'CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION': A STUDY OF FOLKLORE IN THE SEGMENTED ONLINE "COMMUNITIES" WITHIN MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMES (MMOGs)

JEFFERY LEARNING

'Channels of Communication': A study of folklore in the segmented online "communities" within Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs)

by

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Abstract

Massively Multiplayer Online Games house communities that require significant folkloric exploration. This thesis penetrates trends, traditions, and etiquette in an attempt to explore some of the more fundamental folklore theories and approaches to functionalism, space/place, group communication, and identity. Building on works that theorize virtual/physical space and notions of communication space, this thesis rationalizes the informal communication networks that are developed and used by the players of these social juggernauts. As observed through participant-observation of *Dark Ages of Camelot*, the true location of the elusive virtual commons lies not in the simulated physical landscape of the game but instead in the text of various communication channels created exclusively by and for these groups. These channels, i.e., commons, produce a diverse series of traditions that mirror real-world customs, most of which have the side effect of allowing players and groups to build their own identities.

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Chapter One: An Introduction

Thesis Statement, Chapter Summaries and Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relations between tradition, play, and community within the context of one specific gaming environment, *Dark Age of Camelot*. Through the use of ethnographic fieldwork (including participant-observation and face-to face, online, and telephone interviewing), I will examine the role of informal and subversive behaviour in the construction of space and identity within the confines of the official structure of the game. More specifically, I will look at theories of space, play, and identity to demonstrate how gamers create and maintain their own sense of community within the game.

In this opening chapter I will attempt to generate a working definition of a Massively Multiplayer Online Game/ Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMOG/MMORPG).[1] From here I will move into a discussion of paradigms of play in MMOGs. I will then briefly discuss a few of the structural and social obstacles that have been overcome, and a few that remain, to demonstrate the kinds of social impediments that have affected the formation of community and their traditions inside these games.

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[1] MMOGs may also be known as Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) but this is actually a misnomer as most people do not role-play when involved in with these games, at least no more than a forward in a soccer game is role-playing being a forward. This being said most MMOGs have a few servers dedicated strictly for role-playing purposes, where people are punished for coming out of character and strict guidelines exist for naming conventions of characters. However, since these servers are the exception rather than the rule, I will therefore be sticking to the mainstream servers so as not to misrepresent the population at large. As a result, I will be using the term MMOG more often throughout this thesis than the more commonly used MMORPG; it is more accurate as it does not suggest any focus on role-playing.

The second chapter is about the perception of space, place and the overlap of community into play space. This research mostly concerns spacial theory, as constructed by Ray Oldenburg, such as Martin Heidegger, Steven Harrison and Paul Dourish, Patrick Healey, Edward Soja, and Henri Lefebrve. It will also work with ideas suggested by John Jackson and Kent Ryden about the relation between geography and place. Finally, I will compare the bounded space of play with the space occupied by the community. Using Brian Sutton-Smith, Jon Dovey & Helen Kennedy, and Roger Abrahams, I will analyze this space to demonstrate the influence of bounded play space on community commons.

The third chapter focuses on the use of etiquette in community construction. Specifically, I will look at the codes of conduct of a few individual guild communities in an attempt to extrapolate reasons for the necessity of such traditions. I will also look at the separate traditions that these communities propagate to further integrate their membership. The fourth chapter is an extension of this thought, and involves player identity and the ways in which players use tradition to identify themselves within the limited structure of the MMOG. In this chapter I will analyze community alignment, in-game guild dress, and ethnicity and gender in the creation of a player's online persona.

Methodology

The methodology I employ is ethnographic research, using participant-observation and person-to-person interviews, some of which took place in open forums where others could participate and some that were private. I searched for three communities to join, one in each realm.[2] I spoke to the officers and guild masters of each guild and was granted permission to record guild chat conversation as long as all personally identifying information was omitted. I then spent time recording the chat. I also recorded in-game footage using a video capture program called *Fraps*. *Fraps* renders extremely high quality video. The program works by taking screen shots at a fairly high rate (40-60 snap shots per second) while simultaneously recording sound. This allows for the best quality of research material available as it demonstrates exactly what the player sees and hears.

This research also included in-game conversations between current guild members and myself about different aspects of the game. These interviews were more wide ranging in topic than the formal one-on-one interviews that were conducted in-person, by phone, and on MSN.[3] The subjects of these interviews were mostly former members of my original in-game guild, which was a guild created out of a group of real life friends, all living in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The reason I chose these people as extraneous informants is because several of the group are involved in game design for

[2] A realm is a hard division that exists in many MMOGs. In these MMOGs, players choose an in-game faction upon first logging into the game for the first time. From this point on, communication is limited strictly to members of that faction within the game.
[3] Phone and MSN interviews were used to allow me access to community members who were either out of this province or outside of Canada.

various companies and offer greater insight about the official/unofficial aspects of the design of MMOG worlds.

Definitions and contextual backgrounds for MMOGs and MMORPGs

Before any kind of analysis can be performed, much less explained in any meaningful way, a rudimentary understanding of what separates MMOGs from other multi-player games is required. A MMOG is typically defined as a game in which large numbers of players interact with each other inside of a common virtual environment.[4] A vast majority of definitions stop at this point, which is fine, but this definition fails to distinguish these sophisticated games from their much less sophisticated predecessors, the Multi-User Dungeons (MUD) or Multi-User Shared Hallucination (MUSH).[5] Ducheneaut et. al add the required emphasis on a 3D environment. In fact they define MMOGs as "persistent online 3D environments that are populated by hundreds of thousands of players at any given moment" (129). Although it fails to show up in the online search definitions, this emphasis on 3D environment is absolutely necessary. The sharpest division between MUDs/MUSHs and MMOGs exist in the graphical engineering

[4] A Google search might suggest that a MMOG is defined as a game in which large numbers of players interact with each other inside of a common virtual environment. I searched for a more complete definition of the term but stopped after the twenty-fifth page. It quickly became obvious that I was not going to find a definition containing all of the necessary elements to separate a modern MMOG from its text-based predecessors in main-stream media.

[5] Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) is essentially the text-based predecessor of the MMOG. The Multi-User Shared Hallucination (MUSH) also extended from the MUD but this medium is normally delegated as an environment for active role-playing, although MUSHs have been used for many other applications including educational and business.

used in MMOGs to create these visual environments, this separates them from MUDs and MUSHs quite completely as both MUDs and MUSHs are entirely text-based endeavors.[6]

Although not as obvious, the other major division existing between MUD/MUSHs and MMOGs concerns structure and control. MMOGs are well-planned and tediously structured by their developers, whereas MUDs/MUSHs are the direct result of player/designer collaboration, which makes them more amorphous in nature. The most democratic part of MMOGs in the player/developer relationship is probably represented in the random polling that the developers set up to collect players' suggestions about future changes to the game. However, it is a far cry from the democratic deliberation of MUD/MUSH worlds. In MMOGs, development staff retain all the power in this relationship because only they can create and destroy fixtures and environments inside of the game. In addition to this, MMOGs tend to be tediously planned out, right down to their paradigms of community and avenues for community construction. They use these paradigms to influence the social and cultural growth of the population through coded commands that both define and divide their in-game communities. For example, the *promote/demote* commands ensure that by default every guild is set up in a hierarchal situation. This affects player relations because these commands give certain players limited control over other players.

Perhaps the way that this structured approach differs most greatly from the amorphous structure of the MUSH is in the role-playing aspect. MUSHs are almost

[6] In other words, MUDs and MUSHs don't have pictures, video, or other non-text-based visual stimulants to limit the scope of playable environment.

exclusively for role-players, whereas the nature of the MUD dungeon-crawl[7] is more closely related to the paradigm embraced by MMOG developers. Due to their nature MMOGs offer only limited opportunities to role-play because their highly structured approach reduces the players' ability to manipulate the outcomes of most situations (there is no negotiation in MMOGs because everything is handled with in-game formulas). This reduces the ability to manipulate the environment and the other players inside of it; essentially it is like playing a live action role-playing game (role-playing where players physically act out their character's movements, gestures, etc.) with even less control over the playing environment. More over, there are also fewer options for customization of one's character (artistically speaking) inside of MMOGs because there are a limited number of colours and armour patterns to choose from in-game.

In the text-based games, the boundaries on place and space were limited only by the players' imaginations. MMOGs offer a set environment that changes gradually through game updates, but is fixed at any one point in time inside of the game. Although role-playing inside of these games is not impossible, the structure of the MMOG approach imposes severe restrictions on it. Restrictions that most role-players would choose not to deal with, since other environments exist that are better suited for this type of play. These distinctions, as well as their graphical nature, that truly separate them from their text-based predecessors.

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[7] Dungeon-crawl refers to a game where a person wanders from one room into another fighting Artificially Intelligent (or AI controlled) in-game creatures. The storylines are often shallow and straightforward, and the emphasis on the game is game play and making the character(s) being played stronger. Even so, MUDs are better equipped, for much the same reasons as MUSHs, for the handling of role-playing.

What MMOGs bring to the table that is relatively new to gaming is enforced massive team play. Like many sports, these games require a lot of practice to hone skills. Like sports, these games often come to represent far more to their players than merely offering a source of entertainment. Beyond this, these games are designed to create a social environment which, to use David Kelly's wonderfully romantic depiction, make these technological marvels, "living, self-contained, global, three-dimensional virtual worlds, each one the size of a real-world country filled with forests, prairies, oceans, beaches, mountains, towns, and thousands of simultaneous players" (13). Although this is a truly romanticized definition, it contains an important nugget of truth. The goal of the designers of these games is to offer a complete escape from reality in as full a manner as possible with the current technology, while forcing players to interact by ensuring that in-game goals are unobtainable alone.

Probably the best example of the dedication to this escapist endeavor was Code Master's[8] ill-fated project *Dragon Empires* (DE). DE was a development of staggering ambition aimed at setting a new benchmark in the development of gaming environments. So demanding was the geography and climate that the design team had even created working weather systems complete with jet streams and the resulting storm simulations. The game was to be released with marvels such as leaving foot prints, and migrating herds of animals that adapted to avoid player hunting patterns. The realism went so far in their development that these herds could actually be hunted to extinction if the players were not careful.

[8] A major game developing company based out of the United Kingdom.

The in-game weather system spanned from snow that would settle on the ground turning everything in the breath-taking world white, to days where heat waves distorted distant images. Day proceeded into night, and although that in itself was not an innovation to the field, the in-game sunrises and sunsets were visually spectacular. Players could actually sit on the gorgeously rendered mountain tops and watch the digitalized moisture gather to form clouds from the evaporation off virtual oceans and lakes during warm summer days. As a result, players signed up in the tens of thousands for the opportunity to just walk around in the simulated environment (for images of this game, see appendix one).

Tragically, there was a catastrophic failure with *Dragon Empires*. The wonderful world created by the developers, and shown to the public via screen shots and vivid video captions gathered from the envied few that actually got to wander the world, could never stably support the population requirements demanded by MMOG standards (Lafferty, 2004).[9] As a result, the project was scraped, but it stands alone as the pinnacle of what could have been for simulated game environments and will remain the envy of game developers until the day when a development team actually manages to build a working simulation of *Dragon Empires'* caliber. For now though, the current games already offer significant feats of technological achievement and graphical design in their attempts to offer a rich, alternate escape from reality.

[9] The information used in this brief coverage of *Dragon Empires* was taken from the interview with Michael Lafferty.
http://pc.gamezone.com/news/09_13_04_11_07AM.htm.

The game, problems, and paradigms

The game I targeted in my research was Electronic Arts' *Dark Age of Camelot* (DAOC), which was designed originally by Mythic Entertainment and released to the public in 2001.[10] I chose DAOC out of a plethora of games for three major reasons: 1) I have played this game since its inception and have watched it evolve over the years, so I am intimately familiar with it; 2) whether or not the gaming community acknowledges the contributions rendered to the genre by the developers at Mythic Entertainment, it truly is a foundation piece for currently embraced paradigms of the modern MMOG; 3) the communities inside of the game are well-established because of its age, and the player population tends to be somewhat older than that of newer MMOGs such as WOW (World of Warcraft) or COH/COV (City of Heroes/City of Villains). Thus, the players tend to be more experienced with MMOGs in general.

This being said, many of the people that I have interviewed over the course of my research have noted various pitfalls and shortcomings of the game. In general, though, my informants more commonly made note of the vast similarities between DAOC and many other MMOGs. These similarities seem to exist as a result of two major practices. The first is market competition. Companies attempting to nullify the competitive advantages of their competitors do so by implementing all of the same features possessed by their competitions' products. The second factor is the result of the annual meetings held by game developers over the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) conference every

[10] Mythic Entertainment and Electronic Arts are a game design companies. Electronic Arts bought the rights to Mythic Entertainment's *Dark Ages of Camelot* on June 20, 2006 http://pc.gamespy.com/articles/713/713563p1.html.

year concerning the general improvement of the current state of MMOGs. Thus, the similarities between games are almost never coincidence. The benefit of all of these similarities is that many of the conclusions reached in this thesis can be generally applied to other games. These generalizations can exist because most of the situational factors that create these communities exist within other games as well, especially games that closely emulate the paradigm set up by the developers at Mythic Entertainment.

Although MMOGs have many universal similarities a fundamental division in the design of these games has developed in recent years. Games such as *EverQuest 2* (EQ2), *Final Fantasy Online* (FFO), and *Dungeons and Dragons Online* (D&D Online) represent one strain of these games. The focus of the first group lies in creating enjoyable environments for players to interact. This is often called Player versus Environment (PvE)[11], where the emphasis is on co-operative play among players to defeat artificially intelligent (AI) mobs (in-game creatures). Although there are some functions of Player versus Player (PvP)[12] involved within these games, the true focus is and remains primarily PvE-driven.

The other strain contains games such as DAOC, *World of Warcraft* (WOW), *Planetside*, and *City of Heroes/City of Villians* (COH/COV) and is created around an environment divided normally into safe (PvE zones)[13] and contested (PvP zones)[14]. The focus in these games is PvP. These games, at their core, are designed to divide the player population up into teams. In many ways, these games mirror team sports. At the core of this game design is the idea of a balanced group from one realm opposing a balanced

[11] See PvE in glossary of terms.
[12] See PvP in glossary of terms.
[13] See PvE zone in glossary of terms. See also Safe zone.
[14] See PvP zone in glossary of terms.

group from another. In this situation, every person in the competition has a position in their group that they must play in order for the group to succeed. Mythic created the PvP zones with epic scale warfare in mind, meaning the goal of the design team was to pit groups, often massive groups, of one realm (in-game faction) against like numbers of another[15].

To understand the evolutionary advances that *Dark Age of Camelot* (DAOC) has made in the MMOG industry, several problems existing at the time of creation must be considered. DAOC was one of the first games to truly build a working model for a functional multi-team war. At the time of DAOC's release, only a few games of this genre had come before it and all of them contained a free-for-all style of PvP that was often detrimental to low-level players. This was one of the first major PvP problems encountered by the industry. There was nothing to stop a player with a high-level character from parking in a low-level zone and killing all the low-level characters for their own enjoyment (often referred to as ganking)[16]. There was nothing in-place to discourage this type of anti-social behaviour. The only ways to get the gankers out of the low-level zone were either to wait for them to get bored and leave on their own accord or have another high-level character (or several) come and remove them. This meant that players of low-level characters had to have access to higher level characters or they could not play the game until the person playing the assailing high-level character tired of doing so. This acted as a monumental disincentive towards playing these games for new players.

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[15] "Keep-takes" usually involve a lot of players; even "tower-takes" can take more than a group if the tower is well defended. For more information on the realm war see Appendix two. The impact of contested space on player communities is also discussed later in chapter two (64-65).

[16] See "Gank" in the glossary of terms.

From my perspective the staff at Mythic addressed the problem head-on by creating a new paradigm for PvP combat. Adapting to the complaints that resulted from this type ganking, they sought to create a paradigm that removed the potential for this type of activity to occur.[17] Mythic Entertainment offered a partial solution to this problem by designing safe zones that were strictly PvE and off limits to PvP. What resulted was the creation of their three realms-Midgard, Hibernia, and Albion-all of which have safe PvE zones that cannot be entered by enemy players (see appendices two and three for a visual tour of the three realms). This allowed players to level in peace, without having to worry about being jumped by enemies while they were involved in PvE activities. In addition to these safe zones, the staff created contested areas that possess a series of keeps and watch towers. They also created an incentive program to both fight enemy players and take their keeps in these contested zones. These incentives ranged from the creation of another leveling system (experience and levels which can only be attained through fighting enemy players)[18] to damage bonuses for capturing certain objectives. They also created a palpable reason for taking and holding enemy keeps in the form of a massive experience bonus, available once-per-level, for those participating in a successful siege.

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[17] To cater to the crowd that enjoyed the having to be ever watchful while playing the game, DAOC did open two strictly PvP servers. There are no safe zones, and PvP confrontation may occur almost anywhere and at anytime. This is much the same as the PvP in *Ultima Online* and *Ever Quest*, DAOC's two major predecessors, in that a player could be involved in a fight versus another player anytime, anywhere inside the game (with the exception of a very few places where combat is not possible, such as the main cities).

[18] PvP Experience points in the game are called realm points (RP) and the PvP levels are called realm ranks (RR)

In the beginning, the PvP zone and PvP objective was simple. The zone was a small area with three starting points (one for each realm) and the objective was simply to kill players from rival realms. By 2008 the PvP area had grown to encompass four zones, one of which was a neutral zone that connects the three warring zones together. Each side now has their own PvP zone which hosts seven *keeps*, each with four *watch towers* that can be seized and held by players of opposing realms. If certain strategic *keeps* are taken by players in an enemy zone, then the *relic gates* in that zone will open allowing enemies to capture that realm's *relics*. The more *relics* a side possesses, the stronger that side is in both PvE and PvP combat. In addition to this, the side that controls the most keeps also gains access to one of the contested dungeons in the game. This dungeon represents one of the few places where magical items can be bought in the game; therefore, it is a boon to any realm that owns it.

The resulting paradigm, the central idea of which is a perpetual team-based warfare, helped MMOGs achieve a new level of player participation. While limiting PvP to certain areas certainly allowed players to level in safety, many of the old problems of its predecessors still exist in the PvP zones. This was because PvP combat was completely designed for group-versus-group confrontation. This, combined with the fact that the PvP was almost completely unregulated, meant that groups often formed with the explicit desire to hunt smaller groups. Thus ganking was not eliminated, simply restricted to these new PvP zones.

To maintain the division between teams, Mythic removed all cross-realm communication. They did this by using a trick borrowed from the older MMOGs. Instead of seeing enemy speech, the line "*<player's name>* says something in a language you do

not understand" was inserted over whatever one oppositional player said to another. This use of the 'language barrier' differed from the game's predecessors in that there was never a chance to learn the enemy languages. Thus, Mythic almost completely eliminated the ability to resolve in-game multi-faction conflict through peaceful means. In addition to preventing the disclosure of realm movements across factions, this also had the benefit of preventing in-game flame wars.[19] Although players by-passed this problem by creating online forums such as, the *Vnboards.*[20] Other motivations for this action included reducing the regularity of friendly players on opposing sides getting together to farm[21] each other for experience and realm points.

The separation of communities in DAOC went quite a lot further than in other games as it was the first to enact a wartime situation. As time wore on, the focus became increasingly on PvP combat. Eventually enemy players' names were removed from the game. In their place, displayed in red, was the race and realm rank (PvP level) of the character. From my perspective, it felt like Mythic was truly attempting to turn PvP into a more exciting PvE. By removing as many identifying features as they could from enemy players, Mythic succeeded, at least partially, in removing the humanity behind the enemy realm. The only place where the enemy's name even appeared was in the combat text and the death notification. Mythic succeeded in creating a scenario where PvP felt closer to

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[19] Flaming – The virtual equivalent of a real-life screaming match where everything said is hostile and nothing said is particularly constructive or helpful.

[20] For an example of one of these forums, see: http://vnboards.ign.com/default.asp?cat=5033 Side note: Flames do not normally last long on these forums because they are seen as juvenile, unhelpful, and generally offensive. However, speaking from an historical perspective, that has very rarely stopped them from being posted in the first place.

[21] Farm – To perform a task repetitively. This term emerged from the idea of 'farming' items by killing creatures known to drop them, but can also be applied to killing anything in a continuous fashion.

PvE, just a little more stressful, but also more rewarding. Today, the virtual-xenophobia in-game has calmed somewhat, but there are still die-hard players who recite the rhyme 'If it's red it's dead'[22] to denote their feelings about PvP combat.

This step of creating barriers between the realms entrapped players of the same realm together because only through the use of external communication, such as third party chat programs or through voice chat programs such as *Teamspeak* or *Ventrilo*,[23] could this virtual barrier be circumvented. This also meant that the players had to know each other first, as their server information could not be passed across realms because of the communication restrictions. At the time of the implementation of these restrictions, voice-chat programs were used primarily for First Person Shooter (FPS) games, but the MMOG players quickly adopted them because typing in PvP situations is very inefficient.

This social division created by elimination of cross-realm speech has given birth to a new paradigm that has been mirrored many times over. Perhaps the game that most completely mirrored this paradigm in recent memory is Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* (WoW). This procedure polarizes the player communities, lending aspects of xenophobia to the game community. Just as in DAOC where many players outright refuse to play in the realms that they consider to be 'enemy' realms, many players in

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[22] This is in reference to an in-game rhyme that references the red information appearing over the heads of enemy players. This is such a prolific rhyme that it has actually made it into the random quotes that appear on the wait screens occuring when the character is teleporting from one closed geographic space to another.

[23] *Teamspeak* and *Ventrilo* are free downloadable software packages that allow players to communicate through speech instead of text via their headsets. Although neither program is affiliated with any game they are both most commonly used in conjunction with them, especially games such as the following first-person shooters (FPS): *Tribes*, *Medal of Honor*, and *Call of Duty*.

WOW virulently hate the opposing realm and refuse to play there. As a result, of the isolation and xenophobic tendencies of their player bases, garnered through this inability to communicate across realm boundaries, virtual-nationalities emerged within the game. As a result of this structuring of community, delving into the stratified nature of community in a MMOG is a very complicated procedure.

Just as in the real world, people in these games latch onto anything to divide themselves. Although in some ways all of the game's players can be said to make up the DAOC community, in truth it is no more a community than any community denoted strictly by its geography. In fact, arguments can easily be made that it is even far less unified than any city community because the players do not even necessarily play on the same servers, let alone the same realm. In most MMOGs, a player chooses a server to play on when logging on, and in most situations players that are not on the same server will never come into contact with each other. Thus, there is no forum for communication between players on different servers resident in the game. In DAOC there are currently twenty-four servers in operation, most of which have been clustered together.[24]

These clustered groups are the Classic Servers, the *Trials of Atlantis* or TOA Servers, the PvP Server, and the Co-op Server. Each group brings a different rule set to the table, which drastically alters the game for the players involved. The bulk of the work in this thesis revolves around the Bossiney Cluster, which is the group of linked Classic Servers: Ector, Gareth, and Lamorak. This cluster came about as a result of the expansion *Trials of Atlantis*. The expansion was so unpopular among gamers that many of them left

[24] Clustering links the PvP areas of all the clustered servers into one common zone, thus increasing the numbers of players involved in PvP conflicts across all of the linked servers.

the game. They were frustrated by the large amounts of time spent waiting for computer-controlled monsters to respawn.[25] As a result, the three servers Ector, Gareth, and Lamorak were created without the *Trials of Atlantis* expansion enabled. This brought many players back to the game. Even though it is the smallest cluster physically (only three servers as opposed to the next smallest Killibury Cluster, which has seven clustered servers), the total population of the Bossiney Cluster is almost always higher than that of any of the physically larger TOA clusters. For this reason, it was chosen as the central cluster for my research.

By game design standards, each cluster would ideally contain three different communities of players: the community of Midgard players, Albion players, and Hibenerian players. These virtual nationalities have started to deteriorate in recent years, due to changes in server structure that have allowed a limited opportunity for cross-realm communication. This limited communication can now occur if a player switches to another server in the cluster on which they have characters from alternate factions. In the past the division of realm was far more pronounced as players had no way of communicating across realm boundaries. However, due to the dwindling population inside the game, Mythic Entertainment saw fit to allow players the chance to play multiple realms on one cluster, by allowing players to play one realm on each server within that cluster.

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[25] A respawn in *Trials of Atlantis* was always based on a mixture of random and fixed variables many of which the players had no control. The result was that line ups would form, sometimes for days. If a player logged out in that time they would lose their place in the line and would have to start over again. In the younger years of the game, my friends and I would take shifts manning each others characters in front of these spawn points so that they would not lose their place in the lines while they slept.

This changed the nature of the community as it caused an overlap of the community player bases. For example, I play in all three realms, one on each server, of the Bossiney Cluster. Therefore, I am part of all three communities. This means that cross realm conflict can now have repercussions for players on any side of the conflict. Previously, there were few repercussions to ganking. Although the repercussions were still minor, often a flaming of the player that took the dishonourable action would take place by the victim over an open channel or over personal tells.[26]

Another major problem that plagued game developers was that of differing player motivations. Despite the paradigm shift into team combat, the activity of ganking and farming defenseless enemy players still exists within the game. Ganking is now so prolific that it has become internalized as part of the in-game culture. The in-game nationalities have also failed to generate their own realm-specific cultural symbolism. They are simply not different enough. The realms lack meaningful unifying cultures. Instead, players have sought a way to align themselves with a group of people that made sense to them. Since the game is designed to force players into groups, Mythic facilitated community building by creating a means of constructing permanent in-game communities. This was implemented at the onset of the game through the use of their in-game guild system.

This system allowed players to unite in smaller, much more cohesive communities. All of these communities have their own guild channel that is common to all of the guild members and cannot be seen by people outside of the guild. These communities tend to be what gamers refer to when they speak of community in-game. From a community standpoint the virtual nationalities mean little now. Although there

[26] See "tells" in glossary of terms.

are still die hard players in the game that believe in realm pride (devotion to one realm) and the created nationalities, most tend to hide behind this thinking as an excuse to assault helpless players in other realms. Increasingly common are the emerging links between players that stretch across realm boundaries, despite the design of the game, to facilitate a more friendly and organized competition.

As a result of this paradigm established by Mythic, the player communities are quite stratified. Deciding what class to play in the game will often dictate what role in this war a player will play. For instance, if a player makes a sorcerer, then their position in the group will always be putting enemy players to sleep and rooting them to one spot when that sleep spell wears off. If they created a cleric, their job would be to buff and heal the members of their group. Although there are a variety of group builds, depending on the strategy that the group leader wants to use when fighting enemies, each group build is designed around a specific make-up of classes that have been built a certain way. In this way we can see the link between this game and a sports team. Everyone has a role that must be played properly for the team to succeed.

Like all other MMOGs, this game was built around the notion of forcing players together into groups. This focus has unsurprisingly led many players into a complete dependence on their in-game communities. This dependence is most pronounced in PvP where the notion of mutual protection has always demanded having more of your friends around than your opponent. The solution to in-game community problems, the unending search for groupmates that this paradigm has caused, was the creation of guilds.

This idea was built upon the foundations set up by the game's predecessors, and developed to facilitate in-game communication across distance. This resulted in the

creation of permanent chat groups, very much like those that exist outside of the game, except that in these games the topic of choice for discussion is more often than not the game itself. In order to build a guild, eight people must come together and agree to form the guild, and agree upon the name of the guild. In DAOC, guild colours and emblems are then chosen for cloaks and shields (see appendix four). For example, *Shadows of Midnight*, my guild in Midgard, sports a deep purple (royal purple) background with a black hawk (affectionately known in the guild as our 'war chicken') as our emblem. It acts as an easily identifiable marker for everyone involved.

Goals generally differ greatly from one group to the next. I tried hard to find my way into three groups with different goals, but found after moving from one to another that unless I completely changed my mentality towards the game I would never be able to fit into most groups. As a result, the three that I have managed to find a place in have goals that somewhat parallel my own. Examining the goals embraced by a community often reveals a good deal about its particular nature. Inside of DAOC, and in many other MMOGs of this type, there tends to be several major types of in-game communities. Just as MMOGs tend towards a PvE or PvP focus, so too do their guilds.

Two of the three guilds that I studied are more PvE focused than PvP, although not to the extent where there are no PvPers in the guilds. For the most part, though, PvE is what a majority of their players spend their time doing. This can be seen through the examples of the three guilds: *Shadows of Midnight* (SOM), *Forces of Nature* (FON), and *Deadly Defense* (DD). For example, SOM is led by a real-life married couple and has been in existence almost as long as the server has been going (they do not remember exactly how old the guild is, just that it is several years old). The guild's formal polices

are established online in their code of conduct, but tend to adhere more completely with the aims of their guild's alliance. As a result, their code of conduct is short and to the point, opting only to expand slightly on the alliance's code rather than spend time creating and developing their own specific traditions from scratch.

This guild was created as a support network, which seems to be the major reason behind guild formation within the game. They often lead raids to help guild members get quest items, and they are quite generous with helping new players level their characters. They have a guild house with guild vaults, although only officers in the guild can access them now because of problems with in-game theft from the vault. Generally, though, the guild seems to exist for reasons of socialization. Since reaching level 49.5 or 50[27] is relatively easy in DAOC, most guild members merely use the guild chat for its social function. As a result, the guild chat in *Shadows of Midnight* tends to simply be a forum for players to talk about their days and the silly things that happen to them in-game. The conversation is normally shallow and funny.

The other two guilds, *Forces of Nature* and *Deadly Defense*, are much the same except that *Deadly Defense* has a real heavy PvP contingent within the guild. The leadership in *Forces of Nature* is less centralized than *Shadows of Midnight* and *Deadly Defense*. As a result, it is often hard to tell who is in charge, although at least one of the guild masters is almost always on in some form, to regulate the chat and help new players. *Deadly Defense*, like *Shadows of Midnight*, is run by a couple although they remain unmarried. Unlike SOM, they take a very central role in controlling the guild in

[27] Some players do not level to 50 anymore because 49.5 is the last level in which a player can compete inside of a battleground. This has also spawned the saying, "49.5 is the new 50."

every way possible. The guild members often have far less power in the guild. For example, recruiting is restricted to officers, unlike in SOM where anyone can invite to the guild and promoting is restricted to guild masters only. Therefore, the reigns of power are tightly held within the upper levels of the hierarchy of the guild.

Another difference between guilds like FON/SOM and DD is that DD has additional rules set up, such as a 'no cross-realming' policy,[28] although this has been relaxed somewhat of late. DD rules closely mirror the spirit of the development team at Mythic, in that they do not wish communication between realms at all. However, most in-game etiquette originates from player made rules that, by their nature, change the state of the game. For example, honour rules that try and keep the fighting fair on an individual one-on-one level greatly detracts from the group-versus-group mentality that the game staff has attempted to garner in their player base. These rules, whether inline with the game's code of conduct (like in DD's example) or subversive like the honour rules help to define the communities and the identities of the players that align themselves with them.

For the most part, these player-driven changes are almost always subversive in nature, being invented to correct some perceived oversight by the game developers. However, they tend not to be detrimental to the game. In fact, these games would be colossal failures without these additional rules and the cliques that enforce them. The varying traditions created by these communities, be they additional rules or a tradition of advocating their understanding of the game's code of conduct, often result in the creation

[28] A no-cross-realming policy is enacted to prevent guild members from playing multiple sides of the realm war. Guilds such as DD enact these policies to ensure that none of their members are participating in such activities.

of new games inside of the game, such as dueling. Ronnie Swaine pointed out that the emergence of badger hockey[29] inside of DAOC was the result of one of these in-game traditions (Ronald Swaine, Interview 1). Under ideal circumstances, this transforms each of the realm's gaming environment into vast community commons. This commons exists both as a static area, the intangible game environment, and as a dynamic area for community growth in the vying chat groups through which the player-made communities emerge and communicate.

[29] It is actually badger herding but it is essentially an in-game hockey game that employs the herding of a badger in lu of shooting a puck.

Chapter Two: Locating the community commons in MMOG space

Statement of Chapter Objectives

The first major objective of this chapter is to expand the paradigms put forward by Healey et al in their work, "Communication Spaces," to cover the social interaction housed in MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games). In order to do this, several subjects must first be addressed. Community must be defined and analyzed in both its physical and virtual formats, and also in relation to folkloristics and critical theory. The differences between the virtual forms of MUDs (Multi-User Domains/Multi-User Dungeons) and MMOGs must be addressed and resolved. The evolution from MUD to MMOG must be explained to provide context for the focus on the function of space in the game and the change in interpersonal interaction within the two virtual formats. Finally, the ideas of virtual third space, and Foucault's heterotopia's will be presented as models for understanding player-led communities that exist within MMOG spaces.

The second major objective is to theorize about the idea of non-place within virtual frameworks. This will allow for a necessary discussion about the idea of space versus place within these virtual commons. These ideas were briefly broached in "Communication Spaces," but the gravity of this virtual phenomenon demands further insight. I will demonstrate that these null spaces create the heart of MMOG community place and that they have developed along the evolutionary lines suggested by Roger Caillois in more traditional gaming environments (1958). By studying the formation of in-game communities, using an ethnographic approach in tandem with an analysis of online space as place (specifically focused on the in-game persistent chats), I will present practical examples of the communities that exist in these null-places, generated by the game's structural framework.

Folk, Community, and the Link to Place

The argument about what constitutes ethnicity, community, or group will continue unabated, until the last two remaining social academics gasp their final breaths. The diversity of definitions produced by this debate has been staggering. Whether the paradigms are functional or symbolic, they are often complex and amorphous notions and have been the concentration of a variety of discourses in the folklore discipline, as we continue to attempt to resolve the question of who the "folk" are. Alan Dundes' (1965) definition of the term folk as referring "to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor," has been both a blessing and a curse for the discipline (22). Although its ambiguous nature has provided the folklorist the opportunity to expand their field of research it is fundamentally flawed, and articles like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Folklore's Crisis" (1998) point out the problems with leaving such a pivotal definition vague.

Bruce Mason (2008) uses arguments from Ian McKay's *The Quest of the Folk* (1953) and Benedict Anderson's work with 'imagined communities' (2006) suggests that the folk can be seen as the creation of the folklorist in much the same way that the nation is the creation of the nationalist (57). By making this connection between folklorist and folk group, Mason draws a distinct parallel between his work with the folk community and Frederick Barth's (1969) work with ethnicity. Barth envisioned four social properties that he felt must be present in determining the existence of ethnicity: biological self-perpetuation, shared cultural values, a field of communication, and a membership that identifies itself and is identified by others as members (7). This definition need not be

applied only to ethnicity or nationhood. It can easily be applied to the smaller cohesive groupings, of which they are composed, as long as they stress the continuity of their own traditions. Thus, ensuring the biological self-perpetuation of the community.

As in Barth's fourth property, Mason's suggestion asserts that an essential property of folk groups is that they must be perceived as being separate from the people lacking their unifying trait(s) or tradition(s). Thus, members of the group must be cognizant of either the notion of the unifying trait that links them together or their disunity from outsiders, both of which suggest the necessary group cohesion required of a folk group. This suggests that the folk create the folk group, as nationalists create nationality, because it is the folk that identifies and thus defines the boundaries that separate their group from the next. For instance, many Okinawan Karates share the same core cirriculum of *katas*, which links them together as a cohesive group.[30] However, variances in interpretation of these katas between these different groups (such as an open hand strike instead of a closed fisted strike) stand as sufficient divisors for many of these traditions because the folk (in this case the practitioners of each art) deem them to be sufficient boundaries to divide their folk group from the others.

This mode of thinking is very much in line with the ideas of symbolic community postulated by Anthony Cohen (1985). Each group latches onto things that they perceive as setting them apart from other groups. They symbolically create boundaries to separate and keep themselves separate from other groups. These boundaries generally consist of a

[30] Instructional tools passed from one generation to the next that consist of a prearranged series of strikes and counters that normally simulate a realistic combat situation

compilation of a variety of traditions that act together to include and exclude certain individuals.[31]

Dorothy Noyes article, "Group," bridges the gap between group and community. Using an Andersonian, approach she puts forward the idea that community is merely an "affectively charged" group (466). Noyes makes a hard distinction between real communities and other communities, however, by indicating that real communities involve face-to-face interaction, she views interaction as the key to the foundation of community. Thus, the byproduct of Noyes' theory is that she has linked community to the place of interaction by stressing the necessity of face-to-face communication.

This demonstrates two ideas: 1) The importance of place in defining community and 2) Stigmatization of communication that does not take place in-person as somehow less socially meaningful. The first idea, the link between community and place, is a pervasive notion that has been embraced by many scholars linked to folkloristic research. For example, Kent Ryden (1993) quotes Gary Comstock saying that, "geography... is... knowledge that calls up something in the land we recognize and respond to. It gives us a sense of place and a sense of community" (207). John Jackson (2006) quotes Paul Tillich, yet another thinker of this persuasion, saying that, "[space] is the basis of the desire of any group of human beings to have a place of their own, a place which gives them reality, presence, power of living, which feeds them, body and soul" (162). In continuing to examine this first notion from a standpoint of folkloristics, Valerie Fournier and Geoff Lightfoot conclude that, "[s]pace is relational in that unless it is embedded in social practice, it remains meaningless, empty. It is shaped into "permanences", stages of

[31] For more detail on this idea see, "Community, Tradition, and Boundaries in the Karate Scene in St. John's Newfoundland" (Learning 2007).

meaningful action through social processes; only when it has been inscribed with meaning can it add its "weight" to the maintenance and framing of social ordering, and even then only for a time" (233).

The link between community and place, as we can see, is something that has been debated from different angles, but the two that I have found most interesting are the two views seen above. The first is a hard link between physical geography and community. This idea can be seen in works such as John Dorst's *Looking West*, Gerry Pocius' *A Place to Belong*, and Barbara Allen & Thomas Schlereth's *Sense of Place*, and almost any work that occurs around the notion of regionality. This is because, as Barbara Allen so succinctly puts it, region can be broken down into three basics pieces: the people, historical distinctiveness, and geography. Geography has always played a factor, no matter how small its part may be, in traditional studies of regions. Allen notes that this is not only true in folkloric notions of region but also in any other discipline's examination of the subject.

All of these notions seem to run contrary to some of the major objectives of this paper, as the removal of geography is of paramount importance in this examination of this pocket of internet culture. However, if the underlying notions of Allen, Noyes, Pocius, Ryden, and Jackson are analyzed several major similarities occur. Ryden's ideas pivot around the creation of some body of culture that is ingrained in the space, a shared and familiar aspect that cannot be properly vocalized. He attaches this notion to geography, but if we change the word 'geography' to 'space' this quote helps to visualize the nature of online space, because it is not in the physicality of the space but in the social history of it that carries the social context.

Allen theorizes that this spacial history plays a large part in defining the space as a place. Since physical geography is removed from the picture it seems only natural that the other two aspects, the people and the history, would be relied on more to define it, which is the case when delving into ideas of non-place or non-space. Although Allen was postulating about region, her ideas hold true for spaces and places because regions are simply a compilation of these spaces without which regions could not exist.

Gerald Pocius, in *A Place to Belong*, starts making in-roads on notions of private and public spaces to help define and explain how community in Calvert, Newfoundland operates. These notions are also applicable in a more abstract manner for analyzing non-spaces and non-places. What Pocius highlights as private spaces, spaces that exist within his microspace, are, for the most part, what many other scholars have denoted as places. The genius of his work is the analysis of the interaction and its relation with the physical space within which it takes place. The concentration on interaction and the contextualization of it becomes crucial to understanding the community's use of its social spaces.

All of this analysis goes into revisiting Noyes idea of group and making a minor alteration in her otherwise excellent notion by focusing on the quality of the communication instead of type of communication. If we can overcome this barrier and prove that communication over other mediums can be as meaningful as in-person communication, then we can remove the reliance on physicality and concentrate instead on the interaction. From there, we can theorize about how the human interaction in a place defines both it, and the community that extends from it.

Guilds and Community development: Out of the abstract and into virtual reality

Before we can get into overcoming this communication barrier, the spaces of human interaction need to be explained somewhat to assist with the ease of understanding the more abstract ideas later. Within every modern MMOG architecture exists a *hardcoded* method for creating player communities. In *Dark Age of Camelot* for instance, the *guild construct* is the gateway to in-game community.[32] This construct includes everything required, minus the people, to create and facilitate a community complete with the commons.[33] However, just because the potential exists in every guild to become a community, this does not necessarily mean that it will reach its potential. In fact, relatively few guilds would fulfill all four of Barth's principles, most fall instead into the realm of the folk group (meaning small and informal groups, such as three or four real life friends with no desire to expand the guild). Thus, it is only exceptional guilds that actually become communities under the Barth way of thinking.

Barth relies on the centrifugal forces of community tradition as the heart of defining community. In this matter, many of the smaller more cohesive groups with no thoughts towards expansion simply fail to make the cut. However, the opposing centripetal force must also be included because most communities not only know who

[32] *Hardcoded* means that something has been programmed into the body of a program. In this case it is merely stating that the structure of player communities was set up by the designers and that they are, on top being a social forum for players to communicate, merely a series of user commands set up to facilitate that communication.
A *construct* is a function, or series of functions, created within a program to serve a specific purpose. In this case the *guild construct* is a complex series of user commands created to facilitate both the communication and social structure of permanent groups of players.
[33] A guild is created when eight unguilded people come together in one particular place in the game and agree on creating a guild and the name of that guild. How the guild recruits thereafter is limited by guild policy but a command exists "/gc invite <name of player being recruited" which facilitates the expansion of the guild.

they are but also rigidly define themselves by who they are not. To rectify this omission, Cohen's notions of defining community using its boundaries helps to bridge this gap and flesh out a decent working definition of what community is to the people who define it.

In-game, the most common use of this construct is to facilitate a group's ability to be identified as a group, not as a community. This is because of the way that the construct works, which is by displaying the name of the guild under the name of the player's current avatar. It can also provide visual validation from greater distances through the guild's emblem and player-enforced colour coding. Every guild may chose an emblem, which entails the selection of up to two guild colours in the background pattern and a central black symbol in the foreground to complete the image, which can be worn on shields and cloaks (see appendix 2). These colours and emblems can be denoted from a fair in-game geographical distance and marks the avatars wearing them as part of a certain group. Probably the best thing about this from a research standpoint is the by-product of this construct, as almost every in-game folk group has been marked through these visual queues. Looking at this from the perspective of Anthony Cohen's (1985) symbolic boundary theory we see that what is actually going on is the creation of community barriers through a visual statement of group identity.

In the situation where guilds grow into communities they can be seen as having achieved, to some extent, all of Barth's principles. Self-perpetuation occurs through active recruitment in-game. Some guilds delegate members as recruiters, while some guilds grant this ability to all of their members. In either scenario, as long as more people are joining the guild and are active in expanding the community the idea of biological self-perpetuation is being achieved because their ideals of community are being

perpetuated through the indoctrination of the new players. The second principle, 'shared cultural values' occurs in a couple of ways (7). The first is the development of a statement of guild policy and ethics. The second is the enforcement and adaptation of these rules upon the guild population (See chapter three for more information on guild ethics and enforcement of rules).

The link between Barth and Cohen occurs here in the principle notion that community identity must be embraced by both members and non-members alike. In the game, the guild construct, defines these groups from both the perspectives of the insider and the outsider. This is because even if guild members choose not to dress in their guild colours or choose not to fly the guild's emblem on their houses or clothes, their guild name is always visible under their own name. In this way it is part of their online identity whether they wish it to be or not, and it marks them as a member of a group in a way that is hard for anyone to ignore.

Barth's final principle, "all groups must contain a shared field of communication," is also fulfilled through the use of this construct. The persistent chat, created along with the guild, acts as a perfect medium for private group interaction.[34] Researchers such as Ducheneat et al and Healey et al have been searching MMOGs for their virtual commons or third spaces and have, as of yet, failed to locate them adequately. As such, I hope to help this along through this analysis of the places created by these player-controlled constructs. The resulting spaces are the true places of socialization within this medium, and as such they are true commons.

[34] The guild chat is a persistent, meaning ever present, chat that no one outside of the guild has access to but is readily viewable by all guild members at all times.

Space, Place and Communication

The most discussed aspects of the ideas of space and place in folklore tend to stem from the definition of 'region' (Allen & Schlereth 1991) and the notions of "sense of place" (Allen & Schlereth 1991, Edward Soja 1996, Michel de Certeau 1998, John Dorst 2001,) and the divisions of space (Henri Lefebvre1974, Yi Fu Tuan 1977, Foucault & Miskowiec 1986, Pocius 1991). The addition of virtual reality into the scene has only further complicated an already convoluted subject matter. Lefebvre's ideas have been adapted time and again as each new field tackles this problematic area. The truth of the matter is that Lefebvre's three divisions of space, translated by Tim Rogers as, perceived- the materialized, socially-produced space that exists empirically (2002, 29), conceived- the domain of propositional knowledge (32), and lived spaces- the space of inhabitants and users(35), are still quite relevant to the modern study of space.[35] These ideas certainly remain as solid foundations when moving from interpreting space in the physical world to that of the virtual world as all spaces contained within MUDs or MMOGs are "socially-produced" (Rogers, 31).

MUD/MMOG spaces may be the coded manifestations of the developers' view of social structure but they have been modified by the players to suit their own social needs. This freedom to enhance the space is the result of a well thought out and comprehensive construct. The construct consists of a robust list of commands, many of which are seldom if ever used by the players, but the option to use them exists. For instance, there is a command to boot (remove) players from the guild registry. This completely severs access

[35] For more on Lefebvre (1976) see Merrifield (1993), and Rogers (2002), Soja (1996).

to guild resources, including the guild chat. This command is used only in fairly rare circumstances and is usually reserved for upperclassmen in the guild, as a result most players do not use it on a regular basis. An even more obscure command that centers around the notion of in-game tithing/taxation sends a portion of all in-game income earned by guild members to the guild coffers.[36] Additional commands exist which, allow the guild to be shaped in a democratic or autocratic format, depending on the preference of the players involved in the decision-making. As such the development team has created a platform in which the players can shape their own community development by flooding them with tons of development options.[37]

Each level, (perceived, conceived, and lived) exists in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. The only difference is that these spaces are developed differently because the human interaction involved in them is conveyed along a different medium. This makes in-game communication differ from the type of interaction that people have grown used to in face-to-face communication. Thus the perceived space is greatly changed by both the type of interaction contained within and by the change from physical environment to virtual environment. Speaking from a phenomenological perspective, of course, all spaces exist fundamentally in the imaginations of the users. It is true that there are palpable physical attributes in real world spaces but these elements can be mirrored, in some way however imperfect, within the virtual world, which makes the difference between the perceived spaces, be they physical or virtual, from a philosophical

[36] Money is obtained in the game, either through the sale of items via a consignment merchant in player housing or as a boon to winning any battle be it against another player or monster.

[37] It is important to bear in mind that the development team make all of the decisions about which commands exist in the game and which configurations are set as default (for example, upon creation of a guild the person who types in the name of the guild and sends it for verification is the one automatically set to the highest rank within the guild, thus the game defaults to an autocratic situation). As such, even though it is the players that make the decisions, their decisions cannot help but be influenced by the developers.

perspective, moot.While it is true that there are physical attributes to real world spaces these elements can be mirrored, at least partially, within the virtual world. This makes the difference between the perceived spaces, be they physical or virtual, from a philosophical perspective, moot.

The social interaction in space, be it physical space or the created space of virtual reality, is experiential. Therefore it is never quite the same as the time before and always at least slightly different for each person experiencing it. As such, the ideas of lived and conceived space remain fundamentally unchanged in their transition from the physical world to virtual world interaction. This is because each person concentrates on different aspects of the social interaction (regardless of location) and so to them, these aspects become the important attributes that mark the space at that time. Of course space is meaningless to community unless it becomes socially charged in some way and makes the transition from a meaningless space to a specific place, namely the community commons.

Hollan and Stornetta's (1992) idea of "being-with" states that closeness is often not a physical property, it is instead a phenomenological response to space and that, in the same light, being physically or geographically close to someone does not make you with them (2). Using this notion Healey et al. make some particularly lucid comments on 'closeness' stating it as one of the key components of a 'communication space'. When this idea is combined with the notions of Harrison & Dourish as well as Lefebvre what we find is that spaces are the virtual constructions created by us for interpreting the interaction that takes place therein. Therefore, all spaces, regardless of form, are virtual.

Dourish & Harrison offer up the idea that inside of these virtual constructions of space resides the idea of place. They define space as being, "the structure of the world; it is the three-dimensional environment in which objects and events occur, and in which they have relative position and direction" (Harrison & Dourish, 68). Place is simply a more specific space. It is merely a "space which is invested with understandings of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations, and so forth" (Harrison & Dourish, 69). As we can see Harrison and Dourish are drawing much the same conclusions about spaces that Allen has drawn about the folk region. This is simply because a folk region is made up of a variety of places constructed by the folk. It has been acknowledged that a region, on some level, must be attributed a geographical space but the part of that space that makes it a folk region are the series of places that share the same social etiquette and traditions. Therefore, place is the smallest manifestation of region.

These notions differ from Lefebvre's viewpoint because they simply divide space into two pieces, the physical, and everything else. To Harrison and Dourish "We are located in space but...act in place" (Harrison & Dourish, 69). Healey et al. forward this perspective by marrying it with the ideas put forward by Heidegger to include objects in space saying that, "Things are not primarily encountered as isolated objects in particular physical locations but as equipment involved in some practical activity. Equipment is organized in terms of 'regions' of involvements that are defined by our practical concerns" (Healey et al., 4).[38] When Healey marries Heidegger's ideas with Harrison and Dourish's work the result is that a common ground emerges, concentrated on place often to the exclusion of the extraneous space.

[38] For a more complete analysis of objects and equipment in space see Eckert and Boujut. For more information on construction of place see Harrison and Tatar.

In *Dark Age of Camelot*, the idea of space would refer to any virtually simulated physical area and it would include all of its objects. For instance, the major city in the realm of Albion is Camelot. Camelot is a very large space, with hundreds of interactive objects, as well as non-interactive create background ambiance. The transition from space to place has not occurred in very many physical regions of this space, with perhaps the crafting stations (smithy, lathe, alchemist table, etc.) being the only exceptions. This lack of place, at least in regards to the rest of the city, is because there are no gatherings of people to generate rules of conduct in these areas. In other words the space has not become affectively charged with social interaction. Therefore, places in these spaces have not yet come into being as they possess no added social meaning, which is the specified necessity for the definition of a space as a place.

Camelot, apart from the crafting stations, is simply one stop on the way to somewhere else (meaning that people stay in Camelot only long enough to tell the teleporter there where they want to go next). The obsession with efficiency in the game has destroyed many of the virtual mirrors of physical locations of place. For example, when people used to have to wait for teleportation (in the first three years of game time, a fifteen-minute interval between teleportations from one zone to the next) the teleporters became meeting places where social interaction constantly occurred. As a result rules and behaviours associated with these spaces (etiquette) eventually emerged and changed the space of the teleporters into a place of human interaction. With the removal of the timers on these teleporters, these groups ceased to exist and thus so did the places created along with them.

To combat this loss of the physical manifestation of place within the game, the development team created an incentive program for crafters by reducing the length of time it takes to create items, and by increasing the likelihood of leveling crafting skills, at the crafting stations in the main cities. As a result, there are now always people standing around the crafting stations in the main cities, but just like the cafes of Star Wars Galaxies (see Ducheneaut et al (2007) for more detail), most of the people are only semi-present while crafting.[39] Thus, the stations have become gathering spaces but often fail to become actual places because the social interaction is often too limited to create rules for the interaction in that space. The need to transform space into place was recognized by the game developers, however they failed to recognize that this must be community led, i.e., a grassroots construction, instead of a top-down implementation. However, these stations represent in many ways the last vestiges of prototypical physical places inside of the game.

The places of meaningful communication still exist in the game, albiet more abstractly. For example, Player versus Player (PvP) and Realm versus Realm (RvR) zones each have a regional chat that helps to create a sense of place in these zones. They are also the physical spaces in the game where most people spend the majority of their time. Speaking from a phenomenological standpoint, these chats make large geographical areas smaller. Using the break down of Heidegger's spatial distance theory put forward by Healey et al., we see that need is the major variable in the human interpretation of space. They explain this notion through the use of analogy, stating simply, that a tool that is out of reach is far away. Whereas, the tool that is within your reach is close. The Cartesian space does not matter, so long as the tool is within reach. In this way, because

[39] The real online terminology would be semi-AFK where AFK stands for Away From Keyboard

players can speak to the other players in the area, even though they cannot see them, they are closer. This phenomenological interpretation of space makes the area smaller, at least from a communicative standpoint.

One of the major points put forward by Harrison and Dourish was that "human activities are primarily organized in terms of the social practices associated with a location, not the physical properties of the space" (Healey et al., 1). This point stands out particularly well in virtual worlds. In *Final Fantasy Online*, the auction houses are probably the most populated physical areas in the games, despite the fact that there is little to physically define the space as particularly different from the rest of the game. In fact, the only thing denoting these spaces as different is the human interaction that has been generated from the programmed function of the auction house which, unsurprisingly, often entails people using the broadcast channels to sell their wares. In *Dark Age of Camelot*, the entrance of player housing serves this function, and people are always gathered there. However, just as in the case of the crafting stations in the main cities, the actual amount of human interaction is minimal and few rules of etiquette have emerged because people are not anchored to the space. If they do not like the spamming of people hawking their wares, they can merely squelch (silence) the channel or leave the space entirely.

Generally speaking, spaces where players are forced to congregate fail to become true communication spaces because players only occupy these areas out of necessity and for as little time as possible. In the example of player housing in *Dark Age of Camelot*, most players are merely using the area as a stopping point to re-supply before moving on to other places. Since this requires little to no actual social interaction with other players,

most players tend not to interact with others during this process because it detracts from efficiency.[40] It is for this reason that these spaces-of-necessity have never been able to make the transition from space to place. It is only the locations that players choose to congregate in that even have a chance of becoming communication spaces. These areas have tended to be the areas setup explicitly for PvP in *Dark Age of Camelot*, due to its nature of being centered around PvP (Player versus Player). Thus, it is these PvP areas that are the most conducive for player-to-player interaction; they have become places, despite being geographically quite sprawling.

[40] This is because movement is limited only by the speed at which the player is capable of performing these actions. Therefore any social interaction is at the detriment of efficiency.

The spaces and people of *Dark Age of Camelot*

Before proceeding any further with this discussion about space and place, a brief description and history of the relevant spaces of this game is necessary. *Dark Age of Camelot*, created in 2001, has been evolving continuously both structurally and as an online social phenomenon. The basic premise of the game is simple; there are three sides called realms, Midgard (the Midgard from Norse mythology), Albion (the Albion from Arthurian legend), and Hibernia (based on Celtic mythology). This separation has been implemented through both social and physical manifestations of the developer's coding.[41]

The best place to begin looking at these differences is to examine the differences in the physical spaces presented by the three realms (see appendix two and three for visual tours of the three realms). Midgard is drawn as dark and dreary. It is fixed winter. Snow covers much of the landscape and where it is absent the land is barren. The colours used in the architecture tend toward earth tones and are generally dark in nature. Otherwise, the armours and races chosen for Midgard reflect this feeling. The troll skin colours range from dark grey to light grey and the kobolds range from dark green to dark blue. The armours, with the exception of the end game armours, are designed to be plain and unspectacular. The variable head-dress for Midgard are wolf's head, viking helmet (without the horns), winged helms, close faced helms, open faced helms, and circlets (see

[41] All of these realms are based loosely on these mythologies. It is much closer to a Hollywood interpretation than anything else. For instance, Albion is painted with images that could be taken out of almost any movie before the most recent interpretations, meaning that the knights are inaccurately depicted in field plate or full plate (technologies that are centuries from development at the suspected time of Arthur). Other inaccuracies exist more universally such as the fact that the realms are 'clean'. There is no garbage, and all of the people look as if they've just stepped out of the bath. As far as the mythological interpretations and misinterpretations go, there is enough in the game to constitute a completely different thesis. This is because most of the story is the result of a reinterpretation to both adhere to a PG rating and adhere to the aesthetic impression created by the artists to define the physical spaces of each realm.

appendix five). The Midgard-only head-dresses (a viking cap and a wolf head) are all but completely undyeable. If a player wishes to wear one for aesthetics, they have to plan their colours towards the grey wolf head or the brown Viking cap, thus limiting the options.

Hibernia, in contrast, is permeated with bright colours. The landscape is always locked in the depth of summer, where everything is vibrant and alive. The architecture is generally bright white. The Hibernian races, specifically the lurikeen and elves, are often regarded as the cute races by the players. As a result players have tended to regard Hibneria as, "the cute realm." The armours, including the end-game armours are easily dyeable by players and support many variations of colour easily. The variable headpieces range from moose antlered helmets, feathered caps, circlets, close faced helms, to open-faced helms. Head-dresses available only to Hibernians, such as the feathered cap and humourous moose-antlered helm, both take to dye well and are often chosen by players because of their unique flavor (see appendix six)

The last realm, Albion, is the neutral ground between the other two realms. The season is set to late spring in most places although there are obvious locations set in alternate seasons. The architecture has far more range in colour than the other realms, ranging from oak brown to the bright grey-white of the walls of Camelot. Like the colour scheme, Albion has more variety in armour than the other two realms and armours range from undyeable to very dyeable in nature. Aesthetically, something can normally be found to please the eye in Albion and, like Hibernia, a wide variety of colour schemes abound. Albion's realm specific head-dresses are the jester's cap, the tarboosh, and the woodsman's hat, all of which take to colour extremely well (see appendix seven).

As a result of all of these physical differences, Midgard tends towards darker colours, Albion towards a variety of colours, and Hibernia towards lighter tones (even after players have accessorized their characters to their approval). Of course, exceptions to this rule exist in all realms and the differences between the realms runs far deeper than the mere colours associated with their aesthetic designs. Other physical issues change perception almost uniformly from one realm to the next. Problems of game-imbalance (what is not fair about what classes), Issues of class demand (which classes are needed but in short supply), and issues with environmental problems (clipping issues, and bad artificial intelligence), have all come to define the physical spaces that make up the separate realms.

In addition, when the game was young and a person chose a server and picked a realm, this separated them completely from the players of opposing realms. Players were allowed to play on as many servers as they wished. The only stipulation was that each player could only play on one realm per server. This prevented spying and people from switching sides mid-conflict. This entrapment in one realm and separation from the others created an association between player and realm. This association has become known in-game as realm pride. The upkeep of the resulting realm pride was of the utmost importance to the development staff. As soon as a person chose a realm and entered into conversation in that realm, they could not help being overwhelmed with the anti-other-realm rhetoric in which they were immediately immersed. This resulted in a widespread virtual-xenophobia between players of opposing realms. However, due to problems with in-game population levels, this structured separation was compromised. As a result the realm pride and virtual-xenophobia diminished significantly.

In an effort to save resources and repopulate the Realm versus Realm (RvR) and areas in the game, which had declined due to player loss and a disparately wide spread player base, the development team linked different servers' RvR and PvP areas together. These clusters of servers shared the player populations in these areas and this worked to repopulate the RvR zones because multiple servers worth of people were now competing in these shared zones. As with most in-game fixes, solving this problem created another. Many players had Albion characters on one server, Midgard on another, and Hibernians on yet another. As a result, many players were suddenly capable of playing multiple realms in the same RvR zones, bypassing the initial paradigm for the game's structure.

As a result of this structural change in deployment, a diminished sense of realm gave way to an increased sense of an over arching community with members stemming from all three realms. Suddenly, people were more apt to play all three sides, which meant that hatred of the unknown dissipated as the unknown people from the other two realms became familiar. As a result, the sense of space/place in-game has expanded, and extended beyond realm boundaries. This change in the player perception of these virtual nationalities has resulted in a change in etiquette in some places in the game. It has decreased the killer instinct and detracted from the mob versus mob mentality of the game's original design.[42]

To combat this growing sense of camaraderie between players of rival realms, the developers implemented a time lock out, which has since fluctuated from as little as a minute to as great as a twenty-four hour period. The social repercussions of these changes have had an enormous effect on the player base of the game and the communities housed within. Nevertheless, the development staff has been unable to curb this camaraderie.

[42] Of the eleven major informants interviewed, ten mentioned this phenomenon in one format or another.

Based on observation and informant comments on the subject, it appears that the players have spoken in their passive voice and they like each other (at least enough to suggest that they no longer hate each other because one person clicked the blue hammer of Midgard instead of the green tree of Hibernia at the realm selection screen).

This is only one type of social change that has forever altered the face of the social spaces inside of the game. The interface of the game has also undergone sweeping changes. In the first days of the game its interface closely resembled that of *EverQuest*, which is to say it was defaulted to a first person aspect (through the eyes of the avatar). However, most players decided to zoom out behind their avatar in a locked third person view (meaning the camera was fixed at a three quarter ratio behind the avatar). In any regard the interface was initially cumbersome and hard to navigate from, especially for people like me who can get lost in their own house without a map. The interface has now been adapted to closely resemble that of *World of Warcraft*, *Final Fantasy Online*, and the ill faited *New Horizons*. It defaults to the three quarter view and the interface functions in much the same manner as these more recent games.

These changes have fundamentally altered the lens with which the player views the game, no longer are they constantly looking through the eyes of their character but now their avatar is always in view. Thus, looking aesthetically pleasing has become more important because the players have to look at their avatars on a constant basis. On top of this, the User Interface (UI) no longer featured only one bar of macros for a player, now the player could choose to have as many as three bars. As a result, social command *macros*[43] like */dance*, */hug*, */salute*, and more commonly */point* could now be

[43] A macro is a program that can do various things. In the case of the social command macros in DAOC they make the player's avatar perform the desired task such as dance, hug, or salute.

accommodated more easily on the bars and used more often. The most influential change, however, was not included in the modifications to the Graphical User Interface (GUI) but the sweeping alterations to the in-game communication functions.

The developers have always pushed the PvP and RvR aspect of the game, so it was unsurprising that it has been marked as the place setter for the game's communities. Region chats have been created to span all areas in the game but it is used most commonly in contested areas. As a result of this emphasis on the PvP and RvR areas, despite their enormous size, the region chats have allowed for the creation of true community places within these locales.[44] This is because these chats link all of the players in that region together for as long as they are in the area. This has created a series of communication spaces within the game. All of which have distinct identities, that encourage players to communicate freely with each other, while developing player led etiquette.

These PvP zones are simple areas that involve one keep per realm as a starting point, called Portal Keeps (PKs), which cannot be attacked and one central keep (CK), situated in the middle of the battleground (BG), which can be sieged by everyone.[45] The competition takes place over the central keep as all sides attempt to lay claim to it. By developing the BGs in this manner the Mythic staff reinforced the defacto teams (the realms) and created a common purpose for them (either attempting to expand realm resources or protect current possessions). Since taking a defended keep requires many more people attacking than defending, this encouraged large-scale engagements,

[44] The contested areas are the geographical spaces in which players compete against each other for ownership of scarce resources.

[45] The PKs are separated into the three realms, each having their own keep, and have been designated modified acronyms by the players for simplicity of identification. APK, MPK, and HPK or Albion's portal keep, Midgard's portal keep, and Hibernia's portal keep respectively

sometimes concerning hundreds of players in one area. Through this type of design implementation, developers have demonstrated their desire to foster a mob mentality in the game.

When there are not enough people to siege a CK, sieging often takes a back seat to straight PvP. Each BG offers different physical features that create obstacles for enemy realmers, both for sieging the CK and for engaging in general PvP. Due to the distinctly different landscapes and player population trends of every BG, a different character for each has emerged. Some BGs are continuous battles for the CK. For example, Thidranki, the level 20-24 BG, almost always supports a high enough population to both siege and defend the CK. Molvik, the level 35-39 BG tends more towards field battles between groups because the population there is often skewed too heavily on one side or another for an actual siege and defense to take place simultaenously. The final BG in the game, Cathal Valley (CV) is strictly PvP (there is hardly ever a keep take in the BG, and when there is, it is not contested) as the CK is off to the side and offers no experience bonus for taking it. Thus, straight PvP is the dominant activity due to the lack of the group-oriented goal of taking or defending the CK. As a result, many group-oriented players tend to avoid CV, making it a soloist BG. Players often embark in honourable duels while being watched by players from all realms.

Although the developers have created a diverse set of communication spaces in the hope of maintaining the social aspect of the game, its the players themselves that dictate the use of these spaces. Oddly, the development team's solution to the major communication problem was accomplished by revisiting the platform of the genre's

predecessor, the MUD/MUSH.[46] MUD/MUSHs are divided into rooms. These virtual spaces become places when they are populated and human interaction begins producing rules to regulate the interaction in that place. Essentially, the region chat is now functioning in a similar fashion that MUDs use when walking into a room.

Despite the geographical size of the virtual space the players are brought closer together, phenomenologically speaking, by the persistent regional chat. This is a vast improvement over the original in-game communication system that was alienating because of its geographical limitations. In the past a player could only create a semi-persistent chat with others, or join existing chats, but many of these required passwords and were only in existence until the last person in the chat left the game. Currently, the region-chats occupy every zone at all times.

In the old chat interface, there were only two types of persistent chat, the guild chat and the alliance chat. These chats were created for the express purpose of creating player communities by creating player-driven communication spaces that were policed only by the players. On top of these chats, there are a variety of benefits to being guilded, a player gets an extra vault to trade from (there is no other way to transfer money or items from one character to the next without another person without a vault of some kind), they can get a stone to recall to the guild house, and access to a consignment merchant from which to sell goods.

Guilds also provide support for guild members in a variety of other ways: 1) the membership poses as a player base to draw on for crafted items, which are necessary for serious competitors; 2) they present a body of support to be drawn on when an item is needed that requires more than one person to obtain; 3) they provide defense against

[46] Multi-User Dungeon/Multi-User Shared Hallucination

online bullying (to varying degrees); and 4) they facilitate gathering people for group-versus-group competition. They are also pivotal to the game experience itself, because playing the game unguilded presents a lot of problems for players, especially new ones.[47] The simple truth about MMOGs is that they have been created to force players into groups. *Dark Age of Camelot* merely facilitates one series of such examples, but all MMOGs force people together to succeed at in-game goals. Thus, these guild constructs have become a forge for online communities. Since their inception, MMOG developers have intentionally required large player bases to succeed, both from the standpoints of the economic survival of the MMOG and the players involved with them.

[47] The developers attempted to solve this problem by creating start up guilds in each of the realms and making every new character automatically part of the corresponding guild. This was only a partial solution to the problem because members of these guilds are looked down on by members of real guilds, and so players are less likely to remain part of them. This is because being a part of one is a sign to the community at large that a player is new to the game and thus, probably less useful to a group. In addition to these limitations the members of these newbie guilds have no administration rights in the guilds nor do they possess a guild house or any of the other tangible benefits. So it really is an amorphous and ungainly creation that only benefits it's members by providing access to a guild chat. Since the main use of guild chat is the discussion of in-game problems having a guild entirely made up of other new players makes the start up guilds' chats less useful to new players. What it does provide is a place for new players to talk to other new players and form in-game relationships and find real guilds.

Growing Pains, the maturation of a MMOG

The growing pains experienced in the development of *Dark Age of Camelot* are similar to those of most other MMOGs in that it has been a constant struggle for the development team to rectify social problems in the game from a structural standpoint. In general, all game fixes are developed in parallel to social problems-not in tandem with them. The development teams keep strictly out of the limelight, almost never coming into contact with the regular players. This disassociation illustrates the largest social difference between MUDs and MMOGs. In MUDs the wizards or administrators normally rectify problems by working in tandem with the players, or at least include players in the process of developing a solution. Regardless, there is a discourse of information involved back and forth. The player's level of involvement is greatly reduced in the decision-making (with respect to the structural design of the MMOG). As a result of this process, when the design team finally develops a solution to one problem the players often find ways to manipulate that new structure in unintended ways that often cause more problems for the development team.

For instance, a veteran player told me that in the beginning of *Dark Age of Camelot*, leveling from 40-50 was an extremely time consuming process because of the exponential growth of required experience points from one level to the next.[48] The development staff's first idea was a tome that exponentially increased the experience gain a character would earn from defeating anything in combat. According to this player, this book was rewarded to a player upon attaining level 40. What happened almost immediately is that these books were sold for real money to people new to the game. The

[18] Experience points are the in-game reward for killing players or monsters in the game.

developers had not foreseen this problem. The book was created to help reduce the time it took to get from 40-50 and the result was that players went from 1-40 ridiculously fast. According to this source, the staff was forced to suspend access to the game for those involved in this exploitation of the tome, to stop the proliferation of that use of the item.

Another example, from my own experience, concerned the introduction of the BGs and a series of commands that were introduced separately but ended up working in conjunction with them. When the */level* command was introduced to the game, it was intended that anyone who had a level 50 character should not have to play the first 20 levels of the next character, this was introduced necessary as a reward for attaining the highest level in the game. There were several social repercussions of this development. The first of which occurred when the BGs were introduced to the game. The level 20-24 BG became the most popular BG and the population of the BGs under level 20 dropped to virtually nothing across all servers. In addition to this the newbie areas (starting locations for new players) became dead zones.

For the final example, we will look at the implementation of the BGs itself. The BGs were introduced to allow players under level 50 the ability to PvP against characters of similar level to their own.[49] This resulted in a decrease in the numbers of players competing in the end-game RvR which occurred because the BGs were too successful. Players enjoyed their time in the BGs so much that it acted as an incentive for players with end-game level characters to start new characters and level them inside of the BGs instead of playing their end-game level characters in the RvR zones, as a result the

[49] Every BG has a minimum and maximum level so that no player ever has to contend with another player that has a character that is more than five levels higher than their own character

numbers of players actively participating in the world RvR (the driving force of their game) began to dwindle.

The addition of */rp off* and */xp off* commands cemented the players' ability to stay in these BGs indefinitely. They could now control their experience levels and keep themselves from leveling out of these BGs. These commands were introduced as a result of public outcry that came from players having to use work-arounds to achieve this control by themselves. Before these commands were introduced players had no recourse but to use in-game suicide as a means to control their experience levels (dying in-game in a PvE scenario penalizes the player through experience loss). Thus, they used this in-game penalty to control and moderate their experience gains from killing enemy players. Initially, players were not able to control their realm point accrual but public outcry quickly produced realm point removers that returned the character to the base realm rank. This, of course, was not a popular solution to the problem as it meant that players lost all of their accrued realm points (PvP level), and further public outcry resulted in the */rp off* command, which halted realm point accrual but did not remove the points already earned.

The significance of these examples is that they demonstrate the indirect power that the players have over the developers. However, it is far from a perfect system and generally the developers only respond to situations that they are sure affect a majority of players in the game. As in this example, most of these changes forced on the developers are done so by the players through a passive avoidance of in-game rules, or using programmed responses, like the player death penalty, in unintended ways. The developers knew that the players were already moderating their experience through death. Therefore,

they simply accommodated them with the *'/xp off'* command which really changed nothing because the players could already control this aspect of the game.

The largest change brought about by the introduction of the BGs was that it essentially further divided the realm population. Not only were players now divided by realm and guild affiliation, but were also divided by space because each BG exists separately from the rest of the game. In-game communication still exists there. For example the persistent chats and *sends/tells* still function. However, for all intent and purposes the characters within the BG cannot be reached, physically, by players outside of that BG's level range. This hard division has further divided the player community significantly because many players enjoy a certain level of the game and stick with it. This means that the player may not be any help to the guild except when other guild members are passing through that one BG. This can be problematic for both the player who likes the one BG, and the guild. That player is less useful to the guild in the long run as they will never be able to help the guild take or hold a keep in RvR (end-game PvP).

These unintended player divisions provide an excellent tool for the researcher because they point directly to areas of community division. This provides us with an easily observable series of places where negotiation of community boundaries, between groups, can be seen to be taking place. This negotiating process leads unerringly to the formation of these groups' identity. Some of these divisions have been inherited directly from the MMOG's predecessors, MUDs and MUSHs[50] because much of their text-based command structure has been inherited from them. Therefore, almost all of the factors that created friction in MUD/MUSHs still exists in MMOGs. Luckily, there have been many articles written about MUD/MUSH development that deal with these issues. For instance,

[50] See page seven of chapter one for details on these terms.

Michael Beaubien's "Playing at Community: Multi-User Dungeons and Social Interaction in Cyberspace" and Vicky O'Day et. Al's, "Network Community Design: A Social-Technical Design Circle" assert the notion that development of the social space should be aimed at a universal goal and discuss, at length, improving and facilitating meaningful social interaction within this medium, despite its' limitations.

Beaubien focused on the creation of a community space in which the ultimate goal was enjoyment. It was about the very focus of this paper, the search for the ever-elusive online third place. For O'Day et. al. it was the technical implementation and design to facilitate a learning environment that children found both amusing and educational. In reading either of these two articles, the major difference between MUD/MUSH users and MMOG users, the power differential, becomes quite apparent. In general, MUD/MUSH players have far more control over their virtual environments than MMOG users. This is because in the MMOG world there is a sharp division between the administration and the typical MMOG user.

MUD users' can often create their own zones within the game and design their own spaces because in most circumstances all players have at least some power of administration (the system is far more democratic). The closest thing to this in the MMOG world is the city building in *Star Wars Galaxies,* which has been regarded as a failure in online third place implementation (see Ducheneaut et. al 2007), due to logistical problems in managing transport. Other attempts at imbuing players with power to sculpt their own environments in hopes at establishing in-game geographical third places are: *City of Heroes/Villians'* Hide Outs, *Dark Age of Camelot*'s Player Housing, and *Asheron's Call II*'s City Building. However, none of these implementations has ever

granted the MMOG player the kind of control over their environment that the MUD/MUSH user often has by default. Almost all of the communication commands from MUDs/MUSHs have moved to MMOGs and most of the same quirky communication problems still persist.

These wholesale *ports* from MUDs/MUSHs to MMOGs created enormous problems for MMOGs initially. For instance, the direct *porting* of the */say* or */s* command from MUD to MMOG is only just now being resolved in DAOC.[51] In a MUD, when everyone is in a room together the */s* or */say* command will speak to everyone in the room. However, in MMOGs the use of this command is very different. Since the visual aspects of MMOGs are so demanding these games have been segmented into much smaller zones. Due to this segmentation, the */s* or */say* commands only extend about five to ten feet from the avatar. As a result, the functionality is very different. In a MUD/MUSH the */say* command is the equivalent to a real-world radio broadcast, which everyone tuned into the room can hear. In the MMOG the very same command is used in a manner that is much closer to everyday communication, meaning that the ability to hear the speech is based on the proximity of the listener to the speaker. It has taken the introduction of the region chats to fix this problem. These chats create a channel that allows players to speak in a manner that is projected over all of these smaller zones. In essence it has united communication in a manner that is based less on the physical proximity of the players (see appendix 8 for a visualization of how multiple channels work together within the game).

[51] A port (short for import) is the transfer of a program, or pieces of a program, from one medium to another.

The old system of in-game communication forced players into communicating directly with the other players in the zone, but out of their speaking range, to do so on an individual basis via the */page*, */send*, */tell*, */whisper* commands. The real-world equivalent would be everyone in a large group having a phone and call waiting but no conference call option. The result of this type of communication structure was what many *raid* leaders have dubbed as "tell hell," which is the result of numerous people messaging them simultaneously.[52] This limitation to one-on-one discourse lasted until the *battle group chat* (*battle group chat* is a semi-persistent chat created to allow for communication in groups larger than eight people) was created and the information (on how to join) divulged to everyone messaging the raid leaders. As mentioned before, this problem has only just now been rectified, via the introduction of the */region* or */reg* chat command that can be used to broadcast the message to everyone in the zone out of */say* range. After five years of not being able to talk to the people sharing the same geography, the developers finally implemented a solution that essentially recreates what MUDs/MUSHs have been doing since their inception.

These examples, of course, are only a few instances of growing pains for which there are probably enough stories about to write more than one entertaining book. They also exemplify the types of issues concerning space and community caused by both players and developers of online games. Moreover, it demonstrates the types of effects, often unintentional, that developer actions can have on the social interaction within the game, and conversely the influence that the players can assert over the developers to force change, whether it be to the benefit or detriment of the game.

[52] Raid leaders are leaders of large groups designed to deal with either PvP or PvE obstacles that smaller groups cannot handle alone

The new MUDesque communication spaces created by the region chats are only a small detour into phenomenology away from simulating real world communication spaces. Of course, most of the in-game communication still occurs over the guild and alliance chats (historically the only persistent chats in existence before the region chat were created in 2007). These persistent chats remove the idea of physicality from the interaction completely. They exist in non-place or as Healey et al. have put it, in "null place" (14). The truth is that the most social aspect of the game is in the text (or sometimes, though far less often, voice based chat) that occupies no simulated physical space. Using Harrison & Dourish's view, it cannot be a space because it is without physicality, although it exists strictly for human interaction. It is, therefore, a place without a space, which is in this context is a space without geography but one that still, to use a quote Kent Ryden borrowed from Graham Good, "calls up something... we recognize and respond to [that] gives us a sense of place and a sense of community" (207).

Looking at the chat from the Lefebvrian perspective, it is a space that exists without the first space. It uses all of the conceived and lived space added to a severely limited perceived space (as the only perceived space that can be seen is that of the chat and the text-based reactions of the people involved in it). This is further convoluted by the problem that one reading the chat really has no idea what else the person talking to them is doing unless they talk about it. So the conversation in the chat could be about something occurring in someone's current geography or about something entirely removed from the geography of the game.

Conversations about non-game related topics are often briefly interrupted by questions posed by other guild members. However, doing so does not break the thread of conversation; it simply creates more threads. The threads are a very important part of online communication because they demonstrate one of the strengths of text-based chat.[53] Players often find themselves involved in a variety of threads with multiple people at any one time in the game. In these chats, a person can easily be part of one conversation but not another, or they can be responding to multiple threads at once. The result is that communication is occurring on a much broader level than in face-to-face communication. Although text-based chat is not the best medium for long stories or quick communication, it is ideal for many online situations and is far more democratic than voice chat, since by its nature it is wait and respond (meaning that you write something and send it and then wait for a response from the recipient). Thus, by it's nature it gives everyone their turn to speak and be heard. Plus, it reduces confusion over who said what first and it eliminates many problems associated with people speaking at the same time.

Communication space created by persistent chats, especially closed chats, create a different community space than we are typically used to in real world community development. At its heart, the communication is more democratic.[54] Nicolas Ducheneaut et al. explore the ideas put forward by George Simmel (1949) and Ray Oldenburg (1989) as they pertain to MMOGs, and they do a wonderful job of extending Oldenburg's ideas into online culture. Unfortunately, they get hung up on the notion of simulated physical space. Their major problem was that they only searched for third places in geographically simulated space inside of MMOGs, which has resulted in numerous failures because

[53] See Judith Donath for an indepth analysis of the power of text-based communication.
[54] Such as guild chat or alliance chat, closed because only members of the guild or alliance can speak in them.

people do not view space in the same way inside of videogames. However, researchers are not alone in this miscalculation. The designers themselves have been caught up in trying to force players into social spaces that simulate real world social spaces. For instance, the cafés in *Star Wars Galaxies* (SWG). Ducheneaut et al. do a wonderful job of studying the social space there and find it, generally speaking, to be lacking because players do not really respond well to being forced into doing things. For a gamer, five minutes of forced downtime, means time to eat or do real world chores such as housing cleaning.

Gamers, myself included, often become obsessed with efficiency. The severity often differs from person to person, but many power gamers only socialize when it is not causing them issues with efficiency. This means that players do not often stay in one spot for long. They are transient in nature. For example, the players of *Star Wars Galaxies* do not go to the cafés to socialize. They go there to rid themselves of the programmed battle fatigue.[55] As a result, the player is trapped in a café for a given amount of time, where they can take no in-game action other than listening or watching a performance. The idea is to create a situation that forced players into a social environment. On the other side of the transaction, the players doing the mending of the fatigue can speak freely while performing their actions because it does not hinder their efficiency in any way.

Unfortunately, most of the players being healed go idle during the performance because the process is often regarded as wasted time that could be better spent doing

[55] The cafés in *Star Wars Galaxies* were created to bring players physically together in the game. In order to do this the developers made it necessary for the player's avatar to have to relax in the game. The avatar gains battle fatigue over time, through performing actions, and must then go to the café to erase it or they suffer the penalties of the fatigue, which gets worse over time. The in-game entertainment, used by the players to relax their avatars, takes the form of dancing or musical performances performed by other players' avatars.

something more productive. Paralleling this, the entertainers often *macro* (automate) their movements so that they do not have to be at the computer at all for their avatar to perform this healing function for others. As a result, most avatars are left idle to heal and be healed.[56] Although the architecture was created to trap the players' avatars physically together in-game, the system has failed to generate a social space because most of the interaction in the space is automated.

Oldenburg defines a third place as, "is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (16). The cafés in SWG (for the most part) do not fulfill this designation because half the population, the clientel, have been forced there by the structure of the game, and the other half are mostly made up of automated avatars. Therefore, there are no players for those seeking healing with which to interact in a socially constructive format. Their interaction is neither voluntary nor particularly social. It is a waste of the clients' limited adventuring time, and as a result, it is not happily anticipated. The third places in MMOGs exist instead in the persistent chats that hold groups of people together, in a phenomenological sense, despite the geographic dispersion of its members.

Although the guild and alliance chats within DAOC exist fundamentally in null or non-space, they are the places of meaningful socialization and, therefore, are places to use Harrison & Dourish's terminology. A player is free to chat, or not, with her/his guild or alliance mates as they see fit. It is voluntary. They can gripe, joke, or ask questions of

[56] Movements in some games can be automated via the use of macros, in-game programs implemented by players. this allows players to set their characters to performing certain tasks automatically giving the player the opportunity to walk away from the game for a while and yet still maintain a level of in-game productivity.

their community as they choose, and the group acts together to create a comfortable place for all of its members.[57] The community also comes together to set up a tangible manifestation of a guild space in the form of the guild house. The guild house space includes a consignment merchant, a vault, a variety of crafting stations, and a myriad of other shared accessories bought by the guild through a tithe (guild tax on all members' in-game income).

These spaces have failed to become places, despite the construction of guild houses, and all that it entails being the in-game manifestation of guild unity and success,. This failure is mostly due to the types of activities in which the players are regularly involved. Even negotiating the look and feel of the space of the guild house often fails to bring any connection to it from the players. The guild houses merely symbolize the tangible benefits of belonging to the guild associated with it. To those outside of the guild, they tend to represent the success of the guild (guild houses can range from small one room houses to large mansions). Staying in one fixed location in-game, just to socialize is the equivalent of deciding that the corner store down the street is the only place that one can communicate with their spouse. It is simply ridiculous. It is without purpose for the players to remain fixed to a single region when the communication network is in place to facilitate communication in exactly the same format over vast in-

[57] Leveling is simply the attainment of the next level of power in whatever class the player is currently playing. Levels are attained through the gathering of experience points.
Trading normally refers to trading from one player to another but can also refer to trading from one player's character to another character owned by the same player if the options in the game permit such a trade.
Raiding refers to any gathering of players in large groups, normally in excess of the standard group size but not always, to accomplish a specific goal such as killing a monster non slayable by a standard group.
Questing refers to running in-game quests, such as package deliveries from one non-playing character to another or the slaying of a particular monster. Quests are given by certain non-playing characters, and completed by players.
Tithing refers to a guild command that forces all guild members to tithe a certain percentage of their income to the guild coffers.

game geographical division. Since it gets in the way of playing the game, gathering in one place for the express reason of communicating is just not something many gamers do.

Heterotopias and connecting paradigms

Foucault's notion of heterotopia is ideal in online forums. The spaces of contestation, in DAOC, probably remain the best examples of this phenomenon, although the simulated Cartesian space that they cover does not factor well into the equation. The two major principles of Foucault's hetertopias that will be examined are the heterochrony and the notion that heterotopias are a "constant of every group" (24).[58] Every group has some space that is viewed as their utopian space, i.e. a hockey arena for hockey players, or a pool hall for pool players. MMOG heterotopias, as with MMOG communication spaces, exist more completely in null space than at any fixed physical feature in the simulated geography of the game. They tend to become more palpable as hetertopias as the emphasis bears less on the physicality of the space, and more on the socially constructed nature of it. To exemplify this, we will start our analysis at the most physical level, and therefore the weakest of in-game representations of heterotopias: those linked to the simulated geography. From here we will work toward the most abstract, the non-space or null-place, where the heterotopias are the most pronounced.

The realms are fundamentally divided, in a way that one player's sanctuary is quite literally an opposition player's hell (for example the Portal Keep's offer certain death for any oppositional player that strays too close). It therefore unsurprising that the

[58] A Heterochrony is the notion that on place may act as the hetrotopia form more than on group at separate times. For instance, a community hall might act as the heterotopia of a karate class from 6:00pm to 7:00pm and a dance society from 7:00pm to 8:00pm.

geographical areas in between these marked locations, the contested areas, have become claimed by all involved with the space. Therefore, the first and perhaps weakest, form of heterotopia exists in the simulated physicality of space inside of the game. The best example of this idea is resident in the architectural design concept of the Central Keeps in the BGs. The Central Keeps exist, physically and stylistically, as a keep of whatever realm currently holds them. Despite the fact that the Central Keep is a common space to all realms, it always presents itself as realm-specific. However, it is still technically a common space for all involved because it exists in the same physical location despite its allegiance.

The simulated physical space parallels real world heterotopias in that it actually changes with the occupancy. These physical changes are suited to the current occupant of the space in much the same way a meeting hall can become a dojo through the removal of chairs and the introduction of mats. This demonstrates the idea of a heterochrony almost perfectly; the use of shared space by each community is separated completely by time. However, despite acting as an almost perfect example of a heterochrony, the social interaction within these sites is of waxing and waning social importance (if the CK is not under siege it is no longer a place of import or congregation). Therefore, these spaces approach but fail to meet the requirements of a true heterotopia as they do not embody the heart of any one group, let alone several.

The next step closer to heterotopia includes the in-between geographies (between the central keep and the portal keeps), also referred to as contested zones. Although the in-between geography does not reflect the community occupying it, like the central keeps, it is viewed uniformly as common ground. This geography includes the hills and

valleys of the BG. These areas support populations of leveling players, roving PvP groups, duelists, and gankers. In regards to heterotopias, these areas approach the ideal but fall short of the true notion because there is nothing cohesive about the type of interaction going on within the space. The space does not enter into the realm of place because of the temporary nature of the interaction there. For example, the levelers will only be there a set amount of time. Once they reach the maximum level for the BG there will no longer be a reason to level anymore unless they wish to level out of the BG. Roving groups and duelists are transient in nature and, therefore, tend to lay no claim to any particular aspect of the geography unless it is a spot noted for confrontation.

As long as the physicality of the geoscape is involved in the analysis of in-game space the environment fails to produce a true heterotopia. It is not until the physicality moves to either a generalized area tied together with a region chat or further removed to the non-space of guild or alliance chat that the true heterotopias emerge. This is because these other spaces have never become places, as places require a lot of sustained human interaction that these spaces lack. Heterotopias can only exist in communication spaces, which in turn can only exist within places. The failure to translate geographical space into place within MMOG architecture has been seen as a failure by researchers, but in fact the games have become great social successes because they have removed the physicality from the problem.

The next step closer to heterotopia exists in the idea of regions. The region chat creates a sense of place in these areas by facilitating communication across that space. It is the heart of that particular place, in the same way that guild and alliance chats are the forums of other in-game communities. Although each region encompasses many players,

all with different reasons to be there, these chats bind the populations together in a united social forum. Of course many regions in the game fail to become communication spaces because they are simply not populated enough. However, many of the populated regions emerge as these special places. This is because each group populating these regions claims some ownership of the space. In many circumstances these areas define the hearts of a variety of in-game communities, most notably the duelist population within the game. The duelists are scattered across realms, guilds, and alliances and therefore have no persistent chat to keep them in communication with each other. Therefore, the region chat becomes one of the major means of communication for this group. This being said, the population of most regions, BGs included, is far from static. Thus, the groupings formed there tend more toward communitas than community. As a result these places fall short of becoming heterotopia. However, they exemplify Oldenburg's ideal of third place.

Finally, when the physicality of space is removed altogether, the remaining places exist only in the non-space of persistent chats. These chats represent the heart of hundreds of communities per realm, all of who regard this space in their own manner. Heterochronies exist in varying formats that range from domination of the space, based on time zones, to times when groups of players log on to do time-oriented tasks and dominate the chats for these brief moments in time.[59] Obviously, it is at this level where the spaces can also be seen as being the most separate, because the game design has been purposefully designed to separate these spaces from each other. It is no surprise that the ideas of communication spaces, third places, and heterotopias all collide in these non-

[59] Time zones greatly affect the population of the game at any particular time, for instance the lowest population times on the servers are from about 8:00am – 11:00am EST because there is really only one time zone still awake at that time whereas from 9:00pm – 1:00am EST is prime time because so many time zones over lap recreational time at this point of the day.

places. MMOGs create a unique environment, which limits the field of communication to specific non-spaces (the persistent chats). Therefore, these null-places have become modern social juggernauts. All format of social interaction takes place there. They are the locations for idle chat, flirting, and any other format of socializing that takes place within the game.

Conclusion

What I have attempted to convey through this discourse is that all of these socio-spacial paradigms are connected. Place cannot exist outside of a communication space, a third place cannot exist outside of a place, and a heterotopia must be fixed around a third place for it to be representative of a true heterotopia. With all of these theories rushing together it is easy to get lost in the fixation on the geography of it all, but this is a terrible mistake. Communication spaces exist not in Cartesian space but in the minds of those perceiving them.

Lefebvre's first space, from a communications perspective, may influence interaction but it does not determine whether or not communication will take place. It merely facilitates it. If a medium exists that can also perform this function, this first space can be bypassed. When this happens the first space merely becomes a backdrop to communication, much like the socially constructed space of these games. Therefore, the arbitrary dismissal of the existence of in-game third places, on the basis that no geographical feature contained therein demonstrates what a real-world place looks like, is illogical. Just as problematic though, is over-stating the games themselves by presenting

them uniformly as third places because this implies a conformity that does not exist in such a socially divided construct.

With people tacking their earphones in and ignoring everyone in real world social spaces now-a-days, the thinking is that these integral parts of our socialization (third places) are dying off. The interaction within MMOGs and other online groups demonstrates that this is not the case. Just like the car has allowed people to associate themselves with people over a larger geographic area, in effect allowing them to disassociate themselves with many people who are geographically closer. This is merely another geographical expansion of the social network. As a result, communication within this group is alive and well, simply less tied to the geography than before. This being said, it is this feature that makes these third places so important to the study of human interaction, because they exist as one of the few remaining true forms of all of these hypothetical paradigms of community commons.

Chapter Three: Tradition, Etiquette and Group Identity

Functionalism in folklore revisited

Now that we have located the third places within this medium, we may now look at the communities themselves, which are contained therein, and examine how they negotiate their social boundaries. This chapter will focus on two major ideas involving folklore in the social production of community within these spaces. The first idea revisits the notion of structuralist/functionalist thought in folklore, and attempts to suggest that esoteric and exoteric functions work in tandem to perform a greater singular function. The second idea grows organically from the first. It is an examination of how players use these functions, in the form of informal group traditions, to create and define both their community identity, and their boundaries with other groups. Through this examination, we will dissect the relationship between tradition and identity. The result of which suggests that the processes of tradition formulation, occurring within these social spaces result in the production of the unique and fluid notion of identity.

Structuralist thought and the functions that have historically been associated with folklore. The discourse that begins with William Bascom's (1954) monolithic work "Four Functions of Folklore" and is expanded by Richard Bauman (1971), "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore." Bascom theorized that there were four major functions of folklore: validation, education, amusement, and the maintenance of conformity. He believed that traditions existed to validate why a culture did things, to educate the next generation through traditions such as etiquette, and enforce conformity with currently held group ideals.

While it is obvious that folklore performs all of these functions, Elliott Oring was quite correct in pointing out that there is extensive overlap in these functions (1971,73). For example, any tradition that can be seen as educating could also be seen as both validating the knowledge being taught and enforcing conformity through the creation of a shared group knowledge base. This is especially poignant when this knowledge imparts social etiquette embraced by the group, because these rules create boundaries that define the group's identity. For instance, if a group member acts in a manner contrary to this embraced etiquette, that member can be seen as not conforming, which results in the questioning of the validity of their membership in the group. As we can see, Oring's assault on Bascom's functionalism is not without basis.

Oring's major argument is that since hard conclusions about people are impossible to make, functionalist/structuralist thought is flawed and therefore should not be used.[60] While he is correct in his conclusions, both about the overlap of Bascom's functions and about the weakness of structuralist/functionalist thought, discarding this tool (functionalism) from our toolbox seems excessive, especially with the newer ideas of symbolism that augment them so well. Instead, I suggest that we take functionalism with a grain of salt, and continue to pursue this discourse to its teleological end. Especially because the overlap that he has so cleverly pointed out points towards the boarder, more all-encompassing, central function of folklore.

Richard Bauman's (1971) summation of Jan Brunvand (1968) and Alan Dundes' (1965) arguments into his statement, "folklore is a function of shared identity" (32) suggests that at least one of these broader functions is about the group's identity. Bauman

[60] Oring states that "the causal connections postulated in folkloristic explanations are rarely tested... because they are rarely testable" (73).

emphasizes this point by stating that, "the first test of a folk group is the existence of shared folklore" (32). This suggests that in order for this shared identity to exist, so too must a unifying folklore. This infers that shared identity can also be seen as a function of folklore.

However, this is only true when examining the esoteric function of folklore. William Hugh Jansen pursued this idea and found that folklore "has *peculiar virtues* arising from its existence within a more or less *peculiar group*" (45). In other words, the folklore has a specific esoteric meaning to the group members that is limited to them, and the shared context under which they view it. Additionally, it does not mean the same thing to people outside their peculiar group. This argument, combined with Bauman's, really helps to reveal the first truth and the one most discussed in the functional analysis of folklore, the esoteric function of integration.

The flipside of this argument, the exoteric function, has largely part been left out of functional analyses within the discipline. This is most likely because the works in question were intended as esoteric works that focus entirely on the community at hand and not their effect on outsiders. As a result, this esoteric function's impact on the out-group has not been pursued with any great amount of zeal within the discipline. While Bascom's four functions (or any reduced format of them) can easily be seen as combining to act as a centrifugal force for the in-group it is not the only effect that the force exerts. They pull the members together, but it does so by pulling them apart from those outside of the group. This oversight represents the short-sighted esoteric notion of this folklore research. For this reason, ideas suggested by Anthony Cohen (1985), Hugh Jansen (1965), and Fredrik Barth (1969) should be called upon to add the missing perspective.

By bringing the frictional boundaries that exist between people/groups and communities into focus, in an effort to reveal the exoteric function of folklore these authors have touched upon another major function of folklore: disintegration.

The truth is that the centrifugal force generated by group traditions greatly impacts those outside of the community by creating space or division between the members and the non-members. Even the most benevolent of group traditions accomplish this division. To use an in-game example, the guild lottery[61] is a fairly common in-game tradition that forces the guild membership together by requiring multiple members to be present in-game throughout the process. This tradition first requires a gathering by the guild to spend time hunting down the in-game monsters that drop the items to be lotteried (this often takes hours because most items have only a small chance to be dropped by certain monsters). The guild members then have to gather together physically inside the game and actually hold the lottery to dispense the item to the membership in a fair format. In all stages of this tradition it can be seen as having an integrating effect, as it provides crucial bonding time necessary for the group. As in previous studies, one could conclude from the esoteric side of things that this tradition is completely benevolent.

From the perspective of the outsider, however, it is not a benevolence. In fact, this tradition merely represents, to them, one unavailable means of procuring invaluable equipment. Thus, this benevolent tradition becomes a point of division between the in-group and the out-group. This tradition often results in the creation of a division between players as the haves and the have-nots. [62] Van Gennep's list of rites demonstrate many

[61] A guild lottery is a random way of distributing items procured by the guild, amongst it's members.
[62] This is because this group tradition also represents a loss of time for the non-member because he/she cannot pursue obtaining the item by themselves while this group is monopolizing the monster's respawn

notions that obviously impact the out-group. For example, the rites of *transition* and *separation* directly affect the in-group/out-group relationship by creating new boundaries or reinforcing old ones. Rites of transition are created specifically to create a more pronounced division between the in and out groups by reaffirming hard points of separation between the two. The rite of separation either dissolves a link between a member of the group and the group completely, or establishes a new boundary. In many ways these two rites actively overlap with each other in that they serve a function of disintegration. To demonstrate using a real world example I will follow in Michael Robidoux's (2001) footsteps and use an example from hockey because communication in MMOGs often mirrors the communication in team sports very closely and Robidoux has made excellent in-roads in studying the traditions therein.

On October 23rd of 2007 Ryan Smyth (a.k.a. Captain Canada) returned to his beloved Edmonton for the first time as an oppositional player. Smyth, who had spent twelve years in Edmonton becoming the team captain and the team's point leader, had been until the trade deadline of 2006-2007 season, the face of the Edmonton Oilers. Upon his return a unique Edmontonian tradition was held at the rink (a tradition every traded player must face at some point, that of facing his old team and fans, which in itself is a form of *rite of passage*). For their former Captains in Edmonton, however, a more elaborate celebration has become tradition.

Using past footage from his career, the Edmonton Oilers' staff created a video tribute for him (in the tradition that they have maintained for such names as Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, and Jason Smith). When Smyth arrived on the ice, he was

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zone because it would be considered rude for another group to kill the monster while the first group is laying claim to the area.

greeted with a tumultuous roar from the crowd and a standing ovation. Smyth, who was quite emotional at learning that he had been traded the previous year, was obviously moved by the continued support of the Edmonton fans. After the tributary movie clip, the anthems were played, and the puck was dropped. The first pass that landed on Ryan Smyth's stick was met with a resounding "boo" and the former fans proceeded to jeer and heckle him throughout the remainder of the evening. Later, at the post-game conference when asked about the booing and the tribute, Craig MacTavish, the head coach of the Oilers, commented that he has always loved the perspective of the home crowd in Edmonton. Stating that he had always felt that they understood what was appropriate.[63]

As we can see in this example, Ryan Smyth was the subject to both a rite of transition (moving from one team to another) and then to a rite of separation (exile from the Edmonton community). Although most traditions of separation or exclusion are not as pronounced as the Ryan Smyth example, these rites exist for every group. For instance, in-game traditions of exclusion can utilize the */ignore <name>* command which prevents the person subject to the */ignore* command from sending personal messages to the people doing the */ignore*(ing). This eliminates unwanted players in an online chat from a group's heterotopia, in much the same way that a 'no trespassing' or 'members only' sign excludes the unwanted petitioners from real world heterotopias.

One example of this notion occurred in-game several years ago when a female guild member became besotted with one of my informants. As a result of this crush, she created a character named *Followerof*<the informant's character's name>. Once the woman began to extend their relationship into a real world meeting (after about two days of knowing the informant) and was politely rebuffed by him, she became quite angry.

[63] I began exploring this topic in a paper that I wrote in Dr. Paul Smith's Folk6350 class in 2008.

Hurt by this rejection she decided to rename her character, but she then found out that she could not do so without a good reason. In order to appear to have a good reason to do this, she then accused my informant of harassment. The whole scenario then erupted in a huge flame war (essentially the online equivalent to a heated angry debate in which profanity is used rather frequently). As it was obvious to the staff that she had actually started the whole problem, the entire guild was ordered to place her on /ignore and the staff officers were then ordered to remove all of her characters from the guild registry.

As a result, she was completely removed from the guild's heterotopia; she no longer had access to the guild chat, nor could she speak to any member of the guild through personal messages. She was quite literally banished from the group, and while this is perhaps a more extreme example of the use of this kind of tradition, it certainly is not a unique occurrence. Many guilds have players flagged as people that they will not allow into their heterotopia for one reason or another, and most of the time this flagging is not the direct result of a staff order. Any use of the /ignore command whatsoever can be seen as creating a palpable boundary between players.

These scenarios demonstrate that the exoteric function of tradition is quite straightforward they result in the generation of social space between one group and the next. In regards to this paper, these instances act as fairly clear examples of the exoteric nature of tradition, disintegration: Together with the esoteric function of tradition, we can now begin to take steps toward understanding the broader function of tradition, which is to suggest that folklore exists not only to unite but also to separate. They constitute no

less than the building blocks of uniqueness, and therefore of identity in all shapes and forms.[64]

The reason that tradition works so well in this function of defining identity is that traditions, like identities, are malleable. Henry Glassie defined tradition as a "complex temporal concept, inherently tangled with the past, the future, with history" (180-1). Furthermore, he states that they are no less than "the creation of the future out of the past" (176). This means that traditions are recreated with every reiteration. Therefore, they can be shaped and adapted to fit whatever need(s) the community has, and if these needs change, then so too can the traditions that serve them.

By definition, all traditions serve some community function, even if it is only resident as a desire to differentiate one community from another (through the performance of a custom historically attached to one community and not the other). Once a tradition becomes irrelevant and cannot be adapted to serve a relevant purpose, it is discontinued and ceases to exist. In addition, every group must have a core set of traditions that it uses to integrate its membership. Therefore, we know that all traditions are meaningful. This gives us ample reason to pursue the study of tradition. We see practical examples of this in every walk of life. For example, in a previous work, "Community, Tradition, and Boundaries: In the Karate Scene in St. John's Newfoundland" I noted that karate schools used tradition(s) in the forms of training techniques or even differing philosophical perspectives, to separate one school from the next. These traditions were continued or discontinued based on their success in the eyes of their creators. In this way the barriers between clubs have become dynamic. In another example, Pauline Greenhill (1994) noted that Morris dancers tended to divide themselves

[64] For more on structuralism and functionalism see Malinowski (1944) and Spiro (1953).

into 'traditionalists' and 'revivalists' where the major divisor of the two is the length of history of the dance in the location that it is performed (78). In addition, the dancers' idea of what constitutes traditional dancing differs from one group to the next, which works as yet another reason to divide one band from another. These same types of division exist within MMOG communities as well.

The best example of one of these divisions resides in the notion of online etiquette, often referred to as netiquette. The reason that netiquette makes for so great an example is simple: it is prolific. Every online group is governed by a differing code of conduct, as the formation of group etiquette is unavoidable in the course of normal human communication. This is because, as Virginia Shea theorizes, proper etiquette is "prescribed by authority to be required in social or official life" (19). Shea's definition is different, and I believe more accurate, than most definitions of etiquette because most do not imply a source of power of enforcement; but simply state that they are rules that govern communication.

For example, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2009) simply notes etiquette as "the conduct or procedure required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life."[65] It is this source of power, in this instance the guilds, that has been used to enforce these social rules. As with real life, a portion of the 'rules' are written but the majority are not. Judith Martin asserts that this is because etiquette is "a second system of restraint" used to govern everything that is not already legislated against (351). She suggests in her article "A Philosophy of Etiquette" that the boundary between etiquette and law is fairly fluid, and just as social etiquette in real life often

[65] Merriam-Webster Online Search, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/etiquette

becomes law so too does in-game etiquette become incorporated into the game's official code of conduct.

Martin's assertion suggests that the guilds' and alliances' power over social interaction picks up where the actual game rules leave off. Guilds & alliances often post these policies on websites either affiliated with the guild or the alliance (For examples of a couple basic pages, see http://www.wgwguild.com or www.shadowsofmidnight.org). If a member fails to comply with these rules, the result is expulsion from the guild's registry. Looking at the WGW site, under policies, one can see a firm statement of their rules. On the SOM (Shadows of Midnight) website the rules are much less specific, although they serve much the same purpose. Both sites stress civility, particularly with other realm mates.

The source of power referenced by Shea exists more palpably in online life. Just as administrators of online forums reserve the right to boot (remove) those not abiding by the posted rules, so to do guild officers retain this right in-game. For example, although their structures differ greatly, both guilds readily reserve the right to boot (remove members from the registry) or demote members (reduce the lists of guild commands that they have access to, thus decreasing the personal in-game power of the individual) if they participate in behaviour(s) the guild administration deems contrary to guild policy. These set of rules exist outside of the general MMOG etiquette[66]. They are guild-specific policy, and as such can be seen as a means for guild member's to actively assert their guild's independence from other guilds. Therefore, it has become a means of displaying uniqueness and therefore identity. This is quite in line with sociologist Karen Cerulo's

[66] See http://somethingawful.com/d/art-of-warcraft/primer_on_social.php for an example of general MMOG etiquette.

idea, who has envisioned identity as a "source of mobilization rather than a product of it" (400).

One example of a differing policy that has created a striking division between guilds, is that of member priority. Guilds that form pick-up groups from time to time (a group made up of people available at the time of formation) will boot non-guild members for guild members. In these guilds, it is considered proper etiquette to show respect for other guild members by valuing their participation in guild activities more than non-members. As a result, when a guild member logs into the game and wants a position in a group, the guild member leading the group is expected to oust a non-member to open a place in the group for the member. Of course, for the non-members of the group it is a disincentive to join a pick-up-group led by one of these guilds. Many players outside of these guilds regard this type of behaviour as poor manners.

Some guilds opt instead to not oust non-guild members in this way but instead bump members to the front of the queue if there are players lined up to get into the group. However, most guilds run with the more democratic idea of first come first serve. These guilds tend not to like the cliquishness of these member-only guilds and often design their etiquette, including membership priority, to treat all realm mates equally. As a result, this one tradition has become a major division in the etiquette of DAOC guilds. Of course, this highlights only one of many traditions of division that exist between guilds. Other major points of division among guild etiquette concern interactions involving members of oppositional realms and internal restrictions placed on in-game assets (such as the guild vault, guild consignment merchant, and the taxation rate of the tithe).

The game's code of conduct forbids any kind of organization that takes place across realm as it is generally regarded by the staff as facilitating a means of cheating in the realm war. As such, the default etiquette of most guilds tend toward forbidding such interaction. Some guilds go so far as to define themselves as enforcers of this rule by forbidding their players from playing in alternate realms. Of the three guilds that I joined for this study, only one forbade its players from doing so. Of course, enforcement of this rule has become more lax of late, to the point where most players have no reservations about letting it be known that they cross realm all the time (play multiple sides) and as yet, have not been reprimanded for it.

However, in guilds less laid back than the ones to which I have chosen to belong, this could be a demoting if not an expelling offense. As the current situation sits, my behaviour (playing multiple sides in the online war) is now the norm, and has become accepted as such (even if no one really voices the opinion). It is one of the game's dirty little secrets that everyone who plays it knows. This is because after the servers merged, most players found themselves playing multiple realms (see pages 18-19 for discussion of server merges). The merge happened long after the inception of the game. As such, many people who were in support of keeping the realms separate ended up having characters in all realms on a single cluster, despite the original design of the game. When the servers became merged, the players no longer had a choice in the matter. If they still wanted to play their characters, they had to tolerate the fact that most players would be present on multiple sides of the realm war on that cluster, whether they wanted to exist as such or not. The result of this sweeping social change is that a new etiquette has emerged that extends some hospitality across the realm boundary.

This softening of realm animosity has grown organically out of the increased cross-realm communication. This new communication has placed a human face on the avatars of oppositional characters. This new policy shift has forced guilds to either soften their image on cross-realming, such as Deadly Defense (my albion guild), or rigidly define and enforce their own prevention policies. In either regard, the guild has again had to assert its independence to define itself based on its membership's view of what the guild's identity should be. Guilds that have proscribed etiquette on top of general MMOG etiquette come to be defined by their policies, by both the in-group and out-group. The adoption of foreign etiquette (bowing, using Japanese/Okinawan terms such as Sensi or kata) has created barriers between the differing karate schools of the world just as traditions of etiquette divide these online groups.

Outside of etiquette, many other traditions go into defining guild identity (such as having nights set aside for guild activities: (PvE) raid night or a realm versus realm (RvR) raid night) or in-game celebration of birthdays, or anniversaries. In addition to these, there are traditions such as guild lotteries, power leveling sessions,[67] guild tithing,[68] as well as guild funded crafting.[69] Just as guilds have become labeled for their particular traditions of etiquette, so too have they become known for their practicing of unique traditions. Martin O'Brien's notion of identity formation in contemporary societies as being a "mucous, viscous, lumpy, sticky gel... (that is) uneven, politically dangerous and (a) socially regulated process" meshes well with this idea (39). Once early perceptions of a guild are formed by outsiders, major shifts in paradigms become harder to convey to the

[67] Power leveling (PL): This happens when a higher level character groups with a lower level character to advance them through the levels more quickly. See glossary of terms for more information.
[68] A portion of all in-game money earned goes into the guild coffers.
[69] Crafters are paid to advance their crating skills (such as in-game weapon smithing, or armour crafting).

out-group because it requires redefinition of an established stereotype. In essence, the guild will have a hard time shaking off its traditional history. This is not to suggest that once a path is chosen the identity is fixed; it is simply means that the process is, as suggested by O'Brien, politically skewed. There is a ready resistance from the out-group that needs to be overcome to successfully change paradigms once a stereotype is established.

Although none of my informants could think of a particular instance where a guild has changed a major guild policy outside of that aforementioned cross-realm policy, they all said the minor policy shifts were a common occurrence in any guild. Group identity, it seems, is merely too fluid a notion for any change not to affect it. Many variables factor into the process of tradition formulation and reformulation, all of which impact group identity. These variables can be either player-created (such as choosing occasions for group celebrations) or environmentally influenced (such as the server merge).

In either regard, Roger Abrahams' criticism of identity as meaning "cultural, social, and spiritual wholeness" relates to this notion quite well (1982). Abrahams notes that the process of assuming uniqueness of every entity, while basing this process on assumptions of stereotypes, is problematic. Although this hypocrisy seems to nullify the definition, this is not necessarily the case. Group identity is a composite idea, which is based in the customs practiced by the group as a whole. Abraham's readiness to accept and explore this notion places him in good standing with ideas such as those of Anthony Cohen who has remarked that identity is "only occasioned by the desire or need to

express distinction" (1985, 12). Ironically, it is only through conformity that this distinction can be made.

It is this paradoxical notion that feeds into one of Fredrik Barth's four properties quite well, which states that in order for a group to be considered a group, it must be accepted as a group by both non-members and members alike (7). This demonstrated the important role of conformity in identity formulation because groups must be regarded as homogenous, on some level, to be regarded as a group by outsiders. The only way for this to happen is to allow stereotyping to take place. As Dorothy Noyes suggests, it is this reliance on stereotyping, by both the in and out-groups, makes this notion of group dangerous (7). Internally, the group members must find ways to assert that their personal identifies are linked to the group. In order to do so, they often rely on symbolism (in-game examples would be flying guild colours, guild emblems, or displaying guild titles over their avatar's head).

However, identities are not mutually exclusive; being a member of one group does not necessarily stop one from being a member of others. Online, where almost no barriers exist, mutual exclusivity hardly factors into the equation because of the cloak of anonymity under which the players operate. Many players join multiple guilds through the use of multiple avatars. Sometimes none of the other guild members know this; sometimes they do. Many players play different realms and, just as I have done for this research, join different guilds in every realm. True homogeneity does not exist within any group; it is perhaps even less likely online where groups contain members of many different cultures. There are always differing opinions, no matter how like-minded the individuals. There will always be those who remember "the good old days" when

traditions were practiced differently, and in their opinion better than the current incarnations, and there will always be those that see the inevitable change as a step in the right direction. Therefore, even though conformity is sought for the legitimization of a group's identity, the stereotype invoked by this image is always a façade.

Oring was absolutely correct when he stated simply that there are no absolute notions in the social sciences (1976, 73). There are no homogenous groups, there are no static traditions this is a positive, because we would otherwise live in an absurdly boring world. The stereotyping that Abrahams highlights is merely a means to an end. Stereotyping provides groups with an avenue for legitimizing their identity. Without it, and without the conformity that belonging to a group demands, it would be impossible for individuals to assert facets of their own identities.

This is a form of meta-communication embraced by everyone. It allows individuals that do not know each other to establish some knowledge about the other's ideals and conversational taboos before even beginning a conversation. In much the same way, groups benefit by having charismatic people as members because their individual charisma paints the whole group and marks other members as having something in common with them.[70] If conformity is merely regarded as yet another tool, subject to the completely variable nature of the tradition(s) it serves, then we begin to see that it is a necessary part of establishing identity. It is only when these traditions become static that this tool ceases to be particularly useful, because conformity cannot be static as it is

[70] In addition to this, online conformity can cause what Arjun Appadurai (2000) and Marwin Kraidy (1999) would term a glocal effect (a parallel effect of globalization, glocal refers to the local influence on the global). In the game this normally occurs when several people from the same town create their own guild and set themselves up as the core leadership. As a result, their local traditions become the dominant traditions of this group of international citizens. Everything from scheduling of guild events right down to the vernacular used in the guild chat often becomes a local influence an international audience. Of course the local's influence on the global community happens in so many different ways within this medium that a complete thesis could no doubt be written about this very subject.

subject to the changing desires of the group. Conformity is merely the enforcement of certain aspects of the group's etiquette (such as dress code, manners, or other various traditions contained therein). By conforming to group policies, the group appears more homogenous to outsiders, which helps it to both establish itself as a group and create palpable boundaries with other groups. Conformity, in itself, does not limit a group's ability to adapt. To use O'Brien's word, it merely represents identity's "stickiness" that creates the added social resistance to change. As long as the group changes as a whole, and conformity is maintained, the group identity can be changed accordingly.

Conclusion

Despite the recent leaning towards symbolism, the functionalist aspect of folklore is not dead. Studies of tradition help to illuminate aspects of identity and the means in which identity is communicated. Tradition is malleable enough to be changed to identify with one group, but not another. It is even malleable enough to be identified with one member of an opposing group and not others, and its support can be gained or revoked at any time. Tradition facilitates the construction of identity by providing the means to convey it to others. It allows groups to choose with whom they align themselves, as well as providing the tools to change if necessary. Traditions, aside from all the other great things that come from them (such as education, validation, conformity, or amusement), act together, on a meta-communicative level, to provide an established means of communicating personal information outside of normal communication.

Just as in my analysis of the karate community in St. John's, the groups contained within the virtual boundaries of DAOC negotiate social distance between each other through the use of tradition. In karate it could be something as simple as the interpretation of a single strike that divides one community from another. In online life it can be as simple as wearing one emblem on a cloak rather than another. In either scenario, the important information being conveyed is the social distance between the two groups. While they say, "we punch different" they mean, "you punch wrong and we're different because of that". In a similar manner, the colour and design of one's cloak, "I am a part of a group that believes in _____." In karate, it does not matter so much that the different strikes serve the same purpose, nor does it matter if the guilds are part of the same guild alliance (and are therefore subject to the same alliance rules of conduct). What matters is that it has drawn a line. This allows players, on either side of the boundary, to conform to their own traditions, and be seen to be conforming to them (which is just as important to the group). As such, it helps to draw that crucial line that determines the limit of one aspect of the identity of that group.

When these lines are drawn enmass through the use of tradition, which normally occurs when many like-groups come into contact with each other (which is exactly the case in both the examples of the karate community and the in-game community of DAOC), they form a clearer picture of the identity asserted by the group. Anthony Cohen suggested that identity is only asserted when challenged, but Karen Cerulo insists that it is no less than the "complete mobilization" (400) of community members to assert their group identity. In any regard, whether it is proactive or not, tradition's function seems to be to provide a multifaceted approach to explaining identity through a more symbolic

means.

Chapter Four
Of personas and identity: Communicating identity without the chat

Statement of Chapter Objectives

We have seen through the examination of in-game etiquette the ability of a core group of traditions to act as a centrifugal force in uniting communities. We have also seen these same traditions act as a centripetal force in the construction of separation between one group and the next. The idea that tradition functions as a medium to express identity is not one limited to the group. As such, we will embark on an analysis of personal traditions that form identity and create uniqueness. In this chapter we will explore some of the traditions that fuel both the centripetal and centrifugal forces through which online identity is expressed. As such, this chapter will focus on exploring the notions of online identity, as they concern gender, anonymity, and apathy within the places of *Dark Age of Camelot*.

Identity and gender

Hugh Jansen (1965) theorized, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," that folklore acts as both a means to form identity and as a means of forming attitudes towards others. Of course, in the subject matter of identity nothing is ever fixed. Martin O'Brien discusses aspects of identity that may be stickier than others but all of these sticky parts are based on predisposed outside prejudice. For example he uses the drinking identity of the Irish man. These sticky aspects exist in MMOGs as well. It is perhaps the most visible when a particular guild or other in-game group becomes known for unfriendly activities, such as ganking. Players of these groups, whether they participate in these activities or

not come to be defined by outsiders with the same blanket prejudice with which they perceive the perpetrators of these acts.

To use a Cohenian approach, in-game identity is composed of a variety of affectively charged symbols, the most important of which are based on player specific traditions. These traditions can be as complex as personal codes of conduct that define the player's boundaries for in-game play (such as duelists who will often not help realm mates in even one-on-one fights because they see it as unfair) or as simple as showing affection (hugging friends, for example) to guild members in-game when coming into contact with them. Traditions, such as personal dress codes, title selection, naming conventions, and the perpetuation of in-game rumours and stories are used in similar fashions to build both group and personal identities by demonstrating separation from some and conformity with others.

Individual traditions such as naming conventions are used to carry outside information into the game. For instance, Scot Sutton named his characters after lines from Keith's Beer commercials, such as *Mixahandstalkerwithabeerdrinker*, or *Standinginalakeofbeer*. This contrasts my naming convention, which almost always involves the use of the words 'another' or 'crazy' such as, *Acrazylurkchamp* or *Anothercrazychick*. The Keith's beer commericials suggest that Scot is Nova Scotian, whereas my names, which play with the kill spam messages, suggest that I enjoy remaining anonymous and PvP (Player versus Player). These types of naming conventions separate the individually minded players from the team oriented ones. These conventions act to identify players as individuals. This may seem like simple common sense, but in this medium many players tend to completely link their online identity with

their guild via shared naming conventions, such as FONDRUID or FONWARDEN, so individualized names convey extra information. In any regard, naming conventions establish boundaries that give clues to the identity of an online persona. Of course, the avatar's guild name is always displayed under the name, which means that one's choice of guild will always contribute to their online persona.

In addition to naming conventions and guild selection, players may also choose a title. Titles offer a glimpse at a player's in-game accomplishments. For instance Bane of <realm> means that a player has participated in the slaying of 2000 players of that realm. Another title, Dragon Foe, tells other players that the player wearing this title has participated in killing the realms' dragon ten times. As a result, these are quite communicative because most players have access to several titles. Players tend to display the title of which they are most proud. Therefore, one can often determine the player's major motivations for playing the game.

Apart from their title, name of the avatar, and in-game appearance, players identities are also aligned closely with their actions. As in the case of the community, personal codes of conduct become large conveyors of personal identity. As such, the realm specific space (such as the chats) tends to be fairly polite. For example, the use /rude, /taunt, and /slit and other emotes that could be considered offensive are not often used in normal conversation between realm mates (for examples of other emotes see appendix ten). As such, the player's personal code of etiquette often becomes an essential part of what defines them to others. This being said, players can have multiple avatars, which means that the potential exists for players to create multiple personae as long as

the avatars have no link to the player (such as through naming conventions that would readily identify that two avatars are operated by the same person).

David Kelly found, through his work with MMOGs, that most players tend to create characters that resemble their real world selves. He also states that the monikers used by players "seeps into the player over time" (26). By analyzing monikers he broke naming conventions down into a few different categories. One such category of moniker creation was based on choosing names from popular fantasy series. Kelly argued that not only did these player names become an important part of their online persona, but so too did the character that the name referenced. The game facilitated the players' desire to "fashion their own real lives after the lives of their favorite fictional characters, and that the game finally gave them the chance to create a separate identity with that goal in mind" (47).

Although I have not played as many MMOGs as some people, I have played over a dozen separate games. From my experience, the culture tends to saturate with fantasy names in the beginning stages of each MMOG. For instance, since *Diablo II*[71] the names of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* have been coveted. You cannot name your character *Rand*, *Tam*, *Mat*, *Elayne*, *Egwene*, *Nynaeve*, *Perrin*, or *Lews Therin*, as they are among the first to go on any server within *Dark Age of Camelot*. At the launch of *Dark Age of Camelot* I was able to create only a couple of the more obscure characters, Rhurac and Selene. Even misspelled, most versions quickly become used up, in much the same way that people end up having names like sarahlee7888@hotmail.com or jefflearning56@yahoo.com as personal email accounts.

[71] Although this game would not be considered a MMOG it was one of the first games to incorporate a group of servers that housed massive numbers of people that could communicate simultaneously through the out-of-game chat.

Perhaps Kelly's informants truly believe in the outside influence of the actual characters portrayed in these instances because in *EverQuest* a large portion of players truly enjoyed monikers that were proper names. In situations where the chance of role-playing is non-existent, such as the case with most DAOC servers, this seems to be a stretch. None of my informants came anywhere close to suggesting that these types of names would have been the result of attempting to create a persona in their image. For instance, the name of the main character, *Richard Cypher*, from Terry Goodkind's novel series *The Sword of Truth*, appeared above the head of a reaver[72] one day. The idea behind the reaver is that they are the evil counter to paladins[73].

Richard, in the series, is a good person. No part of his character description could really be reflected in the character class of the reaver. Richard uses the sword of truth (a paladin-like weapon which imbues him with righteous anger); reavers use whips and flails to flay their enemies to death. Richard is a wizard capable of doing extraordinary things in his world, reavers are a hybrid tank, the least part of which is their ability to use magic. There is a wizard class in the game, even within the same realm as the reaver. So why did he not choose the wizard or even the paladin if he was attempting to mirror the books?

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[72] Mythic describes the reaver as a "hybrid necromancer/fighter… that protect the lord of the underworld." For more see, http://www.camelotherald.com/article.php?id=30. The reavers have no real world parallel and have often been defined by the fact that they are essentially evil paladins.

[73] "Paladins are members of the Church of Albion alongside the Cleric class. They are primarily hybrids between a Fighting class and a Clerical class." For more see, http://www.camelotherald.com/article.php?id=28. The term paladin has historically been in reference to French knights in Charlemagne's court. The term has been expanded to encapsulate any "trusted military leader (as for a medieval prince) " or "leading champion of a cause." http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paladin. However, in modern times the term has taken on the added meaning of being a "holy warrior" as the term paladin was used by Dungeons and Dragons as the title of their holy warrior class. In the game industry the term 'paladin' tends to reference the Dungeons and Dragons notion of paladin rather than the paladins of our history.

As an optional suggestion for this naming tradition I offer this personal experience. I named the first character I created, *Selene*, which was a reference to one of the identities assumed by one of Robert Jordan's female villains. I only played the character until level fifteen because I got tired of being hit on continuously by guys in the game, which still occurred even after I had added *Imreallyagayplzdonthitonme* as my last name. While I cannot hope to speak for anyone other than me and my immediate informants, choosing names that reference favorite characters was a way to connect with people in the game with the same interests. Although it does not happen often, I will see a name such as *Zeddicuszulzorander* or *Lewistherin*, and I will message them with a quandary or news about the series they are from. For example, on the day that Robert Jordan finally lost his fight with cardiac amyloidosis I saw an avatar named "*Mashadar*" run by (a reference to the malevolent fog creature that lives in one of the cities in the series) and I asked the player if they had heard the bad news.

It was the first that they had heard about it and as a result we spent the next hour talking about our favourite scenes and discussing the importance of the loss. We also postulated about who would finish the series, as he had left it as his last wish to have it finished, (although he had left it up to his wife to decide how or if that was to be accomplished). At the time I created my first *Dark Age of Camelot* character I was heavily involved with a *Wheel of Time* MUSH, and so I always welcomed discussion on the series, which has always been a large part of that MUSH community. As this example infers, and from what I have seen, these names act less as models for the player's personae and more as a way to network through revealing something personal about oneself to others.

The second category in name selection that Kelly marked contained names that demonstrate the education of a player: "*Deus Ex Machina*" (the Latin expression "god from a machine," which describes a divine character in Roman theater lowered on to the stage with a pulley to solve the play's plot problems and rescue the hero)" (48). These types of names really mirror the first category. They are merely communicating the same type of information, in the same way that naming your character something vague from Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* like "*Ashendari*" (Mat's spear) is conveying referential material in the hope that someone else will understand and comment on it. In these situations the names act as both icebreaker and secret handshake into a more personal communication with the player. These types of names allow players to place personal information, such as enjoying Robert Jordan's work or Roman theatre, right on top of their avatar. As such, they become integral forums for metacommunication, which provide clues to the online identity of that player.

His next set of names were the comical ones and he noted names such as *Trapped*, *Compulsive*, *NeopetLover*, *Freak the Mighty* can easily be compared with some of my favourite *Dark Age of Camelot* names such as *Mooselini* (combining the transformative "moosing" state of the hero with the Italian dictator), *Betterthaneyou* (a play on one of the games classes, the thane), *Theurjustairpets* (play on one of the abilities of an in-game classes, the theurgist who casts air, earth, or ice pets at people), *Fatkid Destroyerofcupcakes* (thus, the player chose to name his giant troll because they look chunky), and *Mezzdispenser* (a play on pezz dispenser and the ability to put people to sleep called in game terms, mezzing). The first of these are simply humourous and denote only the aim of entertaining those that read them (and perhaps could be an electronic

projection of a part of the player's personality or physical traits), but the second ones suggest an intimate familiarity with at least one aspect of the game. What Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy might suggest is their technicity (interconnectedness with the technology) with this medium (2006, 64).

Kelly continues with naming conventions that highlight a thematically-based group. However, all of these ideas can essentially be broken into two categories communicative, and non-communicative conventions. Kelly correctly points out that many of these names allow "players to transfer the interests of their real lives into their virtual lives" (51). Conversely, naming conventions such as mine suggest some thoughts about my online persona while reinforcing my anonymity. Kelly also states that these names suggest a deeper reflexivity than most people on the outside looking in at gamers would first suspect. Although I am not entirely convinced of the depth of the stigma placed on gamers by non-gamers, Kelly has nonetheless highlighted an important piece of the online identity puzzle with his idea of transferring outside data into the game via naming conventions.

Since the forums for self-expression are extremely limited within the confines of these games, anything that a player places in them has to be examined as a matter of self-expression. In most MMOGs, like *Dark Age of Camelot*, the guild, the character's name, their title, their clothes, and preferred online status (some players enjoy leaving their away from keyboard flags on so they can selectively reply to other players and some enjoy appearing as offline so that they will not be bothered by other players at all) are essentially the only metacommunication available for manipulation. Therefore, they constitute the only forums for players to convey identity.

For example, although only one of my guilds has purple as a guild colour, I've grown so used to wearing it that I often wear it in other realms despite the differing guild colours. This has gotten to the point where I am upset when one of the cloaks I put in a template will not dye purple nicely. I actually rebuilt the entire template to accommodate a new cloak that would look good in purple. As a result, people tend to know me by sight in the places that I regularly visit. In addition to this personal custom, another personal tradition I have adopted is a naming convention supporting names that begin with "another" like, "*Anotherfrikkindwarf*" or "*Anothercrazytoon*", which makes me easy to identify in-game. So despite running multiple characters, or different in-game races and genders within the same virtual community I am really only placing forward one online persona. These traditions of establishing identity through these alternate mediums of communication demonstrate one strategy of how people use folklore to define their identity. This whole process of using traditions and customs to define identity works much the same way when it is applied to defining people as it does groups, because it is only through the repetition, i.e., formulation of tradition, that these customs become identity markers.

Howard Rheingold, in *The Virtual Community*, tackles the phenomenon of multiple personae in his early work with MUDs, stating that he himself has "three or four personae" (147). However, he does not mention that it is the absolute separation between his characters that allows him to have these varying personae. This is a pivotal part of the whole system, because players link their opinions of other players to the players not their avatars. When Rheingold speaks of his alternative identities he very specifically marks them as resident in separate communities. His notion seems to infer that it is usual to

project different personae to different groups of people; in other words one persona per community.

Rheingold continues discussion with a few scenarios in these virtual worlds where people were discovered to be different, primarily in gender, to the personae that they portrayed to their in-game communities. In the situations detailed, both of which are extreme cases of gender obfuscation, the communities were shocked by revelations of people conveying false identities. The result was a severely negative response from the community as they felt that a breach of trust had occurred. A friend of one of these posers suggested that men are more predisposed to this kind of behaviour online, and women are more predisposed to believe it. Whether this opinion is valid or not is irrelevant, as it illustrates a more important behaviour: a preoccupation with gender online. The opinion of one person is certainly not a proper metric to justify this statement. The idea that men would be more predisposed to this type of behaviour certainly makes sense because being female online is a means to attract attention in and of itself.

Although it is not readily apparent unless it is in the name, such as "*Imagirlirl Noreallyimagirl*," gender plays a pivotal part in in-game identity. For instance, when the *Catacombs* expansion was released for the game it came with two female-only classes, the Bainshee,[74] and the Valkyrie[75]. What was apparent from the time of this release was

[74] Although I cannot be sure I think the insertion of the 'I' into the word banshee to produce 'bainshee' was to personalize the term to the game, in much the way they removed the final 'e' from vampire to produce the 'vampir' class. Of course the breakdown of the term as bain-shee could lead to several negative conclusions. However, I think that the term 'bain' in the context of the game is often seen as a good thing. For example, one of the player-selected titles, based on killing 2000 members of a rival realm, is the title of 'Bane of <insert realm name here>'. This title is a very popular title because it demonstrates a significant accomplishment in PvP. In addition, the bainshee is a very effective class and the name is quite telling in that they are often a true bane to their rivals.

[75] The bainshee and valkyrie were chosen because of thematic issues within the game. Mythic needed one new class for each realm. As such, they needed one class related to Celtic mythology- for Hibernia and one related to Norse mythology- for Midgard, and one for Albion and the result was that they focused on the

that guys, who had not played gender-specific classes in games before, were reluctant to create these classes without adding epithets to the names such as "*Imreallyaguy*." These became less prevalent, as the game culture matured because the player population began to read less into the gender of a gender-specific class.

As this change occurred, names became based less on ensuring that the gender of the player was known, and more on word play with class abilities. The screaming abilities of the Bainshee class, is a great example of this. Players began naming their bainshee avatars such names as, "*Naomi Imoanalot*," "*Screamingwitch*," or "*Hollerbackgirl*." However, cross gendering the non-gender specific classes has only now, in the twilight years of the game, started to achieve this same level of apathy. When asked, "Why do male players play female characters?" The response has ranged from somewhere between, "It's easier to find groups," (Ronnie Swaine, Interview 1) to "If I'm going to have to stare at an ass for every waking moment that I play the game, it might as well be an attractive one" (Isaac Pelley, Interview 1).

This gender confusion in-game has had a specific impact on the non-audio (such as that can be maintained through the use of programs like Team Speak or Ventrilo) player communication. The result is that when people talk about players they do not know, they often use sexually neutral terms such as "they" or address them by class: "that reaver" or "that valkyrie." When applying gender to a person based on the avatar people often will add an epithet to the statement. For example, the simple statement, "she sucks" might become something like, "she sucks, or he sucks or whatever they are, they suck."

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banshee from Celtic mythology, the valkryie from Norse mythology, and they introduced the heretic class in Albion (to support the reavers and necromancers that they inserted to run counter in the game's mythology to King Arthur's court, to create some internal discord within the realm).

Despite the fairly apathetic nature of the community, where gender is concerned, there still remains a preoccupation with this portion of player identity.

Within my three guilds, however, this has never been a problem. If an incorrect pronoun is used, most women (because if there is a mistake in pronouns online it does tend to be the use of a male pronoun used improperly to address a woman) will speak up and set the person straight on the matter. The preoccupation with gender is an issue often exasperated by non-gamers. The inability to know that aspect of the person that they are communicating with seems to be a serious detraction for them. When I was presenting the previous two chapters to my peers I was astounded by the preoccupation of one of my fellow students with gender. The thought of the virtual fake or virtual stalker had obviously terrified her. Perhaps this is because our regular methods of communication are more gendered than we are aware and the inability to gauge the gender of a conversation partner places those of us not used to such situations in an uncomfortable position.

Judith Butler's work with gender subversion suggests that the lack of gender queues in a given situation-i.e. in this case the visual and auditory notions often ascribed to gender-have caused a significant subversion in communication. Butler suggests that subversions of this nature represent moments of "crisis" (1999, 24) where the normal gender indicators are removed and the result is a forced re-envisioning of gender. Using examples such as transsexualism, and cross-dressing she suggests that people are often uncomfortable in these situations.

In online life there seems to be two major ways to deal with this situation, either the player assumes everyone that they come in contact with is male until corrected, or they use gender neutral terminology in order not to offend anybody. As for the idea of a

virtual stalker in the video game, an unfortunate reality of the times, I would suggest that it happens less in MMOGs than in other spaces. Ultimately MMOGs are games, and many people playing these games are less interested in seeking out that special someone, than they are with achieving their in-game goals.

Many forums are more open to virtual stalking where the interaction is more centered around socialization and where commands such as /ignore (which stops the person's the ability to communicate with you directly) do not exist. In short, stalking would be more time-intensive in these mediums than in other extraneous chat rooms. As for gender obfuscation, putting in the time and effort to do what occurred in either of Rheingold's examples would be far less effective in a MMOG situation. First of all, very few people would divulge information as specific as a home address in a MMOG, certainly not without knowing the person fairly well. Second, the pervasiveness of voice chat (which is becoming the normal form of communication for most MMOGs now) makes maintaining gender anonymity over extended periods of time far more complicated.

In Rheingold's examples, the anonymity, which has always played a pivotal part of in-game identity, was breached, because the mental image perpetrated by the fakers differed greatly from the actual (the communities reacted negatively). In MMOGs, these types of deceptions have become less of a problem. However, this is not because people are more open about these types of things, or that they happen less, but because the connections between most players are less personal. In MUD or MUSH communities (as in Rheingold's examples) the personal interaction that takes place within the social spaces is a much deeper type of communication. In MUD/MUSH space people talk shop

while role-playing with each other simultaneously. In all of the MUD/MUSHs of which I have been a part, there have always been at least two levels of conversation going on at any one time. The first is the role-played conversation of the characters (which does not exist in most MMOGs) and the second is the out of character conversation (OOC comments) going on between players. Therefore, all of their in-game time is spent in communication, which has garnered a more intimate connection between players.

My communication over the past seven years has always tended more towards communitas. Guilds often have a hardcore group of dedicated players that know each other fairly well and are filled out with a lot of people that are less well known. Normally this small tightly bound core of players represents the true community or group (often these represent the officers of the guild, who have their own private commons to talk amongst themselves that is separate from the community commons). The more peripheral players represent the variable aspect of the space that facilitates communitas. This community formation regulates the use of the community commons very closely, and inappropriate behaviour is often punished with a permanent expulsion from the community commons. Thus, stalking in these areas would not only be troublesome but would probably end in being reported (to the staff) by the guild officers. This process would likely result in the expulsion of the stalker from both the guild commons and the game itself.

It becomes far easier to understand why there exists a difference between the response of Rheingold's MUD users and the MMOG users when the structural differences in communication are highlighted. The player's identities are not as well known in most MMOG communities and MMOGs are more secure. In addition, most

MMOG communities stem from real life social groups, which makes their infiltration by malevolent persons less of a problem. Because the commons exists only as a text-based chat it is still quite probable that no one within the guild structure would notice when a peripheral player creates a cross gendered character. Since the only identifying markers within the chat are the names of the individuals, it is quite possible that a person could be playing at being a gender not their own only to have no one notice because their name is gender neutral. If a persona's gender goes unnoticed by the guild, it is most likely out of general apathy about the matter. It is only when a peripheral member becomes a core member that gender obfuscation becomes a problem.

In most situations, genders are hidden by the anonymity of the game and remain so until it becomes an issue in conversation. Perhaps it is that these people have become used to communicating without gender. It seems that that the desire to know the gender of conversation partners has been whittled down to a matter of the desire to use the correct pronouns. In my experience, the conversation in the guild chat is often less about unmasking the anonymous population and more about whatever is on the player's mind. Since there has been a reduction in the attempts to unmask other players, and because the type of play involved is different, identities formed by MMOG players differ from those formed by MUD players.

In my tenure as a MUSHer, I found the connections between the players to be fairly close. Things like virtual dating and virtual sex occurred fairly regularly between the players in the game. As a result, the social spaces are quite different because of the differing activities that are encouraged/permitted. Since new rooms (spaces) cannot be created by MMOG players, private areas to conduct these types of highly personal

activities are limited, and therefore these activities tend to be less pursued in this medium. In addition to this, the spaces created in MUD/MUSHs can be tailored to suit the mood, whereas in MMOGs what you see is what you get. MMOG avatars are also incapable of interacting on any level of intimacy with each other. Even the */hug* and */kiss* commands lack intimacy, the */hug* command makes the player hug the air in front of them and the */kiss* simply makes the avatar blow a kiss to someone. Thus, intimate activities are better suited to other mediums that can take advantage of the players' imaginations, such as MUDs/MUSHs or private online chats.

As a result, the most a poser of an opposite gender could hope for in game is the added attention that many male players lump on female players, or the anonymity granted by maleness in the medium. This being said, female players are no longer rare enough to be considered an oddity anymore. In fact, every guild that I have ever been a part of has always had at least one matron figurehead. Although many feminist writers extol the empowerment of anonymity for women, the truth in online culture is that being known as a woman is in itself empowering. Anonymity, at least in the sense that it exists in *Dark Age of Camelot*, is empowering more to men than women because it nullifies the effects of gender.

One of my informants, who is a good friend, was continuously barraged with offers of help, and showered with in-game gifts, as soon as the population of my guild community became aware of her gender. The situation culminated in the expulsion of a guild master and the guild's ejection from an alliance. This all occurred because the male population of the guild began to fight for the interest of one woman. She eventually left the guild because of this situation. She later moved to another guild where she met the

man that would become her husband. Situations like this have tempered the gender relations inside of the game and have created a communication space that is, generally speaking, gender-neutral. Thus, gender is generally left unknown, because it works to the advantage of most of the players.

The interesting exception, at least in the three guilds that I have looked at over the course of this research, is that of the married couple. In these situations the genders are often known but it is coupled with the married status, which seems to prevent situations like the one mentioned previously. Some couples, such as the patron and matron of my guild in Midgard have adopted naming conventions that have linked the two together. For example, their two bone dancers (an in-game class) are named "*Bonedaddy*" and "*Bonemomma*". Of the four couples that I know in the game, all of their characters reflect their connection to their significant others.

In this way they have again brought their real world lives into the game in a way that molds their online identity. In addition, some players use the in-game marriage system to demonstrate a linkage to another player. The in-game marriage works much like real world marriage except that it can be accomplished in about five seconds standing in front of a ring merchant. A marriage certificate is bought along with the rings and one of the players has to change their last name to match the last name of the other person. Back when marriage was young in the game, two of my friends, both of whom were men, got married. Once they decided who was going to take the other's last name, they proceeded to put themselves in all sorts of odd and humourous situations.

Since the male of the pair chose a lurikeen (a 2 ½ - 3' tall race) and the woman was human, the pair was visually humourous. Anytime another male avatar looked in the

direction of the female the guy playing the male would run up and place his 2 ½' body between the female and the unsuspecting victim of their attention. He would then proceed to jump and shout (writing in all capitals) at the guy for daring to look at his woman. When these same two players discovered that gay marriage also existed in game, they did much the same with an (8 ½' firbolg male and another 2 ½' lurikeen male). In this way, they parodied what they saw as a silly in-game addition. However, in-game marriage was and remains a popular way to link identities with another person in-game and can be taken quite seriously.

Another informant who thought that the in-game marriage was just another funny eccentricity of the game, and taking it in that light, proceeded to marry her in-game avatar to a guild mate's avatar and ended up in a very uncomfortable position. The guild mate took the situation far more seriously than my informant had ever imagined, and attempted to lay claim to her in real-life by promoting himself as her real life boyfriend. When she finally rejected him, and dissolved the in-game marriage, he attempted to make her in-game life difficult. Luckily she was a guild master, so she expelled him from the guild and placed him on /ignore. This solved the problem before it became too serious.

The grouping of identities together through traditions of shared or linked names was created to both communicate the link through the communicative medium of nomenclature, and to separate those sharing this link from others. As in the case of the last informant, all in-game boundaries are fluid. Although they are created to divide and unite groups or individuals they are always in a constant state of flux. Forsaking the linkage to her in-game husband, my informant redefined her online identity by removing the link to him from her name. Although many things in these worlds are static, the

ability to create and delete characters ensures that players can redefine their in-game identities as they see fit.

In-game Anonymity

The anonymity that defines the social space is truly an interesting study for a folklorist as it parallels so many real-life masking traditions. An interesting past time that almost every one of my informants had a story about was the harassing of a friend as an unknown character. One informant created a night shade (a class that can become invisible to other players) and proceeded to lure enemy monsters to his friend's location resulting in the many deaths of the friend's avatar. It took a while for the friend to figure out what was going on. The night shade was invisible while performing these actions, but eventually the friend noticed the name of the night shade showing up in the text-based chat every time he performed one of these actions. The friend did not recognize the name of the night shade, but recognized the naming convention of the name. Matched with the behaviour of the friend, he determined who it was doing this to him. He called my informant and proceeded to yell at him for several minutes while my informant laughed at him. Eventually he came around and was able to laugh with his friend about the success of the joke.

Another informant used to harass his friends online, all the while slipping them hints about his true identity. Eventually, when the friends were so annoyed with him that they were ready to start complaining to the staff, he would reveal himself, and they would all have a good laugh. Both of these stories convey essential features of most masking traditions, the validating effect of friendly teasing or unmasking a friend. Although Bascom stressed validation as one of the four functions of folklore, the truth of the matter is that folklore really only has one function that serves to unite and divide people. Both

validation and education, which we can see acting in these scenarios, have a unifying effect, this is ironic, since the behaviour outlined in them is asocial in nature.

This type of behaviour, however, has been a constant of masking traditions. Many forms of Mummering, Mardi Gras, and Mi-Carême involve the unmasking step; all involve the play around fooling friends. Patricia Sawin's work with the Mardi Gras outlines this type of behaviour:

> The son of a friend of mine [Sawin's friend] bet with her that by noon, by the time that we got out in the country to the big red barn, that he could find her in costume. And she said, "No, no, you'll never [guess]." 'Cause she had borrowed someone else's costume, and hidden it at someone else's house and dressed at the third person's house. He's looking for her and he's looking down 'cause he's looking for her shoes. So at noon I said, "Did you ever find your mama?" "Nope," he said, "Silly me, I've been looking for her shoes. First thing she would've done was gone out and bought new shoes." So there was six, seven hundred people out there and he was just barely half-way through the shoes by the time noon came. He was on the verge of missing Mardi Gras for a one dollar bet" (Sawin, 177).

In the case of Mummering, the guessing game can be seen to stand alone as the central point of validation, as those in the host's party attempt to guess the identity of the mummers. Whether or not the mummers unmask at the end of the game, if not guessed, differs from tradition to tradition, but the legitimizing effect of being correctly guessed by something as small as wart on a finger or by the way one dances a jig is undeniable. In much the same situation, and for much the same reason, these antics described by the players in online games force their friends to guess their identity and legitimize the relationship by reaffirming the intimate bond between them.

Another similarity between masking traditions and the behaviour of anonymous online communities is the license often taken with sexuality and sexual innuendo. Various accounts of Mummering demonstrate a sexual license that is gained through

these tradition of anonymity. For example, my uncle relates just such an experience from his many memories of mummers,

> This was a while back now, when we were up in Lab city and Nan and Pop were up for a visit, we had a little troupe come knocking. They did that talking while inhaling thing and creeped [my aunt] out, always does. Anyway, we let them in and they were wild. Running all around, one of them grabbed [my aunt] and started trying to dance with her, but I'll never forget that time, because the smallest one was wearing an apron and underneath it she [they later found out it was woman] had a stuffed cock, and she was flashing us with it. When it was obvious Pop didn't know what the hell to do with her, she pulled it off. It was strapped around her with Velcro, I think, and she rubbed it on his head. [My grandfather is bald, and she was polishing his head with it.] (Interview with Wayne Smith, October 28th, 2005.)[76]

These cases, both of which were remarked as unusual by the tellers, demonstrate that the sexual license extended to those practicing these traditions, due to the anonymity involved. James Faris notes that even the in-group, who were not anonymous, took part in this sexual license because of the anonymity of the mummers:

> In determining the identity of mummers, the hosts are sometimes allowed to explore with their hands the upper torso, head, and face of mummers in an effort to 'find them out.' Undisguised men for example, often single out an obviously female mummer and proceed to dance a few steps with her, then 'feel her up.' It is said that this 'feeling up' must always be 'above the waist' (Faris, 132).

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[76] Clyde Williams recounts another such encounter:

> On the only occasion that I have ever seen janneys, two of them made unexpected grabs at the groins of one or two of the men in the household. The men, who took this behaviour quite in their stride, of course attempted to evade these thrusts and fend them off with much laughter and amusement. I was quite startled at this activity, and even more surprised to learn later from my wife that the two janneys were women of my acquaintance, both of whom were in their mid-forties and very respectable members of the community. Since the janneys' behaviour is to a very large extent governed by how well they know the member of the host group, this type of behaviour is rather an extreme (Williams, 214).

Also see Carolyn Ware (2001) and James Faris (1990).

Mirroring these types of antics online, at least from a physical standpoint, may seem impossible, and they just might be, but it certainly does not stop some players from trying. Sexual innuendo is prevalent in all forms of communication throughout the game (although there are chats where it is specifically banned, normally where there might be children present). Most of this type of banter takes the form of idle flirting, such as this conversation between a few players, which started because of an innuendo made about the buff timer expiry message, "the forest heart's enhanced vigor fades." What follows is a deeply sexual although entirely light-hearted conversation that occurred on the alliance chat:

Depatchy: "The forest heart's enchanced vigor fades"
Depatchy: "That sounds like a viagra failure message or something…"
Depatchy: "Come to think of it, the shorrooms do get kinda droppy when they die…"
Agirlirl: "you'd know all about viagra failure wouldn't you Dep?" ☺
Depatchy: "Yes my floppy drive is outdated."
Kettman: "!!"
Kettman: "my drive is just plain floppy."
Agirlirl: "Oh dear"
Premixed: "I have a hard drive"
Kettman: "LOL"
Depatchy: "Your boyfriend doesn't count Premixed. LOL (teasing)"
Agirlirl: "Oh mai"
Kettman: "lol"
Premixed: "what if Im a female though"
Premixed: "that raises questions doesn't it"
Depatchy: "Then your 'toys' don't count… 0_o; Ok, time for me to shut up.
Agirlirl: "I've got four! \o/
Stihlgar: "you are a busy girl"
Agirlirl: "Oh babeh"
Kettman: "lol"
Conversation cont'

Stihlgar: "got room for a 5th lol"
Depatchy: "LMAO"
Agirlirl: "<laughs>"

Kettman: ":0"
Agirlirl: "depend, is that one real? :-p"
Premixed: "do you use all 4 hard drives at once?"
Agirlirl: "or plastic"
Depatchy: "Best one liner award goes to STIHLGAR!"
Agirlirl: "I don't have enough hands to use four at once :-p"
Kettman: "I can think of 3 only empty drives atm"
Agirlirl: "hands, Kett, hands"
Stihlgar: "thanks thanks I will be here all week"
Depatchy: "drive bays"
Kettman: "Oh"
Agirlirl: "that makes five"
Kettman "ears?"
Agirlirl: "but, lol, can't operate all that alone :0"
Agirlirl: "ears?! Wtf"
Kettman: "oh yes ears can work"
Depatchy: "The world will never sound the same again."
Agirlirl: "you that small Kett?"

Although the conversation goes on for sometime after this point, this excerpt by itself, demonstrates how sexual banter can get even when it originates from one simple innuendo. This type of behaviour is very similar to anonymous traditions where license is taken to express sexuality beyond the normal parameters of community etiquette. The only difference is that this license is a permanent fixture of the community commons. Therefore, this license is not special to the players. However, when invoked its use in conversations tends to degrade into deeper vulgarities as each response attempts to one-up the previous.

This type of behaviour also extends into the realm of the simulated physicality of game. Gesturing, despite the limited motions available through in-game emotes, can also become sexual when the action is cut off prematurely by starting another action or repeating the same action. For instance, the worship command (a command that drops the avatar to their knees to do the Wayne's world "I'm not worthy," series of prostrations) can quickly become sexual when the movement is stopped either before the prostration

begins or just before the avatar starts to rise from the prostration (depending on what position the avatar being worshipped is in (standing, sitting, or lying down). The first scenario is often seen used as a joke, when someone is idle another person will use this command and get down on their knees in front of the avatar. The second is used on dead players waiting to release to their bind or be resurrected. This allows the player to engage in mock copulation with prostrate players waiting to release (this is often used as an added insult to injury against fallen foes).

Aside from the added sexual license taken by those communicating through this medium, anonymity grants the users a far more widely used license. It is a license of freedom of speech. The notion of guild space invokes much the same ambiance as the old bartender/psychologist cliché. It provides that feeling of safety with telling personal things to complete strangers. Players will often tell complete strangers very personal information (although it is not usually identifying information). David Kelly notes,:

> Game life, this player explained, had the same share-passion feel to it as Stamp Club or football. This is because the people in the game are not a random subset of humanity. They are preselected by the game, so a player can feel like a jock among jocks or a philatelist among his own people. Most players have enough of a shared worldview that they get along with each other inside the game better than they might get along with people in the real world who don't understand them (73).

Despite the population comprising of mostly strangers there is a unified feel to the population that allows players to feel comfortable knowing that everyone surrounding them has at least one interest in common. This is probably why the most popular naming conventions still remain word play on esoteric material (such as class or ability names), because knowing the game well is a status symbol within this society. The anonymity of

the place allows for players to talk about their problems without the penalty of being identified as a specific person.

The major difference between the traditions in online games and real life traditional masking games, aside from the lack of physicality in the interaction, is that the period of license is much smaller in real life. In addition to this, everyone playing the game is anonymous and most are quite content to allow others to remain anonymous. This creates a very different dynamic in communication because privacy is paramount within these spaces. This has created a few traditional types of conversation in these games, much like how the conditioned response to "How are you today?" will often illicit "Pretty good, yourself?" Telling someone that you are from Nova Scotia for instance, will probably illicit a response concerning where they are from but it might not and if it does not, most players would not pry into it any further. Some players become uneasy when asked questions about their real lives.

These types of questions help determine what kind of conversation the other players might want to have, and their mood. Despite the evolution away from their predecessors' formats, MUDs/MUSHs, MMOGs are still very much bound to the limitations and advantages of text-based communication (See Judith Donath, and Brenda Danet). However, the added forums for metacommunication have provided arenas for the creation of new traditions very much their own. Through these traditions, players are able to create a limited persona that often reveals some insight about the person behind the avatar without ever having to speak. Conversely, some naming conventions are meant to be communicative of things that the players do not like. For example seeing "*andnoidontwanttogroup*" in a name is not an aberration. It might seem rude to people

new to the game, but sometimes people just need time to themselves and create characters with which to explicitly solo.

In addition, sometimes people want to illicit in-game information, such as a person who specializes a healing class to deal damage instead of heal. It is really a courtesy to place that in the name to ward off groups looking for a dedicated main healer. For example, the name of my cleric is "*Chaincaster*" and as a result anyone searching clerics for a raid would probably skip over me because my name infers that I'm damaged specialized and would probably not be able to fill the roll of main healer. These types of metacommunication help resolve problems before they happen. They are not etiquette specifically. Many players still choose their favourite characters from novels or movies for their avatars, but these are less helpful to people involved with in-game activities. As such, these names have become less popular with the passage of time.

The last types of naming conventions are those used to communicate directly with opposing players. Since players cannot communicate across realms, these are used to either make a person laugh when they see them or misdirect the enemy on the particular class. Since the game always says, "You have been killed by <name>," many people have gone out of their way to find names that are designed for this spam, such as "*Stupidmistakes*," "*Avirulentdisease*," or "*Acoupleofknives*." Conversely, some people create names that will be funny in either part of the death spam message "<name of the loser> has been killed by <name of the victor>." Some examples of these would be, "*Yourmomma*," "*Innocentchildren*," "*Abystander*," or "*Someguy*." Through merely analyzing character names over the span of a single day one can easily determine that humour is a valued part of the space.

The mixture of humour, a desire to make progress in the game, and the anonymity provided by the space has created a fairly apathetic culture in the game. This is not to say that no one cares about others, but it does tend to be community-oriented. This is probably because traditions, such as begging, pollute the few physical spaces in the game where people, not in the same alliance or guild chats, might actually meet. For example, the number of players begging in the major cities, player housing, and in the battlegrounds have created a facet of the space that mirrors city life in some respect. One informant actually named a character "*Imweak Sopleasegivemestuff*." These locations have become areas to be rushed through and the desire to help people in the game seems to wilt the longer players spend in them. For instance, the majority of my informants, with some key exceptions, agreed that they just no longer feel the need to help new players. The reason being that if they help one player, they often have to help others, consequently, they fail to accomplish anything themselves.

Since the game is fairly old by gaming standards (it is now in its seventh year) most of the population seems to be slowly falling in line with this type of thinking. This apathy is perhaps one of the most influential reasons why non-gamers have incorrectly labeled these mediums as more open than regular society about issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This apathy has resulted in the general philosophy of "don't ask, don't tell," which makes conversations about these divisions of society very rare. When they do happen though, at least from my experience, they are just as bad as in real life. They are full of generalities and prejudicial statements that often ignite the chats into giant flame wars.

As a result, these types of conversations are banned on most open channels this is so pervasive that I have yet to see an open channel that would tolerate them. As we can clearly see from these points of etiquette, a circular effect occurs here. Since these topics are not open for discussion, with the exception of the people that include ethnic statements in their names, ethnicity is almost never identified in the space. Thus, personal identities of the players tend to revolve more around in-game features, and this part of their real life identities often remains unknown. A majority of my informants claimed to have no idea of the ethnicity or race of a majority of their guild mates. This lack of cultural diversity has added to the vagueness of the space, which seems to have been designed around being culturally neutral.

As a result, the in-game divisions have taken precedent in all forums of metacommunication. Names such as "*Hibfarmer*," "*Midslayer*," or "*Albhurter*" are a fairly common occurrence. Perhaps real prejudice has been replaced, at least in part, by that of the conflict between in-game ethnicities. I would suggest that this is true merely on the observance that the easiest way to be accepted in any realm is to complain about the inequities of game balance that favour the opposing realms, or by making a virulent statement of hatred towards one particular opposing realm. I made statements such as, "God damn I hate those frikkin <insert name of currently over-powered class in a certain opposing realm here>" in all of the realms and I was immediately caught up in a conversation by both supporters and those in opposition of the statement but no one questioned the right I had to make these statements.

If I had instead gone into these same chats and replaced the last part of the statement with some prejudicial stereotype about a real life religion, ethnicity, or race, I

would have been chased out of the chat immediately. This probably would have resulted in being reported to the staff, which more than likely would have resulted in expulsion from the game. This type of action continues the cycle of reaffirming a culturally neutral-space and again dissuades some players from voicing their prejudicial opinions that make up part of their real life identities. However, it also tends to dissuade any type of celebration of one's ethnicity in the game.

As a result, the space is tagged as a neutral space and in many ways it limits player identities to politically correct ones (by the game designers standards). Thus, player identity is to some degree controlled by the enforcement of the development staff. In any regard, players often find their niche or niches and latch on to them. They often design their identities around these niches by forming traditions of naming conventions, by hang out location (some players hang out exclusively in certain areas like PvP areas or areas devoted to raiding), in-game traditions such as daily power leveling sessions for other people, or leading daily raids to get items and make in-game money. More importantly, what we can see from these types of behaviours is that the formation of identity is based on the formulation of traditions that create uniqueness in a persona and separate one from all of the others in the game. In essence, tradition acts in the same way on an individual level that it does on a group level, which is to say that it forms the medium through which personal identity is defined and performed.

Chapter Five: Concluding Thoughts

First, I hope that this glimpse into MMOG life has helped demystify the communication in this somewhat obscure medium. I hope that if the stigma that gamers are a unified like-minded group of socially aberrant or impaired people who dwell in their mother's basements still exists, that this work has helped to dispel it. Most MMOGers are perfectly well adjusted individuals. Over the course of my tenure as a gamer, I have met and spoken with people from all walks of life, everyone from doctors to military personnel. I spent an evening listening to a friend discuss his work with bio-mechanical engineering and as a result I was able to turn my current girlfriend his way for questions about epilepsy and the alternative methods of care being offered through medical devices he has helped develop.

The gamer is not a mystical person. David Kelly (2004) works tirelessly in his book to debunk the stereotypes that have been used to label gamers, although his perception of these stereotypes revealed a stigma that I am not fully convinced still exists today. What I have attempted to do throughout this thesis is demonstrate how gamers attempt to create virtual world equivalents to all types of human interaction. Their aim is partially one of escapism and partially a desire to create a meaningful social space that works for the type of communication in which they want to take part.

Gamers do this so well because all of them have at least one common interest (the game). Thus, the desire to construct their own communities and therefore heterotopias emerges organically from their desire to play the game effectively (in order to be an effective player, one needs the support of an in-game community). These essential third places constructed by these communities marry the ideas of Michel Foucoult to those of

Ray Oldenburg (1989). MMOG communities emerge out of these communication spaces, which first bring the community together, and then transform into permanent third places.

The ideas of Gerald Pocious (1991), concerning private and public spaces, can easily be used to map the chat-based landscape of MMOG communication. His notions bridge the gap between folkoristics and communication theorists as they explain why spaces that contain meaningful communication can be seen as something more than merely a communication space. Such spaces are the heart of any location that we can translate as a place, according to Steven Harrison & Paul Dourish. These spaces not only facilitate communication; they provide a list of socially constructed rules with which to temper these communications.

In MMOG-life all social aspects of the game's community space can be tailored by the players. As a result, they create tiny communities consisting of exactly the people with whom they want to associate, and govern them with rules agreed upon by everyone in the group. Part of the lure of MMOG life is that there can exist communities without extraneous hangers-on. Once a group has decided that they like each other enough to want to be with each other, in that communicatively special way of using the word 'with,' they create traditions. This closely mirrors real life groups. These traditions provide reasons for bringing the membership together, which helps to solidify them as a group. In real life these traditions might be healthier, such as dancing, swimming, or playing sports; since that is not an option for people that live continents away from each other, PLing sessions, raids, and competing with other players in a virtual environment has to fill this role. Ultimately, this is a social gathering for the express reason of being a social

gathering. It is like a card game that stretches around the globe bringing together all the people that one wishes to be with, under the pretext of getting together for a tradition.

Although the players lack control over most of their 'physical' online environment, the space in which they do retain control is that of their community commons. These commons are as malleable as the traditions that shape and give them life. Even though the virtually simulated space for most of these online commons does not exist in any tangible form, the social rules that govern and shape them remain as tangible as that of real world interaction. These persistent chats provide everything that players' need in a communication space. They are regulated by rules agreed upon and enforced entirely by community members. They are friendly welcoming places that are aimed exclusively toward facilitating in-game community communication. Therefore, they pass the Oldenburg test of third places because they fulfill all of his requirements; they are voluntarily entered and happily anticipated places.

At the same time, there exists a social license about the space, which can bring overtly sexual banter into discussion in ways that might be viewed as inappropriate over the course of a real world conversation. This odd attribute can be fairly easily explained as merely the extension of the sexual license imparted in many real world traditions where people remain anonymous, such as Mummering, the Mi careme, or the Mardi gras. In addition, these spaces also impart a license of vent to the players. This license creates a space where players can feel free to talk about their real life problems with friends that do not know the people that the player interacts with on a daily basis in their offline life. In this way, these places provide a release for many players. Kelly notes that it is this type of license that makes these spaces so dangerously addictive, because many people

become communication junkies, through the freedom of expression in MMOG space. The fact that people can say what they want, who they want to hang around with, and play a game all at the same time is what has made these games so popular.

Folklore is a pervasive force in these spaces. From wonky rumours about the abilities of certain in-game mobs (computer controlled creatures), to decorating traditions of player's houses, almost all aspects of folklore exist in some form or another within these games. The game is rife with it. The pervasiveness of tradition in this medium demands closer study because we have communication occurring in a completely different fashion, due to the nature of text-based chat, and yet tradition flourishes in more or less the same fashion as it does in offline culture. To me, the most interesting folklore is that which is specifically aimed at building identity.

Communities work hard to create traditions that bring their membership together within the same simulated geography, for the explicit reason of propagating communal sentimentality and approaching communitas. This seems an odd idea at first, because the players have already attained that pivotal ability of "being with each other" they are linked together through the communication space of the guild chat. The conversation, however, becomes more personal when a group is forced to work together in the same virtual space, and the players seem to innately know this. The players demonstrate their knowledge of this by constantly creating traditions that bring the group together to perform communal functions.

Regardless, what we see is an attempt to create and maintain the feeling of community. To Bascom's credit, he noted this notion through the use of his four functions of folklore. Traditions, however, work not only as a centrifugal force that bring

these players together but also as a centripetal force that pushes non-members away from the communities. Richard Bauman continued this line of thought to its most teleological end: a relation between shared identity and folklore. This integration and disintegration is, of course, a fluid process that is negotiated in much the same way as personal identity. Groups decide to align or delineate their separation from other groups all the time. Alliances and oppositional groups change over the passage of time as the game changes and guilds die, or change ethos.

In these socially constructed games everything is measured by social distance, and it is the players' traditions that create the majority of separation between groups. Etiquette, as mentioned throughout this thesis, acts as a stellar example of how tradition can act as a major point of division. Apart from group beliefs, players have opinions of their own about group codes of conduct and often use traditions to convey them. For example, the series of traditions that duelists have put together to form an alternative etiquette differs greatly from the etiquette enforced by the game's code of conduct. As a result, it is either virulently hated and dismissed, or wholeheartedly accepted as the right way to play. Players often use naming conventions or even rhymes such as, "if it's red it's dead" to convey where they stand on this divisive issue. Thus, folklore can be seen to play a fundamental role in every part of the continuous process of identity development. Tradition is used to convey both conformity and separation while remaining fluid enough to allow for redefinition of any part at any point in time.

Traditions create the medium for communicating identity within the given context of the available forums. For example, one of my offline friends always wears an overcoat and carries an umbrella when going outside. Through this dress code, he is calling upon a

traditional dress code in our society, one of the many forums of communication open to people in offline interaction, to communicate various things about him. The context for interpreting this dress code, however, relies predominantly on the viewer's exposure to people that dress in overcoats and carry umbrellas. The same is true in MMOG space. The context is set partially by the developers, as my friend's dress code is partially set by his employer, and like offline space most of the social context is generated by the population's manipulation of the communication spaces, i.e. etiquette and status markers.

Much of MMOG life, as in real world examples, revolves around reading into the limited forums that people use to define themselves. Whether it is their offline dress code, social habits, or their MMOG titles, tradition forms an important medium for communication. Naming conventions, in MMOGs, have particular significance to the self-definition of an online persona(s) because they are for the most part permanently attached to the avatar. As such, many different types of naming conventions exist, and convey a variety of different meanings. Naming conventions are such a prolific aspect of MMOG play that an entire thesis could, no doubt, be written exclusively about the topic.

Traditions like these convey identity extremely well because, like identity, they are fluid. Thus, these two temporal concepts, which change endlessly over time, have become interlocked. It is perhaps easy now to understand why Bascom believed that maintenance of conformity was paramount to folklore. Without conformity identity could not work. Both Roger Abrahams' and Anthony Cohen's takes on identity heavily involve stereotyping and glaring generalizations. This is because these are necessary pieces of the identity puzzle. The odd paradox, about identity and conformity, that Abraham's notes, is that uniqueness is based on assuming others are generic. This resides at the core of

communicating social separation. Even Cohen's symbolic construction of community relies on these ideas of social division. They are embedded in symbols instead of functional flow chart, but they still reference social division. Indeed, they still reference tradition, placed in the context of the forum of communication, as the medium for conveying identity. Therefore, whether we are followers of Cohen and believe that group identity is only asserted when confronted with different beliefs, or follow Karen Cerulo's notion that it is no less than the complete mobilization of community members to assert a group identity, what we see is that conformity is essential to the communication of group identity.

Studying traditions, especially those that are created to maintain conformity, still remains relevant to folk studies. On the other hand ignoring the traditions that help to separate one group from another does the discipline a disservice because this undermines the very focus of tradition. Studying integrating factors to the exclusion of the disintegrating factors in tradition, sacrifices the true power of tradition. Disintegration has always been seen as a negative force. Just as identity cannot exist without conformity, neither can integration exist without its counterpart. Without accepting both functions of tradition, we cannot accept folklore's true function in human society, as the major communicative medium of identity.

Further Avenues to pursue

The study of this relatively new medium is exciting in that it provides researchers a means of watching communities advance through the community life cycle at an accelerated rate. If we can come to terms with the differences between online and offline life, and resolve them in a fashion that allows us to extrapolate meaning from one to the other, the potential benefits to folkloristics (among other disciplines) are virtually boundless. That such stark differences in communication methods exist between these two mediums makes the similarities in their usage of tradition more significant. The notions of space and place, and their link to tradition, should be exhaustively researched, because they offer new perspectives on older theories.

The limited MMOG space that I researched consisted of thousands of folk groups with incredible mixtures of race and ethnicity that offer wonderful opportunities for the study of new and interesting traditions in almost limitless permutations. In addition, MMOG space represents an interesting space where the popular culture from a variety of sources spills into the current traditions of the space. This grants interesting opportunities to study globalization, localization, and hybrid theory such as glocalization on a limited sample of the global population.

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Appendix 1- Images from the failed game *Dragon Empires*. As you can clearly see the developers tried their utmost to recreate reality within a computer game. The game sported a live weather system with a working jet stream and pressure zones. It was truly a testament to the goal of creating a completely separate living world for the players to escape into. In the end it was, in part, the intensity of the graphics and the highly interactive nature of the environment that made it impossible for the game to support the numbers of players that are required of a MMOG. Please note that these images have been compressed to save space and so some visual degradation has occurred. Many images, included the following images, of *Dragon Empires* are available at http://pc.gamezone.com/gamesell/screens/s19298_0.htm.

Appendix 1a- Scenic view of a waterside city in-game, it was said that the detail was so intensive that if one were patient enough one could watch the clouds form off of the water on sunny days in the shade of the mountains.

Appendix 1b- Many of the most stunning in-game shots from the *Dragon Empires* included either sunsets or sunrises because of the nature of the weather system these were incredibly realistic and often breathtakingly beautiful.

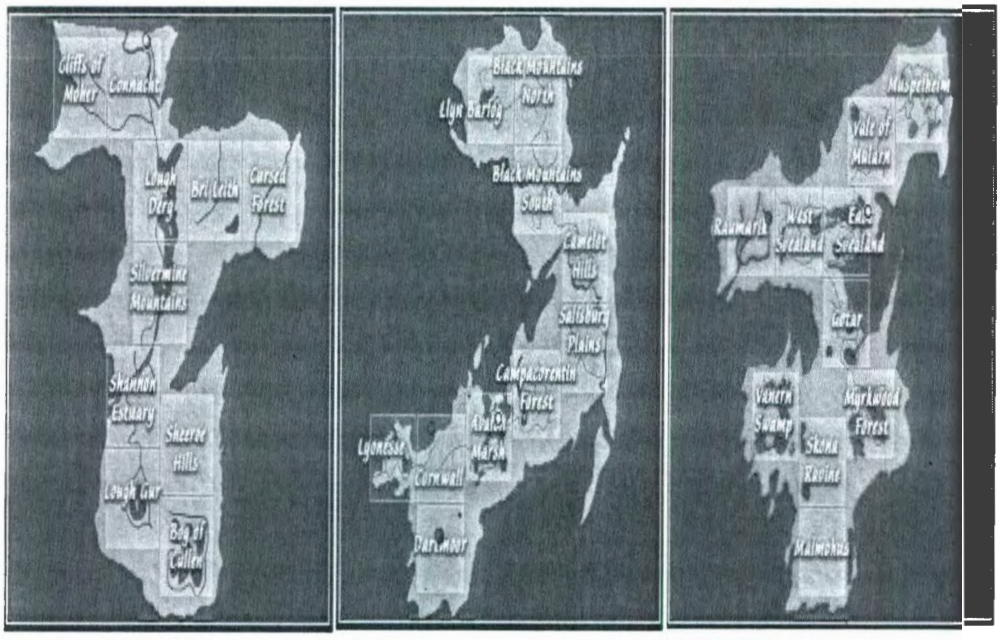
Appendix 1c- An in-game screen capture at night.

Appendix 1d- In-game screen shot of a fortress/city covered in clouds.

Appendix 1d- Concept art of a couple of characters from the same in-game faction using in-game character models.

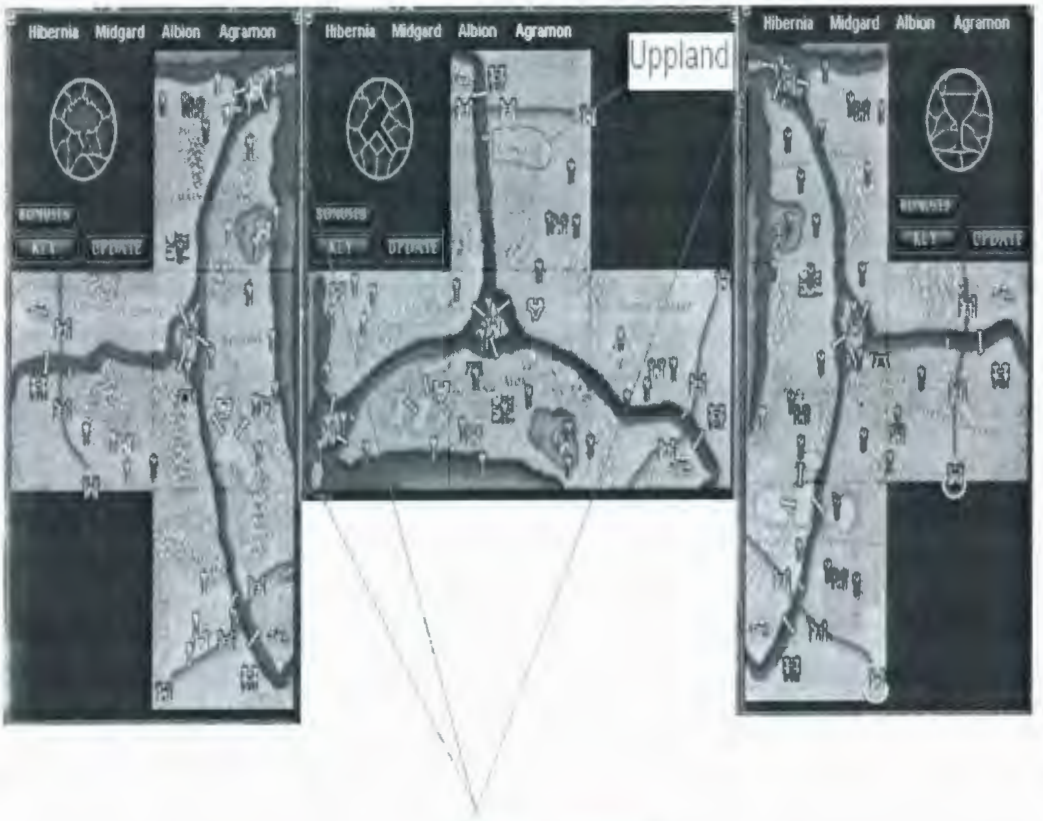
Appendix 2a – These are maps of the core PvE terrain of each realm. Each of these realms is connected to the PvP zone via two one way gates. Only members of the designated realm may pass through these gates. Thus, PvP is prevented from entering these 'safe' zones.

Safe PvE zones



Hibernia Albion Midgard

Appendix 2b- Realm War map, this is a look at the final zone of RVR (Realm Versus Realm conflict) in the game. These are the zones accessed via the one-way portals spoken of in appendix 2b. Each realm has seven keeps, twenty-eight towers, two relic keeps, and two relic gates. Each of these act as assets to the realm that own them thus they become objectives for players from rival realms to capture. For size comparison with the BGs (appendix 2d), a BG would fit into about half of the size of one of the 4 squares in one area of this conflict (i.e. ½ the size of the area in Midgard, the center map, labeled Uppland). These three separate land masses are connected via a neutral central island that attaches to each realm's RvR area at one point (note the bridge to the land mass on the upper left of the first picture, the bridge at the lower left of the second, and a bridge at the upper left of the third).



Bridges leading to the neutral island Aggramon.

Appendix 2c – Sample BG maps. Notice the Central Keep (CK) in the Cathal Valley (CV) map is placed off to the side whereas in the Killaloe map the CK is actually in the center. CV is is based on the original RvR area that was replaced by the New Frontiers expansion (the areas seen previously in appendix 2c). As can be seen it represents a significant expansion in terrain area for combat, as New frontiers is about 20-30 times the size of CV.

Appendix 3- Character generation (often referred to as 'chargen'). This process is fairly straight forward. The player first chooses their desired realm (in-game faction). From there they click on an empty character slot and select an in-game race and class for their avatar. They then name the avatar and then customize the size (height/weight of the character) and the facial features. Once this is finished the avatar is ready to enter the game.

Appendix 3a – This is the initial log on screen for a server. Once a realm is chosen and a character is created (see appendix 2e) that is the only realm playable on that server (If all characters on the server are deleted then the server will return the player to this selection screen).

Appendix 3b- Caption of the initial empty character selection screen.

Appendix 3c- Selection screen for name, race, sex, and class of an avatar. The race and class write ups and statistics are listed on the left while the selection buttons for the different races, gender, and class are on the right. Many classes are either race or gender specific.

Appendix 3d- Facial customization screen. This utility allows players to manipulate the faces of their avatars. Noses can be widened and shortened, eye colour changed, eyes and ears can be enlarged or shrunken, and facial hair and hair styles can be changed.

Appendix 3e- *Cmdrsillypants* is now ready to play. From here all the player needs to do is click the play button and this avatar will be loaded into the game.

Appendix 3 continued- Notice the difference in styles between the three different realms, evident straight through from the races to the architecture. All of this was built to create social distance between the rivaling realms.

Appendix 3f- Touring Albion, Races.

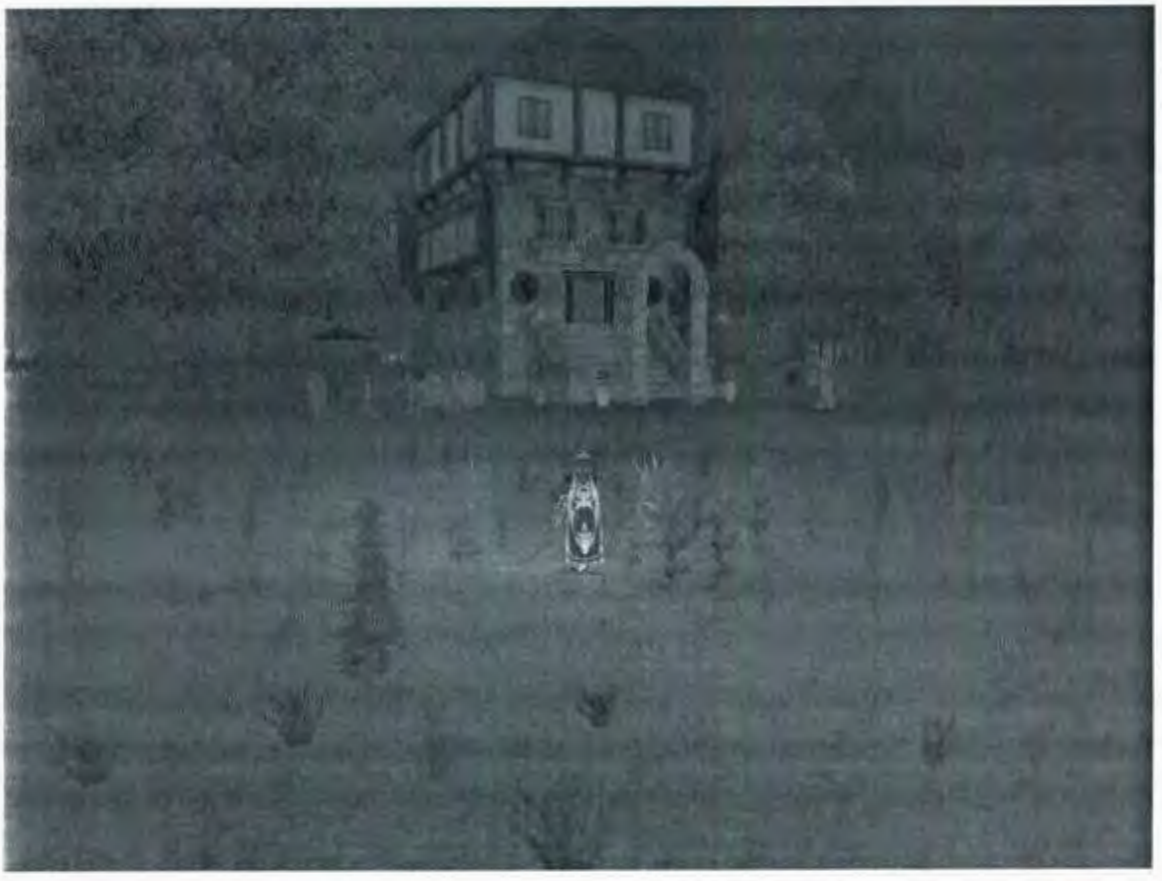
Appendix 3g- Touring Albion, PvE tower siege.

Appendix 3h- Touring Albion, Starting area (Safe zone). Dock, with small ship

Appendix 3i- Touring Albion. Starting area (Safe zone). Town centre and smithy.

Appendix 3j- Touring Albion, Albion cottages.

Appendix 3k- Touring Albion, Albion player housing: player cottage and guild mansion.

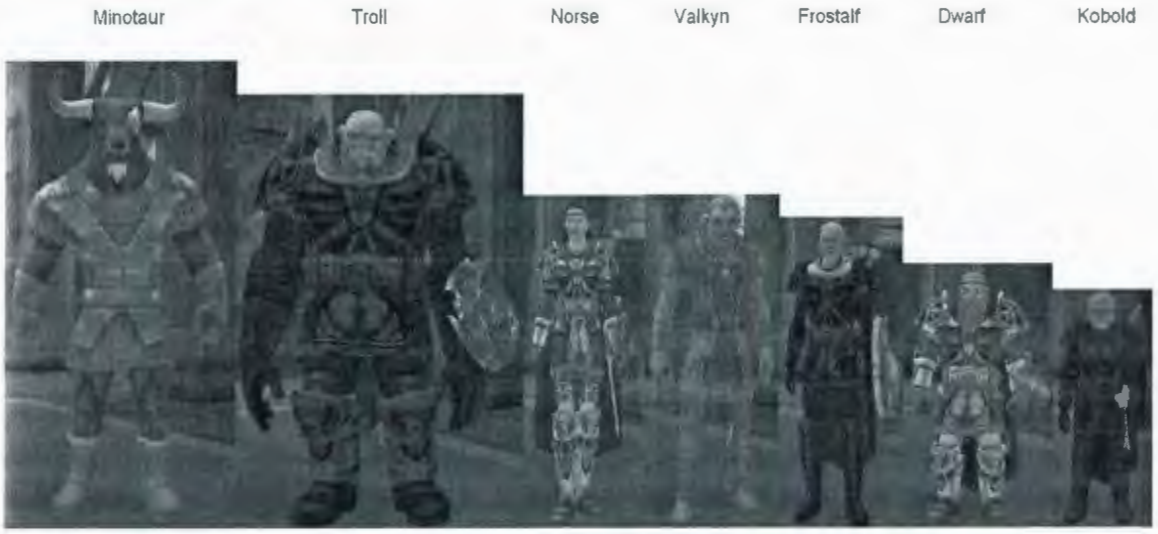


Appendix 3l- Touring Albion, Capital city (Camelot).

Appendix 3m- Touring Albion, Camelot, Magic store.

Appendix 3n- Touring Albion, Camelot, Cathedral.

Appendix 3o- Touring Midgard, Races of Midgard.



Appendix 3p- Touring Midgard, Capital city, Jordheim. Notice the black of Midgard. Even in the day the city is dark in comparison to Camelot.

Appendix 3q- Touring Midgard, Jordheim tour continued.

Appendix 3r- Touring Midgard, player housing: player cottage, and guild mansion.

Appendix 3s- Touring Hibernia, Hibernian Races.

Appendix 3t- Touring Hibernia, Capital City: Tir na nog.

Appendix 3t- Touring Hibernia, Capital City: Tir na nog continued.

Appendix 3u- Touring Hibernia, Capital City: Tir na nog continued.

Appendix 3v- Touring Hibernia, Capital City: Tir na nog continued.

Appendix 3w- Touring Hibernia, Town.

Appendix 3x- Touring Hibernia, Town continued.

Appendix 3y- Touring Hibernia, Town continued.

Appendix 3z- Touring Hibernia, Player housing: cottage and mansion.

Appendix 4- Guild Emblems. The guild emblem is a visual queue that compliments the written guild name above the avatars head. Together they denote group affiliation. The guild emblem is very helpful because it can be made out on a cloak far before the guild name above the player's head can be read. An online emblem previewer exists at http://daoc.catacombs.com/emblem.cfm that many players use to design the emblem before paying for it in-game.

Cloak Shield

Appendix 5- Midgard exclusive helms.

Exclusive Midgard Helms

Appendix 6- Hibneria's exclusive head-dresses.

Hibernia's Exclusive
head-dress

Appendix 7- Hibneria's exclusive head-dresses.

Albion's Exclusive Head-dress

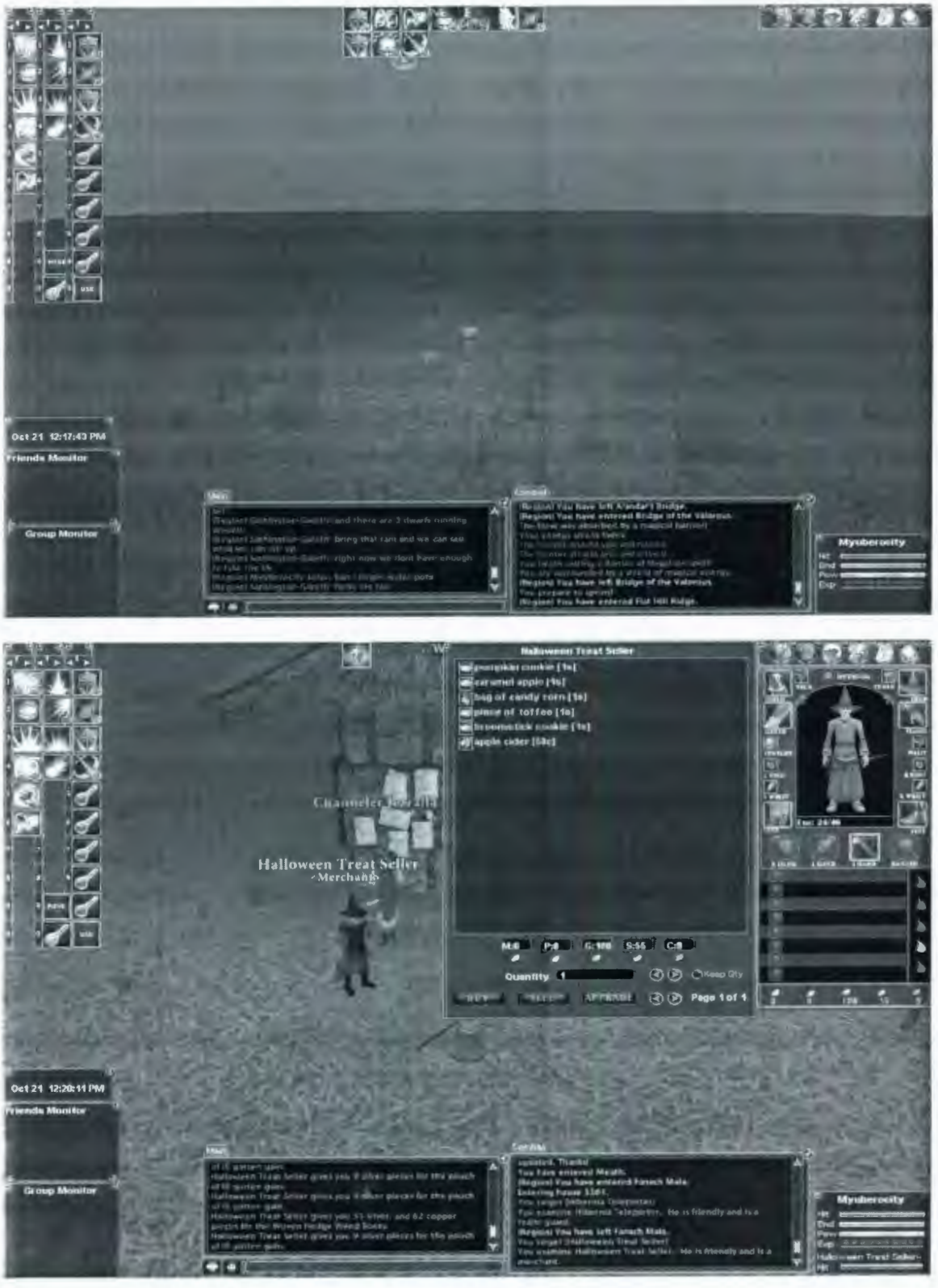
Appendix 8a- In-game chat, with multiple channels. Each channel is colour coded, for example in this picture there is a conversation going on in */region* chat which is happening in blue, a conversation going on in the */group* chat which is using orange, and a conversation going on in */guild* chat which is using green. This is not to say that there is only one conversation going on in each because each channel will often have multiple threads going on at any one time. The purpose of this example is merely to show how the game separates the different chats.

Appendix 8b- The example below illustrates all of the channels available to a player at one time (the right column, "Chat Channels"). Unchecking the channel here squelches it (meaning that the player will no longer be viewing that channel).

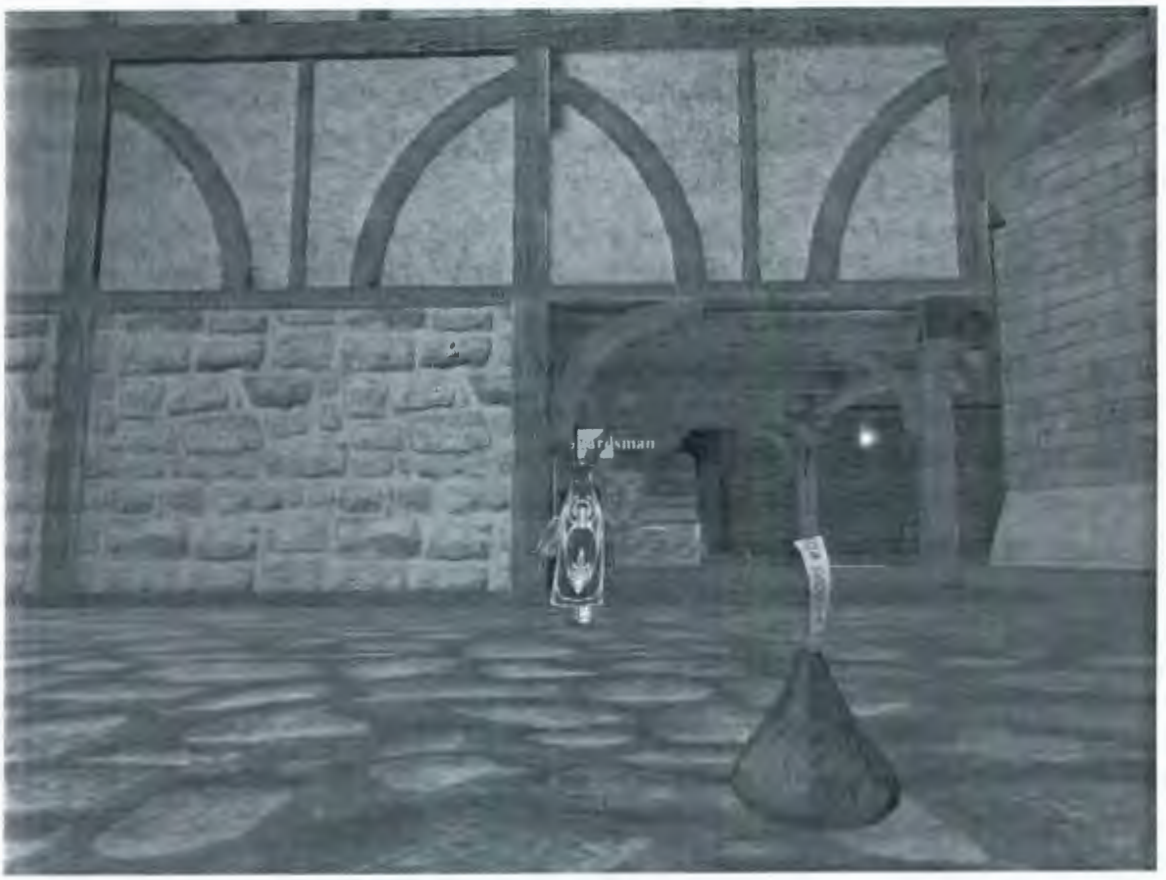
Appendix 9- The following are changes to the environment that have become tradition in the game on a yearly basis.

Appendix 9a- Every Christmas quests are opened up to allow players to buy Christmas trees and Christmas decorations for their homes in player housing. Some use them for internal decorations and some place them on their lawns outside.

Appendix 9b- Every Halloween the developers turn the moon into a jack-o'-lantern (unfortunately I forgot to drop the interface before I took the shot below but the jack-o'-lantern moon is still partially visible below the buffs in the middle of the screen). They also allow the players to change their appearance by purchasing costumes from a costume merchant (second caption).



Appendix 9c- In February the staff change the little bags that players drop when they drop items on the ground with Hersey's kisses.



Appendix 10- The purpose of this appendix is to display the types of emotes and how they work in-game. The emotes can be accessed either by a listing of emoticons in-game (first caption) or by typing the displayed /command (captions 2-4). Most emotes have an animation associated with them (captions 5-10), however there is still a */emote* <text> command to allow players to customize an emote that the game does not support with an animation (see captions 11and 12).

Caption 1- Note the written */charge* mouse over when the mouse pointer points to the charge emoticon.

Caption 2- The alternate way of performing an emote is by typing the associated command, in this example below it is the */charge* command that makes the avatar swing his arm around to motion everyone onward. Notice that on top of the animation there is also a written (in black) accompaniment for the movement.

Caption 3- First part of the */charge* animation.

Caption 4- The final part of the */charge* animation.

Caption 5- */Smile* animation.

Caption 7- */Salute* animation.

Caption 8- */Shiver* animation.

Caption 9- */Taunt* command. This differs from realm to realm, but in Albion (the realm that the avatar below belongs to) the */taunt* command blows a kiss at the enemy.

Caption 10- /Emote <text> command. This command would display the writing (in black) '*Shortfatandawesome* plays his fiddle and dances.' If a target was selected (for example, another player) the emote would read '*Shortfatandawesome* plays his fiddle and dances with <target>.'

Glossary of Terms

AFK: Away from Keyboard.

Add: An additional mob.

Agro/Aggro: Mob's aggression towards a player.

Battlegrouping: Is a way to extend grouping beyond the maximum group size in the game. It essentially daisy chains groups together and almost always has its own chat.

BAF: A mob that will Bring A Friend, meaning that it will cause an add to also attack the group.

Buff: A spell that makes a target stronger.

Camp: Either means a physical spot where a mob spawns or can refer to farming a mob that pops in that location. "That &%*hole has been camping that mob all day."

Crafter: A person that makes or enhances items.

Debuff: A spell that makes an enemy weaker.

DPS: Damage per second.

Emote: An emote is an in-game action (normally a social interaction) performed by an avatar.

Farming: The killing of mobs or running of quests, continuously, normally with the goal of either getting an item that drops a percentage of the time from the mob or just to raise funds inside of the game. "I have to go farm some money," is a very common statement inside of a game.

Flame: To insult, a flame war is essentially a verbal online fight.

FPS: First Person Shooter, this is in reference to the camera view inside of these games which is often defaulted to an eye's view of the character that the player is controlling. Most of these games are shoot-them-up games. Some examples of these are *Doom*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Tribes*, *Halo*, and *Medal of Honor*.

Guild: A term that has become the general term for permanent online groups, such as the guilds in *Dark Ages of Camelot* and *World of Warcraft*, and the Link Shell communities in *Final Fantasy Online*.

MMOG: Massively Multiplayer Online game, sometimes referenced as MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game). However, this is really a misnomer because in general, role-playing is not a core attribute of the social interaction that takes place within these games. There are some servers reserved for role-players but they are fringe groups and not the norm for the games. Examples of these games are *New Horizons, Final Fantasy Online, Star Wars Galaxies, Dark Ages of Camelot, World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest.*

RTS: Real-Time Strategy, games (as opposed to TBS, turn-based strategy games) are any strategy game where actions are conducted in real-time. Examples of these types of games are *Warcraft, Command and Conquer, Starcraft, Age of Empires,* and *Empire Earth.*

RP: Role-Playing.

MMOG Terms:

Grouping: Is more than just being together in the game it is a state in which the games have been designed around structurally. For instance, some effects are group effects, meaning that they will affect only those in the group with you. Groups always have their own chat that lasts as long as the group does. Groups range in size from game to game, for instance the largest group in DAOC is eight players whereas the largest group in WOW is only five.

Mob: In-game monster controlled by the computer.

PL: Power level- This occurs when one, or more, players group a lower level player and share their experience with them. Since the higher level players fight monster's and players of their level, or higher, they generate more experience than the lower level player would ever be able to make by themselves. The result is that the lower level player advances through the levels at a greatly accelerated pace.

PvE: Player versus Environment- This is in reference to players fighting AI (artificially intelligent) controlled monsters. When this occurs it is considered player versus environment.

PvP: Player versus Player- Occurs when two or more players compete directly against each other (normally in combat).

PvE Zone: This is a zone specifically limited to PvE (see PvE for explanation). This means that players from opposing realms cannot enter this zone. This is why PvE zones are also referred to as safe zones.

PvP Zone: This is a zone where all realms can partake in the activities therein. It is essentially a free-for-all type of environment.

Raid: An organized PvE or PvP event (normally these events require large numbers of players to accomplish their task. For example, a PvE raid might be something like going to kill a dragon, whereas a PvP raid might be along the lines of entering into enemy territory with the explicit design to capture an enemy relic or keep).

RvR: Realm versus Realm- This is simply a larger more involved form of PvP where the players are divided into teams (realms) and given objectives (tower/keeps/relics) that one side must assault and the other defend. In *Dark Age of Camelot* there are three opposing realms, whereas in *World of Warcraft* there are only two factions.

RvR Zone: In RvR servers all PvP zones (see PvP Zones for further explanation) are RvR zones.

Tell: This is a direct communication with another person. It does not surface in a regular chat and there is no way for anyone else to know what was said besides the people directly involved with the 'tell.' The reason that it is called a 'tell' is because the command for it is /tell <name of receiver> 'message.' These are also referred to as 'sends' and 'whispers' because /send and /whisper also perform the same function.