> If one adopts lurking as a research practice, one should be aware that one takes only one possible position within a complex system of communications. Ethnographers who only adopt the role of the lurker may easily get access and a great deal of – even 'naturally occurring' – data (Silverman, 2007) at a low cost. What they see and what they are able to understand, however, remain as limited as nineteenth-century armchair ethnography. (43)

Further, in its etymological sense, lurking does not appear a fitting term for a research method. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* describes the verb "to lurk" first and foremost as "to wait somewhere secretly, especially because you are going to do something bad or illegal" (sec.1). Although another definition of the verb, "to read a discussion in a chat room, etc. on the Internet, without taking part in it yourself" has been added (sec.3), the term essentially never lost its dubious connotation. As such, even seasoned scholars of the field had to acknowledge the term's limited suitability in describing a research method (cf. Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet* 57).

6.2 Interviews

Hammersley and Atkinson argue that "[i]nterviews in ethnographic research range from spontaneous informal conversations in the course of other activities to formally arranged meetings in bounded settings out of earshot of other people" (108). This open definition of interviews is likely not one that everybody would agree on. Nevertheless, I refer to it here as it does foster the understanding that "[w]hatever their form, interviews must be viewed as *social events* in which the interviewer […] is a *participant observer*" (120; my highlights). In a practical and refreshing manner, Hammersley and Atkinson counter the chimera of individually and separately applicable methods often depicted in methodological textbooks. In doing so, they refute the idea that the researcher can simply apply one method in one situation and another in another situation, and that those methods would not overlap or inform each other in any way.

To my mind, a cultural anthropologist who can conduct an interview without being a participant observer seriously lacks a unique and fundamental quality of our disciplinary community, "the anthropologist's antennas" (Howell 17). Invited into a research participant's home for an interview, it is the cultural anthropologist's work to notice his taste in interior design, food and drink preferences, family structures, or communication patterns with other members of the household. Meeting up in a public café for an interview, the cultural anthropologist cannot help but notice the smell and sounds of coffee brewing, the cacophony it contributes to, combined with background music and the sound of other guests chatting,

the threadbare quality of the armchairs, the blackboard menu hanging behind the counter. Sitting opposite an interview partner for a prolonged amount of time, the cultural anthropologist surely notes his physical appearance, his way of speaking – is he slightly nervous or is he confident –, the condition of his clothing, the way he uses his body when he talks. The point I want to illustrate here is that the situational and flexible combination of different methods is a natural, if not constitutive characteristic and strength of being an cultural anthropologist. For me, like Howell, this methodological flexibility and open involvedness is at the core of "ethnographic fieldwork undertaken as an integral part of my anthropological identity – as the continually expanding source of my knowledge about human sociality and about human potentials: their dreams, longings, and practices" (19). Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson stress that "ethnography is not just a set of methods but rather a particular mode of looking, listening, and thinking about social phenomena" (230).

Interviewing Techniques

Most of the interviews that I conducted for this study were focused interviews, and were influenced by Schmidt-Lauber's conception of qualitative guided interviews (cf. Interview) and Judith Schlehe's notions of thematic interviews. Although I brought a guideline with me to every interview, I rarely looked down at it. Schmidt-Lauber points out that

> (i)n contrast to the rapid question-answer cycle of (mostly quantitative) social science survey techniques, […] ethnographic interviews should encourage the interviewees to tell stories and leave much room for them to develop the situation and the course of the conversation while the interviewers should show as much restraint as possible, adjusting their comments to the course of the narrative and to the person of the interviewee. ('Ethnological Analysis' 569)

I also conducted some so-called expert interviews.[1] Like Warneken and Wittel, I am critical of the prevalent definition of expert interviews as primarily providing material that is not to be analysed hermeneutically, but rather as a source of in-

1 Naturally the question arises as to how the term "expert" is defined here, and which participants I understand as experts in their fields. Bogner et al. make clear that the image of the expert is both constructed by the researcher and society, dependent on the specific research questions as well as the social representativeness of the so-called expert (cf. 11). First, I categorised as experts those people who are professionally involved with the designing and programming of the participation platforms, predominantly IT experts and software programmers. Second, I categorised as experts those people

formation to take at face-value (cf. 11). Agreeing with Dominic Boyer's line of reasoning, I treated "experts not solely as rational(ist) creatures of expertise but rather as desiring, relating, doubting, anxious, contentious, affective – in other words as human subjects" (38). For me then, interviews with experts were not simply sources of information, but were rather subject to the same processes of analysis as the other interviews.

These "expert interviews" were often marked by a palpable imbalance in conversation. Indeed, they resembled audiences granted to me, the researcher, rather than a conversation or exchange between equals. Warneken and Wittel cite Berthold Vogel, who described the mechanics at work in such situations as effects of paternalism (cf. 7). The effects of paternalism were characterized in my interviews by a demonstrative good naturedness on part of the male interlocutor toward my research and I, combined with permanent attempts to take over moderation from me, the female researcher, and the imposition of conversation content. Initially, these experiences were irritating and frustrating, but in the end I came to see them as "data in and of itself" (Schmidt-Lauber, 'Ethnological Analysis' 563; cf. Koch, *Technikgenese*).

The telephone interview is a format situated on the periphery of the ethnographic methodological canon. As mediated communication reduced to pure voice, it does not seem to fit the discipline's methodological demands to immerse oneself within the research field and with all senses for a prolonged period of time.[2] Although my initial research design did not foresee me conducting phone interviews, due to heavy time-constraints on their behalf, it proved to be the only way to speak to two informants during the research process. As the US-American communication scholars Kerk F. Kee and Larry D. Browning stress, phone interviews are first and foremost a 'practical', as well as 'time and cost-effective' mode for data collection.[3]

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that are professionally involved with local administration and municipal politics, such as politicians and administration employees.

2 It was little surprising that searching for literature on "telephone interview" (Telefoninterview) in both English and German in the Virtual Library of Social and Cultural Anthropology (EVIFA), a mere 26 hits showed up. All but one publication was more than ten years old, and most were much older. Moreover, most centred on surveys conducted by phone, not qualitative interviews by phone. A Google Scholar search for "phone interview anthropology" in both English and German delivered no interesting results whatsoever.

3 Whether one has teaching and administrative responsibilities at university, one's personal/family situation does not allow any absence, or one lacks sufficient funds for travel expenses – the telephone interview, like the email interview, allows the researcher