Chapter 6
Shared Encounters in a Location-Aware and Proximity-Aware Mobile Community. The Mogi Case.

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Introduction

Nowhere does the development of ubiquitous computing and mobile devices impinge more singularly on the construction of public spaces than with location-aware infrastructures, and the kind of "hybrid ecologies" they enable (Crabtree and Rodden 2008). On one hand, location-aware technologies articulate space and place in new ways (Dourish 2006), and may favor the construction of hybrid "territories" as an emergent feature of recurring practices (Licoppe and Inada 2008). On the other hand, particularly when the technology makes locations visible and available through digital mapping devices, it supports forms of interaction and encounters that weave together embodied and digital forms of presence and proximity, as has been shown in some pioneering experiments (Griswold et al. 2003; Benford et al. 2003; Barkhuus et al. 2005). However, such encounters are always highly sensitive to the social and institutional practices of users (Barkhuus and Dourish 2004). Since most of the previous studies involved experiments with specially recruited players engaging once or at most a few times in the location-aware activity, what still remains to be observed and understood is the way a "hybrid" interaction order emerges from the collective interactions of members inhabiting a location-aware environment: As this takes time, as much time as is needed for a collective culture (under-determined by game design and rules) to emerge from multiple interactions in massive multiplayer online games (Steinkuehler 2006). This is precisely the direction that this chapter wants to explore.

It looks at the forms of interaction which may be observed in a location-aware community in which members have been able to dwell and interact over a long time, long enough for a culture to stabilize and for original forms of shared encounters to develop, which are constitutive of the local order that has emerged

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within such a community, and which as we eventually argue, bear a more general relevance to most kinds of location-aware settings. Our work is based on the Mogi game, built by French designers (Licoppe and Guillot 2006), and played intensively in Japan between 2003 and 2006 by a population of a 1,000 players on the average. This was not an experiment, but a commercial venture, and players subscribed directly on the KDDI game portal. We have had access to the anonymous corpus of text messages exchanged by the players (Licoppe and Inada 2006), and also been able to interview a dozen players, some of them several times. The kind of immersion that such a corpus of interactions covering a period of 3 years provides amounts to a form of "virtual ethnography" fieldwork (Hine 2000). The metaphor is here particularly apt for we aim toward an ethnographically-oriented analysis of the culture of encounters that has developed in this singular community, and which is ultimately founded on the ways members manage properly the location-awareness, and ubiquitous computing resources made available to them by the game infrastructure. We will use particularly significant interactions gathered from our extensive analysis of the corpus to provide evidence for some key features of the interaction order in the Mogi community: the fact that locations are public, and the ways in which locations and proximities between players are made visible, recognizable, and may be monitored by members.

We will first show how the players treat locations as public data available for scrutiny and worthy to mention when deemed remarkable. A consequence of this is the occurrence of situations in which players are close, though too distant to perceive one another "directly" (which we will call mediated proximity events), and which warrant mutual recognition, and discussion by the concerned participants as well as by a wider audience of connected players. One of us has argued that in many different cultural settings, the recognition of mutual proximity projected engaging in a face-to-face encounter as a relevant course of action to follow (Licoppe 2009). The specificity of a location-aware society and the kind of collective good on which it rests are then related to the ways members may mutually appear as "close" and manage such mediated proximity-based "encounters," as well as the cases in which they seem to go awry, such as "stalking"-related situations (Licoppe and Inada 2009). Mediated proximities are so meaningful as a part of the players' experience that an unexpected and unforeseen (to the designers) genre of activity (labeled as "cara-gattai") has been invented by them. It consists in playing at breaking the location-based relation between the avatar and the body it figures, and getting the avatars to touch on the public digital game-maps, while the players' actual bodies remain at a distance from one another. We show eventually how some face-to-face encounters of a traditional type take on new meanings when they are accomplished in such "hybrid ecologies": a date between players becomes a collective public performance that extends over days and weeks, involves many players who monitor, comment on and gossip about the encounter and its progress.

The Location-Aware Multiplayer Game Mogi and its Users

The Game

The game Mogi was developed by a team led by Mathieu Castelli at a French start-up (Newtgames), and was commercialized in 2003 in Japan by the operator KDDI. The gameplay consists of collecting virtual objects with a mobile phone. These are "localized" (in the sense that users can act on them only when they are close to their virtual position), and are continuously created and renewed by the game designers. The player has an interface, the "radar," that features a map with a radius of 1 km. This map represents the player's environment with his or her pictogram in the centre of the mobile screen surrounded by those of the other players, and virtual objects situated within the 1 km radius. These data are updated with each server request.[1] When players are less than about 300 m[2] from an object, they can capture it with their terminal. Each object belongs to a collection. Completing a collection earns points, players are classified according to the points accumulated. The basic idea is to create a community of high-tech hunter-gatherers whose activity is set in an economy based on the bartering of virtual objects and a sociability based on text messaging.

The main functionalities of the game are accessible from the main menu. The five most important are as follows:

- The "radar" interface, the map of the player's immediate environment. By clicking on a sufficiently close object on the map, the player can pick it up by launching a collection module. Clicking on a player's icon on the screen opens a window for text messaging (see Fig 6.1).
- The module dedicated to text messaging. The addresses and messages exchanged are accessible only within the game server. Players can create buddy lists of favorite correspondents (Mogi friends or the members of teams to which they belong[3]).
- The exchange and transaction module (for exchanging objects missing from one's collection).

[1]The rapidity of these connections with the game server is critical as regards the acceptability of the game. At certain times the connection time ranged from 30 sec to 1 min, which was experienced as a real problem by players.

[2] Experience of the game is richer with a GPS terminal (the precision of geo-localization is then a matter of a few meters) but the game also offers the possibility of localization from cells. Experienced players have become accustomed to constantly switching from one to the other in their quest for objects since the map in cell mode is slightly different to the GPS map, due to the position of the antennae. It is therefore likely to reveal new objects in one or two clicks, without the player moving at all.

[3]This possibility of creating teams and getting together, introduced shortly before my study, has been highly successful.

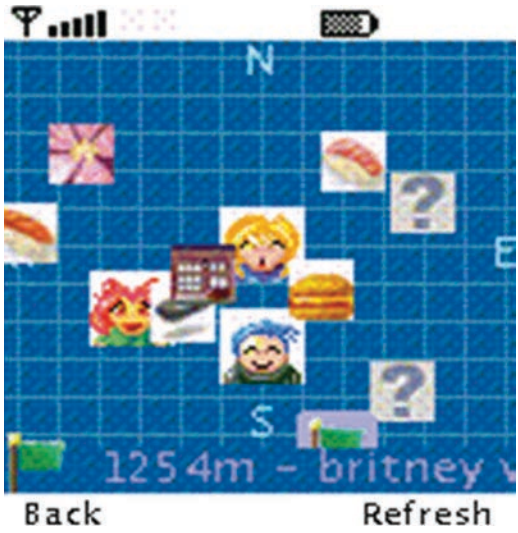

Fig. 6.1 The radar interface that represents the local map of the game around the player (whose icon always appears in the centre of the screen) in an area of 4 km^2. The other players and geo-localized virtual objects appear on the map. The "closest Mogi-friend" is indicated at the bottom of the screen, with the distance even if it is more than 2 km. This functionality was added by the designers to facilitate the "onscreen encounters" discussed later

- The user profile: those who can choose to make all or part of the inventory of objects that they possess, as well as the type of object they want, visible.
- Public classification of players according to the number of accumulated points. This classification is frequently consulted by players and introduces competition between them.

The game objects are designed by the design team. Certain collections are very simple, for instance, precious stones spread across Japan. Others play on the players' situation and context. Certain objects are available only in some parts of the country, other collections are visible and accessible only at certain times of the day. The design was recently oriented toward more advanced objects, virtual "creatures" (that create, move or destroy nearby objects), chests (players close to them can aim for an object and thus obtain the right to open the chest, with the hope of winning a highly valuable object), or quests (additional points can be earned by moving an object close to a given place). This diversity illustrates an important property of context-aware services. Context-awareness concerns not only people or terminals, but also informational objects that can be "placed" in the mobile user's environment. As the Mogi example shows, it is possible to enhance a mobile users' environment almost infinitely, and to create rich and complex ecologies that could be called "augmented" towns.

It is also possible to log onto Mogi on a PC, through a website. In this case the interfaces and functionalities are different. The Web interface includes a chat function not accessible on mobile terminals, but its key feature is that it allows PC-based players to visualize maps showing other players and bigger geo-located objects,

throughout Japan. Since they are stationary, they can pinpoint the position of highly coveted objects, or unusual movements of known players. This is well known among players, and has the very important consequence of turning the Mogi players into a location-aware community in which one's location (as presented in the interface), and by way of consequence, one's displacements become public data, always potentially accessible to other known and unknown players.

The Players

The game was played between 2003 and 2008, and on average it had about 1,000 active users, all of whom were subscribers to a service offering an unlimited mobile data transfer for a flat rate (the WIN rate of 4,200 yen offered by KDDI). Players considered that this type of rate freed them from any worry as to the intensity of their use, and that its existence had a liberating effect relative to the development of their game practices. The subscription to the game as such was 210 yens per month, which the players considered negligible. KDDI ran no adverts on the game. As part of promotion campaigns, it nevertheless offered a 1-month free trial period twice a year for Mogi and many other games on its portal. Most Mogi players who had previously had a WIN subscription had taken advantage of these promotions to try the game, after being attracted by the context-aware concept applied in Mogi.

The Mogi gameplay differs from games available on Internet because it is a multiplayer game based on a very straightforward scenario. Although no precise statistics are available, user profiles are clearly very different to those observed on the Internet. There are almost as many female as male users. A large proportion of users are in the 25–40 age-group. Our study focused on five men and five women in that age-group with widely diverse social origins, from a bank manager to a packer, a sophisticated young mother to a saleslady in a department store. Two of them had a slight handicap, and found that the sociability of the game allowed them a degree of social integration[4].

Basically, with respect to playing behavior, two very different ideal types can be observed:

Accumulation-oriented collectors: they collect as many objects as they can (sometimes ten times the same collection) and interact with other players mostly to obtain the objects they still do not have.

"Social" players are less concerned about collecting virtual objects than with the game as a way to meet, to communicate, and maintain enduring social relationships with other players within the game. Those players are particularly attentive to the forms of politeness that develop in the location-aware community of players and to the proprieties of the various forms of encounters that are occasioned within the game.

Regarding such encounters, most players avoid meeting face-to-face and often elude invitations to do so. Similarly they rarely exchange their mobile email

[4]For cultural and religious reasons, it seems that people with handicaps find it very difficult to be socially integrated in Japan.

addresses, so that most of their text messages are sent and received on the game dedicated text messaging system. Therefore, the social interactions that are elicited in the course of playing Mogi are mostly kept within the game technical infrastructure. This apparent shyness may be a feature of inhabiting a location-aware world with unknown others (outside the scope of the game).

Location as Public Data

One's location can be seen by other players in two different ways. Either by another connected player on his or her mobile phone if and when he or she is close enough (less than 2 km away), or by any player visualizing the game maps on his or her PC. Those players can visualize the location of connected players at any time, and wherever they are.

Most experienced players are aware of this, so they treat their location has something that may be seen and noticed by other players at any time. Locations are therefore treated as public data, and as such not only are they treated as visible and noticeable, but players expect others will indeed notice. In the excerpt below, one player (T.) discusses a long and unusual trip she plans to make, and indicates how she expects others to notice, when they see the location of her icon in the maps of the game.

Extract no. 1

1. T to H (07:59:32): Tが広島行くコト TとHとAしか知らない (*^m^*)ムフフ
れーだ見
たヤツびつくりだなこりゃ(大爆
Only you and A. know that I'm going as far as Hiroshima. The others
will be surprised when they look at the radar. (*^m^*)
2. H to T (08:03:18) : おう、アチコチのヤツがぱにくるかもな（大 それか誰も気が付
かない。。。それも寂しいなw
Yes. Everywhere people will panic. Or maybe nobody will even notice.
Which would be a bit sad. (Laugh)
3. T to H (08:07:20) : Aさんと Sと Yヮ気づくだろう… ヾ(≧▽≦)ノ〃
But at least A., S .and Y. will notice. ヾ(≧▽≦)ノ〃

Her correspondent responds by joking about it, even suggesting that it would be a pity if no-one noticed. This shows how players orient toward being accountable for their locations on a routine basis, and how they openly acknowledge and discuss the fact that their displacements are public and may even become a matter of open discussion between players. Locations are noticeable and warrant being mentioned, as shown in extract no. 2. One player, N., probably connected through his PC (for he gives no indication that he is anywhere around Haneda Airport), remarks on the location of another player G.

The sequential organization of the "noticing" turn is interesting. It starts with an exclamation that works as a "change of state token" (Heritage 1984), which marks that something noticeable and mentionable has occurred and invites further elaboration. This comes in the next turn construction unit, which appears as a query about the location of the recipient which embeds a candidate answer. This indicates that player N was probably playing the game as a connected PC-based player (if he had been a mobile player and sufficiently close to notice G, then the issue of co-proximity would have arisen) and familiar enough with G's mobility for the

Extract no. 2

1. **N to T (18:53:39)** : たらいまなのらぁ 

Here i am I am just back  *((2 hearts, one large, one small))* 

((kissing smiley))

2. **T to N (19:19:57)** :

おちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅかれさま  **大阪**まで

凄いね

You must be ta ta ta ta ta tired  *((apologizing cat)) How courageous you are You went all the way to Osaka.*

3. **N to T (21:32:51) :** 観たのね  **元彼に拉致**られてましたの 

You watched me  *((surprised smiley)) Indeed I got kidnapped by my ex*  *((tear or sweat))*

candidate location to be meaningful with background knowledge of where G usually is or what he does. The familiarity is reinforced by the lack of preliminary greetings. The "query-ness" of the utterance is moreover emphasized with a "question mark" emoticon, putting some stress on the provision of an answer; this shows that in such a community of experienced location-aware players unusual location and displacements may be treated as "mentionables", and used as a legitimate pretext for initiating interaction. Discussion of the qualities of a particular location relevant

to the other participant may be introduced and treated as a "safe topic" for text messaging. Discussing location within the Mogi location-aware community of players is on a par with discussing the weather in a village during a face-to-face encounter (Goffman 1971).

Treating location as noticeable and mentionable, noticing and mentioning it to invite to, and initiate a text message encounter is a routinized practice in the Mogi location-aware community. In the next extract, two players initiate an exchange by commenting almost simultaneously on the location of another.

What is interesting is that T. responds by sending the same confirmatory text message to both of them at the same time. These joint messages were rare in the Mogi text message corpus, and usually concerned with conventional, formulaic messages such as conventional greetings. So the previous excerpt provides evidence for the ritualized and routinized character of "location noticing," and messages as an invitation to engage in a text message encounter between acquainted players.

In a community where locations are public, members are vulnerable to the strategic exploitation of such knowledge, hence the worries about the possibility of "stalking" by another player (Licoppe and Inada 2009). In a less extreme form, any noticing and mentioning of a player's location by another, however routine it may appear, potentially entails a mild form of horizontal social control, and invites the

Extract no. 3

1. **S. to T.(14:28:19)**: あれ　　意外な場所にいるのね

ah!?  *((lol)) you are in an expected place* 

((lol))

2. **Y. to T. (15:00:25)**:

今日はとんでもないとこにいらっしゃいますな

today you (polite form) are in an incredible place 

((lol))

3. **T. to S. & Y. (15:35:43):** なんだよ　　岡山まで遠征だよ
高速ヲモギりのみで

精一杯だす

what then?  *((lol)) I am travelling to Okayama.*  *((lol))*

on the highway I can do nothing but play at Mogi  *((lol))*

production of accounts related to the aforementioned location, or if questioned, call for some form of "remedial exchange" (Goffman 1971).

In this exchange, it is the mobile player who first proposes an unsolicited assessment of her mobility and current location. Since the assessment regards her own experience, it is part of her "information preserve," and she has first rights about such claims. However, the other player responds by providing in her second turn another assessment of the first player's current experiential state (you must be tired), and then further elaborates about her past mobility by stating the city she has just been to. Considering the sequential organization of assessment pairs, T. is strongly competing for epistemic rights with respect to the assessment of the matter at hand (Heritage 2005). Since that particular matter directly concerns N.'s experience, it may be seen as a potential infringement of N.'s informational preserve. N. deals with this in the third turn. She starts by exclaiming about being watched by T. Qualifying location noticing as "watching" is one way to highlight the dimension of social control which the public character of location may entail. However she goes on by providing an account for her trip to Osaka which shows she does not wish to pursue the matter any further. Such offhandedness shows how deep the expectation runs that one's location may be noticed by other players, and one may be held accountable for it.

Extract no. 4

1. **N to T (18:53:39) :** たらいまなのらぁ 

   Here i am I am just back  *((2 hearts, one large, one small))* 

   ((kissing smiley))

2. **T to N (19:19:57) :**

   おちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅおちゅかれさま  大阪まで凄いね

   You must be ta ta ta ta ta tired  *((apologizing cat)) How courageous you are You went all the way to Osaka.*

3. **N to T (21:32:51) :** 観たのね  元彼に拉致られてましたの 

   You watched me  *((surprised smiley)) Indeed I got kidnapped by my ex*  *((tear or sweat))*

In summary, the Mogi case shows that a key characteristic of a fully location-aware community is that members' locations are actually or potentially mutual and public knowledge. The categorization of players as localized and mobile entities is always relevant within the collective game activity, and pointing toward another

player's location is a routine practice that displays one as a member. An immediate consequence of all this is that the current location of a given player may be treated as a "safe" mentionable topic that is always available (in principle) and warrants the initiation of a text message interchange. Location is there to be seen and noticed, but mentioning it may sometimes infringe on one's "informational preserve" and require some specific forms of remedial interchange, while it is also a way to produce affiliation markers and "doing being familiar," We believe that the "visibility" of other member's location and the kind of interactional consequences we have observed here characterize more generally some of the particular ways in which "relations in public" are managed in any kind of location-aware community (Goffman 1971), and the kind of public order that is bound to emerge from it.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the way location and displacements are made visible and accessible is a highly sensitive moral issue. Two years ago, the designers introduced a feature which provided the name of the neighborhood the player was located, which became visible when one clicked on his icon. This feature immediately aroused indignant reactions from the players, who did not want such information to be publicly divulged. Even information as apparently trite as the name of the neighborhood district in which they were located (in a world in which "geometric" locations and maps were already publicly available) was seen as problematic. For, if you know the person well enough, you might more easily infer rightly or wrongly from her/his location thus labeled her/his engagement into some forms of activity. This proved to be too great an infringement of personal territories. Players therefore seem to consider that keeping location data "geometric" and therefore as "neutral" and impersonal as possible gives more leeway and legitimacy to the ways they may notice each others' location, mention it and collaboratively accomplish various forms of consequent encounters. As we will now show, the fact that locations are (actually or potentially) public knowledge made available through location-based networked technologies, and mobile devices "afford" original forms of encounters between members.

"Mediated Co-Proximity" Events and "Encounters-at-a-Distance" as Constitutive Features of the Social Order in Location-Aware Communities

Co-Proximity Events and "Infrastructures of Encounterability"

A particular form of invitation to further forms of encounters is occasioned by co-proximity events. While a lot of attention has been paid to co-present interaction in the work of Goffman and related texts, much less attention has been given to "co-proximity events" (Licoppe 2009). A co-proximity event is a situation in which two persons are made aware that though they are not co-present, they are close to one another, close enough that getting into a face-to-face interaction may become an

issue, usually to be resolved through communication at a distance. In a recent study of mobile phone call recordings[5] instances of the construction of co-proximity events involved a couple calling one another to update their mutual knowledge about their respective locations, particularly as they got closer and one passed a shared meaningful landmark, or perhaps more typically, a woman calling the home of her best friend from her mobile and leaving a message stating that she happened to be in the vicinity and checking whether her friend was at home and potentially available for a visit and a chat. In all these examples, one participant is (1) aware of a particular form of proximity to the other, (2) calls the other to turn this into a shared knowledge, thus "grounding" (Clark 1996) the co-proximity event, (3) presents it as a serendipitous happenstance that projects somehow a face-to-face encounter as a relevant segue to the recognition of the co-proximity event. One could think easily of similar examples in professional contexts. Such situations occur mostly between people who are familiar with one another, because the one who notices the proximity event does it on the basis of previous interactions and extensive knowledge about the habits and mobility patterns of the other person.

There is therefore a spatio-temporal "infrastructure of encounterability" that extends much beyond the times and scenes for co-present interaction. Space and time are deeply interwoven with relational knowledge and shared histories, so that for a given pair of acquainted subjects, it is textured so as to afford a sense of closeness (in absence), that warrants getting in touch and whose experience may be turned into a serendipitous opportunity for various forms of encounters and affiliation-building. Technological systems providing subjects with mutual location-awareness provide new occasions and new formats for constituting co-proximity events, or what could be more aptly described as "mediated" co-proximity events to account for the particular technological mediations through which co-proximity may be mutually recognized. In location-aware communities, the experience of the places members dwell in are augmented with a new "infrastructure for encounterability." Conversely, the particular "co-proximity" events and related social encounter that may occur are characteristic of a given location-aware community and of its emergent culture. In what follows we will show some of the more particular forms of co-proximity events supported by the Mogi infrastructure and the kind of often unusual social encounters that have developed around it.

The Interactional Consequences of Seeing One Another on the Same Mobile Screen Map

A typical Mogi-supported co-proximity event occurs when two players connect to the game and see one another on their mobile device, through the "radar" map interface. Such mediated co-proximities events are specific to location-aware technologies.

[5] Julien Morel, 2006, private conversation

The greater the density of players the more frequent co-proximity events may become (Licoppe and Inada 2006). One of their key properties is that players expect such events to be mutually perceived and noticed by both participants, supposedly connected and playing at the same time. Participants treat such mediated co-proximity events as projecting a possible face-to-face encounter. It is conventionally expected that acquainted players who mutually realize they are close might meet, and if they do not they will somehow have to account of it in their text message exchanges. In cases in which another player is close and remains silent (he does not remark on such proximity nor responds to text messages), the other player has grounds to suspect such a proximity to be "ill intended" that is a case of "stalking" (Licoppe and Inada 2009). Some culturally significant ways of noticing such mediated proximities have been evolved in the community of players, such as an expectation that expert players should take the initiative when they appear to be close in this way to novice players and make them the small gift of a low value item as a token of goodwill (Licoppe and Inada 2006). Players have even given situations in which they are close and fail to notice it the name of "near miss," which also reflects the notion that (contrary to the air traffic control contexts in which this expression was initially coined) an actual encounter would be a positive and expected outcome of a mediated co-proximity event.

Such mediated co-proximity events always make salient some degree of spatial closeness, which is shaped by the interfaces of the technological system. Seeing one another on screen and therefore mutually realizing we are less than a few 100 m apart is treated as a decree of closeness that projects a face-to-face encounter as a relevant segue. How is this practically accomplished? The kind of conventionally expected beginning that such a situation occasions takes the form of an adjacent pair of the type A: "We're close, aren't we?". B: "Yes we are close." This opening makes explicit the mutual recognition of proximity and puts the co-proximity event on common ground for both participants. Such a conventional beginning can be said: (a) to occur near a situational threshold or boundary (marked by the recognition of the co-proximity event which such a beginning makes common knowledge between the participants), (b) to establish a shared perceptual field of interaction (the mobile radar interfaces), (c) to constitute a form of "adjacent pair," (d) to have relatively predictable form and content, (e) to establish implicitly a spatio-temporal unit of interaction, and (f) to mark the addressee as being worthy of cognitive and social recognition. Such mediated co-proximity recognition-oriented beginnings share all the criteria that define greetings for linguistic anthropology (Duranti 1997). They can be considered as constitutive of a particular form of encounter, whether or not a face-to-face meeting actually occurs, and which we think is characteristic of location-aware communities connected through text messaging, in which locations are public and rendered through map-like representations that make the proximity between members recognizable.

The next extract provides an example of such openings and the kind of moral expectations that accompany their accomplishment:

The reference to S's proximity in turn 1 is characteristically modulated by a marker which tones it down in a kind of hypothetical question ("It seems that…,"

Extract no. 5

1. **N to S (20:19:38) :** 今晩、  近いね

   this evening,  *((surprised smiley)) we are very close aren't we?*

2. **S to N (20:22:55) :** うわ  近い 

   Waouh  *((sweat)) we are close*  *((tired smiley))*

3. **N to S (20:24:53) :** 逃げられたー 

   you ran away  *((3 disappointed smileys))*

4. **S to N (20:27:14) :** 違うよ  丸の内線に乗ったから 

   no  *((sweat)) it is because i got on the Marunouchi line* 

   ((happy smiley))

5. **N to S (20:28:35) :**  山手線じゃないの 

    *((train)) It's not the Yamanote line* 

6. **S to N (20:35:26) :** 違うよ  そっちの方にいないし

   no  *((water droplet, tear, sweat)) for it is not my direction.*

7. **N to S (20:36:43) :** そうなんだ…ゴメンね 

   So be it … sorry  *((apologizing cat))*

8. **S to N (20:40:34) :**

   間違いは誰にもあるからね  あんな近いと逃げたくなるかも

    今日は沢山色々な人と接近したよ 

   everybody can make a mistake  *((happy smiley)) maybe one*

   wishes to run when one gets so close  *(sweat) today i got near*

   several players  *((surprised smiley))*

9. **N to S (20:49:18) :**  ヤッパリ都心だと多いよね

    *((surprised smiley)) as one might suppose there must indeed*

   many of us at the center of Tokyo.

"It appears that…," "not so?"). In each case observed, the respondent did indeed treat the first turn as a request to confirm this mutual proximity, after which the interaction continued. The opening of the interaction by an adjacent pair oriented toward enunciation and confirmation of the participants' mutual proximity is a conventional device for initiating text message-based interactions, which relies on location-awareness. Such a convention was shaped by use, and is part of the emergent culture of Mogi. Treating the recognition of mediated co-proximity as a form of social encounter is part of the experience of inhabiting a location-aware world.

N then regrets her having moved away, therefore making a face-to-face encounter a possible and expected outcome of their mediated co-proximity. Interestingly, she first offers an account to counter the potential inference that she might have tried to elude that expected outcome (turn 4) and later provides (turn 8) a kind of rule-based justification for being entitled to evade the face-to-face encounters that might ensue from the serendipitous mediated recognition of mutual proximity. She experienced too many mediated co-proximity events on that day, and she cannot be expected to turn all of them into fully blown face-to-face encounters. The implicit inference here is that one cannot treat "properly" all co-proximity events, and N. takes up that inference in his admission that indeed there are many players, which closes the issue (turn 9). Players orient themselves toward treating the onscreen co-proximity as a legitimate occasion for a text message encounter, and possibly, a face-to-face encounter (even if they almost always avoid such an unplanned meeting).

Getting Avatars to "Meet": The Playful "Fabrication" of Mediated Co-Proximity Events

Any activity can be accomplished in different "keyings" (such as play), and is vulnerable to fabrication (Goffman 1974). Players have developed on their own an original kind of collective activity, which was not part of the "official" gameplay, in which they play at "fabricating" co-proximity events. This shows how significant the latter are with respect to the interaction order, and we will now describe that singular practice known as "cara-gattai" (literally, the "meeting of avatars," cara standing as an abbreviation for character or icon and "gattai" referring to the concept of joining, or rejoining). Unforeseen by the designers, "cara-gattai" also testifies to the way the Mogi users engage in an active and innovative appropriation of the game: they are "active users," a theme of growing concern for Science and Technology Studies (Oodshorn and Pinch 2003), and particular relevant to online game communities.

Without intending it, the designers of Mogi have left open the possibility for players to "freeze" their positions in a given place, by getting there, connecting to the game, and not refreshing their radar screen after they have left the place. Players have been quick to discover and exploit this loophole in the game software. They

Extract no. 6

1. **D to F** (16:07:41) : 合体おめでとうございます 

Congratulations for the gattai  *((lol))*

2. **F to D** (16:09:22) : バレた

Did you see it  

3. **D to F** (16:12:55) : すぐわかるから

Gさんわ昨日から頑張ってたみたいだけど

I found it immediately  It seems thar Mr G was trying hard since

yesterday 

have used it to invent a new form of playful encounter based on the disjunction of their actual embodied location, and the apparent onscreen location of their icon that such a "freezing" of the icon's position on the game map allows. The goal is for a player to position his icon at a given place so that later another player will move so that his own icon will appear onscreen close to the first one, or better still, will touch it, creating the appearance of an extreme case of co-proximity event. The whole point of the performance is that the subject of the "cara-gattai," and other players will appreciate it as a feat. It is a performance meant to be public, which therefore relies on the fact that locations are public data.

Extract no. 6 provides a typical "cara-gattai"-related exchange.

D initiates the exchange by commenting on a gattai performance. She constitutes herself as a witness of it in her PC (and therefore as a member of the gameplay as a public space), and treats its recognition as something noticeable, even standing out (she could see it "immediately," turn 3), worthy of a casual appreciative comment. F collaborates to that treatment of the Gattai as an interactionally relevant topic by returning a question calling for some elaboration n D's part, i.e., "fishing" for more positive appreciations of the performance.

We have observed several instances in which either a player initiated an attempt to do "cara-gattai" with another, and discussed this accomplishment with others. In some cases, a distant player suggested that possibility to a moving player. "Cara-gattai" is a fundamentally a public performance whose accomplishment by two players (one acting deliberately and the other collaborating deliberately or participating unwittingly

Extract no. 7

1. A to B (15:31:50) :ヾ(o≧エ≦o)ノ

ガッター

がCの上に乗ってる

Gattaaaai

[5] is mounted over C

((lol))

2. B to A (15:33:36) へへ んわしがうえ

He he *((strong arm))* *((musical note))*

What, am I on top

3. A to B (15:34:38) : Bが上 馬乗り

You are on top A rider on a horse

through his current displacements) rely on the noticing and the appreciation of an audience of skilled connected players, liable to make inferences from positions and movements of icons on the screen to potential or actual co-proximity events.

Sexual undertones that play on the embodied intimacies of (public) mediated co-proximity events are often alluded to displaying a particular mode of appreciation of "cara-gattai" as a paradoxically embodied (since the whole point is that players' bodies are not actually close) form of public performance. In the following extract, one female player spontaneously "exclaims" on the "cara-gattai" performed by the other player, he asks her about their exact gattai configuration which he has not seen itself (displaying his interest in the actual iconic consequences of that

achievement), and she answers by developing the sexual implications of the configuration she has noticed.

The development of "cara-gattai" as a shared playful practice among the community of players stems from the ability to assess and monitor the distance of icons on game maps with respect to the possible production of a co-proximity event), and on the way the design of the game supports the noticing of screen-mediated co-proximity events. Moreover the practice of doing "cara-gattai" ostensibly relies on the disjunction between what happens in the screens and in the space of ordinary perception: "cara-gattai" is meaningful in the way it actually disjoins co-proximity and co-presence, while preserving co-presence a salient feature of the situation, as a potential relevant development that may be mentioned, discussed, and joked upon. It shows how players orient toward a dual accountability regime, in which they work to make their location and mutual positioning accountable both in the "physical" space of "ordinary" embodied experience, and in the mediated spaces constituted by Mogi players' screens. "Doing cara-gattai" also makes visible how much the collective ethos of the game is grounded in normative expectations about the public character of location. As one player puts it, "one wants to show others that we are in the same place and having fun." The practice of "cara-gattai" testifies to one's commitment to that collective ethos, through a normatively expected contribution to the kind of public good on which such a location-aware, leisure-oriented community is founded: creating collective fun by playing in a meaningful way with publicly noticeable mediated co-proximities.

With respect to actual face-to-face encounters, doing "cara-gattai" is a way to play with the meanings of co-present situations while keeping actual co-presence at bay. This displays co-presence in the location-aware community as something which is fraught with potential dangers, and that is to be avoided most of the time. Through the collective practice of "cara-gattai," face-to-face encounters within the location-aware community are constructed as highly consequential situations, and that as such, are to remain exceptional. When they do occur, however, they may take the unusual form of a public and collective performance.

When Face-to-Face Encounters Become a Collective Public Performance

Players rarely get to meet face-to-face. When they do so, such a face-to-face encounter, if it occurs while they are connected, will be a public occurrence and a highly noticeable and noticed event, for it will lead to a superposition of their icons on the gameplay maps. If the encounter involves a male and a female player, they also would be open to all sorts of lewd inferences and comments. Players therefore often react to the very singular mediated public character of face-to-face encounters in the game community by logging out during the encounter. But then they stop sharing their location with other players, a sharing in which the social order of

the Mogi community is grounded. A player we have interviewed summarizes this particular tension thus:

> If a man meets a woman face-to-face, other players will notice the two superposed icons, and rumors will start to propagate. It will become difficult for them to go on playing Mogi. (Question: but they can always log out when they meet?) In that case only they will have fun. It is a dilemma. One wants to show others that we are in the same place and having fun. Then there is a struggle between the desire to show oneself to others and the embarrassment to be seen by others

There are some instances that vividly show the way the meaning of face-to-face encounters may be reshaped in a location-aware community. In the example we want to discuss here, one (female) player travels with her sister and her children to another region for a short vacation. It happens that a player in the same team with whom she is well acquainted and has been flirting lives in the same region, and she has told him about her trip. He then decides to move toward her destination.

In line with the behavior discussed in the previous section, their trip becomes a public performance. Other players from their own team, or players they are acquainted with from other teams keep noticing they are on the move and judge they might be getting into one form or another of co-proximity later on. They send them text-messages that make explicit such noticing and invite the mobile players to elaborate, which leads to the type of exchange shown in sect. 6.3. As they get closer, some players (those with whom they text messages on a regular basis) suggest to the moving players that since they are getting closer and this is an unusual occasion, they might seize it to accomplish a "cara gattai" encounter. The male player responds enthusiastically to this suggestion, which leads to many text messages discussing his successive attempts to accomplish "cara-gattai" with the travelling female player.

Meanwhile, he has been continuously flirting with her, and the possibility of an actual romantic encounter has emerged as a salient possibility. Again the potential face-to-face encounter is discussed by text messages with some other players who appear to be aware of (if not monitoring) their growing mutual attachment. The romantic encounter will eventually occur, but out of the "public" eye, for during a few hours during that particular night, the two involved players will log out the game altogether. This was the only moment in those few days before and after, during which they could be considered "off line" from the location-aware community of players (with whom they usually exchange many dozens of text messages per day). The next day, the usual intense text message activity was resumed with both players discussing and commenting what happened, with different degrees of explicitness according to the correspondents.

What has occurred here? A face-to-face encounter, but a very singular one, whose occurrence not only involved the coordinated displacements and mutual agreement of both parties, but also a dozen of other players and hundreds of text messages discussing and commenting the event over 2 weeks. Such a face-to-face encounter, "real gattai," must be considered as a public performance and a collective accomplishment. By being produced and displayed as a rare event, it contributes to build and reassert the ethos of the location-aware community as one in

which one's displacements and positioning with respect to other members is something which is always noticeable and liable to be noticed and legitimately so (except during the face-to-face encounter itself), and for which by way of consequence co-proximity and face-to-face encounters are especially meaningful.

Conclusion: Toward an Anthropology of Encounters and Social Life in Location-Aware Cultures

By analyzing in detail a corpus of text messages exchanged by the Mogi players, who compose one of the first instances of a non-experimental location-aware community, we have been able to identify some crucial features of the kind of interaction order it supports. Much revolves around two characteristic features. First, players' locations are treated by them as public data which may be monitored and noticed by other known and unknown (mostly PC-based) players at any time, on a mundane basis. Such noticing is usually performed so as to turn the current location of a given player into a meaningful event (presenting such location as unusual, or remarking on a chance co-proximity) that is worthy of notice. Location becomes a "mentionable" item that can be discussed between acquainted players. It is a "safe topic" to initiate or fill a text-message exchange, much as the weather in co-present encounters in a rural "British" village.

Second, because the game offers different maps figuring geolocalized players, such as the mobile "radar" interface, the degrees of spatial proximity between players become visible. This gives rise to "mediated" co-proximity events where two participants may mutually recognize they appear simultaneously on their mobile screen's maps. This is treated as being close and gives rise to a particular, conventional form of greeting (and therefore of encounter) which topicalizes such closeness (of the type "We are close? Yes we are close"). We have shown how such a mutual recognition of proximity entailed an expectation that a face-to-face encounter would be relevant next, and how such an expectation was treated in this location-aware culture, i.e., by avoiding such an encounter most of the time, but accounting for not having been able to do so. We have also shown how such co-proximity events were so central to the form-of-life which dwells in such a location-aware setting that such events were playfully fabricated by the players, in the frame of an unintended and unforeseen (by the designers) gameplay to which they have even given a name, that is "cara gattai": playing to get one's icon to touch that of another player (who may be aware or not of the game), and expecting such a performance to be noticed and appreciated by an audience of players within the location-aware community.

With respect to encounters, players in a location-aware world are oriented and engaged simultaneously in two different interaction orders, one based on "ordinary" embodied presence and proximity, leading to co-present encounters. The other relies on the mediated visibility of location and recognition of proximity of avatars on electronic map-like representations. So wherever they may be, they are

always in a sense "beyond being there" (Hollan and Stornetta 1992). This is striking in some of the forms that some co-present encounters, such as dating, may take in Mogi: such face-to-face encounters may become shared performances and large-scale collective public events, with many players monitoring, commenting, and gossiping about the progress of the main participants. They constitute a kind of collective ritual which displays prominently the resources from which a location-aware "society" is built.

More generally, the accomplishment of the original forms of encounter we have described ties some game-specific resources (the public availability of location, the possibility of jointly recognizing and monitoring on screen spatial proximities) to core cultural meanings of social life in the Mogi location-aware world. This goes beyond Mogi. The Mogi players may look like a strange kind of tribe in the anthropological sense (and they are indeed), but their social behavior has a wider relevance. It is bound to be a feature of any location-aware group that it will have to develop collective ways to deal with the social consequences of the public availability, recognizability, and sharing of locations and proximities: the interaction order and the culture of location-aware communities will be for a great part founded on the meanings, and expectations that have been elaborated to deal collectively with the social consequences of proximity-at-a-distance and of the unusual forms of shared encounters they entail. And emerging location-aware cultures will always involve the interplay of design practices (which shape the artefactual mediations through which members become aware of locations and proximities), and of the inhabitants' repeated copings with augmented social gatherings over extended periods, neither of which suffices by itself to determine the outcome. Because players have enduringly inhabited the Mogi world and learned to make sense of it together, it is highly significant as a kind of laboratory in the wild, from the standpoint of which we may start to understand how collective experiences of location-awareness and shared encounters are shaped and coalesce into original cultures.

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