Beyond Play in one of Yayoi Kasuma's Obliteration Room Installations.

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Capturing Play Beyond the Game. A Category System for Game-Related YouTube Videos

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Abstract
Video sharing platforms have become spaces of game-related practices that extend beyond the player community and contribute to remixing, referencing or recontextualising videogames in diverse ways. However, academic research focuses largely on let's plays and live streaming on Twitch.tv, ignoring a range of other game-related video sharing practices. Part of the problem is that such practices are difficult to map and understand, given the absence of any overview of the content hosted on platforms such as YouTube. The aim of our research is to develop such map of game-related video practices on YouTube and beyond. As a first step toward such aim, this article proposes an adaptable category system for evaluating the content of game-related videos available on the popular streaming platform YouTube across multiple game genres, language spaces and, by extension, game-cultural contexts. The category system was developed and refined over the course of two years, using several hundred popular YouTube videos related to Nintendo's *Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (2023) and Capcom's *Street Fighter 6* (2023) in the languages Japanese, Korean, Chinese and English as test cases. The category system introduced in this article provides a useful content discovery system, a tool for macro- and meso- level comparison between game-related media and language space, and a method for gaining a better understanding of the internal logic of YouTube.

Keywords: YouTube, Video, Let's Play, Remediation, Street Fighter 6, Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom, Taxonomy, Category System, gamevironments

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Introduction

From the very beginning, digital games have always facilitated shared experiences and community building. Beyond simply offering a multiplayer option, game worlds have been the subject of collaborative exploration, whether it be in physical co-presence, or by way of sharing knowledge about game worlds and individual play experiences in magazines, forums or on other platforms. As Nakazawa points out in one of the earliest theoretical pieces on gaming in Japan written in the 1980s, once the game was cleared, players would take it on themselves to collaboratively explore the limitations of the game world and the game system, discovering hidden pathways, bugs and accidental opportunities (Nakazawa 1984).

In recent years, such exploration of the game space takes place in large parts in text-based walkthrough wikis and similar guides, such as GameFaqs or Fandom.com (Barr 2014, Sköld 2017), and through live streaming and video sharing of gameplay and analysis on platforms like Twitch, YouTube, Bilibili or Niconico Video. This exploration also repositions gaming as only one dimension of a wider range of game culture and digital media culture, which corresponds to what this journal terms *gamevironments*. Furthermore, these phenomena take place in an increasingly connected, transregional and ecological media environment, under the simultaneous influence of processes of regionalization and globalization, which makes the contours of the nation (and of national games culture) difficult to disentangle (Roth, Yoshida and Picard 2021, Roth 2025).

This form of gamevironments research leads to an interest in the potentials of game-related videos to investigate game contents, game culture, and game culture archiving and preservation (Newman et al. 2024). In contrast to the volume, diversity and popularity of video game-related video sharing content posted on YouTube

alone, academic research about the emerging socio-cultural space of game-related video sharing and viewing practices remains scarce. Aside from the groundbreaking methodological work by Radde-Antweiler and colleagues (Radde-Antweiler, Waltmathe and Zeiler 2014, Radde-Antweiler and Zeiler 2015), there is a growing body of inspiring, but specific, research investigating “Let’s Plays” and Twitch streaming specifically (Deng et al. 2015, Nguyen 2016, Ackermann 2017, Taylor 2018, Johnson and Woodcock 2019a, Johnson and Woodcock 2019b, Consalvo, Lajeunesse and Zanescu 2025), mostly focusing on live-streaming, Twitch.tv and the content creators themselves.

Such approaches expand our understanding of gaming cultures in many ways. At the same time, they also zoom in on and consecutively generalize what is only a small part of the activities related to video games found on contemporary streaming platforms. Game music, expert opinions, or anime created based on game content are crucial building blocks of contemporary digital culture, even when they get most attention not from what might be considered as core gaming communities, but from music fans, anime enthusiasts, or non-player users who seek diversity in their entertainment consumption. Just like other platforms that provide no full account of the content they host, YouTube confronts any attempt at mapping its space with a difficult challenge: How do we capture and describe the media-cultural practices and contents on the platform comprehensively in a way that facilitates comparison within gaming culture or with other neighbouring cultural domains, without defaulting to categories such as Let's Play (for a discussion of subscription based video-on-demand platforms, see Delanaux, Tse and Roth 2025)? Achieving such mapping would allow us to develop a more detailed understanding of the building blocks of game-related videos and their transmediality, offer a comparative angle across different games and across different local gaming cultures and language spaces, and finally provide a

potential point of comparison with other cultural domains negotiated on YouTube. Mapping YouTube content thus allows us to identify particularities and commonalities in contemporary video streaming and sharing cultures around the world instead of assuming either the media-specific, vernacular or transmedial, cosmopolitan character.

The challenge such mapping confronts is threefold: Theoretically, the question is how to map a space without clear boundaries? Do we include videos that reference games or gaming culture only indirectly? How do we determine which videos to include, and which to exclude? Methodologically, the question is how to know whether we have captured the space we set out to capture. In the absence of any ground truth to compare our own data with, and with the platform's interfaces being the only possible point of access, who can determine what is missing? This empirical challenge of YouTube and other platforms is outlined in detail by McGrady et al. (2023). Operationally, the challenge is how to develop a system to describe video contents that can accommodate the diversity of contents found on YouTube without being too generic to be meaningful.

As a result of research conducted at the same time as the work on which this article founds, Newman et al. (2024, 281) have recently proposed a category system for game-related YouTube videos aimed at providing guidance for the video-based preservation of game culture consisting of a total of 17 distinct terms for categorizing game-related YouTube videos, grouped into 4 main categories: Direct representations of the game experience, meaning "videos featuring content centred around the game interface and gameplay," indirect representations that give insight into the community because they "share and apply player and community knowledge", re-representations that concern game culture and represent "new forms

of participation, either in style of play or within the community itself" (Newman et al. 2024, 282) and platform representations that "cater to the platform over the game object" (Newman et al. 2024, 283).

Touching upon a range of important questions from the perspective of game preservation, Newman et al. make an important step toward a more precise understanding of game-related YouTube video contents and their preservation by means of YouTube videos. Focused on the relation between video and game content, they reflect on the limitations of such perspective when it comes to capturing the range of relevant materials for understanding game culture as both experiential and participatory in the categories of re-representation, which includes videos that

> "may not preserve a specific game, [but nevertheless, mrvi] highlight how communities are thinking about community knowledge and transforming gameplay experience into something new" (Newman et al. 2024, 282)

and platform representation, which includes videos that

> "are not directly connected to the game object itself or game culture but arise due to the nature of YouTube as a secondary participatory medium and are much more focused on the content creator." (Newman et al. 2024, 283)

While recognising the important position game texts hold as starting point, reference point and fuel within game-related YouTube practices, this article proposes a different, complementary approach to game-related YouTube practices as distinct cultural practices, rather than as representations of or paratexts to a central game text (Consalvo 2017, Roth 2022). Game-related videos are more than representations of gameplay. As Newman et. al note, they also represent game culture in diverse ways. Taking the implications of this diversity seriously, this article starts from the

recognition that game-related video sharing practices are not limited to let's plays or paratextual representations of gaming, but have to be recognized and conceptualized as discursive and entertaining media cultural practices in their own right that players and non-players engage in alike (Roth 2022). In other words, we aim to work toward a perspective on the diversity of content, form and cultural contexts that come into play in game-related video practices on YouTube beyond the general category of Let's Plays, beyond their representational qualities of a specific game object, and beyond the boundaries of the English language space.

A first step toward such understanding is to ask what is negotiated in game-related videos in different language spaces or cultural contexts: that is, how does the video content, performance and values reframe and transform the game and the act of playing into a specific playful practice in a glocalised media environment on a specific platform that is at the same time part of a platform ecology.

In this article, we propose a category system for evaluating game-related YouTube videos based on their form, content, and perceived motivation and account for the development of this category system.[i] While developed during a research project focusing on popular videos related to the games *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020), *Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (2023), and *Street Fighter VI* (2023), the proposed category system is meant to provide an expandable, accessible, and widely applicable skeleton for considering game-related YouTube videos.

Following a short overview of the choices made during the development phase, we present and discuss the category system. We subsequently discuss preliminary data and insights from a broad application of the category system, which is followed by

the discussion of the actual limitations and challenges the category system faces. The final section is dedicated to an outlook on next steps and perceived obstacles.

What's on YouTube? A Category System for Game-Related Videos

Approach and Workflow

In an initial explorative approach, Roth and his research group developed a series of tentative and case-specific categories to describe the top 100 most viewed videos about the game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* in Japanese, Korean and Chinese retrieved via the YouTube API in November 2021 (Roth 2025). The result fulfilled its purpose of comparing video content and related user interactions across multiple language regions. However, the approach had a number of shortcomings, most importantly in regard to the low resolution of the categories and their specificity. Given that they were only intended to cover the range of videos within the sample, the resulting category system was not useful to describe videos related to other games, nor did it facilitate detailed descriptions of video content.

Expanding the analysis to other games thus made necessary a more comprehensive category system and the development of a training process for coders capable of categorizing videos in the various languages in question. We approached both tasks by developing and applying a category system to a new sample consisting of a monthly captured list of popular videos related to the two games *Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* and *Street Fighter 6* [from now on, *Zelda: TotK* and *SF 6*]. Both games were chosen as starting points, due to their timely and similar release date and sharp differences in genre and player communities.

As mentioned above, collecting videos on YouTube is a methodological challenge because the platform's interface and its search functions are the only viable point of access. Specifically, the YouTube API accepts a number of qualifiers in any query. In order to facilitate language diversity and content diversity while also covering popular videos and respective trends, we chose to collect metadata via the API by querying for 100 most relevant and 100 most popular videos per language (Japanese, Korean, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, and English) each month, starting in September 2023, using the titles of each game in the respective language as search content.[ii] The popularity query offers an understanding of the temporal development of videos and ensures coverage of the content most viewed by the users. The relevance search is more dependent on YouTube's algorithms: the results differ from those in the popularity ranking, reflecting a tendency to suggest new content to the user. Note that this data collection includes a substantial number of duplicates, meaning videos that have been included in previous lists, particularly among the most viewed videos, and a considerable overlap between the two Chinese scripts – the latter are not clearly separated in the results, despite the fact that YouTube provides the option to specify the script.

With some inconsistencies in the data being filtered out in this initial tentative overview, the unique data points per game and language used to showcase the category system in this article are as follows:

game	Japanese	Korean	Chinese	English	total
SF 6	848	458	868	796	2970
Zelda: TotK	557	494	581	324	1956

Table 1. Final count of unique coded videos, broken down by game (rows) and script (columns)

The substantial fluctuation in these numbers is both a symptom of the work-in-progress state of this project, and a question for upcoming analysis of the data, which will show whether the lower numbers in the Korean language dataset in the case of *SF 6*, and the English language dataset in the case of *Zelda*: *TotK* are due to the stronger convergence of viewing practices on a smaller number of videos in these languages, or result from the share of data that has yet to be processed. For the purpose of this article, the data should provide a sufficient basis for showcasing the potentials and limitations of our category system.

The monthly set of metadata and videos was thus checked, classified (from now on, *coded*) and used to develop and refine the category system, iteratively. A large share of the testing was being carried out by native speakers in the respective languages, and through cross-checks both among coders within the same language and between different languages, so that the categories indeed adequately described large parts of the content and were applicable to different types of games and different cultural contexts of video creation.

To identify potential limitations in the category system and develop an intersubjectively shared understanding of the categories, all videos were coded by at least two coders, who then discussed the results of their coding with each other. Frequent meetings of the research group were used to report potential issues identified by language-specific coding groups, ranging from vagueness of the category descriptions to content that escaped the category system due to its peculiarity or due to the rigidity of the system. Following this iterative process, a final step was carried out to confirm the validity of the category system and to ensure cross-lingual alignment among the research team: all members of the team were required to categorise the same set of videos in Japanese – the shared language

among the research team – and to evaluate the results. This step proved crucial for harmonising the research team, and it yielded additional discrepancies and questions in the categorisation, which we will discuss in more detail after introducing the category system below.

Through this process, the category system went through four main iterations: a preliminary draft version in September 2023, a first major overhaul in November, a streamlined version in February 2024, and its refined, present version in July 2024. The iterations included both small and large changes to the system. Any tags have been reworked during the iterations, added or merged together, and some still provide potential for improvements and issues, such as tags designed to distinguish single from multiplayer videos, which were initially implemented and later discarded in subsequent iterations of the video. A concluding meeting was held to discuss any potential adjustments, remaining vagueness, and other issues that arose during the coding process, to which we will return after discussing the category system itself.

Challenges and Lessons Learned from the Development Phase

Most challenges encountered in the development of the category system result from typical characteristics of natural languages and classification attempts using tag-based category systems: vagueness, ambiguity, and indetermination.[iii] What complicates our specific context is the fact that the categories and tags are based on specific words from one language, in this case English, and as such provide a variable amount of ambiguity (e.g., multiple specific acceptations), vagueness (unclear boundaries and thresholds) and indetermination (lack of context or information in the text), which may be interpreted differently due to language proficiency differences among our language-diverse research group. Since tags are not mutually exclusive

(as taxonomy-based category systems are), issues arise due to potential overlapping between tags because of their respective vagueness or indetermination (e.g., are clothes items? Does *isekai* necessarily imply *fantasy*). Different interpretations, different degree of pertinentisation and hierarchisation, and thus different usage by research members was observed during the early stages of the coding, and remained a potential issue.

In addition to these challenges, the very development of the categories posed a series of procedural challenges, related to different aspects of the workflow and the best way to iteratively improve the category system:

- *Defining the workflow*: before settling on a workflow and monthly schedule, task coordination between members within the team proved quite difficult. For example, improvement of the category systems would arrive in-between the coding process, and discussions over tag issues and limits would happen when members were not fully accustomed to coding. New members would join in-between tasks and required onboarding during changes.
- *Coding onboarding:* the category system proved more complex to learn than expected, and a proper form of onboarding was needed to coordinate and standardise the team. Two-persons teams and a coding training sub-set helped reducing the learning time and simplifying the workload of teaching members.
- *Developing guides and documentation:* a series of files and applications were created throughout the project, with the goal of supporting the coordination of the team and the development of the categories. This included the category master file (spreadsheet), a coding issues and doubts file, a Trello board, a Discord channel and other temporary specific files.

- *Harmonising interpretations in coding*: one of the main challenges pertained to the different and sometimes conflicting opinions about the categories and tags, their different individual use and usefulness. Sometimes, requesting immediate solutions to the category system (e.g., adding a tag, or removing another) could create unwanted consequences later on (e.g., making a similar tag too broad, or making other tags less specific). This created much back and forth in the versions of the category system, but ultimately led to the definition of its guiding principles (presented below).

Proposed Category System

Guiding Principles

Given the aim of developing a readily usable and easily operable skeleton that helps discovering different types of game-related video content, rather than providing a detailed, case-specific category system, the refinement of the category system was guided by the three principles of *non-specificity*, *accessibility*, and *clarity*. In practice, this means that we gave preference to broad categories where specificity edged on case-specificity while leaving the option of expanding and customizing the categories further. The category system and its future versions will be made available via GitHub in order to facilitate easy access and forking.

Furthermore, we considered the potential limitations that specific category decisions could have on the coding process. In particular, assuming that not all coders are equally familiar with all aspects of one or more games in question, we avoided categories that require detailed knowledge of either game or game culture.

Finally, considering that the category system may be applied to a large number of potentially long-duration videos with relatively scarce resources at hand, we avoided categories that require a detailed analysis of a particular video.

Put differently, a practicability requirement for the proposed category system is to facilitate easy-to-apply categories, which can lead to a broad understanding of the macro-differences between different sets of videos in performance, content and values. With some training and a good understanding of the categories, coding any video accurately should be achievable without detailed knowledge about the game in question by watching a good share of its content and looking for additional markers such as the video title or description, as well as the creator.

Overview of the Category System

The category system emerged from basic W-questions and evolved into three distinct dimensions and corresponding type of analysis: *Video* (formal analysis), *Content* (Semantic analysis) and *Values* (Motive analysis). Each of the dimensions is further organized in sub-categories, each one accompanied by a number of predefined tags, alongside a sub-category (*other noteworthy*) intended for additional tags and further specifications.

The detailed documentation of the category system, including the category names, descriptions and appropriate use notes, which we have omitted below, can be accessed via the stable version published at the time of article submission available on Zenodo (zoomingmediaresearch 2025a).

Video

The first category (*Video – Formal Analysis*) addresses the audiovisual elements that constitute the YouTube video. The category addresses the questions "How is the video made? In which way is the content shown?". The tags describe the audiovisual sources of the video, specific elements that can be analysed formally, and their interaction. It is further divided into sub-categories (*main video source*, *formal elements*, *other significant tags*, *YouTube shorts*) and the above-mentioned o*ther noteworthy formal elements*, which is used to provide further labels and notes for tags.

1. VIDEO – FORMAL ANALYSIS	This category analyses the elements that make the YouTube video. It answers the questions "How is the video made? In which way the content is shown?". The tags describe the audio-video sources and their features	
Sub-category	Instruction	Available tags
MAIN VIDEO SOURCE (…) ***(choose 1)***	This sub-category describes the most important source of the video, the one that defines the whole video. Only 1 can be selected.	Animation Game Live-action Performance Mixed
FORMAL ELEMENTS (…) ***(multiple choice, can be left blank)***	This sub-category describes all the other sources that might appear in the video. May be left blank (when no tag is valid), multiple choice is possible.	Avatar Camera Text
OTHER SIGNIFICANT TAGS (…) **(multiple choice, can leave blank)**	This sub-category includes other secondary elements, that might be part of the video.	Background Extra Music Multiple Actors Re-used videos Voice/sound FX
YOUTUBE SHORTS (Yes/No)	The video is shot in the short-form version of YouTube (e.g., vertical format, max 1 minute long).	Yes No
OTHER NOTEWORTHY FORMAL ELEMENTS (write here)	The video includes other noteworthy formal elements that are not covered by previous tags, or not sufficiently addressed by those tags.	[Freeform]

Table 2. Category system first category: Video with all sub-categories and tags.

Content

The second category (*Content – Semantic Analysis*) focuses on the elements and features that determine the content or general meaning of the video. It answers the questions *What is shown? What are we seeing?* It is further divided into three sub-categories: *content type, content focus* and *other noteworthy content elements*.

2. CONTENT – SEMANTIC ANALYSIS	This category analyses the elements that define the content of the video. It answers the questions "What is shown? What are we seeing?". The tags describe the typology and main topics/focus of the video.	
Sub-category	DescriptionInstructions	How to useGroup of tags
CONTENT TYPE (...) (leave blank, or choose 1)	This sub-category describes the type or genre of the video, among a list of common video types and formats. Only 1 choice is possible. May be left blank (when no tag is suitable)	Creative Experiment Game Comparison Reaction Video Speedrunning Tournament Training Walkthrough Opinion/Review
CONTENT FOCUS (...) (leave blank, or choose max. 2)	This sub-category represents the most important content and object of the video. Up to 2 choices can be selected. It may be left blank (when no tag is suitable).	Boss fight Character Crafting Derivative Equipment Glitch Graphics MODs OST/Music PvP mode Story
OTHER NOTEWORTHY CONTENT ELEMENTS (write here)	The video includes other noteworthy content elements that are not covered by previous tags, or not sufficiently addressed by those tags.	[Freeform]

Table 3. Category system second category: Content with all sub-categories and tags.

Values

The third category (*Values – Subjective Analysis*) gauges the goals that can be ascribed for the creation/broadcasting of the video. It answers the questions *Why was it shown? What's the aim of the video?* It is not further divided into sub-categories, and the tags include possible understandable reasons and motives behind the creation of videos, which tie to the video and content characteristics. It is considered the most subjective evaluation among the different categories, with higher than standard degree of subjectivity among coders.

3. VALUES – SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS	This category analyses the values behind the videos, according to the interpretation of the researcher. The focus is on the values and goals that might perspire from the video. Multiple tags are possible.	
Sub-category	Instruction	Group of tags
SUBJECTIVE EVALUATIONS (Multiple possible)	This sub-category identifies the perceived values, goals and intents behind the video, which are subjectively evaluated by the researcher.	Comedic Community-building Entertaining Informative Promotional
OTHER NOTEWORTHY EVALUATION (write here)	The video conveys other values, goals or reasons, that are not covered by previous tags, or not sufficiently addressed by those tags.	[Freeform]

Table 4. Category system third category: Values with all sub-categories and tags.

Coding Example

All teams used a *Google Sheet template* to perform the coding (zoomingmediaresearch 2025b). The template includes all the previous categories and sub-categories in the column fields, and one row for each video in the top 100 Relevance or Most viewed dataset. The template makes it possible to directly compare coding among teams and export the coding for automated analysis and comparison. The template adds an automatically created video link based on the ID

and allows the coder to also indicate whether a video matches the initial search criteria (game title, video language), as well as a column for additional memos.

Below, two examples of coding using the category system, respectively taken from *Zelda*: *TotK* Japanese script, and *SF 6* English script. To improve readability, categories and sub-categories have been projected on the rows.

VIDEOID	_2YUP5yflbs	h0jzmGLg-gg
LINK	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2YUP5yflbs	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0jzmGLg-gg
CONTENT CHECKT (yes / no)	yes	yes
LANGUAGE CHECK (yes / no)	yes	yes
MAIN VIDEO SOURCE (choose 1)	Live-action Performance	Game
FORMAL ELEMENTS (multiple possible)	Camera; Text	
OTHER SIGNIFICANT TAGS (please describe new tags in the tag description column)	Extra Music; Multiple Actors; Voice/sound FX	re-used video
YOUTUBE SHORTS (yes / no)	yes	no
OTHER NOTEWORTHY FORMAL ELEMENTS		
CONTENT TYPE (choose 0-1)	Creative	

CONTENT FOCUS (choose 0-2)	Equipment	PvP mode
OTHER NOTEWORTHY CONTENT ELEMENTS		
VALUES (Subjective Evaluation) (multiple possible)	Entertaining; Comedic	Entertaining
OTHER NOTEWORTHY EVALUATION		
NEW TAGS AND MEMOS		Shows Pro Player

Table 5. Two different examples of coding, *Zelda: TotK* video (left) and *SF 6* video (right).

Application Showcase: Popular Videos Related to *SF 6* and *Zelda: TotK*

With the overall number of data points per game and language (Table 1, above) in mind, the application of the category system helps identify a series of substantial cross-game and cross-language differences (Figure 1, below).

It's important to reiterate that these data may include duplicate videos for two reasons. First, a video may appear in the search in multiple languages, which is a characteristic of YouTube's search and API – in order to replicate what a user searching for a specific game in a particular language would get, we did not filter these results out based on language. Secondly, and rarer, videos might be published on multiple channels, such as the *SF 6* Teaser Trailer, which is published both by the *Street Fighter* channel (@Street Fighter 2022), and the IGN channel (@IGN 2022). These cases are not filtered out either.

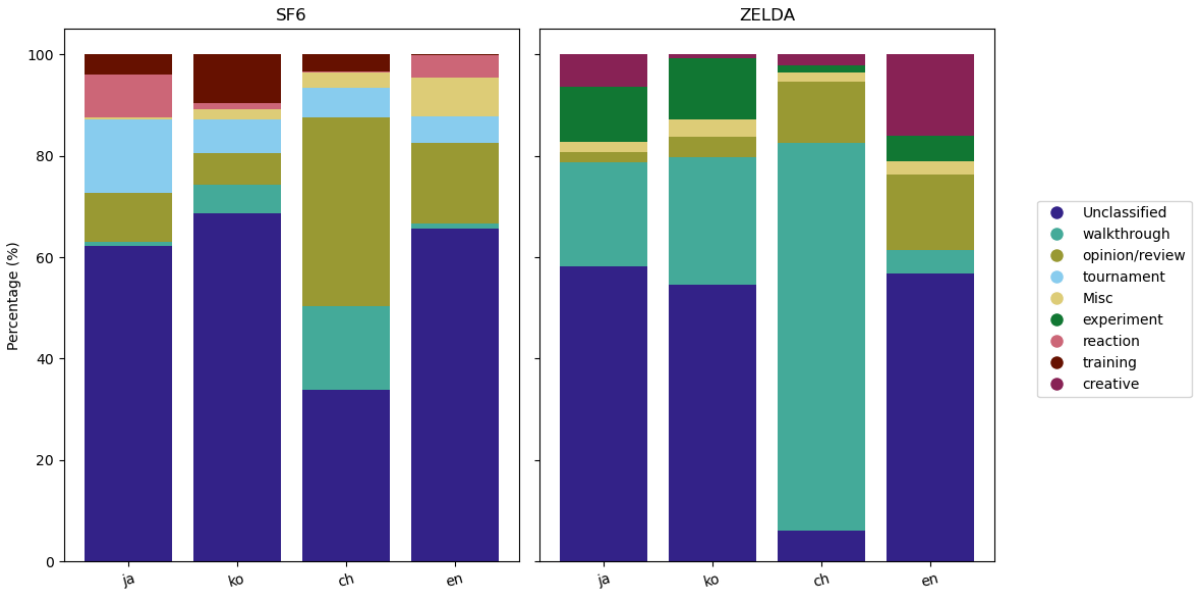

Figure 1. Content type comparison (shares of total per language)

term	ch	en	ja	ko
unclassified	293	523	528	314
opinion/review	323	127	83	29
tournament	50	42	122	30
walkthrough	144	7	6	26
reaction	1	36	72	6
training	30	1	33	44
creative	20	18	2	1
Game comparison	5	25	1	2
experiment	1	17	1	4

Table 6. Content type (absolute numbers per language) for all videos related to *SF 6*.

term	ch	en	ja	ko
unclassified	35	183	324	270
walkthrough	444	15	114	124
opinion/review	71	48	12	20
experiment	8	16	60	59
creative	13	52	36	4
Game comparison	6	6	10	6
reaction	3	1	0	8
speedrunning	1	0	1	3

Table 7. Content type (absolute numbers per language) for all videos related to *Zelda: TotK*.

The distribution of shares for the types of video contents indicates a clear and expected difference between *SF 6* and *Zelda*: *TotK* whereas both games are the source of a large number of *unclassified* videos (which indicates non-specific gameplay content), experiments and creative content are much more prominent in *Zelda*: *TotK*-related videos across all languages than in *SF 6*-related videos, which in turn feature more tournament and reaction videos. Walkthroughs are also more prominent in *Zelda*: *TotK*-related content, whereas opinion/reviews take up a larger share in the context of *SF 6*. While each language dataset has its own distinct characteristics within the context of each game, the English language datasets stand out from the rest due to minimal share of walkthrough and training videos, and the relatively large share of opinion/review and creative contents. The Chinese language datasets display an even more pronounced difference to all other languages – demanding a more detailed inquiry in the next step of the research project.

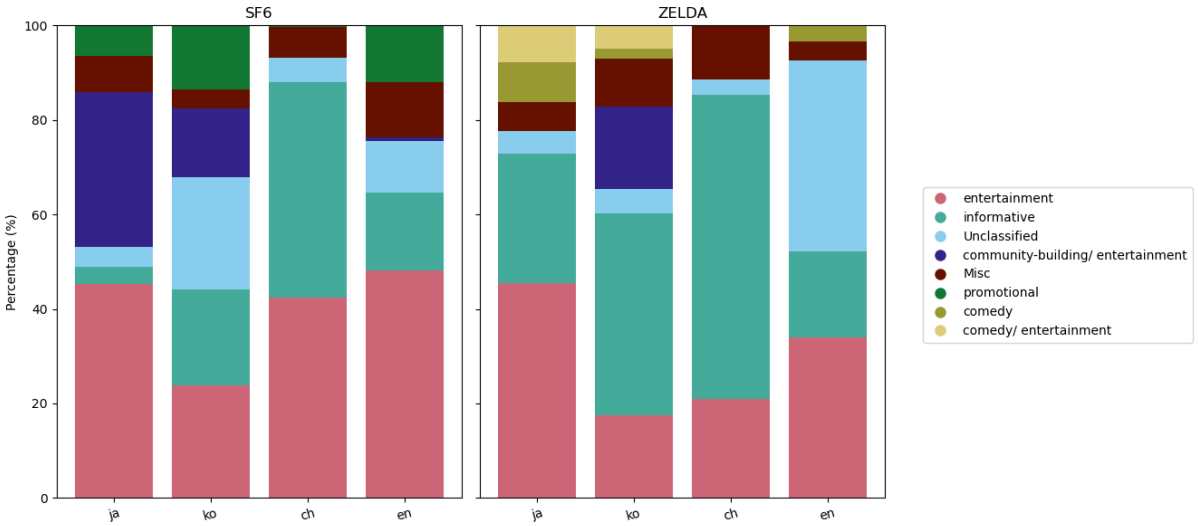

Figure 2. Subjective evaluation Comparison (shares of total per language)

term	ch	en	ja	ko
entertainment	368	383	384	109
informative	396	132	31	93
community-building; entertainment	0	6	279	67
unclassified	45	87	35	109
promotional	2	95	54	62
entertainment; informative	0	42	28	3
community-building	53	5	0	0
comedy	3	24	4	2
community-building; informative	0	3	20	1
comedy; entertainment	0	10	7	1

Table 8. Subjective evaluation (absolute numbers per language) for all videos related to *SF 6*.

term	ch	en	ja	ko
informative	374	59	153	211
entertainment	122	110	253	86
unclassified	19	131	27	26
community-building; entertainment	0	0	0	86
comedy	1	11	47	11
comedy; entertainment	0	0	43	24
community-building	51	0	0	0
promotional	14	13	8	11
entertainment; informative	0	0	18	23
comedy; informative	0	0	3	8

Table 9. Subjective evaluation (absolute numbers per language) for all videos related to *Zelda: TotK*.

In the subjective evaluation, the picture is equally diverse. A visible difference can be seen in the category of *comedy* and the dual assignment *comedy/entertainment*, which are visible even if not prominent in the *Zelda*: *TotK*-related videos, but do not appear in the *SF 6*-related videos. In turn, the *SF 6* data displays a noticeable amount of *promotional* videos. This is due to the fact that *SF 6* is a strongly character-centred game which is promoted heavily by Capcom by means of character introduction videos. Between the languages, a marked difference is the large share of videos considered as *community-building/entertainment* by the coders in Japanese (*SF 6*) and Korean (*SF 6* and *Zelda*: *TotK*). This perceived dual intent does not appear in the other languages, making it a potential candidate for language specific video culture – or a potential difference between coder perceptions across the languages. Once again, the Chinese language stands out with a comparatively larger number of *informative* videos related to *SF 6* and *Zelda*: *TotK*, albeit the difference is less pronounced in the latter case.

In summary, applying the category system to videos related to the two case studies this project focuses on is useful to highlight similarities and differences between

different games and between different languages, thereby exposing a series of questions to potentially follow up in a more detailed analysis of video contents. To the extent to which the categories are meaningful in the context of a particular research project, the category system can be said to fulfil its intended purpose.

Limits, Issues and Challenges of the Category System

While our preliminary evaluation suggests that the main premises of the category system (e.g., the division into three levels, the use of specific tags and tags lists, the use of *other noteworthy* free tag, and the general workflow developed during the process) provide sufficient freedom, flexibility, and adaptability, the coding process has also revealed a number of points of contention or areas where further refinement is necessary. Paying attention to the points where categories fail is not only important in order to improve the existing system, but also a way of exposing the moments in which the taxonomy approach risks missing the emergent, variable and playful character of YouTube videos. The following section discusses several of these moments and thus aims to serve as a starting point for refinements to the category system as much as it hopes to inspire new research avenues in pursuit of understanding the distinct qualities of game-related YouTube culture, its contents, practices, and underlying platform logic.

Across the different video types, language spaces, and games referenced, categorization struggled most with:

1. Determining the general relevance of particular video elements or features (YouTube affordances)
2. Reconciling the degree of abstraction of the categories in relation to the specific of the videos under scrutiny (complexity reduction)

3. Agreeing on *subjective evaluations* of video intentions and mixed cases (coder subjectivity)
4. Coding category-defying videos (outliers and hybrid characteristics)

YouTube Affordances

While creating and improving the category system, a key challenge was represented by properly selecting and evaluating the relevance of many distinctive video features (from now on, affordances) in order to establish tags or tags list for the category system, which could be applied across a diverse range of game genres and video types. A significant challenge for the research team emerged when evaluating the relative relevance and priority of some affordances over others in the category system, or assessing the need for subsequent changes after the introduction of new tags.

A general related issue was the diverging degree of contextual knowledge expected of the viewer of videos for *Zelda*: *TotK* and *SF 6*. *Street Fighter* videos were generally considered more difficult to categorise because they require a higher degree of language- and game-specific literacy from their players, which resulted in more frequent proposals of context-specific tags. For example, videos in which the narrator or commentator is not the player are a common way of commenting tournament replays and recorded fights, often resulting in complex videos such as (@HaitaniTV 2025), in which the Pro player Haitani, after streaming his screen while commenting on a Pro Player match, added extra text commentary and video reactions to the video itself. These videos are not only difficult to disentangle for unfamiliar coders, but they also represent a level of meta-gaming that is difficult to capture in our category system. A future investigation into the large number of popular *SF 6*-related videos that do not feature gameplay, but consist solely of voice commentary or review by

seasoned players over stills or screenshots, may feed into a more substantial inquiry into the complex, multilayered character of game cultural reaction and commentary videos.

With regard to the category system, the underlying question is which of these aspects should be included in the category system (the recorded nature of the video, the commentary provided by Pro Player, or the visual traces of remediation), and how can one implement and operationalize them without relying on detailed coder expertise.

Other examples include commentary and opinions on particular aspects of the game by pro gamers, which take up a noticeable share of the Japanese language videos (e.g., @nemonuki 2024). While the inclusion of tags such as *commentary* and *metagame* was proposed during the meetings, it was difficult to develop a clearly bounded tag that could be applied to different types of games and genres of video, and to agree on its limits.

Another important aspect in the categorization of metagaming practices relates to the provenance of video contents. Before the *re-used video* tag, our original proposal was to keep track of predatory videos in the *Subjective Evaluation* category, highlighting the fact that such videos are frequently created with little additional effort by the creator, with the aim to obtain views and notoriety.

In particular, a number of videos in our dataset are created by using the *SF 6* in-game function Record Match to search for the training or sparring matches of pro players and post them almost daily, most likely with the intention of boosting channel popularity (e.g., @Street Fighter 2022 or @streetfighterreplays41 2023). However, we

quickly realized that the tag predatory is too complex and elusive to be identified by non-experts of *SF 6*, and is potentially less applicable to other games.

The present proposal is to cover this tag in the Formal category (video), under the label of *re-used video*. This tag does not require qualifying intentions, but instead identifies content that relies heavily on pre-existing videos. Thus, it shifts the focus towards a similar but separated video affordance, which can be verified and evaluated in a simpler way.

Complexity Reduction

The aim of identifying video characteristics across different game genres and practices and the requirement of accessibility for non-expert coders are somewhat at odds with each other and require a balancing act. In practice, this means that many tags we experimented with were too complex to be understood and mastered by the coders, and/or too specific to particular games or domains of game culture to be implemented in the general category system. Among the various potential candidates for more detailed descriptions of particular subfields were videos with hybrid or mixed language properties and the single vs multiplayer distinction.

The former is potentially interesting when considering the translingual distribution of content: for example, a number of Japanese language *SF 6* tournament videos were re-used and localized in Chinese, with Chinese commentary. The latter was discarded in our current version of the category system due to the presence of hybrid (asynchronous) single player modes (e.g., Souls games, *Death Stranding* [2019]) and the fact that a number of *SF 6* videos depict single and multiplayer content. *Zelda*: *TotK*, on the other hand, is exclusively single player, which means that the tag does not qualify the videos so much as it describes the game itself. The current version of

the category system features a *content focus* (*pvp mode*) but no single player equivalent. This tag might be paired in the future with similar *content focus* tags such as co-op or asynchronous multiplayer. The advantage of both tags is not to highlight the actual mode of the game, but the way the game is played and content is provided through the act of playing as depicted in the video.

Coder Subjectivity

The category system was built on the idea of capturing the three dimensions of form, content, and intention – the latter, especially, resulted in confusion among the coders, and a higher degree of variation and subjectivity in the preliminary coding attempts. This is partly due to the fact that we were unable to develop a clearly distinct definition of the available tags in this category, and partly because tags such as entertainment and comedy, or promotional and informative frequently overlap in practice. After multiple iterations of trying to define a simple and non-ambiguous set of intents behind video creation, we shifted to the analysis of the *subjective value* that the coder identified in the video, in order to circumvent the impossible task of determining authorial intent. Despite the many iterations of coding alignment and discussion, this category remains both susceptible to individual interpretation and difficult to disentangle in specific videos, which often display more than one intention (@겜시쿠 2024 or @botw_jinyoung 2024). As can be seen in figure 2, a large share of all videos has been classified as *entertainment*, which is both sensible and relatively information-poor given that game-related YouTube videos tend to aim toward entertaining their viewers.

An additional layer of complexity lies in the cultural and linguistic subjectivities of the values being classified. Due to the different language scripts and sub-cultures involved in the videos, some degree of variation emerges in how values such as

comedy or *community-building* are understood and articulated by the native coders as a result of them sharing the target viewers' cultural codes. In this regard, the most difficult tag with the highest variation among coders proved to be that of *community-building* – introduced to reflect the tendency for video creators to create and nourish communities via their videos.

Finally, the *extra music* tag, which denotes music added to the clip that is not part of the in-game music and sound, hints at a peculiar relationship between the different parts of the category system. Despite appearing simple, it was/is a source of discussion and doubts during the coding process, because identifying extra music requires knowledge of the in-game music and sounds in the first place, and different interpretations would arise when in-game music score was applied to a scene to which it didn't belong originally, or whether to consider trailers and full OST as part of game music. Moreover, the contrast with other video subcategories is significant, since tags such as game, camera are audiovisual sources which require little further specification. This example shows how specific tags can trigger different layers of interpretations and involve the coder's subjectivity in unintended ways.

Thanks to our process, we were able to achieve relatively high intercoder reliability. The intercoder reliability was not quantitatively measured during the development of the category system, as our process involved the onboarding of new coders in different phases, as well as the change of the system across four main iterations, and the implementation of pairing system for coders of a language space. All this would clearly influence the results of such measure, and instead qualitative group discussion and evaluation of the system's intercoder reliability was carried out during periodic meetings. Towards the end of the coding process, once implemented the final version of the category system, a specific onboarding task for familiarising with the coding of

the system was developed. The onboarding required new users to code a subset of game-videos from the videogame *Mario Kart World* (2025). However, this task was only carried out successfully by the coders for Japanese and Korean (two coders each), since the Chinese language dataset included predominantly non-Chinese data that was excluded from the coding process by the Chinese coders, and the English dataset could not be coded due to lack of coders at the time. Considering the disagreement between coders, the following intercoder reliability data suggest that any dataset should at least be coded by two coders.

	Korean				Japanese			
Column	**Agreement %**	**Divergence %**	**Cohen 's Kappa**	**Kappa Interpretation**	**Agreement %**	**Divergence %**	**Cohen 's Kappa**	**Kappa Interpretation**
Content match (yes no)	40.5	59.5	0.143	Poor	97.52	2.48	0.779	Substantial
Language Match (yes no)	90.5	9.5	0.841	Almost perfect	98.14	1.86	0.855	Almost perfect
Main Video Source (choose 1)	94.63	5.37	0.886	Almost perfect	90.68	9.32	0.734	Substantial
Formal Elements (multiple possible)	90.91	9.09	0.813	Almost perfect	83.85	16.15	0.767	Substantial
YouTube Shorts (yes no)	93.8	6.2	0.876	Almost perfect	94.41	5.59	0.898	Almost perfect
Content Type (choose 0-1)	92.56	7.44	0.378	Fair	78.26	21.74	0.446	Moderate
Content Focus (choose 0-2)	99.17	0.83	0	Poor	85.71	14.29	0.766	Substantial
Values (Subjective Evaluation) muliple possible	78.1	21.9	0.616	Substantial	72.67	27.33	0.532	Moderate

Figure 10. Intercoder reliability for the Japanese language coders, 100 most viewed and 100 most relevant videos related to Mario Kart World, retrieved from YouTube on June 9, 2025.

Outliers and Hybrid Content

One of the most interesting consequences of the development of the category system was represented by a series of videos, with a specific set of affordances that proved to either escape the key principles around which the system was based, or to partially question several design decisions that led us into its actual implementation. Insofar as they escape any attempt at characterizing videos as paratexts that reference a central game text, these video features, video types or affordance combinations prove particularly useful to understand the diversity, complexity and playful character of game-related video practices on YouTube.

Applying the category system highlighted the difficulty of characterizing and positioning generic gameplay, dealing with videos in which the creator is more central than the game-related content – an aspect also emphasized by Newman et al. (2024), the multilayeredness of remediation widely seen in videos related to *SF 6*, and the difficulty of identifying the playing actor in some videos. Generic gameplay proved difficult to capture because it risks overlapping or with a number of other tags, such as walkthrough. We opted to introduce a *content focus* category, which allows specifying the content of the video. However, as figure 1 indicates, this resulted in a high number of videos that did not receive a tag for *content type* or *content focus* due to the generic nature of the gameplay they featured and are thus marked as unclassified in the visualization (e.g., @BreNeko 2023 or @25smil-E-gao25 2023). This remains an open task for the project, and it may also be an interesting facet of YouTube video culture to explore in more detail in the future.

Another exciting outlier can be found in the diverse practices of remixing and remediating videos, background images, music, text, game replays and other content in game-related YouTube culture, such as, for example, *Zelda*: *TotK* contraptions

montages (@Top Gaming Plays 2023). This outlier is particularly frustrating for our intended category system because it frequently escapes recognition and often involves multiple layers of remixing or remediation.

For instance, recordings of *SF 6* matches reuploaded by specific channels are easily mistaken for tournaments (e.g., @streetfighterreplays41 2024 or @aka2548 2024), and it is basically impossible to confirm if *Zelda*: *TotK* collages of contraptions are taken elsewhere from previous videos. Furthermore, it is not possible to verify which videos exist as reupload of other streaming services (e.g., Twitch, niconico video) aside from direct knowledge or traces of the UX (which are separately tagged as Video *background*).

Conclusion and Future Revisions

The development of the category system, and its application to the *Zelda*: *TotK* and *SF 6* related data, have proved how an adaptable category system can be useful for mapping the space of game-related video practices on YouTube and other platform, going beyond the simplicity of labels such as Let's Play. The system here described, even if preliminary, made it possible to observe a diversity of content types surface within and between language regions, as well as a difference in the values provided by the videos across languages, and in relation to content types. Due to the methodological focus of this paper, we did not delve into the insights that emerged from a comprehensive analysis of the coding, on a finer level of detail (e.g., co-occurrence of tags from different categories).

In its current form, the category system constitutes a preliminary, yet, in our view, practically useful instrument for a range of research practices at the intersection of

game studies, platform studies, and, due to its general character, the analysis of a broad range of online audiovisual content. Its potential applications can be outlined along the following lines: First, due to its universal and versatile design, the system is well-suited to comparative analysis across different game titles or different language spaces. Researchers may operate at the macro-level, examining, for instance, how different games sharing some attributes (genre, release time, audience) might show significant differences in their audiovisual discorsivisation. Or they can use the system to focus on meso-level analysis, in which a single game is observed in its variation, for instance in language regions. Lastly, the category system can show differences at the micro-level, in which some trends and co-occurrence of tags can be identified within a game corpus or language region of a corpus, highlighting meaningful comparisons across different levels. This comparative scope is one of the system's defining features, and it distinguishes it from category systems developed with a single game or a single cultural context in mind.

Second, this comparative potential opens the way to further comparative analysis that pertains to the analysis of other cultural domains and platform contexts, analysing phenomena such as the degree of platform remediation, media mix practices, and performing quantitative analysis on user origin and practices, regional overlapping, language overlapping and much more. As briefly mentioned in the preliminary results, the system can serve as a starting point for platform analysis and culturally situated inquiries that investigate trends of recency and stickiness in platform, the amount of cross-platform remediated content, as well as culturally specific genres, trends and content, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data based on the category system itself.

Third, given its relatively limited and stable tag set and the open availability of its data, the category system can function as a content discovery system for future research into online audiovisual game culture. By making it possible to select tags related to video format, video genre, or specific game content, researchers will have access to a growing corpus of pre-coded videos that could serve as entry point for more targeted analysis. In a context in which the sheer volume of available video content makes systematic exploration difficult and time-consuming, we expect this to provide a value as a first step filter for access to data. Furthermore, as the corpus of coded video will grow, whether through our ongoing research or through adoption and extension by other researchers, there will be more possibilities to provide a corpus that will help data-supported broader interpretive work in cultural studies and game studies. The possibility to trace recurring themes, video formats, values and focus, might offer more than some usefulness for research in digital humanities at the intersection with game and cultural studies. Considering all that in relation to our own interest in de-centring games and rethinking the significance of play practices outside of digital game spaces, we identify four parallel steps to take next. First, we intend to test the category system with a wider range of games from more diverse genres. Second, we need to develop a better understanding and refine the uncategorised *content type* and *content focus* (e.g., what has been referred to as generic gameplay). Third, we need to revisit the tags suggested in the *other noteworthy* freeform category in the context of a more diverse set of games to determine their adequacy. Fourth, the lack of differentiation of actors involved in the videos and their roles is a blind spot that, considering the importance and diverse roles different actors take on, needs to be addressed in the next iteration.

With this in mind, the analysis of the data and the reflection on the current challenges and limits of the system clearly indicates that the phenomenon of game-related

videos can't be solely understood as paratextual and ancillary to game objects/media. Many of the outliers and hybrids we encountered point to, and ask for, a more critical understanding of the ways in which digital game-based audiovisual media emerge through playful and entertaining cultural practices on digital platforms and, as such, rely on, appropriate and subvert these platforms and the content they negotiate. What emerges are new media objects/projects and practices.

In addition to the complexity of the videos, further complication is provided by the different regional communities and language-based cultural practices that mix and cross through the platform. This embeddedness is highlighted by the results of the coding, while also resulting at least partially from the coder's individual perceptions. The coding process thus inevitably introduces a culturally driven subjectivity – one that is relevant for a regionally situated understanding of the differences between videos across different language spaces and thus the cultural phenomenon in question.

We should point once that the accountability and intersubjective traceability of this research is challenged by the volatility of the content on YouTube. When videos disappear from the public YouTube space, it is no longer possible to verify coding or clear up discrepancies. In such cases, the coded descriptions become the only historical trace of the original content. In some cases, videos may disappear before they can be coded.

Finally, the preliminary version of the category system has displayed a few limitations in relation to its focus and scope as a system for universal investigations. Depending on the target game, the goal of the researcher, and the tacit knowledge of the coders, the information provided by the classifications and tag can prove relatively

less insightful, and the coding tags can provide limited relevance for certain games, or for the specific needs of the researchers. Future versions of the category system will be developed with the goal to improve its adaptability and flexibility to provide a set of categories and tags that can be relevant and of broad application, without increasing the complexity or the coding effort needed to the user.

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[i] This research was developed as part of the JSPS-funded project "Exploratory Research on Play and Communities on Video Streaming Platforms."

[ii] We have experimented with the data collection since August. However, the final decision for the appropriate number of titles and languages was only made in September.

[iii]For theoretical background related to these issues, we refer to Pinkall (1995) or Kennedy (2011) for natural languages, and to Gray (1978) for the semiotics of classification systems, and to Goodwin (2015) for the semiotics of vision and discursive classifying practices.