

On the Ontology of MMORPG Beings: A theoretical model for research

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ABSTRACT

In the Game Studies field, the study of MMORPG's have been approached by four mayor research traditions: social aspects tradition, individual player issues, narratological themes and ludological themes. Although these are not mutually exclusive, focusing in one or two aspects of MMORPG's usually means omitting elements of other themes. One fundamental theme that has been usually ommited is that of the essential characteristics, or ontology, of the online beings that inhabit MMORPGs. This paper focuses on this aspect, by providing a practical example of how, by applying a theoretical model that has at its vertex the Ontology of MMORPG Being, all the other themes and levels of analysis can be taken into account in one single theoretical framework.

Keywords

MMORPG, virtual identity, virtual community, ontology, online being, theoretical model

1. INTRODUCTION: Wherein the online being in MMORPG Studies?

The study of MMORPG's (Massive Multiplayer Online Games) has become by now a well established tradition inside the Game Studies field. Works such as Lisbeth Klastrup's, T.L. Taylor's, and Constance Steinkuehler's, are starting to shape a more or less common ground on the theoretical and methodological approach for the study in MMORPGS.

In this context, four basic themes or study traditions can be identified : themes regarding the very basic social fabric of MMORPGs (such as social networks and other sociability issues); themes centered on the individual and its identity (like issues on gender in online gaming, player typologies, and so on); the narrative aspects of MMORPGS and the likewise related fan-fiction and simulation/interactive story elements (corresponding to the "narratologist" school of thought); and themes related to the MMORPG "gameplay", "rules" and/or ludology by design (corresponding to the "ludological" approach). These research traditions are not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other, but usually focusing in one or two aspects of MMORPG's usually means omitting elements of other themes. Although this can be seen as a natural practice in science (focusing in, lets say, modern history would most likely omit elements of ancient

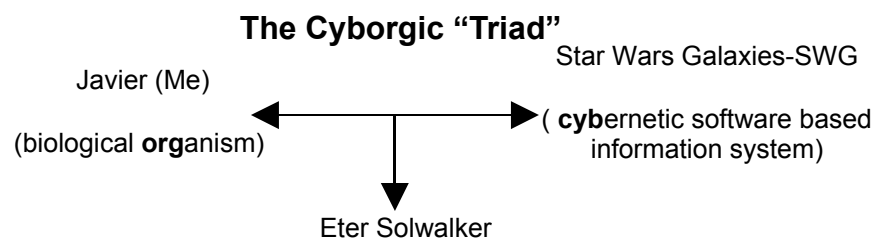
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greek history; the same way as focusing on social networks in MMORPGs may leave out some elements of gender differences gaming, for example) I believe there is one fifth theme or tradition that Game Studies is currently lacking when it comes to the study of MMORPGs: the ontology of MMORPG Beings. On this paper I would like to propose an alternative in which, by focusing on a particular view of the essential characteristics of MMORPG Beings, a theoretical model that touches all other main MMORPG research themes can be applied. But first, I would like to briefly examine how the current main traditions typically omit discussing about the Ontology of the MMORPG Being, either by leaving it out of the discussion or by taking it for granted- both different ways omission as they avoid the problematic nature of this issue.

The sociologically-anthropologically oriented tradition of MMORPG and its social aspects is usually related to themes that can be located in what Hakken (1999) calls the micro-social level (the micro, close relations the players construct) and the meso-social level (sociability issues on MMORPG as virtual communities, including all the wide arrange of social phenomena that occur on PA's and other social formations, such as leadership, cohesion, social identity, etc). These studies widely assume that MMORPGs are social spaces, places that allow sociability in their players, which indeed is more than obvious for anyone who has ever played an MMORPG. In addition, if we take into account the fact that a space can only be social if the individuals who inhabit it are carriers of sociability, then as a corollary this tradition usually takes for granted the nature of the individual player as a social being. However, if we assume that the “toons” or “avatars” are the very basic sociability carrying entities of MMORPG's , then we also need to explain the subjective processes that occur in the individual level and that result in the injection of sociability into these entities, a theme that not necessarily appears in Game Studies literature¹.

If we examine papers much more concerned with the MMORPG player at the individual level, we can see a similar picture: there are still many essential elements that are usually left out due to the complex particularities of MMORPG's. For instance, one common example is to understand MMORPG beings as if they were “cyborgs”: a transgressive mixture of an *organism* and a *cybernetic* information system. As an example of this notion, I could even present a personal reflection: when I connect into the Star Wars Galaxies MMORPG (on which I am currently conducting a research on Social Identity Genesis) I indeed become a kind of a cyborg, called “Eter Solwalker”. This process could be represented on what I like to call “The Cyborgic Triad” and it can be visualized in the following form:



The problem with this model is that it doesn't explain all the intricacies that come into play on the MMORPG experience. For example, it doesn't say anything about gameplay issues,

¹ It's not that there aren't any papers at all that consider this aspect. Taylor (2002) , for example; sustains that : “In general, any methodological approach which does not take participants as the primary actors produces flawed results”. What I am trying to imply here is that the appearance of this theme in MMORPG papers is not always proportional to the importance such aspect has regarding the coherence of the study.

or narrative aspects of MMORPG's, nor it even explains how individuals inject sociability into their players. Neither do other traditional models of virtual identity made by researchers such as Turkle (1996) suffice to encompass the wide arrange of elements that comprise the wholeness of the MMORPG, such as the individual user's interaction with the online world, the hardware and software restrictions that includes, the users' own subjective psychological content (wishes, personality, expectative, etc) that pre-exists the MMORPG; the cultural constructions and the exchange of signifiers in the form of symbolic content, etc.

This previous aspect, (symbolic contents and exchange of signifiers) is the realm par excellence of the "narratologist" tradition. Narratives can be considered as a part of the whole cultural content that is (re)produced inside the MMORPG. Still, narratives are a result of semiotic activities, and therefore are ultimately created by individuals who already carry a subjective content that shapes the narrative. So, necessarily, the "narratives" that the "narratologists" care so much about depend on an essential symbolic/semiotic (re)production capability that the "toons" or "avatars" bear, which is also usually taken for granted among narratologically oriented studies.

A similar kind of omission happens with ludologically oriented studies. If we focus on the "gameplay", "playability", "rules of play" or per se of a particular MMORPG (or whatever other topic that ludologically-oriented game researchers and even game reviewers like to emphasize) then we should equally consider all non-game dependant content that the gamer brings in before even playing the game. For example, the expectatives towards the whole game experience that an individual player might have *before* even entering an online world, also shape the game experience itself and do have a strong influence on how the gamer will handle the original "rules of play" the designer might had in mind when he developed the MMORPG.

In this sense, if users enter MMORPG's already carrying a set of essential qualities as humans that are what ultimately shape the online world, then: How can we continue talking about games if we keep turning our head away of all the subjective aspects that preexists the "rules", the "gameplay" and "simulation" of the ludologists, the narratives of the "narrativists", and the very basic social nature of MMORPGS that sociologically oriented game researchers take for granted?. Players before playing games already have a subjective content, an essence, that must be taken into account if we want to call ourselves "game researchers". After all, games are games because people play them, so on whatever study topic we choose about games, we must at least give heed to the existence of an individual and preexisting psychological content/cultural background that influences any gaming experience. But this leads to another important question: How can we focus on the individual subjective elements of the player without losing sight of the other themes in the study of a MMORPG?. The answer to this question is related with the levels of analysis to be used on MMORPG Studies.

2. MMORPG's Studies and its Levels of Analysis.

What all this questions point towards to is a problem of focus: research focused on differing themes usually equals focusing on different levels of study. To illustrate this point, I would like to bring forth again what Hakken (1999) calls the "levels" program for coherence in cyberspace research. The author proposes 6 levels of analysis and if we relate them with the above explained traditions in MMORPG Studies, we can obtain the following allocation map:

<i>1. The basic characteristics of the entities</i>						
2. The self-identities formed by such entities. 3. The micro social relations these entities construct 4. Their meso-social, intermediate social relations 5. Their macro-social relations (national and transnational)	<table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="812 325 1104 388">{ Individual Issues</td> <td data-bbox="1104 325 1421 388" rowspan="4">} Narratology Approach & Ludology Approach</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="812 388 1104 598" rowspan="3">{ Social Aspects</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="812 598 1104 661"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="812 661 1104 724"></td> </tr> </table>	{ Individual Issues	} Narratology Approach & Ludology Approach	{ Social Aspects		
{ Individual Issues	} Narratology Approach & Ludology Approach					
{ Social Aspects						
6. The political economic structures which cyberspace entities produce and (re)produce and by which they are constrained.						

As it can be observed on the previous scheme, the narratological and ludological approaches can be used to explore either social issues or individual identity and gender issues, but there are at least 3 levels of analysis that usually are not mainstream, in the game studies field. Regarding level 5 and 6 it must be said that recently there have been some studies of comparative culture game studies (level 5). For instance, Chee (2005) and Chang & Wang (2005) examine cultural differences in how of players experience MMORPGs. The 6th level, on the other hand, has a long tradition among Cyberspace Studies [Hakken , 1999] , but I believe its still too early for it to fully find its way in the Game Studies field; as we have yet to see, for instance, foucaltian-like deconstructions of the power structures that constrain MMORPG development, distribution and proliferation. However some insights on the political and economic structures behind the emergence MMORPGs can be found in Lugo & Lossada (2002), Zackariasson & Wilson (2004), and McInnes (2005).

Nevertheless, the previous scheme is not necessarily prescriptive, it has no intention to be a kind of “recipe” for the sequence on which MMORPG studies should be conducted. The reason why I cite it here is to point towards the idea that in order to achieve coherence in a certain level of analysis, the previous levels should be accounted for first. The fact that the very first, and fundamental level of analysis – the Ontology of the MMORPG Being- is very rarely discussed in Game Studies literature may be a sign of why; asking forth questions about the social aspects of a game without first explicitly assuming a model for the explanation of how players inject sociability into their avatars is a conundrum, one that threatens the coherence on our views of MMORPGs. The same can be said of examining narratives without approaching the subjective content on which players draw from in order to submerge in the MMORPG’s story; or examining ludological aspects of a game without posing questions about the individual that is playing it, and so on.

On this paper, I intend to provide an illustration of how, by applying an ontologically oriented theoretical model to an individual case example of a MMORPG being, it’s possible to ultimately attempt to explain how all the other themes are intertwined. In this sense, the model does not intend to add a “new” tradition in MMORPG studies, it simply purposes the reallocation

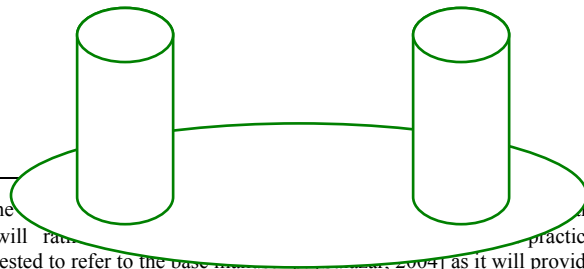
of all common traditions on a coherent framework. By focusing on this model, a researcher can, for instance, connect the narrative and gameplay aspects of the MMORPG with the process on which players inject sociability into their “avatars” or “toons”. By providing this example I hope initiate and alternate discussion of a possible common ground on top of which MMORPG researchers can continue their work on all the other levels of analysis; under the premise that no research that concentrates on the study of a MMORPG can stand by its own unless its equally sustained by an explanation of the essential characteristics of the being that inhabit the MMORPG.

2. On the Ontology of a MMORPG Being: A practical example .

The following practical example is based on the Model for the Understanding of the Ontology of the Online Being proposed by Salazar,(2004). Briefly speaking, this model attempts to “dilute” common cyberspace studies notions such as the “cyborg” construct, cyberspace as “space” and as “place”, and virtual identity issues into the wider notion of “online being”; and integrate them into a model that has the intention of shedding some light on the process by which human beings imprint sociability and subjectivity to the entity that emerges when connected to cyberspace². In this sense, the subsequent case example is intended to be an adaptation of this model to the particularities of the online beings that inhabit MMORPG’s. This exemplification will be based on the personal experiences of the author as a regular player of the Star Wars Galaxies (SWG) MMORPG; and as so, it must be seen as an anecdotic and ethnographically oriented subjective illustration of how this abstract theoretical model can be brought “down to earth” on a practical level.

2.1. On the preexisting subjective content.

Even before SWG’s launch date, I had many expectatives toward it. Since my childhood I have always been an avid fan of the Star Wars saga, and its no coincidence that I picked SWG as my research ground for my currently ongoing Master Thesis Project. As it will be explained later, I wanted to study how Social Identity emerges in online virtual communities, and also “live” a Star Wars like experience while doing so, the role I invented for myself in SWG is expressed in my online character: Eter Solwalker, a Xenoanthropologist; being “xenoanthropologist” a kind of “star warsy” translation of what an hypothetical ethnographer would be if it ever lived in the Star Wars World. This sole wish has definitely -and fundamentally- shaped (and will continue to shape) my SWG experience. This is just a small example of the kind of pre-existing subjective content that must be accounted for when examining an individual MMORPG player, the kinds of aprioristic wishes, and even personality traits that will ultimately shape its gaming. On the referred model, all this subjective content can be localized in one single puzzle piece:



² A detailed explanation of the model is above the length limitations of this paper. Since in this paper I will raise a practical application of this model, I would strongly advise to anyone further interested to refer to the base model (Salazar, 2004) as it will provide the full theoretical context and fundaments on which this case example is based.

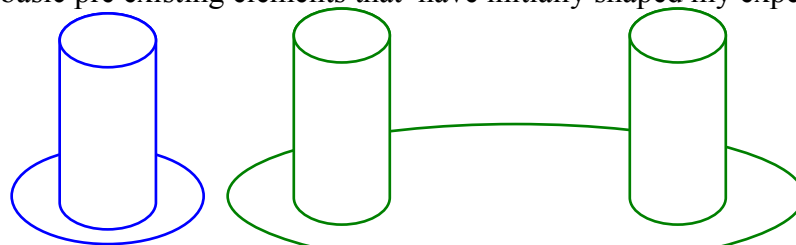
Player's subjective content

At this point is important to explain that the ontological model used as foundation of this case example is a multi leveled one, in which each level represents an analytic category that can itself be visually represented as a single story of a multi storied cylinder. As for now, setting the player's pre existing subjective content as a kind of foundation in the form of two pillars has the intention of providing a visual cue of the premise that gaming experiences build upon a previous set of intangible subjective contents such as wishes, conscious and unconscious expectatives, personality traits etc. On how this relates with other important aspects of MMORPG's beings will be explained further.

2.2. On the pre-existing software, hardware and design aspects of all MMORPG gaming experiences.

Besides the pre-existing subjective content, before the player enters for the first time to any virtual world there is also an already given environment created by its designers and developers. Virtual Worlds are software and hardware based environments, meaning that they are made of lines of code that run on computers, and in the case of MMORPG's, the internet's features are also needed to provide connectability to its users, serving as a kind of hardware correlate of the social formations that emerge on them. All of these hardware/software given aspects of the MMORPG, including all its design features (such as the 3D graphical environment that serve as the "space" on which the virtual world takes place, human interaction interface, character customization, class/profession system, quest system, rules of the game, physics of the MMORPG environment and so on ... basically all of the single features the designers and developers of a MMORPG "intended" to offer to the player , which is actually a very wide and surely controversial category indeed) will later on shape the experience of the individual in the MMORPG.

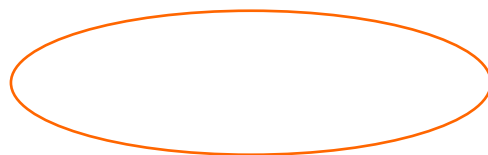
Adding up this preexisting element to the previously explained subjective content, we now have two basic pre existing elements that have initially shaped my experience in SWG:



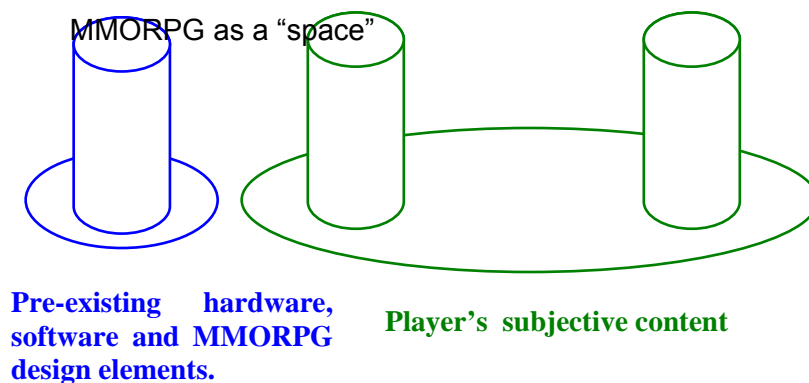
Since describing all of the particular hardware, software and design features of SWG would take hundreds of pages, on the next paragraphs I will rather refer to only some of the most illustrative features that have fundamentally influenced my experience in SWG.

2.3 On the notion of MMORPGs as "spaces":

The term "space" is surely a problematic one. There are many pages written about the



allegories of space in cyberspace [see for example Hicks, 1998, and Aarseth , 1998]. Certainly talking about the MMORPGs as “space” is somewhat ambiguous, or even blurry: what kind of space is this? Is this referred to the 3-D environment designed by the MMORPG’s developers? Or is it instead the sociability space where players can engage in social relations with the other players?. The reason of this ambiguity is that the notion of a MMORPG as a “space” refers to both of the previous questions - and even more. In this regard, in order to understand this notion, we first need to examine how the preexisting elements of the MMORPG shape the idea of space in these virtual worlds. The following “piece of the puzzle” of the Ontology of MMORPG Beings can serve as a starting point for this analysis:



This illustration intends to show that at first, there is a given “space” bounded by the spatial features the MMORPG developer intended to provide to the player. These not only refer to the 3D graphical world on which the player inhabits, it also refers to other aspect such as the set of game mechanics, rules of play, game engine, A.I. interactivity, etc that regulate, expand and/or constrain the player’s actions and interactions inside the MMORPG. As an example: In SWG I can build a house and live in Tatooine because the developers intended so, as well as they intended being a rebel in order to blast away stormtroopers , etc.

This space, that I’d like to call “game space”, is closely related to ludologically oriented concepts such as “playability” and “gameplay”. “Gameplay” can be defined on a wide variety of ways ³, but one common assumption is that it refers to whatever set of tools and environments the developer presents the player with and the use the players gives to this features [Jorgensen, K. 2004] . Hence, this assumption of “gameplay” , which can be reduced to the “game space” or “what it is in the game design itself that leaves borders for the player to act within” [Jorgensen, K. 2004, pag.6] is just one of the many aspects of the MMORPG’s as “spaces”.

As suggested above, there is more to “gameplay” than just the given design elements set forth by the developer. The author elaborates further, by postulating that while the game system sets up formal parameters that become the frame of the players’ actions, the player itself engages in a mode of experience where its own playing style, expectatives, wishes, etc. interact with the

³It must be said, though, that “gameplay” is itself a very problematic concept. Recently I attended to a PhD Seminar which purpose was to discuss the challenges and setbacks of establishing “Game Studies” as a separate field or discipline (Aarseth, 2004). One of the recurrent themes was that among the many difficulties on this task was that Game Studies is plagued with ambiguous and difficult-to-define notions such as “gameplay”. It seems that the “gameplay” term is widely used by game researchers, game reviewers, and game designers and even the actual players ... not always conveying the same meaning and implications. “Gameplay” appears to be one of those notions that, even tough everybody that has ever played a game may have at least a slight idea of what it is, nobody can easily attain to define it concretely. Anyway, on this paper I will limit myself to selecting one of the many definitions of gameplay and apply it to the matter at hand: its relation with the Ontology of MMORPG Beings.

game's features and create a particular "gameplay" experience for each individual players. This means that the pre-existing subjective content of the players also shape this "game space", as illustrated on the MMORPG as "space" graph. In SWG (as in many other MMORPGs), for example, players are presented with the opportunity to build, place and decorate structures and cities. This way, the tools are there to build a city, but its name, city layout, and location are all up to what the particular P.A may find meaningful for themselves. Garva's Home Show, a forum thread lead by one of SWG's game "devs" that periodically picks the best home decorations, is a good example of how creativity and player initiative can turn what was once supposed to be a player home into a Radio Station, or how a plain piece of furniture such as a couch can end up being a repulsorlift of an ingeniously configured X-Wing. The possibilities of creating, experimenting and reinventing within a set of MMORPG game mechanics are usually so vast that can even sometimes lead to unintended or undesired game "features", such as exploits and griefing.

Besides the "game space", the players' own subjective content also leads towards the construction of the MMORPG as a "social space", one that allows sociability and the exchange of signifiers among its members. MMORPG are played by humans (besides NPC's that is ... whether it can be said if an A.I entity such as an NPC "plays" a MMORPG or not is another matter), and regardless of the cultural background or personality traits of a particular individual, humans are inevitably carriers of sociability. On discussing how the Model for the Understanding of the Online Being views the way humans essentially translate into social terms the given terrain of a virtual world, Salazar (2004) postulates that the social space is " a **consensually** simulated and hyper real realm for the encounter of the "online being" with the "online other"[pag. 12]. This means that players act within the MMORPG world in a "as if" of the place where humans inhabit. Accordingly, players use the terrain given by the developers to assign meaning to objects and to create social networks that ultimately generate subcultures [Taylor, 2003; Squire & Steinkuehler, 2004]. The members attribute social significance to the digital space where they socialize with others, therefore they in fact shape the social landscape that constitutes the very essence or social fabric of the MMORPG. Thus, according to the MMORPG being model, the social aspects tradition can be allocated within this MMORPG's as space level of analysis.

The narratological tradition can also be localized along this level, as it depends on the exchange of signifiers that occurs inside this hyperrealized social space. As an illustration; Klastrup (2003) -a well known representative of the narratological tradition- on her introduction of the concept of "worldness" as an artifact for the measurement and description of the particular traits that constitute the experience of a virtual world, appeals to a set of functions and aspects that constitute units of meaning. Consequently, these semiotic aspects refer to the basic ability that humans (the players) have to assign meaning to experiences and surrounding objects. Hence, the "worldness" concept can be equally localized in the intersection of the two basic foundations of the notion of MMORPGs as "spaces": the pre-existing design elements and the pre-existing subjective content of the player.

At this point of the analysis, it's easy to see how the "game space" and "social space" that result from the intersection of the aforementioned pre-existing fundamentals, comprise basic themes of the ludological, social aspects and narratological tradition in MMORPG studies.

2.4 On the notion of MMORPGs as "places":

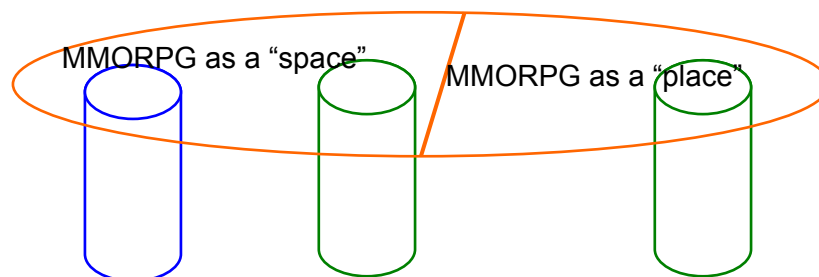
As explained above, MMORPGs, in order to be experienced as social spaces, must be first “consensually” constructed as such by the players who inhabit it. However, not all of the constructed spatial elements of a MMORPG are consensually experienced, in fact, a same object can be experienced and signified in different ways by different players. This particular or subjective position that a player may occupy within the constructed space is what Salazar (2004) refers to as *place*.

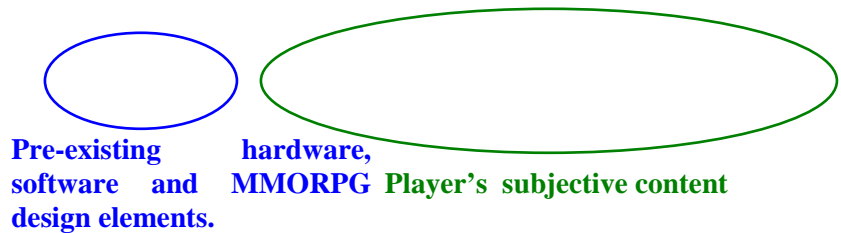
On practical or concrete terms, a space can be the same as a place. The difference, though, between this two notions is a logical one: a space is a space in the extent that it meaningfully bounds a group of players, while a place is a place in the extent that is only meaningful for a particular individual. To further explain this distinction, I would like to refer Taylor’s (2003) work on social network formations in Everquest:

“This [social network] system develops slowly over time and thousands of players contribute to the creation and upholding of the norms in a way that makes all players co-constructors of the game world that they, and future players, are part of. The specific contribution of any single player is almost never visible. Understanding the nature of the collective, in both its temporary associations and more formal organizations, then becomes key.” [pag. 1].

If I apply this assumption to my own experience in SWG, I’d say that indeed, Eter is a part of a social network inside the Naritus server of SWG. This collective system emerged among a larger social structure, a co-constructed social space where a complex set of interactions and reputation attributions came into play. *Although I cannot identify the individual contribution of Eter in this network, I can definitely perceive which particular place Eter may occupy inside this larger social structure.* In this sense , I see myself as a XenoAnthropologist, an intergalactic researcher of alien cultures. I wished to fill this role as a way for searching a meaningful coherence between my original purpose of entering SWG (to conduct an ethnographic study) and its interaction with the SWG world. I chose the Ranger profession as my main activity in SWG, because for me it seemed coherent with the way of life that an imaginary XenoAntropologist would have. I wrote for Eter a character biography that reflected this idea, and even have been decorating my house as a XenoScience center, a research lab coherent with the whole XenoAnthropologist theme. My experiences and social interactions have been somewhat influenced by this imaginary theme ... a theme that is particularly meaningful for me, and that defines many of the aspects of the particular *place* I wish that Eter would occupy inside the larger social network; inside the *larger social space* that constitutes the SWG MMORPG.

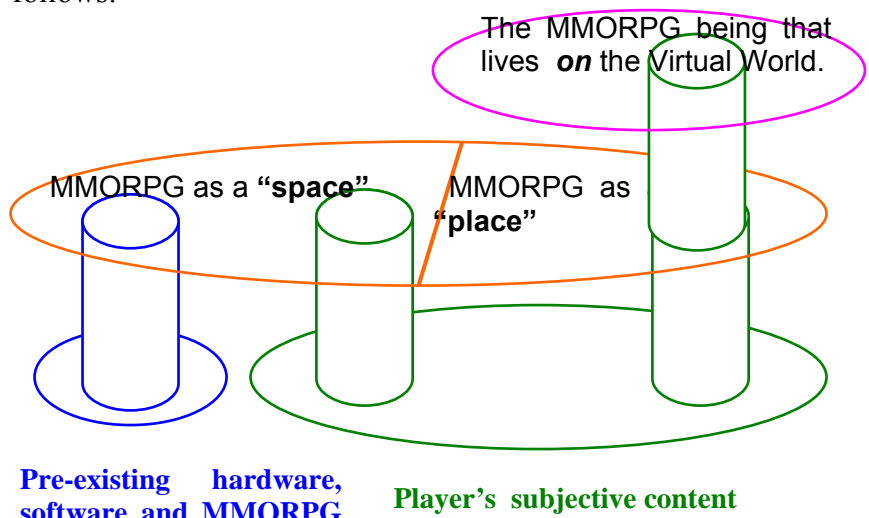
In this sense, the notion of MMORPG’s as places is intertwined with the ludological tradition as it has to do with the particular gameplay style a player may have; as well as its strongly related with the narratological tradition since it has to do with the particular meaningful narratives on which the player submerges in the virtual world. This level of analysis and its relation with the previous ones can be represented the following way:





2.5. On the Identity of the MMORPG Being: Living *on* the Virtual World.

The particular place that a player occupies within the MMORPG is also closely related with the individual aspects tradition. Issues on gender & online gaming, virtual identity, and MMORPG player typologies have had their share of attention in the Game Studies literature. In this context, Turkle's (1996) classic views on virtual identity are useful to explain how, in a sense, players act on the screen one of the many fragmentations of the self. Take for instance, Bartle's (1996) widespread classic typology of Achievers, Socializers, Explorers and Killers—they all can be seen as different expressions of the player's self, an expression that is lived and experienced *on* the screen, *on* the virtual world. Through Eter, I also live *on* SWG a fragment of my role as a researcher in “real life”. These are all MMORPG Beings that result from the projection of subjective wishes, desires, needs, etc into the reality of the virtual world, and can be allocated as follows:



2.6. On the Identity of The MMORPG Being: Living *in* The Virtual World.

In addition to the online being that lives *on* the screen, there is another aspect of the Identity of the MMORPG Being that is worth noting: the particularities of the *avatar*, or *toon*. This is a theme that fills many pages of Game Studies literature, because as Taylor (2002) points out:

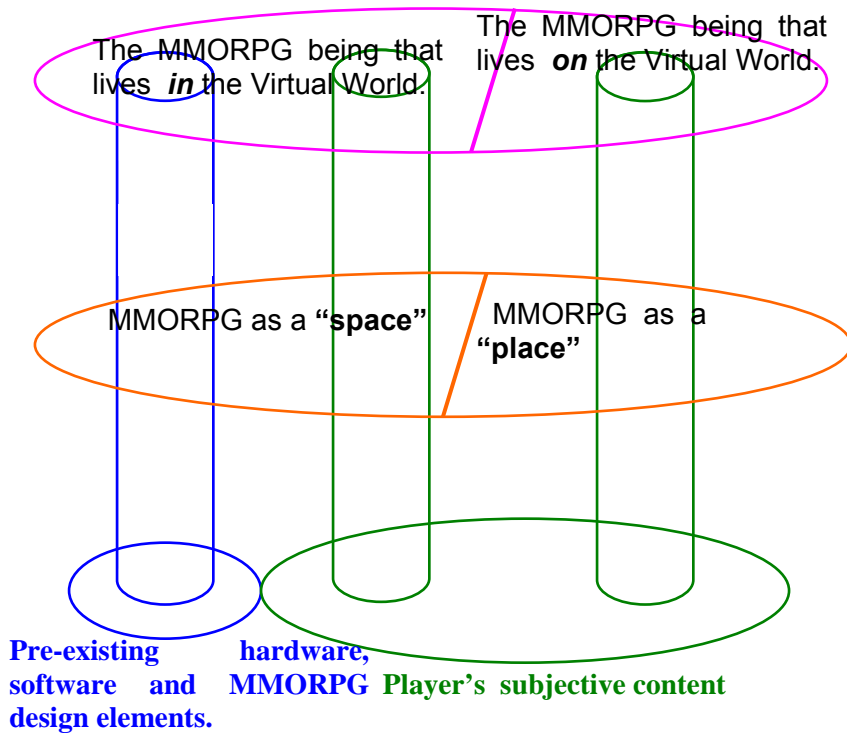
“The kinds of avatars people are able to create and use (hence, the avatars and looks the game designers

provide for players to use) is important for our understanding of embodiment in virtual worlds. Avatars are in large part the central artifacts through which people build not only social lives, but identities. They become access points in constructing affiliations, socializing, communicating, and working through various selves. They are the material out of which people embody and make themselves real.” (pag. 3)

The “avatar” is a mixture of lines of code and the player’s subjectivity. In MMORPGs players have a wide variety of customization options for their avatars, so players usually configure their avatars with characteristics that reflect their choices, expectations, needs, etc. to the point where the graphical avatar is a reflection of the individual’s subjectivity. The player then, not only lives *on* the virtual world through the avatar, but also lives *inside* of the MMORPG in the form of a digital correlate. Even when I am not connected in SWG, Eter still lives *in* the MMORPG as an entity whose corporeality is made by lines of code. Thus, Eter is a cyborg, a living entity that results from the transgressive mixture of the subjectivity of a biological organism and an information based system.

The identity level of analysis of the Ontology of the MMORPG then, is consequently allocated the individual aspects tradition, as well as the ludological aspects (avatars are embedded on the game mechanics, and are one of the many expressions of the players “gameplay”) and the narratological aspects (the avatars are the characters of the story, the player controlled actants of the narrative that shapes the MMORPG).

The final piece of the model can now be added to the puzzle :



I hope that at this point of the analysis, a clear example of how by concentrating in the fundamental ontological aspects of MMORPG beings, a theoretical model that takes into account all the mayor research traditions can be proposed as a common ground to further MMORPG studies. The model does not intend to favor one research tradition over the other, instead, its main purpose is to coherently explain how the successive levels of analysis are essentially intertwined and complementary.

3. Final Words: Alternative Interpretations.

I initiated this paper by focusing the discussion towards the fact that the different research traditions in MMORPG studies inherently omit important aspects of the other traditions; and that the purpose of this paper was to propose a model to assess this difficulty.

However, it must be said that by proposing this model, I am also inevitably incurring in important omissions. Not only because length limitations of this paper make it impossible to take into account all the possible themes on MMORPG studies, but also because this paper is a result of a personal interpretation of the field of Game Studies, MMORPG's and its research traditions.

Furthermore, this paper presents just one of the many possibilities in which Salazar's (2004) model can be applied on the analysis of MMORPG Beings; and I believe this model is open to a vast variety of interpretations. I invite the reader to search for its own alternate and

meaningful interpretation of this model and to adapt it to its own research focus and methodology.

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