

Matt D., "Wizards vs. Engineers: The Rumble in the Proverbial Jungle," June 2005.

Undergraduate Term Paper for "Games for the Web: Ethnography of Massively Multiplayer Games,"
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

Questions to Matt D. can be directed to Aaron Delwiche (aarond@trinity.edu)

There's the old adage that says: "the gamer will never be pleased"...I think Socrates said that...Actually, I just made it up, but it accurately summarizes the plight that many a trying game developer finds herself in when trying to develop a game that will satisfy their players. Gamers in search of the ultimate immersive experience will be your worst enemies if you have developed a sub-par video game, but will lay palms at your feet and worship you as their personal lord and savior if you hit the virtual nail on the head. When a development house releases a game lacking engagement, immersion, or any of those other codified elements of quality, the critical backlash is a torrent upon them. As a developer, it must be hard to avoid criticism in the realm of single player games, where once the final product is truly the final product (discounting minor patches for pc games post-release). Even non-persistent multi-player games such as counter-strike, halo, and team fortress brought out the most critical elements of the gamer strata; people complaining about everything from the effects of bug exploits on game play to the pixel size limit of their favorite spray paint logo. Now take the level of commitment and sense of community that followers of single player and non-persistent multiplayer games hold toward (or against) their games, and multiply that by the levels of persistence, effect, community, collaboration, and basically living-life mentality that comes parcel post with massively multiplayer online role-playing games. If single-player gamers will never be satisfied, the MMO community's criticisms will never be silenced ...ever. This is not to say, however, that some games don't hit closer to the mark of pleasing their patrons than others.

We have discovered, through the course of this semester, that there is much more to creating a virtual world than meets the eye (or the force-feedback controller). And just as it is more difficult, from a technical standpoint, to develop a computer game bug-free and compatible with an infinite number of hardware/software combinations, it is doubly difficult to create a game that adequately suits the needs of the virtual populace. And with the sheer number of MMOs that have exploded onto the gaming scene in recent years, it is becoming more and more apparent that most are tailored toward a number of specific (and sometimes not-so-specific) needs and tastes. Like an album whose style of guitar instrumentation you wish you could switch with that of another of your favorite albums, it is difficult indeed to find an MMO whose design components will truly suit one's needs and playing style. Everything from Caillois' subdivision of player types to the study of degenerative play strategies should have at least taught us by now that, just as there can be no "greatest rock 'n roll album of all time," the equally subjective plane of video game criticism can be no more strict about which deleterious traits it targets and which it praises. I had the opportunity of interviewing a number of gamers of varying backgrounds, and our continued dialogue, along with that of our class, has led me to believe that one gamer's recycle bin is another gamer's mithril lock-box. The power that designers wield to construct worlds tailored to particular needs and desires comes to the fore when seeing how seriously immersed players become.

Motives

The basic idea for this research endeavor was this: having experienced most of the range of both mechanical and conceptual elements in video games, it always struck me as queer that someone could share my love for, say, the covert espionage elements of Metal Gear Solid, and at the same time hold so much disdain for the same elements as applied in Deus Ex. The difference may be subtle to me, but it's a gaping chasm to them, and it's all based on preference and playing style. It's been a learning process, but it has become apparent that the success of a game is dependent on the developers' ability to satisfy the needs of a particular group of people. Two games that I believe have done that exceptionally well are Blizzard's World of Warcraft, and Funcom's Anarchy Online. The former is a medieval-fantasy world, while the latter takes place in a cyber-punk sort of dystopian future. The two games share enough similarities and differences that a meaningful comparison could be made regarding differences in personality attraction.

The focus of this research project was to discover the key factors of importance to the inhabitants (players) of each game. I will focus on each game's combination of story presentation, the formation of community on the part of the game's players, as well as the immersive elements of each game that lead to identification and role-playing. By unearthing and analyzing those differing factors of enjoyment, attraction, and engagement between two games I hope to bring into focus the idea that virtual worlds can be as numerous and varying in nature as there are gamers of differing tastes. What does this say about the personality-types that are attracted to these two examples of the combination of design elements? Furthermore, how does this change the way we view video games? And most importantly, what does this say about the role of interactive persistent virtual worlds in contemporary world culture?

Literature Review

To this point there has been a wealth of information regarding the nature of game play and design, the role of storyline in narrative play, the function and development of community around play, as well as the formation of role-playing activities and character identification as a result of immersion. It is the combination of these factors into a cohesive and relevant pattern of results that I hope to contribute toward the field. In "Man, Play and Games," Anthropologist Roger Caillois writes that "a characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus different from work or art" (Caillois, 1961). It is my hope that the results of this research will help to address what is arguably the dominant conception about the nature and utility of games and play.

Perhaps one of the most immediately obvious potentialities that exist within the medium of video games (as we currently know it) is the presentation of an interactive fictional narrative dynamic. This element is shared with the schools of literature, film, and other mediums that we often recognize as "high art" (not to be rear-windowistic or anything!). I am not raising video games to the level of Tolstoy, just drawing a parallel from which a significant portion of my study was derived. How well applied is the storyline in these games? Do gamers even care or desire a well-developed, well-written story? S. Poole (2000) disagrees, as he writes in his examination of narrative delivery in video games "the diachronic story of a videogame, however complex, is merely an excuse for the meat, the videogame action" (page #). Poole is not alone in his assertions, and this study investigates the legitimacy of his claims, in comparison to those who more firmly believe in the narrative power of games. In his study of narrative structure in games, for instance, Carr suggests that, while the narrative presentation of games differs largely from that of other mediums, narrative pleasure can still be derived from the presentation of story (Carr, 2004).

It is the existence of player communities that separates virtual worlds from more traditional forms of interactive entertainment. Massively Multiplayer Online Games are defined as much by their persistence and interactivity as they are by their sprawling virtual societies. A goal of this project is to discover what role community plays both in determining the direction of a virtual world, as well as how important a factor an MMO's population makeup can be in attracting and maintaining players fitting general preferences and/or playing styles. In his analysis of relationship formation in MMO's, Nick Yee scrutinizes virtual communities under J.B. Walther's requirements for hyper personal interactions, "interactions that are more intimate, more intense, more salient because of the communication channel," positing that all of these elements exist within the virtual worlds of MMO's (Yee, 2004). If, indeed, community influence and interaction plays as prominent and salient a role as Yee would suggest, what might this tell us about potential social utilities of virtual worlds?

There is a wealth of literature regarding the role-playing and avatar identification in MMO's. T.L. Taylor talks about the push toward revamping contemporary framing of feminist modes of play in MMO's, as well as how "MMORGPG's give the user an opportunity to engage in various identity performances and corresponding forms of play (Taylor, 2003). Kennedy analyzes the feminist representations of Lara Croft in Tomb Raider, and thus questions the role playing strategies of gamers from a Mulveyesque investigation of scopophilia (Kennedy, 2002). An analysis of the immersive elements of WoW and AO might frame identification and role-playing as consequences or derivatives of immersion

Study Design

This research was originally conceived as an all-across-the-board examination of the game mechanics and less hard-coded elements of each game and how they work to the desires and needs of their respective players. The target has since been reduced to the focus of three major elements of each game, and the main questions are as follows: Each game represents a conscious combination of design elements on behalf of the game designers. Using these two games as the proverbial litmus paper, I hope to answer the following questions:

1. What do gamers' attraction and faithfulness to the design elements of either of these games tell us about the kind of people who play them? What kind of gratification is brought about from play, and how much of this is reliant upon initial design and how much depends on player/community influence?
2. If virtual worlds are so customizable from a design standpoint, and thus can be pretty much retrofitted to anyone's taste, how might that change the traditionalist view of video games?
3. Finally, if one were to adopt a more contemporary view of video games, what does such a point of view suggest about the role of virtual environments? Based on current research, supplemented by my own findings, what can we look forward to in the coming years?

The first question, regarding the combination of game design and community influence accommodating itself to certain playing styles and personalities, represents a loose approach from a uses and gratifications standpoint. What motivates players to continuously return to their favorite virtual world? Is it game design (and furthermore, which elements are the most pertinent), is it community influence, or is it a combination of the two? These

are the kind of initial questions whose answer I hope to use as a foundation for the second and third analytical inquiries. If substantial findings can be wrought from the first question, it would be reasonable to deduce that the more traditionalist views of video games (i.e. Callois' aforementioned definition/functions of play) might require revision in a more contemporary context. For the third and final question, we can couple the findings of the first inquiries with the results of a substantial portion of my interview protocol: those questions regarding players' favorite elements of the game, and suggested improvements to the game population/mechanics that might better accommodate their tastes and playing styles. If players have reasonable expectations (or wishes) of improvements to their favorite virtual world, or perhaps even hopes for a future MMO that better suits their individual tastes and playing styles, what does that suggest about the social and psychological utility of virtual worlds now and in the future?

My investigation of MMO's focuses almost strictly on those that have thoroughly immersed themselves in virtual environments. It seemed logical to assume that those with the most experience in MMO's, and most likely video games in general, would have the most useful feedback regarding my research questions. Much like Chow and Ting's study of flow state and addictive behavior, I chose a sample population that might accurately reflect the interests and opinions of virtual world inhabitants. I used a non-probability convenience approach, with a bit more judicious screening based on potential subjects' prior experience in either (or both) games, as well as their frequency of play and experience in other video games. Specifically I was looking for three different subject types: Those who had invested a significant amount of time in World of Warcraft, those that had done the same with Anarchy Online, and finally a few subjects that had played both games for a significant period of time.

I gathered subjects through a variety of avenues. A large portion of my strictly-WoW participants were people who I had met while playing the game over the course of the semester; some were guild-mates, a couple personal friends, and the rest were players on my friends list (many of whose names simply did not click in my memory – an evening of killing dragons alongside an ally and I couldn't remember their name! – What does that say about the pertinence of social interaction in MMO's? coming soon to a theatre near you!). While most of my WoW contacts already knew I was to be trusted and thus were rarely hesitant to participate, recruiting strictly-AO players was a bit trickier. I managed to gather a few subjects by periodically broadcasting hails via general chat in higher populated areas of Rubi-Ka. Mostly, however, I was either ridiculed or harassed by overzealous and misguided players. Coming up short on AO players with adequate experience (and basic grammar skills), I decided to take my showboat to the message board communities. This is where I found a large portion of the sample portion that had played both games substantially. Not surprisingly, it was this last 1/3 of the sample that had the most detailed and unique observations in response to my questioning (and consequently theirs were the interviews that took an hour plus!).

In all, my sample was composed of 8 strictly-WoW players, 7 strictly-AO players, and 4 members who had played both games. Interviews were conducted via chat modules (i.e. AIM or MSN) or in-game. The interviews followed a generally pre-defined course, supplemented by an interview protocol I had developed. I had three similar protocol paths developed for each of the three sample members (AO, WoW, and Both). Often, however, I'd find the conversation moving in a particular direction, as most subjects had particularly interesting commentary on specific portions of the subject matter. Interviews typically lasted 45 minutes to one hour (and sometimes a bit longer, however I'd usually cut it off at that point, for both our sakes!).

I suppose a couple technical limitations to the study were that, in the course of impromptu discussion, some of my questioning may have been a bit too leading (i.e. "d'you see the IRRK news wire as enhancing the story?"). Often the interview would turn into a conversation, because for better or worse, most of the composition of my subject pool was either people that I "knew" or those that were very easy to get along with! This is probably why my interviews lasted so long. That, coupled with the scatter-shot approach to this research focus, may have made this project a bit more complicated to manage and organize than I had originally anticipated. As in Charles Piot's study of the violent video game culture, my study was equally "a mix of scattered, multi-sited, often-improvised ethnographic techniques" (Piot, 2003). And, just as I thought Piot's study could have been more structured and coherent, and less flight-of-fancy, I believe mine could have undergone the same revision. All in all, however, I was very pleased to find very eager and accommodating interview subjects; thanks guys!

Results/ Discussion: Story

Chris Crawford writes that "because the [video game] story is generated in real-time in direct response to player's actions, the resultant story is customized to the needs and interests of the audience, and thereby more than makes up for any loss in polish with its greater emotional involvement" (Poole, 2000). From a more hard-coded tangible standpoint, the effect of players' actions on the diegetic storyline of AO and WoW are a bit lacking, if only due to technical constraints (as Poole writes "show me a writer who wants to work that hard and I'll choke on my Martini" (Poole, 2000)). An overwhelming majority of my participants embraced the importance of story in an MMO, some emphasizing its importance than in single-player counterparts; "storyline gives a strong background and purpose, and forms the basis for plots" writes Kyrice, and Faba (WoW player) elaborates, questioning "Who are we? What are we fighting for? What are our goals? All of these things have to be very clear in MMO". Another WoW participant, Teekay, shifts the focus from the hard-coded diegetic storyline intended by the game developers. He look instead to the more intangible furthering of story on behalf of the player community, as well as other game dynamics unique to MMO's. As opposed to single-player games where story reigns supreme if only for the fact that "there is no other force to keep a player playing," he believes that there are other main focuses in MMO's, largely player-driven, that are not evident in any other genre of game.

Player's Influence over the Game

Crawford's commentary on narrative games being "customized to the needs and interests of the audience" is arguable from a game-design standpoint. While this may hold true for some video games, the potential for narrative customization in MMO's is almost guaranteed, but only from an intangible origin, the players. Whereas it may be questionable as to whether the game designers intended for a malleable story or highly interactive and flexible fiction, the basic dynamics of a virtual community make for a highly flexible and constantly changing player-story (strangely similar to that of real life). This intangible side of the virtual world is a player narrative, where the experience and effects of socialization and decisions made lie solely in players' memories, not in the game's hard-coded narrative, per se. Anarchy Online, however, challenges the typical role of the player community in an MMO. A daily broadcast transmitted by wire to every character in Rubi-Ka by "IRRK News" gives a news recap of everything from clan summits to player marriages. Asking Kyrice, a long-time resident of Rubi-Ka, whether the IRRK news wires service actually affected the story of the game, he responded fervently "yes, especially among the clans, where I was in. The IRRK news wire is often influenced by player decisions of the council of Tir, which comprises leaders of the top organizations...so in a way, players determine the future

storyline." Kyrice's sentiments, particularly the last comment, were shared by a number of other interviewees. Funcom's implementation of IRRK is a hybrid of intangible communal experiences and salient effects on the game's storyline progression.

Quest Descriptions/Adherency

Large amounts of criticism came against WoW's lack of coherent diegetic storyline. Kyrice writes "WoW doesn't have [Anarchy Online's] epic scope. It comprises small quests that have little bearing on the future plots." World of Warcraft is a game designed around quests, which are overwhelmingly the best way to gain experience, and thus improve one's avatar. Most of the responses I received corresponded with that statement. Furthermore I discovered that Anarchy Online's mission system is largely unrewarding, as far as experience gain. However, a strange contrast in player opinion largely pointed toward AO's story being more effective, flexible, and grand in scope, and this is in no way related to the presentation of story through quests; quite the opposite, actually, as most AO players agreed that the game's quests were pretty secondary to the purpose of the game ("AO quests were rather generic," Udod writes). The responsibility for a richer story must lie elsewhere, then.

Community

Yee writes "MMORPGs allow us to ask questions about how the mechanics of a world influence the communities that form..." (Yee, 2004). If it is the developer's responsibility to set up the cards initially, the playing community of any solid MMO bears the brunt of the community development work. Just like a summer camp coordinator can help push the resident children into having fun and socializing with each other, the game developer can only go so far in determining how the in-game community will develop. And this is an opportunity for player influence the likes of which no single player game has ever seen. This is, in fact, one of the elements of the gaming experience that is unique to MMO's.

PvP/Death Mechanic

Nick Yee writes that "user dependencies, the mechanics of death, and other structures all play a role in encouraging or discouraging relationships to form in [virtual] environments" (Yee, 2004). (Udod would disagree: "PvP often brings out the worst in people. Worst aspects of modern day humans"). Kyrice writes, regarding the enhanced focus on PvP in AO as compared to WoW, "cities and notum mines are being fought over, and change hands often. There is also dissent among the clans, allowing for new twists in the plot." Is the focus on PvP, and what is arguably a more "realistic" death mechanic the reason for a less tangible, player-propagated storyline? To answer this question, we take the next step, analyzing the impact of the PvP system and death mechanic on the social dynamics of the virtual community.

In-and-Out-Group Sentiments

Funcom's release of the "Notum Wars" expansion pack incorporated a system of territory struggles. The basic idea is that guilds can set up and defend towers or outposts that increase their overall influence and power, thus increasing the power of their individual members. This was an extreme shift in focus from earlier conceptions of AO, making territory possession the sole variable determining guild (and thus player) power. One could see how, after this expansion's release, communal effort became more of a necessity than a

luxury. With WoW, Blizzard has set up a PvP system and death mechanic that, as many of my subjects would agree, is inconsequential and aimless. Kyric writes "the only need for communal effort [in WoW] is for raiding high end instances...and even then, there isn't as much impact. So what if an epic weapon drops? Only one person can win it." Similar complaints concerning futility were made against the newly implemented honor system, specifically that only one person could conceivably become grand Marshall. Richard Bartle suggests that "only players can make themselves heroes. If they later come to realize they're not the heroes they thought they were, disenchantment sets in" (Bartle, 2004). WoW Participants expressed dissatisfaction in the potential imbalance caused by a perk only enjoyable by a single player out of the whole population. Good for him, bad for everyone else, basically.

Collaboration

Anarchy Online and World of Warcraft each present virtual worlds racked by war. And with any war scenario, there is bound to be some player-manifested sentiments of distaste (or utter disdain in some players' experiences) for the "other team." It is a difference in PvP, the actual hardwired mechanics of mass power struggle that separates the playing styles and tastes that are found in the populace of Rubi-Ka as opposed to the inhabitants of Azeroth. In WoW, a sense of "nationalism" or communal effort against the common foe is less poignant than in AO, as my interviews have suggested. Kyric writes that "in AO...there's often an intense atmosphere of desperation." Players literally need each others help in order to maintain a fighting chance in the future ("we NEED help...our tower controller is down to 50%"), whereas in WoW, the less strict death penalty combined with the optional PvP toggle makes the continued struggle more of a common past-time rather than a communal struggle (Kyric writes "no one in WoW really cares if horde owns south shore for a few minutes"). In a comparison of all of the interview responses regarding this area of the study, 16 out of 19 subjects suggested in some way or another that it is not a matter of friendliness or stronger social cohesion that makes communal effort so much more salient in Anarchy Online. It seems to be, instead, a matter of utility.

The same suggestion was made regarding WoW's main focus: in PvE, there is a requirement for large parties that is pretty much spelled out in the lower-level interactive tutorial ("this is an elite quest, you will need help to finish this quest"). In this case, however, there was a large disparity of opinion; some subjects stressed the utilitarian aspect of grouping for instances (and thus experience, items, and money), while many others suggested that grouping was genuinely desirable, in and of itself, regardless of rewards wrought.

Immersion: Exploration

Where WoW seems to have prevailed in the eyes of the subjects whose experience lies in both games is in its simplicity. Lynn, long-time resident of Rubi-Ka writes "AO [was] a lot more complicated than it needed to be....you can tell that [World of Warcraft] is a game designed by gamers and they've taken a lot of the headache out of general game play." Richard Bartle writes that "virtual worlds encourage [players] to present different sides of themselves in a safe environment" (Bartle, 2004). It is the less consequential death mechanic and optional PvP element that many interviewees felt gave players more leeway to explore, both geographically as well as with regards to role-playing and class/skill set experimentation. PvP and death mechanics in AO, being more stringent than those of WoW, seem to elicit less exploration (in any aforementioned regard) in players. Lynn, a long-time resident of Rubi-Ka, retells a very interesting story: "in AO, if you were Omni and had a Clan alt, and your Omni guild found out about it, they kicked you out and word got out on

the server that you were a spy.”

Jaidin, who is currently enjoying WoW, recalls her earlier days in another MMO called “Asheron’s Call,” when she developed an aversion to PvP due to a very harsh death mechanic (“I really am working on overcoming the attitude I got towards PvP in AC”). She admits to being slightly timid at the idea of experimenting with PvP in WoW, if only because of previous frustration with Asheron Call’s system. Extrapolating from these and other examples and informed opinions, the effectiveness of immersion can be related to both the hard-coded PvP competitive system, along with less tangible player-manifested anti-opposition sentiments.

Historical Foundations

A contrasting difference between AO and WoW is a matter of cosmogony; whereas Anarchy Online is the first installment of an original story, WoW “draws on its roots,” a wealth of game lore developed throughout its single-player predecessors, “essentially an extension of the previous titles,” as Udod points out. Pretty much speaking for the majority of the WoW sample pool, he writes “it makes everything richer, every aspect of the game, not just the story.” It’s this connection to history and origin that almost every subject I interviewed mentioned in some form or another, completely without any suggestive questioning on my end. Lynn comments “I like a story with opposing factions and history for their dispute.” Kyrice also suggested an interesting comparison between the diachronic setting of Anarchy Online and historical events in our own past. Take, for instance, the relationship between the dominating Omni-Tech Corporation invading and dominating the home planet of the rival faction, the clans. He relates Omni-Tech modes of imperialism to that of the Dutch East India Company in the early 17th century. Again, just another example of how more palpable connection to the real world adds to the immersive elements of the game, according to a few of the interview subjects.

Furthermore, the diachronic back-story and general atmosphere of Anarchy Online suggests a virtual world significantly more analogous to the real world that we (well, most of us at least) live in. World of Warcraft’s medieval fantasy backdrop is contextually much more distant from our immediate 20th century experience. In a world being pushed increasingly faster into the future by advancements in technology and science, our real-life experiences seem to manifest elements of AO’s science fiction setting much more than that of WoW. Kyrice writes that “its so easy to [role-play] in AO because its future based ... the politics and jargon is similar to our present time’s” This observation, representative of majority opinion among the participants, coupled with the emphasis on the importance of significant cosmogony or diachronic backdrop, suggests that Anarchy Online’s is more of a graspable virtual world. The presentation of technology, while highly advanced, still draws foundations from technology incorporated into our daily lives. What was brought up on a couple occasions was Funcom’s use of nanotechnology in AO as an equivalent to the treatment and presentation of more traditional “magick” in the medieval fantasy motif. Lynn comments “I thought it was really cool that they brought in the typical mage role found in most MMO’s and put a sci-fi spin on it.”

Conclusion

Marshall McLuhan, in his disjointed post-modern analysis of the nature and potential of modern media *The Medium is the Massage*, formulates the rear-window allegory, and the idea can be used to aptly summarize the traditionalist (mis)conception of contemporary video games. McLuhan’s applied his allegory, however, from an application standpoint; It was originally a critique of authors’ use of old media styles in the production of new media

content. Basically, new media goes through three stages: firstly, the "toy" stage occurs during the first adoptions and uses of the new medium, where it is utilized for ineffectual and often gimmicky purposes. Second is the actual rear-window phase, during which the authors adhere largely to the production format of an older, more experienced medium. Looking at video game development through the late 20th century up to present day, It is logical to propose that the medium has passed up the "toy" stage (i.e. the pong days), and is currently in transition between the "rear-window" phase and the third, final step of maturation. The "art" stage has the medium in question being utilized to its potential, and being continuously pushed to its limits with progressive stylistic invention. And, while it is true that the vast majority of video games have yet to reach a level of high "art" (a point that is arguable in itself), a simple comparison between a complex narrative RPG of recent creation to its distant predecessors shows progress.

I have found numerous occasions involving the misconceptions surrounding modern ideas and technology where Marshall McLuhan's rear-window allegory is applicable. Wolf, for instance, in his dissection of the implementation of time in video games, is basically forced to take a cinematic perspective on the distinctly different and interactive medium of video games (Wolf, 2001). Approaching what is new and progressive from a critical and perhaps outdated point of view is the story of every generation throughout history. It seems to be within our nature as socialized, aging human beings to unwittingly reject that which departs from what we have settled so comfortably into. This isn't to say, however, that it is merely the aged strata of society that so adamantly follows a rear-window mentality. It comes from all parts of our social makeup, finding its origins in everything from religious dogma to absolutist systems of ethics to even civil law. Salen and Zimmerman define play as "free movement within a more rigid structure" (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004). If one were to apply this commentary to the progression of modern art, one can see that it has always been a movement out of the constrictions of orthodoxy. Rembrandt was once criticized for his unorthodox monotone figural painting, as well as his treatment of the female nude. This is not an attempt, however, at drawing a parallel between 19th century impressionist painting and modern video games (how rear-window that would be), but merely an example of the time gap between the realization of a progressive idea or invention and a society's leveling with that idea or invention.

There is some dissenting opinion regarding one aspect of the research inquiry: the nature of collaboration in Anarchy Online. Lynn writes "I made several close friends in AO, where I've only made acquaintances in WoW. But [in WoW] I have 2 level 60 characters already and still no close ties to a guild or teammates." Those subjects involved in guilds seem to also hold a somewhat differing view of cooperation and communion in the player community. Jaidin writes that guilds "really foster bonds between people, helping to form good friendships and a sense of 'family' and belonging in the game." Besides this dissent, however, agreement was pretty universal across the board regarding the following results:

1)Attraction and gratification is due to hard-coded design elements, which serve to inform the socialization and playing styles of each game's player community, respectively.

- The PvP and death mechanic were major influences on the development of out-group mentality, as well as the necessity of (or lack thereof) collaboration.
- Anarchy Online is much less quest-oriented than WoW, but players experienced in both games found the story more engaging than that of WoW. It can be extrapolated, then, that story effectiveness is independent of the quest system, contrary to popular belief.

- In AO, PvP collaboration is a necessary utility, many subjects stating that it went no further. There was, however, some haziness in unanimity
- In World of Warcraft, PvE collaboration is necessary at higher levels

2) Traditionalist conceptions of video games could stand more analytical scrutiny if the medium is ever going to gain any legitimacy

- Both from a production and conceptualization standpoint, rear-window approaches should be tossed out the window.

3) If my subject pool in any way accurately reflects the sentiments of the larger gamer population, then there will always be room for improvement in the realm of MMO. Players obviously will never be satisfied, but it is their continuous desire for improvement that is an interesting corollary to the desire that any ordinary man might have regarding the betterment of his life as well as that of his fellow man, and the world around him. If players have reasonable expectations (or wishes) of improvements to their favorite virtual world, and furthermore hopes for a future MMO that better suits their individual tastes and playing styles, then game designers wield a magical technological power to satisfy, at least to some point, the dreams and curiosities of gamers anywhere. The social and intellectual benefit of virtual worlds has already been demonstrated, and it will require a dialogue between developers and players to see the fulfillment of the medium's potential. And, who knows, players might one day be able to take the developers' chair much more easily...think about the evolution of the music industry to date). Alongside the increasingly open dialogue between creator and inhabitant should come a revamped idea of what video games are, as well as their beneficial utilities in the modern context.

Appendix A

Example of Research Protocol, Loosely Guiding/Initiating The Interviews: Narrative

- How do you see the narrative form in video games as differing from that of say a novel?
 - Can you recall any stories from a video game that compares with something you read in a book?
 - Do you find yourself actively reading quest descriptions?
 - Any interesting storylines/quests that come to mind?
 - Do you read the scattered reading material?
 - Any interesting plot veins?
- Do you see storyline as a central factor to an MMO's quality, as compared, say, to other single player games?
 - Would you rate the story content in the game as pretty thick? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
 - If you could, summarize the idea behind WoW's storyline in just a few sentences.
 - Upon starting the game, were you well versed in the Warcraft back-story?
 - If so, has playing WoW supplemented/enhanced your appreciation of the storyline? Has blizzard done a good job at extending the story? In what ways?
 - If not, do you feel connected in any ways with the story/characters/events in the game? Does this make you want to play the original games?

Bibliography

Bartle, Richard A. (2004). *Designing Virtual Worlds*. Boston, MA: New Riders.

Caillois, Roger (1961). *Man, play, and games*. New York: New York Free Press

Carr, D. (2004) Doing game studies: a multi-method approach to the study of textuality, interactivity and narrative space. *Media International Australia*, vol. 110, pp. 19-30, Feb. 2004

Kennedy, H. (2002). Lara Croft: Feminist icon or cyberbimbo? On the limits of textual analysis. *Game Studies Journal*, 2(2), December 2002.

Piot, C. (2003). Heat on the street: video violence in America's teen culture. *Postcolonial Studies*, 6(3), 351-366.

Poole, S. (2000). Never-ending stories (Chapter 5). In *Trigger happy: Videogames and the entertainment revolution* (pp. 90-111). New York: Arcade Publishing.

Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. (2004) Defining play. Excerpt from *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (pp. 301-11).

Taylor, T.L. (2003). Multiple Pleasures: Women and Online Gaming. *Convergence*, Vol. 9, No.1, 21-46, Spring 2003.

Wolf, M. J. P. (2001). Time in the video game (Chapter 4). In M. J. P. Wolf (Ed.), *The medium of the videogame* (pp. 77-91). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Yee, N. (2004). The Psychology of MMORPGs: Emotional Investment, Motivations, Relationship Formation, and Problematic Usage. In R. Schroeder & A. Axelsson (Eds.), *Social Life of Avatars II* London: Springer-Verlag.