: so Tails is the junior partner is

Ben: yep he's the apprentice

Geoff: he's the apprentice

Ben: sort of

David: no you gotta jump on the other ( )

Ben: if I get this I'm just going to do this -- oh I just didn't make it - yeah I did - huh I missed - whoa -- hey I'm spinning - -

David: boy

Ben: that sucks ()

David: spin--

Geoff: so does Tails actually get rings

Ben: yep he can get rings

David: ( ) don't go ( ) we'll jump over it Ben: I won't be able to I'll probably just hit it

--ohh

David: ( ) with Tails dude you can just muck round with it

Ben: yeah - = ohh *

Geoff: = don't* have to concentrate as hard

Ben: yeah <David: no 'cause yer> +Sonic does all the work

David: wh wh when it's like this

Geoff: when it's like what

Ben: = like um* <David: = like * there's not um > 'cause Tails is only there Tails is only he you can only control him when he's in the same screen - as Sonic <Geoff: right> like 'cause you don't know where he is or what's going on <Geoff: right>
when it's not -- that's how you get to that -- ohniv?-- they give you all these rings and then they take them straight offa= you

David:  = I know

Ben:  suckoos -- just have to go slowly-- ohh < David:  ( ) > ( ) by now -- oh hate ( ) --

David:  oh go back

Ben:  why what

David:  what's on that screen- just go back in there- () you can go up to that

Ben:  yeah I know there's that ledge < David:  that thing- look- just there >  [fx] aww it's ten rings I think- yeah I know ( )

David:  no go no go up < Ben:  whoa >  I meant - just stay on that thing and jump that way -- see if there's anything

Ben:  uh oh ( ) there - land [David laughs]

David:  [public voice] tails isn't as fast < Ben:  yeah >

Geoff:  tails isn't as fast

Ben:  tails is a baby baby he's a baby fox -- alright now watch this bit oh film this bit --

Geoff:  Sonic seems to have defied gravity*  < David:  =oh oh get* the ah thingie - ah > get the thingie

David:  oh - what - no not the forcefield - < Ben:  oh them things yeah > yeah

Ben:  () step back for them eh

David:  watch out ()

Ben:  oh I stuffed that -- there's no way in the square?

David:  jump now - jump across

Ben:  doesn't work =

David:  = you used to be able to

Ben:  no but I'm not sure if it was there-- I hope? this happens - oh -- you can never get a lift can ya - oh () < David:  I have > have you

David:  Tails dies

Ben:  only if you um jump on - a thing-- oh - there goes all my rings

David:  there's one back -- oh there was one of those things ( ) - that way -- what's down there
Ben:  ditch -- ( )

David:  you're right? - just jump up - right jump over the other way jump over it --

Ben:  there's got to be fifty rings there from somewhere

Geoff:  so how do you know when you're bored - with the game

Ben:  oh I ( ) um- you know everything and - you know where everything is - and - the same things sort of happen < Geoff:  mmmh mmh - no surprises > yeah no surprises 'cause you got a special route and everything like and - to to finish with it and you just know everything -

Geoff:  so it's predictable < Ben:  yeah >

Ben:  the games ya get for Christmas and that =

David:  =wait wait + um

Geoff:  +yeah David:  um- there's a- just go back a minute and =

Geoff:  so there's nothing more to find out < David:  nuh > so then what you do is you < David:  go > sell it

Ben:  yup - hoe it depends if ya- if you think you've gotten too old for it or something but that doesn't usually happen < Geoff:  yeah > um

Geoff:  you might get too old for it < David:  [considering the possibility with enthusiasm?]Yeah < David:  there you go you can - yeah > how old are you now

Ben:  eleven

Geoff:  eleven - how old are you David

David:  twelve

Geoff:  twelve - when do you think you'll get too old for it

David:  don't know - never

Ben:  a lot of people don't there's like - adults even play it - like David Rapaport's mum she's

David:  oh she's a she's a

Ben:  she's thirty - something she over forty Mike

David:  yeah she's forty

Ben:  she's in her late forties I think and she and she loves it all she ever does is sit around and play the Sega

Geoff:  who's this
Ben: um a friend ah aw used to be a friend anyway - his mum -s friend's mum yeah
Geoff: yeha- she likes playing computer games for relaxation
Ben: she hogs it
Geoff: hogs it
Ben: [laughingly] she won't let her kids play it
David: and then and then when =
Ben: = and she says she pay she paid for it so she gets to play it < Geoff: right > she gets to play it all the time
Geoff: so it's her toy -- well I've heard of people who have model trains < David: I got some > adults that have model trains and won't let their kids play with them-- you got some have you David- electric ones
David: yeha - but it's not set up right now [Ben laughs]
Geoff: it's all in the cupboard is it
David: ah - yeah most of - wardrobe
Ben: ah not this way again - forget this I don't < David: hoy? > I'll I'll jump it < David: no just jump up oh- go up that way- no > ( ) runner
David: ( ) go down the other way- try it again at that thing
Ben: try again at this -- oh - doesn't work
David: quick-try jumping from the ground
Ben: ( )
David: ohh - I thought I thought Tails was
Ben: I'm just gonna -- jump over this thing ok
David: what go the other way - go the other way
Ben: aw top oh good idea
David: do you wanna go ( )
----
Ben: oh it's the end < David: run > oh no < David: we're stuffed > oh well
David: I'll kill the big baddy
Ben: ( ) first-- whoa -- you don't have to worry about dying hey - you don't have to worry about dying with *Tails* that's that's what's good about being *Tails*

Geoff: oh right you can't die

Ben: nuh you can't die

Geoff: whereas with = <David: = AH KILLED HIM>

Ben: I hit that once - and twice - really about six times -- took us ages to finish that 'act' <David: [fx] ( ) > and all the zones

David: you're only allowed ten - ten minutes eh

Ben: mmhm hm

David: ten minutes for each scene

Ben: what's next [David sings along with soundtrack] oh 'Chemical' - now look you've gotta film this right see ya *Tails* <David: NO> *Tails* go bye byes [David laughs] <David: ( ) > try and get these now watch this

Geoff: what happened to *Tails*

David: I ran off

Ben: watch this - this is something I found <David: it's the best-- he goes so fast>

David: ? *Tails* I die

Geoff: so why is this so special

Ben: oh

David: watch how fast everything goes <Ben: yeah>

Geoff: 'cause it's so fast

Ben: yeah it's real fast and you can and it's hard to keep up - oh I think ( )

Geoff: so it's a challenge

Ben: yep - watch this see we're see we're in this tube *Tails* is gone - gone- gone [David laughs] oh there he is - excellent yeah there he is - hey - thief- I don't kill and I don't bother 'cause I'm going to die- I'll let you you do the work [David shows delight?] you gotta protect me you're my bodyguard

David: ok

Ben: sometimes I go too fast for my bodyguard [David laughs]

David: whoops I did the wrong way

Ben: whoa whoa WHOA holy whoa - whoa whoa oh
David: oh Tails caught up fast eh
Ben: yep - hey Tails you come back here
David: I'm just checking the pipes sir < Ben: ? where is he > oh way ahead
Ben: oh he went- there he is - someone anyhow
David: = ( )
Ben: = ( ) secret it's got to be
David: keep pushing that way -- no
Ben: what happened here
David: I jus [clipped short]
Ben: ok Tails come on
David: sir? wait up --
Ben: ( )
David: [laughs]

[both laugh]
David: continue yeah
{change in recording level on audiotape}
Ben: bye Tails - oh yes swished? a man [David hums with soundtrack]

David: bags man? on two spiders
Ben: pause it < David: ( ) > while I jump
David: cool
Ben: oh yeah ( ) on myself Tails
David: was he fast oh
Ben: () quick get on - let's go
David: it would be good if Tails is the same speed eh < Ben: yeah > he doesn't I just made it even before you then
Ben: [voice of authority] *Tails* come back here [David laughs]
you can't break him < David: I know >

-----

Ben: whoa -- I'll get 'em this time

David: what's down there

Ben: [special voice] () -- nope=

David: [rapidly] yeah yeah yeah

Ben: not so dead? - yeah yeah we're there- ok ()
[bonus level: down the chute]

David: shall I go in front < Ben: no > I'll take all the rolls? sir > 60 now

-----

Ben: ( ) in the same place

David: ( )

?: whoa

David: ohh

Ben: ohh - we made it just-- it's 110 now --

?: dooh

-----

?: getting hard--ohh

Ben: I think we missed

David: ( )

-----

David: there's going to be some bombs I reckon [Geoff laughs] < Ben: I love it > ( ) man eh - 18 to go c'mon - ahh = only 18

Geoff: [reading from screen] = not enough rings

David: [fx] what's wrong with that screen bit

Ben: don't know

[new level starts]
David: doh ( )

Ben: ( )

[both sing along with soundtrack]

Ben: stay here

David: whoa it's back - you can get another life

Ben: no can't-- on it's? with this bit-- no it's different eh

David: [fx] bdair jump

Geoff: so you have to coordinate your jumps= here

David: =but go down - oh that's right you have to wait

Ben: what - yep that's what you have to do

David: oh - could've got < Ben: managed to ( ) > yep and you got another chance of that thingie

Ben: yep Geoff: and you need a bit of cooperation

Ben: yep - tons of it - and you need patience - lots of patience

David: it's what I don't have

Geoff: you're right out of patience are you David

Ben: ( )

David: oh I can't break through them

[singing with soundtrack]

David: get down here Tails [laughs]

Ben: ( )

David: go back up there -- I was slumped? down the bottom ( )

---

Ben: ( ) down the ramp

David: did you die < Ben: huh > did you < Ben: nuh -remember 'cause I got that > do you want to kill the ( ) sir

Ben: no ( ) they're easy ( )

David: it'd be good if you could just fly whenever you want being Tails eh
Ben: yeah that'd be cool

[David laughs]

David: only just

Ben: I hate you Tails I'm gonna beat you next time-- trying to win trying to overtake - no - Tails is the winner --

David: Tails took off there?

Ben: whoa -- oh there's that thing

David: yeah that ( ) -- whoa -- what happened-- yes EXTRA MAN go back go back - yeah extra man

[both sing with soundtrack: [fx] dit didda dit dit dear dear dear]

David: = oh no

Ben: =we've got 9 men now - ah I beat you ( )

David: wait for me

Ben: no no you'll never make it

David: oh I just came up then

Ben: you won't be able to keep up so

David: whoa whoa uh

Ben: oh it's that magnet - remember

David: get through the magnet

Ben: oh no here ()

David: what magnet

Ben: oh don't you remember that magnet

David: oh get him get him get him

Ben: we're in

[both sing with soundtrack: dip diddler do do [fx]]

Ben: oh shit
{change in soundtrack level}

[bonus screen: down the tube]

David: ( )

Ben: ( ) ready one

David: yeah let's go

David: ()

Ben: oh not one of these I hate them ( )

David: yeah you ( ) no we need 70 eh

Ben: got 60

[both] ohhhh

David: eleven -- see what we got this -- just two of these --

Ben: yeah made it

David: easy - [sighs] - what's this - 160 just need 3 rings

Ben: ( )

?: yes

David: oh no

Ben: oh

David: no

Ben: no

[Geoff laughs]

Ben: that is slack- that is slack I don't believe that

David: six rings oh we gotta get
Geoff: you were cruising and then you were done

David: yeah - extra man

Ben: oh we can get them on on this there's so many levels

David: yeah

Ben: we'll get it

David: this is only the second level

Ben: yes the second update? - oh get it off me get it off [laughter]- oh I hate this - 'cause there's extra men down here ( ) -- watch this there's a hidden extra man here

Geoff: a hidden extra man where's the hidden extra man

Ben: right there -

David: on the water

Ben: and you can drown <Geoff: right> -- 'cause it's sort of - it's unrealistic this game that's why people like it so much I like um how Tails does loops he he puts his legs together - watch - COME BACK COME BACK HERE

David: he's going to do a flip

Ben: oh he died that's why -- see see how his legs sort of go everywhere < David: yep > watch Tails - Tails - go Tails do you ever watch him - see look

Geoff: what's happening

Ben: see watch watch - bottoms go up and you all sorta go see < David: oh yeah > sorta straight up

David: come here Tails

[laughs all round]

Ben: oh whoa whoa not this bit I hate this bit -

David: this is where you need

Ben: I've died on this one before

Geoff: why do you hate this bit

Ben: watch - 'cause they almost drown ya

David: yeah it leaves you for ages - and then when you're sliding down [fx] dunner dunner dunner* < Ben: =see you gotta get to the top but if you if you lose patience * if you lose patience then you um drown - like 'cause you fall off 'em + and you go all the way back to the bottom
David: + what's the the tune for that- how's it go >
ToDavid: [hums a tune] da dun dun dun - no
David: yeah and and it makes you panic - you just push all the buttons and you jump it
Ben: aw and you go get out get out and then you die certainly
David: works works < Ben: oh >
Geoff: so it teaches you not to panic eh
Ben: mmhm hm - - you just do it patient- makes you patient=
David: = oh Tails just jumped straight off
Ben: [fx] ()
David: not so ? in the water
Ben: [sotto voce] ( )whoa whoa whoa
David: do a certain? jump ( )
Ben: looks like you're back on yer?
David: let me do all the work and you just dodge those things
Ben: there's about two -- oh [David laughs] yeah you do all the work yeah right -
Geoff: so what's happening now
David: you won't let Tails land you bastard
?: oh
Geoff: you're fighting - < David: aww > Robotnik here are you
Ben: yep - we're always fighting Robotnik and now we're dead - and now we're back again
Geoff: Robotnik won
Ben: yep -- that's only that's only that fight though
David: you just sat beat em there
Ben: get stuffed -- oh oh I'm dead
[everybody laughs]
David: Tails was left behind - I'll beat ya [David pants] [fx] ( )
Geoff: alright well I'm gonna switch this off 'cause my arms just about falling off

David: oh do you want to

Geoff: uh there you go - oh well I'll be Tails - < Ben: alright > not too hard a job hey - sorry David - what have I got to do < Ben: um > anything

Ben: um- you come somewhere - I don't think you

{videotape stopped}
Simon playing videogames  6.1.95

(This is a transcript of a videotaped interview with Simon, aged 15, which took place at his home in the long summer school holidays. Simon was at home by himself. I rang to check his address and arrived at approximately 2pm and left his house about 3.45pm. The first filming was done in the family loungeroom - there were several interruptions to the electronic part of the proceedings caused by a severe electrical storm which raged midway through our session. Towards the end of this taping we moved to his mother's bedroom where he demonstrated a number of games on his mother's PC. Simon is an old school friend of one of my sons. I however had not any contact with Simon or his family for a number of years prior to speaking both to Simon and his mother a few days prior to making arrangements for this filming.)

{tape starts}

[Simon is playing the game Donkey Kong on a 32 bit Nintendo console connected to the television in the loungeroom of the family home.]

Geoff: the music in this is quite impressive - from what I've heard

Simon: yeah the um - there's like lots of people working on it - major kind of production thing - lots of companies and stuff do <Geoff: mmhm> the people that did Terminator II made the 3D stuff

Geoff: Terminator II

Simon: yeah they did um - the guy made of alloy or whatever--

Geoff: so this is um the coming together of the - of Hollywood and computer games really isn't it

Simon: yep - it's what IBM's doing at the moment

Geoff: mmhm -- I don't know whether you've come across the information that Sonic the Hedgehog has grossed more money than Gone with the Wind - it's grossed over 400 million dollars worldwide which is a lot of money

Simon: yep - it's everyone most people have got one of these now <Geoff: mmhm> console of some sort - some game

Geoff: so do you find a lot of your friends at school <Simon: yep> for example <Simon: yeah> have got

----

Geoff: so this is Donkey Kong

Simon: um yeah this is

Geoff: wasn't there a real old game called Donkey Kong wasn't it one of the first computer games that was ever invented
Simon: yeah there's an old guy in this which was meant to be - the - old guy - that was in that game and they have puns about - they make jokes about how many th - how he could only get a certain amount of animation fitted in with slim memory and all that stuff

Geoff: right - so they make reference to it in this game <Simon: yeah> oh I'd be interested to see that bit where is it <Simon: ah> in the game

Simon: it's he's called Cranky Kong

Geoff: Cranky Kong

Simon: yeah and he's like the old guy -- on this

Geoff: I'm just going to try filming from over in that corner - I've got a suspicion that - oh if I can make it over there - I might get a better

Simon: there it is

Geoff: oh this is - this is old Cranky Kong

Simon: yeah and ( ) bit

Geoff: ( ) now what's the screen say here

Simon: he just thinks he's really good that the other guys aren't half as good as him - and -- he gives you tips and stuff on what to do

Geoff: right

----

Geoff: do the um - the backgrounds um- quite complex I was just noticing- like those two rows of mountains- and how - how the* <Simon:+the parallax *> yeah how there's a three dimensional effect there- it's very clever isn't it - very clever indeed- I've yesterday I was looking at Sonic 2 and - Sonic 2 you have that very um 2 dimensional BACKGROUND- you don't get anything like that effect- it's very interesting -- so what what's going on here

Simon: I'm just fighting a boss and just killed him

Geoff: so when you say 'you just fight' you're playing which character

Simon: umm you switch between two characters like so Bessy when you've got two lives- and they- they're different like- this guy is strong- so he can kill enemies

Geoff: so what's that guy called

Simon: he's called the - it's called Donkey Kong' <Geoff: right> and the other guy is called he's called Donkey Kong Junior and the other one's Deedee Kong <Geoff: right>

---- [soundtrack: calypso music]

Geoff: and a victory celebration there
Simon: mmhm

---

Geoff: ( )

---

Geoff: the levels in this game don't seem to be um - really noticeable <Simon: yeah> not compared with um say um Sonic - you know where you have all these announcements of levels in Sonic

Simon: there's a - heaps of levels in this - they're a lot shorter ( )

Geoff: yeah they seem to be quite short - what's the significance of the numbers at the top of the screen

Simon: um that's - if you get a hundred of these you get a free life and you've got sixty second as a bonus stage

Geoff: oh right - so this is like roughly equivalent to collecting rings in Sonic

Simon: yeah it's oh- you collect bananas - in the actual game in ( ) stages your player's an animal <Geoff: right> and it's like ( ) animals and you collect little pictures of that animal

Geoff: and and this guy's a kind of undressed Kermit the Frog

Simon: yeah- and when you knock one of them you can ride them

Geoff: that's cute - he kinda sticks to the wall with his um with his chin there

---

Geoff: these graphics are quite stunning aren't they

---

Geoff: exploding barrels -- I see -- now this is the other character

Simon: yeah this is - this guy can- jump - higher and he's quicker

Geoff: Dinky Kong

Simon: Diddy Kong yeah

Geoff: Diddy Kong

Simon: he can jump higher than the other guy but he's not as strong

Geoff: so you don't get this - numbering of the levels in this game do you

Simon: yeah there's there's no ( ) there's no point in scores or anything
Geoff: apart from collecting the bonuses

Simon: yeah and the idea the main idea of it is to there's bonus stages so the idea is to you can finish the game but only do 50 percent of all the levels <Geoff: right> I think I'm going into one now no I'm not maybe and so there's like secret levels to go to <Geoff: right> and you have to find them it's

Geoff: aw so you don't to begin with you don't really know how to find them

Simon: yeah and then there you might have to jump down a gap or something or jump on an enemy <Geoff: mmmhm> when you go into a barrel or something <Geoff: mmmhm>

Geoff: 'cause it's not immediately obvious is it when you look at that screen it doesn't have a sign up saying you are here jump in here

Simon: yeah some of them are really impossible to get to and others aren't that hard <Geoff: mmmhm> it's just a different level there

----

Geoff: so what's the flashing of the ah of the alphabetic- characters there

Simon: oh it says Kong with a banana in it and you're gotta it goes across the barrel so you've gotta get it - to say Kong by touch=

Geoff: = it's a little bit like the barrels on a poker machine isn't it <Simon: yeah>

----

Geoff: so which of these levels has a different name- associated with it

A: um they've all got different names but they're broken up into sections there's like um a Vulture Valley section and Construction Site and stuff <Geoff: mmmhm> each would have 7 or 8 levels in them <Geoff: mmmhm> -- () on border sooove() - ( ) if your life

Geoff: right so that sort of gets you free lives

----

Geoff: oh so something happened did it

Simon: yeah I just died I got hit by a bee

Geoff: and what happens when you die do you lose a life do you end the game or

A: yeah you lose a life and your lives get to zero and then you lose another life and it's game over

----
Geoff: well there's some transformation took place then you switched from one character to the other

A: oh the other one died <Geoff: oh> see when one dies he runs away- and- you use the other one - and you can just switch between characters- whenever you want <Geoff: right> if you want to use - whatever special characteristics characteristics of one <Geoff: yeah> you can change=

Geoff:= because that one jumps higher or all<Simon: yeah> that kind of stuff hey <Simon: yep> -- one's stronger

Simon: yeah-- it takes less to jump on someone's head to kill them

Geoff: right-- presumably the bigger guy kind of kills people <Simon: yep> more effectively

Simon: yep more bulk

----

Geoff: this seems to me to be a similar idea to um Sonic and I suppose there's a similarity between ah most ah <Simon: platform> platform games

Simon: yeah - they're basically collect something and you get a hundred or something and you get a- you get a um free life <Geoff: mmmhm> they're all basically just timing <Geoff: mmmhm> - some of them have got puzzles in it to find out which way you go<Geoff: mmmhm> it's basically the same idea <G: mmmhm>

----

Geoff: what kind of um - attitudes are expressed by schoolteachers - um to computer games do you get anything <Simon: um yeah> at school

Simon: my English teacher says they're a complete waste of time - <Geoff: right> she doesn't like the violent ones <Geoff: right>-

Geoff: has your English teacher got um kids of her own

Simon: yeah - she's + pretty old though*

Geoff: + I wonder if they play games *

Simon: oh no I don't think her daughters like - a music person they're very into music and stuff <Geoff: right> I don't think she plays any - computer games

Geoff: probably doesn't have any in the house

Simon: no - forbidden <Geoff: heheh> -- but most teachers don't mind them except for the really violent ones <Geoff: mmmhm>

Geoff: I've seen Mortal Kombat which is often described as a fairly graphic violent game =

Simon: = I've got a worse one on the IBM <Geoff: have you> called Doom
Geoff: oh I've heard about *Doom* <Simon: yeah>

Geoff: that's a - I met the um the guy who distributes them in Australia <A; yeah> um I think he's from Queensland would that be right

Simon: yep probably

Geoff: but apparently when it first came out it's one of the fastest selling games on *IBM* ever I think <Simon: yeah *Doom* 2 that was really *Doom* 2 - but they're got MA [Mature Audiences] ratings on them and stuff -- they just basically use chainsaw and- cutting up people <Geoff: yeah> and- a variety of weapons <Geoff: mmm> but it does have- it's not all- you do have brains in it ( ) <Geoff: mmm> because you have keys and stuff and open doors and things like that <G: mmm>

Geoff: I was down at university at the beginning of last year and I think *Doom* is actually on the network down there so that you can play it interactively <Simon: yeah you can> you can play four of five players +

Simon: + yeah you can you got different modes you can- run around - shooting monsters together or you can have no monsters and try to kill each other

Geoff: right - but you can play it where one person plays one character and another person plays another

Simon: yeah at the same time

Geoff: yeah I wondered what was going on I saw all these guys kind of yahooing and yelling at one another and <Simon: yeah> 'cause normally in the lab they don't people play computer games but I think this was um -before- the lectures started in the year <Simon: yeah> and these guys are saying 'ah don't shoot me' 'yah I'm your friend' and you know they carried on like this [laughs] <Simon: yeah [laughs] um they certainly got quite excited about it

Simon: we used to have a - at school - we had a game which was just black and white - really bad graphics - but the thing was - we used it on the school network and you shoot each other - it was just like a really primitive *Pacman* <Geoff: right> but it was lots of fun 'cause you got to shoot each other +

Geoff: + so so then you can play interactively as they say I mean I have a bit of a problem with that word but <Simon: yeah> where you've actually - one person's playing one character and one person's playing another character is that more excitement

Simon: yeah it's a lot more fun when you're trying to kill your best friend - and he screams out for mercy and stuff

Geoff: and when you say he screams out for mercy do you actually hear the person's voice - like you're not talking about the character screaming out =

Simon: = oh no there's like a terminal next to you they're going 'oh don't kill me please it's my last life'

Geoff:[chuckles] right- so that's what they're actually saying to you <Simon: yep> in real life as it were
Simon: we only got to play those after exams though

Geoff: that was a special treat was it

Simon: yeah--

Geoff: special motivation - for doing well or something like that

Simon: yeah - then they stopped letting us play it altogether

Geoff: mmmh - [reading from screen] 'Vulture Culture'

Geoff: and so? a car tyre

Simon: yeah it helps you bounce

Geoff: I almost thought I could read the brand name on it

Geoff: that hasn't happened yet in computer games has it with + <Simon: + name of selling?> where you actually see branded products appearing in the games <Simon: I don't know> you know when you go to the movies <Simon: yeah> and you see people drinking Coca-Cola

Simon: I haven't actually noticed that - there's probably probably something will happen when they do the like on CD ROM and you get- good enough graphics actually- make it worthwhile

Geoff: well I know with products like Coca-Cola they actually pay movie companies a lot of money - <Simon: yeah> to make sure that they have their product visible on screen at some stage during proceedings

Simon: didn't they stop that

Geoff: no it still happens I can tell you - movies in particular <Simon: yeah> -- I was watching - we were watching Karen Silkwood the other night - it's a - movie that um my wife wanted to watch - and sure enough they sat down and drank Coca Cola in the cafeteria of the atomic power company

Geoff: so are we down a coalmine now are we here

Simon: in a Mine Cap? yep

Geoff: that looks like it would take a bit of practice - to negotiate

Simon: oh you get used to it - jumping
Geoff: you didn't do it right the first time did you
Simon: no not the first time I tried it

-----

Simon: you're meant to have all the levels done once the logo? but I - someone erased it
Geoff: oh that's that option there [on screen] 'erase game'
Simon: yeah someone erased it --
Geoff: there must be a way of getting it back again surely
Simon: oh you have to do all the levels again
Geoff: oh-- and so some options don't become available to you until you've completed all the levels is that =
Simon: = oh no - there's - it's just that- still wanted to start a new game and he wanted to make space and so he took that off <Geoff: right> I wasn't very pleased
Geoff: heh heh caused a degree of friction did it
Simon: it did <Geoff: huh>

-----

Simon: do you mind if I change games
Geoff: no no by all means um - - whatever you want to show me or whatever you want to play--

[Simon selects a new cartridge and places it in the console slot]

Geoff: what have we got here
Simon: this is called The Lost Vikings <Geoff: right> and this is a platform game <Geoff: right> it's more of a puzzle game

-----

Geoff: yep ( ) I think it just went - [reading from screen] 'my name is Eric the Swiss' <Simon: yep> what else can you tell me about this game

Simon: um well- you've got - THREE - VIKINGS <Geoff: yep> of different varying abilities and you've got to coordinate them- to get to that exit <Geoff: right> so this guy's a fighter- he can shoot arrows and stuff - and this guy can block attacks and float on this shield <Geoff: right> and the red guy can run and jump - where the others can't jump -so - he can get to places that they can't
Geoff: and so you really need the um abilities in tandem <Simon: yep> -- and where are they
Simon: um they've been kidnapped by - some- ah space guy ah alien who wants to have a zoo - intergalactic zoo or something <Geoff: right> and he's got all these weird animals --

Geoff: and that accounts for the ah images of space flying by the windows there

Simon: yep-- this is a spaceship - there are area? then you go to jungle- and to industrial sites and stuff +

Geoff: + ah so this is just one of the um screens or the levels

Simon: yeah there's forty levels

Geoff: FORTY

Simon: yep

Geoff: [whistles] do you ever get through them all

Simon: yeah I've finished it- you use a - you can use a pa they're they've got a password so you can go back to- the one level - if you haven't done it which makes it a bit easier <Geoff: right>

-----

Simon: I just ( ) a bomb

Geoff: sorry what was that

Simon: that was a bomb I just blew up <Geoff: oh right> the ship's computer <G: mmmh> see now --

Geoff: so what's your mission here

Simon: to get out - basically <Geoff: mmmh> to fight your way

-----

Simon: I'll show you the last level- it's a bit easy

Geoff: so this is the last level

Simon: yeah I'll go to the last level now-- you can use the password to--

Geoff: oh so you're selecting a password here to go to the last level

Simon: yep

Geoff: how do you find out about that

Simon: oh when you get to the level it gives you- this is the password is <Geoff: oh ( ) > for that level- I've got it written down in the manual somewhere all the passwords but I don't know where the manual is
Geoff: [chuckles] you've lost the manual have you-- oh well- plenty of kids tell me that they don't read the manual- they find out

Simon: yeah

Geoff: aw do you read it or do you

Simon: um- I don't really read it oh you do just to find out what buttons to- there's a lot of other stuff in there --<Geoff: mmmh> that you don't really read

----

Simon: here's the bad guy that kidnapped you

Geoff: what's his name

Simon: um I've forgotten - I don't know

Geoff: the bad guy <Simon: yeah> [chuckles]

----

Simon: mmmhhhhmmm

Geoff: () this game you pause um on screen text <Simon: yeah> that tells you um I suppose the other game did to but this this one seems to employ it to get you to chose options <Simon: yeah> and that type of thing

Simon: it's it's - it's meant to be funny - some of the text - it's not really

Geoff: it's meant to be but it - doesn't come off

Simon: yeah - so it's just stupid

Geoff: do you think why do you think that is

Simon: I don't know 'cause- they try too many jokes or something they're just not funny <Geoff: mmmh> whenever you get to the exit they always say something stupid

----

Geoff: some of the images here remind me of- one of the levels in Sonic I think it's Chemical Zone =

Simon: = yeah they're just- a lot of them are the same kind of - they're all basically the same idea

G: mmmhm very machine like background <Simon: yeah> um-- mechanical devices of various kinds- <Simon: ( ) > this is an interesting bit of graphics isn't it- that little screen there =

Simon: = they're meant to be dead and- uh - the ghosts of Thor and gods and stuff- bring the rack?
Geoff: I'll just swap sides again <Simon: ok> ahhhh if I can get up that is -- oh -- getting old -- gee it's getting dark in here isn't it- can we flick a light on-- [Simon goes to turn the light switch on] that's better -- [reading from screen] 'give up yes no'

Simon: it's getting dark outside -

Geoff: it's getting dark and it's going to rain again-- toorlay?

---

Geoff: have you seen a game called Flashback

Simon: um yeah - with the gun and stuff

Geoff: yeah

Simon: yeah

Geoff: what do you think of it

Simon: I haven't played it - I've just - seen it- it's all right

Geoff: it's something about a guy whose lost his memory I think <A; yeah> doesn't know who he is and he's gotta find out who he is and what he's on about

Simon: another platform game

Geoff: yeah it is another platform game -- platform games seem to be the ones that are most popular

Simon: they're the best and - you get fighting games and stuff but you always get bored with them

Geoff: so what fighting games have you played

Simon: um- I used to play Street Fighter and then '2' and then started going- to everyone's? super and all that stuff and I just gave up on it and- I didn't play any other- fighter games

Geoff: so when you play the fighting games do you generally play them- um with friends or do you play them solo

Simon: ah I only played them in arcades - sorta like - basically or I'd fight a friend both

Geoff: so you mean go into TimeZone or something like that <Simon: yeah>

---

Simon: my friend's got an IBM and we go down to TimeZone and play um not Time a place called Playtime which is basically like TimeZone <Geoff: mmhm>
and play a game called *Run and Gun Man* which is a basketball game - everything else gets pretty boring

Geoff: *NBA Jam* is another one of those basketball games isn't it

Simon: yeah it's not {power interruption caused by electrical storm}

Geoff: maybe this is a dangerous activity [laughs] maybe we're all going to fry here on the end of our little pieces of electronics-- so we were interrupted in the middle of what was it <Simon: *NBA Jam* > ah that's right we were talking about *NBA Jam* - what was the game that you said you reckoned was better than that

Simon: it's called *Run & Gun* and it's - it's only in this one place- *TimeZone* doesn't have it on or does anyone else and it's

Geoff: *Run & Gun*

Simon: yeah it doesn't sound like a basketball game <Geoff: no it doesn't [chuckling]> but it's it's a lot better than *NBA* 'cause *NBA* jam even if you win a quarter you have to pay money to keep playing <Geoff: right> so it doesn't matter if you win or lose you always - pay out the same amount of money

Geoff: so this game's different

Simon: yeah if you win you go on to the next quarter

Geoff: oh right so you actually get a free game or you get the equivalent of a free game

Simon: yeah <Geoff: yeah> you just go on till you lose

Geoff: well I don't know if you've ever played the old fashioned pinball but in pinball if you've got enough points you actually get some free balls as I remember it =

Simon: = yeah you pop it <Geoff: yeah> you can pop credits and stuff in pinball <Geoff: yeah>

Geoff: then there was the ORR +there was just a fantastic lightning strike over there <Simon: + ( )> did you see it <Simon: yeah> it wasn't sheet lightning - it was a <Simon: = straight > = strike to the ground- what do you call them -- there was two of them very close together- what directions that -that'd be Watervale wouldn't it<Simon: yeah> BOOM BOOM they went

----

Geoff: do you think that your age has anything to do with your appreciation of computer games do you think that as you get older you get a bit more bored with them

Simon: oh a you- no not really some-you change your preferences about of games - like- one of my favourite games is called *Civilisation* on *IBM*

Geoff: oh Ben's got that on *Atari* actually <Simon: yeah> that's one game he forked out his cold hard cash for =

Simon: =that's a good game
Geoff: you like that one

Simon: yep

Geoff: yeah - yeah he um he hasn't played it so much lately but for a while there he was - yyou had to kind of drag him away from it you know - you had to get out the surgeon's knife and cut him away from the computer- it's a complicated game isn't it

Simon: yeah- takes a while to get into <Geoff: mmmh> but it changes all the time which is good

G : how would you describe that game you know if you were trying to describe it to somebody that - had never seen it

Simon: basically a strategy game <Geoff: mmmh> where you just gotta balance everything <G: mmmh>

Geoff: it kind of involves a lot of planning doesn't it

Simon: yeah you have to- know what's more important and how to build stuff-- but there's some games that ah like that that are just too far {loss of intensity in soundtrack; lightning strike close by} to spend on them

Geoff: too far

Simon: like - it was just over there [referring to lightning strike] [Geoff: chuckles] it's like Microsoft - Bill Gates company always tries to make - like flight everything that's exactly as it is - like they made a flight simulator and the manual was like a thousand pages or something <Geoff: mmmh> and you're just- you're just trying to play it and you just get so bored with trying to work out what to do

Geoff: so too much training required <Simon: yep>

Geoff: well Bill Gates might be a bit pissed off because um Nintendo um- made more money than Microsoft, Macintosh and IBM put together <Simon: they're not> - did you know that

Simon: nuh they're not making a hell of a lot of money though at the moment

Geoff: not now but they did <Simon: yeah they> they made a fortune <Simon: they made heaps>I think this is about 1993 1992 their gross earnings were more than IBM Macintosh and um Bill Gates company Microsoft

Simon: but that's that's going to change though- it's going to go back to personal computers <Geoff: mmmh you reckon> unless they unless consoles bring a much better - there's one the price's the major thing but -there's just so much more potential in an IBM than there is on a console

Geoff: yeah well I wouldn't =

Simon: = and CD ROM and stuff
Geoff: I wouldn't disagree with you—apparently in the states at the moment the market for CD ROM and - on IBM is—although it's still relatively small it's kinda growing at 20% a year.

Simon: yeah the - every new computer now comes with- um - CD drive Geoff: yeah yep - I agree with you - I don't I don't think - there's been a lot of consoles on the drawing board <Simon: yeah> the one's I know about are <Simon: 64 bit> yeah 64 bit machines and there's one called 3DO <Simon: yeah> I don't know whether you've heard of that but I think they're going to be fizzers- the 3DO one's being financed by American companies and I think they're going to fall flat on their little faces - and I think the problem- the problem with the 3DO one was that the console was something like 8 or 900 dollars <Simon: yeah I know> an incredible amount of money

Simon: change games again

Geoff: I might just give it a break for a while I'm a bit worried about that um- <Simon: lightning> lightning I don't whether we can get zapped here I don't think we can- they tell you not to talk on telephones if there's lightning around - it's not much good for computers if it

Simon: I better go and unswitch the IBM <Geoff: yeah>

[Simon goes into the next room to switch off the IBM computer]

{videotaping stopped ; videotaping re-started}

Geoff: we're back on the air - with lightning and thunder all about- but we'll press on-- so this is Zelda <Simon: yep> now this looks more like - 8 bit graphics to me <Simon: yeah> probably isn't but it just looks more like 8 bit graphics

Simon: I think this is about 3 or 4 years ago - it was just made-

Geoff: this looks like - Mario Brothers <Simon: yeah> so tell us again about about the various um pieces of equipment that you've had and what happened to them I'm interested in this <Simon: um> kind of a history

Simon: a friend bought a - he had a Master System - <Geoff: this is Sega > yeah a Master System I raised up - I worked through the holidays and got a hundred dollars and - and bought myself one - and - I usually- with all my consoles I usually only bought about 2 games <Geoff: yeah> I couldn't afford them <Geoff: yep>

Geoff: 'cause they're about 70 bucks a pop or something aren't they <A; yeah> unless you get a - package when you buy the game - buy the console and three games for free - or three games for however many dollars

Simon: the IBM and this are about the only ones I've ever spent any money on games I had the Master System for about- 2 years no 3 years and I probably bought- 3 games <G: mmhm> --

Geoff: so you had the Master System for about 3 years <Simon: yeah> and you bought 2 games for it and then then what happened to it

Simon: um - then - I sold it ah-
Geoff: so you sold it to a friend or something* <Simon: =to one of Mum's* Mum's friends at work wanted it> oh yeah

Simon: I didn't get much for it 'cause it was broken basically <Geoff: yeah> all the cords were stuffed and <Geoff: yep> and it kept going on and off <Geoff: yep> so it wasn't that good and needed fixing up and I just got twenty bucks for it <Geoff: yep> and I sold my Game Boy 'cause I didn't really use that 'cause I was going to use it in the car in the car- but I realised I got sick

Geoff: what [laughing] playing in the car <Simon: yeah> not a good idea-- so you sold that

Simon: and then I - and I sold my Megadrive - for 40 bucks

Geoff: how long did you have your Megadrive for

Simon: about a year - and then- with my money and also got a birthday gift I got this and I actually buy games for it

Geoff: you will

Simon: I do

Geoff: you do you have

Simon: I've got about six games- which is a record --

Geoff: and do you hire games for it

Simon: um - I try to but we don't go up to Watervale that much and it's the nearest place- to hire games in RBM and stuff in Hillsville but they don't have Super Nintendo games <Geoff: right> another thing they do now is they hire out CD ROMS

Geoff: they do that now <Simon: yeah> mmhm

Simon: at computer stores and stuff

----

Simon: yeah killed me

Geoff: the music to this is has an orchestral quality about it

Simon: it's very lovey dovey

----

Geoff: so um talking about your um- acquisition of consoles you had one for three years - one for one year and this one now for how long

Simon: about 3 years <Geoff: right>

Geoff: so this one's a stayer
A: I'm not going to get anything else

Geoff: you reckon this is =

Simon: = this's good enough for me <Simon: yep> everything just gets bigger and better there's no point

Geoff: yeah - this one'll see your game playing days out will it <Simon: yep> you might be playing games when you're 35

Simon: I might I'll probably be using an IBM then

Geoff: right- you reckon you'll be on CD ROM by then Simon: yeah we've got a CD ROM now -- but the IBM's aren't really powerful enough yet <Geoff: for> CD ROM

Geoff: well graphics has always been a problem with IBM hasn't it

Simon: yeah Mac's had a reputation as a better graphics

Geoff: well even the humble Atari has got very good graphics <Simon: yeah> considering it came out something like 7 years ago now

Simon: they're getting it's good though the graphics are pretty good now <Geoff: mmhm> but - you know - Dad's got an IBM - it's like- the game's that aren't - on CD ROM and not the graphics are heaps better than on IBM - there's a lot more colours and stuff <G: mmhm> -- Macs are just too expensive

Geoff: yeah they I think they're over priced don't you

Simon: yeah it's because only Macs make Macs - so -

Geoff: well they had the good sense to tie up their operating system with their architecture so that people couldn't do clones like they can of IBM <Simon: yeah> in order to do a clone of Mac you've gotta to break their copyright <Simon: yeah> whereas with IBM you can you know you can make the identical - um computer it was a very clever move but I think um- I read about a year oh somewhere in the last year or so that um-- there's some firm in south-east Asia that's actually making a Macintosh like computer from the ground up <Simon: yeah> and they reckon they're going to be able to beat all the ah lawsuits <Simon: yea 'cause >= = and they made sure when they got all their technicians that none of them had ever worked for Macintosh so that they couldn't be accused of ah pinching secrets off them - stealing their ideas- I haven't heard anything more about it though it was quite a while ago -- I wouldn't mine having a look at this at Doom - can you set that up on your PC

Simon: yeah yep

Geoff: will I need to bring my stuff in where the PC is <Simon: yeah> yep OK I'll do that I'll just stop it

{videotape stopped and relocated in Simon's mother's bedroom where the PC is located}

Geoff: I don't know how well the um-- ok we have now moved rooms - we are ( )in the family personal computer in the bedroom- and Simon has just ah put - Doom on the
screen- and I can tell you something about *Doom* and it was released in Australia 24 hours before it was released in America- how's that for a bit of exciting information

Simon: it's the same with that *Donkey Kong* game it was released before it was released in America - here-

Geoff: now take up through this game Simon- just tell us about it

Simon: well um-- you're on Mars- and- there's they've been doing inter-dimensional experiments - on Mars and- something went wrong - and it opened a gateway to hell- and you are all your marine buddies went inside to- to kill whatever killed everyone in here <Geoff: yeah> and they've been killed by it and you're the only one left- so you have to go and- and they've all been possessed - by some sort of evil- and now they're trying to kill you so= <Geoff: = all right so they're um> it's your job to blow them limb from limb- and you have array an array of weapons - including- the chainsaw- pistol- shotgun- chain gun- a rocket launcher- <Geoff: aha huh> plasma gun- <Geoff: plasma gun that sounds sweet> BFG the big F'ing gun

Geoff: I see I thought it stood for big friendly giant

Simon: it used to

Geoff: that was back then <Simon: yep>

Simon: and so basically what you do is in the there's 3 episodes - in the first episode you fight your way through the base on Mars- and then you go to the- a base on the moon on Mars where they were doing the experiments- and then the third episode is you fight your way out of hell-- I've got it on *Invincible* mode at the moment- I'm not taking any damage-

Geoff: oh so in 'Invincible' mode affords you some - 100 per cent protection does it <Simon: yep> this is what you start off with I presume is it- *Invincible* mode to get the hang of it

Simon: aw no - you start off there's levels of- play there's like- *Don't hurt me* then there's *Nightmare* where they regenerate and come back to life - and you start on the easiest ones and work your way out but there's like there's secret codes for - *Invincible* and *Ammo* and things like that

Geoff: right so this ah cute fellow has been wielding a chainsaw there for a while <Simon: yeah> and now he's wielding some kind of automatic weapon <Simon: a chain gun> a chain gun-- and it's all operated by keyboard

Simon: um yeah you can use the mouse but- I find it harder <G: mmmh> it's better with the roller mouse <Geoff: right>

----[sounds of gunfire and human cries]

Simon: I'll load the games -- ah that's?

Geoff: so which um software house produces this game

Simon: um -- Manic? um I don't know
Geoff: who are they -- [reading] Manicomni -- yeah I wonder if they produced it or if they're just the agents I think it's an Australian made game isn't it - is this one Australian do you know

Geoff: yeah I think that's the guy that I spoke to um Ian Mackay I think his name is- I know he was from Queensland ah from Queensland -- so this is running on a CD ROM is it

Simon: ah no this is off the hard disk

Geoff: oh right - it's probably available on CD ROM now I guess eh

Simon: yeah um number 2 is available on ROM on CD ROM <Geoff: oh>

----

Geoff: so um- I notice Sierra ( ) disc so it might be um Sierra-on-line that's a software company from the states

Simon: yeah they didn't they didn't do Doom though <Geoff: didn't they> ah just 'cause I haven't got enough RAM to run the CD and DOS and stuff in high memory res and have Doom on <Geoff: right> so I have to a boot disc

----

Geoff: so this is about as much blood and guts as you get () isn't it <Simon: yep>

Simon: there's a -- on your complete the last level ( ) there's a charming picture of a bunny rabbit

Geoff: are you going to show me that are you

Simon: yeah I've just got to find which - one it's saved on

----

Simon: just a () -- yep

----

Geoff: what is it

Simon: it's a demi- spider? -- spotted ( )

----

Geoff: so what are you - what's your opinion about violence on videogames- you obviously enjoy this one

Simon: I suppose you can go too far if it's too realistic but unless you're pretty warped to start with it can't have I don't think- it'd do that much to you
Geoff: I suppose you certainly see a lot of violent scenes on television + <Simon: TV and stuff yeah> apart from anything else -- so what I've we got here

Simon: this pretty one moment? and now that's where- the demons- oh no it's not - that's like- the starting bit for *Doom 2* which is called *Hell on Earth* <Geoff: right> and it's ()

Geoff: that bunny looks like it's had it's throat cut

Simon: it has it's on this little stick

Geoff: oh

Simon: poor bunny - I've got some other games if you want to see them

Geoff: ok

----

Simon: um -- [Simon is installing a new CD ROM]-- this is one of the first so-called interactive games <Geoff: right> [soundtrack: funball?!] and it was of the first - [soundtrack: he he he] CD ROMS games to- to use the graphics - that it was capable of and it's just a puzzle game it's not that interactive <Geoff: yeah> at all -- you just solve puzzles - but the graphics are pretty good

----

[soundtrack music begins: orchestral in quality; soundtrack music stops]

Simon: and - the idea is to solve [soundtrack music starts] - of? the puzzles - and they get progressively harder <Geoff: mmhm> and - they're very hard [soundtrack of music continues]

Geoff: so this ah hand beckons you on

Simon: yep [soundtrack music continues]

---- Geoff: high quality graphics aren't they

Simon: yeah- they're *super VGA* - which is- higher resolution - mmhm and the idea of this puzzle is to get all the white horses on to the black squares and all the black-horses on to the white squares

Geoff: move in and clicking with the mouse I suppose

Simon: and it's not very easy

[soundtrack: 'ah - so that's how they move']

Simon: and that's your player person - he's just called *The Ego*

Geoff: *The Ego*

Simon: yeah
[soundtrack voice: 'Black is white and white is black. Everything must change']

Simon: which gives you clues about what to do

----

Simon: that's basically - just a - pioneering <Geoff: yeah> CD ROM game <Geoff: yep that's a=> [soundtrack: 'ha ha' [hideously]]

Geoff: [chuckles] gee the sound is - very clever isn't it

Simon: yeah that was the - before that they only really put games that adventure games on <Geoff: mmhm> that were - too big and just added a bit of speech on them <G: mmhm> that was the +

Geoff: + well I might - I might stop at this point Simon - thank you for your participation

Simon: pleasure

Geoff: it's been great and ah - I'll um - I'll keep you in contact - in fact one of the things I wouldn't mind doing

{videotape stopped}
Written communication between participants and researcher
Introductory letter to participants

RESEARCH ON COMPUTER GAMING

I am conducting research on computer games as part of gaining a higher degree in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Western Sydney - Nepean. My interest is in talking to, and where possible videotaping players engaged in playing computer games.

Typically, players use consoles such as SEGA or NINTENDO hooked up to television set or alternatively might play games on computers such as IBM PC, a Macintosh, an Amiga or an Atari.

The research is not being conducted on behalf of any commercial organisation, nor is it being commercially funded. I will arrange to show the tapes, after editing to the players who have participated, should they be interested. Such tapes will be shown only for educational purposes within university or professional conference settings.

If you, or your son or daughter would like to participate in this research project I can be contacted in the following ways:

[home and university contacts were listed]
Computer games research follow up questionnaire

September/ October 1995/page one.

Last time I spoke to you was ....[filled in by researcher]

Do you play computer games as much as you did then? (circle a number)

1 not at all 2 less 3 about the same as before 4 more 5 much more than before

Do you still own a console? yes/no

When I talked to you last you were playing....[filled in by researcher]

Do you still play...

What new games have you played since then?....

/page two

What are you favourite games to play, now?

Why do you like them?

List the games you own.

Do you use a computer apart from playing games? yes/no

If yes what do you use the computer for?

your date of birth:

First name:

Thank you for your assistance. Contact me if you have any queries.

Geoff Denham [name/ address/ phone number]

Request for Formal Permission/ page 1

Dear

I am in the final stages of writing up the research you participated in. Although you gave your consent to participate in the research at the time I spoke with you about it, the university requires me to have that consent in writing. In order to meet the university's requirements I have prepared a form which I am asking you to sign. It puts in writing our verbal agreement and the procedures for protecting your identity. Please read it, sign it and return it to me in the stamped envelope, to the above address.

You may be interested to know that the Australian Broadcasting Authority have completed a piece of research on computer game playing which they entitled 'Families & Electronic Entertainment'. I refer to it in my work, because I think that it offers a misleading view of computer game playing, particular when it suggests that it is a family based activity. You showed me that it wasn't.

thanks again for your help

Geoff Denham
Thursday, October 10, 1996
Dear

I am conducting a study of computer game playing. I am intending to come to your home (with your permission), and make videotapes of your playing of computer games. I will ask you some questions about what is happening at various times because I want to learn more about computer game playing. I do not have a list of 'set' questions, because I like to find out things as we go along.

I am conducting the research as part of my postgraduate studies at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. There are no other researchers involved in the study apart from myself. I am intending to make transcripts (written records) of our conversations from the soundtrack of the videotape, or directly from audiotape. I will give each of you assumed names so that you cannot be identified in the written records. The written records will form part of my thesis. Once the audiotapes have been transcribed they will be wiped. I will need to keep the videotapes for some time, and will want to show excerpts of the videotapes to academic conferences, such as those held annually by the Australian Communication Association.

When my thesis has been marked I will return the videotapes to each of you. I will not make any copies of the videotapes without consulting you first.

STATEMENT BY PARTICIPANT

I have read this page, and agree to participate in this research.

................................

STATEMENT BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN (where applicable)

I have read this page, and agree to my son/daughter participating in this research.

................................

DATE:  .....................