# CONSTRUCTION OF EVERYDAY REALITY IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE CASE OF 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT'

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

JULY 2016

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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# ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: THE CASE OF 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT'

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June 2016, 155 pages

While video games came to incite large attention in the Western world, scholarly examinations of these techno-cultural artifacts have also dramatically increased. Motivated by the sociological studies undertaken in the Game Studies body, the aim of this thesis is to explore the manner in which mechanisms of everyday reality are constructed and constituted in the virtual world of a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, 'World of Warcraft'. The notion of 'everyday reality' was studied based on Berger and Luckmann's work 'The Social Construction of Reality'. In order to observe the virtual world dynamics that constitute everyday reality, the researcher conducted a 13-month ethnographic study in the 'World of Warcraft'. In line with the research problematic and insights provided by Berger and Luckmann's work, this thesis ultimately examined the common-sense knowledge produced and maintained in this particular virtual world.

Keywords: MMORPG, everyday reality, virtual world, common-sense, World of Warcraft

# ÖZ

SANAL DÜNYADA GÜNDELİK GERÇEKLİK KURULUMU: 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT' VAKASI

Yolgörmez, Ceyda

Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi : Doç. Dr. Çağatay Topal

Haziran 2016, 155 sayfa

Batı dünyasında video oyunları büyük ilgi çekerken, bu tekno-kültürel eserlere olan bilimsel ilgi de dramatik bir şekilde artmıştır. Oyun Çalışmaları alanında yapılan sosyolojik çalışmalardan hareketle, bu tezin amacı gündelik gerçeklik işleyişinin bir sanal dünya olan Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrim İçi Oyun, 'World of Warcraft'ta nasıl kurulduğu ve oluşturulduğunu araştırmaktır. 'Gündelik gerçeklik nosyonu Berger ve Luckmann'ın 'Gerçekliğin Sosyal İnşası' isimli eserine dayanmaktadır. Gündelik gerçekliği oluşturan sanal dünya dinamiklerini gözlemlemek adına, araştırmacı 'World of Warcraft'ta 13 aylık bir etnografi çalışması yürütmüştür. Araştırma sorunsalı doğrultusunda ve Berger ve Luckman'ın çalışmasının sunduğu kavrayış ile bu tez sonunda özellikle bu sanal dünyada genel kanı (common-sense) bilgisinin nasıl üretildiği ve sürdürülüğünü incelemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrim İçi Oyun, gündelik gerçeklik, sanal dünya, genel kanı, World of Warcraft

*To my father, who incited the possibility*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of a collective effort that is comprised of non-human and human actors. This is an acknolwedgement of the fact that I am the crystal form of the combination of these elements. Therefore I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those that have made this thesis possible.

First of all I would like to thank Brain.fm for providing me the tools to focus my concentration on the thesis. Also I want to thank METU Library for both giving me the possibility to study in an undisturbed environment, and for granting access to many academic databases through which I was able to pursue my research.

I would like to thank sincerely to my advisor Assist. Prof. Çağatay Topal, for being the disciplined person that he is. It was through his patience, practical approach to problems, scholarly vision, and determined support that I was able to write this thesis in an orderly manner. Besides my advisor, I want to thank the members of the thesis committee, Assoc. Prof. Erdoğan Yıldırım, and Assist. Prof. Emek Barış Kepenek for extending their insights into the thesis problematic.

Also I want to thank Ecem Ece for her endless belief in me, for her attitude towards life, and for being whoever she is to me. Thanks to our 'Thesis Talks', I was able to employ a more critical approach towards my work. In this regard I also would like to thank Demet Gülçiçek, who, even in her absence, had a large influence in my intellectual life.

I also would like to thank Yunus Emre Gürzsoy for his patience and understanding especially at those moments where I would feel like I was made up of the thesis and nothing more. Lastly I want to express my sincere gratitute to my mother and my sister, who have encouraged me in every part of the journey.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

On March 4th 2006, a large group of people started gathering by a lake in the snowy Winterspring to hold a memorial for a beloved friend whom they had lost to a sudden stroke. A spirit of solidarity and remembrance was encapsulating the group as they formed a long line by the lake. They were sharing their thoughts and feelings, and the service was going harmoniously. This was an important moment for them to show their gratitude and pay their respects. There was sorrow, but there was also a strange bliss in knowing that they were upholding the memory of their lost one. This only lasted until a group of people from a rival faction started rushing in on their war mounts. The service continued as they did not understand what the group was doing. All of a sudden, a rogue emerged from the shadows and started attacking the person at the front of the line. The incoming group started slaughtering every mourning person present in the funeral. What was a serene moment turned into a blood bath. With no war equipment to defend themselves, the mourners quickly fell to the blades of their enemies. Calming snow was now covered with corpses, and the carriers of massacre left the place, feeling satisfied.

This was an incident that took place in the famous online video game 'World of Warcraft'. The event took place between two guilds (player organizations) from competing factions, and in the normal occurrence of gameplay these two factions would fight one another. The perpetrating guild, 'Serenity Now', made a video of the slaughter and posted it onto Youtube. Following was heated debates all around the internet about morality, rules, and reality of a virtual world. As player vs. player battles were allowed in that zone, some claimed that this act was justified, for 'this is just a game'. Others have argued that such lack of morality should not go

unpunished, because even if this was in a game world, the funeral was just as real as one that could have been held in the 'real' world. Even after ten years since the incident, debates still continue in various realms of the Internet. While discussions seem to point to a blurring of the lines between 'real' world and 'virtual' world, an interesting point would be examining the rules and norms that are specific to the world in which the incident took place. Judging players' moves inside the game from an outside position only further complicates our understanding of the dynamics that are constituted by the game world. The world inside the game works on a different level, and while influenced by the 'real' world (and vice versa), the land that exists in the wires has its own dynamics that make up different meaning associations.

Video games became a widespread phenomenon, escalated in their accessibility especially after 2000s. They are virtual environments that present the player a constructed set of rules, game-play, and narrative; the player enters the environment via a technological artifact and interacts with the software, and sometimes other players. Videogames offer the players different experiences in different scopes: it might be a middle-age inspired fantasy role playing game where the player encounters unearthly creatures on a heroic adventure; or the player could be an interstellar traveler who unveils the secrets of the far galaxies. Whatever the theme, the experience that is offered promises one goal: a quest in a reality that is different than the ones that we live in.

In the vast ocean of video game industry, Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games found a special place. This is because of the social nature of experience that awaits the players. These games are shared environments that are occupied by a large number of people. MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Game) are emphasized by the enormous size of their player communities. This is a 14.9 billion dollars industry that keeps growing (Statista, 2013). Being center of attention of the entertainment industry, they have also been subject to scholarly inquiry. The rich possibilities for social encounters make it an interesting subject, especially for the field of sociology.

**Research Focus**

The aim of this thesis is to understand the everyday reality dynamics that are constituted by the virtual world of 'World of Warcraft'. This question is formulated adhering to an understanding that Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMORPGs) comprise of mechanisms that make them more than 'just a game'. The purpose of the research is to show that these game worlds, or virtual worlds, construct and maintain everyday realities that emerge from the relationalities within their domain.

The choice of the particular object of study, 'World of Warcraft' (which will be referred to as WoW in the remainder of the thesis), rests on the fact that this world hosts the largest player community for over a decade. WoW was the fifth most played PC game on 2015, and is rated as fourth Online Game in revenues, holding the leading position in its own genre (Statista, 2015; 2014). While the numbers started to shrink after 2010, WoW is still the most played MMORPG worldwide. Its popularity provides the possibility for a wide scope of players and play styles to be inhabited in the game world. Also the fact that this game is twelve years old aids to flourishment and concretization of an everyday reality.

In line with the thesis problematic, this study will focus on firstly locating the Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Game (MMORPG) at hand, 'World of Warcraft' (which will be referred to as WoW in the remainder of the thesis), as a virtual world; the inquiry will try to give an account of the characteristics that make it a virtual world. Then, the thesis will try to highlight through which characteristics this virtual world comes to possess qualities of an everyday reality.

As can be deduced from this brief introduction to the thesis problematic, this is a twofold study that ultimately considers the particular MMORPG at hand as one that constitutes an everyday reality. I should state beforehand that this study takes its object as the virtual world of WoW, and will not be focusing on extra-game content and contexts. The reason for this narrowing down of the world of video game is the purpose to uncover the common-sensical dynamics that are specific to this virtual world. This study is not a comparison of 'two realities', and does not intend to reach at a comprehensive understanding of practices performed in the wide social reality

that encapsulates the game world. Rather, the aim is to conceptualize the video game as a world on its own, and inspect through which dynamics it establishes its taken-for-granted reality. Analysis of the findings will make use of Mark Bell's (2008) conceptualization of virtual world, and will follow Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theoretical framework presented in 'The Social Construction of Reality'.

Making use of a social constructionist theoretical line, the thesis will adhere to this position as a theory of knowledge, which takes all meanings as socially constructed, and materially maintained. The aim here is to show how knowledge is constructed, what parts of the knowledge produced in this particular world are taken for granted, or exerted as such by the design of the virtual world. While studying the common-sense reality, the emphasis will be on the mechanisms through which knowledge is sustained by social mechanisms and technical form. Thereof, this thesis will try and outline how the everyday reality itself is constructed and constituted in the virtual world of WoW.

Although this is a research into a world 'inside' the wires, this thesis does not argue along the line of 'magic circle', which is widely used as an analytical tool in the literature on the studies of games. This concept implies a separation of the game space from other aspects of life, within which play is practiced and meanings are transformed. Contrary to this view, this thesis aims at understanding the world at hand as one that does not solely comprise of play as such, but as one that accomodates mundane practices through which an everyday reality is established. In this sense this thesis could be thought as a challenge to the idea of a 'magic circle', and as a contribution to appreciation of the everyday nature of gaming. Also by attacking the 'real vs virtual' binary, this thesis shows that these two apparently distinct realms are not so different. Indeed, this study shows how the 'virtual' is made 'real' through the processes and dynamics of the game world.

This thesis is developed out of 13-months of ethnographic study conducted in the game world of WoW. As the aim is to uncover the mundane, taken-for-granted parts of the reality at hand, the researcher submitted herself to the field in order to trace how and through which mechanisms the common-sense world of the particular case at hand is constructed.

**Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis will begin by first introducing the 'World of Warcraft' as an artifact, and will provide a historical context to the phenomenon at hand. For this aim, an overview of the fantasy genre and roleplaying games will be laid out. Following this, the emergence of virtual worlds will be traced and their development will be sketched out. As the thesis takes a virtual world as its object, academic debates surrounding this form will also be presented. In laying out issues and approaches to virtual world, a discussion on the notion of 'being there' (Schroeder, 2006) will also be held.

In the remainder of the literature review two main concepts will be discussed by following the debates in the scholarly body of game studies: game and reality. Firstly I will try to lay down a discussions on games, their meaning and mainstream approach to studying the phenomenon. This part will be concluded by delineating MMORPGs from other video games, which will clarify the possibility of arguing for an everyday reality taking place in a computer game. Then I will be focusing on the issue of reality, by contrasting it with the notion of fiction. I should highlight here that I will be solely focusing on the game studies literature, in order not to lose sight of the object of study at hand that is a computer game.

The second chapter will present the theoretical and methodological frames of the study. I will first present the theoretical framework that is based on Berger and Luckmann's 1966 work 'The Social Construction of Reality'. To this end, firstly the general approach held by these two influential scholars will be outlined. The manner in which they consider the question of reality, and through which methodological trajectories they come to formulate their work will be presented. Berger and Luckmann insists that sociology of knowledge should concern itself with common-sense of a particular society, and they try to formulate how such taken-for-granted knowledge could be studied in relation to other bodies of knowledge. So their theory builds on an anticipation of studying the unproblematized, mundane parts of reality, or everyday reality as they come to call it. While this part will clarify the theoretical background on which this thesis was

built, the operationalization of the particular concepts that are utilized will be presented under conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework will provide a first-stage operationalization of the concepts that are used to analyze the findings of the research. As this will be a two-fold analysis, a concretization of the characteristics of a virtual world and everyday reality will be laid out. Mark Bell (2008) identifies five characteristics of virtual worlds by defining it as "A synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers" (p.2). These five characteristics will be used to formulate WoW as a virtual world, so that we can see if this virtual world constitutes dynamics of everyday reality. Once the conceptual definitions are given, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) formulation of everyday reality will be laid out. They mention three major principles that everyday reality is organized through. These are the 'here and now' zone, construction of an objective world through intersubjective relations, and taken-for-grantedness of the reality. Following the identification of the concepts proposed by these scholars, an analytical relation between these two apparently distinct conceptual realms will be established. As the main argument of the thesis is that this virtual world constitutes an everyday reality, I will show beforehand how links between concepts have been drawn and how this conceptual framework came to be. By this outline we will reach at an understanding of the manner in which analysis of the findings will be undertaken.

Once we establish an operationalization of the core concepts, an explanation of the processes through which this research was conducted will be given. For this aim, I will firstly focus on how the research problem was formulated. In this part, I will try to lay out both analytical and social processes through which I came to devise this research question. Next, the employed methods will be discussed in relation to their adequacy to the research problematic. As an ethnographic inquiry, the setting of the research will also be explicated. Finally the methodological considerations and choices made in the undertaking of this research will be shared. Here, the choices made by the researcher regarding the avatar and particular realms will be given; and also how this practice of 'research through play' is conducted will be accounted for. This will conclude the second chapter.

The first two chapters focused on through which academic studies this thesis tries to find a ground, and how the research was designed and undertaken. The third chapter will begin the analyses. The aim of this chapter is to uncover the virtual world aspects of the video game at hand, the 'World of Warcraft'. As mentioned before, this analysis will greatly rely on the definitions made by Mark Bell; and the chapter will begin by operationalizing the concepts provided by his definition. So, the focus will be on how this world achieves synchronicity; how persistency is ensured in the world; what computer based facilitation entails for the world; an exploration of the associations between the players; and lastly how avatars come to be in this world. This chapter will essentially provide the audience with a sketch of the virtual world on the one hand; and on the other it will provide the necessary form for me to further investigate the everyday reality dynamics of this world.

Thereof, the following chapter will first give a conceptual account of the everyday reality dynamics laid out by Berger and Luckmann (1966). The aim of this chapter is to identify the everyday reality dynamics, and actually try to see how common-sense is constructed and sustained in the world. Berger and Luckmann give out three principles through which this common-sensical everyday life is produced, as mentioned before; and the start of this chapter will try to operationalize these principles in relation to the virtual world dynamics. Following the conceptual framework, then, these three organizational categories will be inspected. For this aim, firstly an understanding of what 'here and now' zone refers to in the virtual world will be established. Next, how production of a 'world of things' is achieved by the intersubjective realm will be discussed. Berger and Luckmann particularly emphasize this dynamic, for, in their view, it is through intersubjectivity that an objective structure is sustained. Here they point to symbolic systems as producing an objective world, and mainly social stock of knowledge particular to a social group or society. Common-sense knowledge, they claim, is found in the taken-for-granted relations and realities of the world. Especially mundane and routinized activities rigidify these realities, and they are considered to be an important part that makes up the flow of everyday life. So this chapter will follow the trajectory briefly summarized above, and will trace how everyday reality is constructed in this virtual world.

These two chapters will be discerning what passes as common-sense in the world. The practices and relations that produce the world also point to what are taken for granted, and therefore will also be delineating the common-sense knowledge. So in the conclusion chapter, alongside an overview of the analysis, a brief discussion on the common-sense notions will also be held.

**Literature Review**

In this part I will try to give an account of the relevant literature. For this purpose, I will first try to locate the possibilities that fostered the emergence of the particular virtual world at hand, the 'World of Warcraft'. In accordance with this aim I will provide historical background of fantasy genre, role playing games, and virtual worlds. Then I will turn to academic discussions on terms game and reality.

World of Warcraft – The Context of Emergence

"World of Warcraft thrusts you into a central role of an ever-changing story. You and your friends will be active participants in events that are steeped in the rich lore of this fantasy universe" (Blizzard, 2012). 'World of Warcraft' was developed by the Blizzard Entertainment in 2004, as an online follow-up of one of their previous game projects, 'Warcraft', which was first released on November, 1994. The game had reached a massive audience in a rather short term, and many expansion packs of the game had been released to keep the audience engaged, and in order to keep the culture of Warcraft alive. The latest statistics show that 5.5 million players are subscribed to the game at the end of the last quarter of 2015; this is a rather small number, compared to its 12 million subscribers that were active in 2010 (Statista, 2016). With an ability to reach at high numbers, the game constitutes a wide influence on the lives of many diverse individuals all around the globe; this game is part of the everyday reality of 5.5 million people in the world. This is one of the major factors that contributed to the choice of this particular MMORPG as an object of analysis.

Before moving onto constructing analytical tools to understand the object at hand, a brief contextualization will be provided. It is important to understand where WoW stands, both as a game, and a crystallized feature of a wider cultural formation, as its unique position gives us clues about how a reality emerges from complex

historical relations. In order to contextualize the game, its story of emergence will be outlined under three headings: its position in the fantasy genre; and in relation to it, its position as an online role playing game; and lastly the development of virtual worlds.

*Fantasy Genre*

'World of Warcraft' is a fantasy game: the game-space is set in an imaginary world where uses of magic and unearthly creatures are just ordinary facts of this specific reality. Fantasy genre had existed throughout human history utilizing a wide-scale of media to maintain its durability in forms such as myths, legends, fairy tales, utopian allegories, science fiction, horror, and magical realism (Toft-Nielsen, 2013, p.251).

George MacDonald had framed what fantasy is, in an introductory essay to an American version of his fairy tales, as construction of an imaginary world that is constituted by consistent laws: "… and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws" (as cited in Boyer and Zahorski, 1984, p.15). The Oxford philologist, who is seen as one of the world's best fantasy writers for his elaborate construction of fantasy worlds, J.R.R. Tolkien, had insisted that fantasy is a rational activity, as opposed to Coleridge's 1817 formulation of fantasy as "the willing suspension of disbelief". This approach ignores that an individual can genuinely believe in a fantasy world, and at the same time be aware that it is fictional. Tolkien finds such neglectance as inadequate, as it rules out the reader's profound emotional and intellectual investment in the fantasy worlds.

In this line of reasoning, Tolkien insists that a 'Secondary World' is ought to be presented as true, and it should exist in its own terms:

> What really happens is that the story-maker becomes a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed (1947, p.12).

Constructing the fantasy elements in an art form then produces a world on its own. This world has its own rules and it provides a consistent whole to its audience, a truth. Here Tolkien also emphasized the role of believing that occurs once the audience is constantly involved in consumption of the form. Believability is in a sense tied to author's ability to create a consistent world. Yet in our case this notion is to be dispelled, for the practice of play, the requirement of active participation on the players' side breaks the necessity of belief in the workings of the world. I will be discussing the relationship between make-believe and games under the section 'What is Real, Really?'

To conclude this part, it is possible to say that fantasy genre makes the best space for videogames to construct their realities upon. WoW, as a fantasy realm, utilizes such features of geography, consistency, and rule-bound nature that are deemed to be crucial in a fantasy art form.

*A Role Playing Game*

An important tradition that had emerged out of the fantasy genre is role-playing games (RPGs). Played across many media, role-playing games find their roots in the 1974 table-top card game 'Dungeons and Dragons', and they became quite popular among the fantasy literature enthusiasts and forms of RPGs have proliferated throughout decades. A role-playing game is a complex world constructed virtually among the players and a game master (who occupies the spot like Tolkien's story-maker, but with less authority on the overall narrative) on the course of a storyline. William Sims Bainbridge (2010) identifies three dimensions to role-playing. As the player assumes a role in the game, the role itself exerts a certain demand on the player, and the player must be competent in fulfilling the demands of the given role; so, the notion of competence makes the first dimension of role-playing. The second is the creative improvisation of the player; as the game itself is not pre-scripted, the player should improvise within the boundaries of her role. Third dimension is genuineness, which relates to the believability, or the match between the intentions and the thoughts of the person and the role that is undertaken. Role-playing on various media is comprised of such features, and it is

these features that outline the mechanic of play in the object of analysis, that is WoW.

Online role-playing games also hold an important roadblock in the history of RPGs. Through visualization possibilities brought about by the technological artifacts, RPGs played on computer up against other players bring up an aesthetic value to the combats that take place in the course of the game. In table-top or card based RPGs, combats come to life in the imagination of the participants of the game. However, in computer mediated RPGs, combats are lived and represented materially on the screen of the players. The rules of combat inside the game are embedded in codes, and the actions of the players are mechanized through certain combat principles such as character strength, armor, the particular (magical/physical) type of attack and characters' hit points. The complicated calculations that are necessary for the combat scenes are undertaken by algorithms, and this removes the requirement of having to go through extended dice rolls and pen-paper calculations in mid-combat. This increases the fluidity of the combat scenes, and removes the necessity to take explicit turns during the battle (in the case of WoW, specifically). Also in modern RPGs, players have great freedom between combat scenes. Even though the game at hand seems to be focusing on the notion of 'war' (hence the name), there is much more to game than just combatting enemies. Just as Richard Rouse (2005) had stated in his book 'Game Design: Theory and Practice', WoW is a highly nonlinear game, where "the player is not locked into achieving different goals in a specific order or in achieving all of the goals she is presented with" (p.556). Rather, the player gets to construct her way through a variety of paths, and there are many measures of success that could be found outside of combat situations.

As a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, WoW utilizes the core mechanics of RPGs. However it should be noted that WoW is not simply a game. While it is constituted by many features of a game, it is more than a game. Like Bainbridge (2010) states in his book 'The Warcraft Civilization', "World of Warcraft is also something between a game and a world, namely, a civilization" (p. 10). Being a game space that presents millions of players a world to construct a culture upon, WoW can be considered as a virtual world.

*A Virtual World*

As mentioned before, WoW contains a role-playing game at the core of the experience that it offers, through which large number of players interact with each other. The players assume a role, or rather a character, and team up with others to go on campaigns and quests in a fantasy world where orcs, trolls, gnomes, elves and many other fantastic beings conduct their daily lives in a virtual realm. It is important to note that the virtual worlds have a shared past with the role-playing games, as the MUDs (Multi User Dungeons) have emerged out of the *Dungeons and Dragons* tradition, by carrying the task-based adventure mechanic into the electronic networks.

Virtual worlds as we know today have evolved from text-based games that were played over TelNet back in 1979. But even before that, an imagination as to what a virtual world might be was being discussed by computer scientists (Bell and Robbins-Bell, 2008). Ivan Sutherland used the term in a speech he gave in 1965 as follows: "the screen is a window through which one sees a virtual world." He was pointing to happenings inside the computer, and was not using the term as a constructed world. With advancements in technology, in 1988, the term was used in relation to a notion of multitude of environments by Frederick Brooks, winner of A.M. Turing Award. He stated in his work "today such computers empower us to build sophisticated models of complex natural phenomena and to explore them for new insights into models and phenomena" (1988, p.6). This marks the achievement of technological capability for access to a multitude of virtual worlds. Bruce Damer, later at 1997, defined virtual worlds as "The generic and shortened form for navigable visual digital environments. These worlds can be inhabited by users represented as avatars." This is an early depiction of today's apprehension of the term virtual world. However, a proper definition that includes essential properties of the term was yet to come (Bell and Robbins-Bell, 2008). Following attempts lacked certain characteristics; for instance Richard Bartle[1] emphasized the world aspect of the term, whereas Raph Koster[2] did not include technology to his description (ibid).

[1] From his 2003 book 'Designing Virtual Worlds'

[2] From his 2004 book 'Theory of Fun for Game Design'

A widely used definition was made by the combined efforts of Mark Bell and Robert Schroeder in 2008 on the Journal of Virtual Worlds Research, demarcating five characteristics that are synchronicity, persistency, network of people, network of computers, representation through avatar; and by emphasizing the sensory output generated by these worlds, namely 'being-in-the-world' (Bell, 2008; Schroeder, 2006). Although a sound definition was achieved, the literature still developed over ambiguities; and multitude of terms that are used synonymously with the term virtual world were introduced (Girvan, 2013). This lack of common understanding is attributed to the fact that this is a newly developing field.

Now that we have a sense as to how the term emerged and what its definition holds, let me now turn to the history of the technology itself. Joe Sanchez (2009) identifies five milestones that summarize the history of virtual worlds: Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), TinyMUDs, Multi-User Dungeons Object Orientated (MOOs), MMORPGs, and 3-D social virtual worlds where game element is not constitutive of. 3-D social virtual worlds will not be mentioned in this review, as it is not relevant to the scope of this study.

The first MUDs were text-based, and all the interactions, environments, communication were conducted without the use of graphics. Players have navigated through the virtual world offered by the MUDs by precise directional text commands. The players in MUDs were given a set goal like killing the dragon or saving the princess, and the user actions were thus task-based.

Ten years after the initiation of MUDs, in 1989, TinyMUD was introduced by James Aspnes. TinyMUD offered a different, richer experience than MUDs, as it went beyond combat and adventure questing, and had contained a creative and social element. Players in TinyMUD had utilized the virtual space as a place to create objects and to socialize with each other, rather than going on adventures or questing. This stage marks an important development in the history of virtual worlds: the players were not mere actors in the environments, but they were active participants in the construction of the world. With TinyMUD, notions creativity and collaboration became important elements of virtual worlds, alongside with combat and competition.

MOOs were more focused on the creative content than other aspects of the virtual world. Users in MOOs were able to interact with each other and create items for others to use in the virtual space. In this sense, MOOs became exceedingly customized environments, and because of the easy programming language it became a popular tool for education (Bartle, 2003, p.22).

Taylor (2004), in giving virtual world history by focusing on the designers' way of producing such worlds, emphasizes the power that they hold in creating and sustaining normative structures in their worlds. By enacting certain forms of embodiment in their player class templates, designers actually pave the way for specific social interactions to emerge through them. The manner in which the world 'works' depends largely on the technical choices made by the designers. Seemingly regardless of the idea of constructing a community, design choices implement certain ways of being in the world, and create the ground for particular normative behaviors to emerge. Taylor exemplifies how design choices made for technical reasons (for instance ease in introducing new codes, less requirement of computational power) entail reproduction of certain values:

> No children, no physically challenged, no short, no tall–all the bodies you saw in this world were similar in stature and implied age. The system enacted an embodiment norm through standardization and in turn formally structured the kinds of identities and interactions possible in this space. As can be seen in many of these examples, such normative constructions are not simply matters of virtual world design but often bear close resemblances to the offline world, even revealing something about the value systems at work in our culture. Rather than worlds that are somehow set off and "protected from RL," what we find are ways broader cultural values come to find a place in virtual environments. (2004, p.264)

As these worlds are not isolated bubbles, their social construction entails that certain meaning associations emerge within their body. The problematic formulated by Taylor should be kept in mind to critically apprehend the medium at hand, as the same problem can be traced in other forms of virtual worlds.

The next phase began with the development of the first MMORPG in 1996, 'Meridian 59' (The 3DO Company). The products of this era had combined the

previous features of the virtual worlds, and had produced an online visual and persistent world where the players interact with other players through assuming role-playing characters and try to achieve a goal or accomplish a task (Sanchez, 2009). An important feature that was utilized by major MMORPGs was team play. These games (including WoW) were designed in a particular way that would require the players to form spontaneous or regular teams in order to achieve certain goals. The need to commit to a collaborative play had created a game environment that depends on social networks. This is why MMORPGs are surrounded by large social formations that expand beyond the game-space and into the online forums, or even to real-life meetings.

In these virtual worlds avatars can explore the surrounding world as they wish, and they increase their strength and skills by collecting experience points via certain game mechanics (i.e. killing a unit, completing a quest) (Lastowka & Hunter, 2006). The objectives of the game world are created and implemented by the designers, and they provide purpose to their players (Song & Lee, 2007). As indicated by the genre title (Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Game), these worlds are home to large numbers of participants from around the globe. One of the famous early examples of this period, EverQuest, had a player base of 450,000 subscribers in 2003 (Weston, 2012). 'World of Warcraft' was released in 2004, and it had reached 12 million subscribers in 2010 (Statista, 2015). There surely was an increased attention to this medium. Balkin and Noveck (2006) estimated that 20 to 30 million people visit these worlds and they spend approximately twenty hours per week in them. They concluded in their work that "Indeed, virtual worlds are believed to have implications that go beyond how we play, to also include how we buy, work, and learn" (Balkin and Noveck, 2006).

This large number of active participation into the virtual world, and appreciation of the tool as an important site for understanding societal dynamics is evidence to the social side that the play practice entails. Once again remembering the insights delivered by Taylor's (2004) work, it is important to keep in mind that the manner in which the social is constituted in the game is governed by the code that is programmed by the designers. As she clearly states: "Social life gets fostered via

the architecture of the system and the structure of play" (Taylor, 2004, p. 264). For instance, character templates provided by the game "contains explicit imaginations about how participants not only will, but *should*, be constructing identities and inhabiting that space" (ibid, p.265). Not just the character creation phase, but the in-game mechanics, the game engine itself also constructs the manner in which an avatar will move, interact, create, and communicate in that space. So an analysis of a virtual world should keep in mind the technical structure as enabling certain forms of being "in-world" (Damer, 2008).

This does not mean that the meanings created in the world are solely fostered by the designers' agency. In fact, some view virtual world as a "distinct genre where users create the majority of the experience and meaning they come there to experience" (ibid, p.97). Yet losing sight of the power that designers and technology have in shaping the experience that the world holds for the player may result in a rather flat view of the object at hand. The complexity of a virtual world is brought about by ongoing negotiations between the players themselves, between players and designers, and between the computers and servers.

As an MMORPG, WoW is considered to be a virtual world with a persistent social network. These types of virtual worlds are deeply rooted in the fantasy genre, role-playing games and in the development of online networks, as this review had shown. It could be said that virtual worlds offer the most 'real' experience to the players all around the globe. With their massive size (both spatially, and demographically), virtual worlds establish themselves upon rigid foundations, and they enable flourishing of civilizations upon their territories. In this sense, they offer a complete, consistent and paramount reality to their participants. Joe Sanchez stresses:

> As the technology behind virtual worlds evolved from small text-based worlds to massive 3-D worlds, the user base also evolved. In this co-evolution, players of virtual worlds became residents of virtual worlds, and what were once fantasy worlds over time became mirrored worlds: worlds complete with social and financial dynamics that seeped out from cyberspace into real space. (2009, p.12)

Once again one of the primary features of these worlds is constituted by the players or participants. Bell and Robbins-Bell also reiterate "Without users, a virtual world would be an empty data warehouse" (2008, p.127). These worlds are social worlds, but they should not be confused with social networks, or be taken just as games. Virtual worlds oscillate between a game and a social network, fixating at a point with whatever the actual form of use entails. A participant could be logging into a world to socialize with her friends; and another would only play to combat her enemies at certain times. Virtual worlds allow a wide range of activity in their territories. Cara Thimm (2012) calls for approaching this medium as a hybrid:

> In this sense, virtual worlds are themselves a hybrid between game and social network – they offer playful elements, challenge the participants/avatars with various levels of expertise which can be attained by being an experienced member, and offer various ways of "being social." When taking into account that the overriding motive for the participants is of a social nature ("meeting people, communication with other people"), the element of play comes in only secondary in the shape of its entertainment function. From this perspective, their hybrid status as mainly social worlds and the absence of competition might be the main attraction of the current virtual worlds (Thimm, 2012, p.189)

Formulating 'World of Warcraft' as a virtual world entails appropriation of such an approach. This study focuses on the everyday reality dynamics constituted by the virtual world aspects of the video game; and even though it is still a 'game', it embodies characteristics that may not be found in a common-sense meaning association that surrounds the term 'game'.

Virtual world as a medium is still a newly developing technological form. While ambiguities as to what this form includes are trying to be resolved in the academic body, the medium itself finds interest from a wide range of businesses, from education to military; its use is discussed for even remote space exploration (Noor, 2010).

'Being There' in the Virtual World

The object of analysis in this thesis can be considered as a virtual reality: an MMORPG that is the medium of communication for interaction either between

humans or among the human and the game. Virtual reality was first defined in terms of its particular collection of technical hardware, before an interest emerged in its content rather than the form (Steuer, 1993). The term virtual reality itself was coined by Jaren Lanier, the chief executive officer of VPL Research Inc., a corporation that produces the technological artifacts that construct a virtual reality (ibid).

The early apprehension of virtual reality was very device-driven, and failed to provide insight into the processes or effects of using these systems. As the content offered by the virtual realities came into the focus, a common understanding was established, defining the virtual reality as a medium of human communication, as a means of sharing information and experience among people (Sherman & Craig, 2003).

The virtual reality, in certain contexts, takes its setting in a virtual environment: a geographical space that is represented through a digital medium or media. Schroeder defines the virtual environments, or virtual reality technology as "a computer-generated display that allows or compels the user(s) to have a sense of being present in an environment other than the one that they are actually in, and to interact with that environment" (1996). This definition emphasizes the sense of 'being there'; and if one takes this definition to a multi-user level, to reach at a shared virtual environment description, it could be depicted as 'being there together' (Schroeder, 2006).

What does it mean to have a sense of 'being there'? How is this sense constructed? The concept of immersion is frequently encountered in the everyday practices of the individuals. The sense of 'being there' is achieved through an immersive practice, be it reading, watching, or playing in this case. The medium that the user is interacting with possesses a potent ability that alters the reader's cognition to the extent that they (consciously or unconsciously) place themselves within a scene, and even self-identify as a character within that scene. In this sense, they become a part of the content that the medium is offering. A text, such as a book, has this ability to shift the perception of the reader, even though it might be said to be a raw medium, in that it does not contain multiple layers of perceivable input. Coming to

videogames, the medium becomes more complex, thus constructing an immersive environment becomes more of a challenge. In this multi-modal medium, there are different fragments to be taken into account: combining visual input with a rich soundscape comes to the foreground. The more persistent their combination is constructed, the greater the potential for immersion becomes (ibid). Another element that adds to the level of immersion is the players' ability to interact with the game's story, characters and environments. The more autonomy that the player has in a game world, the more immersive that environment becomes (ibid). All these add to the construction of the sense of 'being there'. Game designer Toby Gard (who created the famous character Lara Croft from 'Tomb Raider' series) talks about the construction of this sense of immersion in the online game development magazine 'Gamasutra' as follows:

> When we are creating worlds in games, immersion is only possible for the player if we can convince the players that the space is authentic (whether stylized or not.) If the critical features on screen don't match up with the critical features of the player's schemata, then he or she will not be fooled by it. (2010)

What Gard refers to is a collapse of the boundaries between the fictional and the real. The consistency of the created content, even if it is a fictional content, produces a sense of the 'real' on the side of the player. The socially constructed reality, be it in everyday life, or in the virtual world, produces a common-sense world, in which the reality of the elements within its domain is not subjected to scrutiny by its participants, in that, they do not question whether the objects of their intentional consciousness are real or not. They work within the boundaries posed by the everyday reality, the paramount reality in which they operate, they produce certain relations, and reproduce certain structures. The player enters the world of videogame through play practice, and as she becomes more immersed in the world, the more the boundaries between the machine and the human comes to collapse, and she becomes a part of the common-sense world that the videogame offers.

It is important not to miss that the sense of 'being there' is accompanied by a sense of 'being there together', as the world of MMORPGs offer an intersubjective[3]

[3] I refer to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) use of the term, which will be explicated under 'Theoretical Framework'.

common-sense world. This 'being there together'ness is an indispensable part of the construction of a reality in the virtual realm. Instead of interacting solely with artificial intelligence (AI), or with preconfigured non-player characters (NPCs), the participants of the world are offered a web of connectivity on which they are able to interact with each other, and thus construct and sustain relations with other humans. Immersion by itself does not offer an entry into the everyday reality of the virtual world; it is the intersubjectivity field that provides a concrete sense of being part of a world. It removes the feeling of isolation, or ultimate domination that one gets when playing in a single player game where the playable characters are the center of that reality. In the virtual world of an MMORPG, the player is part of a greater network of people, as similar in the case of everyday reality. The constraints imposed upon the individual now include social, political, and cultural ones: the layers of reality become more and more complex, and thus the common-sense world in the video game come to resemble that one experiences in the everyday world.

(Video) Game and MMORPG

Games come to receive significant scholarly attention, which has been dramatically increasing since the second half of the 1990s. Especially with the rise of video games, discussions about what games are have taken up heat. Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron point to this in their 'An Introduction to Video Game Theory' by stating that:

> The video game is now considered as everything from the ergodic (work) to the ludic (play); as narrative, simulation, performance, remediation, and art; a potential tool for education or an object of study for behavioral psychology; as a playground for social interaction; and, of course, as a toy and a medium of entertainment (2003, p.2).

Their introductory explanation of the problematic is made visible in the quote: there is a wide ranging interest to the topic, and therefore it is not possible to come up with a unified understanding of games. As a culturally grounded phenomenon, and as a term used by general public, difficulties arise for those who wish to create an analytically sound and clear conceptualization of games. Espen Aarseth points to these difficulties and states:

> Thus, an ontology of games cannot productively start with a crisp, formal definition of what a game is, but must accept that it means different things to different people, and that this is as it should be. (2011, p.51)

While this is the case, there have been attempts at trying to get a rather concrete description of the term. Guided by early attempts conducted by Johan Huizinga (1950) and Roger Caillois (1961), Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman[4] came up with a broad definition of 'game', claiming that a game is "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (2004, p.80). Another clear definition comes from Jesper Juul:

> A rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable (2005, p.36).

Juul calls this 'the classic game model', and is indeed encapsulating a classic understanding of games. It points to a concerete outcome, such as a win or lose situation; the player effort is mentioned[5]; and the socially constructed borders are given a place in the definition. While this description is applicable to a wide array of games, whence we move to the edges of the notion and encounter other forms of games such as pervasive games or MMOGs, these definitions forfeit their relevance.

This is mostly because of the fact that the notion of 'quantifiable outcome', which is central to both definitions, cannot be accounted for in the case of MMORPGs (Glas, 2010). This issue was also raised by both Salen and Zimmerman, and Juul. As MMORPGs are open-ended[6] "the player never reaches a final outcome but only a

[4] I should mention here that this definition is based on an appropriation of the term 'magic circle' of play. Firstly introduced by Jonah Huizinga in his seminal work 'Homo Ludens', the term is used to demarcate a space specifically constructed by and for play practices. The circle could be metaphorical or concrete, depending on the particular practice of play; and the magic stands for the transformation of the meaning inside the circle. While largely employed by several studies that concern themselves with play and games, the term also found large criticism in the same scholarly body. For a reformulation of 'magic circle' please see Stenros (2014) 'In Defence of a Magic Circle'; and for a large criticism of the term please see Consalvo (2014) 'There is No Magic Circle'.

[5] Aarseth (1997) calls this effort a 'non-trivial' one while distinguishing games from other traditional narrative media such as books.

[6] They do not have a certain end-point to which a player reaches and evaluated as winner or loser.

temporal one when logging out of the game" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p.43). Thereof the game only exists in sessions: the world comes to 'be' in the act of play, and with or without a quantifiable outcome, it ceases to exist once the play activity is over. Salen and Zimmerman point to accumulation of experience and the never ending progress of character building by stating that MMORPG is "a larger system that facilitates game play within it, giving rise to a series of outcomes that build on each other over time" (2004, p.82). So it could be said that these scholars also recognize that while MMORPGs embody certain characteristics of games, it is not easy to frame this genre as game. Rather, as we can see from Salen and Zimmerman's quote, these games are considered to be systems that allow play within their body.

These definitions, however, are situated in a game design perspective. From a sociological standpoint, MMORPGs appear as more complex game objects. T.L. Taylor points to such complexities by stating that such video games are "situational and reliant not simply on abstract rules but also on social networks, attitudes, or events in one's non/game life, technological abilities or limits, structural affordances or limits, local cultures, and personal understanding of leisure" (2006, p.156). These game worlds are home to emergent behaviors, and are even called as ecosystems (Pearce, 2006).

Celia Pearce argues that most of the MMOGs take place in an MMOW: massively multiplayer online world. She explains: "The term 'MMOW' refers to an entirely digital, networked environment that simulates three-dimensional place and has its own set of intrinsic rules, 'natural' and 'man-made' laws, narratives and aesthetic style" (2006, p.60). While upholding such distinction, she also indicates that the relationship between MMOG and MMOW is always shifting, and thus makes it hard to conceptualize one given virtual world as a game or not.

This game/non-game distinction is relevant to the thesis at hand. In the analysis, the virtual world is sometimes called a game world, and at others non-playful aspects of the world are emphasized and unimaginative activities are brought up front. The case at hand, nonetheless, circulates the market as a 'game' product, and thus can be

said to be a game. However, I argue in line with Celia Pearce (2006) that this particular MMOG, 'World of Warcraft' takes place in an MMOW.

But What is Real, Really?

*Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.*

*Philip K. Dick*

The object of study being a game, however, may raise questions as to the 'reality' of the entities and events that take place in the world. This question was also raised by game studies scholars, and had resulted in two different schools of thought, as Espen Aarseth (2014) claims: ludo-fiction and ludo-realism.

Ludo-fiction takes the game-related forms or entities as "props in a game of make believe" (Walton, 1990). In this view, the rules of the game are considered to be real, but the actions and discursive elements, and eventually the game world, are fictional (Bateman, 2011). Influential game studies scholar Jesper Juul, in his doctoral dissertation (2003) and later on in his book 'Half Real' (2005) talks about the reality of video games from a similar perspective:

> *Half-real* refers to the fact that video games are two rather different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules that players actually interact with; that winning or losing a game are real events. Conversely, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not real, but fictional. In this perspective, playing a video game is to be engaged in the interaction with some real rules *while* imagining a fictional world, and designing a video games is to design a set of rules as well as designing a fictional world. This does not imply that the fictional world is *more* real than in other media, but rather that fictional worlds in games are special kind of tentative and flickering fictions that in complex ways interact with the real and non-fictional rules of the game. (Juul, 2003, p. 2)

Markus Montola (2011) criticizes Juul's dual apprehension of game worlds as fictional and game rules as real entities by arguing that if one takes a constructionist stand both entities are to be regarded as equally real and intangible, for both are socially constructed. Especially in a study that seeks out common sense knowledge

in games that stand at the edge of the classic magic circle, such as MMORPGs, this kind of dual understanding of games as having both fictional and real properties would result in confusion.

Aarseth also takes a critical stance toward this kind of understanding while paving the way for the ludo-realist school. He points to the widespread categorical coupling between the 'real' and 'physical'[7] by posing the question "Why must 'real' always mean 'physical'?" (2011, p.65). This is an interesting point, as the actions that are performed in game worlds are usually considered as 'having no consequences'. However, if one is conducting a study inside a virtual world, it would be rather problematic to assert that, say, killing another player has no 'real' consequence, for the victim is not 'physically' harmed by the other. This is because the killer earns 'something' for the killing, and the deceased loses 'something' for getting killed. That 'something' is defined by the game rules and is applied through the algorithm by the game servers in the case of online games. So it could be said that 'something', or game entities in general, are information objects. By conceptualizing them as informational, one can engage with the study of game entities while not reducing them to fiction up against physical reality.

Aarseth problematizes the underlying understanding pertaining to the category of fiction where the invented signs do not signify real entities, for they are imagined, unreal signifiers. This, however, is not applicable to video games, because "the signs generated by the game's interfaces, unlike those of fictional media productions, are in fact referential, and therefore not fictional: they refer to the information objects (e.g. cellular automata) maintained by the game engine" (Aarseth, 2014, p.491). The relationship between players and game entities is not the same as one between audience and a stage prop; the former rests on machine, and the latter on imagination. Aarseth explains:

> A prop is a physical object that refers to a fictional object, and whose existence and capabilities are secondary to those of the fictional object. But there is no need for make-believing when players shoot at each other in Counter-Strike; they are manipulating nonphysical, informational guns that shoot non-physical,

[7] This is also encountered in Berger and Luckmann's understanding of 'objective' reality. I will comment on this under the second chapter.

> informational projectiles and when their avatars are hit, they do not have to make-believe that they are eliminated. This happens, factually, in the game machine, entirely independent of the players' imagination, just like a pinball when it drops below the reach of the flippers. (ibid, p.491-492)

What he emphasizes by this example is that one cannot 'wish away'[8] the reality of in-game objects, or the game world; this is because of the fact that the actions that occur in the virtual world are maintained by the game software and hardware.

It is in this sense that this thesis takes up its object of analysis as a real object; and following this, it could be further exerted that this virtual world is capable of producing and sustaining an everyday reality.

This concludes the literature review. In this section I have tried to provide an outline of the studies that were conducted in the field of game studies. I should state that game studies as a newly distinguished discipline is home to a vast number of studies than mentioned here. Being home to debates ranging from philosophy of games to principles of game design, this field continues to grow as a demarcated academic area; and it had provided this thesis with the necessary background over which the object of study came to be constructed.

[8] I am referring to Berger and Luckmann's use of the expression when they say: "It will be enough, for our purposes, to define 'reality' as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot 'wish them away')" (1966, p.13)

# CHAPTER 2

# RESEARCHING THE EVERYDAY REALITY OF A VIRTUAL WORLD

In this chapter I will try to give a theoretical and methodological account of this thesis. Firstly I will try to frame the major theoretical line to which this thesis adheres. As it studies the construction of everyday reality, this thesis takes Berger and Luckmann's 'The Social Construction of Reality' as the core theoretical framework. After establishing the theoretical line, I will present my research question and then show the conceptual tools that were utilized in studying this particular question. I will outline the conceptual framework by highlighting the analytical links that were established in the inquiry of this object of study. In such manner, I will actually be presenting the construction of the object of analysis. Next, I will focus on the process of research question formulation by trying to outline the roots of my thinking. Subsequently I will lay down the methods that I have used in the research process; and lastly I will explain methodological considerations that I have taken into account while 'constructing' the object of study.

While the conceptual framework provides the reader how construction of the object of study is achieved; the outlining of the research process presents the position of the researcher with respect to the object that is studied. As an audience of feminist literature, I believe that it is of importance to locate oneself in relations that provide the conditions of possibility for such a study to emerge. While I try to give an objective account of myself, my aim is to proximate to a more 'scientific' position with a study that takes participant observation as its main method of data collection.

At this point, I am trying to adhere to 'participant objectivation' as put forth by Pierre Bourdieu. He notes that

> Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself. It aims at objectivizing the subjective relation to the object which, far from leading to a relativistic and more-or-less anti-scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine scientific objectivity (2003, p.282).

In his view, an ethnographic account should take into consideration the position of the researcher (the so-called knower, subject), and give an objectivation of her location. By this process, researcher can be conceptualized as yet another object that makes up the study at hand.

With such concerns in mind, I would like to start this chapter by explaining the theoretical framework. This will be followed by the conceptual framework; contextualization of the research problem; methods that are utilized; and an explanation on the undertaking of the research process.

**Theoretical Framework: the Construction of Everyday Reality**

Social constructionism was first systematically presented by the work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966. Their book 'The Social Construction of Reality' was directed at understanding the reality of everyday life that is the concrete foundation of existence. This reality constantly and imperatively imposes itself onto its subjects, and appears as an objective reality to the common sense of the individuals. Hence, their concern is the production of knowledge that pertains to this reality, and they deem the study of common-sense knowledge as the task of sociology. Sociologists take this everyday reality which presents itself as "...a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world" (p, 19). This particular point of view criticizes the sociology as an empirical science that neglects the further inquiry into the reality that it takes as an object of knowledge: the foundations of this reality is left as a philosophical task, and thus the reality to which the individuals partake in, is regarded as a given entity. The

everyday life, in this perspective, originates in the thoughts and actions of the individuals, and is maintained as real by these. Therefore, in order to understand the reality, one must examine the objectivations of the meanings and subjective processes through which the intersubjective commonsense world is constructed (p, 20).

Taking the individual consciousness as the plane through which the reality is constructed, they propone for a phenomenological approach in studying the reality. For them, the consciousness is always intentional, and is directed towards objects. An adequate phenomenological analysis would aim to uncover the different levels of experience, and the different structures of meaning involved in that reality: the analysis of the intentional character of all consciousness. Following from this argument, the objects themselves are constituent of different spheres of reality; different objects impose (or present) different realities to the consciousness. So, the individual consciousness is capable to perceiving different realities. Or rather, in their own words: "I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities" (ibid, p. 21). They then turn to understand the dominant reality that inserts itself as above the others: the reality of everyday life. In this sense, they do not really see social constructions everywhere, but rather, they try to see the construction of the everyday reality, as a dominant mode of reality, one might say. However, if one pushes this idea to its extreme, to the limits, one might reach at a universal constructionism, and argue that nothing can exist unless it is socially constructed (Hacking, 1999).

In a world where everything is constructed, one lives in different intersubjective meaning structures, and experiences different realities simultaneously, or respectively. Taking up Berger and Luckmann's argument of the everyday reality as the reality par excellence, how could we locate the reality that is posited by the game? Berger and Luckmann discuss the construction of the special pockets within the everyday life, in order to weaken the imperative presence of the undeniable brute reality. They suggest:

> Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by

> circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion... The transition between realities is marked by the rising and falling of the curtain. As the curtain rises, the spectator is 'transported to another world' with its own meanings and an order that may or may not have much to do with the order to everyday life. As the curtain falls, the spectator 'returns to reality,' that is, to the paramount reality of everyday life by comparison with which the reality presented on the stage now appears tenuous and ephemeral, however vivid the presentation may have been a few moments previously (p,25).

What they describe in this passage could be understood as a game world where an individual participates in for a definite period of time. The participating individual then 'returns' to the brute reality of everyday life. Generally, in order to adapt this approach to the study of games, one could say that the player puts an effort to weaken the imperative presence of the everyday life, through immersive play practices (Montola, 2011).

However, the aim of this thesis is to focus on the virtual world aspects of the game at hand (WoW), and thus move away from the game-like properties of it. With such a focus in mind, it could be possible to save the virtual world from the clutches of a 'finite province of meaning'. As an open space upon which millions of people come together and 'live', these virtual environments are able to produce everyday reality dynamics. I should also emphasize that I am not approximating to a theoretical line that could be called 'social constructionist', as I would rather not point at one particular subject that comes to construct reality. Rather, my aim is to show the principles of organization of everyday reality, and underline how it is constructed.

Berger and Luckmann, inspired by Durkheim's 'The Rules of Sociological Method' and Weber's 'Economy and Society' come to describe their path as follows:

> How is it possible that human activity should produce a world of things? In other words, an adequate understanding of the 'reality sui generis' of society requires an inquiry into the manner in which this reality is constructed. This inquiry, we maintain, is the task of the sociology of knowledge. (1966, p.30)

What they mean by the 'world of things' is the physical reality in which we all partake. Yet I would like to take their meaning a step further, and indicate that this world of things can be produced in a virtual world. While the physical reality has its own indications, the 'things' inside virtuality are also constructed entities; these virtual 'things' also shape and reflect the common sense of the social life inside the wires. Thus, looking at how the everyday reality is constructed in the virtual world will require us to seek out and analyze the social actions and how they produce a 'world of things' in virtuality.

Lastly I would like to mention Berger and Luckmann's emphasis on the study of common sense in the discipline of sociology. They indicate that what one society takes real can be found in the common-sense of that society; and a study of this reality will thus inquire into the common-sense, the taken-for-granted knowledge dispersed into the tiniest relations in that particular society. When writing about the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday reality, they especially stress that these notions will be found in the mundane, routinized activities of the individuals; for these are the unproblematic parts of the reality that require no doubt by the individual (1966, p.37). In fact, one is "obliged to suspend such doubt as [one] routinely exist[s] in everyday life" (ibid). This insight oriented me towards looking at the routinized activities that individuals perform in the virtual world, and uncover the unproblematized, perhaps even unnoticed notions of common-sense knowledge. As they claim, this kind of inquiry is a study of the everyday reality of a particular sociality.

Under such a theoretical framework, this thesis will study its object of analysis by first locating WoW as a virtual world, and then show how characteristics of a virtual world constitute dynamics of everyday reality. Now let me outline the manner in which these characteristics relate to each other.

**Conceptual Framework**

This thesis is a study of the question "How does the 'World of Warcraft', as a virtual world, constitute an everyday reality?" As can be observed at first sight, this is a two-fold problematic: characteristics of a virtual world, and constitution of an everyday reality. Henceforth this thesis will analyze the object of study, 'World of

Warcraft', by first showing the characteristics of virtual world embodied by the game; and then by focusing on how these characteristics enable dynamics of an everyday reality to emerge. So in this part I will introduce the analytical map of the study: which concepts are used to refer to virtual world and everyday reality; and how these concepts relate to one another in the context of this work. Let me begin by identifying the virtual world characteristics.

Mark Bell (2008), in trying to put together a definition for virtual worlds, comes to locate five essential characteristics that all virtual worlds embody. Bell suggests that the virtual world is a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers (2008, p.2). Bell's careful examination of the concept of virtual world provides the best definition applicable to the case of 'World of Warcraft'.

Firstly, a virtual world is synchronous in that it provides a common time and space, distance, and possibility of co-existence of other participants in sync with each other. In this sense, it gives a sense of environment in which participants can communicate simulateneously. Communication without delay is crucial in virtual worlds, because this mechanism provides the means for participants to organize themselves, and co-exist in the world. Communication in the world is shaped according to the needs of the participants of the world; so a specific sign-system, a language-like structure is observed to emerge in this world. Also it is important to see that this is not just a shared content, but rather a navigable landscape, such as offered by the online videogames. However, not all videogames could be seen as offering a virtual world. In most of the single-player videogames, the player is constructed as the center of that world: all the objects and characters exist with the precondition of the existence of a particular in-game character. But, the second defining characteristic of the virtual world is its persistence, with or without the participant's presence. The virtual world cannot be 'paused'; even if the participant is not readily active in the world, the world continues to exist, and continues to change. So, the participant is no longer the center of the world, but rather a member of a dynamic community and evolving economy. Yet this does not entail the idea that the participants are irrelevant. On the contrary, as the third aspect suggests,

people are central to the virtual worlds. They communicate and interact with each other, and the environment. Being far away from irrelevant, the participants' actions create a difference in the world, affecting every other part of the system. These people are represented through an avatar in the virtual world, which brings us to the fourth characteristic of the virtual worlds. What should be understood from the notion of avatar is that it functions like a user-controlled puppet (Bell, 2008). It is a digital representation beyond a simple label, which has agency, and is controlled by a human agent in real time. Both the avatar and the human behind the avatar have an agency. This is because, the users command the actions of the avatar, but it is the avatar itself that performs the action. So, up to this point, what was defined look pretty much like our world, but the difference is that this is a computer generated world. The fifth aspect of a virtual world, lies in it virtuality. In a virtual world, data management is conducted on a computational level: networked computers make it possible to store all the objects, environments, interactions, and transactions. This allows for an instant communication across national and geographical boundaries, and poses an increased level of persistence and complexity.

By this description, the object of the study, that is 'World of Warcraft', fits into the boundaries of a virtual world. It offers a persistent synchronous experience to a network of people that are represented by avatars, through a network of computers. Mark Bell himself also points to the 'World of Warcraft' as being a virtual world (2008, p. 4).

Now I will focus on the dynamics of everyday reality formulation by Berger and Luckmann in their 1966 work 'The Social Construction of Reality' itself with an inquiry into this common-sensical world (1966, p.29). Simply put, everyday reality is organized around three major notions that take their center as the individual who experiences the everyday life: 'here and now', intersubjectivity, and taken for grantedness. The notion of 'here and now' refers to the immediate spatial and temporal surroundings of an individual. Intersubjectivity highlights that the everyday reality is shared, and it is constituted as an objective realm through processes of interaction between individuals. By objectivation they refer to how "human activit[ies]… produce a world of things" (p.30). They implicate that the

processes of intersubjectivity create knowledge of such things, and some of these knowledge are taken-for-granted in the everyday reality. These are unproblematized parts of life that we call 'common-sense'.

Let me explain how these three analytically distinct characteristics of everyday reality work to construct a common-sensical world. The zone of 'here and now' refers to setting of this reality. It is within the pragmatic reach of the individuals, and therefore open to manipulation. The reality is also home to a social life, and is therefore constructed intersubjectively. This construction is operated through signification processes, and comes to form what passes as knowledge in a particular society. Furthermore, this construction implies a taken-for-granted world. This taken-for-grantedness is rather diffused and it may be hard to trace its crystal form. Because of this fact, I have tried to uncover the common-sense reality in order to show what is taken-for-granted in the everyday life of this world. So while 'here and now' refer to a spatio-temporal structure, intesubjectivity emerges as the mechanism that objectifies the world by constructing knowledge; and the common-sensical knowledge, an unproblematic flow sustained in a reality, shows us what parts are taken-for-granted in a reality.

The everyday reality of a virtual world is by no means exceptional to the construction principles outlined by Berger and Luckmann. While we look for the everyday reality dynamics in a virtual world, it would be useful to understand how common-sensical world is constructed through the characteristics of virtual worlds, as put forth by Mark Bell. If we are to map which of the characteristics of virtual world aid the construction of everyday reality, we could come up with a table such as this:

Table 1 – Conceptual map of constitution of everyday reality by characteristics of virtual worlds

| Characteristics of Everyday Reality / Characteristics of Virtual Worlds | 'Here and Now' | Intersubjective | Taken for Granted |
|---|---|---|---|
| Synchronicity | + | + | |

Table 1 - continued

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Persistency | | | + |
| Network of Computers | + | | + |
| Network of People | | + | |
| Representation through Avatar | + | + | + |

As here and now implies spatio-temporal organization of the world, synchronicity feeds these characteristics the most. Additionally the fact that the 'here and now' is constituted by the network of machinery requires us to take into account the kind of organization fostered by the computers. Intersubjectivity, evidently, indicates a world shared by individuals. This means that the 'network of people' characteristic of virtual worlds corresponds fittingly to this aspect of everyday reality, while synchronicity aspect provides the means of communication in the intersubjective realm. Furthermore, the fact that these communications take place among the avatars of the players, 'representation through avatar' will also be examined in relation to intersubjectivity. Taken-for-granted world, if we consider it as the underlying, common-sensical, unproblematized aspect of the reality, is mostly strengthened by the persistency of this world. As a never-ending and ever-evolving realm, this reality creates mundane and routinized activities that come to constitute the very foundation of the world. Surely the network of computers also aid the process of sustenance and production of common-sense notions in the world, and thus this characteristic will also be discussed in relation to taken-for-grantedness. One characteristic encompasses all these organizational principles of everyday reality, and that is representation through avatar. As avatars are the individuals of this world, everyday reality is produced and reproduced through their experiences. Common sense could be traced in their naturalized activities, and it is in their experience of the world that the reality retains its 'everyday' quality. As I have

mentioned above, Berger and Luckmann's formulation finds at its core an individual experiencing the everyday reality. Avatar gives us that experiencing individual. It provides the possibility of communication, and could be seen as the representation of common-sense of the virtual world.

These are the conceptual tools through which I have tried to approach my research question. While I have given a brief account of how these concepts are analytically linked, I will explain their operationalization more in detail at following chapters. Now that we have a sense as to which concepts will be utilized and in what theoretical background, I would like to move on to explain how this research question was formulated; and how it was studied; and through which methodological processes I came to conclude this study.

**Formulating the Research Problematic**

I started playing games at an early age, similar to most game studies enthusiasts. As a young woman in the context of Turkey where patriarchal relations are predominantly exercised at every level of sociality, partaking in gaming activities, especially in the public domain (such as internet cafes) was in itself a 'deviant' activity as perceived and reflected by my peers and significant others. Once I came to university for my undergraduate studies, I was already leaving the clutches that revolved around my gaming habits, and was able to get involved in social groups who would not consider this activity as deviance once performed by a female. This was the time when I decided to play WoW: another reality that was supposedly composed of individuals not much unlike me. My engagement with the game was incited by my social circle's involvement with WoW, and soon enough, at February of 2006, I joined them in this virtual world.

Questions regarding the reality that was produced over there were already on my mind around those times. My whole life was immersed in WoW: I was playing for over 8 hours a day, and my real life friends were also playing WoW, so I was still talking about WoW when I was not online. Even my dreams were taking place in various places of Azeroth. I was practically living inside the wires and the code with thousands of other players, and was part of the everyday reality that flew over there. As a hardcore gamer I was not even questioning the so called 'reality' of the

occurrences in the game world; I was simply living whatever the game life was bringing in front of me, engaging with signs of that world, communicating in the language of that reality, and investing intense labor to Azeroth. It was in the realization of the fact that a significant portion of my conscious life had taken its setting at a virtual world that I have decided to tackle the question of reality in a game world.

The first problem on my mind was related to the degree of reality that this place presented to me. How come I was so immersed in a virtuality to the point of turning down my 'real' life responsibilities? Which dynamics of this world had rendered me into a disciplined raider[9], and which dynamics of 'real' world had failed me? Aside from an escapist attitude, there lay an irreversible immersion to the mechanics of this world. As a person who committed so much time and effort to this realm, I was no doubt living the reality of that world, and not this. Once I started thinking about how to problematize the subject at hand, this was the first thing that I thought of arguing about: that there is a reality over there which is just as much real as our material world, sometimes even more. Yet how could I conceptualize the tools to measure this 'degree' of reality from the standpoint of sociology? Also what would posing such a question implicate? That somethings are more real, and others are less? This was quickly leading to a spiral of questions that took on metaphysical qualities. So I have decided to tackle the question from another angle. Engaging with the game studies literature had aided me in formulating a more appropriate research question. Especially Celia Pearce's 2006 study on the relationship between the designers' and players' social construction in virtual worlds; and T.L. Taylor's book 'Play between Worlds' (2006) have both been influential in the process of my formulation of research question. Both ethnographic inquiries into the world of MMORPGs, these studies have inspired me in understanding the embedded layers of reality in game worlds that allow specific meanings to emerge, and that guide the flow of everyday life.

Knowing that I was interested in the everyday life of this virtual world, I turned to Berger and Luckmann, and their understanding of sociology as a discipline that

[9] This is a category used to define players who are mostly interested in raiding activities (Player vs. Environment).

'should' study the common sense of a particular society. I came to question what could be the common-sense of this reality. What are the taken-for-granted notions that come to be invisible in relations of this world? How such common-sense knowledge organizes the social world in the game? Which dynamics of this world contribute to construction of this common-sense knowledge? What routinized and mundane activities have founded this world? These questions guided me into looking at world-specific dynamics, and into studying construction of an everyday reality that was particular to this virtual world. While dealing with these questions I always weighed the importance of materiality in construction of this reality.

Science and Technology literature especially contributed to my thinking at this stage. Woolgar (1991) speaks of how users are 'configured' by the technical objects; and it is in a similar way that the computer code –and thereof the developers- shapes the individuals who live in that world. Larry Lessig (1999) also underlines the importance of the code while he discusses the Internet in his book 'Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace', by suggesting that the values of the online world are realized through software code and underlying architectures. While I had established the importance of code, I was also facing a threat of producing a tecno-analysis of the reality; from which T.L. Taylor, as an influential sociology scholar in game studies body, had saved me. Taylor had proposed that game studies could approach the game as an assemblage of "actors, concepts, practices, and relations that make up the play moment" (2009, p.332). The advance brought about by Taylor's formulation became quite dominant in my approach to the game world. While my analysis does not conform to Actor Network Theory, my perspective was largely shaped by the insights of the implications of this theoretical line.

It was in the context of such social relationality and epistemological considerations that I formulated my research question: How does the virtual world of WoW constitute an everyday reality? The question itself implies other questions: What mechanisms make WoW a virtual world? How do these mechanisms relate to construction of everyday reality? How the dynamics of everyday reality are constituted in the virtual world? These were the questions that guided this thesis.

I should state that as a Master's level pupil of the discipline of sociology, I am aware that my remarks are in no way so refined or rigorous. Hopefully though, problematization of the case at hand presents questions regarding the general appreciation of the games, especially in the context of Turkey where an association between toys and games is still prevalent. In fact, it was this kind of attitude towards games that have oriented me to take a more critical stance of the playful attitudes, and formulating the subject of my thesis as to the study of MMOGs having everyday reality properties. Also substantiating the virtual world through an understanding of its everyday workings could be considered as a contribution to questioning of the position where 'real world' appears as infinitely more important than 'game world'.

**Methods**

In the remainder of this part I will lay down the processes through which I have studied these questions. But before, I would like to give a rough outline as to which methods I have used for my inquiry. The major source of data that I have gathered from the world was obtained through ethnographical research. Goodall defines ethnography as "less a formal method of inquiry then it is a disciplined attitude and conversational style" (2000, p.21). Researcher gets a firsthand account of the workings of the world by submitting herself to the daily routines of the people which she will study. Indeed, "the researcher becomes the primary instrument or medium through which the research is conducted" (Lofland, Snow & Lofland, 2006, p.3). The analysis of this world is thus directed from the experiences that I have obtained in my journey in this reality. Knowing this fact, I have tried to reach at a wide range of social relations in the game world, in order to understand if and how various meanings emerge in this world. In this kind of research "emphasis is placed on exploring the meanings, definitions of the situation, members use to make sense of the world around them" (Rowlands, 2010, p.450). In order to get a comprehensive appreciation of the meanings and definitions produced by the world, one should 'go native', and join the everyday reality of the particular object. Goodall stresses that "Cultures, even game cultures, are fundamentally constructed through language, stories and symbols and cannot be apprehended from some imaginary outside position, the God's eye view of Hegelian Absolutism" (2000,

p.13). For the sake of avoiding a bird's-eye-view of the world, I have tried to install myself to the setting of this virtual world.

I have (re)joined the world at the September of 2014 as a researcher, and conducted participant observation in the world until the October of 2015. I have played on three European realms: The Sha'tar, Jaedenar, and Twisting Nether. The Sha'tar was a Role Playing Server; Jaedenar was a Player vs. Player (PvP) server; and Twisting Nether was also a PvP server where majority of the players were Turkish. I have joined several guilds in this period, and none of which were hardcore raiding guilds. Only one of these guilds was a social guild, and rest were semi-core or casual raiding guilds. My social network was not limited to the guilds I have joined as I was also playing with a group of friends; but I was not able to sustain a large circle of 'friends'. I have made casual contacts with many players, but did not establish long-lasting relationships.

I opted for this method of participant observation in order to be able to grasp how the common-sense world was practiced in the game world. Christine Hine denotes the emergence of ethnographic research in computer-mediated-communication studies as "claiming of the Internet as a cultural context" (2005, p.7). Ethnographic approaches have been held by various scholars who were interested in understanding the cultures that emerge from the virtual relations. Hine stresses the adequacy of ethnographic work as it "make[s] explicit the taken-for-granted and often tacit ways in which people make sense of their lives. The ethnographer inhabits a kind of in-between world, simultaneously native and stranger" (2000, p.). Her emphasis on the paradox of insider-outsider conflict brings me to another methodological consideration of my position, which I will extrapolate under the section "Researching through Play".

Now I would like to continue explaining the methods through which I have obtained and analyzed data. Major source of data was collected by participant observation, and additionally I have referred to official website of 'World of Warcraft' (http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/) in order to gather information from the official guidelines, and from the Forums. Also I have frequently visited two of the largest databases on the game, Wowpedia (http://wow.gamepedia.com/), and

Wowhead (http://www.wowhead.com/) in order to validate my observations, and to enhance my knowledge about the world. However, I have tried not to delve deep into these extra-game contents, as my aim was to get a grasp of how the world itself was constituted. Of course this brings the question on the boundaries of the game world: is it a contained world? Where does the game end? As a former player of MMOGs myself, I am well aware of the fact that these secondary sources are frequently used by the players as an extension of their mundane, routine activities. As Taylor states in her book 'Play Between Worlds', playing an MMORPG is "about playing between worlds- playing back and forth, across the boundaries of the game and the game world, and the 'real' or nonliteral gamespace" (2006, p.17). However, my intention is to study the world itself, constituted by the code of the game, and inhabited by avatars and NPCs. In my analysis I have tried to emphasize the agency of the avatar, and not the player. I have focused on the geography of the in-game world, and not to boundedness of the play activity performed in a room with a computer. Ultimately, I have tried to extend a sociological approach to this particular world; and that is why I have tried to remain in the boundaries of the virtual world.

**Researching with Pinkybubble**

I have started my participant observation when I conclusively decided on the topic of my thesis, which was on September of 2014. After that I have renewed my subscription to game world, and tried to join the daily life which had dramatically changed since my last visit to this world. I have started a new character, a male Tauren Paladin named Pinkybubble, which was the first character through which I started my participant observation. Although I have tried out many other characters in order to seek out the differences in experience of the daily life in the world, Pinkybubble was the main character through which I conducted my ethnographic work. My choice of avatar was informed by Taylor's experience in 'EverQuest'. She underlines that "understanding how avatars and play choices are inextricably tied to the research process is important" (2006, p.15). What she means is that by submitting to a certain characterization in the game world, the player's experience of the world, her inclusion or exclusion to certain groups follows the choice. For instance, playing as a tank character would allow the player to persistently be a part

of dungeon and raid groups; whereas playing as a Hunter, which has soloing attributes that does not require the player to form groups while questing, may result in rather lonely playing sessions. Taylor's choice of Gnome Necromancer in 'EverQuest' for instance consequently shaped her play sessions into frequent downtimes[10], and thus resulted in more time spent on extra-game content. Inspired by Taylor's account of her avatar creation, my avatar choice for this study was tailored around the character's ability to access to social groups and activities undertaken in such groups. Paladin class has the ability to specialize in tanking, healing, and damaging. By following various traits offered by this class I was able to experience different façades of the gameplay.

An important factor that contributed to this choice of race, Tauren, was instigated by the massive transformation that the game went through during my absence. Before the Cataclysm expansion pack, the classes were more rigidly aligned with appropriate races: Paladins, which we can think of as warriors of the light against the forces of the dark, were only available to Blood Elf race who had a war history with the Undead. With Cataclysm, Tauren race were also able to bring out Paladins who worshipped the Sun aspect of their deity, Earth Mother. Through this choice I was able to follow the changes brought about by the new world lore.

[10] The time spent while rejuvenating lost vital resources such as Health Points and Mana Points.


Figure 1 – Research is conducted through this avatar.

The reason behind my choice of playing a male Tauren was affected by my previous experience in the game world. My main character before was a female Blood Elf Priest named Laurelinde. While playing as this character I had been subject to various harassments that mainly resulted from the general assumption that women play female characters. While this assumption is discredited (Lou et al, 2013; Bergstrom, 2012), the general approach in the gameworld is still prone to associating male characters with men, and female characters with women. As a huge male cow who had holy attributes and named Pinkybubble, I was able to remain exempted from the male gaze, which enabled me to undertake my research without being harassed.

**Researching Through Play**

In this section I will briefly discuss how play and research go hand in hand, and through which considerations that I have undertaken this study. In game studies play is often seen as a necessary activity in order to appropriately understand the object at hand. Espen Aarseth had proponed for a "playing research" orientation, and insisted that "If we have not experienced the game personally, we are liable to commit severe misunderstandings, even if we study the mechanics and try our best to guess at their workings" (2003, p.3). In order to get a concrete grasp to the phenomena that revolved inside the game, I have aligned myself toward this understanding of "playing research", and have conducted my participant observation by playing the game at hand. The approach that I have taken in this study resembles the one that social constructionist game researcher Markus Montola (2011) upholds. He states:

> The methodological implication of the constructionist view is that the researcher must understand the object of research on numerous levels and be aware of what kind of knowledge is produced on each level. This view questions the taken-for-granted nature of games as unambiguously codified formal systems that produce uniform play experiences. A thorough understanding of a game includes understanding of players and contexts as well as formal properties (p.314).

As a study that seeks out the taken-for-granted knowledge and construction of the common sense reality, it was necessary for me to try and understand the object at hand on different complexities that it produces and sustains. While play had given me a chance to comprehend how knowledge in the game is produced on different levels by the players, it had also enabled me to research into the formal properties that also come to construct a world of things.

Yet I was not simply playing the game, as I was keeping records of my sessions, and was trying to establish a distance between me and the world at times. However this is not an easy move, as play itself can become an immersive activity, especially at intense moments of combat. In this sense, I was moving between play and research. I was at times adopting a 'lusory attitude' (Suits, 2005[1978]), whereas at others I was critically observing the world around me; and sometimes I was

simultaneously adhering to both positions. Game researcher Sybille Lammes had written on this subject and proponed for the need of the researcher to combine the tools of

> reflexivity and situatedness because both situatedness (intertwining agent and environment) and reflexivity (distance/proximity) take into account the involvement of the researcher/player with its material and view this as a cultural praxis. Situatedness allows for game-research that shows the physical locality of playing whilst still relating play to a more global or national context. Reflexivity permits us to show how the researcher is culturally and locally involved in her quasi-object of study through play (2007, p.25).

In my research, I have tried to reach at a wide range of social groups, and tried to incorporate a non-local account of the events. But it is not possible, for all activities are bounded and situated. By installing myself to various accounts of a single phenomenon such as raiding, I was able to monitor how the experience of the world had changed, and thus was able to confirm that these practices are indeed grounded in their locality. For this fact I will try and show the challenges that were presented by this study, and will account for the decisions that I have made in working out the common-sense of this world. The first challenge was brought to me by the fact that I was a native to this world before this research. I have started playing the game at 2006, and was intensely involved in the world for four years. So when I planned to undertake this study I was so convinced of my insider position that I was struck with the question of how can I, as an insider, bring out the taken-for-grantedness of this virtual world? I have struggled in the paradox of not only the participant-observation, but also the insider-outsider dilemma. However my assumption was itself problematic. What I have witnessed so concretely once I have returned as a researcher to the ‘World of Warcraft’ was that I was no insider to this realm. I left behind a world that seemed orderly to me, and returned into a chaos brought about by a massive transformation that took place after me leaving the land of Azeroth. All levels of details were changed, and I was struggling in the face of this new world order. Mikael Jakobsson clearly shows how these virtual worlds are subject to transformation at each and every level:

> …the experience of the game changes dramatically based on where in the process the player is. This is easily overlooked since the layers existing beyond the current position are in many ways hidden to the player. I myself have several times thought that I had reached a status quo where the gaming experience would not change dramatically again—only to be proven wrong by continued play. The understanding of the properties of the game world goes hand in hand with a more developed experience of the game as a player. (2006, p.223)

My absence in Azeroth did not stop the world from changing, and my return was in that sense confusing to me. I was no insider to this world; but the fact remained that I was also a part of this world. I was unable to process the changes made to the world at first, but over time I settled to the world, as my pre-acquired familiarity to the world eased my process of initiation. The more time I spent in the field, the better my understanding of the underlying meanings have established. Taylor also mentions the importance of time spent in the field site as follows: "…the game continuously changes, so being a part of the world in the long run provides a deeper understanding of the layers that constitute the reality of game" (2006, p.18). So, my previous affiliation to the world enabled me to rapidly adapt to the environment and get a hold of the emergent meanings and associations that took place, alongside the continuities and ruptures with the former world. Furthermore, as a researcher, I was able to reflect and objectify the flow of everyday reality through my experience, which was also capacitated by the gap between my former nativeness and current strangerness.

In this chapter I have tried to give an account of the processes through which this study was made possible. To this end, I have first presented the theoretical line in which I have tried to make sense of my object of study. Next, I have outlined the conceptual tools, and provided an analytical framework of the thesis at hand. Thirdly I have explained how I came up with such problematization; and then moved on to explain through which methods I have studied the object. In the last two parts I have tried to portray my relationship with the field and object of study by focusing on methodological considerations through which I have worked on the

research question. In the following chapters I will present analyses of the constitution of virtual world and construction of everyday reality.

# CHAPTER 3

# ‘WORLD OF WARCRAFT’ AS A VIRTUAL WORLD

In this chapter, I am going to analyze and point out how WoW constitutes a virtual world. As explained before, virtual worlds have five defining characteristics: synchronicity, persistency, network of people, network of computers, and representation by avatar (Bell, 2008). In my analysis, I will try and highlight how these characteristics are constructed in WoW, and stress the mechanisms through which the world could be conceived as an everyday reality, and thus as a space that constructs its own common-sense. In this chapter, I will focus on delineating these mechanisms that are essential to world-building, and in the next chapter I will discuss how these mechanisms contribute to establishment of an everyday reality.

Before moving on with my investigation, I would like to present the way in which I will utilize the characteristics laid out by Mark Bell in analyzing this virtual world. These five characteristics appear as analytically separate, but it is not easy to distinguish the world mechanisms as they are intertwined at some instances, and it is their mutual operation that constitutes the world. So having a methodological outline may clear away potential questions that might emerge.

The first characteristic is synchronicity, which refers to the synchronous communication both between the players, and players and their avatars. It refers to common time and common ground that gathers all the components of the virtual world. In this sense, synchronicity refers to synchronous and instant communication and a navigable landscape in Bell’s definition (2008). In order to understand how synchronicity is achieved in WoW, I will first focus on how communication is ensured in this world. An overview of communication channels and a remark on the employment of a specific sign system (or rather the manner in which players

communicate with each other) will be made. Later, the focus will be brought to spatial properties of the virtual world at hand. An examination of how this navigable landscape is constructed via visual (and audial) imagery and how it functions in relation to explorative practices will be presented. This entails creation of a consistent land, where narrative and technological means overlap. Moreover, the fact that this game is a franchise, that it releases expansion packs once every three years, creates a spatial expansion in the world. So an indication as to how this expansion is integrated will be analyzed under this characteristic. Speaking of an increasingly expanding world also necessitates a mention of its limits. What these limits hold for players might vary according to where these limits are located. This brings us to how space is experienced by the players. To investigate the social aspects of space, I will focus on how spatial construction comes to shape social practices, and enhance the sense of 'being-there-together' (Schroeder, 2006).

Second characteristic that will be examined in this chapter is persistency of the virtual world. This aspect is mostly ensured by the absence of a 'pause' mechanism in the game world. Persistency establishes the world as a shared space, one that is external to an individual player; and this construction of the world removes the player from the center of the universe, and positions her as one of the pieces that make up its constitution. Also this externality enables the world to continuously exist in a flow. So I will examine how this flow is maintained or disturbed by the game structure, and what kind of social mechanisms it gives way to.

Third aspect that capacitates a virtual world is its technical existence, or rather the fact that it lies in a network of computers. This network consists of machines that occupy different positions in a power hierarchy; which creates the condition for a rational game structure to emerge. To understand what this characteristic holds for our virtual world, I will focus on the server system and how types of realms entail specific socio-cultural formations.

The fourth dimension that is under scrutiny is network of people. Under this characteristic, I will try to understand under what terms people come together, and what kind of formations that they construct. In order to specifically pin out the manner in which people bind together, I will first focus on communication practices

prevalent in the game world. As there are many channels for communication, I will present them in a scope from public to private channels. Next, I will concentrate on means of associations between the players. In order not to get lost in the vastness of emergent associations, I will only fixate on patterns of organization initialized by the game structure.

Finally I will focus on representation through avatar. As a bridge between the world and the player, avatar holds an important spot in this analysis. I will analyze this aspect first through the limits that it brings to the player. Then I will see how avatar is invested by the players, as in how its progress in the world is empowered by instrumentalization of various mechanisms implemented by the game structure. The mention of progress also leads to means of evaluation that is made possible by the measures brought about by the game developers, which will be examined once again in relation to avatars. Lastly I will try and show the position of avatar in the world, how it becomes a body of inscription, and how, through the practices of both Blizzard and the players, comes to be an individual of this particular world.

Let me now draw an outline of the way in which I will present my findings. I will try to create a flow, coming from the baseline of the virtual world, the skeleton if you will; towards the sociality that takes place in the world. While the baseline provides consistency to the world, the social interactions, metaphorically, give life to the world. In defining the characteristics of the virtual world, I will specifically focus on those that contribute to the common-sense of the world. In the game world, the notion that largely feeds the common sense, as the name of the game indicates, is ‘war’.

**Synchronicity**

In line with Mark Bell’s (2008) presentation of synchronicity, let us first take a look at how synchronous communication is established in the world to ensure that players are able to organize themselves in common time. Communication is essential in an MMORPG. It is the prime means of connecting people together in a common time, giving them a space for organization, and it provides the basis for a social life to emerge. All players have a chat pane in their interface, and they can

adjust or modify this pane according to their needs. In WoW communication is established through purposively organized channels, and additionally there are three casual chat styles. Some of these channels are pre-defined by the game, and some can be created by the players themselves (Suznjevic et al, 2009). I would like to analyze these channels under two headings: public and private channels. By looking at them through this divisions, we could see the diverse means of engaging with others. Also I should highlight that I am not suggesting that these two spheres are distinct and separated by a boundary; on the contrary, I am thinking of this not as a division, but as a scope. Some chat channel may fall to the far private end of the scope, and some may be in the middle. I will present the communication channels from the most public to the most private respectively.

There are four public chat channels in place that cannot be modified by the players, but the player can either leave or join these channels. These are referred as World channels by the game, and are Trade, LookingForGroup, LocalDefense, and General. The first one that I will examine is the Trade Chat, which is the most frequented channel. This channel is mainly used for trade purposes. If a player wants to sell some item, buy a professional trait, or a skill, Trade Channel is the prime communication channel for such purposes. Trade Channel can only be accessed from the capital cities, this is because of the fact that the cities are hubs of economic activity. In servers with high population, the Trade Channel can be really crowded, the text flowing at a rapid rate, which may make it hard for a newcomer to adjust and follow the content of the chat. The swiftness is also caused by the fact that not everyone uses the Trade Chat for economic purposes. Usually people use it to gain access to a large number of people, as this chat has the widest access among all channels: it can be folowed from all main cities. Therefore players use this chat to let other players know that their guild is recruiting, or to find members for a raid that they are organizing. It is not only the players who make use of this channel: gold selling activities, even though illegal, are also advertised in this channel. Trade Channel has a special language that it acquired. Players use acronyms to save some time and space while they are looking whether for items or other people. These acronyms can be hard to grasp for a newcomer, but over time, through a socialization process, every inhabitant of this realm come to realize what these

codes stand for. I will explain more how this language is established later in this section.

The second channel is LookingForGroup (LFG), which, as the name suggests, is used to make calls for a group. This group could be a party for a dungeon, a group for a raid instance, or questing party for group quests. As explained before, the environment in WoW prompts players to work together against majority of the threats. If a player is having difficulty with completing a quest, or has to deal with a group quest, she can use this channel to make a call to the entire zone. LFG channel creates the possibility for teaming up with strangers, especially for those who are not in the position to find a group immediately (from their guilds or friends).

The other public chat under World channels is the LocalDefense chat. The purpose of this channel is to communicate any disturbances caused primarily by the opposing faction. If a high level member of an opposing faction is camping the player, she can call for help from this channel. Also, if the NPCs are being attacked by either the member of an opposing faction or another enemy NPC, the channel automatically warns the players, notifying them of the location of the attack. For instance the LocalDefense chat of the Hellfire Peninsula continuously gives out warning, because there is a constant battle with the demons in this area, and Burning Legion's NPC troops always attack the Horde base located near the Black Portal. This channel is also zone-specific.

Lastly, the General chat channels cover a specific zone, and the player automatically joins a general chat of a zone once she enters the region. For instance if I am walking from the Barrens to Ashenvale, the moment that I enter the border of Ashenvale, I get the notification in the chat pane that I left the Barrens General Chat, and that I joined the Ashenvale General Chat. If I write something to this chat channel, people who are in Ashenvale will see what I write, unless they have left the channel for some peace of mind. General Chat is usually used for calling for aid from other players, or for casual chat. There is one particular General Chat that became rather famous over time, and that is the Barrens Chat. Tauren, Orc, and Troll races live near the Barrens, and this area, in old times, was the main leveling site for these races from level 10 to 30. The phenomenon emerged in the early days

of WoW due to inexperience of the players with the environment, and players were always asking questions on the General Chat, helping each other with their quests. However this was not the sole use of the Barrens chat: over time, it became a common entertainment place for players who were rather bored with constantly running the massive barren lands (hence the name). Players communicated various topics in the channel; the scope of content was quite wide, from trolling for the sake of trolling to deep philosophical debates, depending on the composition of currently active players. Although the Barrens chat pretty much died with to the introduction of LookingForGroup mechanism which removed the necessity of leveling from 10-30 at one place, the phenomenon was so enduring that some players have tried to keep it alive, and "Barrens Chat" came to signify any silly chat that take place in a chat channel. Players being silly may be told to "Take it to the Barrens Chat", or if a channel comes to be infested with spams or puns and jokes, people acknowledge these temporary instances as "going Barrens Chat". So, although the General Chat's purpose is to create a channel for people who are in need of help, the material composition of an area may make it something more than this function.

Alongside these World Channels, there are two more public channels: /say and /yell. Text written in these chats create a bubble over the character, and can only be seen by people within a certain radius of the player's position (25 yards for say channel, 300 yards for yell channel). These channels are mostly used for casual chat.

So far we have reviewed six public channels, among which Trade Channel happens to be the most public one, for it has the widest coverage of spaces, and thus most participation. It is also mentioned that although the World channels are purposefully organized, their use may surpass their purpose at times.

This brings us to the private chat channels. There are four private channels in WoW: guild chat, party/raid chat, private channel, and whisper, if we align them in accordance with their level of privacy. I am using the notion of 'private' here to indicate that these channels are not open to general public, and they require certain conditions for participation. I should remind you that these channels are not zone-specific.

All guilds have their own chat channels. Members of a guild[11] can see their guild's chat channel at all times, unless they leave the channel. Guild channel is like the common room or gathering place of a guild. All guild-related announcements, and in addition to this chats, casual conversations are made in the guild chat. This is the space where a certain belongingness is established to the guild. Guild channel is private in the sense that it only provides a communication line to those who are members of the guild; but it is also a public place for the guild members.

The second private channel is the party and raid channels. Once a player joins a group, she automatically joins the communication channel for the specific group. These channels, too, are more on the public side of the scope, as even though these channels are created solely for the members of a particular group, the chat is still commonly seen by the members, who may or may not be pre-related with each other. Players generally communicate battle strategies in these channels, for these groups are formed with the purpose of warring against particular enemies. Some guilds forbid casual chats to be conducted at raid channels, in order to ensure that there is a certain undisturbed space allocated for administrating and communicating the battle strategies.

The third one is the private channels that are created by the players themselves. Players can use their interface options to create a channel with a desired name, and can share the details of this channel with their friends or relevant people to communicate outside the intrusions of other people. These channels could be created for various purposes: guild members who share the same role could use these channels to communicate their specific strategies; guild executive members could make use of such channels to discuss administrative activities; or friends could create such channels for social purposes.

The last and the most private form of communication is conducted through a mechanism called /whisper. This mode of communication takes place between two players, and these conversations cannot be accessed from the outside. We can think of /whisper as an instant personal messaging (PM) system, which automatically gives an audial notification to the players. Whisper chat could be used for various

[11] Persistent player organization in WoW.

reasons in various contexts, so it is not possible to categorize the scope of characteristics of communication.

Thus far I have tried to highlight the means of communication that are made available by the game structure itself, and the forms of communication in relation to their level of privacy and publicity. It is of prime importance to provide a virtual world with synchronous communication tools, as it is through these means that they come to construct a complicated and specific culture and social life.

Another important thing to note in relation to communication is the language that is used in the game. Communication is "of crucial importance to achieve goals and for role-playing in MMORPGs" (Swoboda, 2015, p.151). MMORPGs players employ particular sign systems that refer to specific artefacts and phenomena of the world, and over this signification processes a specific terminology has flourished. WoW community makes use of such terminology and further extend it by deploying common forms of constructing such specific signs (namely acronymic ways), and thus establish a language of its own. As typing while playing can be a hard task to accomplish, players write in the shortest way possible whatever they wish to convey (Swoboda, 2015). There have emerged certain templates that apply to certain situations as well. For instance LF stands for 'looking for', and the player could complement whatever she is looking for to this abbreviation and other players will understand what she is talking about. LF is commonly used for people who are searching for a group or people to join their group. For example if a player types "LFG MC", this means that she is looking for a group to raid Molten Core. Another common template is WTB/WTS, which stand for 'want to buy/want to sell'. Noticeably this template is commonly used for trade purposes. There are many other signs that are employed by the language used by the community, all of which cannot be listed here. I will list some of these words to be an example, and to show the logic behind this signification strategy:

L2P: Learn to Play – this is used by players to warn a player who is performing poorly.

FTW: For the Win – this is used to indicate that a particular item or an event is beneficial

UBRS: Upper Blackrock Spire – this is the name of a dungeon instance located in Azeroth.

DOT: Damage Over Time – stands for damaging skills that produce a debuff on the enemy target that deals a particular amount of damage over a certain period of time.

LoS: Line of Sight – this is used to indicate if there is an obstruction between the player character and an enemy character that causes the avatar not to be able to interact with the latter.

IMO: In My Opinion

FYI: For Your Information

G2G: Gotta Go – a player can use this to say that she has to leave the group or go AFK

As can be seen from this list, there are particular, as well as employed forms of abbreviations. While game-specific content is signified by abbreviations, players also make use of general internet language or 'leet speak' in their communications. A player who had a history with online chat rooms, or with other online games can easily adapt to this language. However, this could be a terrifyingly alien structure to a newcomer. I remember that before I started to play the game, I was not able to understand a word from my friends' conversations about WoW. A while after I started playing the game, I was able to make sense of the logic of abbreviation, and also came to know what abbreviation referred to which content in the game. Once a player comes to understand the terminology, her sense of belonging to the world largely increases, as she also becomes part of the agency that produces and reproduces the game specific culture.

It would be safe to conclude the communication part by stating that while communication mechanisms provide a synchronous line over which players can organize themselves, the specific sign system that had emerged in the culture of Azeroth also serves the purpose of bringing together different players, cementing them in commonality. While communication is one part of the synchronicity characteristic, the other is spatial aspect that provides the players a shared landscape. In the remainder of this part I will be presenting how Azeroth is created and lived.

The everyday reality of this world takes its stage as Azeroth, a planet where high fantasy characters live out their lives in epic adventures. The landscape over which players and non-players interact is designed as an open space. If a player sees a mountain up ahead and wants to go there, she can do that. In this sense, the spatial configuration is continuous and this creates the condition for a different gameplay to occur in contrast to discrete spatialities (Fernández-Vara et al., 2005). The space is navigable, and open to exploration. This is an important component of the spatial construction: in majority of the videogames, there is a backdrop to the lived space, and not every part of the visual imagery is open to navigation. McGregor explains backdrops as "the default position of game space when no qualities are assigned to it" (2007, p.543). The backdrop is used to create ambience, but it has no other practical use. In contrast to this, game spaces that are designed as open worlds promise that every part of it is available to the player. Azeroth is one of those worlds where the constructed space is vast and open to exploration. So, visual landscape does not act as a static curtain that conceals the code, but as an invitation to navigation and exploration: it gives a sense of geography and terrain (Bell, 2008). The manner in which space is represented in a computer game is of great importance in understanding the particular game at hand (Aarseth, 2001). In this case, we can see that having a continuous and explorable space implicates a world that opens itself up to various social and cultural practices.

One important component of synchronicity that can be analyzed concerns the visuals of the world. Azeroth has a cartoonish look to it. One can encounter surreal visual depictions of vast deserts, magical forests, areas worn down by plague, or

giant mushrooms (see picture below). These places in themselves give the Azerothian landscape a sense of unearthliness. This unearthliness is pushed to its extreme via cartoon-like visualizations of the environment. While the environment certainly refers to geography of our material world, its depictions are nothing like 'real'. Instead, the portrayed landscape disconnects from this reality to a certain extent and comes to form another reality in which the cartoon-like graphics are the norm. This process of disconnection and (re)construction aids in creating the sense that, this world, while similar to Earth, is not of the Earth. It is from an entirely different universe. This movement away from our material world is an important one in world-building, especially in high-fantasy genre. These worlds maintain their connection to the world in certain mechanics (especially those concerning laws of physics such as gravity), but achieve a disconnection from it via introduction of certain themes or a different visual rendering in this case. We should keep in mind that while there is a move away from the 'really real'; this world establishes another 'real' in its own terms, where a logical consistency is sustained via narrative means. This actually gives the gameworld a mythical aspect to its existence, as a separate world of high fantasy, if we look at the issue from Roland Barthes' famous work 'Mythologies'. In this book Barthes (1991) states that such mythical structures take the signs from a first order language, dismantle the already existing signifieds, and then identify them with new signifieds of their own symbolic order. We can conceptualize this move away from the Earth and establishment of another 'real' in terms of construction of a second-order-language. Accordingly, spatial construction produces its own truth by creating a world that has its own logical consistencies. The mention of consistency is of importance to our analysis of virtual world, as it ties together the pieces of the world.

Figure 2 - Zangarmarsh is an area that is mostly covered in giant fungi.

WoW creates meaning associations via spatial means, which ultimately provides consistency to the land. This process feeds to the construction of a worldness, which can be defined as the unifying consistency of the world. Tanya Krzywinska emphasizes the way in which history is incorporated to the world while discussing worldness, so as to provide it "integrity, vivacity, and dramatic gameplay possibilities" (2008, p.127). While the designers borrow signs from fantasy genre, the manner in which they utilize them makes Azeroth unique in its own regard. Every corner of the world signifies the lived history, and the spaces become places through narrative means. Let me examplify what I mean. If I am walking in an area under domination of Orcs, I am signalled by large huts, red flags, pet wolves, a large weaponry, and fences built with uncarved wood. These signs represent the Orc race's preoccupation with battles alongside with their shamanic practices. Such signs are accompanied by a soundscape that heavily uses drums. Every bit of the town point to the fact that this is an Orc town. Spatial narration, in this sense, contributes to establishment of consistency. Every corner of the world has a meaning attached to it that comes to identify any paticular place: it reflects the history of that locality, the lifestyle of its inhabitants, the state of affairs in the

world. The logical consistency cements different parts of the world, providing it integrity.

In Azeroth, landscape has undergone major changes throughout its history. As WoW is rooted in the previous games of the franchise, designers have turned the places that were used in those games into an integrated whole. In previous games the players had to experience the world in partial fractions. In WoW, however, they are able to navigate continuously in the realm, from one part of the world to another, and even to other worlds. Blizzard makes changes to visual landscape via continuous introduction of new expansion packs and patches. Azeroth first started off as a world with two major continents: Kalimdor and Eastern Kingdoms. With the introduction of first expansion pack (The Burning Crusade), they have presented the Outlands: an alien world that is connected to Azeroth with a magical portal. In two expansions (Wrath of the Lich King and Mists of Pandaria) they have added two other major continents to Azeroth; and in Cataclysm, they have made radical changes to landscape of Azeroth, changing every part of it, where new environment was only reminiscent of the old one. What Blizzard had achieved in the sense of synchronicity was that they have sustained player engagement with these expansions, as they have provided more space to explore. With more places to travel, the world (or the universe, as there are other worlds in the game) had grown larger and larger. Each expansion added to the complexity of the environment, and provided more means for possibility of action on the part of the players.


Figure 3 - The current map of Azeroth.

Following the spatial design in an open world, it should be noted that while every part of Azeroth is open to navigation, it does not allow itself to inscription. While players can roam around freely within the defined space, they cannot leave a permanent mark on the land. The environment remains disinterested to epic battles, long-lasting relationships, to all player actions in general. This is a design choice, as some game worlds allow their players to participate in the construction of the world, whether through object-creation, or building-construction mechanisms. In Second Life, for instance, players are able to create their own buildings and are free to create objects; this feature was very much praised by both gaming community, and by scholars as it both increases player engagement to the world, and boosts creativity (McIntosh, 2008). However, this is not the case in WoW. In Azeroth the players cannot interact with their environment. Both the structures and the objects within them are impervious to player intervention; one cannot even break the barrels that are standing in one place, or cut a tree off, or plant one. So, while players are able to navigate within it, they cannot alter the landscape. Therefore, although rich in complexity and provision of possibility of action, Azeroth is a dead space[12]. Celia Pearce makes note of how, even in such fixed worlds "players will

[12] As opposed to "lived space" (Lefebvre, 1972).

find ways to be creative, whether by appropriating game spaces and objects for different uses than those for which they were intended" (2006, p. 146). An adequate example of such player creativity will be laid out in the following paragraph.

This brings us to the limits of this world. Azeroth is a flat world, where major continents are linked together through a vast ocean. Players can navigate from one continent to the other via various transportation mechanisms. They can use ships or zeppelins that are found near major cities, and while using these players are not able to see what lies in the middle of the ocean, because a loading screen fills the time that takes crossing continents. If they try to cross the ocean by swimming, they drown, for a mechanism called fatigue is in place to prevent players from roaming off the grid. Another limit is imposed by pixelated imagery. Especially in hills and mountains, there are certain parts that cannot be reached because they are not defined by the code as accessible and therefore do not allow movement. However, players with exploratory ambitions have found ways to manipulate these non-defined spaces for purposes of amusement. For example, in Gadgetzan (a goblin city found in Tanaris, Kalimdor) one can climb the outer wall of the town, and through there find a wormhole-like bug that causes a malfunction in graphics. After that point, the player finds herself floating over and beneath the space in a traversed version of Azeroth. So while there are limits to the world, not all of them restrict players to traditional uses of space; on the contrary, some of these limits are challenged by players who have explorative ambitions.

Let me now turn to what kind of a social life takes place in relation to spatiality. As emphasized before, Azeroth is a vast land that is open to navigation. The large size of the world suggests that while every part of it might be populated at any given time, the intensity of population depends on the provision of possibilities in a given space. For this reason, the most populated places in the world are capital cities of the playable races. Cities are large hubs for social and economic interaction, and thus they attract large numbers of players. If a player is looking to trade an item or a skill, she has to go to a city. This is because cities have a specific chat channel, Trade Channel that is used for economic purposes; and an Auction house in which the players trade goods among themselves. Or, if a player wants to upgrade her

class or profession skills, city is the best place to do so, as they contain trainers for all levels. I should note that cities are not residential areas, but are places for war-time interactions. People buy items that will aid them in battles, or learn professional and class-specific traits that will prove useful in their raids. Competition and conflict is once again reinforced at the cities.

Aside from cities, content-based population patterns can also be observed. This means that location of a raid instance that is dominant at a given time will be populated by players, especially around common raiding times[13]. In addition to this, common questing areas are also frequented by the players. Especially with the introduction of Daily Quests[14], certain zones become a daily visiting place for dedicated players. The habitual visiting places of players also create a possibility for PvP[15] action. As both factions share the same raiding and questing places, these areas become a zone of confrontation for players. It is commonplace to see the outside of a raiding instance covered in corpses around prime raiding times; or daily quests becoming a challenge to complete due to persistent attacks of enemy faction's players. These moments create the possibility of collective action against long-lasting rivals. Let me exemplify: I was questing in Timeless Isle at around 2 a.m., and there were not much players in the island. As I was waiting for an enemy mob to respawn, an Alliance player had sneaked in and caught me off-guard. He instantly killed me, and then kept camping[16] me, forcing me into a furious anger and a need for revenge. At that point I have made a call from Local Channel to fellow Horde players, giving them my exact location details, and saying that there was an Alliance player who was grieving me. Horde players started flowing to the place where I was being camped, and they started camping the Alliance player. At that

[13] Most guilds raid at around 7-8 p.m., at prime time, in order to include all the players in the guild body.

[14] These are quests that can be repeated on a daily basis. They commonly reward the player with gold and reputation to a certain faction.

[15] Player vs. Player. In WoW, players from competing factions (Alliance and Horde) are enemies to each other, and killing a player from an opposing faction gives the player an Honor Point.

[16] Camping is a grieving practice that means continuously killing a player. In WoW, after death, players respawn by recovering their corpses from their death locations. So, just by waiting at the exact location where a player is killed, a player can continuously kill another.

point, I knew that things were going to get bloody, because more Alliance players started to come to this location. In a manner of ten minutes, a battleground was made that came out of a small conflict between two players from competing factions. The place was covered with corpses, people from major cities started coming to the island, enlarging the size of the battle. In the middle of the night, we were waging a PvP war at an island for daily quests. This type of spontaneous player vs player interaction is commonplace at contested territories[17]. When a fight breaks out among Horde and Alliance, a collectivity is also formed within each faction: players from both factions form collective teamwork bodies, and the context of battle reignites each player's sense of belonging to her/his faction. The situation that arises from conflict becomes a show of strength and dedication for players, and when a winning situation is achieved, players interpret this as the power of their faction. In such instances, it is possible to see players yelling "For the Horde!" or "For the Alliance", insulting enemy factions' players, and showing support to their comrades in combat. These confrontations become sites of power struggle among the factions, reinforcing the sense of 'being there together' (Schroeder, 2006). This 'being there together'ness, or connected presence, is a term emerged from the Media Studies literature, which is used in relation to immersiveness of media technologies. However, my aim here is not to indicate presence or immersion, but to stress how and under which spatial conditions create a possibility of emergent social relationality. Also it should be highlighted that the emergence of this incident relies largely on synchronous communication capabilities of the virtual world, and to the fact that the components of the world share a common time and space. In this sense this is a good example of what kind of sociality synchronicity gives place to.

In conclusion, synchronicity is achieved by provision of synchronous communication lines, and a complex but static landscape that progressively (but not in linear fashion – think of the Cataclysm where the whole world had changed for the worse in some parts) changes. Visuals, with the aid of audial stimulants, create an ambience of high fantasy where players conduct their everyday dealings within a cartoonish world. By moving away from the 'really real', WoW breaks itself off

[17] These are zones that can be visited by each faction's members

from our material world, and successfully establishes itself as another realm that can be found in virtuality. As an RPG, WoW is in the business of world building; and with continuous introduction of expansion packs and patches, it adds more layers to its spatial skeleton by establishing other wars, new enemies, and places of conflict. Synchronicity characteristic enables players to come together in a shared space, and connects them in a common time, and gives them possibility of simultaneous communication. This lack of delay and the sense of space could be said to be cementing various aspects of this world, and renders the possibility of emergence of a world.

**Persistency**

Players enter Azeroth via a log-in screen and can log off anytime that they want. The world comes into existence for her whence she is online, and disappears from materiality once she logs off (Bell, 2008). Yet this is the subjective experience of the player if the game at hand is one that constitutes a virtual world. In MMORPGs, game world continues to exist and change even if the player is not actively present in the world. This indicates that the player is not the center of the universe, but is part of a larger socio-technical[18] world. There are various mechanisms at play to ensure the persistency of the world, so let us explore.

Persistency is achieved in the game world chiefly by the fact that there is no pause button. One can go AFK[19], but does so knowing that the game world will not stop and wait for her. On the contrary, the gameworld will persist, as it is sustained by the game servers, and not the personal computer at use. WoW servers provide a realm to millions of players, so even though the player might perceive the world as the center of it, she, factually, is not. The game world thus exists in a continuous flow, and that flow can only be manipulated by game masters[20] or bugs. Players are, in this regard, powerless in controlling the game-related content and are subject to game world's ever-present flow.

[18] I am using this word to emphasize that the world contains both human players and machine operated entities (NPCs, objects etc.)

[19] Away from Keyboard – means that although the avatar is present, the player herself is not available.

[20] Blizzard employees who are responsible for game-related issues..

This flow, however, is not without its disruptions. The game servers undergo regular maintenance once every week. Under this maintenance certain bugs can be fixed, and the game content is reset. This reset does not cover the whole game world, but concerns the raid instances. Let me first explicate what instances hold for the game world, and then discuss how they contribute to persistency.

While there is a continuous shared environment in WoW, the dungeon and raid instances function differently. These teamwork requiring places are specially designed towards one goal: defeating the final boss[21] and getting loot (World of Warcraft Beginner's Guide). In the regular environment, players simultaneously exist in the realm. However, as dungeons and raids are designed for single teams to compete against the Environment[22], they only provide a space for parties or raids formed by players. To ensure that many groups can enter these dungeons simultaneously, an instance mechanism is established. Instances are located at separate servers provided by Blizzard. These virtual spaces require additional loading time, and server-related problems do not affect them. Dungeon instances undergo a daily reset, whereas raid instances are reset once per week on Tuesdays. Through this reset process, the raid and dungeon content is restored, so players can start over and battle again.

This poses a discontinuity to the flow, and may disturb persistency. Players can kill the enemies, but they reappear, and in a sense, the game content retrieves a past time to present. This is not a traditional saving mechanism, but it nonetheless disrupts the flow. As the servers undergo maintenance once every Tuesday night, it could be said that the gameworld exists in weekly periods. Its persistence is regularly unsettled in favor of changing the world. Temporal organization is rather cyclical, "a kind of 'eternal recurrence' to use a phrase from Nietzche" (Krzywinska, 2008, p.134).

This is due to the fact that this world exists in a virtual realm constituted by machines. So, while the player is well aware that the game world will continue to

[21] Boss is different than mobs. They are significant computer-controlled enemy characters that require skill and knowledge of the game mechanics in order to defeat.

[22] By environment I mean computer controlled enemy characters. Hence the acronym PvE (Player vs Environment)

exist with or without her presence, she is also aware that this persistence is not without its disruptions. But this regular maintenance is accepted as a fact of this world, and it is regarded as a normal situation. In fact, Tuesdays bear specific activities and produce different economic states. Since players know that the servers will reset, they try to complete the raid instances that they haven't yet, which creates a crowd of PuGs[23]. Also, the number of items that are sold by players on the Auction House throughout the week decrease towards the end of the week, thus the prices of the items hit their highest; whereas on Wednesday, as many people gather more items and put them in the Auction House, the prices drop down. All in all, the weekly scheduled maintenance is perceived as a normal process, and it creates specific dynamics in the game world, as exemplified.

Another (economic) mechanism that is brought about by the persistency of our virtual world is accumulation. Players are able to gather materials from around the world, and store them in their inventories (either in a bank located in a city, or in a backpack to carry around with them). As the state of the world is continuously 'saved' to the servers of the game, material wealth acquired from one's journey in the world is also recorded and kept. This allows one to accumulate wealth and improve one's material condition in the world. The state of the world, or the flow of the gameworld, thus includes possessions of players, and players' process of empowerment is set up by the persistency of the virtual world. However this process of accumulation is more bound to the representation of the player as avatar in the world, as these practices further strengthen one's avatar in the world. Therefore I will discuss this issue more elaborately under 'Avatar' section.

The flow is also ensured by continuous addition of patches and expansion packs. Let us remember that Warcraft is a franchise that is founded at 1994. Every game had introduced new conflicts and wars, which have culminated into the current state of affairs in the world. When the world was first established as an MMOG, it had continued on the history that was encountered in the previous. The world is subject to transformation with progression of the narrative. New enemies, races, and conflicts are introduced to the world with this continuous release of expansion

[23] A pickup group, or pug, is a group of random players that are grouped together via the matchmaking system, usually to do an instance or quest (WoWWiki)

packs and patches. Greg Street, one of the designers of the game, stated in an interview that in order to maintain motivation on the part of the players, they frequently add new content to the already existing gameworld (Digital Spy, 2013). What used to be a major challenge to the world becomes trivial in the face of new challenges and threats. This is specifically experienced at pre-expansion patches. Let me exemplify: During the Burning Crusade expansion pack, there were in total eight instances that were organized progressively in accordance with a tier mechanism[24]. So, if a player was raiding at a lower tier, her chances of encountering late-game content were close to none. When the following expansion pack's pre-patch was released, many new mechanics pertaining to skill and talent sets were introduced. This empowering move allowed for lower tier players to enjoy higher level content. This was the case for me: While I was at around tier-6, I was able to find a group who, even though did not have the required item-level, were able to successfully clear the Sunwell Plateau raid, which was one tier above. What was impossible for my guild before the pre-expansion patch became an easy sport. Furthermore, whence the Wrath of the Lich King expansion was released, we never went back to old raiding instances, because they were then simply low-level raids that did not provide any functionality (such as items or decent challenge) to our characters. Just like that the Burning Crusade became a fond memory for us, and the Wrath of the Lich King provided a space for new challenges and possibilities. The game was progressing into a new era, and we were subject to this transformation, whether we desired it or not. However, there are those who resist such changes. A famous guild called 'Crusaders'[25] was formed at 2013, who aimed at "go[ing] through the ladder of progress, just like it was done in old BC[Burning Crusade]. Starting at 5 men heroics, progressing to Karazhan, Gruul's and Mag's and eventually reaching Sunwell"(World of Warcraft Forums, 2013). This is more than a nostalgia guild for old players: they are determined and serious about keeping the old raiding spirit alive, which can be deduced from this statement: "As it is

[24] Every raid content provides a particular set of items that belong to the specific raid's level. For instance Karazhan raid had tier-4 level items, and the Black Temple had tier-6 level items. As the gear level has a large determinacy in ensuring the success of a raid group, this tier fashioned organization also shows how further into the game content a player has seen and conquered.

[25] Server: Burning Blade, Faction: Alliance

probably clear and obvious by now, this is NOT a twink guild, we are not interested in being ran or helped by higher levels. Our intention is enjoying an experience as close as possible to what old BC raiding was" (ibid). Their characters are all level-locked to 70, and they go on with their lives as if they were living in TBC. There are numerous restrictions about not using newly introduced mechanisms, and thus they are able to raid these old instances and find challenge. This is a curious case, but then again is an example of the scope of possibilities that players can extract themselves from the persistent game world. While some only reminisce the past, others may be determined in living in it. This also points to the cumulative progression of the game space: while the new game content becomes the center of attention for majority of the players, the now-historical sites are not lost: they persist in this world, even if they are close to being forgotten. For a player who has been a part of the world for a long time, this means that she has been a part of the lived history. She can revisit the old lands and remember the times when things were different. For others, this comes as a sense that this world had gone through much in the past, that it has a history, which is crystallized in every corner of the world. They hear stories about the past in general chat channels, they travel along the old content and come to realize that this game world has been, and probably will be there for a long time. The temporal aspect of the world feeds persistency in the sense that living in a temporal world removes the player from the center of the world and situates her as just another piece that makes up the world.

In relation to temporality, it should be mentioned that the state of affairs in the world is decided by the encounters between the non-player characters. The player comes into a pre-existing drama that has been in motion for a long time. There are many lead characters in the game world that have been part of the decisive situations in the world history. These characters have well-developed stories, and "play key roles in the legends and mythology of the virtual world" (Bainbridge, 2010, p.22). Illidan Stormrage is such a character. He was born a Nightelf, and was so consumed by his magical powers, he committed crimes against both his people and the races of Azeroth, and came to be known as The Betrayer. Illidan was a character that the players have met in the previous games of the franchise, namely Warcraft 3. Having him occupy an important part in the narrative canon did not

come as a surprise, and indeed was much anticipated by the player base. Illidan was introduced at the Burning Crusade expansion, and was the final boss of the original content. As players roam around the Outlands, they follow the progress of a storyline about Illidan who became the master of Black Temple, and become part of a plot against him, planned by a huntress called Maiev, who has been after Illidan for a long time, and by Akama, whose home was destroyed because of Illidan's actions. It should be noted that the player is not given a choice in whether helping these characters out or not. They are simply part of an already ongoing drama, and they are expected to play out their parts which will ultimately handsomely reward them with items and reputation. The battle against Illidan is carried out with 25 players, and is initiated by Akama. If players succeed in bringing him down to 30% health points, Maiev enters the scene, and a dialogue between the huntress and the hunted take place while players cannot move. At the end of the battle Illidan is defeated and the narrative that employed these characters come to a halt. The Black Temple has no evil master, and Akama and his people are now able to live out in peace. As can be seen from this battle, even though the players act out a significant role in deciding the fate of the world, it is the canonical characters that give out the decisions. The state of the world is decided by the pre-designed narrative components, and players' role is also designed in a way. They can do nothing but defeat Illidan and help Maiev and Akama. The gameworld had existed long before the players had come to inhabit the land, and although they continue to fight their battles, the wars are decided by the lead non-player agencies' actions. Players only provide an aid to the way that things go. They are part of the flow, but are not able to control it. This lack of agency on the part of the player is indeed limiting the scope of narrative actions that one might take; but against the possibilities brought about by gameplay and intersubjective field, it could also be considered as an element that holds the world together. Also, as Bainbridge explicitly states with regard to such key NPCs, "the richness of the story and the complexity of the events provide a credible vision of reality" (2010, p.23).

The organization of game structure regarding persistency creates a double effect: the game world exists in a continuous flow, but this flow is subject to regular discontinuities. This obviously creates a conflict; however, we can also see that this

kind of organization brings about certain social and economic dynamics which adds more layers to reality. Particular player activities and market conditions emerge that revolve around this mechanism. Therefore, it can be said that while this regularly discontinued persistency creates a conflict in the virtual world, this conflict also produces different relations that complexify the experience. Persistency is also empowered by temporality of the gameworld. There is continuous introduction of patches and expansion packs, which are presented by a will outside of that of the players'. The world continues to grow, and a historicity is achieved by this continuous addition of conflicts and wars. The social life also reflects on the historicity, channeling to new encounters, or sometimes reminiscing the old. The fact that the world had existed long before the players is also crystallized in the narratives of the battles. Players are only part of the conflicts in a pre-given position. The agency is on the part of the non-player canon characters, who create the history of the world by the battles that they fight. Player finds herself part of a long history, and has nothing other to do but play her part as to be a part of the flow. She is now part of a world that stands outside her, a world that is persistent. It should be remembered though that the persistency, or rather the whole world is made possible by the network of computers, as the gameworld actually exists at the servers of the game company. The next section will explore dynamics that stem out of the network of computers.

**Network of Computers**

The gameworld is sustained by a large network of computers and machinery. As indicated in the genre, this is an Online game, so the players must have an internet connection to play the game, which requires that they operate a computer in order to reach the game world. While the game's skeleton structure is contained within the personal computers, the game content is stored in the servers operated by Blizzard.

We can think of the network of computers as the backbone of the game structure. All game related content is stored on these computers, and information related to game is regulated by these machines. Mark Bell (2008) emphasizes: "…the computer keeps track of all the conversations, social connections and networks of people allowing them instant communication across national and geographical

boundaries" (p.4). This machine-based infrastructure provides a baseline to the virtual world, which ensures that all in-game mechanisms will function rationally. While computers are regarded as the hallmark of rational processing, it should be kept in mind that they are not without 'flaws'. Every now and then game system can be bugged or crashed, which creates glitches to the gameplay experience. This fact necessitates that gaps in the system should be supported by another framework, to ensure that the rational process is kept intact. In its Code of Conduct, Blizzard clearly states that they will not tolerate exploitation of bugs in case of their occurrence. Since the servers execute commands that have been coded by the developers of the game, enforcing bug exploitation punishment is up to game developers, and to the players who report on these bugs. There are cases where players are punished for taking advantage of such situations. For instance the world famous guild Ensidia (which was a merger of the top two best guilds in the world) members were banned for eight days when it was discovered that they had exploited a bug in the game to defeat the final boss of the content (Engadget, 2010). This was a big blow that led to the end of this guild, even though their players have been around since the very first launch of WoW. Blizzard makes no exceptions when it comes to sustaining integrity for all of its players. So, the rational infrastructure is supported by another rational rule-based regulation to ensure that the computer-based framework remains intact. Thereof, it can be deduced that the network of computers, alongside with rules established by Blizzard, secures the stability and consistency in the world.

The network of computers organizes the game in mirroring servers each of which are home to "emergent cultures" (Taylor, 2008, p.188). There are four regional servers of Battle.net; they are US, EU, China, and Korea regions. These regional servers are divided into subgroups to provide better service for locales. There are seven sub-regions of US (Pacific, Mountain, Central, Eastern, Latin America, Brazil, Oceanic), five sub-regions of EU (English speaking, French speaking, German speaking, Spanish speaking, and Russian), nine sub-regions of China (eight Chinese regions, and Taiwan), and there are no sub-regions in Korea (WoWPedia). While the servers in the US and China are divided according to geographical locations, the EU servers are divided according to language. It should be noted that

while this division aids the organization of the players (as there are no time-zone conflicts if one signs up according to one's region), a player has the freedom to choose to which regional server she will sign up. For instance, one of my guildmates was from Brazil, but she was playing in a European server. This meant that she had to join the raids in European time; therefore she managed her time according to European time-zone.

WoW operates on a regional server system, because it caters to millions of players simultaneously. This massive amount of player input means that there is a large flow of data which have to be handled by the machines. So servers can be thought as administrative bodies that record and regulate the events in the game world. It is the server that transmits data about the game content, and the data are uploaded to personal computers which are connected to the game world (Castronova, 2005). Servers handle large processes, and with massively multiplayer games, these processes are multiplied. To prevent crashes that might come about from these massive transactions, the game world is mirrored across multiple realms. The server system prevents any one realm from becoming too crowded, and ensures that connection times remain unharmed, and thus provide an experience that is "stable, smooth and consistent" (World of Warcraft, Beginner's Guide)

Also there are types of realms that cater to different play styles. There are four types of servers. First type is PvE (player vs environment) servers which are also called 'normal'. There are no additional rules that apply to gameplay other than the regular rules of the game in these realms. What I mean by additional rules will become clear once we get an understanding of what other types of server hold. The second type is PvP realm, which upholds Player vs Player play style as opposed to a PvE realm. The difference between the two is that in a PvP realm the players are automatically flagged for PvP combat which cannot be canceled by the player. So the player is always open to threat by members of the opposing faction. The third realm type is RP realms, in which PvE rules and roleplaying rules are applied. Roleplaying means that the players take on the role of a character with established personality, morals and goals while playing with their avatars. While RPG in the name of the genre suggests that there can be roleplaying in the game world,

Blizzard established specific realms to cater for the players who are interested in this aspect, where in others the players are not expected to act in-character. Roleplaying rules indicate that the players must always act in-character when they are socializing, and also a stricter naming rule enforcement is in place at these realms. The last type is RP-PvP in which players are again flagged as open to PvP combat, and rules related to RP realms also apply. With the server system, Blizzard ensures that it reaches a wide variety of audience, and tries to provide an environment for many of the play-styles desired by its players.

There are two factors about the computer network that hold a large determinacy over the social life of WoW: the type of the realm, and the population level of the realm. As mentioned above, the type of the realm imposes certain rules to players, and thus they produce different collective bodies. I will be examining two different realms in order to highlight the different socialities produced by different types of servers: a PvP realm (Jaedenar), and an RP realm (The Sha'tar). PvP realms are considered to be the best servers for good action: they present ample opportunities for interfaction battles, and one has to be careful in their journey among these realms because going AFK without first safely positioning the avatar could result in death. Also, one has to be prepared to get ganked[26], which is a common pattern of action in these types of realms, or even camped, which results in grieving on the part of the camped player. It is in these realms that inter-faction conflict is at its highest. As mentioned before, the places in front of famous raid intances are usually covered in corpses, and I have not yet seen an Alliance player and jumped on to kill her, even if I knew that I would fail. Another thing to note is that the contested spaces in front of the major cities (such as Orgrimmar and Stormwind City) are used heavily for dueling[27] purposes in these servers. As it is forbidden to duel inside the city, people encounter one another at these places. I have seen many people making reputation out of dueling at such places. All in all it would be safe to assert

[26] "Ganking is the process in which a group of charecters gang up on one or more players that do not have a chance to defend themselves, Or when one high level player does the same action to a player way below his or her own level" (Urban Dictionary)

[27] Dueling is a PvP encounter between two characters from the same faction. In order to duel, one must challenge the other player, and if the other accepts the challenge, the characters become enemy to each other and duel for defeating the other party. Duels do not result in death.

that PvP realms incite conflict among the individuals, and create a larger ground for war purposes. This is not necessarily the case in RP realms.

In the RP realm of 'The Sha'tar', I started playing as a Blood Elf, and therefore in short time I have made it to the capital city of the Blood Elves: Silvermoon City. From my experience with other servers I knew that this city was supposed to be quite empty, as it is not preferred by the players. However, as I made it to the Bazaar, the common gathering place for economic activities, I came across an unusual crowd, made up of players from various levels. At first I did not understand the reason for gathering at such a weird place, but then I realized that they were there for role-playing purposes. I ran toward them, occasionally jumping, and suddenly other players were emoting about my rude intrusion. Apparently I was not supposed to be jumping and running, and I was immediately warned by my peers that the appropriate way of acting was to walk and chat in public '/s'[28] channel. As a role-play enthusiast myself, I began hanging out with this crowd of Blood Elves, joining their drama and events. The type of the server had provided me with the experience of going in-character, and building a fictional background to my avatar, and thus altering the relationship between my character and the world. Now I was not just out to hunt enemies, but was having a pleasant chat at a niche, or participating to a ceremony in a nice looking venue. One thing to note for the RP realms is that the inter-factional conflict is not as ignited as that in the PvP realms. Even though from a general picture it is possible to see that these two factions are enemies, there were lines of communication established among them as well. At a party that I had participated, one of the elders of the crowd had brought in a Night Elf friend of his, which at first caused a nervous tension, but then was found to be acceptable by the attendees. Also, at the later stages of the game, I made friends with people who played on both factions, and I realized that the communication channels between these two factions were kept intact. While we were waiting for raids to start, people from both factions were gathering at the same spot, and were just emoting and making fun of each other. Communication between factions is made possible by the fact that on RP realms a player could start up a character on

[28] This is the 'say' channel, where the typed words appear in a cartoonish bubble over the character's head, and is displayed at the chat panels of everyone within a certain radius.

both factions, whereas on PvP realms a player has to stick with either of the factions. Although a small window for communication, this mechanism enabled players to establish relationships across the faction divide. So it could be said that these realms do not solely focus on the war aspect of the game, but provide a basis on which peace and friendship can flourish.

This sort of crude alignment of PvP servers with conflict and RP servers with peace is rather problematic though. I should highlight here that I have solely focused on interfaction relations in both these types of realms. As MacCallum-Stewart asserts, "In most cases, combat between Alliance and Horde players is the norm, and in PvP realms, the possibility that a player may be attacked by the opposite side in contested or enemy territory is high" (2008, p.40). Intrafaction relations, on the other hand, are affected differently. Drawing from the previously mentioned experience with spontaneous interfactual conflict (under synchronicity), it could also be said that as PvP realms provide a hostile environment to players, they incite cooperation among individuals (Öqvist, 2008). So, considering the complexity of sociality in the world, it is not safe to assume any categorical proximity as encapsulating the whole reality. We could observe friendship between Alliance and Horde players in certain cases at various PvP servers, or increased conflict in an RP realm. However, it is possible draw some general tendencies by relying on the materiality of the world. Thereof, I would like to emphasize once again that I am not attributing universal codes of behavior, but am rather trying to point out patternalized actions that are motivated by the material relations.

The other aspect of the network of computers that entails a specific social life is the population level of the realm. It is not clear what the maximum capacity of the realms is, to how many people they can cater to simultaneously. According to Realm Pop[29] (2016) in the US servers, the highest population is in the realm Tichandrius with 651.430 characters, and in the EU servers the most populated server is Outland with 635.998. These are really large numbers, but we should keep in mind that not all these characters log onto the game at once. Some of them are

[29] Realm Pop uses names and images from World of Warcraft, and data proprietary to Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.

twinks[30] and some of them are inactive. But compared to lowest populated servers, we can estimate that the discrepancy is quite large. The lowest populated server in the US is Tol Barad with 69.240 characters, and in the EU it is Suramar with 101.694 characters. So what does the population level indicate in terms of player experience?

The first, and least impacting factor is queue times. At high population servers players have great difficulty at entering the realm, especially at prime times, and at expansion or major patch releases. Waiting times could go up to over ten hours for those who play on most populated servers (see picture below). Of course these queue times are estimated on certain algorithms and do not give out an exact timeline, but they indicate that logging onto the game world could be a problem at specific times. So people living in populated servers have to watch out for when to log in. The lowly populated servers do not have such problems, but they are not exempt from the queue time especially at around expansion releases.

Expansion releases are those times when long-time inactive members, new players, and already active members all try to log onto the game at the same time. Everyone wants to experience the novel content at first hand. This creates an intense flow of data that has to be organized by the servers, which most usually lead to malfunctions and system crashes. When the first patch of the Wrath of the Lich King was released, everyone in the server was trying to raid the new instance. At some point the server was overloaded, and we have found ourselves floating in an undefined space, constantly falling and flying, with no enemies on sight, and unable to log off. This lasted for two painful hours, and came to a halt when some guilds gave up on trying to battle and go AFK for the day. Players generally expect such crashes and may avoid raiding at crucial releases, or log onto the game at minimum-intensity hours (such as daytime).

[30] A player's alternative (alt) character. Many players use alt characters to economically support their main characters, or to explore other race and classes.

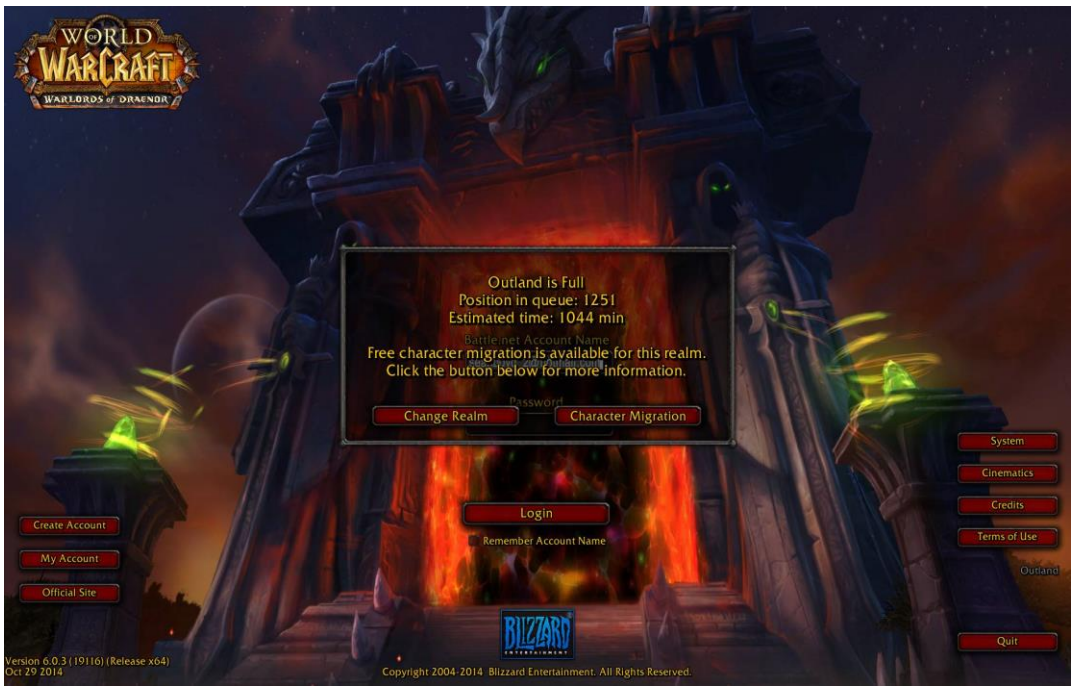



Figure 4 – Outlands server giving estimated time for logging in as 1044 minutes (World of Warcraft Forums, 2014)

Population level also entails specific relations. I have played on various servers with various population levels, and was able to observe the differences between high and low population servers. Let me begin by the experience of the low population server, which was once again in The Sha'tar. The most significant social feature in this realm was construction of belongingness to the realm as a whole. As there were not much people around, it was possible to encounter one individual more than once at common spaces such as the cities and raid instances. Over time, frequent encounters with others results in a lack of anonymity, and this could lead to a more community-like lifestyle where gossip and intimate relations could occur in the more public arena. Brignall and Van Valey liken this kind of emergence of social life as a kind of neo-tribalism (2008). It is not my intention though to suggest a tribalistic relation structure emerging in this world. It is nonetheless curious to see how the assumed boundary between public and private become easily interpenetrable. Let me exepmlify this part, because it may be hard to imagine how a private life can be maintained on an online realm. By private I do not refer to domestic relations conceived with the rise of modernity, but to a preserved space of communication, and thus relation. In WoW, this is the guild chat, the private

channels, and whispers. Moreover, by public I mean to signify the public channels of communication, such as trade channel, local channels, and /s or /y. In low population servers, since most people know of each other, interpersonal communication on public channels can be observed. It was a common practice of mine to make jokes when I saw a friend of mine make a call on trade channel for the goods he is selling. I would make comments on the trade channel, then another person would join us, and all of a sudden we are all chatting on trade channel, and occupying this public communication line that is commonly used for economic purposes for our private entertainment. This is also made possible by the fact that there would not be an intense flow of text on the trade channel. As the server is low populated, the public channels are not used as frequently. This allows a space for these channels to be used for other purposes, such as casual chat, teasing, and overall entertainment. This increases the chances of meeting with new people; and the frequency of encounters empowers the bonds between people, resulting in the development of long lasting relationships. Even though I have played on various servers and with many people, the friends that I have made on this server still last to this day. This does not mean that strong bonds are not formed in the high populated servers, but I indicate here that as the low population servers create more possibilities for interaction and frequent encounter among their inhabitants, the likelihood of forming long-lasting relationships, especially those that stem from random encounters, may be higher. This, ultimately, establishes a sense of belongingness not to just one's immediate social group (such as a guild) but to the server as a whole. One's social environment enlarges, and comes to include those who are not in their immediate surroundings. Drama spreads, interpersonal communication among different guilds even factions becomes common place.

Figure 5 - Orgrimmar, the capital city of Orcs in low population server

When we look at high population realms, the first thing that stands out is the level of crowdedness in common meeting places, such as cities or questing areas. These places become so populated at times that it may become quite a challenge to pick out friends from the crowd. Even finding the right NPC might be a difficult task, as characters may graphically move through each other, or stand on top of others. In these realms construction of belongingness differs from that in the low population servers. What we see in these realms is the emergence of anonymity that is caused by the intense stimulation in most of the places. There is so much input that one has to render, and it is not possible to keep track of everyone and everything. This in turn may result in isolation on the side of the player, and an increased individualization[31]. When I was leveling my character in the realm Jaedenar, I was frequently visiting Orgrimmar to complete my trainings. Every once in a while I would be needing something from the community, such as a portal for transportation, or a professional trait that could conjure an item for me. I would type what I need to the Trade Channel, and spam it every once in a while to make it visible (as the Trade Chat would be in a constant flow, it was not easy to make out

[31] A kind of blasé attitude, if we were to reference Georg Simmel's (1903) brilliant work 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'

who was asking for what), wait for a significant amount of time for someone to notice my cry for help, and hopefully get the trade that I would need. These trades were always conducted with in-game currency. Even simple portals that do not have a material cost would be given out for at least 10 golds. This was interesting for me, for in the low population realms people would be willing to help others in need, whereas in this realm people were disinclined in giving out help, even if you were ready to pay for their services at times. The intensity of population had pushed the players to be more individualistic: one would have to be self-sufficient, reliant on oneself or to those that are close to her (such as guild members or friends). If the player does not have a social group, the world would become a tough place for her, as she would be isolated and every activity would become a challenge (even transportation, as I have mentioned above). This brings us to how belongingness is constructed in these realms: as opposed to low population realms, belongingness is first to one's guild, or to her immediate social circle. The level of isolation that is prompted by increased anonymity pushes the players to form their own groups, or to join others. This does not have to mean that one cannot make acquaintances or create sustainable relationships with strangers, but it would take dedication on the side of the players to construct such relationships, whereas in low population realms the casual encounters that become frequent readily present such a space for these relationships to emerge.

Figure 6 - Orgrimmar in a high population realm

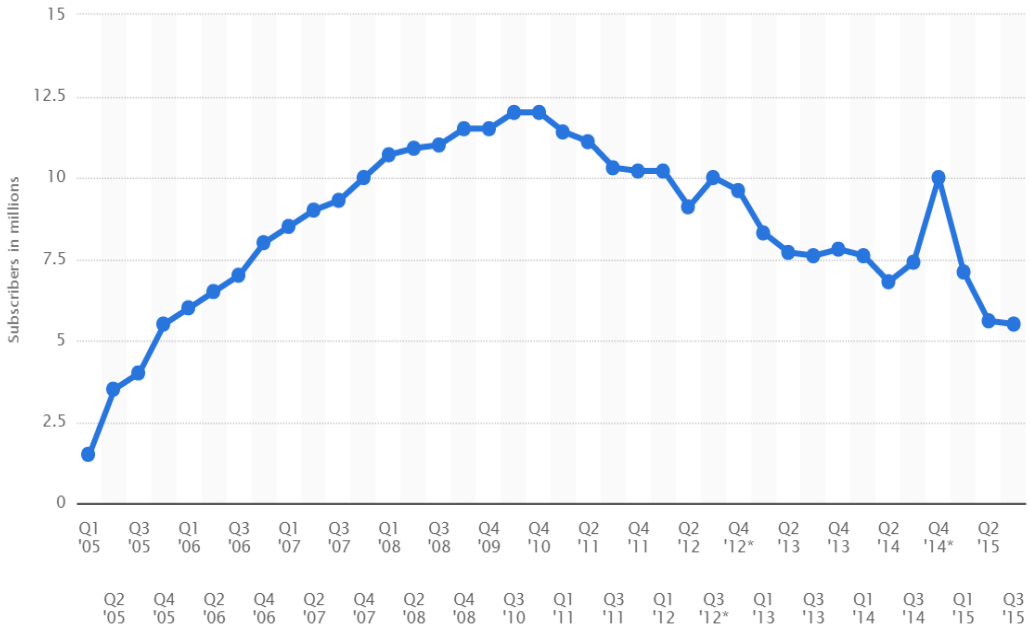
To sum up, the fact that this world is constituted within a network of computers that are organized under servers ensures that the game world operates on a rational basis. This rational structure is further enforced through Blizzard's Code of Conduct where it prohibits exploitation of bugs. The servers are organized regionally to overcome the difficulty of rendering a massive amount of data that flows from the players' personal computers, and to allow player organization to be easier, as time discrepancies are reduced with the localization. Also these servers are organized according to certain types, which allow certain play styles to be focused at a given server. Play styles also create different social lives in these servers, where either conflict could be fueled or communication could be fostered. The server population is another factor that comes into play in shaping the social life that takes place inside. The population levels ultimately have ramifications for the sense of belongingness that one establishes to her social environment. Surely it is not only the organization of the network of computers that decisively shapes the social life in WoW. There are mechanisms at place that regulates the network of people. The next section will focus on these systems.

**Network of People**

Azeroth is home to millions of players. The game world is identified as a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. The large number of people involved in this reality is specifically referred to on the game's identity. For games that fall under this genre, network of people is an essential component. MMORPGs' main difference from other games is the fact that they contain a large network of people within which everyone can find a place. WoW is a social game, where much of the content depends on teamwork and collaboration against environment or other players.

The term Massively Multiplayer hints us that the game hosts a large number of people. But how many people actually participate in this world? In its high times, WoW was home to 12 millions of people, which is comparable to size of a modern large city (Statista, 2016; see table below). It is the massiveness, the size of the network that adds to the complexity of the world, making it an area that requires the attention of the discipline of sociology. In WoW, the network of players is sustained through certain game mechanics that foster player organization. I will analyze this part through the institutional mechanisms, and leave out irregular forms of grouping. By institution I refer to rule-based patternalized mechanisms. In WoW there are three major forms of institutionalized forms of relating to one another: Looking For Group, Battleground system, and guilds.

Table 2 – Number of World of Warcraft subscribers from 2005 to 2015 (Statista, 2016)




Let me start with the Looking For Group (which will be referred as LFG in the remainder of this section) system. Similar to a communication channel, this mechanism is used to bring players together who are looking to group up to fight against Environment: the creatures and Bosses that dwell within a dungeon or raid instance. In order to join the LFG system, player has to indicate which role she will be performing within the group. There are three roles which a player can undertake: tank, healer, and damage dealer. Tanks are responsible for holding the creatures' attention on themselves and take (or tank) damage. Healer is responsible for keeping the group alive, and the damage dealers are obviously responsible for taking the enemies down by dealing damage to their health. It should be mentioned that while tanks and healers are rarer to find, there is an abundance of damage dealers. This due to the fact that fewer numbers of players in these roles are required to attend the battles, whereas damage dealers are needed in large amount. Also classes that allow tanking or healing roles to be taken are specific: it is not possible to be a tank as a Mage, or a healer as a Death Knight.

LFG system removes the necessity of players to manually search and find other players to join their adventures. As doing dungeon and raid runs becomes easier, people enjoy these teamwork based activities easily and probably more frequently. However, there is a downside to this mechanism. As the players are automatically matched and grouped, and the purpose of coming together is obvious, they can refrain from socializing with their group members. Since there is no incitement to communicate with each other (especially in the dungeons which do not require in-depth strategies, and are easier to battle through), making friends or forming meaningful relationships in these groups become more and more unusual. Let me give a contrasting example: Before the LFG system, one would have to whisper to strangers or use LFG channel to make calls for a dungeon. Players were obliged to talk to each other if they wanted to group up and battle the dungeons. Back in those days I have made many friends, because once we formed a group (which was a painful process) we would not want to let go, especially if it were a successful group. People would add each other on friend list, and keep in touch for further adventures. Once the LFG system was implemented, forming a group for dungeon purposes became much easier – all it takes is a wait time – but with the easing up of the process, the necessity of forming a social relationship with the group members was also removed. This is probably an unintended consequence that followed the design. As Yee et al. (2006) have deduced from large empirical data that they have gathered from WoW, "…game mechanics… have an immense impact on the resulting social formations and interactions within these spaces" (p. 340). This is clearly observable from my field work as well, and directly relates to the situation with the automated LFG mechanism.


Figure 7 - LFG Interface Panel

Another system of collaboration that is pre-designed by the game structure is the Battleground (which will be referred to as BG) matchmaking system. Battlegrounds are used for Player versus Player combat. There are two teams of Alliance and Horde players who compete against each other to complete certain objectives and achieve victory. There are various BGs from which the player can choose one to engage in. Players can enter the matchmaking system by using their Player vs. Player interface pane, and the system automatically creates groups and teleports the players to the BG. The system works quite similar to LFG, only this time the player works against another team of players instead of the environment. The BGs further reinforce the dispute between Alliance and Horde, providing a new realm of battle to players. Although the game rhetoric is continuingly moving away from conflict between these two factions to their joint effort against third party threats

(MacCallum-Stewart, 2008, p.47), these battles sustain the primordial conflict that lies in the foundations of their interrelation.

The last mechanism that I will analyze under player-associationg mechanisms is the guild system. Guild is a hierarchical system of association that provides a private chat channel, a calendar planner, and a private bank that can only be used by its members. Guilds are exclusive structures in this regard, and they provide a framework to the network of people. The hierarchy in the system is predefined by the game structure, and there are certain types of members that are also pre-given by the system. These are guild master, officer, and member. This three-level ranking system is however subject to change according to a particular guild's needs. For instance in a guild that I was leading we had six ranks: guild master who is in charge of the administration of the guild; officers, who are responsible for aiding the administration; class leaders who were responsible for guiding the guild members' towards the needs of the guild; raiders who were regular attendees; casuals who were usually socially bonded to the guild; and alts which are sub-characters of guild members. The guild master position has the ultimate authority over administrative mechanisms, and can adjust the capabilities of lower ranking positions. The strict hierarchical positioning could be thought as a bureaucratic system in which positions are vertically aligned, and capabilities and responsibilities are clearly assigned.

There are many types of guilds that may have different goals, sizes, and membership (Yee et al., 2006, p.344). I will exemplify four major types of guilds, and will also mention some other special types that emerge out of different political or social needs. The first type is a hardcore guild. These guilds focus on progressing into the raid content, and ambitiously achieving the end-game in the shortest period of time possible in order to be able to farm these contents. These guilds are much disciplined in their activities, committing excessive hours to the game in order to achieve fast progress and get highest level of items possible. They are disciplined in the sense that they require high levels of attendance (these guilds usually raid at least five days a week); they expect their members to be ready for raid (farmed up with items that can be necessary in battles); they implement certain restrictions on

the ways that a class can be played (such as appointing particular talent trees to particular players) in order to optimize the raid group to get the best results possible; and they require the players to be experienced with the game. Additionally they employ certain control mechanisms so that they could keep up their success in the game. These controlling measures may include but are not limited to regulating the means of communication by assigning roles certain channels (such as healer channel, tank channel), appointing class leaders to keep the members in check, and enforcing rules of behavior violation of which may lead the guild administration to take disciplinary measures (getting banned from raiding, reducing the rank of the player etc.). Hardcore guilds take the game at high priority, which may lead to a dissolution of the boundary between fun and serious, or leisure and work. Being in a hardcore raiding guild requires one to submit considerable amount of time; this is because the players must keep up farming in order to be able to provide maximum beneficence to their raid group. Also members of these guilds must devote themselves to practicing their characters and gathering as much information as possible about the game in order to excel at grasping the combat mechanics. This requires a serious sacrifice on the part of the player, which is rewarded with rapid progress of the game content, and earning the best possible items offered by the game. Members of these guilds are regarded with respect and are quite reputable in their realms.

The second type is casual raiding guild. These guilds progress at a much slower rate in the game content, and are not so demanding of their members. They accept new players, and do not offer top quality items, but they require less time, which can be desired by players who do not wish to devote majority of their time to the game world. They do not employ control mechanisms, they do not enforce any disciplinary measures, and they are not solely focused on raiding, but would rather focus on ‘enjoying’ the game. These guilds usually raid two times a week, and they do not require serious attendance from their members. Tension in these guilds are much lower than in the hardcore guilds, but accordingly their success level is much lower –if we take success as one’s progression into the end-game content-.

The third type is social guilds. These guilds focus on building social sites for people who are not so ambitious for raiding in their lives in the game world. Their aim is to enjoy the game at the pace that they like, and are not 'success' oriented in their ventures into PvE or PvP content.

The fourth type is the PvP guilds. These guilds exclusively focus on Player vs Player action. Members of these guilds excel at PvP mechanics, and they come to form high ranking Arena and BG teams.

There are also guilds that are created for special, sometimes political purposes. Members of these guilds group around certain interests. One of the prime examples of such guilds is the national guilds. Although the official language of the game is English, some players may be lacking in their knowledge of the language, or may feel more comfortable playing with people from a similar culture (Taylor, 2006, p.321). These people often form national guilds, and only recruit people from their nation. A common example of this could be the Finnish guilds. These guilds can also be ambitious in their progression into the end-game content, but their priority is to play with their fellow nationals. Another example of such guilds can be LGBT guilds. Online realms are much criticized for housing sexist and homophobic attitudes, and MMORPGs are no exception to such demeaning behaviors. For this fact, some members of LGBT community have decided to create guilds who either exclusively recruit LGBT members, or LGBT friendly guilds. The most famous example of this attempt is gayguilds.com, which is an umbrella site for LGBT members who seek a guild whose members are friendly and accepting.

The guilds are the backbone of association in the game world. Their institutional structure allows them to be persistent, and powerful means for achieving end-game content. However, as we have seen, what a guild life entails depends entirely on their composition and acclaimed purpose. I have tried to mention the most significant patterns of guild construction which can be encountered more commonly in the game world. Since the guilds are run by the players, there are as many types of guilds as there are types of players and play styles. This ensures diversification and a multicultural sphere to be attained.

In this section I have drawn the outlines of the frameworks through which people in the virtual world come to be associated. As can be seen from these structures, the way in which players are connected to each other is quite crystal in form. All possible positions are predefined by the game structure, but there is also a space that is open to modification by the players. While how they can formally relate to each other is drawn by the designers, they can manipulate these frameworks according to their needs. The major point that can be deduced from this outline of network of people is that players, or inhabitants of the world, are channeled into associating with one another. There are many mechanisms at work that organize these associations according to the requirements of certain game states. Even if a person starts the game as a solo player, she is always in the presence of other players. Mark Bell (2008) notes: "A user can go into the World of Warcraft and not speak to anyone but still interact with the environment. Even these solitary actions affect the world for every other participant." (p.3). A player may be guildless or groupless, but she is nonetheless part of a large network of people, and she continuously encounters other players. It is not possible to remain isolated from other players in the game world.

**Avatar**

As a tiny individual in a vast reality comprising other people, the player first creates an avatar through which the actions of the player will be performed on the virtual realm. Only when a player chooses her character from character creation pane that she can 'Enter World'. From that point onward, avatar becomes the plane through which limitations of the world are experienced. It is a digital representation beyond a simple label, which has agency, and is controlled by a human agent in real time. Both the avatar and the human behind the avatar have an agency (Bell, 2008). This is because the users command the actions of the avatar but it is the avatar itself that performs the action. Following this, avatar could be conceptualized as the filter through which the player operates. It is the first step to attunement to the reality of a virtual world. It defines the limits, the capabilities of the player.

Figure 8 - The start screen before a player 'Enters World'

In the gameworld each avatar is member of a pre-defined race (i.e. Human, Night Elf, Orc, Tauren etc.) and has a class (i.e. mage, warrior, priest, shaman etc.). Race, in Warcraft lore, is used interchangeably with our definition of species. It determines the physical attributes of an individual, and so is the primary framework of the digital "representation of self in the game" (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler, 2008, p.230): race defines the way that the avatar 'looks'. Races are preassigned to a major faction, Alliance or Horde; so when a player chooses a race, she also chooses her faction, or vica versa. For instance, the Undead are member of the Horde, and the Draenei are members of the Alliance. While there are thirteen races that are open to players, there is a wider variety of them found in the world which are not playable.

Class is the other defining characteristic of an avatar. It can be considered as the primary component of the play style of a player, because it determines the type of weapons and armor one can employ, as well as what abilities, skills, and spells that one will utilize throughout her journey in the world. As Blizzard states in their official guide, "Your choice of class is a gameplay decision: it determines what your character can and can't do, and what kind of experience you will have playing that character" (Blizzard, World of Warcraft Beginner's Guide). There are twelve

playable classes in the world, and each of them have unique attributes. For instance a warrior specializes in heavy melee combat, whereas a priest casts spells that affect the spirit of another player or enemy character.

Class and race provide particular sets of skills and talents to the characters which combine into a character role, such as tank, damage dealer, and healer. These roles are usually used in team combats such as raids and dungeons, and they can be considered as positions in a division of labor. Although the division of labor, in this manner, is not too complex (there are three main roles), as the advantages that player brings with her avatar depends on the class, it can be said that all twelve classes have unique contributions to a group[32]. For example, back in The Burning Crusade expansion pack, a Paladin with Retribution talent specialization was not a preferred line to be followed, because it was too weak in combat situations. Although it was the case, Retribution Paladins were sought for in hardcore raiding guilds, because they provided a unique buff to the party. So, once again, the division of labor can be more complex, depending on the play style of a group. All in all, class and race define the boundaries of an avatar, giving an estimation both to player and to others about what this particular avatar can and cannot do. It could be said that race and class provide the building block for a character, but it is up to the player to empower this character and give direction to the manner in which the avatar will progress.

[32] This mechanism is continually dissolving with each expansion pack. Unique attributes are coming to be available to at least two classes or races.

Figure 9 - Avatar's attributes and characteristics are displayed on this panel.

Empowerment is achieved chiefly through two means: by educational means, and by combat. The avatars can be trained in various professions. All avatars can have maximum of two primary professions, and can also acquire many secondary professions. The primary professions usually provide the avatar with a set of skills that are oriented for trade purposes. Professions do not directly provide combat abilities to a player, but can be used to enhance one's capacity in war situations. For example, my Priest character was a Tailor and an Enchanter, meaning that she could weave various items, and could use magical means to enhance them. Being a tailor or an enchanter does not have a direct impact on my battle capabilities, but the items and enchantments empower my skills, and thus create a significant difference. Secondary professions are less significant in battle situations. My character was a Fisher and a Cook, which meant that I could fish up and cook what I have. This entails that I could create certain foods that provide those who eat them certain buffs that could be helpful in battle situations, but are not as significant as having the buffs from my primary profession. As professions are trade skills, players can exchange or sell the items that they create by such traits. So having a profession actually creates a positive growth on a player's financial capacities; and overall implies an integration channel to each player to join economic activities. I should stress that although professions do not create as much impact as items do on overall

combat capabilities of an avatar, they are a must have for a raiding individual who wishes to maximize her output in a battle.

Empowering the avatar is also achieved by itemization. Wearable items are the primary means of fortifying the capabilities of a character, especially at the maximum level. These weapons and armors come in various qualities, namely common, rare, epic, and legendary. The higher the quality of an item, the more it increases the power of an avatar. High quality armor and weapons are usually found in raids. Once a raid group battles and defeats a boss, they can loot the corpse and get the items that the boss was carrying. This is a typical war situation: the conquerors 'possess' power over what has remained of the defeated entity, and decide on how to make use of them. The common choice in WoW is sharing the loot among eligible members. There are various mechanisms developed by players to achieve a fair looting system. Most of them usually rely on counting and rewarding participation and overall success of their members, what they contribute to the raid and to the guild in general. The items that are dropped by the boss are then allocated to members according to whichever system of looting that they are using.

Having a high quality item, then, means that the player has achieved a victory over an enemy, and has the proof to show off this victory. Also by equipping the items that are dropped by the boss, the avatar actually retrieves a portion of the power of defeated entity onto oneself, strengthening oneself in order to be better prepared for future, and possibly harder, enemies. This sort of accumulation of power by transferring the defeated enemies' sources of power (their items) points to a linear progress on the part of the avatar: boss by boss, the player gets better and better items, making use of them until she is able to defeat a more powerful enemy, and thus receiving more powerful items. The item level of a character therefore is a common reference point among the player base, where most of them believe that it shows the skillfulness of a player. This is not a commonly agreed statement though, as some of the players (especially those in hardcore guilds) strongly assert that the item level of a character does not represent much. This is because of the fact that raids are collaboratively conducted, and therefore the success of a raid only shows

the team working capacity, and not individual skill. It is not possible to complete any battles in victory if the raid group is not complementing each other through a well-thought and well-implemented strategy, which implies that while individual play skills are of significance, the overall success of a raid group does not directly indicate the success of a character. There is a negotiation regarding success of playing skills of an individual, and some meanings emerge from such debates that players adhere to according to their point of view. One thing that we could be sure of is that the more one participates in these battle practices that generate a source for empowerment, the more one produces difference, and moves upward in a social mobility scale (Tjong, 2015, p.33).

As these items are wearable, they change the way a character looks, giving the onlookers an estimate of how powerful a character is. In Cataclysm expansion pack, Blizzard introduced Transmogrification, which enables the player to change the way an item looks with another one's. Henceforth most of the avatars in the game world became more fashionable, but this meant that their appearance did not reflect their combat power. Transmogrification indicates a gap between the way an avatar looks and the capacity of that character. This gap had created another way for players to gain respect from others, which does not rely on the battle capabilities of a character. One can find many guides on the web about, for instance, where to find the best looking Shaman armor, and players dedicate significant thought and time in improving the cosmetics of a character. This is also regarded by some players as a way of fooling oneself, as cosmetics do not really signify any real strength or capability of an avatar. Players on this camp believe that it is the combat capacity of a character that determines the overall success of an avatar, and as changing appearance has no effect whatsoever on the warring abilities, they do not think that it is a worthwhile activity to pursue. Transmogrified or not, the way in which an avatar looks is obviously an important aspect, as it is the first thing that one sees when she looks at a character. Ragnhild Tronstad (2008) discusses the relation between appearance and capacity in the particular case of WoW through roleplayers, and comes to argue that capacity is not a disconnected category, and is very much bound to appearance (as something "fundamentally connected to performance") of a character (p.250).

Figure 10 - Avatar using transmogrified armor set.

All in all there is a negotiation process in attributing meaning to how one avatar looks and what determines its skillfulness. As exemplified above, there are changing views regarding how one can deduce or signify the power and skill level of a player. With Wrath of the Lich King expansion pack another way of evaluating the character of an avatar was introduced: achievement system. Before this system, what a player wanted to do in the world was dependent on the player: she would define her own goals and act accordingly. Achievement system had changed this, as it provides the players with pre-defined goals which reward them in achievement points, and sometimes items or titles. This system created a whole new ground for goal-oriented players, because now they are able to prove their commitment to the game world through completing various achievements. Just like wearable items, achievements are also visible to other players via their interface. This system encompasses almost all styles of play, defining a wide range of activities such as PvE, PvP, world exploration, and character progression. For instance, I was leveling

up a new character, and when I reached at level 10 I was immediately notified that I had received the achievement 'Level 10!' So there are those achievements that can be earned without putting an extra effort to complete, and there are those that require a serious amount of labor to unlock. One achievement named 'Insane in the Membrane' (the name hints us something), commonly regarded as the hardest achievement, requires the player to commit several days of in-game time. Players who complete this achievement receive the title 'Insane', and are revered among their peers for committing a lot of their time to a huge grind. Achievement system is another scale for players to negotiate success and worth, from which ideas about what proves one's skill as a player spring.

As the player comes to life in the game world through her avatar, the avatar becomes the body onto which the experiences in the world are inscribed. It keeps track of the influences of the gamestates, and such influences or the current state of the avatar is displayed on different interface panels (such as character sheets, or achievement panes). Although both the player and the avatar experience the game world, it is the avatar who is 'subject', 'doer' in the world. We can see this from Blizzard's Code of Conduct that directly regulates avatars.

Starting sentence of the first subsection in Blizzard's 'Code of Conduct' is that "Each user will either select a character name or allow the Service to automatically select a character name at random" (Blizzard Entertainment, World of Warcraft Terms of Use). This indicates that one must have a labeled representation in the gameworld. This is an operational rule, conditioning entry into the world. Following this, Blizzard makes a list of the rules where it explicitly excludes certain types of names. Let me examplify a few: names that impersonates another person, that use vulgar language, name of a religious figure, names related to criminal activity, that incorporate titles (rank, religious, or monarchistic titles), names of pop culture icons, gibberish and Leet are all prohibited from use. By excluding use of such names, Blizzard actually ensures that the gameworld will not pose harm or expose hostility towards neither its players nor to third parties. Also, by forbidding gibberish or Leet names from gameworld, it assures that the space remains as an RP world. A world where players are named 'asdasdasd'or 'xxnewbxx' would disrupt

the reality established there. Of course there are hilarious nicknames given to avatars, but by limiting harmful labeling, they aid player integration to this world.

Going through the rules, it is possible to see that these rules, in practice, are applied over the avatars. The first set of 'Code of Conduct' specifically deals with the name of the avatar, and it clearly states that one must have a character name to be a part of this world. It should be noted that violation of these rules result in disciplinary measures enforced over the avatars. Of course avatar is not a disconnected entity living in a digital world: it is representation of the player herself over the world. However, it is the avatar that is regulated by the rules, and it is the avatar's capacity that is once again defined by the rules. Avatar holds agency over the world, and the game developers act accordingly. Game masters refer to players by their avatar's name, even though they know the name of the account holder. In the game world, the player lives through the avatar. Avatar is constructed by the game developers as the body that is responsible from its actions, because it has agency over the world. This is also the case for the workings of the world. Everyone calls their friends by their avatar name. Everyone measures other's worth by examining their avatars. The world revolves around the avatars, and is made real through the actions of the avatars.

Under this subsection I have tried to give an outline of how avatar is constituted, and what social relations that avatars give way to. Avatars can be thought as the limits of the player, they attune the player to the world. While race and class provide the baseline of capabilities of an avatar, it is possible to empower such capabilities. To this end, an avatar can employ certain professions, and also equip items that she loots from the enemies that she conquers. Items bring about discussions on the worth of a character which is widely negotiated by the players. Blizzard introduced other measures of worth that do not solely rely on combating skills of an avatar, namely achievement pane. In addition to how an avatar is constructed and measured, on a more abstract level, we can see that avatar is a body that is inscribed by her experiences in the world. It is labeled and disciplined by the game world, and accordingly assembled as the individual of that world. The player

experiences the world through her avatar, but it is the avatar who inhabits the virtual world.

In this chapter, I have focused on analyzing how WoW is established as a virtual world. I have tried to focus on how game-related structures give way to social relations in the world. Under synchronicity, I have identified how communication is established in the world, and the way in which Azeroth as the common and shared landscape of WoW is constructed. Here, I have stressed how WoW breaks away from our material world by employing a specific sign-system and spatial narration, and establishes itself as a separate navigable land. Next, I have tried to trace how persistency is constructed in the game world. I have focused on how the flow of persistency is organized by non-savability mechanisms, and how disturbances to the flow created additional dynamics on the side of players. The way in which Blizzard sustains this virtual world is achieved by a network of computers, or in more general terms, a network of machinery. This massive association of technical artefacts provides backbone of the virtual world, as the reality is constructed and maintained through hardware and software. The fact that the system relies on machine-powered generation feeds consistency and stability to the world. This can be deduced from the rational framework under which computers operate. The network of players is what distinguishes MMORPGs from other games, and what enables me to conduct a sociological investigation in this realm. There are millions of players actively present in mirroring worlds. I have focused on understanding through what means the game structure sustains the massive amount of players and channels them into associating with one another. These organizational mechanisms enable a sense of 'being there together', which can be said to be the cardinal component of a social reality. The last component of the virtual worlds is representation through avatars. Avatar holds agency over the world. They are diverse, customizable, and responsible bodies of player behavior in the world, which are also used as measures of success in the game world.

All in all, what we see in this chapter is the manner in which this particular virtual world is constructed. The virtual world is enabled by such socio-technical composition, and it is the complexity and mutual constitution of these five

analytically distinct parts that combines into something that we may call a world on its own. The major theme that comes out from this analysis is, obviously, war. This game world is constructed through war, and it is the ultimate signifier of the world. Therefore relations in the world, expectedly, revolve around the notion of war. Although the game allows players to pursue other, non-combatant lives in the world (exploration is the common example of such play styles), main components of the game are nonetheless constructed according to battle situations. The first thing that a character does is killing other non-player creatures in the world. Every corner of the world has seen war, everyone talks about the war, and cities are brought to ruins; so it is not really possible to follow a pacifist lifestyle choice in the world. War is the fact of this world. In the next chapter I will try to analyze how an everyday reality around such a virtual world is constructed.

# CHAPTER 4

# CONSTRUCTION OF EVERYDAY REALITY

In the previous chapter I have focused on analyzing the aspects of 'World of Warcraft' that make it a virtual world. This formulation now allows me to infer how such a world comes to constitute an everyday reality. Here I should stress that this virtual world comes in a material or digital package, and is installed on a computer, which in the end allows the player to enter the world: a world that is predesigned and structuralized by developers. However, as an MMORPG, a massive amount of players coexist the world simultaneously, and their actions combined with the mechanisms of the game world come to produce a reality that takes on the qualities of an everyday reality. As Berger and Luckmann explain "The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene" (1966, p.35). There is an already-existing world that has a symbolic structure in place, and whence the individual partakes in this reality she comes to reproduce this structure.

According to Berger and Luckmann the reality of everyday life is pragmatic, intersubjective, and taken-for-granted. It is these principles around which everyday life is organized. Pragmatic refers to the 'here' of one's body and 'now' of one's present. Everyday life is the immediate surroundings of a person. By intersubjectivity they imply the construction of a common-sense, how the subjective meanings of the participating individuals come to be objectified in this realm. Finally, taken-for-grantedness refers to the unquestioned side of this reality, to the fact that "it does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.37). I should make note that these dimensions are only analytically separate, and they are experienced simultaneously

in everyday life. The zone of 'here and now' is enabled with a pragmatic motive, which is socially constituted through objectivation practices, and these objectivations present themselves as mundane facts of life that require no additional verification. It is the intermingled relationality formed among these aspects that gives it a quality of everyday reality.

They also emphasize the spatial and temporal structure of the world of everyday life. They put special effort in explaining the implications of temporality, which is taken to be an intrinsic property of consciousness (1966, p.40). The order brought about by temporality is of great consideration, because "[o]nly within tis temporal structure does everyday life retain for me its accent of reality" (p.42). While they do not lend much importance over spatiality, it is an important dimension in my study, for space is a cardinal pillar of virtual world. In my analysis I will point out how these dimensions are organized in relation to the construction of everyday reality.

For the purpose of showing the everyday reality dynamics present in WoW, I will utilize the aspects of our virtual world definition. Not all aspects of virtual world equally feed into the dynamics of everyday life in the game world: while some have great implications for a specific dynamic, they might not be related to other layers of everyday reality. For this reason, I will only mention those that provide a material aid to the construction of this reality. I will begin this part of analysis with 'here and now', continue with the intersubjectivity, and lastly present the taken-for-grantedness.

In relation to 'here and now' aspect of the everyday reality, I will be mentioning three chracteristics, the first of which is avatar. This is an important characteristics in discussing the zone of 'here and now', because it is the avatar who is actually 'there and then'. The avatar's capacity defines the 'now' of the player in the world, whereas it's 'here' is manipulated by the actions of the avatar. Here a disparity between avatar and player may be implied, but a bridge can be constructed by focusing on moments of action performed synchronously by the avatar and the player; which brings us to second characteristic that is synchronicity. The player is able to navigate the world by controlling her character synchronously, and is also able to manipulate the world within (mediated) reach. Synchronicity, as an aspect

referring to spatial organization, locates the avatar in the world, and cues whatever is in her immediate reach. Last aspect through which we can understand how the 'here and now' is maintained in the world is network of computers. It is through the interaction of the machines that 'here and now' is mediated to the players, and is therefore of importance to our analysis.

Second characteristic of everyday life is the intersubjectivity. This aspect of reality will be analyzed through three main traits of virtual world, namely synchronicity, network of people and avatar. I will first focus on synchronous communication, especially the role of language in production of an objective reality. Next, I will be examining the network of people, which has the most obvious relation to intersubjectivity. In order to bridge Berger and Luckmann's understanding of intersubjectivity with our virtual world, I will focus on communication and guilds in particular, and then processes of socialization and acculturation in general. Lastly, motioned by Berger and Luckmann's emphasis on face to face communication, I will be highlighting how avatars organize the intersubjective dimension; and also focus on the emergence of typificatory schemes once again in relation to avatars.

The last aspect of everyday reality is taken-for-grantedness. This aspect provides us with the facts of life, the common-sense. In order to relate this to the virtual world at hand, I will firstly focus on how avatars convey the already objectified meanings of the reality. As vehicles of players, avatar defines how one can 'be' in the world. Secondly I will be mentioning how the network of computers contribute to taken-for-grantedness. This will be discussed through first the server system, and then I will explicate what having a network of computers itself implies in the world, and what notions does it prompt to be taken-for-granted in this reality. Persistency is the last characteristic that will be mentioned in relation to taken-for-grantedness. Under this characteristic, I will specifically focus on mechanisms of accumulation which the reality at hand imposes onto the players; and through this will show how a social life emerges.

Before starting the analysis, I would like to mention how these characteristics of everyday reality resonate in terms of their analytical relationality. The zone of 'here and now' refer to setting of this reality. It is the zone that is within the pragmatic

reach of the individuals, and is therefore open to manipulation. The reality is also home to a social life, and is therefore constructed intersubjectively. This construction is operated through signification processes, and comes to form what passes as knowledge in a particular society. Furthermore, this construction implies a taken-for-granted world. This taken-for-grantedness is rather diffused and it may be hard to trace its crystal form. Because of this fact, I have tried to uncover the common-sense reality in order to show what is taken-for-granted in the everyday life of this world. So while 'here and now' refer to a spatio-temporal structure, intesubjectivity emerges as the mechanism that objectifies the world by constructing knowledge; and the common-sensical knowledge, an unproblematic flow sustained in a reality, shows us what parts are taken-for-granted in a reality. With this operationalization in mind, I will begin my analysis with a discussion on how the 'here and now' zone is sustained in the virtual world of WoW.

**Here and Now Zone**

Berger and Luckmann, in their original work, mention that there are two "zones of everyday life": here and now, and there and then (1966, p.22). The 'here and now' refers to the world within reach, to that which is in one's immediacy; and the 'there and then' refers to the world that is outside the reach of the individual. What this division implies is the fact that the here and now requires one to be in face-to-face situation with the others. It also means that a world that is outside the reach is not of great concern to one, as it is not directly accessible to one's manipulation. Now this division is hard to maintain in parts of the world that come to be connected to each other via Internet. Mediated communication has become a commonplace, bringing the world that is supposedly outside of the reach from face-to-face level to the tip of one's fingers. Therefore it is now possible to conceptualize the here and now as "world within mediated reach", which was later on included to the discussion on everyday reality by Schutz and Luckmann in 1973 (p.44).

The 'here and now' zone is called pragmatic for one's attention to the world around her is "mainly determined by what [she is] doing, have done, or plan to do in it" (1966, p.36). The immediate reach of a person is directly accessible to one's manipulation, and therefore is of greatest importance to her. Berger and Luckmann

also accentuate that the structure of everyday life is organized both spatially and temporally, which has a direct connotation to 'here and now' aspect of this reality. The 'here' includes the spatial formulation and the 'now' refers to temporality. They put special emphasis to this temporal dimension, which I will discuss in relation to avatars.

I will now try to analyze the parts of the virtual world that foster the zone of 'here and now' in the reality of everyday life in the game. Avatar, synchronicity, and network of computers have direct implications for the construction of this zone, and I will focus on these aspects respectively.

The player enters the world through an avatar. It is the physical representation of the player, a body of agency in the world. Player experiences the world through her avatar, and is located in the world by the characteristics of her avatar. It is the immediate surroundings of an avatar that makes the 'here and now'. In the last section I have discussed how avatar is the body through which actions in the world are inscribed upon, and how it is the entity that is subject to empowering processes provided by the game structure. This implies that our character in the world has a historicity: she is going through a journey in this world, and every major input has an output that adds to the development of the character's capabilities. The 'now' is closely related to the current progression level of a character, the point that she currently occupies in the temporal sequence: her current power position. The history of character development "determines [one's] situation in the world of everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.42). Avatar's capabilities are always in a process of linear progression[33]: this is due to the design of the game. Avatars start as weak characters and develop into mighty heroes. As a level one Blood Elf Priest, I obviously was no match for creatures above my level. But 'now' as a level 100 epic hero who has seen many wars, achieved many victories, I am able to take down almost anything in my sight. The now of my presence provides me the current limitations, and thus determines what the reality ahead holds for me: will I be crawling in the world, begging for mercy or waiting for help; or will I be able to take down whatever is standing before me, and thus emerge as a powerful body in

[33] This kind of emphasis on progress and success is criticized as being a 'capitalist fairytale' (Rettberg, 2008, p.20)

the world. Also, as I have exemplified while discussing empowerment, the current equipment of my character determines which raid content will I be eligible for to a large extent. Yet, as the biography of my avatar can be displayed on 'Achievement pane', I can show historical evidence as to my previous success, and be able to get a better position than I would under normal circumstances. The use of temporal structure, or the way of keeping biographical records in virtual world, however, is not so similar to 'real' world. Achievement system only keeps track of the successes of the avatars, and thus actually creates a reality that revolves around 'who achieves what'. This reality is composed of what one can successfully accomplish, who she has defeated, and what feats of strength one possesses. This kind of interface design complements the understanding about progression in linear fashion, and can be seen as quite useful if one considers the context in which the game world is constituted: this is a game of war, and the only thing that counts in war is whether one succeeds or fails, whether one wins or loses. Losses can be turned into successes with enough commitment of time and effort. War is the reality of this everyday life, and it consequently organizes the world as having a linear developmental scope over which players march ahead.

Another fact that this kind of bookkeeping regarding the 'now' of an avatar promotes is rational calculation. All the character traits and attributes are quantified and displayed in Character pane. What the avatar's 'now' holds of can be seen in numerical fashion. This quantification lends itself to calculation of one's capacity in battle situations. The attributes of a character are displayed as statistical data to the player, so that she could calculate her current position of power, and make more calculations over in order to squeeze out the optimum values that would be essential in excelling various combat situations. This is a very detailed panel of character information, and this level of quantification makes the world a rational place of skill stats[34] that provide a metric for measuring the capacity of an avatar. Of course this does not mean that the player will realize the full force of her character, but the potential lies in there and is open to various analyses.

[34] Abbreviation for "statistics"

The ‘now’ consists of knowledge about the situation of an avatar in the world. The ‘here’ on the other hand is about the immediate surroundings of the avatar. The avatar moves in the world, and what the reality ahead holds for her is crystallized on the screen of the player. Actions performed by the avatar in the game world become of utmost importance to the player, as she is in active manipulation of her immediate surroundings. There ‘here’ of the avatar is also the ‘here’ of the player, for the player comes to inhabit the virtual world through this digital representation. Avatar is the crystal form of the player in the world. I should reflect on my in-game experience here that the assumed boundary between the representation and the represented (avatar – player) is minimized at the moment of action. This immersion process enhances the sense of ‘being there’ as Schroeder (2006) argues. Player becomes the avatar that she is controlling, especially at times that requires an intense participation on the part of the player. I have observed this more concretely in combat situations where an exquisite orchestration of an avatar’s capabilities should be performed by the player in order to excel and achieve victory over one’s enemies. This requires the player to be acutely aware of her surroundings, to pay maximum attention to her enemy’s movement and attacks, and to constantly relocate herself (when needed) for the sake of ensuring a clean success. The excessive amount of stimuli that should be controlled requires the player to be intensely focused to the situation in the world that surrounds the avatar. The player at that zone of ‘here and now’ is actually manipulating one’s immediate surroundings by controlling the avatar.

The way in which avatar moves is another important point, for ‘here and now’ is manipulated through control of the avatar, which brings us to synchronicity. Players control and move around the world with their avatars by a combined use of keyboard and mouse. Player’s body is extended into virtual world by manipulating the control devices of their computers. The actions performed by the players on the keyboard and mouse are synchronously reflected into the virtual world, and the player’s actions simultaneously become avatar’s actions. The player moves the avatar’s body in the world by control keys, and therefore player’s ‘here and now’ actually becomes the world that she is operating in, which is WoW in our case. When I am playing, I am actually just hitting buttons and rotating my camera view

with the mouse, or that is what I look like to an outsider. The purpose of such movement is to manipulate the in-game situations, for that world is made my immediate reach via the computer. Sheila Murphy (2014) explains this process as an interaction between the player and the software. She specifically assigns the controllers as "the yoke between player and game. It is the site of physical interactivity that links a player with his or her in-game representation and proxy, be it avatar or blip" (2014, p.19). In this sense, controlling, or manipulating as Berger and Luckmann call it, the 'here and now' is more of an attribute of the relationship between the player and the screen. I will elaborate on the specificity of the process of such relationality under the network of computers.

Another dimension of synchronicity is its provision of a common space that is shared by the players. It is the space upon which objects and relations come into being. It is possible to distinguish between the zones of everyday life better in this realm: the world within my immediate reach, my 'here and now' is the location of my avatar, and the parts of the world that are outside the view of my camera are also outside my reach. I may be in communication with those parts, but my full attention only stretches once I navigate to these places. I could lend some manipulation over those parts but I can only do it through communication. The 'here and now' is already spatially ordered by game developers, and manipulation of it depends on the presence of my body. For instance, when I am grinding[35] I am only engaging with wherever my avatar is, and am focused on whatever I aim to accomplish (which usually means killing enemies). If I get information regarding some other activity to which I can join, such as a PuG or a city raid[36], I would have to leave the current place in which I was operating, and move to the specific location in order to manipulate the reality that is taking place over there.

The spatial organization defines what 'here' holds for the player. She is cued by various visual and audial input as to what 'here' is about, and what can be the possibilities of action. For instance when I move into a contested territory where Night Elves are residing, I can see that my immediate surroundings are made up of

[35] This is the process of engaging in repetitive tasks for financial or other sustenance purposes.

[36] Players are able to raid counter-factions' main cities.

long old trees, and various forest creatures. This spatial organization hints to Night Elves' affiliation with nature school of magic, which is complemented by a music with unworldly tones. As I enter this zone of 'here and now', I have an idea as to what this place holds for me. I will be encountering more Alliance players; the NPC enemies that I battle will be the common enemies of Night Elves, namely corrupted creatures. I come to possess this information regarding what the 'here' consists of via the common-sense knowledge that I acquired through a socialization process. The zones are specifically differentiated and spatially ordered in Azeroth, so all of them hold unique characteristics so as to define the place, and as to notify the player of the reality of a particular zone. The consistent composition of spatial construction aids in conveying the common-sense of the world.

The other characteristic that adds to pragmatic aspect of everyday life is the network of computers. This world is constituted by a network of machinery, including the personal computers at use by the players. Computers allow mediation, and ensure a continuous flow between the game world and the player. The player is ported to the everyday reality of our virtual world via her computer. The here and now is brought to her by the network of computers in which the player operates. There is a mechanical process that ensures a continuous flow between the player and the world which is sustained by the network of computers.

Machines send information to each other, receive data, and ensure what will remain in the 'here and now'. What or who is included in the 'here and now' is regulated by the code of the game, administered by the servers, and information regarding the components that make 'here and now' is distributed by the servers. Here we see a confrontation between the machines: my computer connects me to the world, and through my manipulation of its control devices it comes to locate my avatar in the world. In order to locate me in the virtual world simultaneously with others, it sends information regarding my actions and positions in the world to the game server; this information is then processed by the server and distributed to other computers, ensuring that while I occupy this 'here and now', I remain in sync with other players.

The importance of 'here and now' also implies a connection between individuals who share the same immediacy. For Berger and Luckmann communication between those who come in close contact is of utmost importance in sustaining the everyday reality. In our case this communication is mediated. This part of the analysis concerns intersubjectivity, and will be explained under the next heading.

**Intersubjectivity**

The second characteristic of everyday reality is intersubjectivity. People in everyday reality come into contact with each other and their zones of 'here and now' "continuously impinge on each other as long as the contact situation continues" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.43). Thus an intersubjective field is created and sustained by either face-to-face or mediated relations. Intersubjective sphere enables objectifications to take place which are shared by the individuals as common-sense knowledge. Berger and Luckman depict this aspect of everyday reality as follows:

> I know that my natural attitude to this world corresponds to the natural attitude of others, that they also comprehend the objectifications by which this world is ordered… I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and their meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality. (p.37)

Intersubjectivity provides a space of already objectified meanings, and the participating individuals further objectify the reality by signification processes. Here, language emerges as the prime sign system that "is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulation of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations" (p. 53). This accumulation refers to a social stock of knowledge. In their book, Berger and Luckmann place knowledge as the pinnacle of social organization:

> Knowledge… is at the heart of the fundamental dialectic of society. It 'programmes' the channels in which externalization produces an objective world. It objectifies this world through language and the cognitive apparatus based on language, that is, it orders it into objects to be apprehended as reality. (p.83-84)

From this point it could be deduced that a study that takes its object as what passes as knowledge in a given society will pave the way for an analysis of its reality.

The fact that this shared stock of knowledge is constructed by language indicates that different everyday lives will produce different realities. This is because language originates in the everyday life, and therefore it refers to the life from which it emanated. Berger and Luckmann explain

> [I]t refers above all to the reality I experience in wide-awake consciousness, which is dominated by the pragmatic motive (that is, the cluster of meanings directly pertaining to present or future actions) and which I share with others in a taken-for-granted manner… I encounter it [language] as a facticity external to myself and it is coercive in its effect on me (p. 53).

According to Berger and Luckmann, then, expressivity among individuals objectify the reality, and create a social stock of knowledge. This social stock of knowledge is variant according to objective reality of a social group, and can be said to be integrating the common sense of the participants. The new coming individuals (children in Berger and Luckmann's case, newbies[37] for mine) are then socialized into these knowledge processes.

The reality under investigation therefore could be thought as producing its own facts of life, its own social stock of knowledge. This is because the 'here and now' of that reality is composed of the aspects of a virtual world, and thus will lay ground for a specific knowledge to emerge. The particular characteristics of a virtual world that come into play in the process of objectification are synchronous communication, network of people and representation by avatar. These characteristics will be discussed in relation to how they contribute or make way for the emergence of an intersubjective world to come into existence.

As highlighted before, the most significant aspect of this genre of games is its massive inclusion of individuals to its social body. The game is shared by many players, and its social dimension is seen as being the most interesting side to these games (Lazzaro, 2004). This may be due to the power of intersubjectivity in

[37] Players who are new to the game world. Should not be confused with 'noob', which refers to inability of a player to strategize or cope with her surroundings.

generating reality. Berger and Luckmann stress the "reality-generating potency" of conversation in their work. This is due to the objectification brought about by language. They say that

> ...language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it. Conversation is the actualizing of this realizing efficacy of language in the face-to-face situations of individual existence (1966, p.173).

Communication by language, then, is of great importance to the processes of both generating and maintaining the reality at hand.

Our case fits well with this concern, for, as stated above, MMORPGs are primarily social spaces. As a shared space among individuals, this reality is one of intense communication. In consideration of the analysis we have seen in the previous chapter, communication is one of the most significant aspects of synchronicity, as it sets the channels for players to organize themselves without delay. We could think of some communication channels as public spaces, which was also discussed in the previous chapter. Some of these channels are public in the sense that they allow participation worldwide to both factions. I am depicting these public channels as spaces, because they are organized through spatial terms: zones are limits of these channels, and they bring about means of communicating with individuals who do not necessarily share an immediate surrounding with you. The public channels are common zones for conversation, and are the main spaces for reality to be generated and maintained. The social stock of knowledge is distributed via these channels, and players are socialized into these realms primarily by means of communicating with others.

As was exemplified in the previous chapter a different language is used in this world. Expectedly, this language is not quite understandable to an outsider, as the signs employed by this meaning structure refer to objects and phenomena of another world. The particular language utilized in the game world indicates what this reality holds for its participants. The first characteristic of this language is its intense use of internet slang. Majority of the players are fluent in this internet originated language, and they represent their inheritance by commonly employing such signs. This part of the language, however, does not signal a unique appropriation of the particular

virtual world, as most of the online games make use of such language. The second characteristic, once again in relation to the internet slang, is frequent employment of abbreviations. Players typically resort to use of abbreviations mainly due to their efficiency in conveying large meaning with a small effort. This is a codified language that enables players to conveniently communicate in battle situations. During combat players are preoccupied with manipulating their 'here and now', and are under great pressure to win against the enemy, especially if it is a challenging encounter. This means that they are in deep engagement with their skills and abilities, and may not have the luxury to make time and type whatever they wish to tell their fellow raiders, which necessitates employment of abbreviations. I should stress that most of the guilds use voice-communication in order to ensure a better contact among their raiders, but this does not mean that they do not rely on such language in their everyday lives. This language of abbreviations is universal in the game, connecting the cosmos of the game at large together.

The use of abbreviations makes the language more obscure to outsiders and newcomers, because even skills and names of the places are reduced to their initials. So when a player is asking for BoM, the other should know that she is asking for a Paladin buff called Blessing of Might. Or in another case if a party is listing to combat in LBRS, we can find them in a dungeon called Lower Blackrock Spire. The locations, abilities, spells, in short all objects in the world are subject to abbreviation; and as mentioned above they are frequently used by the players. This language clearly refers to this world and cannot be employed to refer to other things in other realities. Such use of language provides uniqueness to the reality at hand, and makes it possible for a specific culture to emerge.

Of course the reality at hand is not a homogeneous one; the meaning associations may vary according to social groups. Players' interactions with others in the world of "everyday life is constantly affected by common participation in the available social stock of knowledge" (ibid, p. 57). The social stock of knowledge that is created by such common participation is dependent on the objective reality of the participants. This means that knowledge that is shared by the player body of a particular realm – let's say members of The Sha'tar realm – is not necessarily found

in those who are in Jaedenar. This is because of the fact that these two realms employ different play styles and produce and maintain different objects in their reality. So it could be said that common participation or the level of availability of a channel does not automatically imply a universal common-sense. Not all individuals partake in conversations in the public channels, but they nonetheless come and see and thus become a part of these objectivation processes; however the public channels are accompanied by more private channels that can be used to share qualitatively different knowledge. Berger and Luckmann assert that "[p]articipation in the social stock of knowledge thus permits the 'location' of individuals in society and the 'handling' of them in the appropriate manner. This is not possible for one who does not participate in this knowledge" (ibid, p.56). Thereof, it can be deduced that individuals who are part of different objective realities come to produce different meaning associations. A player who is in a casual guild would have a different sense of reality than one in a hardcore raiding guild, as her participation in the social stock of knowledge is directly bound to her position in the everyday life. For her, killing the end-game boss might be a dream, but for a member of a hardcore guild that boss is nothing more than an enemy to be farmed week after week; the boss fight might be a real challenge to members of a casual guild, and it could be just a mundane combat to members of a hardcore guild. The manner in which players associate with each other, or network of people, then, influences construction of a social stock of knowledge.

From a more abstract position though, as most of the objectivations are provided readily by the game world, there is a common-sense world that is shared by the players. Knowledge pertaining to how to kill a monster, or how to be an Orc Hunter, on how to complete a quest is communicated to the players by the game. This creates a unified but rather crude knowledge about the workings of the world. More specialized knowledge is produced by the players collectively in other areas of the Internet –but as these areas are not part of this study, I will not delve deep into them. Suffice to indicate that it is the players who produce knowledge of this world through conversing about the workings of the world. Therefore spending time in content related to gameplay is crucial for success of a player, for it allows the player to integrate into a larger social stock of knowledge.

An important thing to point out in relation to the network of players is the process of socialization. Newbies form an important part of the player base that continuously and rapidly come to be socialized into the common-sense world and the social stock of knowledge by various agents. Steinkuehler emphasizes the learning practices employed in MMOGs, and states that "Through participation in a community of practice, an individual comes to understand the world (and themselves) from the perspective of that community" (2004, p.523). Socializing into the world and learning what this reality holds for the individual is thus shaped to an extent by the participating players' attunement to different social groups. This claim is in accordance with Berger and Luckmann's aforementioned argument regarding the construction of a social stock of knowledge. Associations between the players are therefore of importance, and hold agency over the processes of socialization. Berger and Luckmann explain this process through primary socialization in children, and place significant others in the position of reality generating entities. However in their case a child has no choice over whom they will socialize into the greater reality; whereas in our case the player is able to choose the agents of socialization, at least to a certain degree. Alongside the communication channels available in the game, guilds and friendships also influence the way in which a newbie comes to be part of the everyday reality.

Entering a new world could be confusing for a newbie, especially if she is new to the genre of RPGs. Player traverses in the world and comes into contact with a complex combination of objects and events that do not automatically accommodate their meaning to the knowledge of the player. A player could understand what an object does, what the limits of an object is, but going about it individually would result in a long period of learning that would be painful to the player. Socializing agents ease this process and convey the values and meanings pertinent with the respective social stock of knowledge. Player associations are therefore in a position of power in influencing the future social formations.

Among these agents some are more affluent with the knowledge of the game, and are therefore regarded with higher respect. These are members of high ranking guilds who have proven themselves in battles and wars. Their success with

manipulating combat situations reflect on their capabilities for constructing knowledge, and this knowledge is sometimes shared by the guild members in various online extra-game domains. These high stakes guilds provide battle strategies for those who wish to better understand and succeed future enemies; by visibly participating in the social stock of knowledge, they come to "hold a symbolic power among their fellow players, representing a play experience that many may aspire but in fact never quite achieve" (Taylor, 2006, p.45). They nonetheless share their knowledge of everyday reality with their fellowmen, and contribute much to the social stock of knowledge in general about the game. Their itemization trends become dominant throughout the world, and their battle strategies appear as the most legitimate ones. Their objectivations become an important factor in the organization of everyday life and meanings that emerge from within.

Socialization process is complemented with acculturation. As this is a world that is home to a massive amount of players, a normative system emerges from interactions among individuals. Newbies are acculturated into the everyday reality further by these emergent norms about social behavior. These norms regulate how to behave at various settings; they are grounded in the practices of the players, and are once again pertinent to the already objectified world. Norms about how to loot a boss in a PuG, how to ask a stranger for a portal, and how to behave in guild raids are all formulated by the players; the newcomers observe and engage with others and come to employ these normative behaviors over time. Those who deviate from the established norms may become subject to various disciplining mechanisms. For instance if some player hijacks an item from a raid by dishonest behaviors and is caught while doing that, players in the group may decide to reveal this person as a 'ninja'[38] and expose her identity over at public channels and thus disrupt her potential alliances; or they can report her to game masters and ask for appropriate punishment. The mechanisms of exclusion and punishment are employed in dealing with such breaching of normative behavior.

[38] This term is used to refer to people who steal items in raid groups.

I should conclude this part about by stressing that availability of public communication spaces allows a large network to construct and share social stock of knowledge. These social bodies also aid in social and cultural integration of new comers. However these guilds or social circles are not the sole carriers of knowledge about the everyday reality of this virtual world. Next we will look at how avatars also construct and aid in the construction of this social stock of knowledge.

Avatars as interfaces of the virtual world reflect the already objectified reality. These tokens of representation provide the basic common-sense knowledge about the world. Avatars could be seen as types of individuals occupying the world: one could be a Tauren Shaman, or a Draenei Priest. As it is through the mediation of avatars that players come into 'face-to-face' contact with each other, one could say that these typificatory schemes of faction, race, and class hold some degree of determination of the relationship between players. Berger and Luckmann state that "The reality of everyday life contains typificatory schemes in terms of which others are apprehended and 'dealt with' in face-to-face encounters" (1966, p.45). If we take avatars as crystal forms of such typificatory schemes, we could see how the reality of this virtual world is readily imposed over the players.

As mentioned before, avatar creation screen initiates the player to a world of two factions: the Horde and the Alliance. The player has to choose one of these factions in order to continue. Battle between these two factions have long been the subject of Warcraft franchise: their wars and alliances make up the history of this world. The gameworld, by forcing the player to choose one of the either factions, imposes this knowledge onto the player, and presents primary typificatory schemes to the players. Disconnectedness of these two factions (there are no communication channels available between these two factions) disable the possibility of melting down of these schemes, on the contrary, it reinforces them. Berger and Luckmann state that face to face level of relations indulge in high flexibility, for "whatever patterns are introduced will be continuously modified through the exceedingly variegated and subtle interchange of subjective meanings that goes on" between the participating individuals (p.44). However there can be no 'interchange of subjective

meanings' among the Alliance and Horde players. What they can communicate between themselves are combat abilities and emotes. This creates the condition for a continued battle among the factions, and further ails the already broken relations. I would suggest that while typificatory schemes germane to factions have a large effect on the social reality of the world, other avatar-related characteristics, such as race and class, do not really crystallize as typifications in the intersubjective field.

In this section I have tried to analyze how an intersubjective world is constructed in the everyday reality of WoW. Intersubjectivity is a crucial notion as it implies how objectifications take place and how common sense is constructed. Following Berger and Luckmann, I have focused on first how language creates a social stock of knowledge and common-sense about the world, and looked for clues of such processes in network of people in our virtual world. Public communication channels, game-specific language, socialization and acculturation processes emerged as important themes in this part. Next, I have highlighted how the already objectified world, the common-sense of this world is conveyed through avatars. As interfaces of the players, avatars create the ground for face-to-face encounter, and while they maintain some typificatory schemes, they also carry the facts of this world to the players. Now that we have a sense as to how knowledge of this world is created and conveyed, I will now focus on the taken-for-grantedness of WoW.

**Taken-for-grantedness**

For Berger and Luckmann the reality of everyday life is also characterized by its taken-for-grantedness. This implies that the world around is not subject to doubt, and its flow is accepted as unproblematic by its participants. They state that:

> The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling facticity. (1966, p.37)

For them, the reality at hand does not indulge in explanation for its existence, but that it just exists as it is. Even if one questions its reality, she is "obliged to suspend such doubt as [she] routinely exists in everyday life" (ibid). What they mean is that although participants of reality may doubt the reality at hand, in order to be able to function in the world, or continue with their lives, individuals accept reality at face

value in their ordinary dealings with the world. In this sense, taken-for-grantedness refers to common-sense of the world. One does not question it until a problem arises, and it is always implicitly referred to in one's dealings with the world. It is the routinized actions that presuppose a taken-for-granted world, and facts of life can be deduced from such habitual activities.

For Berger and Luckmann the study of common-sense of a society is of utmost importance, and they designate this as a major task to sociologists. What a reality takes for granted varies according to its constitutive dynamics, and it is up to the sociologists to uncover how such facts are produced and maintained in a social setting. For this particular reality at hand, that is the virtual world, an inquiry into what is taken for granted will provide us with a compass as to what constitutes the common-sense of this reality. By understanding the specific dynamics that contribute to the construction of reality, with this final part of analysis, we will be able to have a sense as to what kind of social facts are produced and maintained in the world.

Taken-for-grantedness of the everyday reality of WoW can be traced from three main characteristics of virtual world: avatar, network of computers, and persistency. They construct the taken-for-granted world, and also convey and point to what is taken for granted in everyday reality. I will present them in the above stated sequence, for it parallels a character's regular development in the world.

Avatar creation is an important process of initiation to the game world, for the choices made in this part of the game cannot be reverted. One will remain an Alliance member if she chooses to play as a Gnome Warrior. Avatar creation blatantly introduces the world to the player, or rather imposes the facts of this world. There are only certain characteristics that a player can choose from if she wants to exist in the world. Races, alongside with classes, provide the player the knowledge that there are Taurens, Draenei, Orcs, and Elves in this world, and that they are able to perform as Mages, Shamans, Warriors, or Death Knights. This is a high fantasy world, which is the foremost fact of this reality. Every corner of the world will be inhabited by players as these races, and players will interact through these interfaces. If a player wants to play a non-playable race, she will have to only

fantasize about it, as the reality only permits a certain way of being in the world. Like in the real world, one cannot wish away the reality at hand.

Another fact of the world that is conveyed by avatar is that this is a world of war. The opening scene of the original WoW game states clearly that "The drums of war thunder once again" (Blizzard, World of Warcraft Cinematic, 2004). The avatars controlled by the players are specifically designed for war purposes. Player has to decide how to function at a combat situation: will she be tanking the enemies, dealing damage to them in order to kill them, or will she aid by lending a healing hand to her fellows. All the panes in the character creation screen outline the combat advantages of a particular class, alongside with information regarding a race's capabilities. The game interface notifies the player of the role, the armor class, the combat style, and power resource type of a particular avatar choice. So the player is informed and attuned to the reality of war right from the start. There is no other option for a player to 'be' in the world. She cannot perform as a merchant, or a farmer. The reality is already set-up by the game developers, and the ultimate legitimizing notion –and therefore the one which is most dispersed to all the relations- is war. The common-sense in this world is constructed with reference to war: players gain experience and learn new abilities that will empower them; they learn professions to strengthen their capabilities; and they engage in continuous battles and combats in order to progress their current state in the world. This reality is therefore enmeshed in unceasing and endlessly repeated wars, and they represent the common-sense of this reality. What the avatar creation process shows is a confirmation of this fact: war is a taken for granted fact of this reality. Even if one chooses to explore the world, or engage in social play, she will have to combat her way through the world. No matter the dominant mode of play that one 'chooses' to invest in, she will have to routinely battle with various enemies.

Once the player creates her character, she will enter the world: a specific realm of her choosing. This brings us to the network of computer characteristic of virtual worlds. As discussed in the previous chapter, all realms have different cultures and social lives as they differ in play styles. So these mirroring realms are home to different common-sensical routines that are taken as unproblematic. For instance it

is not surprising to see a group of players gather in one corner of the city and engage in roleplay sessions in an RP realm, and one does not even question what those people are up to: obviously they are reproducing the dominant play style of the realm. This is a habitual activity of this type of realm. However, having a roleplay community at a PvP server might raise some eyebrows and incite questions as to the adequacy of having such a routine in this type of realm, and this kind of behavior could even be seen as an act of deviance (Mortensen, 2008). I have encountered such a case in one of my play sessions in Jaedenar realm. I have joined a random dungeon group and two of the members of the group were acting in-character, probably continuing a long-played session (there seemed to be quite a bit of history behind their characters). Our tank was not happy with this situation, and wanted this session to come to an end. He teased the players, blamed them with engaging in social play[39], and stated more than once that "if they wanted to RP, they should not have come to this server". There was no apparent disturbance posed to our combat aside from popping chat bubbles, and as a former RPer myself, I did not really understand why this person was acting so outrageous. Yet from an analytical standpoint it is possible to see that the role-players were occupying a ground that was not accommodating their style. This reality was constructed on the particular absence of this kind of play. There are servers designated for roleplay activity, and this particular server, Jaedenar, was not one of them. Having an out-of-the-ordinary happening occur nearby was disturbing to this individual and to the common-sense understanding that dominated this realm.

In relation to the network of computers, I should also note how this kind of structure enables the emergence of a common-sense that is based on rationality. As the world operates on a programmed code, the world is expected to behave in a rational manner, and it is accepted as a reality of calculation. All characters are actually sums of stats, and combat encounters work on these numerical calculations. In a battle situation as a Mage, when I cast a Fire Blast on an enemy, I will lose 2% of my base mana, and I will blast the enemy with 78,9% of my Spell power in Fire

[39] People with different tastes in play often argue about the 'appropriate' way of engaging with the game. I have encountered such instances more than once where players with a taste in combat oriented play style make condescending statements about casual or social players.

damage (Wowpedia). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, such quantification turns this reality into one of rational calculation. Also, it is expected on my part that this damage will be dealt as described, and not in any other way; furthermore, I cannot make this spell hit more than its designated power. The calculations are administered by the servers, and the computational power of these machinery make sure that all the mathematical equations are processed orderly. This is an invisible process to the player though. Even though the player knows that these calculations take place, she is not actively aware of the server's contribution to the combat sequence. The visual and audial environment conceals the algorithm and presents the player a flow that seems to be uninterrupted and unproblematic.

Mentioning the flow of the game brings us to the analysis of the third characteristic, which is persistency. The world having an objective existence that is external to the player, and the fact that it does not revolve around any particular player informs the common-sense that this world is a shared reality, and that it will continue to exist with or without any particular player's existence. A player cannot expect the world to disappear once she is AFK. In this sense, persistency as a characteristic of virtual world becomes a taken for granted fact of life that entails other dynamics.

The world does not disappear, and the player's accumulated wealth and resources are saved by the game servers. The flow of the game world is maintained through collecting all game states, including players' current status. So when a player returns to the game world, she will find her character where she left off (unless she left her avatar in a dangerous zone –in that case the avatar may be dead) and her items in place. This paves the way for the players to accumulate resources and further empower themselves in the world. They maintain these resources by committing a significant amount of labor to farming and grinding activities. Farming is a goal oriented practice (which may or may not include battles) where aim is to find items or gold, which have indirect impact on a player's overall power. Grinding on the other hand refers to the process of direct stat gain, achieved once again by battling. Both of these practices are repetitive, and are routinely performed by the players who wish to progress their characters. However they are both undesired practices, as they require the player to engage in a mundane routine

where she might have to spend hours doing the same thing over and over again. This mundane repetition is inevitable for a player who wishes to secure her place in this persistent world. Forums are crowded with farming guides, grinding principles, and even discussions about how to keep up motivation for this prosaic activity.

Farming and grinding appear as hard facts of this life. For me, and for many, farming or grinding has ever been a painful practice, but one that I must endure in order to achieve more success in my everyday life, and to ensure a life of wealth. Once, this time-consuming activity came to a halt for me when I decided that I had enough materials that would keep me resourceful for some time. Keeping up one's wealth requires one to engage in daily quests and farming activities, and at that time I was not aware that non-compliance with these practices would rapidly cause one's financial decay. In short time I was lacking the resources to join the raids, and lacking motivation to go out and farm. This inactivity on my part was not met with contentment by members of our guild's executive board. After two weeks they gave me notice that I had to keep up my resources or that I would be banned from raiding. This raiding guild obviously made sure that its members would be actively participating in the routines of the game world, and that they would not fall into decay: it was this level of dedication that ensured the success of the guild (which was ranking at number one in the realm at that time). If one wishes to succeed in the world, it was obvious that she would have to farm and grind her way through the world. Let me emphasize that this understanding regarding accumulation, and practices that emerge in providing resources, are all directed towards war purposes. Once again we encounter notions like empowerment and progress achieved by accumulation in relation to combat prowess of a player. War emerges as the all-legitimizing concept over which the world is constructed.

Inevitability leads to routinization, and routinization allows a taken-for-granted reality to emerge in the everyday life of the individuals. Berger and Luckmann emphasize while writing about the origins of institutions that:

> Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his

> general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future (p. 71).

The world as persisting through accumulation and growth leads to incorporation of different habitualizations, and emergence of routines that come to occupy an important part of the everyday reality at hand. In order to excel in combat, players should engage in certain routines of everyday life, they must participate in daily quests, spend time farming various materials, in other words, she must engage in these routine activities to be able to sponsor herself.

To sum up this part about taken-for-grantedness, I have tried to focus on what parts of the world are taken as unproblematic, and how a flow through routinized and habitual practices is maintained. I began with the process of avatar creation which signals that this world will be a world of war, obviously. Yet the manner in which one engages with combat situations might differ according to the realm of a player. What I mean is aspects of what passes as socially accepted ways of behaving are organized by the realm definitions. Furthermore, while players carry on with their ordinary dealings, they actually operate on a rational plane that is systematized by a code and administered by a server computer. All combat situations "take(s) place against the background of a world that is silently taken for granted" (ibid, p. 172). The flow of reality is ensured by the persistency of the shared world, and this persistency opens the way for players to accumulate wealth and power through routinized means, much like having a job in the 'real' world. Players invest significant labor into these mundane activities for the purpose of progressing into a more powerful position in a battle situation.

A question might be raised at this point: why one should invest so much time and energy into a mundane task in a game world though? It is supposed to be a playful space, a space of joy, not of boredom and annoyance. If I have been able to present my findings and made a reasonable analysis, the answer to this question is that this is not purely a world of play. A virtual world is a space where "among other things, play happens" (Stenros, 2014). The reality has a flow that does not simply accommodate play, but it allows an intricately constructed everyday life to emerge. This life has its own environment, its own language, and thus its own common-

sense. Consequently, this ‘game’ that carries the characteristics of a virtual world comes to construct a reality that imposes itself over the individuals, which can be conceptualized as an everyday reality.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis is to understand the dynamics of everyday reality that are constituted by the virtual world characteristics of the Massively Multiplayer Online Game, 'World of Warcraft'. These dynamics provide us what the common sensical notions of this world are, and how they are produced and maintained in the game. As an online video game that is inhabited by millions of participants, this world is sustained through relations between the designers and players, technology and players, and among players themselves. This complex social environment is studied through ethnographical means: by the researcher submitting herself to the everyday reality of the virtual world, and following the patterns of mundane activities that construct the common sense.

In this chapter I will firstly provide an overview of the core concepts through which the study was conducted, and then present some concluding remarks on the common sense of the world.

Berger and Luckmann's 1966 work 'The Social Construction of Reality' lays the ground for this thesis. As a sociological analysis of a virtual world, this study tries to understand the common sense of the world, how it is constructed and sustained. The insight into this sort of study is, again, inspired by Berger and Luckmann themselves. In the introduction of their book they state that:

> The need for a 'sociology of knowledge' is thus already given with the observable differences between societies in terms of what is taken for granted as 'knowledge' in them. Beyond this, however, a discipline calling itself by this name will have to concern itself with the general ways by which 'realities' are taken as 'known' in human societies. In other words, a 'sociology of

> knowledge' will have to deal not only with the empirical variety of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also with the processes by which *any* body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially established *as* 'reality' (1966, p.15).

While this study does not position itself within the body of 'sociology of knowledge', it is this kind of approach to 'knowledge' that is employed in the project. The main concern is to reach at an understanding of how common sense knowledge is constructed and sustained in the virtual world of WoW. To this end, the study had first located WoW as a virtual world, and by this establishment had traced the manner in which everyday reality is constructed.

Thereof, the first task was to seek the virtual world characteristics of WoW. While this particular video game is largely apprehended as a form of a virtual world as seen in the literature review, there is no empirical research into the game world itself that discuss construction of these characteristics, and the kind of sociality that these characteristics bring about. In consideration of this, the thesis has taken up on the definition of virtual world provided by Mark Bell (2008), and discussed how these characteristics construct certain ways of being-in-the-world.

According to Mark Bell's (2008) encapsulating definition, virtual worlds have five defining characteristics: synchronicity, persistency, network of people, network of computers, and representation by avatar. So firstly I have focused on how synchronicity is achieved in the world main via communicational and spatial means. In this definition, simultaneous communication is an essential means for players to organize themselves. In accordance with this, the communication channels that are presented to players, and the specific sign systems that have emerged out of the relations between the players have been analyzed. Moreover, in terms of control and spatiality, the landscape requires the player to hit concrete buttons on a keyboard and a mouse, and the software enables the characters to move and act upon bound actions in the world. This synchronous movement and action enables players to navigate and explore the landscape of Azeroth. Also, the dynamics through which a consistent world comes to be are explored in this section. The narrative and technological means, expansion of the world, and limits of space are all analyzed in

relation to synchronicity. In a sense, the synchronicity of the land itself is brought to lens.

Mark Bell also mentions the sharedness of the virtual world under synchronicity, and how synchronous communication is an important aspect of virtual worlds. While I have specifically focused on communication under network of people, as a means of association, I have attended to the sociality that is entailed by the spatiality and synchronicity. The players are connected to each other through a shared space and a common time: this enables the emergence of a dynamic sociality and emergent phenomena. Synchronicity ensures that there is no delay between the action performed by the player on the computer and that of the character in the virtual world, which adds to the sense of 'being-there-together'; furthermore it connects various aspects of the world by the notion of 'sharedness'.

This common ground that is brought about by synchronicity is accompanied by persistency, which ensures the undisturbed continuation of the world. Persistency also establishes the world as having an objective existence that is independent of the individual participants. Player is not the center of the world, as she would be in a single player game; she is rather just another component that is in-tune with the flow of the world. The continuous and independent existence of the virtual world enables various mechanisms among which accumulation and transformation emerge as the most significant for our case. Characters in the world are able to collect experience and materials that ensure their progression and success in battle situations. The world itself, on the other hand, is subject to shifts and changes that are brought about by continuous introduction of patches and expansion packs. The world, thereof, appears as a dynamic universe; a cosmos[40] that is ever-evolving.

The persistency is materially maintained by a network of computers. Players connect to world via their personal computers, and the actions of the players and the designers are administered to the world by server computers. While this technical infrastructure ensures the world to operate on a rational manner, the specific position in which the computer is located also creates the ground for particular

[40] I use the concept with reference to Riezler's work 'Play and Seriousness' where he states "The game is a little cosmos of its own" (1941, p.505).

socio-cultural formations to emerge. The locality of the servers, and the styles of play that each server caters to, come to contribute to a specific normative formation. Player actions are therefore partially bound to their position in the network of computers.

The manner in which players come to associate with each other is the topic which I have analyzed under the characteristic of network of people. Virtual worlds are largely defined by their integration of social aspects into the world dynamics[41]. In relation to this, communication and organization patterns among the players are brought to focus in this part of the chapter. As a world that is characterized as 'massively multiplayer', this component of virtual world comes to forefront as largely defining the experience that one goes through in Azeroth. The game mechanics channel the players to collaborate with each other, especially at maximum level where raiding appears as a core activity. While players are able to form institutionalized associations (guilds) among themselves, they are also able to constantly communicate with each other via various levels of chat channels. Here we saw how design of the game complements the social structures of the game. As Williams et.al. (2006) emphasize in their study of guilds in WoW, the game architecture is laden with social consequences. Hence, one cannot think of the social life without a consideration of the technicality that gives way to a certain sociality.

The possibility of existing in the world is prompted by creation of an avatar. This characteristic of virtual worlds is of prime importance, because the manner in which player is represented in the world is defined by the avatar. It limits the player in the sense that the avatar is capable of performing certain actions and it looks in a certain way that is defined by the specific race and class that it belongs to. Yet it is not a fixed entity as such: the avatar is subject to change throughout the journey in the world. In fact, the avatar goes through a linear progression in Azeroth for game mechanisms promote accumulation of experience and wealth, which in turn strengthens the avatars, increasing their chances of success in the face of lethal threats. This also means that the experience of the journey that one goes through in

[41] Raph Koster, from a game design perspective, asserts: "MMORPGs are COMMUNITIES. Not games." (emphasis in original, as cited in Duchenaut et. al., 2006).

the world is inscribed on the avatar. This digital representation is the prime body of agency that lives in the world, in the land inside the wires.

Discussion of the characteristics of virtual world in WoW enables us to examine how an everyday reality is maintained in the world. So far we have a shared spatial world that exists continuously with the power of computers, and participated by a network of people that are represented as avatars. Although this world is designed by game developers, the reality inside the game is constituted by both the players, and the mechanisms that are continuously developed and maintained by the designers. The meaning structures that emerge within the virtual world are thus results of negotiations among the players themselves, and between the designers and the players. The fact that the world pre-exists the player could be likened to our material world, where individuals come into an already-existing, 'already objectified'[42] reality.

The second part of the analysis relies on Berger and Luckmann's take on sociology of knowledge that particularly focuses on common sense, the taken for granted world. In their explanation, the everyday reality is composed of three principles. It is the 'here and now' zone that prompts an individual to intersubjectively contribute to objectification of a taken-for-granted world. So in my analysis I have tried to tackle these principles, and tried to deduce how the everyday reality is produced and maintained in the 'World of Warcraft' by the mechanisms of virtual world.

Berger and Luckmann emphasize that the everyday reality is that which is within a person's immediate reach. What they stress here is the argument that one's attention to the world is largely determined by what one is currently occupied with. This entails that it is the immediate spatial and temporal surroundings of an individual that is considered to be the everyday reality; this is also because of the fact that it is this immediacy that provides the possibility of manipulation on the part of the individual. Keeping in mind this explanation, three characteristics of virtual worlds come to be related to the 'here and now' zone, the first of which is the avatar. Avatar is the body of agency in the world. It is this digital representation that

[42] Here I am referring to Berger and Luckmann where they state "The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene" (1966, p.35).

actively participates into the world, and manipulates her surroundings. The capacity of an avatar defines the location of a player in a temporal zone, for it is the accumulated strengths upon which the avatar acts. In the moment of action, the avatar is controlling her surroundings, she is moving in her immediate spatiality. In this sense, the 'here and now' zone is treated as the avatar's here and now in the virtual world. The avatar is produced out of a combined effort between the player and the world: it is their synchronous action that actually manipulates the world. This brings us to synchronicity, which appears as a crucial aspect that both indicates how the 'here and now' is manipulated; and also feeds the location of an avatar in the larger world. This locational information is, of course, brought to the game world through the network of computers. The servers feed information to personal computers and set the setting of what 'here and now' is composed of. So it is through these three characteristics, avatar, synchronicity, and network of computers, that the 'here and now' zone is constructed.

The second characteristic of everyday reality that I have examined was intersubjectivity. This aspect is specifically emphasized by Berger and Luckmann as one that produces "a world of things" (1966, p.30). The individuals produce objective structures (symbolic and material) through their relationality and signification processes. Language appears here as a kind of a cloud that is made up of accumulation of meaning and experience that can be preserved in time in order to transmit to future generations. In their explanation, then, two characteristics of intersubjectivity stand out: communication (via sign systems) and socialization. In line with their argumentation, I have focused on these characteristics and traced them in our virtual world. Firstly I have analyzed how associations between players feed to objectification processes through communication channels and guild organizations. In discussing the network of people, I have also emphasized how these associations feed to socialization processes of incoming individuals, and to transfer of knowledge between generations[43] of players. While stressing communication in their work, Berger and Luckmann accentuate the importance of face to face communication. As there is no face to face communication available in

[43] By generation I refer to bulk of players that start the game at a certain expansion pack. In this sense there are currently six generations of players present in the game world.

the traditional sense, I have discussed this aspect of intersubjectivity in relation to avatars. Avatars, as the responsible bodies of the virtual world, come into contact with each other in the virtual world, and it is through this interface that the players could be thought as coming 'face to face'. In this section, then, I have focused on analyzing how intersubjectivity, the network of people, produces objective knowledge structures and transmits them via communication among avatars.

The last dimension that I have examined under everyday reality was taken-for-grantedness. This aspect is directly related to construction and sustenance of common-sense. In relation to characteristics of virtual worlds, firstly I have concentrated on how avatars convey already objectified and unproblematized parts of the reality. As avatars define the ways of being in the world, they are both carriers of common-sense and agents of its construction in the workings of everyday reality. Secondly I have discussed in relation to network of computers how servers produce their own common-sense knowledge. As realm types determine to a degree the manner of sociality that is lived within them, different common-sense behavior can be observed in different servers. Also I have focused on how operating on a network of computers itself prompts certain notions that are taken for granted, such as rationality and precise calculation. Berger and Luckmann specify routinized and mundane actions as products and producers of taken-for-granted parts of reality. In relation to this idea, I have focused on persistency as enabling mechanisms of accumulation, and discussed which ideas emerge as common-sensical to this particular everyday reality.

Throughout the analyses, it became apparent that the notion of 'war' comes to be the prime idea that organizes the everyday reality. Other notions such as linear progression, investment, accumulation, empowerment etc. emerge in relation to 'war'. The everyday reality inside the wires revolves around war, and players are always in the face of enemies, be it NPCs or other players. At the start of the game, player has to choose from a scope of battle-capable classes. She has to be a combating character in order to come into existence in the world. Moreover, player has to choose a side on a never ending war between the two leading factions. Not to mention, combat between Horde and Alliance is justified on every occasion as the

example of funeral attack conveyed by members of 'Serenity Now' shows. Common-sensical elements are further (re)produced over this binary contradiction. The normative structure in the game world, although differentiated in each server, emerges through this division between Horde and Alliance, and relies on maintenance of the war situation among these factions. As communication lines between these factions are non-existent, the war continues to shape relations among and within Horde and Alliance. Main activities in the game world are battles either between the players or against Environment (as in PvE). Majority of the quests involve combating enemies and collecting loot. The design of the game further complements this by rewarding the player if she wins a fighting situation. While explorative practices or economic activities are also pervasive in the world, the defining routines are largely shaped by war. As Esther MacCallum-Stewert[44] (2008) asserts "The narrative of *World of Warcraft* presents a society where the state of warfare is naturalized" (p.58).

This study aimed at understanding everyday reality dynamics constituted by the virtual world of WoW. While doing so, it once again became apparent that, virtual or not, every social formation brings about their own taken-for-granted notions through routinized and mundane practices of participating individuals. As a study into a world that exists in virtuality, this study contributes to our understanding of such worlds not as realms of escapism, but as spaces where everyday reality is experienced in a different form. While this study finds its uniqueness in explaining the reality inside a virtual world through world-specific dynamics, further research conducted with the inhabitants of the world would aid at uncovering how players come to experience the particular reality in the game. Furthermore, a sociological study into how the game world comes to (re)organize the everyday reality of players, and on how these spaces could also be considered as a continuation of everyday reality of its participants would shed light into the dynamics between the so-called binary between the 'real' and the 'virtual'. On a preliminary level it is seen that the virtual worlds are not just playful spaces, but contain boredom,

[44] For a discussion on how World of Warcraft represents the ambiguity between the notions of 'good' and 'evil' in war situation, please see Esther MacCallum-Stewart, ""Never Such Innocence Again': War and Histories in World of Warcraft" (2008)

seriousness, and prosaic activities. It should be stressed that as a genre that stands at the edge of mainstream games, MMOGs form an important interest area for researchers that seek to tackle the so-called binary of play and serious. While this was not the particular focus of this thesis, such notions were implied in construction of the everyday reality of 'World of Warcraft'. Further research into this divide would shed light onto our assumed, 'common-sensical', approach towards the relationship between play and fun.

Also, while this research contributes to literature an appreciation of MMORPG genre as a virtual world that could constitute dynamics of everyday reality, it could also be thought as a challenge to the concept of 'magic circle', which was widely used in studies of games albeit large criticisms. While this study is a peek into the world 'inside' the wires, it does not argue for a clear separation between the outside and the inside: the 'magic circle' implies a space that is separate from the everyday life in which play as a form of joy is practiced. However this study shows to contrary of this understanding, that the world 'inside' the game does not solely constitute play, but mundane and repetitive practices that are in no sense 'magical'. It is in this sense that this study could also be thought as a challenge to the widespread approach to games as 'magic circle', and a contribution to the criticisms of this analytical tool.

The argument behind the research question was that MMOGs comprise of mechanisms that make them 'more than a game'. In this study it became apparent that this 'more' is produced through mundane routinized practices. The game world produces an excess in this sense, which could be considered as a transformative power, if we look at the issue coming from Durkheimian (1912) understanding of 'collective effervescence'. The game is transformed into something more through these habitualized (ritualized) activities, which while do not constitute any 'magic', have the potential to reorganize meaning structures that emerge in the particular social life. Such transformative power brought about by both the novelty of the game artifact, and by the constitution of patternalized mundane activities surely have implications for some applications, especially in education and health industries.

Lastly I would like to touch upon the issue of how these two apparently distinct realities of the virtual and the real converge. While this is out of the scope of the thesis, I would like to make a brief remark through my observations, which could be considered as a suggestion for further research. In the thesis, it was emphasized many times that it is the social component of these games that makes them 'more' than a game. Habitualized activities such as farming or grinding are turned into common-sensical elements through players' emplooyment of these patterned practices. In a sense, a 'world of things' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.30) is produced by the intersubjective component of MMOGs. It is this social element that connects the player sitting in a dark room on a computer to the everyday reality that is found inside the game world. The virtual/informational spills over the real/physical world via intersubjective relations. It is the social life that cements different components of the game world, and additionally it is the social mechanisms that connect these two apparently distinct realities. The reality that surrounds the game is by no means limited to the 'virtual' world, but encompasses socio-cultural and economic formations in relation to the game world that are practiced by its participant base in the 'real' world. So the relationality between these two realities could be studied on a large scale through the social sphere that holds them together.

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# APPENDICES

# A. TURKISH SUMMARY

## SANAL DÜNYADA GÜNDELİK GERÇEKLİK KURULUMU: WORLD OF WARCRAFT VAKASI

Bu tezin amacı Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrimiçi Oyun olan 'World of Warcraft'ta sanal dünya özelliklerinin oluşturduğu gündelik hayat dinamiklerini anlamaktır. Bu dinamikler bize bu dünyanın genel kanı kavramlarının neler olduğunu ve oyunda nasıl üretilip sürdürüldüğünü gösterir. Milyonlarca katılımcısı olan çevrimiçi bir oyun olarak bu dünya, tasarımcılarla oyuncular, teknoloji ile oyuncular, ve oyuncuların kendi aralarındaki ilişkisellikler ile devam ettirilir. Bu karmaşık sosyal çevre etnografik bir şekilde çalışılmıştır: araştırmacı kendini sanal dünyanın gündelik gerçekliğine entegre etmiş ve genel kanıyı kuran olağan aktivite kalıplarını takip etmiştir.

Bu özette çalışmanın kullandığı ana kavramlar kısaca gözden geçirilecek, ve dünyanın genel kanısına dair sonuçlayıcı görüşler sunulacaktır.

Tez öncelikle 'World of Warcraft'ı bir *artifact* olarak sunacak ve eldeki vakanın tarihsel bağlamını literatür içerisinden sağlamaya çalışacaktır. Bu amaçla fantazi janrı ve rol yapma oyunları kısaca gözden geçirilecektir. Bunu takiben sanal dünyaların ortaya çıkışı izlenecek ve gelişiminin taslağı çizilecektir. Bu tez sanal dünyayı bilimsel nesne olarak aldığından bu forma dair akademik tartışmalar da sunulacaktır. Sanal dünyalara dair sorunlar ve yaklaşımlar anlatılırken 'orada-olmak' ('being-there') kavramı üzerine bir tartışma da yürütülecektir (Schroeder, 2006).

Literatür taramasının digger kısmında iki ana kavram Oyun Çalışmaları alanında yürütülen tartışmaları takip ederek sunulacaktır: oyun ve gerçeklik. Öncelikle oyuna dair tartışmalar, oyunun anlamı ve oyunun nasıl çalışıldığına dair ana akım düşünceler sunulacaktır. Oyun kavramını akademik bir tanıma dönüştürmenin zorluğu, oyunların incelendiği genel analitik çerçevelerle birlikte izlenecektir. Bu bölüm Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrimiçi Oyunların diğer video oyunlarından farkını ortaya çıkararak sonuçlandırılacaktır. Bunun amacı bir bilgisayar oyununda gündelik gerçekliğin olabileceği argümanına bir zemin sağlamaktır. Sonrasında gerçeklik meselesi kurgu kavramına karşıt bir şekilde ele alınacaktır. Burada belirtilmelidir ki bu bölümde tamamen oyun çalışmaları literatüründen yararlanılmıştır. Bunun nedeni de eldeki bilimsel nesnenin bir bilgisayar oyunu olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır.

Tezin ikinci bölümü çalışmanın teorik ve metodolojik çerçevelerini sunacaktır. Öncelikle Berger ve Luckmann'ın 1966'da yaptıkları 'Gerçekliğin Sosyal İnşası' isimli çalışmalarının teorik kapsamı sunulacaktır. Bu amaçla bu iki akademisyenin genel yaklaşımının taslağı çizilecektir. Gerçeklik sorusunu nasıl ele aldıkları, hangi metodolojik yörüngelerden kendi çalışmalarını formüle ettikleri bu anlamda sunulacaktır. Berger ve Lukmann bilgi sosyolojisinin belli bir toplumun genel kanısı ile ilgilenmesi gerektiği konusunda ısrarcıdırlar, ve bu çalışmalarında bu tür verili alınan bilgilerin diğer bilgi alanlarına ilişkilendirilerek nasıl çalışılabileceğini ifade ederler. Yani teorileri gerçekliğin sorgusallaştırılmamış, olağan kısımlarının çalışılacağı beklentisi ile kurulmuştur. Bu kısım tezin üzerine kurulduğu teorik arkaplanı açıklar; kavramsal çerçeve altında da kullanılan kavramların tanımlamaları ve birbirleri olan ilişkileri tartışılacaktır.

Kavramsal çerçeve araştırmanın bulgularının analizinde kullanılan kavramların ilk aşamadaki tanımlamalarını içermektedir. Tez iki katlı bir analizden oluştuğundan ötürü, sanal dünyanın özellikleri ile gündelik gerçeklik somutlaştırılacaktır. Mark Bell (2008) sanal dünyaların beş özelliğini tanımlar: Bir bilgisayar ağının olanaklılığını sunduğu, senkronize, kalıcı bir insan ağının avatarlar ile temsil edilmesi (p.2). Bu beş özellik WoW'u bir sanal dünya olarak formüle etmekte kullanılacaktır, bunun sayesinde de bus anal dünyanın bir gündelik gerçeklik

oluşturup oluşturmadığı görülecektir. Kavramsal tanımlardan sonra Berger ve Luckmann'ın (1966) gündelik gerçekliği ele alış şekilleri sunulacaktır. Onların açıkladığı şekilde gündelik hayatın etrafında örgütlendiği üç ana prensip vardır. Bunlar 'burada ve şimdi' alanı, nesnel dünyanın öznelerarası ilişkilenmeler ile kurulumu, ve gerçekliğin verili alınması. Kavramların bu akademisyenler tarafından verilen tanımlamaları takip edilerek bu iki ayrı kavramsal bölge arasında analitik bir ilişki kurulacaktır. Tezin ana argümanı bu sanal dünyanın bir gündelik gerçeklik ihtiva etmesi olduğundan, analize geçmeden once bu kavramlar arasındaki bağlantının nasıl kurulduğu ve bu spesifik kavramsal çerçevenin nasıl ortaya çıktığı sunulacaktır. Aşağıdaki tablo bu amaçla oluşturulmuştur:

Tablo 1 – Gündelik gerçekliğin sanal dünya özellikleri tarafından kurulumunun kavramsal haritası

| Gündelik Gerçekliğin Özellikleri / Sanal Dünya Özellikleri | 'Burada ve Şimdi' | Öznelerarası | Verili alınma |
|---|---|---|---|
| Senkronize | + | + | |
| Kalıcılık | | | + |
| Bilgisayar Ağı | + | | + |
| İnsan Ağı | | + | |
| Avatar üzerinden temsiliyet | + | + | + |

Ana kavramların tanımlamalarına erişildikten sonar araştırmanın hangi süreçlerden geçilerek yapıldığı açıklanacaktır. Bu amaçla, öncelikle araştırma sorunsalının nasıl formüle edildiğine odaklanılmıştır. Bu bölümde araştırma sorusunu oluştururken geçtiğim analitik ve sosyal süreçleri sunacağım. Devamında kullanılan yöntemler araştırma sorunsalına uygunluğu üzerinden sunulacaktır. Etnografik bir çalışma

olduğundan, araştırmanın ortamı da açıklanacaktır. Son olarak araştırmanın yapılma sürecindeki metodolojik düşünceler ve deçimler de paylaşılacaktır. Burada araştırmacının avatar ve sunucu seçimlerini etkileyen süreçler ve ayrıca 'oynama üzerinden araştırma' pratiğinin nasıl işler hale getirildiği de sunulacaktır. Bu bölümü takriben analizler anlatılacaktır.

Daha once de bahsedildiği gibi Berger ve Luckmann'ın 1966'da yaptıkları 'Sosyal Gerçekliğin İnşası' isimli eserleri bu tezin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Bir sanal dünyanın sosyolojik analizi olarak bu çalışma dünyanın genel kanısı, nasıl kurulup sürdürüldüğünü anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Bu tip bir çalışmanın görüsü yine Berger ve Luckmann'dan esinlenerek oluşmuştur. Kitaplarının giriş kısmında şunu belirtirler:

> 'Bilgi Sosyolojisi' ihtiyacı toplumlar arasında neyin 'bilgi' olarak veri alındığına dair gözlemlenebilir farklar ile zaten verilmiştir. Bunun ötesinde, ancak, kendine bu ismi veren bir disiplin kendisini insan toplumlarında hangi 'gerçekliklerin' 'bilinir' olarak alındığının genel şekli ile ilgilendirir. Diğer bir deyiş ile, bir 'bilgi sosyolojisi' sadece insan toplumlarının 'bilgisinin' ampirik çeşitliliği ile değil, aynı zamanda her hangi bir 'bilginin' sosyal süreçler ile nasıl 'gerçek' kılındığı ile de ilgilenmek zorundadır (kendi çevirim, 1966, p.15).

Her ne kadar bu çalışma kendini 'bilgi sosyolojisi' bünyesinde mevkilendirmese de, bu projede 'bilgi'ye bu türden bir yaklaşım sergilenmiştir. Ana ilgi genel kanı bilgisinin WoW'un sanal dünyasında nasıl kurulup sürdürüldüğüne dair bir anlayışa erişmektir. Bu amaçla çalışma öncelikle WoW'u bir sanal gerçeklik olarak meviklendirmiş, ve bu kuruluş ile gündelik hayatın kurulma şeklini izlemiştir.

Bundan dolayı ilk görev WoW'un sanal dünya özelliklerini aramaktır. Her ne kadar özellikle bu video oyun literatürde genellikle bir tür sanal dünya olarak görülse de, sanal dünyanın kendi içinde bu sanal dünya özelliklerinin nasıl kurulduğuna, ve bu özelliklerin ne türden bir sosyallik oluşturduğuna dair ampirik bir çalışma yapılmamıştır. Bunu göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tez Mark Bell (2008) tarafından

oluşturulan sanal dünya tanımını kullanmış, ve bu özelliklerin nasıl bazı dünyada-oluş halleri yarattığını tartışmıştır.

Mark Bell'in (2008) kapsayıcı tanımlamasına göre sanal dünyaların beş belirleyici özelliği vardır: senkron, kalıcılık, insan ağı, bilgisayar ağı, ve avatar temsili. Buradan hareketle ilk olarak bu dünyada senkronun başlıca iletişimsel ve mekansal araçlar ile nasıl elde edildiğine odaklanılmıştır. Tanıma göre eşzamanlı iletişim katılımcıların kendilerini örgütlemeleri için esastır. Buna uygun olarak oyun dünyasının oyunculara sunduğu iletişim kanalları, ve buna ek olarak oyuncuların kendi iletişiminden doğan özel işaret sistemleri incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, sanal dünyanın peyzajı oyuncunun bir klavye ve farenin butonlarına basmasını gerektirir, ve yazılım karakterlerin buna uygun hareket etmelerini sağlar. Bu senkronize hareket oyuncuların Azeroth'u gezmesini ve keşfetmesini sağlar. Ayrıca tutarlı bir dünya yaratan dinamikler de bu bölüm altında incelenmiştir. Anlatısal ve teknolojik araçlar, dünyanın genişlemesi, mekanın limitleri senkron ile ilişkilendirilerek analiz edilmiştir. Bir anlamda dünyanın senkronunun kendisi incelenmiştir.

Mark Bell aynı zamanda sanal dünyanın müşterekliğinden, ve buna ilişkin senkronize iletişimin sanal dünyaların önemli bir parçası olduğundan bahseder. Oyuncular birbirlerine ortak bir zaman ve mekan ile bağlıdırlar: bu da dinamik bir sosyalliğin ve beliren olayların ortaya çıkmasını sağlar. Senkron oyuncunun bilgisayarda perform ettiği hareketler ile sanal dünyadaki karakterin hareketleri arasında bir gecikme olmamasını sağlar, ki bu da 'orada-beraber-olmak' hissine katkı sağlar; üstelik dünyanın çeşitli yönlerini 'müştereklik' kavramı ile birbirine bağlar.

Senkron ile getirilen bu ortak zemine kalıcılık eşlik eder, ki bu da dünyanın bozulmamış bir şekilde devamlılığını sağlar. Kalıcılık ayrıca dünyaya objektif, bireysel katılımcıların dışında bir varoluş kurar. Oyuncu, tek kişilik bir oyunda olacağı gibi dünyanın merkezinde değildir; bundan ziyade dünyanın akışına ayarlı bileşenlerden sadece biridir. Sanal dünyanın devamlı ve bağımsız varoluşu çeşitli mekanizmalar sağlar, ki bunlar arasında birikim ve dönüşüm bizim vakamız için en önemli olanlar olarak ortaya çıkar. Dünyadaki karakterler savaş durumlarında ilerleme ve başarı sağlayacak deneyim ve materyal biriktirebilirler. Öte yandan

dünyanın kendisi sürekli yama ve genişletme paketleri ile değişim ve dönüşümlere tabidir. Dünya, bu nedenle, dinamik bir evren olarak ortaya çıkar; sürekli evrilen bir kozmos.

Kalıcılık materyal olarak bilgisayar ağı tarafından sürdürülür. Oyuncular dünyaya kendi kişisel bilgisayarlarından bağlanırlar, ve oyuncular ile tasarımcıların eylemleri dünyaya sunucu bilgisayarlarından uygulanır. Bu teknik altyapıu dünyanın rasyonel işleyişini sağlarken, bilgisayarın özel konumu da ayrı sosyo-kültürel oluşumların ortaya çıkmasını sağlar. Sunucuların yerelliği, ve her sunucunun sağladığı oyun stilleri belli normatif oluşumlara katkı sağlar. Bu nedenle oyuncu eylemleri kısmen bilgisayar ağındaki yerlerine bağlıdır.

Oyuncuların hangi şekillerde birleştikleri insan ağı özelliği altında incelenmiştir. Sanal dünyalar büyük ölçüde sosyal yönleri kendi dünya dinamiklerine entegre etmeleri üzerinden tanımlanır. Buna ilişkin olarak, oyuncular arasındaki örgütlenme kalıpları bölümün bu kısmında odağa getirilmiştir. 'Devasa Çok Oyunculu' olarak nitelendirilen bir dünya olarak, sanal dünyanın bu bileşeni kişinin Azeroth'ta yaşadığı deneyimleri tanımlayıcı olarak ön plana çıkar. Oyun mekanizmaları oyuncuları birbirleri ile işbirliği yapmaya kanalize eder, özellikle de baskınların (raid) ana aktivite haline geldiği son seviyede. Oyuncular kendi aralarında kurumsallaşmış birlikler (lonca/guild) kurabilirler. Burada oyun tasarımın nasıl sosyal yapıları tamamladığını görürüz. Williams ve arkadaşlarının (2006) WoW loncaları çalışmalarında vurguladırkları gibi, oyun mimarisi sosyal sonuçlarla yüklüdür. Bu nedenle sosyal hayat, ona yol açan teknik yapı göz önüne alınmadan düşünülemez.

Dünyada varolma olasılığı bir avatar yaratılmasına bağlıdır. Sanal dünyaların bu karakteristiği çok önemlidir, çünkü oyuncunun dünyada nasıl temsil edildiği avatar ile belirlenir. Avatar belli eylemleri icra etme kapasitesini sahiptir, ve kendi ırkı ve sınıfının belirlediği şekilde görünür. Ancak tam sabit bir varlık değildir: avatar dünyadaki yolculukta değişimlere tabidir. Hatta avatar lineer bir gelişim gösterir Azeroth'ta, çünkü oyun mekanizmaları deneyim ve zenginlik biriktirilmesini sağlarlar, ki bu da avatarları güçlendirir, ölümcül tehditler karşısında başarılı olma şanslarını arttırır. Bu ayrıca kişinin dünyada yaşadığı yolculuğun deneyimin avatar

üzerine kazındığını da gösterir. Bu dijital temsil dünyadaki, kabloların içindeki alandaki ana faildir.

WoW sanal dünyasının özelliklerini tartışmak bize dünyanın gündeliğinin nasıl sürdürüldüğünü araştırma olanağı verir. Buraya kadar elimizde müşterek mekansal, bilgisayar gücü ile sürekli varolan, bir insan ağının avatar temsilleri ile katıldığı bir dünya vardır. Her ne kadar bu dünya oyun geliştiricileri tarafından tasarlanmış olsa da, dünyanın içerisindeki gerçeklik hem oyuncular hem de tasarımcılar tarafından sürekli geliştirilen ve sürdürülen mekanizmalar tarafından oluşturulur. Sanal dünyanın içinde ortaya çıkan anlam yapıları bu nedenle oyuncuların kendi arasında ve tasarımcılar ile oyuncular arasındaki pazarlıklar sonucudur. Bu dünyanın oyuncunun öncesinde varolması bizim materyal dünyamıza benzetilebilir: bireyler hali hazırda varolan, 'hali hazırda nesneleşmiş' bir gerçekliğe gelirler.

Analizin ikinci kısmı Berger ve Lukmann'ın genel kanıya, verili alınan dünyaya odaklanan bilgi sosyolojisi anlayışına dayanır. Kendi açıklamalarında gündelik hayatı üç prensip oluşturur. 'Burada ve şimdi' alanının bir bireyi öznelerarası bir şekilde verili alınan dünyayı nesneleştirmeleye katkı sağlamaya itmesi olarak özetlenebilir. Analizimde bu prensipler ile uğraşıp, gündelik hayatın 'World of Warcraft'taki sanal dünya mekanizmaları tarafından nasıl üretilip sürdürüldüğünü çıkarmaya çalıştım.

Berger ve Lukmann gündelik gerçeklik kişinin hemen erişiminde olduğuna vurgu yapar. Burada üzerinde durdukları argümana göre kişinin dünyaya yönelik dikkati kişinin ne ile meşgul olduğu tarafından belirlenir. Gündelik gerçeklik, o zaman, kişinin en yakın mekansal ve zamansal çevresidir; bu yakınlık bireye etrafını işleme olasılığı sağlar. Bu açıklamayı aklımızda tutarak, sanal dünyaların üç özelliği 'burada ve şimdi' alanı ile ilgilidir, ki bunlardan ilki avatardır. Avatar dünyadaki fail bedendir. Bu dijital temsil aktif olarak dünyaya katılır, etrafını işler ve güdümler. Bir avatarın kapasitesi oyuncunun zamansal alandaki konumunu tanımlar, zira avatar biriktirilen güçleri ile eylemlilik gösterir. Eylem anında, avatar etrafını kontrol eder, kendi yakın mekansallığında hareket eder. Bu manada, 'burada ve şimdi' alanı avatar'ın sanal dünyadaki burada ve şimdisi olarak ele alınır. Avatar oyuncu ve dünyanın ortak gayretinden üretilir: onların senkronize eylemleri

dünyayı işler. Bu da bizi senkrona getirir, ki bu da hem 'burada ve şimdi'nin nasıl işlendiğini gösterir; hem de bir avatarın genel dünyadaki konumunu besler. Bu mekansal bilgi, elbette, dünyaya bilgisayar ağı ile getirilir. Sunucular kişisel bilgisayarlara bilgi besler ve 'burada ve şimdi'nin ortamının nelerden oluştuğunu kurar. Bu üç özellik sayesinde 'burada ve şimdi' alanı kurulur.

Gündelik gerçekliğin ikinci özelliği öznelerarasılıktır. Gerçekliğin bu yönü Berger ve Luckmann tarafından "şeyler dünyası" üreten olarak özellikle vurgulanmıştır (1966, p.30). Bireyler ilişkisellikleri ve imlem süreçleri üzerinden nesnel yapılar (sembolik ve materyal) üretirler. Dil burada gelecek nesillere aktarılmak üzere zamanda korunan anlam ve deneyim birikiminden oluşan bir buluta benzer şekilde ortaya çıkar. Açıklamalarına göre, o zaman, özneleraraşılığın iki özelliği göze çarpıyor: iletişim (imlem sistemleri üzerinden) ve sosyalleştirme. Argümanlarına uygun olarak öncelikle bu karakteristiklere odaklanıp kendi sanal dünyamızda izledim. İlk olarak oyuncular arasındaki birliklerin nasıl nesneleştirme süreçlerini beslediğini iletişim kanalları ve lonca örgütleri üzerinden analiz ettim. İnsan ağını tartışırken, ayrıca bu birliklerin yeni gelen bireylerin sosyalleşme süreçlerini ve oyuncu jenerasyonları arasındaki bilgi aktarımını nasıl beslediğini özellikle vurguladım. Kendi çalışmalarında iletişimin önemini anlatırken Berger ve Lukmann mzellikle yüzyüze iletişime vurgu yaparlar. Geleneksel anlamda bir yüzyüze iletişim bulunmadığından, öznelerarasılığın bu özelliğini avatarlar üzerinden tartıştım. Sanal dünyanın sorumlu bedenleri olarak avatarlar dünyada birbirleri ile temas ederler, ve bu arayüz üzerinden oyuncuların 'yüzyüze' geldiği düşünülebilir.

Gündelik gerçekliğe dair incelediğim son boyut verili alınma. Bu boyut direk olarak genel kanının kurulması ve sürdürülmesi ile alakalıdır. Sanal dünyaların özelliklerine ilişkilendirerek, öncelikle avatarların nasıl zaten nesnelleşirilmiş ve sorunsallaştırılmamış kısımları taşıdığına odaklandım. Avatarlar dünyada oluş şekillerini tanımladığından, hem genel kanı taşıyıcısı, hem de genel kanının gündelik gerçeklik içerisinde kuruluğunun failleridir. Sunucu tipi kendi içinde yaşanan sosyalliği bir dereceye kadar belirlediğinden, farklı genel kanı davranışları farklı sunucularda gözlemlenebilir. Ayrıca bir bilgisayar ağında işlemenin kendisinin nasıl rasyonalite ve kesin hesap gibi kavramlara yol açtığını da

inceledim. Berger ve Luckmann rutinleşmiş ve sıradan eylemlerin gerçekliğin verili alınan kısımlarının ürünleri ve üreticileri olduğunu anlatır. Bu fikre ilişkin olarak kalıcılığa birikimi sağlayan bir mekanizma olarak odaklandım, ve ne tür fikirlerin genel kanı olarak bu gündelik gerçeklik özelinde ortaya çıktığını tartıştım.

Analiz boyunca ortaya çıkmıştır ki 'savaş' gündelik gerçekliği örgütleyen kavramdır. Lineer gelişim, yatırım, birikim, güçlenme vs. gibi diğer kavramlar da 'savaş'a ilişkili şekilde ortaya çıkar. Kabloların içerisindeki gündelik gerçeklik savaşın etrafında döner, ve oyuncular sürekli düşmanlar ile yüz yüzedir, Yapay Zeka Karakteri veya diğer oyuncular gibi. Oyunun başlangıcında oyuncu savaşma kapasitesine sahip sınıflardan birini seçmek zorundadır. Dünyada varoluşa gelebilmek için savaşabilen bir karakter olmak zorundadır. Ayrıca, oyuncu iki lider fraksiyon arasındaki asla bitmeyen bir savaşta taraf seçmelidir. Horde ve Alliance arasındaki mücadele her an meşru kılınır. Oyun dünyasındaki normatif yapı, her sunucuda farklılaşsa da, Horde ve Alliance arasındaki bu ayrışmadan çıkar, ve bu fraksiyonlar arasındaki savaş durumunun sürdürülmesine dayanır. Bu fraksiyonlar arasında iletişim kanalları bulunmadığından ötürü, savaş Horde ve Alliance arasındaki ilişkileri şekillendirmeye devam eder. Dünyadaki ana eylemler oyuncular arasında veya da Çevreye karşı (PvE) verilen savaşlardır. Görevlerin çoğunluğu düşmanlarla savaşmayı ve yağma toplamayı içerir. Oyunun tasarımı oyuncuyu savaştan galip çıkması durumunda ödüllendirerek bunu daha da arttırır. Keşif pratikleri veya ekonomik eylemler her ne kadar oyunda çokça görülse de, tanımlayıcı rutinler genel olarak savaş tarafından şekillendirilir. Esther MacCallum-Stewert'ın (2008) dediği gibi "World of Warcraft'ın anlatısı savaş durumunun doğallaştırıldığı bir toplum sunar" (p.58)

Bu çalışma gündelik gerçeklik dinamiklerinin WoW sanal dünyasında nasıl sürdürüldüğünü anlamaya çalışmıştır. Bunu yaparken, bir kere daha ortaya çıkmıştır ki, sanal veya değil, her sosyal oluşum katılan bireylerin rutinleşmiş ve sıradan pratiklerinin oluşturduğu kendi verili alınmış kavramlarını getirir. Sanalda varolan bir dünyayı çalışan bu tez bu tür dünyalara kaçış alanları olaraj değil, gündelik gerçekliğin farklı bir formda deneyimlendiği mekanlar olarak anlamamıza katkıda bulunur. Bu seviyede görebiliriz de sanal dünyalar sadece oyun mekanları değildir,

sıkıcılık ve ciddiyet de barındırırlar. Vurgulanmalıdır ki, ana akım oyunların sınırında kalan Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrimiçi Oyunlar oyun ve ciddiyet ikiliğini araştırmak için iyi bir alan oluşturur.

Ayrıca bu araştırma Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrimiçi Oyunlar janrının bir gündelik hayat içeren sanal dünya olarak kavranmasına katkıda bulunurken, ayrıca 'sihirli çember' kavramına karşı bir tartışma olarak da düşünülebilir. Bu kavram oyunların çalışılmasında genel olarak kullanılır ve fakat büyük eleştirilere de maruz kalmıştır. Her ne kadar bu çalışma kabloların 'içindeki' dünyaya bir bakış olsa da, içerisi ve dışarısı arasında katı ve açık bir ayrım olduğu argümanını gütmez. 'Sihirli çember' kavramı içerisinde eğlence içeren oyun formlarının pratik edildiği gündelik hayattan ayrılmış bir alan ima eder. Ancak bu çalışma bu anlayışa aykırı olarak göstermiştir ki oyunun 'içerisindeki' dünya sadece oynamaktan oluşmaz, aksine sıradan ve tekrar içeren, herhangi bir 'sihir' içermeyen pratikler içerir. Bu anlamda bu çalışma oyunların genel manada bi 'sihirli çember' olarak görmeye karşı bir tez oluşturur, ve bu kavramsal aracın eleştirilerine bir katkı olarak düşünülebilir.

Araştırma sorunsalının arkaplanındaki argüman Devasa Çok Oyunculu Çevrimiçi Oyunların onları bir oyundan 'daha fazla' yapan mekanizmalar barındırdığıdır. Bu çalışmada ortaya çıkmıştır ki bu 'fazla' sıradan ve rutinleşmiş pratikler tarafından üretilmektedir. Oyun dünyası bu anlamda bir fazlalık üretir, ki bu da Durkheimcı 'kolektif coşku' (collective effervescence) anlayışından bakılırsa, dönüştürücü bir güç olarak düşünülebilir. Oyun bu türden alışılmış (ritüelleştirilmiş) aktiviteler tarafından daha fazla bir şeye dönüşür. Bu aktiviteler herhangi bir 'sihir' barındırmasa dahi belirli bir sosyal hayatta ortaya çıkan anlam yapılarını yeniden düzenleme potansiyelini taşır. Oyun ürününün yeniliğinden ve kalıplaşmış sıradan aktiviteleri barındırmasından gelen bu türden dönüştürücü gücün pek tabii uygulama alanlarına türlü etkileri olacaktır, özellikle de eğitim ve sağlık endüstrilerinde.

Son olarak gerçek ve sanal dediğimiz bu iki görünüşte ayrı gerçekliğin nasıl birbirlerine bağlı olduğu meselesine değinmek isterim. Her ne kadar bu tezin kapsamının dışında olsa da, gözlemlerimden yola çıkarak kısa bir görüş belirtmek isterim. Tezde pek çok kez vurgulandığı gibi bu türden oyunların sosyal

bileşenleridir onları bir oyundan fazla bir şeye döüştüren. ‘Farming’ veya ‘grinding’ gib alışkanlık haline gelen aktiviteler oyuncuların bu kalıplaşmış pratikleri uygulamaları üzerinden ortak algı elementlerine dönüşür. Bir anlamda ‘şeyler dünyası’ (Berger ve Luckmann, 1966) MMOGlerin öznelerarası bileşeninden üretilmektedir. Karanlık bir odada bir bilgisayarın başında outran oyuncuyu oyun dünyasında bulunan gündelik gerçekliğe bağlayan da bu sosyal bileşendir. Sanal/enformasyonal olan gerçek/fiziksel olanın üzerine öznelerarası ilişkilenmeler sayesinde akar. Oyun dünyasının farklı alanlarını birbirine bağlayan bu sosyal hayattır; ve de bu iki ayrı görünen gerçekliği birbirine bağlayan da sosyal mekanizmalardır. Oyunun etrafını saran gerçeklik ‘sanal’ dünya ile sınırlı değildir: gerçeklik katılımcıların ‘gerçek’ dünyadaki oyuna ilişkin pratiklerinin oluşturduğu sosyo-kültürel ve ekonomik biçimleri de kapsar. Sonuç olarak daha geniş kapsamlı bir çalışma bu iki ayrı gerçekliğin arasındaki ilişkiselliği onları birbirine bağlayan sosyal alan üzerinden araştırabilir.

## TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

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**YAZARIN**

Soyadı : Yolgörmez
Adı : Ceyda
Bölümü : Sosyoloji

**TEZİN ADI** (İngilizce) : CONSTRUCTİON OF EVERYDAY REALİTY İN A VİRTUAL WORLD: THE CASE OF 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT'

**TEZİN TÜRÜ** : Yüksek Lisans ■ Doktora ☐

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**TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ**: 12 Temmuz, 2016