Construction of a Playspace -

Autoethnographical Inquiry to Temporal and Spatial Frames of

the Play Experience of World of Warcraft

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2015

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

This study addresses the temporal and spatial boundaries of the play of massively multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft with phenomenological and autoethnographical approach. The study assesses if the play happens inside a magic circle and can this magic circle be equated with the digital game. Magic circle is concept defined by Johan Huizinga (1938) and it maintains that play activity is spatially and temporally separated activity. In this study the play experience of the author has been taken as the starting point of the autoetnographic evaluation and through the play-experience it is assessed if the play is disclosed to the game or if it surpasses the limits of the game.

The study suggests that play escapes beyond the boundaries of the game and that magic circle cannot be equated with the game platform. In this it follows Stenros (2014): Instead of one frame of the play or one magic circle we have multiple. This study suggests that the magic circle of play is larger than the digital area of the game. The magic circle itself becomes permeable too. Its edges are hazy and differ from one play experience to another. The study suggests the use of term playspace for this hazy and shifting area of play. Despite the fact that playspace is individualized space which varies in relation to the players, some general tendencies can be found by analysing the game itself: the game temporality and spatiality can suggest how much can be brought from outside of the game to the playspace. The analysis of the game temporality is done by following Zagas and Mateas (2007), Ricoeur (1992, 2004) and de Mul (2005). It is suggested that as World of Warcraft is open world game which heavily encourages co-operation and socialization between the players, the game itself facilitates and encourages expanding the playspace beyond the area of the game.

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Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Taiteen ja kulttuurintutkimuksen laitos
Tekijä – Author Maria Ruotsalainen	
Työn nimi – Title Pelitilan Rakentaminen -Autoetnografinen Tutkimus Pelikokemuksen Tilallisiin ja Ajallisiin Raameihin World of Warcraftissa	
Oppiaine – Subject Digitaalinen Kulttuuri	Työn laji –Pro Gradu
Aika – Month and year 02/2015	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 111 sivua + Appendix 8 sivua

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee World of Warcratin, massiivisesti monipelattavan netti rooli-pelin, pelaamisen ajallisia ja paikallisia rajoja fenomenologisella ja autoetnografisella lähestymistavalla. Tutkimus selvittää tapahtuuko pelaaminen taikapiirin sisällä ja voidaanko taikapiirin rajojen katsoa olevan samat kuin itse digitaalisen pelin. Taikapiiri on Johan Huizingan (1938) määrittämä konsepti ja sen mukaan pelin ja leikin kokemus on ajallisesti ja tilallisesti muusta ympäristöstä rajattua aktiviteettia. Tutkimuksessa tutkijan oma pelaamisen kokemus on otettu autoetnografisen analyysin lähtöpisteeksi ja pelaamisen kokemuksen kautta arvioidaan onko pelaaminen suljettua pelin sisään vai ylittääkö se pelin rajat.

Tutkimus ehdottaa että pelaaminen ylittää pelin rajat ja taikapiiri ei ole sama asia kuin peli ja sen rajat. Tässä se seuraa Stenrosin (2014) ehdotelmaa jonka mukaan pelin raameja on useampi kuin yksi. Tutkimus ehdottaa että pelaamisen taikapiirin on laajempi kuin pelin digitaalinen alue. Taikapiiri itsessään on myös periksi antava ja sen reunat ovat sumeat ja muuttuvat eri pelaamisen kokemuksien myötä. Tutkimus ehdottaa konseptia pelitila kuvaamaan tätä muokkautuvaa ja liikkuvaa pelaamisen kokemuksen tilaa. Siitä huolimatta että pelitila on yksilöity tila joka muokkautuu suhteessa pelaajaan, joitakin yleisiä tendenssejä voidaan määrittää analysoimalla peliä itsessään: Pelin ajalliset ja paikallalliset kehykset voivat ehdottaa kuinka paljon pelin ulkopuolelta voidaan tuoda pelitilaan. Pelin ajalliset ja paikalliset kehykset ovat analysoitu hyödyntämällä Zagasia ja Mateasta (2007), Ricoeuria (1992, 2004) sekä de Mullia (2005). Tutkimuksessa ehdotetaan että koska World of Warcraft on "avoin maailma" peli, joka vahvasti rohkaisee sosialisaatioita ja yhteistyötä pelaajien välillä, se itsessään mahdollistaa ja ehdottaa pelitilan laajentamista itse pelin ulkopuolelle.

Asiasanat – Keywords autoetnografia, fenomenologia, kokemus, pelaaminen, taikapiiri, World of Warcraft,
Säilytyspaikka –
Muita tietoja – Additional information

Preface

Late last fall, while still writing this research paper, I was out celebrating the five years party of my internship employee. When finally, at four a clock at night, me and my husband headed towards home, he said he hopes that I do not mind that he discussed with one of my colleagues about how we met, and told him the whole story how our relationship started in World of Warcraft. How it started when we were playing together, doing the rated battlegrounds, and sharing together the space of play, continuing this till it was the physical space we came to share together. I smiled and say no, I do not mind.

The play in World of Warcraft happens in multiple spheres, it breaks out from its boundaries, and it changes people's life as it can change them too. Many of the players I know have hidden away their play life as it has had a somewhat negative stigma around it. But this is changing as societies view on gaming and gamers is changing, and one of the important cataclysm for this change is the study done on these instances. It is also starting to affect the mainstream view on gaming. And gaming, even if often in its more casual form, has also become mainstream activity. Yet, when I first started talking about my thesis topic and how I am also interested how the play might affect us beyond the game, it was received with some caution outside of the academia. There can be tendency to think that if play can affect us beyond the game, it is in a negative manner.

Regardless, the play has an effect on us, one sometimes reaching beyond the game – but the stories I have heard from my co-players are usually stories of growth and empowerment, stories of people who through play have been able to find meaning and encouragement. My own story is similar and the expanding of the playspace has had positive effects. Not only has

it changed my relationship to myself and been the ground for my marriage, but it has enabled me to bring what I have learned through the game to the everyday life surrounding me. And the lessons I have learned have been those of playful growth. I have learned to work as part of a multicultural team, I have grown beyond my own culture (and beyond myself), and been part of creating a new one.

This research process has been one of introspective kind for me. The other day I was skyping with my former study colleague from the Netherlands and telling him about the process of the research and how it has been a long journey for me, a journey through self simultaneously than it has been journey through the theories and the data. How it has felt that an extra-effort has been required the gain a clarity and the emotional distance needed to do a scientific study on something which is essential to the selfhood I have. I also told him that if I would do the study now I might do it differently. I would start from the year 2009 when I was playing World of Warcraft at home, at the times when I was still looking for direction for my life. I would start the research paper with a story within story. How I was discussing with a fellow player in World of Warcraft in the times of the Lich king, the third expansion of the game. I would tell how he asked me what is it that you really want to do with your life, as everyone has something. I remember how I was standing there, in the game-world, and asked him:" You know that purple bubble over the lost city of Dalaran? The one which discloses under itself the whole city, so that those living there have no access outside of it and what they see beyond it is always seen through that purple glass? Those are us. In our everyday lives. We are in our bubbles and the little we see beyond them is colored and distorted. What I really want to do is to get out of my bubble, rise beyond that bubble and see how the world look likes from there, where there are no bubbles left".

It might not be possible to us to rise where there are no bubbles, and now the grandeur of those words leaves me bit ashamed. Nor do we ever really leave our bubbles behind. They live in us as traces, as experiences, as "having been there's" and have effect on our positions, as both researcher's and persons. But we can indeed stretch away from our own purple bubbles, to trespass and inhabit other bubbles, and hope that by having been moved, having had understood that there is multiple more bubbles then just one and having been able to bring them into our life-world, we can gain wider understanding of ourselves and our surroundings.

My own way beyond the bubble, started by that discussion in the game, took me in 2009 to the Netherlands. In one spring day I was sitting in the corridors of Tilburg University, clutching my hands together. I was waiting to be called in for an interview. This interview would be decisive if would I be accepted to a Bachelor degree program "Liberal Arts and Sciences". I was called in and the interview started. When it became time to tell about myself and what I want, I told the interviewer, the purple bubble of Dalaran in my mind, that I want to be able to see the whole picture and understand it components, to be able to see as far and wide as I can. He looked at me and said "Ah now I know what you want to be, you want to be an intellectual". And I, who had avoided all the roles as far as I could, I liked that identification.

I would have never moved to the Netherlands and started my studies there if it would not had been for World of Warcraft. Not only was I able through the play conceptualize what I want and had enough space to leave behind my everyday conceptualization of the self, but on the practical level the person who I talked with in-game about it was Dutch and he helped me through my endeavors while moving there and living there. This whole event is what really

made me for the first time to ponder the boundaries of play and the effect play has on us. And what can we actually achieve through play and the mindset it creates.

This story, a narrative which is simultaneously story told to oneself as it is as story told to others, might to an extent clarify the topic of interest here, the question of the frames of play. In its center is the play experience, what it really is, how does it come about and where are its boundaries. It is through this question larger themes and tendencies become of interest. One of these is playful mindset. Playful mindset is a mindset of trust and trust is the state when we are open for the change, learning and growth. There is immersive potential in games and play in relation to this and hence understanding play and its boundaries is increasingly important. When playful learning and gamification have become buzzwords we need to understand what play is and how can we actually bring that which is learned in game beyond the game by understanding the vey boundaries of the play.

And then again, other benefits aside, just understanding play itself is important, end in itself, exploring the joyous activity it is.

Table of Content

1. Introduction

When I for the first time tried out the massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) over eight years ago, I was instantly fascinated by it, despite my lack of experience and familiarity with online multiplayer games. While having been an active player of digital games in my early childhood -my father bought us Commodore 64 when I was three years old, and I was as eager as my brother to go through what felt like endless amount of games in floppy discs- I had spent most of my teenage years and early adulthood separated from them. In fact, in my early twenties I did not even have a working computer nor a private internet connection at home. Thus I was maybe a child of the digital era, but my interest towards the digital revolution taking place around me was minimal and I had no great thrive to participate to it. Yet, when I for the first time logged into World of Warcraft, this was all due to change.

It was a friend's recommendation which made me test out World of Warcraft, and I did it on his computer. When entering to the game, I remember being both curious and scared at the same time. Curious of the game and utterly fascinated by the sensation the act of play was creating in me, and yet scared of the world which was inhabited and occupied by other players in addition to me. These players would not only share the space of the game with me, but would also try constantly to communicate with me through chat and emotes, leaving me so little space to get to know the game only on my own terms. Thus, from the beginning on, it was clear that I had entered a world which was inhabited, narrated, and in existence already before I took my first (virtual) steps in there. The play had already started and I was merely trying to gain access into its magic circle.

In my early days of playing I sometimes felt that the new culture I had entered was incomprehensible for me. Not only was the language of the game (and consequently that of play) English, but furthermore it was not merely the English I had learned in the school. It was in-game jargon where terms such as "noob" and "powned" were used with confidence. The chat on the screen was filled with abbreviations "LFG" and "WTS" and the like, and I had no understanding of their significance. It soon dawned me that the rules of the play were not only the rules of the game, but rules of interaction between the players as well. For a player it was not only enough to understand the game mechanics, but understanding the social world of the World of Warcraft appeared to be sometimes even more crucial in order to advance in the game and to became part of the world of the play.

Despite these initial difficulties the fascination of the play, the sensation of curiosity, made me break away from my reservations and open up to a new space so different from that of my everyday life. The play, regardless of its frightening elements, carried with it both the sensation of possibility and a tentative promise of success. I became immersed in the act of play and grounded to the moment the act of play provided.

Now, over eight years later and having countless hours of playing World of Warcraft behind me, I am no longer feeling lost when I am talked to in the game, and next to the narrated self of the everyday "I" other forms of self-historicity have come into being. Thus these days when other players ask me how long I have been playing World of Warcraft, I am one of those players who can, with a certain sense of pride, state that I have been around since the Vanilla (even if it is by late Vanilla). This statement indicates I am one of the originals, one of those players who have been there from the beginning of the times (while I am definitely outranked by those players who can casually mention that they have started the game at beta,

these players are few and rare, and my stance as Vanilla player holds). I was there before the World (of Warcraft) was first expanded by The Burning Crusade and then by the Wrath of the Lich King; turned over and re-organized by Cataclysm; and then again enlarged by the Mist of Pandaria. I was there when Blood Elves were introduced as a new class to be played and I was there when Death Knight was brought in as the first hero class ever to be part of the game. I was there when Orgrimmar became a place of war and refugees and when the world itself was shattered by the actions of the mad dragon, Deathwing. And I was there when my guild cleared Dragon Soul and killed the very Deathwing himself.

When I make these statements, interesting questions arise. What is this "there" I am talking about? And why would I in one sentence decide to talk about eight years of playing the game and in the next sentence make measure of the time the Vanilla, the Burning Crusade, or the Mist of Pandaria, thus using concepts which to those who have not played the game or are not acquainted with it make no sense? To relieve some of the suspension, I can now reveal that Mist of Pandaria and the others are the expansions of the World of Warcraft (all expect Vanilla, which as indicated refers to the original the World of Warcraft, hence to the time before any of the expansions had been yet published). In other words, to a player they are occasions when the game-world has drastically changed, thus making them measures of time-periods, periods which have been significant to those engaged with the game - in a similar manner that, for instance, semesters are significant to University students. The expansions and their names mark the passing of the time and the coming of a change, in a manner which is both actual and symbolic, but latter only if one is engaged with the (life-)world where this symbolism holds any meaning. They are part of the historicity of the "I" which plays.

The passing of the time is important not only because it marks duration of the play, but

because it also facilitates the possibility of any kind of space itself. By adopting a relationist view of the time we come to think of time itself as a relationship between events, instead of an steady container where events take place (Zagal & Mateas, 2007). This relationist view is at the heart of understanding the user experience of the play, according Jose P. Zagal and Michael Mateas (2007). Furthermore, any space without time would became a static space where movement itself would not be possible. Thus, if we would be to discount the time, we could not talk about beginning nor ending – conceptually we would be left with static nothingness, the very opposite of the play.

The expansions are by no means the only measures of the time for the players. We the players talk about patches, raid-instances, PvP seasons, and the like, using all these to indicate what the time-frame was when something happened. We even talk about "Killing a boss", or about "finishing a battleground" in order to inform the time we will be occupied for the given moment. "I will be ready as soon as finished this battleground" Says another player to me. "Which bg is it?" I ask. "AB" I am answered. We structure our temporal and spatial surroundings and our understanding of them by telling the others that our guild is now trying to kill Deathwing on the normal; that our guild is at 2000 ranking in rated battlegrounds; that we do rated battlegrounds four nights a week. And this is not only how we are in relation to the game, but always in relation to others. Being higher in battleground ratings does not only indicate certain time and space in-game we occupy, but indicates something about us to the other players, being thus a status-symbol in the world of play which is an utterly social world to its core. And to those who see World of Warcraft only as a place of dragon and magic, I hate to announce that sometimes it is through the mundane and every day we establish the frames of our being: "I will make some coffee real quick", "I need to do the laundry and I will be ready after that".

13

All these, the mundane and the magical, are to me, as a player, meaningful indicators of time's passing, as they inform me about one's location in the game, and occasionally outside of it. Talking about locations, what about the "there" already mentioned? What are these "here" and "there" which we occupy and refer to while playing? Firstly, the "here" is clearly a negation, a denial to statement of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur: "The body, the absolute here, is the landmark for any there." (2004, p.149). According to this statement our body marks our location as an absolute, as something which does not stretch in space. Ricoeur makes this statement while discussing about the linearity of historical time, linearity which persists even in our attempts to account for history in another kind of models. Ricoeur argues that it is hard for us to conceive history in any other manner than linear (even though attempts to do so exist), as in order to do so we would have to, borrowing from Claude Lévi-Strauss; "spread out in space those forms of civilizations which we imagined as spread out in time" (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p.337).

Yet, in games, while playing digital, multiplayer games, we constantly indicate our relation to "hereness" and" thereness" even if our physical body rarely moves. The physical body keeps occupying one (offline) space but this no longer constitutes the ultimate reference point to here or there. I can say "I will be there in a sec" (or maybe "once this bg ends") when telling other players that I will be logging (coming) to TeamSpeak (voice over internet protocol) soon. Or I can ask another player "where are you?" and he says "in Orgrimmar" which refers to one of the capital cities in World of Warcraft. Thus the "I" which moves is no longer tied to the body, and body ceases to be the ultimate marker of the "here" and the unimaginable, societies stretched in space, as well an "I" stretched in space, becomes conceivable. Consequently, the "I" is no longer just one, but existing in layered contexts, in multiple

14

frames of space and time which in turn are constantly negotiated together. The digital self becomes fluid and flexible. While playing I am both in Jyväskylä and in Orgrimmar and the layers of the space themselves constitute a new space, that of play, a space where the game-world and the "I" meet, always in relation to those the game is played with and the act of play performed together with.

The physical "I" is not replaced, relocated. From the act of play the physical body is neither excluded nor denounced. It still announces its existence through utterances like "getting the coffee" or even being dictated by its needs: "Brb, I need to pee" and through sensations the act of play creates in it. Play, even the digital kind, is first of all an activity to which body is included, engaged activity. This becomes especially evident in the flow-states, where we are so utterly concentrated on the task in hand that we no longer consciously differentiate ourselves from the task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).Here the play and the game become almost extensions of the body ("I am here" we say while in the game world) instead of body becoming negotiated away. Here we can think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945): As the glasses which can help us see when our vision is otherwise impaired, so do the peripherals of the computer (mouse, keyboard, headset, screen) become not only a way to access to the game-world but as well part of our experienced body, helping us to experience the game-world, in a similar manner as the glasses become part of experienced self. In this manner, we are all becoming cyborgs now, or perhaps posthumans as "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" marks N. Katherine Hayles (1999, p.3).

Also the physical as an immediate environment, as the surroundings of the body, penetrates to

the act of play. Hence to play, in a virtual environment, is not to relocate completely away from the physical surroundings but playing at my summer cottage introduces sauna to be part of the discursive practices of the play, and playing at my home creates sensation of opening space which is usually intimate and safe (that of home) to the others or the play itself might even extend the location of home:

> "We actually tend to joke, me and my partner, that Azeroth (location in game) is our true homeland, the place we call home. We come from different edges of Europe, he from Romania and I from Finland, and yet we feel an utter sense of understanding between each other. And it is not so surprising. It was in WoW where we met, and the frame of existence was the game and our activities in it. There the shared meaning was easy to find, and more importantly, it was no longer dependent on the physical space of our existence"[1]

Sherry Turkle, in her book *Life on the screen* (1995), discusses about the early MUD, multi-user dungeon[2], players. She notes, after observing and interviewing a number of players that a player engaged with MUDs could have multiple windows open on her computer screen, with multiple different games being played simultaneously. In all these games the player would play a different role in a different story-worlds and contexts, having so multiple existing identities, multiple "I"s spread in the multiple "theres", in the (virtual) spaces. These identities remained to be more or less disclosed to their respective frames, to those games in relation which they had come into existence: In one of the games player could be a great hero while in other she would occupy the role of an evil villain (p.12-14).

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[1] From my field research journal, *later reflections*, 22.01. 2014
[2] Multiuser Dungeons started appearing at 1975. They were usually text-based, had elements of role-playing in them, and in many ways were predecessors of the MMOs, massively multiplayer online games and MMORPGs, massively multiplayer online roleplaying games.

While this sense of being "spread" in space is something which is present while playing World of Warcraft as well, there is also sense that this identity, this "I", is not only spread in space, but also in time ("I played since Vanilla") and that it is not by necessity disclosed to the space of the game. Consequently, I do not completely undress my player identity when I exit the game, but it continues to be present in other spaces as well. My skype name is my in-game name and it is paired up with picture of (offline) me, not that of my character. In Facebook I host a group for the players I play with, and occasionally in offline spaces I meet up with these very players. As a result, I sometimes even hesitate to mark the "I" who is playing as a separated role or identity, but instead I find the matter more complicated. I as the player, I as someone else, I as the character – the lines are hard to draw as the "I" in question is simultaneously one and multiple, fluid, changing and adapting. She is in Orgrimmar (city in World of Warcarft), she is in Jyväskylä (city in Finland), and she is somewhere in between these two. This threefold relationship to oneself comes close to Jonas Linderoth's construction of the avatar and the functions it occupies. To Linderoth Avatar is not by necessity only the character or the toon in the game, but can also be a role for social interaction or even a prop for presenting self to others (2005). And if to others, to self as well.

This wandering "I" and the lack of complete disclosure of the playspace to the area of the game suggests that the play does not only happen in the game nor are the boundaries of the play fixed and impenetrable. Hence, by the value of the play occupying multiple spaces, the boundaries of the play seem to be shifting, moving, permeable, and messy. This has been suggested by a number of game and play researcher's in relation to the "magic circle hypothesis" (see for instance: Taylor, 2006 and Castronova, 2005). Or to even call it a hypothesis might be a stretch in itself: Magic circle and all it entails (and it does entail a lot)

is a paradigm in game-studies, paradigm at least conceptually originating from Johan

Huizinga's book *Homo Luden: a study of the play-element in culture* (1938), where Huizinga

assesses play to be temporally and spatially disclosed from the real-world, shielded by the

magic circle in which it takes place. The idea of magic circle has persistently fascinated

researchers (Stenros, 2014), only if sometimes in order it to be negated away, denied, or over

and over again reformulated.

For Huizinga the magic circle was the metaphysical or actual area where the player enters

while playing the game or participating the act of play (1938). Thus magic circle shields the

area of the play from the outside influences, making it self-standing instance which has its

own rules and is temporally and spatially disconnected from its surroundings. It is worth

noting that, as argued by Stenros (2014), that the magic circle for Huizinga was mainly a

metaphorical tool, not a tangible "thing" we could always detect and clearly trace down and

define. Hence while we can recognize for instance a football stadium to be a clear physical

magic circle of the play, football itself as a play activity can take place in a multitude of

spaces, not requiring the stadium to have its boundaries drawn and defined. Activity of

playing football can take place on the streets, in a quiet cul-de-sac where the magic circle

becomes negotiated between the players of the play in the act of play; the schoolbags of the

boys playing the football become the markers of the goal area and the lines of the field are the

buildings disclosing the area. And not only are the limits and rules of space negotiable, but

also that of time. While there are official rules about how long a football game is planned to

last (45 minutes plus 45 minutes), the play in cul-de-sac might well last only ten to fifteen

minutes, or till the other team scores, depending on whatever the participants of the play

agree upon together.

What about World of Warcraft then, or more precisely playing it. Even if here and now I have been discussing how the playspace of World of Warcraft seems to extend beyond the area of the game, it does seem that the activity of playing World of Warcraft would be by default disclosed to the virtual space of the game. It seems to be almost against common sense and intuition to assume otherwise: The playground of this specific type of play is limited by the code which constructs the game and it seems safe to assume that the player is most definitely either inside the game-world or outside of it. Nor can the players use merely their schoolbags to remark the location of the game if the game itself has been taken away from the equation: when T.L Taylor in her book *Play Between Worlds* (2006) describes EverQuest (massively multiplayer online role-playing game similar to World of Warcraft) real-life convention where the participants of the event play a quest designed as it would be in the game EverQuest in real life space, it does not make us think that they are actually playing EverQuest, but more as if they would be performing the act of play, re-enacting it in another context which transforms it to play of another kind. Nor do the players of the World of Warcraft ever, to my knowing or experience, refer to any act happening without the game itself as playing World of Warcraft.

And yet: In the year 2012 I participated to a guild meeting of my World of Warcraft guild to the time being. The event took place in the Netherlands and I remember arriving at the meeting rather nervous, having a sense of being out of my place, being displaced. What gave me a sense of coherence and familiarity was a small nametag I was given – and the name in it was not my "real" name, it was my in-game name. This little action, suggesting identity to be performed, gave me an idea of how to act and embed myself for the situation and my surroundings, it brought a sense of familiarity and suggested a frame of meaningfulness to me.

World of Warcraft seems to be needed for play of World of Warcraft to take place, yet there is something in relation to the play which seems to escape the boundaries of World of Warcraft. It seems we cannot talk about playing World of Warcraft without the game being present, but not all that is part of the play is contained inside the area of the game. To understand how this stretching of the magic circle happens and how the play experience is sustained in this wider sphere which exceeds the game, there is a need for an analysis of these particularities which extend beyond the game itself. In the process of doing this, we need to treat play itself as somewhat particular too, to be able to understand the messy boundaries it has.

Play is a contextual event, which does not necessarily abide to rules or definitions outside of it. Here, in (this particular) case of playing World of Warcraft, it has been my instances of play which have been set under analysis. This approach comes with limitations. It was me who played, and this act of playing happened in certain context particular to it. Hence we do not ask the essentials of the magic circle (or essentials of necessarily conditions of act of playing World of Warcraft) and there is no goal to reach a full closure about the nature of the magic circle, but to study its relation to a particular event, which is my play activities in relation to World of Warcraft. Importantly, this does not entail a complete disclosure to a sphere of total individuality. Experience of play (of multiplayer game) is an shared event, created in dialogue not only with the game played, but other players played with, as Marinka Copier (2005) stresses. These create the space of possibilities, the very context itself, in addition to what residues outside of play, namely the past and the tentative future of the "I" not the player, and the "society" outside of the play. To negotiate, to affirm, to redraw the lines of the play is what happens not only constantly but it is what happens in relation to all the possible others (including the self) and not in a vacuum. Thus it is not only the game then

what creates the boundaries of the play, but the metaphorical schoolbags do redraw the limits of the magic circle, while not having the full autonomy of doing this.

1.1 Structure of the research paper

The data of the research consists of two layers. Firstly I have made use of all my years as a player and of the experiences which have come with that. Secondly, more focused field research period, which lasted approximately four months during the summer and fall of 2013, accommodated more methodologically solid data gathering period. During those four months I continued playing World of Warcraft as I had played if before, but simultaneously kept collecting data from the game and from the act and sensation of the play. The data collection method has been autoethnographic and thus my own experience has been the starting point of the research, but at no point has the voice of the other been silenced or closed out. The reading of the data has been phenomenological. I discuss these points more in the chapter two: Method, methodology, and research strategy.

Due to the autoethnographical nature and the phenomenological premises of the research, I have struggled with the structure of the research paper, as throughout the research the analysis conducted was by its nature that of double. On the one hand we have the analysis of the play-experience, what it is constituted of and where does it takes place (the limits of the magic circle). This is to an extent a particular to a player and social surroundings where the play comes into to being. On the other hand we have the game itself, World of Warcraft, which for the player is always unique, experienced as such as the decisions the player makes or contexts the player encounters and creates are not universally shared, but which simultaneously has the quality of being something which is similar for all the players, at least

as long as we discuss the form instead of the function. Hence there is analysis of the game and its form and of the spatial and temporal boundaries it has or it suggest.

This twofold analysis of the experience and of the game also required different levels of closeness with the object studied, and was, when conducted, never linear by its nature, but instead spatial and layered. The stretching between fluidity of the play and the fixed form of the game in order to captivate what produces the experience of the play has created somewhat unorthodox structure of a research paper where the analysis and reflection are never far from the dialogical action undertaken with the theories.

Moreover, the research position, where the researcher is embedded to the object of the study, requires analysis which takes place in two locations, in and out so to say. Throughout this movement the data has the commanding voice. It is through the data the theories have been read, accepted, and brought into synthesis. The chapter four concentrates on the theoretical framework and contains traces of analyses throughout it, especially while discussing about magic circle. The attempt is first show that an alternative theory or synthesis of theories is needed, before moving further. Besides this, I have tried to situate data and its analyses to chapter five, which is fully concentrated on data and analysis. At the end of the research paper I have included an appendix which contains the explanations of the World of Warcraft related terms used throughout the paper.
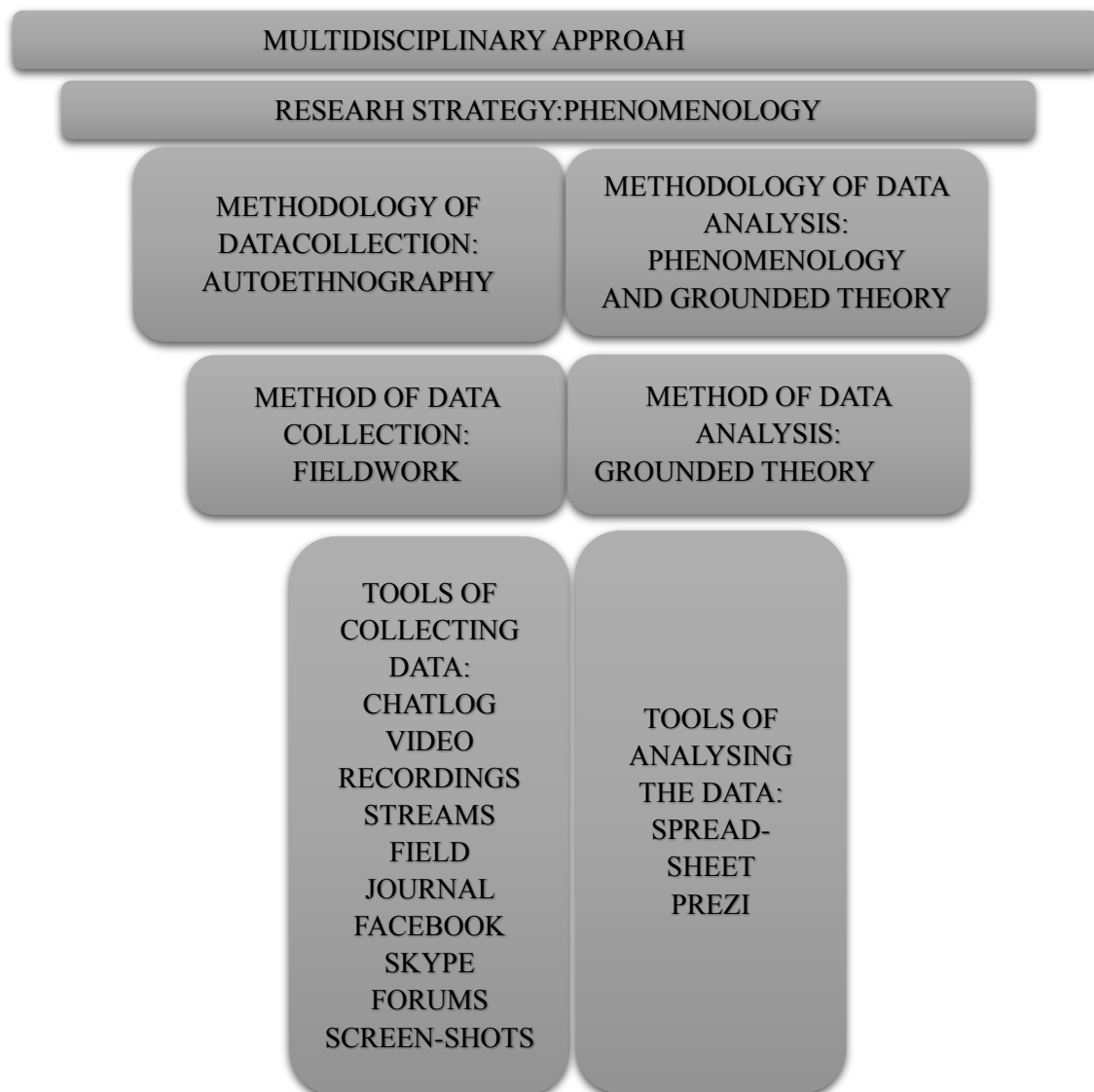
2. Research strategy, methodology and method

When studying something as elusive and evasive as an experience or phenomenon, an additional scrutiny of the methodology and the topic of study is strongly called for. Thus to think how the experience of play can be studied it is needed to start by thinking what play itself is.

Play is, first of all, an activity which requires participation. Play is never merely watched or merely observed by its players but it is always *played* and thus it requires action and "being there". Consequently it is located to the point of action instead of to the point of view, as Britta Neitzel describes it (2005). This participatory quality of play has its implications. Player is never just the passive viewer of the play but always an active creator of the play. Thus when we play a game we modify the course of our play by doing decisions and acting upon them. The play is never the same and never following one pre-established path. Instead, play is not only action, but it is interaction and as Hans-Georg Gadamer defines it, never fully realized without its players (1975/2004).

As the player becomes not only a participator in the play, but also a (co-)creator of the play, play never has fully established form (even though games do). Instead, play event is always a unique undertaking to greater or lesser extent, and can never be repeated as the same as it has been before. Thus play is always open and changing, even if a game contains it fixed form through the rules it has. This creates a relationship between the researcher and that what is researched which is never fully and solely observatory but at prima facie existential by its nature. The experience has been there, it has been experienced, it is not a linguistic construction even if it is through linguistic means we later on approach it, refer to it, and

classify it. But "I was there" contains a value which cannot be negotiated away.

These premises adopted here have consequences for the data collection, method, and methodology of the study. These consequences have guided me in the process of selecting the methods and the methodology. In the following sections I will discuss about the research strategy, methodology of the data-collection, method of the data collection, methodology of data-analysis, method of the data-analysis and the ethical questions related to research and its topic and at the end of the chapter I will introduce the research questions. Through the topics discussed also the researcher position is specified and clarified.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROAH	
RESEARH STRATEGY:PHENOMENOLOGY	
METHODOLOGY OF DATACOLLECTION: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY	METHODOLOGY OF DATA ANALYSIS: PHENOMENOLOGY AND GROUNDED THEORY
METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION: FIELDWORK	METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS: GROUNDED THEORY
TOOLS OF COLLECTING DATA: CHATLOG VIDEO RECORDINGS STREAMS FIELD JOURNAL FACEBOOK SKYPE FORUMS SCREEN-SHOTS	TOOLS OF ANALYSING THE DATA: SPREAD-SHEET PREZI

Picture 1: Map of the research strategy, method, methodology

2.1 Research strategy

The approach to the topic throughout the research has been multidisciplinary, thus not only the tradition of the games studies has been included, but when deemed necessary or fruitful also voices from other disciplines have been brought up respectively. This multidisciplinary approach has been chosen as games and play themselves are multidisciplinary to the core, or as Joost Raaessens (2006) defines them, containing multiple facets which cannot be understood without the use of multiple disciplines.

As the cornerstone for the research strategy I have used phenomenology. The relationship of phenomenology to the research is twofold. It demonstrates itself on the premises of the study and it has been the methodology of the data-analysis. The understanding of the world and how it appears to us has been first of all phenomenological, even when other methods of data analysis have been applied and other theoretical approaches accommodated.

Consequently, I will next discuss briefly about the phenomenological premises on which the research is built upon and especially the influence they have had to the research position, and then proceed to demonstrate how phenomenology, while being originally a philosophical school of thought, can be used in the study of cultural objects.

2.1.1 The phenomenological premises

According to David Carr phenomenology is a philosophical tradition where certain statements about how things are (and how they appear to us) re-occur with variations more than it is one unified theory (1985). Carr notes that while phenomenological approaches are

currently used in multiple disciplines, originally it is a philosophical school of thought which was interested in both metaphysics and epistemology and consequently made claims on the nature of the both. Historically the phenomenological tradition dates back to Edmund Husserl and to his philosophical inquiries, taking place in the 19th and 20th century (1985).

Edmund Husserl maintained that we are always having an intention towards objects in our mind and the conditions in which objects come into being for us do not have independent existence from our mind (1939). Thus our relationship with objects is never neutral nor fully objective but our relationship to the object is always only in existence in relation to our position. Consequently, Husserl concluded, we are not able to see objects past this relationship as the relationship itself is part of the object for us (Carr, 1985). Husserl introduced the method of ”bracketing” or “phenomenological reduction” as a tentative solution for this problem. The method of bracketing suggests that we should approach the objects of our intention by setting them inside metaphorical brackets, thus withhold our natural, every day, taken-for-granted attitude towards them, in other words the very relationship we have with them. By doing this, the aim is to arrive to the essence of the object, to the state where our conception of the object would be purified from our pre-existing and taken-for- granted notions about it, from the very conditions with which it was in a first place intended with (Husserl, 1939).

But this solution was only partial. Carr (1985) notes that when Husserl set the process of intending itself under the notion of bracketing, he was forced to come to the conclusion that one cannot arrive to the essence of intending but instead the person bracketing the intending would just create new layer of intending. Carr (1985) points out that Husserl's own conclusion did not move Husserl towards purely relativist view of knowledge, but it did made

him recognize the intersubjevctivity of our (everyday) knowledge and position science to be the field where quasi-objective knowledge could be obtained. Husserl remained anti-relativist in his view on the epistemological matters.

 As Carr (1985) points out, it was the philosophers who succeeded Husserl, mainly Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hans-George Gadamer, who would more strongly continue exploring the intersubjective vein and its implications. This amounted to different variations inside the phenomenological school.

In "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations" Susann M. Laverty (2003) draws a line between hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology by using the differences which can be found by comparing the works of Husserl to the works Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer as the demarcation line between the two traditions. Even though Laverty's reading of Husserl mostly concentrates to his earlier thinking, and thus stresses the position Husserl took before his conclusions on the nature of intending, arguably the line she draws is valid in regards to different traditions which followed. Thus on the one hand we have phenomenology which occupies the plane of thought where the action of bracketing happens outside the nexus of action, outside of that what it is bracketed. Ideally then we have process which aims to purify that what has been bracketed from all what is taken-from-granted around it, until the bracketer comes to the essence of the thing bracketed. And on the other hand we have hermeneutic phenomenology.

Carr (1985) discusses a similar distinction that Laverty makes (even though he does not use terms phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology) by noting that while Husserl

continued to maintain that science can offer us a quasi-objective knowledge, those succeeding

him, especially Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, would put significant weight on

intersubjectivity, arguing that our position is always a situated position, and there is no way

out from this situation – at best personal "accent" can be acquired in the midst of

intersubjective thought and beyond this intersubjectivity the object itself cannot be marked as

separated entity (or arrived to through different points of views). This is in par with the

hermeneutic phenomenology, in which Gadamer has been especially influential, according to

Laverty (2003).

Laverty (2003) discusses the consequences of intersubjectivity for the position of the

researcher. If we take seriously the claim of intesubjectivity (as hermeneutic phenomenology

does), we also have to recognize the researcher as part of the net of meanings constructing the

object. Thus one never approaches an object of study with an empty mindset in which

phenomenological reduction resulting to the essences of things would be possible, but one

brings with him his pre-existing thoughts and assumptions, adding them to the layer of

intending. The object studied is actually this relation. Thus, and this is what Gadamer

(1975/2004) sets weight on, it is the researcher's responsibility to recognize these

assumptions and build them into the discourse of the study itself, all while approaching the

topic with awareness of one's own position and accepting that the "point from nowhere" it is

never achievable nor even desired as such.

These are the premises which are held throughout the research. Adopting this premises also

guided me in choosing autoethnography as my method of data collection, for the following

reasons. Firstly, as it is so that as a player I am already intimately embedded in the instance I

study, it is also so that I carry a number of preconceived notions of that what I study. Hence

the aim is to recognize my position, take its implications seriously and while conducting the research to attempt not solely to set aside and on hold the preconceived notions I have as Husserl would have suggested, but also to attempt to deconstruct them and recognize their inevitable weight in my relation to the object studied, relation which I can never escape. Secondly, in order to study experience of something we need to obtain the first-hand experience of this something, in order to approach the phenomenon studied not solely as linguistic construction. Lastly, as part of the group of which plays, I have also taken to discuss the play in terms of the playing community and part of my playing identity is constructed in relation to that, making it thus so that it is not separated sphere of its own, upon which I am reflecting, but it is lived and constructed – part of the net of meanings created by the us the players I am part of.

2.1.2 Phenomenology in the study of cultural objects

Michael T. Carroll, Chris Nagel, and Eddie Tafoya (2000) advocate the use of phenomenology for the study of cultural objects basing this mainly on two aspects. Firstly they point out that phenomenology advocates the study of meaning of cultural objects rather than assuming it or taking at face value, and secondly they point out that the radically anti-ideological nature of phenomenology allows us to look into processes through which "meaning in general is created – that is, how things come to be what they are for us" (p.9) instead of focusing to address how things currently are.

This does mean we are interested also how things are, or rather to say how they appear. And to understand how things appear for given beings, we need to understand their life-worlds as the things do not have independent existence from that. Christian Beyer (2013) discusses

Husserl's conceptualization of life-world and notes that it refers to the experienced world of the group or community, both on the level of beliefs and socio-cultural constructions. The life-worlds indicate what kind of expectation of the group has of the future, to what kind of patters the group divides the world and how the group constitutes objects from perceptions (2013). The life-worlds can be more global (all Europeans) or local (all Finns).

Don Ihde discusses life-worlds in relation to the virtual spaces. He advocates what he calls post-phenomenology, a strand of phenomenology which takes seriously contributions of post-structuralism and Jacques Derrida (Ihde 1993, 2002).Ihde notes that while studying virtual locations and entities it is important to keep in mind that while we can demarcate something as real- not real (virtual) with materialistic basis, for the experiencer the virtual life-worlds can be and are experienced as real (Ihde, 1993). Consequently, this life-world of the experiencer, while not taken for granted but set under scrutiny as how it comes about, is respected throughout the research, with an actual interested how it is constituted and becomes to be in existence, instead of entangling ourselves into discussions of the conceptual pair real – unreal. This being the case, when terms real-world or real-life are used in this research paper, they refer to what is socially negotiated to be as real, as every day, in contrast to the play. There is no take on the ontological status of real included (except that what the phenomenological premises of the thesis entail). This also demarcates this work as work of cultural studies and not that of philosophy.

Occasionally in this research paper the life-world constructed by the (community) of players playing World of Warcraft is discussed as a space of play or playspace. This concept is different from the Husserlian conceptualization of the life-world by being more centered around the playspace of an individual, while this space itself is never solely or totally

individualized. Moreover, it is concentrated on that what happens around and in relation to the play. In the analysis and results sections the construction of the concept in relation to the data and theories is fully opened.

2.2 Approach to data-collection

I have chosen autoethnography as my data collection methodology, mainly due to my own position as a player. As I indicated in the introduction I have been playing World of Warcraft for over eight years now and this creates a position where I am not approaching the phenomenon to be studied as an outsider or as someone entering a pre-establish context and becoming part of it, but as someone who has been there for long, has experienced it beforehand, and does identifies strongly with this. Consequently, it is safe to argue that while I am approaching the topic as researcher, I am simultaneously most certainly a World of Warcraft player - as I have been for long. This sets on me a double role of player-researcher, creating a tension between being in and moving out, tension which becomes the whole focus of the research to an extent: "In traditional ethnography the researcher studies a group of people that are in some way estranged, and typically involves 'breaking in'. In contrast, self-ethnography involves the study of the researcher's own group; a group in which the researcher is an established participant." (Eriksson, 2010 p. 91- 92). Thus the task of the player-researcher becomes to break out, to widen her horizon, to include more to her life-world and to her reflections, to marry together multiplicity of the worlds.

As a long-term player I carry a pre-established attitude towards the game and the play with me, this attitude being colored by all that which is human: preconceptions, ideas, emotions, affections, experiences. This "having been there" creates a need to scrutiny my own attitude

during the process of the research. To scrutiny is to ensure that I remain unaware of none, ideally, few, realistically.

Throughout the research it has been mainly the play experience itself and its frames which I have been studying, thus not the playing community nor merely how the playing community discusses about the game and play. And yet, it is often through the utterances of the other players and through my own utterances that the frames of the play-experience can be detected and analyzed. While the focus has been on the play experience itself, experience (lived, immediate) is something to which we can only have an access through secondary sources and through reflection, and which we can only talk about through what refers to it, and by what it is constituted of.

I have approached autoethnography with the premise that the other is never excluded as the line between self and the other cannot be always firmly established. Moreover, World of Warcract is a multiplayer game and it is very rare, if not even impossible, that one would play the given game alone, as far as we take alone to mean in isolation, not being affected by the others. This being the case, my experience of the play and the frames of the play are molded, affected, narrated, constructed together, and ultimately enabled by other players. Furthermore, game is always accessed through the act of play. Game to be experienced it needs to played and the interactive quality of games makes it so that we need to become participant at least in the act of play. Thus, even if we try to estrange ourselves from rest of the players or playing community in a hope of maintaining an outsider position, to the play itself we are never outsiders.

2.2.1 Autoethnography

In the context of this research I have adopted quite a wide understanding of autoethnography. This is not unusual. Caroryn Ellis and Laura L. Ellingson (2008) describe autoetnography as a method which accommodates itself under multiple approaches and ways to engage with the research topics and research materials. Consequently, it is hard, if not even impossible, to pin down one way or the correct way of doing autoethnography or to construct one overarching definition of what autoethnography is. Regardless of that, some tendencies which mark the work as autoethnographical can be found. Firstly, autoethnography is interested of the experience of the author or the researcher herself and implies that we can learn something through this experience. Secondly, it holds that there is value in this subjective position, setting itself thus against the demand of the absolute objectivity. Thirdly, it states that from the experience we can also learn something beyond the accounted experience itself and thus there is a possibility of generalization from the particulars (Anderson 2006).

Leon Anderson (2006) describes this last condition to be the goal of analytical autoetnography. For Anderson the aim of the research is not, or it should not be, solely to unveil the experience of the researcher and understand her personal narrative and what it entails, but through the experience and the account of it the researcher should try to understand how larger themes and tendencies can be revealed. According to Anderson this is what separates analytical autoethnography from evocative autoethnography, together with the permissiveness of analytical autoethnography to bring in to the research voices of the others next to the narrative of the author (2006). It is in these two respects this research follows rather analytical autoetnography than evocative autoetnography: While the narrative form of my accounted experience can still be seen, I have consciously used multiple forms of data

collection and embraced the dialogue and communication with the other players. Another deviation from evocative autoethnography is the focus on the practices and the action in the research. Together with the reflective journal entries considerably high amount of the data is focused on the way players (including the researcher) act and express themselves during the play.

In practical terms these methodological premises entail that throughout the four months of data collection I have used multiple tools to capture the data in multiple formats and thus have not relied solely on reflective journal entries. Also my focus has been to collect data from the act of play where I am involved with other players, not solely to study my accounts from the acts of play.

2.2.2 Method and tools of data collection

Throughout the field research period I have used multiple tools to accommodate the data collection and collected data in multiple formats. I will now briefly present them and discuss about them. I will also address the difficulties and challenges faced during the data gathering period.

In terms of quantity the most data I have gathered is through chatlogs. Chatlog is a function embedded to World of Warcraft and it allows the player to save all the in-game text chat to logs. This function is available for all the players and can be activated simply by typing "/chatlog" to in-game chat window. Repeating the command will stop the chat logging. The logged chat can be found from the World of Warcraft file folder, under the file "Chatlogs".

During my field research period I logged around 10 000 pages of chat. While the amount of chat logged may sound substantially high, most of the chat logged and saved has not been used in the research as it has not been visible to me during the play[3] and using it might not have been methodologically solid.

The second method of data gathering I have used has been the recordings of my own gameplay. I have around five hours of recorded gameplay saved. The most notable challenge with this data collection method has been the technical demands recording your own gameplay sets to your computer. The recorded movies are large files, and I had to stop the recording frequently while playing, in order to compress the files so that my computer would continue functioning while playing. This amounted to experience of play which is constantly disturbed by factors outside of the play, collapsing so the sense of play. Furthermore, when I played with the other players while recording my play, I ran the risk that my technical issues would amount to hinder or break their play experience as well. Thus at the end I did a very moderate amount of recording of my own game-play. When I did record it, I used the program called Fraps for it.

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[3] While playing the game the chat window appears on the left-hand side of the screen, by default at the down corner (player can move it if she wishes show, and get all kind of different addons to change it looks as well). There are multiple types of chat channels displayed in the chat window: the Guild chat (given player is in a guild), the officer chat (given the player is an officer or the guild master in a guild which she is in), the party chat (given player is in a party), the whisper chat (when whisper is received), the raid chat (given player is in raid), the local defence chat, the trade chat (given player is in one of the in-game capitals), the general chat (given player is one of the in-game capitals), the looking for players chat (given player is one of the in-game capitals), the battleground chat (given player is in a batteground), battle.tag related chats, which allow player to talk with players who in her friend's list, and yell and say which are dependent on the proximity of other players who are performing the yell or say function. Moreover, players can create additional channels and conversations between each other and there are number of addons available which can further change the appearance of the chat-channels. By default all of these chats appear in one window and I use to have them like this as well. I modified this quite in the beginning of the field research period, when I (in the game) migrated to another in-game server (World of Warcraft is divided to multiple servers in order to accommodate the massive amount of players) which was hugely more populated than my previous one. Consequently, the massive amount of population made all the chat channels much more busy and thus after I migrated I divided almost all the chat channels in their own windows, mainly only keeping track of party chat, raid chat, battleground chat, whisper chat and guild chat. I would only look trade chat and general chat, for instance, when I would be posting on them. Nevertheless, the tool I used recoding chats (chatlog) records all the chats regardless if they are visible for me or not. Thus during the data analysis phase I have only taken account the chats that I know have been visible for me during the activity of play.

The third data source from the game have been the live-streams. Live-streams are real-time streamed game-play and are usually displayed in some channel or website on the Internet. The most popular channel for displaying World of Warcraft streams is the twitch.tv[4]. The streams which I used as part of my data are not my own, hence the point of view they offer to the play are from one of my co-player. Nevertheless, I have always been included in the act of play, being so able to establish the condition "I was there".

Again, technical demands stopped me to do the streaming myself. As live-streams are immediately uploaded online, they do, while not demanding the same massive amount of free memory space that fraps and recordings do, demand sufficiently high internet connection upload speed. Unfortunately my connection does not meet those requirements and due to the building I am living in, I was not able to get faster connection. I have around 70 hours of streams saved. Due to technical difficulties around 40 hours of the stream was without sound and I have mainly discharged them and used the ones where the sound file has not been corrupted.

In addition to chatlogs, recorded game-play, and streams, I have number of screenshots from the game as part of my data. There has not been any strict rule when I have taken a screenshot of an event and when not: Mainly the screenshots are from events which stand out from the ordinary (our rated battleground team reaches 2000 rating or there is something interesting In the game-world itself) and events I wish to remember (there is interesting discussion between me and another player).

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[4] The streams that I am using as part my data have been displayed on one of the twitch.tv channels, www.twitch.tv/pandrex, even though they are no longer accessible there due to website changes.

I addition to the data collected from the game, I have also collected data from instances which have been part of the play-experience or instrumental for facilitating the act of play[5]. I have included large number of online forum posts to my data. These posts are from my World of Warcraft guild's online forums, and they are mainly, but by no means solely, written by me. Secondly, I also have considerable amount of skype chats and Facebook chats added to my data. In these chats I usually either discuss about the game with other players or communicate with other players while playing the game. The one instance which I, in retrospect, should have collected data from as well, but I did not, is TeamSpeak.

TeamSpeak is a voice-over-internet-protocol (VOIP) software released in 2001. I mainly use TeamSpeak for the voice communication with other players while playing. It is quite a recognizable part of my play experience as almost always when playing the game, I am also using TeamSpeak. This part of the experience has been recorded together with streams and my own recorded gameplay but not as an individual instance of its own. It may be so that I was hesitant to choose to record the TeamSpeak activity as other players might have experienced this as uncomfortable as without the recording of the game the focus might have seem to been in what is said in TeamSpeak. I have, while constantly being open about my research role while playing, done my best not to let this intertwine my own experience of the play or other players' experience of the play. I will return to this topic in the section where I address the question of research ethics.

The last source of data has been my own research journal entries, notes, and reflections. These have not followed any strict format. I have around 30 pages of journal entries as word

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[5] Live streams actually fall into bit ambiguous spot here: While the action they display is clearly from the game, there are other elements as well: Sometimes streamer includes video from his web cam to be part of the streamer, so the viewers can see him. Also sometimes he might stop streaming, and show layout he has chosen instead. So strictly speaking streams are not data directly from the game, but belong to the extended area of play.

documents. In these entries I have reflected on play or accounted for events which I have thought are worth of taking note of. In addition I have used Prezi presentation program where I have maintained a mind-map throughout the research. There I have written observations about events of the play and about the theories, respectively. I also have not hesitated to look back to some of my old reflections of the topic if this has been deemed as beneficial. These contain old notes and scribbles, some old journal entries, my bachelor thesis, the original research prospectus for the study in hand, and some other course papers throughout my University years. In addition, as I have continued playing the game as before, I have also in odd occasions used data which has been acquired after the research-period had officially ended: During the revision of theories and data-analysis new aspects in relation to the topic have constantly unveiled and consequently made me to pay attention to them while playing World of Warcraft. I have, naturally, made sure that I follow the same ethical guidelines which I have applied during the official field research period.

During the field research period I played World of Warcraft approximately from two to four hours per day, around four to five days per week. This is in par to my normal gaming time even while not conducting a research. I made no visible changes to my way of playing the game during the research period, apart from the fact that I used the data collection tools, took notes, and informed the other players of my research when I deemed it to be needed and appropriate. Other than those actions I continued playing the game as I had played it before the research.

2.3 Data Analysis

In the data analysis I have applied multiple methods. I have loosely followed the grounded

theory in the organization and the coding of the data. This has greatly helped me to give the data more structure. The methodology of the data analysis has been phenomenology and together with this the method of bracketing, withholding my taken-for-granted or initial attitude towards the research topic. I have discussed the role of the phenomenology in this research already above and will next discuss the somewhat unlikely marriage of grounded theory and autoethnography, after which I will proceed to describe how the grounded theory has been applied in the research.

Anderson (2006) advocates grounded theory to be used together with analytical autoethnography, as it offers a good structure for the analysis while simultaneously allowing for the autoethnographical form of the data. While grounded theory has been beneficial in offering me insights as to how to structure my data, I have always given the primacy to the data itself and to whatever helps me to make most sense of the data, thus preferring the function over the form. It is worth of noting that this approach does not contradict the premises of the grounded theory. If we look at the original formulation of grounded theory by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss from the 1967, we see that grounded theory was advocated as a flexible method of data-analysis where the data has the primacy over the rigidity of the form. It was only later that grounded theory gained more rigid formats in some of its variation, after the two inventors of the theory came to disagree of its premises (see: Goulding, 1999).

In this research the use of grounded theory has been visible mainly in the process of the classification and the coding of the data. I have looked into the different aspects of the data in order to analyze how (i) the frames of play are constituted for the player in relation to the events in the game and other players, and consequently (ii) how this has been discussed

between players during the act of play and outside of it and (iii) what references have been used. This has been in order to analyze how we the players address the boundaries of play through inclusion and exclusion during the play and around the play, and how I as a player frame and define the boundaries of the space of the play in the interaction with the game and with the other players. Moreover, I have looked in the actual or virtual spaces hosting this interaction.

For the organization of data I have used spreadsheet and prezi, respectively. Due to the rather massive amount of data I gathered, not all the data has been used for this research. At the end around 5000 pages of chatlog, 30 hours of streams, 20 forum posts, few facebook posts, two hours of recorded gameplay, and around 40 pages of field journals and reflections sufficed as data being actually used in this research.

2.4 Research ethics

I have divided the ethical considerations into three categories: (i) The ethical questions in relation to informants and others who were affected by the research; (ii) the ethical questions related with the validity of research process; and (iii) the ethical questions related with the importance of information produced by the research. This division follows loosely the work of Juhani Pietarinen (2009).

While the data collection has mainly been autoethographical, the other has never been excluded. Consequently, there have been other informants than just the researcher present. I have informed the other informants, thus the other players, about the research taking place by posting to our guild forum's about the research and what it entails, and by asking permission

for the recordings. Moreover, I have withheld using the names of the players in this research

report, unless they have indicated they do not mind their name to be used. I have applied this

same policy also in regard the in-game names, as I deem that the online-identity is worth as

great protection of privacy as any other identity, especially because in many cases those two

are not clearly separated.

The second category in relation to ethical questions is concerned of the processes through

which the information is gathered and analyzed (Pietarinen, 2009). It asks the question of the

scientific and academic validity of these processes. I have attempted to justify my position

through the phenomenological research strategy I have adopted and by the premises it holds.

I have followed the principle of transparency in both the data collection and the data analysis

and I have aimed to open up the ways both were conducted and the reasons why certain

approaches were chosen.

The third category addressed here is interested in the importance and value of the information

produced by the research. I follow here, again, Pietarinen (2009) who reflects in his paper

Jürgen Habermas' threefold division of nature of scientific information produced – practical,

technical, and emancipatory (see: Habermas 1971) and adds himself to this division one more

category, that of the metaphysical. In this research the main importance is on practical,

emancipatory, and metaphysical domains of knowledge. The knowledge produced is practical

as it aims to produce more information about the experience of digital play and its positioning

in the cultural and scientific frames; it is emancipatory as it aims to provide different ways of

discussing the digital play and our understanding of the digital play; and it is metaphysical as

it comments on the ontological, metaphysical, and epistemological questions by having an

underlying argumentation about the how world is (or appears to us) and how can we gain

knowledge about it carried throughout the research. These questions have been especially influential when I was planning the research. Moreover, while I make claims about our experience of play, I make claim about our experience in general. We sometimes underestimate the value of games as our possible "metaphysical laboratories", a term Michael Heim uses to describe virtual worlds (1993). Through the study of play and games we can also gain understanding not only about the two of them, but also about how temporal and spatial frames in general affect our experience and what this can mean in relation to our everyday experience of the world and what we frame as the reality

2.5 Research questions

1. What is the relationship of magic circle to the play of World of Warcraft?
2. What are the temporal and spatial frames of the play while playing World of Warcraft?
2.1 Are they limited to the game-world or extend beyond it?
3. How much the game, its mechanics and is design effects to the frames?
4. How is the playspace constructed?

As often the case is with studies like this, ones of qualitative nature having their starting point on a haunch of something, the questions have been formulated and re-formulated again during the research. When I worked on the research prospectus (which now has become part of the data) and consequently started the research, I had no clear set of research questions, but essentially collection of description of my own play and sensations which had accompanied the play experience.

3. World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft (Blizzard entertainment, 2004), or WoW as it mainly referred as, is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game which has been up and running for almost ten years now. World of Warcraft was released by Blizzard Entertainment in November 2004 and ever since its release has enjoyed a rather large player base, having had up to 12 million active subscribers on its peak year 2010. In the third quarter of 2014 it had around 7,5 million subscribers (The Statistics Portal, 2015). In 2007 it was the most popular massively multiplayer online game in existence (Corneliussen & Rettberg 2008). World of Warcraft requires its players to buy the game, subscribe to the game, and pay a monthly fee in order to have an active account, which consequently allows the players an access to the game-world.

3.1 The world of World of Warcraft

The game-world of World of Warcraft is a persistent one, hence it continues existing regardless of player's involvement to it. Moreover, it has additional qualities which create a sense of worldliness to it: Its own economy, its own culture and its own history. As such it works not only as a game(-world) but as an avenue of events, which can be that of multitude, and not necessarily predetermined (as far as they are undertaken by the players) nor advancing in a linear manner. Moreover, unlike many games, World of Warcraft has no clear ending and is continuously growing through new expansions.

The world of World of Warcraft is also a quasi-open world. As such, it imposes certain amount of restrictions over the player and her actions, but the player also has a significant degree of freedom in her play. In her conference presentation in 2014 Crossroads Julie Rak

notes that games like Minecraft (Mojang AB, 2009) belong clearly to the category of open

world games, while World of Warcraft comes to be so after the player has played the game

long enough (2014). Games like Minecraft present the player almost infinite ways of playing

the game by offering the player a (multitude) of worlds which are modifiable and fluid,

restraining to suggest the path the player ought to undertake. Instead player negotiates the

directions with oneself and between her and the other players, inside and outside of the game.

This negotiation happens in the act of play but also in different forms of metacommunication:

Multitude of videos in Youtube display ways of playing Minecraft and offer players

directions and then the players themselves implement these directions to the rules of the game

by hosting their own Minecraft servers which differ from each other. The game-world of

World of Warcraft, on the other hand, contains a bit more limitations: There is a stronger

sense of storyline, especially in the beginning of the play, and the world itself is not very

interactive. As Espen Aarseth (2008) describes it, the world of the World of Warcraft is a

hollow, almost as a multicolored shelf, as to the game-world itself player cannot make lasting

changes. Instead the world appears almost as a background for the player. One can contrast

this to Minecraft which as a world is almost infinitely modifiable, the degree dependent on

the server player plays at. Regardless, there is plenty of openness in World of Warcraft. Even

if the world keeps returning to its original state again and again and allows little game-world

player interaction, players who inhabit the world modify the act of play through addons,

guilds, social relations and the like, and do not necessarily follow any pre-established path in

their play. Miquel Sicart describes this as follows: "We´re not just players of World of

Warcraft, we are somewhat citizens of Azeroth…Being in a game-world like Azeroth is being

ethical and political entity that is interested in playing, but also in creating social networks

and upholding those values that, as players, we want to live by". (Sicart, 2009)

The game-world on of World of Warcraft is constituted from four different continents, and additional planet (Outland). The old or the traditional game-world, containing the continents, is called Azeroth. Moreover, the continents (and planet) have zones of their own. The zones vary quite greatly from each other, and you have zones filled with snow, sometimes peculiarly just next green and forestry areas. Yet the graphical style of the zones connects them together. In addition to the main game-world, there is also number of instances. Instances can be either the dungeons, raids, battlegrounds, pet battles, or arenas. They are area temporally and spatially separated from rest of the game-world and occasionally contain their own storylines. The main narrative of the game and the game-mechanics tie the instances to be a coherent part of the game.

The lore of World of Warcraft and the fictional universe is largely inherited from the preceding games of Warcraft franchise from Blizzard Entertainment, Warcraft I (1994), Warcraft II (1995), and Warcraft III (2002). The universe of World of Warcraft inhabited by orcs, trolls, elves, and the kind, and the dragons and other magical creatures roam freely in Azeroth and Outland. The narrative of the game, which supports the fantasy theme, is to an extent embedded to the game and can be followed by watching the in-game movie cut scenes, by reading NPCs (non-player characters) accounts, following the storylines through the quests and different dungeons and raids, and by absorbing cues from the environment. The consistent theme of the narrative is the war between two factions, Horde and Alliance, but each new expansion introduces new narrative elements and storylines to the game.

3.2 Playing World of Warcraft

When player starts playing World of Warcraft she creates a character to play. A character, perceived from third person perspective, is an access point to the game-world and the point through which the game-world is experienced. The character determines the location of the interface in the game-world almost throughout the game[6]. While making a character player can choose between two factions (Alliance and Horde), which are in a seemingly eternal war against each other, between 13 playable races and between 10 classes. The classes have differently roles the fill in the game. They can be either damage dealers[7] or healers or tanks. In addition some of the classes are so-called hybrid classes, which means that more than one role can be chosen to be played with them: For instance player choosing to play druid class can occupy any of the before mentioned three roles[8]. In addition to the factors determined by the game-mechanics, each race and class has their own story which usually unveils through the starting quests.

While creating the character player also creates it appearance (face, hair, and so on), and chooses the gender and the name of the character. After this process is completed, player can finally log in to the game-world itself. The first task for the player is to level the character by gaining experience points. The task rewarding the player with experience, most commonly quests, can be, depending on their nature, completed either alone or only in co-operation with other players.

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[6] Few exceptions to this occur.

[7] Damage dealers can be further divided to melee and casters or ranged where melee fights on the close proximity of the enemy and the ranged in further away.

[8] The player cannot occupy these roles efficiently simultaneously: Player has to choose from either three or four different specializations (usually called specs) of which only one can be active at the time. Druids for instance have four specializations, one which is healer, one which is tank, one which is melee damage dealer, and one which is ranged damage dealer.

The need for co-operation comes especially visible once the player reaches the max level in the game and wishes to participate to the end-game content. End-game content no longer rewards the player with experience point, as there is no longer an option of gaining levels, but instead players gain better gear, gold, and possible reputation with different factions. All these accommodate the player to become better, stronger and advance further in the game, this in turn unlocking new ways to play the game. At the max level most of the activities require co-operation amongst the players as their difficulty level stops player completing them alone. Especially raids, rated battlegrounds and arenas are activities participated together with other players.

Raids are instances temporally separated from rest of the game-world and have high-level "bosses" (mobs with massive amount of health-points and more complicated mechanics than normal mobs) for players to kill. In the raids players fight against the computer controlled characters and they are labelled as PvE (player versus environment) activity. Individual raid instance can take up to several months to complete and groups working together towards this goal can be either guild groups, which means that the players belong in the same guild in the game, or they can be pick-up groups, which means that players playing together might not even know each other beforehand.

Guilds play a prominent role in World of Warcraft. They are part of creating the social environment for the players and also are instrumental in completing difficult tasks together by enabling an environment of commonly agreed rules of behavior. Guilds also facilitate establishment of raid groups which contain the same players for longer periods of time and often work as the basis for the long lasting player communities.

The guilds are established by the players and they are part of the game-mechanics. When establishing a guild player goes to NPC (non-player character) called guild master and with 10 signatures from different players can create a guild. One character can belong to one guild only. In the beginning guild is always level 1 and when the players belonging to the guild do different activities, it gains levels. The maximum level for a guild is 24.

Belonging to a guild has a number of benefits for the player. For instance guild perks allow obtaining greater rewards from quests and dungeons and faster levelling of the character. In addition the leader of the guild (guild master) can add more benefits for the guild members, for instance by allowing guild bank repairs which allow the members to use certain amount of gold (in-game currency) from the guild bank to repair their broken gear. In addition to the material rewards, belonging to guild can also offer access to activities it organizes and allow the player feel of being part of something bigger than herself. The game mechanics encourage guilds to have rather hierarchical structures as only one character can be the guild master and thus the leader of the guild. Under the guild master there are seven different hierarchies which can be named. The guild master can then decide how much power each of these hierarchies have and to which level hierarchy any given member belongs.

There are many types of guilds in the World of Warcraft. Some of them are concentrated on PvP (player versus player) activities, some are concentrated on PvE activities, and some offer both PvE and PvP activities to their members. Moreover, some guild might be solely "social" guilds, in which case they do not necessarily organize any prescheduled activities to theirs members. Also the age of the guilds varies. Some guilds have existed since the beginning of times, thus they were created very soon after World of Warcraft was released and some are very young and might have a short life spam. Guild also impose different kind of restrictions

and requirements to their members and prospective members: There are guilds which only accept people over eighteen years of age, some only accept people talking certain language, and some require certain amount of gear and experience from the new members.

Other common end-game activities next to raids in World of Warcraft are rated battlegrounds and arenas. They are PvP activity and differ from the PvE mainly by the value that players no longer combats against computer controlled characters, but against each other. In addition to battlegrounds and arenas, which are temporally and spatially disconnected from the rest of the game-world, the game-world also hosts PvP areas which are areas temporally part of the game-world and have PvP related tasks in them

In arenas 2-5 players engage against a team of same size to a battle for survival and the team which has the last man standing, wins. In battlegrounds 10 to 40 players engage against group of the same size from other faction in a battle of winning and survival. Depending on battleground there are different aims to be achieved, next to staying alive and killing the opponent players. The tasks are usually related to holding control points or capturing enemy flags or carts in order to gain more points. The team which gains more points through completing the battleground specific objectives wins. Rated battlegrounds are version of battlegrounds where there can be only 10 players against other 10 players and the team has to be readymade in order player to enter to the battleground. Players also gain rating in rated battlegrounds, while in normal battlegrounds gear and honor points are the rewards. In simple terms playing battleground can be called the more casual way of engaging with the PvP side of the game, while rated battleground require bit more effort and input from the side of the player. Throughout the research period I played mainly rated battlegrounds with my guild, which was strictly PvP oriented guild.

4. Theoretical framework

For several years when I started World of Warcraft on my computer, the first window which opened up was the World of Warcraft launcher. This small-sized window would show me the latest news in regard of the game and also possible changes brought by the maintenances and patches would be announced on this window. If there was a need to update the game, this was the instance where the updating would start and further take place.

On the left bottom corner of this screen there was a button saying "play". Once I clicked it, the game would open in full-screen window and I would enter to the logging screen. On the logging screen there was a space for my account name and for my password. In the background there would be a picture relating to whichever expansion was the most recent. If there had been a new patch, here I would also have to read up again the terms and the conditions of the game and agree on them before I could proceed.

Once I inserted the password and account name, I would enter the character screen where the character I played the last time would be shown. Alternatively, the very first time I logged into the game this was the location where I created my first character, by choosing its faction, race, looks, gender, and class. Also this is the location where a new character can be made or surfing between the servers is possible. Once I choose which of my characters I want to play, I press the button "Enter" under the character and loading screen pops up- and once the loading is completed, I am in the Azeroth, in the game-world.

All these actions which have taken me to the point where I am finally in the game-world have a ritualistic quality to them, quality which is typical for play according to Johan Huizinga

(1938). Going through all the screens before being able to play the game marks a passage, a rite we complete before starting the act of play. This ritual passageway can be seen in a variety of play and sport (and what sport if not institutionalized form of play) activities. It can be the changing of the clothes of the football player and marching to the stadium before the game starts or it can be the actual dressing up of the role-player. Or it can be the schoolboys playing football, setting their schoolbags to mark the area of the play and assigning the roles to each other. It can also be the establishment of the play activity between the children: When I was a child me and my friend would often play with our toy horses, of which we had a notable collection of, and every time before new play session started we would divide the horses between us, so that both of us could at her turn take the horse she wanted. Peculiarly enough, both of us would almost always pick exactly the same horses she had chosen to play with before and there were unwritten rules about not choosing certain horses which were seen as belonging to the other one. Yet, even if the outcome of dividing the horses would be the same or similar to outcomes earlier, this action was always undertaken before the actual play session itself could start.

These actions – dividing toys, dressing up - mark (or intend to mark) the threshold between the play and the non-play. Thus while logging into World of Warcraft the player performs the actions needed to gain the rights to access to the game, such us agreeing on the terms and conditions and by creating or choosing the character to play. All this contains a ritualistic aspect of the undressing of player´s everyday identity (in a similar manner than a football player who changes cloths or a priest who prepares for a mess) and choosing the play identity instead. Huizinga describes this becoming of other as follows: "The 'differentness' and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in 'dressing up', (p.107) "Here the 'extra-ordinary' nature of play reaches perfection, the disguised or masked individual 'plays' another part,

another being. He is another being, 'The terrors of childhood, openhearted gaiety, mystic fantasy and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in this strange business of masks and disguises'." (p.107).

The (intended) passageway between play and non-play is located where the magic circle separates play from its surroundings and shields the play from everyday influences. According to Huizinga this makes play a self-standing instance (i) in which one undertakes actions which have no influence on that which stands outside the magic circle (ii) which is disconnected of everyday rules of life; (iii) which has its own rules of time and space and ;(iv) which is host for action which is always voluntarily (1938). Play then, contains a degree of difference to the everyday and the function of the ritualistic passageway is to indicate for us which world we are inhabiting, that of real or that of play and according to which set of rules we ought to act.

But this separating passageway is not always one of an absolute kind nor does it necessarily shield the play completely. In August 2013 Blizzard presented their new battle.tag launcher for World of Warcraft. Unlike the old launcher, the current one is not designed only for launching World of Warcraft but offers an access to the whole of the Blizzard Universe: Games like Diablo 3 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2012), Starcraft 2 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010), and Hearthstone (Blizzard Entertainment, 2013) can be started with this application as well. Another development has been the incorporation of battle.net chat to the launcher, which allows me to see which of my battle.tag friends[9] from the game are online (not even necessarily in the World of Warcraft, but in the launcher is sufficient or any other Blizzard game) and gives me the possibility to chat with them, even when I am not in the game

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[9] Battle.tag friends are other players from any of the Blizzard games one has added with battle.tag. With these players one can communicate directly through chat even if not playing the same game, or when playing the same game not occupying the same area for instance.

myself.

This modification has changed the way I experience the threshold between the game and non-game, the passageway separating play from real. The passageway has become more diffused as now I can chat with other players who are online playing the game, inhabiting the game-world, while I am not. This is not all together new, as I have done this before through different communication applications, such as skype and Teamspeak, but through battle.net application the amount of players I can now chat while not being in-game has become bigger as I have considerably more in-game friends in battle.tag than in skype (not to mention that it has made it part of the game itself, as it has come through an design-choise). Moreover, through launcher I am also able to see the locations of the players in the game, which allows me almost as observers view to the game while I am not in it myself. In this way the suspension of who will be online once I log into the game has, if not all disappeared, at least shifted. I do not need to log in the game, I can just have battle.net launcher open at my desktop and remind somewhat aware of what is happening in the game, having sensation of already being part of the world of the play. The activity of play becomes less closed to its own sphere. Thus the play does not seem to be all the way constrained to the area of the game and something of it escapes beyond the marked area, sometimes even by the value of the game-design itself.

This can set questions over the concept of magic circle or its applicability in regards of World of Warcraft (not to mention the countless skype and TeamSpeak chats which had already before taken place outside the area of the game), as the situation described above seems to break the conditions Huizinga defines for it (1938). This is also merely one example which brings forth the questioning: Cornelliussen and Rettberg (2008) point out that World of

Warcraft is, in addition of being a game, a social framework for communication and has culture of its own which is not constrained to the game. Nevertheless we should not abandon magic circle too swiftly. It is worth noting that, as argued by Jaakko Stenros in his article "In the defense of the magic circle" (2014), that the magic circle, thus the area which separates the play from the reality surrounding it, was for Huizinga mainly a metaphorical tool, not a tangible thing we could always clearly detect and trace down and define. Thus while sometimes it is easy to define the exact physical location of the play, like a football stadium, this does not mean that all play takes place in such physically constrained and clearly defined areas. Instead, on the other extreme, play can take place in a multitude of locations and almost any space can be transformed into an area of play through the contract of the players. One of the best examples of this is probably the pervasive games[10] like the "Assassin"[11] (also known as "Killer") which constantly transform the everyday spaces of the player to the areas of the play by negotiating new ways for the player to relate to their immediate, usually mundane, surroundings. And while play can take place in areas where the markers "this is play" can be hard to recognize for the one who is not engaged with the act of play, for the players themselves there seems to be ways of distinguishing areas and locations to be areas of play, as there seems to be ways of negotiating a line between what is play and what is not play even if the location of the play is one the ambiguous kind. Thus in some way the player of the "Assassin" knows he is now playing the game even if the everyday space surrounding him would not by the value of itself suggest that the activity of play is taking a place. So it does not seem impossible to imagine that something similar could be going on with World of Warcraft.

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[10] Pervasive games are games which knowingly blur the line beween play and non-play. To read more about the topic, see Montola (2012).
[11] Assassin is pervasive game where group pf players try to assassinate each other. Assassin can be played out anywhere and it mends itself to the physical settings of the real world.

Of course, here we have to be cautious, as there is a danger with analogies, especially with the ones I have been drawing between World of Warcraft and another types of play, such as Assassin and football. The danger lies in equating the areas of the play to be of similar kind, while they are actually not. I can walk to the football stadium and step on the field and stand there. It will not necessary mean that I am engaged in any activity of play, let alone activity of playing football. I can even start jogging around the football field and continue doing just that, jogging, instead of engaging to any kind of act of play. I might even find it hard to start playing football if necessary equipment would be missing. Something which can function as ball, and perhaps another person to play with.

When I log in to World of Warcraft the situation is rather different. As the world of World of Warcraft is a persistent virtual world, I enter a space where the play is constantly happening and where I can instantly engage with the activity of play, might actually find it hard not to do so. I can even do this if the other person to play with is missing, as it would be while playing single-player digital game. The game itself functions in this sense as more than just as a location of the play. It already has embedded to itself the rules of the game and the other, be that other being part of the game itself or another player. The digital game can be simultaneously ones opponent, judge, and ally. Thus, while some of the play seems to extend beyond the game-world of World of Warcraft, it still remains essential for the play (of World of Warcraft) itself.

4.1 Stretching the magic circle

When I am sitting behind my computer, log into World of Warcraft and enter the game-world, I am clearly at the location of the play. Simultaneously it is not all there is for a location and

neither it is all where I am, as the game itself takes place in a virtual space while my body occupies a physical space. Again here we can mark how playing World of Warcraft differs from playing football, as the spatiality of a World of Warcraft player is always by its nature double. The limits of the game do not limit the physical area of the play in the same manner than football field limits the area of play. Instead the play of World of Warcraft is physically restricted by the means of access to the game (These are the least decent computer and internet connection. These could be seen as analogies to the ball -or the like- needed to play the game of football), but the game itself is an emergent property of the physical (the serves it is based on), thus containing more than the physical which gives raise to its existence. This being the case, disclosing the play solely to the sphere of virtual carries both danger and false success. It carries a danger by strengthening the dichotomy of virtual–physical against which Taylor has warned about (2006) and which cannot be maintained in the current digitalizing society. It carries the tone of false success by smoothing away the question of the relationship of physical and virtual, by including only what happens on the screen to be part of the play, as Stenros points out (2014).

The play of World of Warcraft exceeds its virtual location by the causal connection it has to us, our bodies, and to our physical environment. When we succeed in the game we can be visibly (physically) excited and when we fail our frustration can be seen in us. Hence it produces physiological changes in use, events happening in it having in this manner a causal connection to our bodies. Moreover, our physical environment can change and affect our play activity.

In the summer of 2013 I travelled to my summer cottage with my mother. I took my gaming laptop with me as the group of players I played with had an activity in World of Warcarft

planned for the upcoming night. At my cottage, I set my laptop on the kitchen table and opened the game. I logged in both World of Warcraft and TeamSpeak and started playing the game and chatting with other players. This created a different sensation of my immediate space not only for me but also to my mother who was occupying the same physical space with me. To her the space was filled with talk in English and with a sense of me not being fully present in the space we shared together[12].In her book *Alone Together* Shelly Turkle (2011) discusses this kind of existence in layered spaces digitalization creates: While we are physically present somewhere (or to someone), our attention can become almost exclusively attuned to another space, that hosted by the virtual.

The space of the play would change for me and the other players I played with.as well as I would take a break from the play to go to Sauna and include this in the conversation with other the players, after which it became a reference connected to me by the other players (Sauna would thenceforth be sometimes mentioned in relation to me). Hence we exceed the location of the game while playing by the value of our physical properties being affected by the play and by the value of our physical location and what it entails, both on the existential, practical level and by the discursive means and possible meanings it opens and introduces to the life-world of the players.

We also exceed the space of the game by the means we use to communicate about the play and during the play. These are the communication channels such us battle.net launcher and the communication applications which can facilitate more level of presence in the playspace, such as TeamSpeak and Skype. They allow us to include our voice to the act of play. By doing so they also bring new elements to the space of play and simultaneously take away

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[12] From my field Journal 01.07.2013

some of the allure the play with voiceless players has - it is harder to experience narrative-based immersion to the game once the Female Blood Elf next to you talks with strong British accent and with a male voice- and also simply by introducing background noises to part of the play.

During the research period TeamSpeak server of our guild (the community of the players I play World of Warcraft with) went down and I was not able immediately restore it. I started playing battlegrounds together with my guild member, and as TeamSpeak was not available, we decided to use skype instead for our communication. Unlike with TeamSpeak, with skype one cannot use "push-to-talk" option. In TeamSpeak Push-to-Talk option allows player to keybind certain key to be pushed when he wants his voice to be transmitted to others. This allows player to control what can be heard by others and what not. Skype instead transmits all the audible sounds near the mic of the player. Hence when I was playing with my friend from the guild and using skype, I could hear music transmitted through his mic. The music was classic and had a calming effect on me. The space between us (and that of play) became framed and effected by that music, creating a different kind of playspace for me than normally, as I do not usually have any music on, not even the in-game music. Later on my friend told me it was actually his family playing the music on the background, not him, but it had affected me regardless[13].

It can thus be the very small, accidental (or bound to the varying technology used while playing) factors which modify the space of play for us and this highlights the particularity of every play experience and the need to study play beyond the form of the game and avoiding solely formalist accounts, while simultaneously respecting the importance of the form next to

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[13] From my field Journal 26.06.2013

the function (see Consalvo, 2009). Moreover, virtual locations such as Facebook and online forums allow us to extend the space of play beyond the game. Sometimes these locations can be even more suitable for communication than the game itself (many of the raiding guilds in World of Warcraft have their own guild forums, for instance, as they can better facilitate sharing and discussing of the tactics and the like that the game itself). And these again, in similar manner as physical locations which frame our play, bring in the new elements to the life-world of the play.

The third way we can exceed the area of game is the discursive practices created and upheld during the play, thus through the social framework of communication, framework which does not limit itself to the events in the game: Often matters discussed are about the play and the game itself, but they can also expand beyond the game or have their origins outside the game, as it happened when I was playing World of Warcraft at my cottage and went to Sauna in between the play sessions. There are several types of matters discussed during the play, matters which have their origin in the physical surroundings of the player, in her culture, background, and the like. At the same time there are matters which have their origins in the play activity itself. Together these create new kind of references, allowing new kind of ways to discuss and form meanings to be born.

The final way the play exceeds the game is the way how the playing "I" changes the everyday "I" and the vice versa. In the introduction I discussed the sensation I had when I went to the guild meeting 2012 and how the nametag I received structured my surroundings for me. There I brought the "I" who plays out of the space of the virtual and set it to the real-world context: before the nametag and naming I had sensation being out of my place, not being sure what is the context of that where I had entered. The nametag was a sufficient cue

for me to attune myself towards my surrounding and bring with me the references constructed during the play. But the changes are not always solely dependent on the context, especially in the era of digitalization where the context is so often that of double. I am Aniar in many locations. In my skype, my phone, sometimes in my home, when my husband while we are playing calls me with my in-game name (he does that, to everyone else's confusion, sometimes outside of the game too). As the contexts have become so mingled, so has the "I" who plays escaped beyond the boundaries of the play itself.

Thus while playing World of Warcraft we exceed the game in four ways (See picture 2). We do this by the value of occupying a physical space simultaneously to virtual game space, we do this by using communication programs whilst playing or communication channels to extend to space of play, we do this by creating discursive practices together which are not solely grounded to the game, and we exceed the game by expanding the "I" which plays beyond the area of the game.
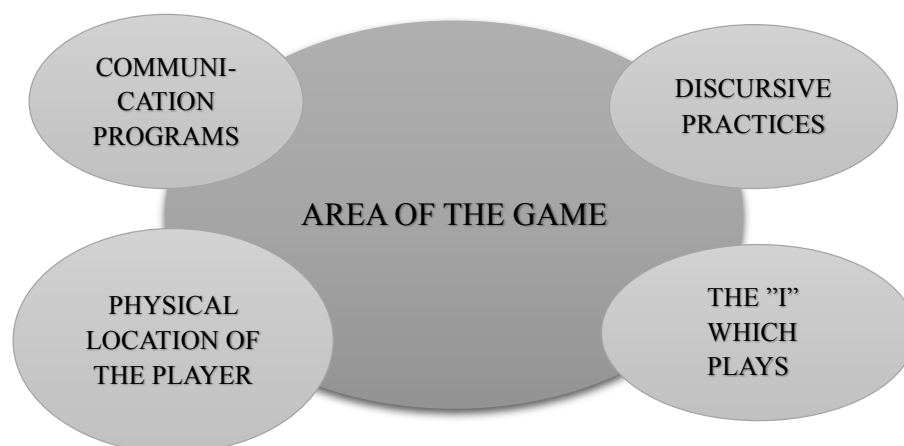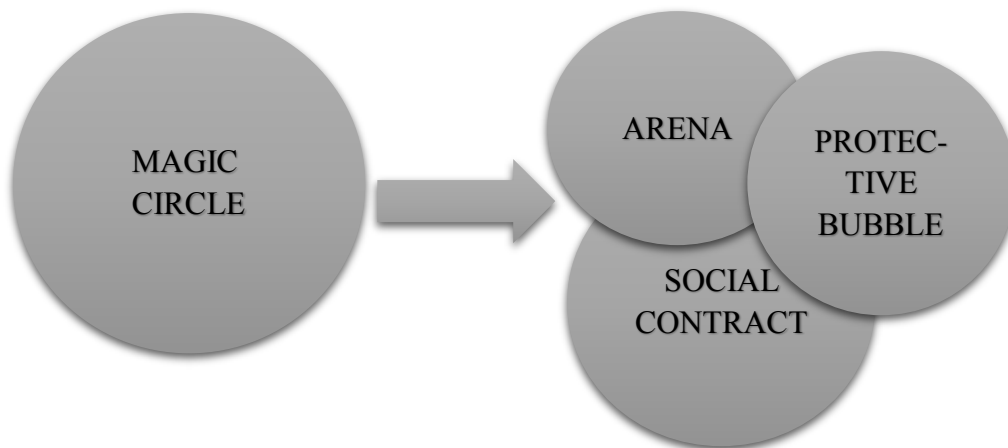

Picture 2

As it seems that playing World of Warcraft exceeds the area of game, then equating magic circle one to one to the area of game seems problematic. This issue with magic circle is by no means new, and it has been addressed numerous time (see for instance Taylor, 2006). Stenros (2014) has discussed the issues with magic circle by suggesting that in order to adequately understand the location of the play and its relation to the magic circle, we need not one but three "magic circles", or frames of the play.

4.2 From one magic circle to three

By adopting a multidisciplinary approach Stenros (2014) assesses the boundaries of play not only from the perspectives of game studies and ludology, but makes use of a broader selection of disciplines, assessing the status of the magic circle from the perspectives of psychology and sociology respectively. With the help of works from numerous researchers he extracts three frames of play. He names these three frames to be the social contract of the play (the magic circle), the actual physical or virtual area of the play (the arena), and the playful mindset we gain while participating to the act of play (the protective boundaries of the play). These three frames intermingle and are constructed in relation to each other (2014). I will next utilize these three categories in order look deeper how play in World of Warcraft is positioned in relation to them and revise additional theories related to them.

Picture 3: In Stenros' (2014) suggestion we have, instead of one all-encompassing magic circle, three frames of play which overlap but are not reducible to one and another. It is important to see that the three areas of play do not exist in separation or stagnation but are mingled and experienced together.

4.2.1 The Arena of play

The arena of the play is the actual physical or virtual location where the play takes place (Stenros, 2014). Hence it is the virtual game-world, and it is the football stadium. It is the location which becomes the physical or virtual constrain of the playful activity and that which disconnects play spatially from its surroundings. Constructed beforehand (football stadium) or marked when the play starts (the schoolbags in cul-de-sac) it functions as the physical or virtual limitation of the space of play. It is already clear by now that marking the game-world of World of Warcraft as this kind of an arena is difficult, but approaching the matter through the temporal and spatial boundaries of play can help us furthermore to understand why this is the case.

The boundaries of the arena of the play seem to be designed to mark the spatial frame, the location, of the play, but Huizinga notes that play takes place not only in a spatially constrained area but also in a temporally constrained area (1938). According to Huizinga "play begins, and then at a certain moment it is 'over'. It plays itself to an end. While it is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation." (1938, p. 104). The temporal constrains of the play can be either part of the arena of the play, negotiated by the players, or a combination of the two.

Thus, while the football stadium marks the limits of the space for the play happening, it does not, by its construction, mark the limits of the time of the play. Once the football game actually starts there are, clearly, the limits of time – the official rules in the institutionalized form of the play or the rules momentarily agreed upon in the freeform of the play. So the constrains of the time can be agreed upon between the players (the schoolboys in the cul-de-

sac might agree to play until the other team scores or for fifteen minutes as that is the time they have free), be set by the formal rules of the game (in the official football game the playtime dominates the time outside of it: It is 45 minutes plus 45 minutes and does not, in general, submit itself to externals), or it can be set upon the players by others, as it often is in child's play – it becomes the time to halt the play when adults call for dinner or the like. Yet quite often also this type of play becomes to be played out, finished also due internals of the play. Me and my friend, when playing with the toy horses, could continue the same play even if it had been stopped by the parental call for dinner. The play itself had come to its end, whatever this end might have been, before the new round of dividing toys would take place and the play would reset, ready to start again.

In World of Warcraft the toys are never really divided again, not if we talk about the game and play as whole for all the players. While the individual player has countless opportunities to reset the game for herself[14] (by creating a new character, by trying again an especially difficult task) the play itself as whole is never halted, but continues to go on. Hence comes the sensation that when one enters to World of Warcraft, the play has always already started[15]. This is because of the other players always occupying the game-world, continuing the act of play even if the player herself is not engaged with the play activity. Temporally the play, as a whole, does not stop. No matter what the individual player chooses to do, the environment remains dynamic, even if this is often the dynamics of reoccurrence as the game-world keeps returning to its original state, regardless of the intervention of the player. Hence unlike the football stadium, multiplayer digital games are both active and reactive by their nature. Events often happen even if the player is not the primus motor for them and the player never

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[14] And even if this reset happens, the history of the player carries with her, even if it can be so that player requires new identity so that the history and what it contains is no longer enforced by other players.
[15] This has actually lead to discussions if we should call MMORPGs and MMOs places where the play happens instead of games (see for instance T.L Taylor 1995)

has the full right to halt the game or call the play to its end. Instead, the play will persist continuing.

This type of temporal boundaries are not exclusive to digital games, but for instance tabletop games have them, even if they lack the capacity to enforce the boundaries upon the players. The play of monopoly will end after certain set of actions have been taken and this has led one of the players to win the game. What digital games and monopoly have in common is that the arenas -as so far we now include the monopoly and the virtual space of the world of Warcraft to be the arenas- themselves have the rules of the play embedded to them, which makes the arena itself participatory to the act of play. This is due to the rules of the game, which Huizinga also names to be one of the factors separating play from its surroundings (1938).

Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004) discuss that there are three types of rules in the games: Constitutive, operational, and implicit. The constitutive rules are "the mathematical core of the game" (p.139) and they are not apparent to the player. The operational rules appear in the level where the player observes and acts upon rules. The implicit rules are the norms of the game, and might be unwritten but expected to be followed (2004). Often in digital games the constitutive and operational rules are embedded game in a manner which leaves little room for the player not to follow them. Thus part of the temporal limits of the play are built in the rules of the play which the player accepts when accessing to game. These are the temporal frames of the game.

Zagas and Mateas (2007) divide the temporal frames of the game into four categories in their paper "Temporal Frames: A Unifying Framework for the Analysis of Game Temporality"

64

(2007). These are the fictive time, the real-world time, the coordination time (the response time between actions in the game), and the game-world time. According to Zagas and Mateas the fictive frame of the time is the time's passage as it is indicated in the game through different socio-cultural labels applied to the game (2007). These labels work as indicators suggesting to a player that there is a narrative level (even if not always linearly advancing) in the game, that the world of the game is indeed an actual world, not just a space empty from significance and meaning. While the fictive time of the game is to an extent disclosed to the arena of the play, thus the virtual location of the game, there are ways it surpasses the arena as well: Through fanfiction which takes place outside of the game and the ways players perform it in other locations (for instance through costumes in live roleplaying events and gatherings).

The real-world time refers to the actual clock time and offers a connection point between the game and the world surrounding it. It can also help the players in multiplayer games structure their activities together as they can assess the play in relation to the real-world time if necessary (certain event starting this and that hour). Game-world time on the other hand refers to the way the time moves in the game-word. These two can intersect and even contradict each other.

As the game-world time in World of Warcraft is time of constant resetting (unless we look at the calendar time embedded to the game which actually follows real-world time), there is little sense of linearity in the experience of the play. Moreover, the play of World of Warcraft, especially at the max level, often happens in embedded temporal frames, which are "games within games" (Zagas & Mateas, 2007). They are instances in the game which have their own temporality embedded to them and they thus do not abide under the rest of the world's

game temporality, even though there can be connection points. In this sense they are distinct, removed from the temporal sequences of the game-world time, even though they often have same or similar fictive time embedded to them. They representationally belong to the same game-world than rest of the events but yet they are temporally (and often spatially as far as we consider different spatial schemas inside the game) distinct from the rest of the game-world. World of Warcraft has multiple embedded temporal frames in it: battlegrounds, arenas, pet battles, raids and instances some to mention. The amount their temporality varies from the game-world temporality is dependent on each specific case.

This can also vary inside the game-world. The sense of linearity one might experience when starting to play World   of Warcraft (through levelling) changes when other activities in the game became part of the play. These activities, which contain less linear continuity, open up the space for other frames to become part of the play, widening thus the location of the play. As long as the play mainly follows linear time it remains to be more disclosed to the arena of the play.
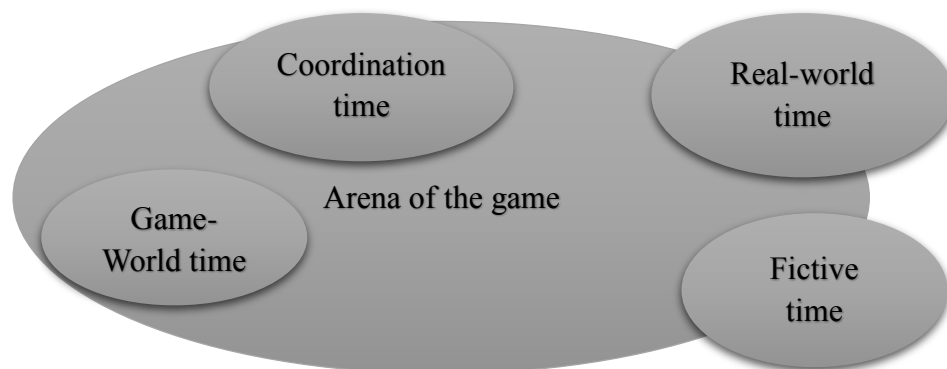
Picture 4: The arena of the game is spatially constrained, but temporally less disclosed: The fictive time, the real-world time[16], both embedded into arena, expand beyond it.

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[16] It could also be argued that the game-time extends beyond the game as the player use it in their communication (" I will come as soon as I am done with this bg")

4.2.2 Social Contract of the play

At first sight the temporality of World of Warcraft is that with no ending, only beginning. Having been launched in 2004 the game still continues existing, the play never ceasing. Despite the apparent everlastingness of the play, players do discuss the play in the World of Warcraft as limited and restricted by the certain periods of time. This can be the time periods framed by the expansions, or they can be shorter periods indicating player is engaged with an activity in hand for limited period of the time, such us playing a battleground. They can also be agreement on when (certain event of) play starts or will take place, for example setting up times of the communal activities of the guild to the in-game calendar (rated battlegrounds at Tuesdays from 20.00 to 23.00 for instance). In this manner players establish new temporal limitations on when and how long the play takes place and they do this together, in relation to each other.

World of Warcraft is a (quasi) open world game which contains multiple paths for players to undertake and room for negotiation for new paths. Hence the rules and structure of the game do not limit players only to follow pre-established, linear direction, but especially at the level of implicit rules[17], which are no longer solely constructed by the arena of the game, it allows room for the players to negotiate the path they wish to undertake, alone or together with the other players, be this construction of new temporal order in the game and spatial extension

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[17] While bringing new elements to space of the play and thus to its frame happens often in the level of implicit rules, it can also happen so that they effect the constitutive and operational rules, thus the arena of the play itself. In a video published in August 2006 player called Leeroy Jenkins became popular between World of Warcraft players. In this video a player – Leeroy Jenkins- completely ignores discussed tactics while a group of players is in a dungeon together, and instead following the tactics runs in middle of all the enemies, causing a wipe (everybody in the group dies). The popularity of the video made Blizzard to introduce achievement and title called Jenkins to the game itself in the 15.10.2008. In this achievement player, in order to earn the Jenkins title, has to do what Jenkins does in the video, and survive from that. Thus by breaking the social contract of play and the implicit rules, Jenkin's actions actually became to change the constitutive and operational rules of the game itself.

beyond the game in the act of play. The fact that most of the end-game content happens in temporal bubbles and that the fictive time is often not enforced in mode of narrative linearity enhances this. The negotiation of the temporal (and spatial) limits of the play belongs largely in what Stenros (2014) calls to be the social contract of the play.

Stenros discusses the social contract mainly through Erving Goffman. Goffman (1974) calls the different kind of contexts and spaces which have their own sets of social rules and norms as frames. When we enter to the situation we have certain understanding (or we come to gain this) of what the situation is and how meaning is establish in it. Accordingly, we come to understand that certain situations are play through the cues embedded to them which communicate to us that this is play. From these cues we also deduce how we ought to behave in the give frame and switch our behavior in relation to this frame. These are the social rules of behavior surrounding the play. In the beginning of the book *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity – a World of Warcraft Reader* Corneliussen and Rettberg (2009) describe a student who had been given an assignment to write about World of Warcraft and who complained she cannot do it as she cannot understand the game and "last time I logged on, someone spat on me" (p.1). Corneliussen and Rettberg note that this was because she lacked the understanding of the implicit rules of the play. Indeed, we could say, she had not gained access to the social frame of the play nor constructed an understanding how to behave in the given social context.

Thus the social contract of the play is the frame negotiated between the players. It is the limits of the play as the players establish them or negotiate them together. This can be the marking of the space and setting up the temporal limits of play as when agreeing when play will start or in what timeframe it will take place, but it is also the agreement (and

disagreement) about how the play spatially and temporally expands beyond the game. In games (both digital and other forms of institutionalized play) social contract is to an extent embed to the arena of the play itself through the operational and constitutive rules, which limit how much can it be negotiated beyond them, but does not totally annul the effect of the social negotiation. The temporal and spatial boundaries of the social frame are considerably harder to define as they are to large extent more individualized than those of the arena. While the game through its form can be the same or almost same for all the players[18], the social frame varies and changes depending on the social environment player plays at, be this a guild, a server or a team, or maybe a group of real –life friends[19]. Yet some tendencies of the spatial and temporal expansion taking place in the social frame can be tracked down and named, based on our earlier inquires. Spatially these tendencies are the different kind of communication applications which extend the virtual space of the game, real-life meetings outside of the arena of the game and to a varying degree physical surroundings of players. Temporally these tendencies are the real-world time (and possibly other temporal models embedded to the different communication applications and virtual locations), and the narrative level of the time constructed not solely in relation to the game, but between the players who play and retell the stories of the play and thus create new shared meanings through the social interaction and discursive practices. This kind of narrative level and its relationship to the game-world can be understood through Paul Ricoeur's threefold categorization of (hermeneutic) time and space (2004). Riroeur's categorization also has the advantage that it takes into account the inevitable interconnectedness of time and space.

The first category Ricoeur (2004) presents is the category of the cosmological time and the geographical space. The cosmological time is the clock time and the calendar time, the units

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[18] The game never appears the same for all the players though.
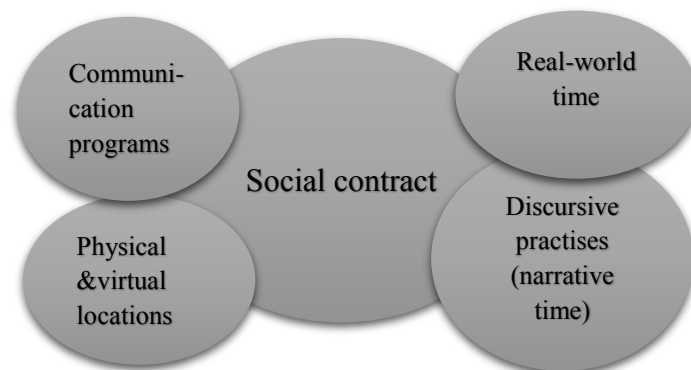[19] Nevertheless, somewhat unified culture can be found in World of Warcraft and the game strongly suggest certain ways of behaviour, as we will see in chapter 5.

of the time agreed upon and used in everyday life, inflexible by their construction. The geographical space refers to the space of maps: mapped, measured, ordered environment, which can be understood and qualified by this order. The formation of this category is external to the experienced world of the individual. The passing of the time and the length of the distance are measured as it is agreed upon and grounded on the earth's own relation to its surroundings, not as it is experienced as. This category also creates frame which penetrates through frames of smaller collective life-worlds and also offers a passageway between them by helping the experience to understand her experiencer as part of something else or in relation to something else, defying thus total alienation. Also in World of Warcraft we see the usage of cosmological time as the in-game calendar follows the structure of the calendar time agreed upon in the Western world.
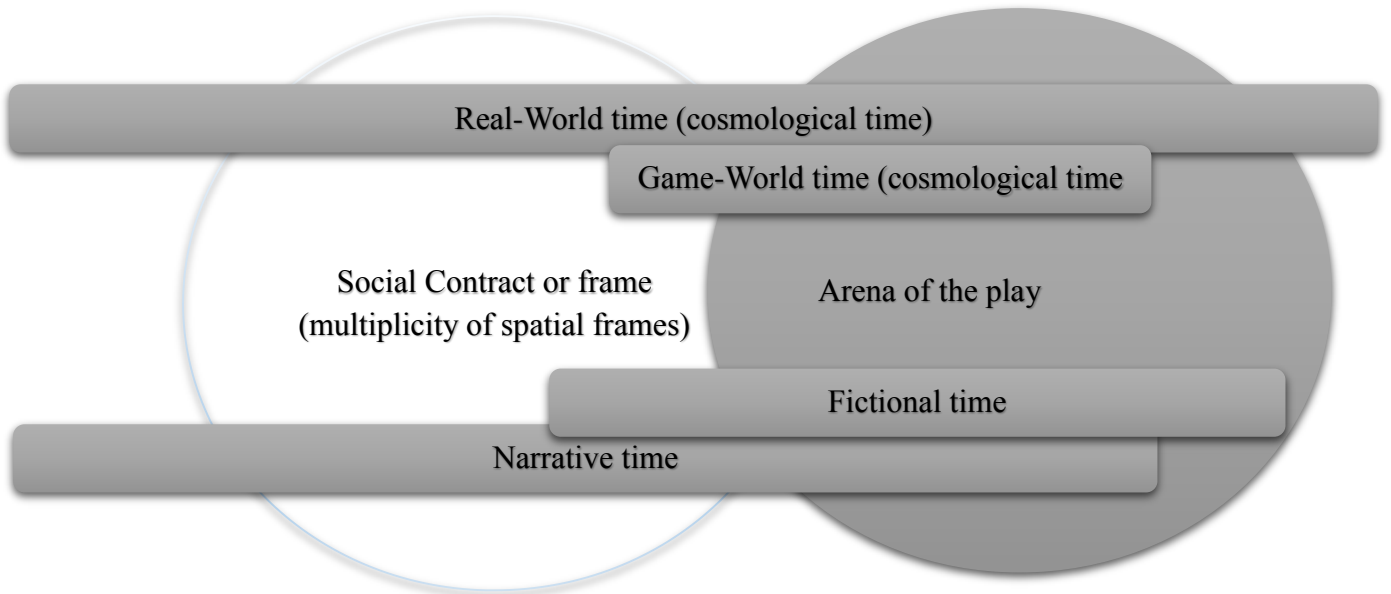
The second category Ricoeur (2004) sketches is the category of lived space and lived time. This is our instant, immediate environment as it is lived and experienced. This category is where the immediate experience of time residues and it also comes close what Heidegger calls Dasein's existential spatiality (1927, 1962): The thing is nearby or far not by value of existing in a location in the external, mapped world (in the geographical space then), but by the value of its existential meaning to us. Our orientation towards the world is functional and situated, always tied to our locally constructed point of views. The lived time and space is the time and space of the "here", then. This category interests us more in the relation to "I which plays" and we will return to it later.

What is of interest for now is the third category Ricoeur (2004) suggests. This is the category of narrated time and inhabited space. This category carries with it a similarity to the fictive frame of time suggested by Zagas and Mateas (2007). For Ricoeur (2004), it is through narrated time a space becomes a place. This happens when space has been, not only modified

and touched by human hand, but also when it has been marked by stories told about it. Places are spaces which have narrative accounts made of them and are to an extent understood through them (2004). Hence they are locations which have meaning to us not only so far that we are immediately experiencing them or because we can point their location in the maps, but they have meaning so far as they have become historically significant to us and are known to us through this historical significance and meaning it bestows on them. They are the "there", when there is already something with meaning to us or comprehensible to us through the meanings bestowed upon it by narratives or stories. Hence this category refers to the places which have familiarity to us, often through stories we tell about them, marking so their role in the space and time. This is similar to the function fictive time has, but needs not to be restricted to the game-world. We can thus, with some freedom, also conceive this category to be constructed in the interaction between players as they become to mark significance of events between each other and create new layers of narrated time. This can happen in manner when players include stories and events from their real life to be part of the play by including sauna be part of the discursive practices or how they narrate event which happened while play to each other. This also helps to transform the world of Word of Warcraft from space to a place: While players cannot mark the game-world with their actions, they can tell stories about the different areas and places and thus mark the game-world with familiarity and sense of ownership.

Picture 5: Through the social contract the play exceeds the arena.

Real-World time (cosmological time)

Game-World time (cosmological time

Social Contract or frame
(multiplicity of spatial frames)

Arena of the play

Fictional time

Narrative time

Picture 6: Narrative time is formed in interaction between the players and the game. Also that what exceeds the social contract or frame in relation to game often influences this. In a similar manner the real-world time penetrates through both of the frames (social contract and the arena of the play) and is not reducible to them. The game-world time is alike part of social frame as it becomes a way to measure time between players ("I am ready as soon as this battleground ends"). The fictional time of the game residues mainly in the arena, but again plays part in the social contract ("Our guild cleared the dragon soul and killed the Deathwing") and is entangled with the narrative time.

4.2.3 The protective bubble of play

Game to be played or any play activity to take place the players need to take the rules of the play seriously so that the engagement the play requires can be established. Hence the players have to, an extent, leave behind them the everyday indicators of meaning and submit themselves to the play and the play experience without reservation. Thus when we enter a playful space, we take the rules of the game as if they were true, in a sense that they are a matter of consequence, regardless of the fact that we know that it is an activity of play we are actually participating and it is thus a make a believe activity. This psychological or

phenomenological state of submitting and upholding the playful mindset is what Stenros (2014) calls the third frame of the play or the third magic circle.

Under this category, or frame, Stenros groups a number of theories from psychology. He discusses lusory attitude as a state of mind which we gain while playing the games, according to Suit (1978), and the psychological bubble which is what allows us to be in playful mindset (Apter, 1991). He also mentions that according to Richard Schechner (1988) the mindset of playfulness is marked by increased sense of trust. While there are differences in these descriptions, the psychological frame of the play comes across unified by the weight it sets on the experience and the state of mind of the player. Maintaining the playful mindset or the protective bubble is crucial for the play to continue and the playful experience to be upheld. And we need to be able to trust the play for this to be the case. Thus when we amongst the players negotiate about the rules of a community or a guild in World of Warcraft, we also create the boundaries of the safety for the play, creating a shared understanding what can be expected in terms of co-players behaviours and attitudes. Hence breaking the rules during the play is not only seen as breaking against the community, but it can be seen as breaking against the spirit of the play itself. And it is not only the other players who can collapse the sense of play for us and erupt our trust, but it is also the game itself. When Blizzard implements changes to World of Warcraft, players tend to react negatively or positively. If the changes are seen as negative, this can lessen the players' trust towards the game. The same happens when the game "bugs out" and thus some unexpected event occurs. This means that the constitutive rules are not working as they are expected and this can hinder the sense of trust the player has towards the game. If these kind of issues continue being present too long, the protective bubble erupts and player withdraws her involvement from the act of play.

For our inquiry of the play experience in relation to temporal and spatial frames of the play this category is crucial. As such it deserves a section of its own. Moreover, while we talk about the protective bubble or the mindset player has towards the play, we are still left with question, to an extent, who is the "I" I which plays and what are the layers which constitute the identity of the player, allowing so far the protective bubble to be in existence in relation to specific surroundings, not only in relation to the arena of play and continue being so even outside of the arena of the play. Also the question what is specific about the activity of play so that it produces the playful mindset in the first place can still be clarified. Hence in the next section there will be a look to theories in regards the identity construction of the player, in regards the "I" which plays.

4.3 The "I" which plays

Jos de Mul (2005) approaches the experience of play and the playing self through ludic identity construction. De Mul (2005) extracts his account through the ontological structure of games and shows that ludic identity is a displacement from the narrative continuity of time by constructing it through (and contrasting it to) Paul Ricouer's account of identity formation through narratives.

In Riceour's (1992) account the self is understood to be constructed in relation to the stories we tell and are told to. Our self comes into being in how we situate our self to these stories and understand the stories in relation to our self. Narratives, in turn, are the formal expressions of this process (1992). Paul Ricouer (1992) starts his mediation of the narrative self by following Heidegger's conclusion of the twofold nature of the self: we, as human beings, are not solely idem, having identity and existence in space as for example rocks do,

but we are also ipse, thus having existence also in time. Hence the self is not merely occupying a spot in space, but by the value of memory and expectation comes to occupy a spot in time. And this spot in time, the perceived continuity of the self is nothing less than the self itself. Marking condition of our identity is its persistence in time. And this is what Ricoeur names to be the narrative self or what gives the birth to the narrative self. It is through the stories we tell about ourselves and about the world around us we become to formulate and (attempt) to have unity of the temporal self. These stories are both individual stories (my life story) and historical stories (the world's story, the history and histories).

Ricoeur (1992) constructs a threefold mimesis[20] of the self: The mimesis one is the narrative configuration of our daily lives, embedded with implicit narratives which guide our actions and give them meaning. The narrative mimesis two is the expression of the former in formal narratives, which are based on the Aristotelian plot where the elements create one unity and whole – there is middle, beginning and the end. This creates the concordance, the unity. Finally, the third state of narrative mimesis, mimesis three, is where we reflect upon the formal narratives and identify with the characters and events in them.

The concordance, and the unity that narrative self seeks, is naturally not constantly uniform and unproblematic. It is rather constantly challenged by the disconcordance, the state of disturbance. This disconcordance is created by the different life events where our narratives about ourselves and the narratives about the world surrounding us become under jeopardy and are set under a doubt. We will then try to overcome this disturbance by creating new narratives about ourselves, which are in (adequate) unity with our past and stories we have already told. Ricoeur maintain narratives are what we use against the threat of heterogeneous,

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[20] In philosophical discourse term mimesis have range of meanings; in this context it comes used as the representation of the self.

the threat of that without closure (1992).

De Mul (2005) notes that Ricoeur has a clear preference of concordance over the disconcordance. He calls this the "Western bias" as it is in the West where the narrative with the linear form (with its movement toward closure), inherited from the Aristotle, has had such a great significance. De Mul also notes that Ricoeur is hesitant to accept any other forms of narratives than written narratives. But, according to de Mul, we should consider other forms as well, even if linear structure is not their central element. These can be such as films, and games.

Games have different ontological structure than narratives. Narratives, according to de Mul (2005), have three temporal levels and one spatial level: The temporal levels are the level of the reader, the level of the plot, and the level of related narrative events. Spatially, then again, narratives are one dimensional, with predestinated path where the plot determines action. This, according to de Mul, is reversed in games. In games we have three spatial levels: We have the game-space with multiple possible directions (which are restricted with the rules of the game, but the direction the user takes is not predetermined like in narratives), we have the interface space of the player which is different from the virtual space disclosed by the game, and finally we have the space of the player where these two become interpreted together (2007). Games, on the other hand, have only one temporal level. Consequently player is in "eternal present" and the interactivity binds together the temporal level of the game and the player, resulting to the act of play (2007). This comes close to Ricoeur's (2004) category of lived time and space.

It is important to note that at no point does de Mul deny the narrative aspects of games, but instead he assesses that narratives are part of play and part of games. Moreover, we have seen

that there are more than one temporal frame in the game, but from the point of view of the experiencer these are often interpreted as one level as they are fragmented and rarely linear. Thus narrative self and ludic identity are not separated not opposing poles absolutes but the difference is in what the weight is in the given way of experiencing one self. And while in the narrative self the weight is in unity, concordance, the ludic identity facilitates disconcordance better due to its configuration.

Just like we have a three-fold mimesis of the narrative self, we have a three-fold mimes of the ludic identity, according to de Mul (2005). Thus both narratives and games seek to give formal expression to our everyday experience of life. The mimes of ludic identity follows the structure of the mimesis of the narrative self. As so, first we have the everyday experience of movement and alteration, perhaps exactly the alteration Huizinga (1938) discusses about, the sense of spatiality, then we have the formal expression of this in games, and then again in the third phase of the mimesis we have the identification of the rules and possibilities of the game. Hence we come to construct a type of identification with a structure which no longer abides itself under linearity and need of narrative closure, but instead is open to conflicting narratives as narrativity is no longer its core element.

This way it becomes possible to entertain the idea that exactly because games and play do not strictly follow the narrative structure of the stories and to an extent that of everyday[21], they can allow us also to withhold our disbelief and enter to the state of trust required the play experience to be maintained, to enter to the playful mindset discussed by Stenros (2014). Thus while our everyday self comes to being to an extent from the narrative coherence it holds, which require sense of continuity and consistency so that the threat of disconcordance

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[21] De Mul (2005) does note that it is not only in games that ludic identity can be seen, but to an extent the whole society is changing in a manner which supports ludic identity construction.

to be countered, the ludic identity comes into being in a space which is not, initially, part of this liner continuity. Instead this space allows displacement from the temporal line of the self, thus not setting the self to stretch between predetermining past and indicated future. Hence the player can submit herself to the play as actions happening in the magic circle(s) of the play do not threaten the narrative unity and the concordance of the everyday self.

Of course, this is just another half of the story. As we have seen the walls protecting the play are not impenetrable but the playing self occasionally escapes beyond the space of play as it does bring elements outside of the play to the playspace. This could be reformulated as a question that if the ludic construction of the identity which comes forth while entering to game and playing allows the playful mindset, what then allows the extension of protective bubble beyond the game?

Cosmological time and geographical space	
Narrative time and place	In narratives the focus is here
Lived time and space	In games the focus is here

Picture 7: We can use the categories from Ricoeur introduced in the 4.2.2 to demonstrate where the focus is in different forms of identity expressions.
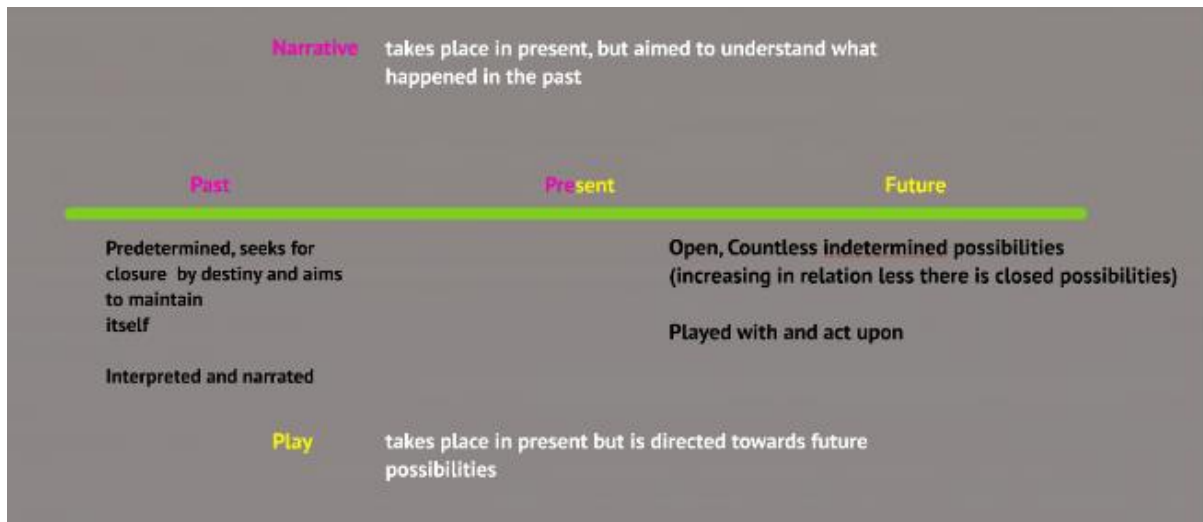
Picture 8: In games the focus is in the present moment and is directed toward future possibilities.

4.3.1 Historicity of the "I" which plays

Regardless of the spatially dominant ontological structure of the games, the narrative level is not excluded from the games. Fictive time plays important role in games and the narrative accounts players tell each other are part of identity construction of the player. Consequently, there is also temporal stretching of the playing self. For player who has played World of Warcraft for several years there is a sense of narrated self in relation the play and play activities. This self is nor in par with the history of the character played as far as the history of the character would be the in-game narrative of the character, but it is more complicated and contains more diverse range of aspects to it.

The gain better understanding what this "I" who plays is and what it identifies with, we can contrast playing World of Warcraft to role-playing[22] games in which there is a thrive towards identifying with the character played in a narrative level. In his analysis of the

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[22] While World of Warcraft is massively multiplayer online role-playing game, it actually facilitates actual role-playing very badly as this is not supported by its mechanics (see MacCallum-Stewart &Parsler, 2008).

phenomenology of role-playing game Daniel Mackay (2000) notes that while playing live role-playing games there are quite rigid frames of the diegetic world, the story world, and non-diegetic world, and consequently between the diegetic and non-diegetic identities. These frames are uphold consciously by the role-players and it is indicated by the role-player when she is out of the character. The aim is to keep the two roles (and worlds) separated, so both can continue having the narrative coherency of their own. Thus players thrive towards narrative identification with their characters. While playing World of Warcraft the process of identification is different. Ragnhild Tronstad (2008) stresses that the identification with the character played in World of Warcraft is first and foremost through an embodied empathy (identification with skills, which can be seen coming close to de Mul's suggestion about the identification with game's rules and possibilities and Csikszentmihalyi's conceptualization of the flow state) instead through a narrative empathy or an imaginative empathy (identification with the perspective), as World of Warcraft, while often being called a role-playing game, actually facilitates role-playing quite badly (2008). Consequently, when playing World of Warcraft we do not have clear, exclusive narrative frames like the ones we have, or aim to construct, while role-playing. Instead, while playing World of Warcraft players constantly refer themselves and their characters as "I" interchangeably. It is usually the context which indicates which "I" is actually performing the action (even though sometimes we need to do a clarifying question "in game or?" when other player is referring to an action which could happen in either of spaces and there is not enough context to clarify it, like "I need to drink"). So the players do not separate themselves completely from the game-world and the character. Moreover, when discussing even about the mundane everyday things, be them game related or no, players tend to call each other with their in-game names instead of their real names, thus blurring the lines between diegetic and non-diegetic world even more.

Jonas Linderoth (2005) proposes the use of the concept of avatar in relation to the identity of the player. Linderot's avatar is not reducible to the character the player plays as the player might refer to both, herself and the character, as "I". Consequently, Linderoth suggests that we can distinguish three layers or three functions the avatar may fulfil. It can be a role the player plays, a tool used by the player to act in the game-world, or it can be prop used for self-presentation in the social circle of the play. In the play of World of Warcraft, thinking of the configuration of the game, the two latter could be imagined to be most common, while certainly playing a role is not totally amiss neither. If we consider avatar as social prop, it is easy to imagine it oscillating in and outside of the game, as long as the social circle itself extends beyond the game.

In conclusion, by treating the "I" which plays as something that contains simultaneously the history of the player and the history of the character in an intermingled web of meanings, and being predominantly constructed in a relation to the spatially layered ontological structure of the game which itself allows the existence of multiplicity of narrative configurations, it can be easier to see how the protective bubble of the play can extend beyond the area of the game and sometimes even beyond the play. As long as the identity predominantly constructed in relation to the play is triggered, this can happen. Hence the "I" which plays is a sum of the actions and stories from the play-experience, but the playspace being larger than the game-space it is not identifiable with the character, but carries in its traces from other spaces alike. Furthermore, the narrative time of the play is not only the fictive time of the game, nor is it the historicity of everyday, but it is the combination of these who and it is over and over again reconstructed in relation and with the other players. Consequently, other kind of fictive and narrative frames became mixed with it. These create the conditions for the playing "I", which turns out be multiplicity instead of a singularity.
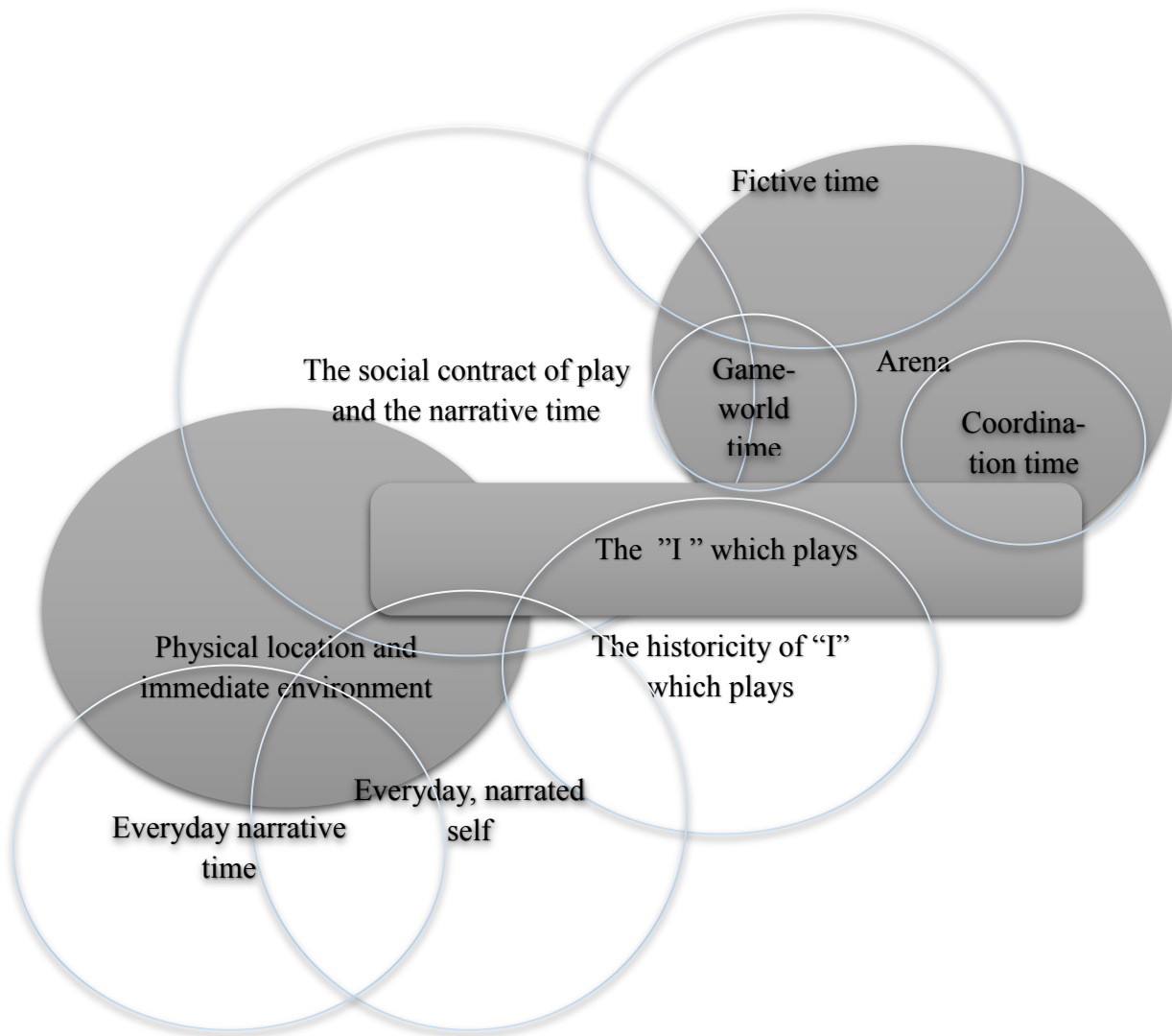
Picture 9: The "I" which plays is in the nexus of arena, social contract or fame, the physical location, immediate environment, the everyday, narrated self, and its own historicity.

5. Analysis

Every occasion where play is acted, performed or takes place is by its nature contextual, framed and yet unique in its position and relation to its frame. Thus it becomes hard to discuss playing World of Warcraft as if playing it would be an action which is generic by its nature, having the quality of being the same, thus being the general or constituting a category of generals. In similar manner it is hard to talk about the game (World of Warcraft) as the game would be just one, removed from the act of play itself and something which can be set under scrutiny, analyzed, and discussed, just having the player and the instances of the play be set into the context of that what has been discussed and defined a priori as an afterthought. Instead, the relationship the player forges with the game is by its nature organic and forms from bottom-up: The game as far as "I" as the player know it was introduced to me through the act(s) of (my) play. This forces me to avoid treating World of Warcraft just as one, as something which appears to us all in an all-comprehensive and all-encompassing unity. The acts of play where my play, in relation to the changing circumstances.

Yet there are simultaneously similarities, an opening for more generalized approach, as the arena of the play, while existing for us, also exist beyond us and effects to the frames of the experience. Moreover, while playing we are not in isolation, as part of the frames of our play experience are firstly shared with the others and the game and secondly constituted together with the others and the game in the act of play and occasionally outside of it. Hence we move beyond the dichotomy of total sameness and total difference to an ontology of degrees of sameness and differences and use what we have to model out what can belong to which frame (of the time and the space) and this way attempt to understand how much each of the frames can contain: We take under scrutiny a lived, organic, phenomenon and instead of treating it as

one totality we treat it as a construction which has become an infinite assembly, never finite, never disclosed solely to itself. It is in this cross-point of the individual and general where the lifeworld of the player, the playspace, residues.

5.1 The construction of the playspace in relation to the arena

Julie Rak (2014) maintains that World of Warcraft becomes an open world game when a player has played it for long enough. I agree, the time one has played the game is most definitely a factor effecting on the experience of the play and how much sense of linearity this experience contains. When I started playing World of Warcraft there was considerably more feel of linearity to my experience of the play than there is now. This sense of linearity was experienced when I was leveling my first character and following mainly linearly structured quest-lines while doing so. Linear in the sense that one quest, once completed, would point me towards another quest, and the quests themselves corresponded the fictive ethos of the game-world. Consequently there was continuously a path, a direction to be followed and a background where this constructed path was more or less coherently embedded. This sense of coherence would result not only from the graphic coherence of the game-world I was embedded to, but it was as much a result of the sense of story and sense of history the game-world had. Thus quests appeared, even if sometimes clumsily, to be part of a bigger whole.

When I started leveling my Blood Elf Warlock character it was then through the quests I completed in the beginning the history of the Blood Elves would unveil to me: I learned that Blood Elves, formally known as the High Elves, had by then become addicted to the magic they had been always so drawn to and this had led to their downfall and to the destruction of

their once beautiful city Silvermoon, which had by then been rebuilt next to the old ruins. I

would understand why Blood Elf is a horde character, instead that of an Alliance character. It

was their very addiction to the magic and their fascination with its source, Well of Eternity,

which had led them to be banished from the community of the other elves. Night Elves, the

other powerful race of the Elves, on the other hand were part of the Alliance. This had forced

the Blood Elves to make a pack with the Horde, even though through the utterances of NPCs

and through the quests I learned that Blood Elves considered most other Horde races as

savage and vastly inferior to them. Despite their demise, Blood elves were nothing if not a

proud, vain, and infinitely obnoxious race.

The linearity apparent in the start of my play did not persist throughout the whole endeavor of

leveling and beyond it. Instead, once I had played longer I started to step on the sidelines

from the linearity offered by the quest chains. I would discover PvP activity and I finally at

max level I would start raiding, which would change the experience of the play for me by

radically extending the playspace beyond the arena of the play due to diminished linearity

this activity contained, together having a rather heavy social aspect to it, together with the

need to co-operate with the other players.

I started raiding once I reached the level 70, which was the level cap in the Burning Crusade

expansion. By that time I had played World of Warcraft around a year and I had become

somewhat accustomed to play with the other players, mainly through random battlegrounds

and instances. But the level of co-operation raids require shifted the social world of play to

the core of my play activities. My play time would start circulating around the raids and the

preparations needed for them. No longer were the fictive time of the game or the time I

personally allocated myself for the play the most important frames of time, but the commonly

agreed raid time together with other 24 players became to focus of the temporal structuration

of my play. The play also started to have a framed ending and beginning through this focus,

even if in the activity of the play itself there remained its own rules of temporality, that of the

game-time. Moreover, the raiding changed my relationship to the game-time as well: sense of

repetition became more common than sense of moving forward when we wiped on the same

boss over and over again. So instead of moving forward (following line) and advancing,

happened the expanding of the space and repetition of the in-game temporality. And while

there had always been the opportunity for repetition by restarting failed quest, now repetition

became the norm. The raid bosses required countless attempts of kills, constant repetition

before I would have the change to move forwards. Moreover, the raids would reset every

week which again opened new way for returning, different from the kind one had with the

quests. Quests, once completed, would usually (an exception to this are the dailies, quests

which can be repeated every day) become closed. This strengthened the sense of moving on,

moving forward. Raids, with their resets, carried a promise of an eternal return.

When I started raiding the spatial and temporal expanding of the playspace beyond the arena

of the game would come through the use of voice communication in the raids and through the

use of online forums of the guild I raided with. Many times raids would require planning,

together with other players. This often happened in the guild forum where there would be

boss guides and videos to be read and watched before the night's raid and heated debates on

what would be the best way to down the boss. After the raid there usually were performance

logs which contained the amount of deaths of each player, the damage done and the like to be

read through and learned from. And the forums did not only host the boss tactics but would

have other sections as well (many World of Warcraft guild forums seem to follow the same

format dividing their forums on subsections): a section dedicated to the different classes of

the game, but also sections named "off-topic" or "real-live" which hosted discussion not about the game, but other meaningful areas of the lives of the players. Yet these topics were often discussed under the character names or the forum names players had, even being so that next to the players name there might be his real-life picture posted. This all created the expanding of the playspace and the narrative time of the game which would no longer be only the story of the Blood Elves: It would be the stories of my co-players and these stories would mingle peacefully around the play and non-play topics, constituting so a new frame, that of playspace.

While raiding the connection to the fictive time (and its advancing as a linear narrative) still remained somewhat present. The raid-instances are connected to the lore (the last raid of any given expansion usually has the main antagonist of the expansion as its last boss) and this binds the player closer to the current fictive time of the game. It was when I started to concentrate more on the PvP, player versus player activity and especially to the rated battlegrounds, that this link to the fictive time of the game would became even more diffused, as unlike in the random battlegrounds, which follow the fictive world, its ethos and narrative by setting the factions against each other (horde players always playing against alliance players), in the rated battlegrounds the opposing team is not necessarily made of players from the other faction but can be as likely made of players from the same faction. Thus, in the rated battlegrounds, regardless of the fact that I am playing a horde character myself, I can be tagged as an alliance if there is two horde teams facing each other: In these cases one of the teams will always be taking the role of the alliance. This strengthens the (e-)sports ethos the rated battlegrounds have – and also makes them more disconnected from fictive time of the game,.

The spatial and temporal expanding of the playspace beyond the arena of the game did not only happen through activities with other players, but was to an extent encouraged by the arena of the play itself and how real-world time is embedded to it. The calendar time (there is modifiable calendar embedded to the game) in World of Warcraft follows the real-world time and the dates and the months are the same as well. The real-world time embedded to World of Warcraft helps the players to coordinate and cooperate. Different kind of in-game activities become scheduled in so and so hour of the server time. It also modifies our relation to the countries the players come from. Telling I am from Finland becomes assessed that I am one hour ahead of the server-time, the cosmological time which has become the marker of the ending and the beginning of the events. Moreover, through the calendar and the embedded real-world time also the narrative time of the culture, where World of Warcraft has originally been created, comes through as well. Being a Western game, World of Warcraft's in-game calendar has also the festive holidays such as Christmas and Midsummer fest marked to it. These also manifest themselves as in-game events. When one goes to Orgrimmar (in-game city) during the Christmas, he will find there a Christmas tree, with presents underneath it.

There are also special quest-lines connected to the festivities. These quest-lines are only accessible while the festivities are going on. Hand in hand with these "real-world" festivities marked to the calendar are the festivities particular to World of Warcraft, such as Darkmoon Faire. Thus in the calendar two different fictive (or narrative and fictive) times exist in a same location. Hence the Christmas tree in the capital of World of Warcraft is not just a tree; it comes with handful of connotations, stories and histories connected to it. And these connotations are not (necessarily) forged in the game but beyond it and also modified in this another sphere temporality. Despite this double function these festive events have (significance in the play and significance outside of it) their existence in the playspace does

not seem to break down or collapse the sense of play: They have been cued to the play and player accepts them as part of the play, even if she might know that in the lore of the World of Warcraft there is no events which would have paved the way to holidays such us Christmas, like there has been in the Western metanarrative and the history.

5.2 Construction of the narrative time and place in the playspace

Just like the game itself is space, there exists "spaces in space". Around the time I started the field research period in World of Warcraft I also created a guild in the game, called Pumped PvP. Throughout the research period it can be seen how the community of players who formed this guild negotiate and re-negotiate the location and limits of the play and its meaning in relation to both what is included to the game and what is outside of it. Through this negotiation my own playspace was molded and effected. It guided me in understanding what was part of space of play and helped me to draw the lines of inclusion and exclusion.

The negotiation of playspace never happened solely in relation to the other players, but also in relation to arena of the play (game), in relation to my own history as player, and in relation to my life outside and edges of the play. The edges of the playspace can sometimes be hard to detect and trace as they are moving and shifting. Yet there remains the sensation of the presence in the playspace which can be tracked down. We still, be the lines of play permissive, experience something as play in contrast to non-play. While playing we do tend to leave behind the structure of our everyday narrated self and instead orient towards the frames of the playspace, existing so "there", spreading in the space, following de Mul (2005) In order to continue to do this, we need to trust the play, thus maintaining the protective bubble discussed by Stenros (2014). Hence we continue constantly negotiating the limits of

the playspace on all its different levels.

During the field research period, the most prominent space for me, when negotiating my playspace in relation to and with the others, was my guild. In our guild we had the guild master (me), three officers, and number of members who were either social members or rated battleground team members. Despite these rankings, our guild was rather flat on hierarchy. It also was solely a Player versus Player guild, hence substantive amount of its ethos was derived from the juxtaposing of PvP versus PvE. The guild and its identity was defined in contrast to PvE, not the least because it branched out from a PvE guild in which PvP had been minority activity and not been held in as high regard as PvE. Yet simultaneously it sustained some aspects typical (or discussed as so) to PvE guilds, such as a friendly atmosphere and importance of the community, most likely due to the fact that most of its players where at the time of its formation just switching from PvE to PvP.

The negotiation of the limits of the shared playspace happened in multiple spaces. The guild's online forums played a visible part in the formation of the guild, its rules and boundaries, but so did the in-game chats, talks in TeamSpeak, and even discussions in Facebook. Also the activity of life-streaming changed the space of play for us. When we had rated battleground night and our games were streamed by one of us, an additional space of the play was opened. Next to the stream window there would be chat where the viewers could comment and seek contact with us. Often we would advocate the streams inside the game-world through general chat, which would the lead other players watch the stream and consequently we might then again discuss with them in the game-world about what they had seen.

Streaming allowed also others outside of the game to have an access to the space of the play, even if this access would be limited and usually restricted to the role of spectator. When my friend was visiting me from the Netherlands during the research period, he could watch our games through streams while I was playing and become so, if not fully included, at least part of the playspace. We would not be oriented to different spaces while sharing the physical space as it had been with my mother at my summer cottage, but we could to an extent share the playspace, even in all honesty if he did said that he no idea what was really happening on the screen[23].

Moreover, the guild we created did not only try to define its boundaries by contrasting the predominant activity it hosted against PvE, but it did so also by contrasting itself against other PvP guilds, teams, and communities. The chats between the players and the posts in forum reveal tendency to exclude and negate away, so that the boundaries of the guild could be recognized. Thus the ethos of the guild was built in many ways not only in relation to what it was but also in relation what it was not. This what it was not was the other guilds and teams in the game, but examples were drawn also from the world of sports, so that what we were could be named and identified.

> "Maybe I lost sight of what the aim of our team is - in most aspects of my life I have always strived to be the best I can and achieve the highest achievements, but I understand that sometimes that's not a realistic aim. Just so you know my background, I did rowing to quite a high level when I was younger, which is a very cut-throat environment, where everyone is fighting for spots in the top crew. If someone new comes along that is better than someone in the top crew, they take

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[23] From my field journal 29.07.2013

their place. If you don't perform well for a while, you are replaced. Unfortunately I probably still have some of this mindset, where it may not be applicable!"[24]

Once established (even if never in their final form), the boundaries of the guild would be then communicated also to others, often in a format of rules and norms. This would be done for instance by including requirements to the advertisement message of the guild and by having indicators there what the community is like:

> "[1. General] Aniar: {star} Pumped PvP {star} has just arrived to Kazzak. We are PvP community which does RBGs (around 1900cr), random BGS and Arenas together in friendly, mature atmosphere. Application required: pumpedpvp.freeforums.org" [25]

The above message, which we posted multiple times to the general chat in the game, gives out variety of things. Firstly it indicates something about the history of the guild. We had just migrated from another server to Kazzak and this being from somewhere else was in the beginning part of our identity. The server we migrated from, Agamaggan, was a low population server, meaning not many players played there, and we had been the only guild doing rated battlegrounds there. Thus the activity of doing rated battlegrounds and doing PvP already gave the guild somewhat distinct identity.

In contrast to Agamaggan, Kazzak is one of the highest populated servers[26] in Europe and there just doing PvP and rated battlegrounds was not enough to give an identity which would

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[24] From our guild forums ((15.06.2013), posted by one of our officers when we were having ongoing discussion about the ethos of the guild and about the aims of the rated battleground team
[25] From chatlogs (15.06.2013)"
[26] There multiple servers in World of Warcraft and while they are equal to content (besides language might vary), some are considerably more populated than other.

mark our guild apart from the others. Thus identifying the guild as something which had come from another server was something I personally identified strongly with as well at the time being: While discussing with the other players in my new server, Kazzak, I would usually mention that I have recently migrated.

With time this tendency would lessen, and eventually it was almost totally dropped out. This would be seen by the way it would be no longer included in the recruitment message. Also with the time we changed our method of recruiting to be based on the networks of players we knew, instead targeting the wide audience of all the players. This became possible because with time we would get to know more PvP players and also because our guild eventually became the highest ranked rated battleground guild (meaning we had the highest battleground rating in between the top ten people from the guild while contrasting to other guilds top ten players) in Kazzak, which made it so that we no longer had to look players to join us, but players would instead approach us.

Hence the rating matters. While the players have their own individual battleground ratings, the teams are usually combined from players whose ratings are close to each other. Taking a player with a lower rating could mean that all the players of the team would lose significant amount of rating if the teams loses the game. Hence, in the advertisement we would also indicate what ratings the players applying should have and our battleground rating (1900cr, cr meaning current rating) would tell at what level we played at the time being.

Thirdly, highlighting the friendly atmosphere was in the recruitment add because PvP guilds and communities are often discussed, amongst the players, as competitive and rather unfriendly places. The same rhetoric is also applied to PvP:ers: PvPers are often

conceptualized as arrogant, unfriendly jerks, who are centered on their own achievements.
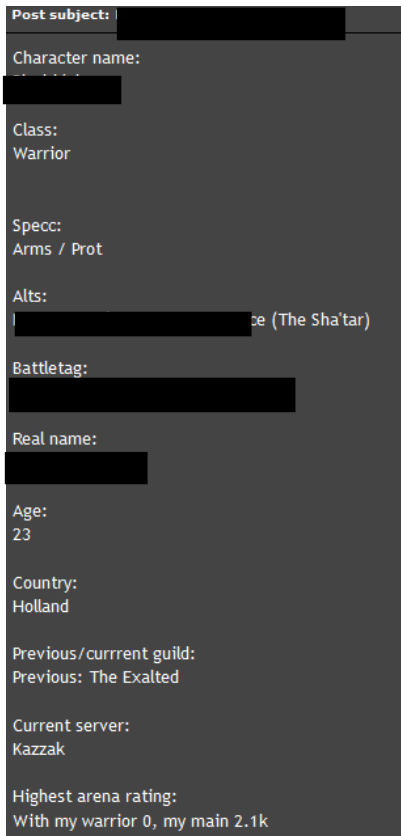
The last part of the advertisement sets a downright requirement for joining as a player who would like to become part of the guild would need to do an application. This requirement also indicates the expanding of the playspace beyond the arena, as the applicants would have to go the guild forums to do the application. In the picture[27] we can see player (purple whispers) in interested in joining us asking me if he/she really needs to do an application, as he/she thinks we are in so low level in rated battlegrounds that it should not be necessary.
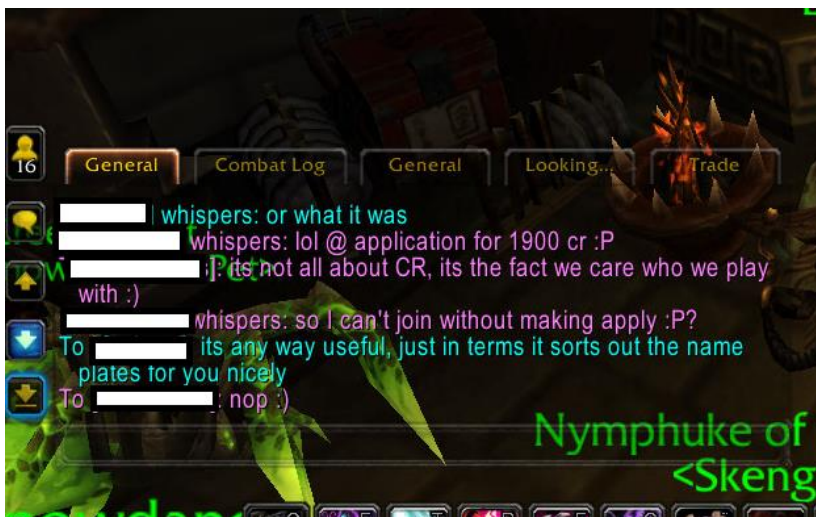
Second expanding of the playspace beyond the arena of the game would happen if a player would decide to apply. In the application form the applicant would need to answer to questions such as what is his real name, age, and country of living. As sense of trust is essential for playful mindset and thus the playspace to be uphold, asking the applicants name, age, and location of living, for instance, can be a way of having the applicant committing to the guild not only as a character, but wholly as a person, even though the character name is what continues to be used in relation to the person playing and the way of knowing the other happens primary in the framework of the play: Much more than being interested on one's

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[27] from World of Warcraft 01.07.2013

country of origin, the class one plays tend to be a more important way of classifying the other. Thus also in the recruitment form the vast majority of the questions would be about the character and skills related to the play.

Post subject: █████████

Character name:
███████

Class:
Warrior

Specc:
Arms / Prot

Alts:
████████████ ce (The Sha'tar)

Battletag:
████████████

Real name:
███████

Age:
23

Country:
Holland

Previous/currrent guild:
Previous: The Exalted

Current server:
Kazzak

Highest arena rating:
With my warrior 0, my main 2.1k

Part of an application in our forums[28]

In the communities which come into existence through World of Warcraft it is first and foremost through the character the other player comes first known as. Thus the character is usually the first impression one gains from the other player, even if having ones country of origin included applications form and the like have an effect as well. This is different when we establish a community for players in a physical space, as there the everyday "I" of the other penetrates through and frames our first impressions, maybe role-playing games aside. This changes the process of getting to know each other to an extent: The in-game character is the first reference point, not the one which follows. This can naturally be different with the players who already know each other in real-life and decide to play together, but what I saw

in our guild was that when new player was introduced to the team or to the guild, he was usually referred by his class: That hunter, that warlock, that priest, or the like[29]. It is not surprising as the set of skills the character has are central to the activity play. Usually when the time passed the new player became known with his in-game name instead of the class he played.

It is not only the other players we need to trust in order to maintain the playspace. The players also expect the game to act in certain way so that trust towards the game can be maintained. Thus we do only expect the implicit rules to be upheld, but we extend this expectation, maybe even more forcefully so, towards the constitutive and operational rules of the game.

While playing rated battlegrounds we would occasionally run into problems with the game itself, problems which where apt to collapse the sensation of play. Some of these problems would be related to "bugs" in the game: The problems with the constitutive rules of the game which would cause unexpected events to happen. This could be disconnecting in the midst of the rated battlegrounds which would amount to losing one of the players from the team, or it could be other kind of event as well. In some battlegrounds there would be "glitches", areas which allow activity which should not be allowed by constitutional rules of the game. This can for instance players being able to "cap" a base in rated battlegrounds from a location from which it would usually not be possible. Often capping the base would mean for instance capping a flag, activity which would take few seconds and the player cannot be interrupted during this time in order it to be successful. A character capping has to stand right next to the flag to do the capping and he thus is in a very vulnerable position in relation to the enemy

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[29] From recorded live streams 12.07.2013

players. In Eye of the Storm (one of the maps for rated battlegrounds), there was a spot on the alliance side from where one could capture the flag without standing next to it and this would be infuriating and demoralizing experience if a member from the enemy team would do this and could even amount stopping playing the game. Thus when a player encounters events where the game acts in a way that is not expected from it, this tends to break the sensation of flow and erupt the trust towards the game. Players act disappointed towards the game and depending on the situation will renegotiate their relationship with game. We for instance would start trying to use that glitch in Eye of the Storm to our own benefit and be aware of it in a manner that other team would not be able to benefit from it.

While most of the time the constitutive and operational rules of the game would not fail and would thus allow the player to maintain the sense of trust towards the game, the changes which would come with patches and expansion could create altogether different situation. The changes done to the classes could infuriate the players and make them feel let down. After every major patch and expansions there tends to be heated discussions in both in the game and in the online forums about the changes and if the changes "nerferd" (worsened) some class in unfair manner.

What is interesting note is that these discussions are not usually related to any kind of narrative turn in the game, but are about the class mechanics or the play mechanics in general: How much damage or healing can the class do when compared to other classes and how well does it perform in PvP and PvE activities. Hence, when my character would have to do a quest where she would have to torture another person as it was the case in one the quests in Wrath of the Lich King expansion, I would not feel hesitant to do so nor would I feel that the game is letting me down by forcing me to do this. But when in the 2014 the new

expansion Warlord of Draenors game out 13th of November and the class I play, Warlock, was in my opinion heavily "nerfed" in terms of damage output in PvP, I did feel really disappointed towards the game and cannot wait Warlocks to be "buffed" (strengthened) again. This highlights that it indeed seems to be so that players experiences higher levels of affective empathy and identification with rules of the game than narrative empathy and identification with the narrative of the game. This could also be seen in the way I related to the temporal and spatial levels of the game while I was playing World of Warcraft during my research period there was little sense of narrative linearity left in my play experience. Mainly my play activities circled around the scheduled events of rated battleground which were taking place in the embedded temporal frames instead of being part of the any kind of advancing narrative.
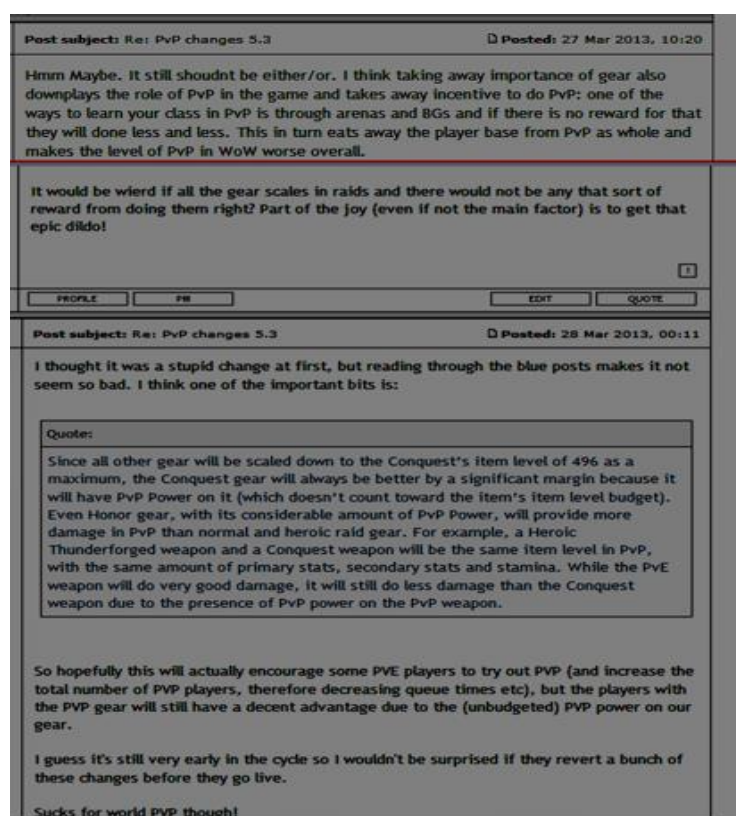
Extract from the forums of the guild we separated from when we are discussing the changes in game-mechanics[30].

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[30] From the online forums 27.3 and 28.3 2013

Another substantial factor in my play during the research period was the social activities

related to organizing and maintaining the rated battleground team and the guild: My

playspace had become first and foremost a playspace which spatially expanded beyond the

limits of the arena of the play and which temporally existed mainly in synchronization with

the real-world time (the cosmological time) which helped us the players to coordinate our

actions. In the below picture[31] we see the in-game calendar were all the rated battleground

activities of our guild are marked and scheduled. This same calendar has in it marked the

Christmas and the like, even if in the picture almost any other event is overdriven by our

guild activities.

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[31] World of Warcraft 02.07.2013

Hi! 🙂 I can't join the TS meeting today becuse of the lack of computer these two weeks, is there anything involving me that you need to add or that I have to add to the conversation? 🙂

02/07/2013 15:14

Maria Ruotsalainen   02/07/2013 15:14
Hmmm, not so much I think

I will put notes about in forum so you can see what has been discussed 😊

02/07/2013 15:15
Okay awesome thanks 😊

Maria Ruotsalainen   02/07/2013 15:15
its mainly about the team diivisions and some ground rules etc 😛

Also other boundaries between play and non-play became diffused during the play as virtual locations such as Facebook would became hosts for both worlds that of play and non-play, when I would establish Facebook page for our guild. In the picture above[32] there is discussion with other player in Facebook about him not being able to make it to a scheduled TeamSpeak meeting. Later on, after the research period already ended, we also started using mobile phone application WhatsApp for communication between the players.

The dominance of action happening in the embedded temporal frames was also reflected in the way I related to the space of the game. Often I would log into the game and not move around in the game-world at all. Instead I would stay in the location where I last time logged out from the game, usually in one the Horde capital cities. These where chosen to be my places of staying due to their functionality. Everything I needed from the game (repairs, vendors, access to chat-channels) would be close to me. Instead of moving around in the game-world, I would chat with other players through some of the in-game chat channels or through TeamSpeak. When I would do arena, battlegrounds, or rated battlegrounds, I would

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[32] My Facebook 02.07.2013. Private messages with other player

use the button from the interface which allowed me to queue for those. This created a different relationship with the game-world than levelling or raiding had created. It made it so that the game-world had become the dressing room of the football player and the actual play would happen in the embedded temporal frames, which had become the stadium of the play.

5.3 The sense of presence in the playspace

Changed relationship with the game would also be noticeable in the rhetoric I used while playing rated battlegrounds with my team. Between the games we would chat happily about different topics and when the rated battleground would "pop" (we would had been on the queue and then the game would have found another team we can face so that we could enter to the rated battleground) I would be asking people to concentrate, or "put their game faces on"[33]. Thus the rated battlegrounds became the occasions where the real play happens, while the spaces surrounding them became the hazy edges, areas of agreeing and disagreeing of the rules, where the social negotiation of the limits of the play happened. Even through the rules of the team we can see that the rated battlegrounds are where the "real play" happens:

> "Behaviour: Behaviour in the RBGs should respect the guild rules and ethos.
> In addition, please remember that while the games can be frustrating, keep
> your behaviour in check. Constant snapping, pointing out others mistakes
> midst game and yelling are not accepted. Mistakes should be pointed out (in
> constructive manner) and talked through, but after the game. While the game
> is on, please concentrate on your own play and the game in hand. Also, avoid
> talking over the leaders, unless asked otherwise (for instance when target

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[33] From recorded live streams 10.7.2013

calling is spread to everyone): While there is multiple ways to do things and is all good to bring these options out, especially after game, yelling contradicting orders constantly in the midst of the game will result to chaos. Like it or not, the leaders have the final word." [34]

Thus for me, while concentrating on the rated battlegrounds, the sense of movement, moving forward, advancing, would no longer come from quests nor from boss kills as it did when I was actively raiding. Instead it would come from gaining rating in the rated battlegrounds, especially when notable milestone would be achieved. In World of Warcraft player gains an achievement and title every hundred rating from 1100 onwards. Thus when player hits 1100 in rated battlegrounds, he gains in-game title "Scout" (on the Horde side, Alliance side has its own titles, but rewarded in same manner), and when he hits 1200 he gains title "Grunt", and so on, all the way up to 2400 when he will gain the "High Warlord" title. These milestones would strengthen the sense of advancing: While one could always lose rating, the titles would stay for good and be there to proof that the player had indeed been "up there". In the below picture[35] we can see a list of achievements.

Together with this sensation of "real playing" taking place in the embedded temporal frames, happened also the transformation of the game-space, the space where one is "in as character",

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[34] Written and posted 09.09.2013 to our online forums, written by the author

[35] World of Warcraft 18.05.2013

from space of playing to a space which was not exclusively that of play. Instead, the game-world would be more and more a stage for chats about everyday matters. Regardless, these activities taking place outside of the embedded temporal frames would maintain their playful quality as far as playful quality is seen as the lusory attitude or the protective bubble surrounding the player. Thus while these activities do not necessarily have the intensity of the flow-state which the activities happening in the embedded temporal frames had, they still remained to be present in the frames of the play and thus there was the kind of absorption that the lusory attitude and mindset of trust and submitting allows. During the everyday chats I was still there when there is not here.

What is this there then? This questions has been already asked in the beginning of the research paper and while we have had several indicators what it could be, definitive answer has still evaded us. I take it so that is "there" which is not "here", here being the physical location of the player or the everyday space of the player is the presence experienced when player is in the playspace. This can manifest itself with sense of presence equated with the character played, as it would for me while playing the rated battlegrounds or similar activity called as "real play"- play where I would feel affective identification with my character or be in a flow-state. Thus for instance when playing rated battlegrounds I would yell other players "I'm here, don't run there"[36] when wanting to indicate my location in the battleground to them, my location then being the location of my character[37]. Player would use this "here" in normal battlegrounds too, as can be seen from the chatlog extract below:

[36] From recorded live streams 10.07.2013

In this specific occasion I am playing random battlegrounds with a guild member without voice communication. We are sharing the same space in the game (an enemy team's flag room in a battleground called Warsong Gulch) and he is referring to it as here when the other player, the flag carrier, joins us.

Secondly, I would also experience "hereness" and talk about "hereness" while just being in the TeamSpeak and chatting with other players I had been playing with: But in this case the "here" would refer being present for them, in the shared playspace. For instance, in the break between rated battlegrounds we would ask other players "are you here?"[38] and not refer to the location in the game-world, but for instance being present in TeamSpeak and being able to hear us.

5.4 Playspace and the "I" which plays

For now I have been discussing about creation of the playspace in relation to other players and to the game, but the playing "I" also needs to negotiate its own me, identity, the role it takes in the act play. Partially this happens through the social circle of the play as the other players keep constantly suggesting a role to occupy and often this role is connected to the character the player plays: As mentioned new players would be usually be referred by their classes, "that warlock", and so on. Hence the negotiation of the "I" happens also through the game which suggests the characteristics of the role played, both through the mechanics of the class played, but also through representational means, as can be seem in the pictures below.

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[38] From our recorded live streams 10.07.2013, 27.07.2013
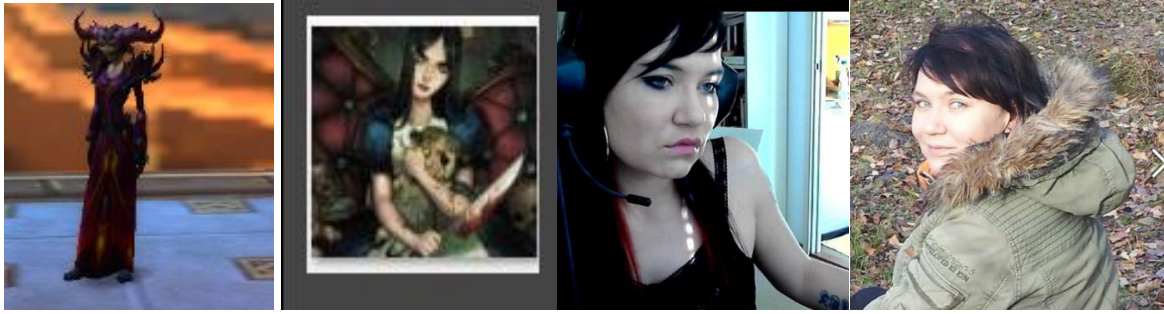
The first picture is my character, Aniar, in the game[39]. She is Blood Elf Warlock, and I had played her for 8 years now. Warlocks are characters often connected to fell magic, demons, and vile corruption. The second picture is from our guild's online forums and the picture was my Avatar I used in the forums[40], thus it would appear next to my posts. It continues the themes of the first picture and connotations often connected to warlocks, while it is not from World of Warcraft itself[41]. The third picture is real-life picture of me which I used in the skype and for period of time as my TeamSpeak avatar as well[42]. The last picture is real-life picture of me which has little connection to the "playspace". In all the three first pictures we can observe similarities. The avatar in forums and the TeamSpeak avatar both attempt to perform the characteristics the in-game character has, thus creating unity between the different instances by strengthening the identity performed. The headset present in the last picture also strengthens the connotations towards gaming and play. All these three pictures would to an extent present "Aniar", as they would all be present in instances where I would be most of time addressed as Aniar. Thus Aniar, while originally having been a name of the in-game character, has become more general name for "I" in relation to the playspace. The last picture[43] creates a contrast to this performed identity, while it is not totally disconnected from it.

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[39] World of Warcraft 10.7.2013
[40] Our online forums, 01.06.2013, origin of the picture Alice: Madness returns, Spicy Horse, 2011
[41] It is actually from game *Alice: Madness returns*, Spicy Horse, 2011
[42] 15.06.2013
[43] 10.11.2013

This threefold division of the playing self, observable in the pictures, comes also close Linderoth's (2005) concept of avatar, occupying two of its three layers. We have the toon, which while being visual representation of the "I" which plays, is also a functional access point to the game-world. The pictures 2 and 3 on the other hand both work as props for the social environment (and the self), presenting and confirming "this is who I am".

As there is not total disconnection - or at least there has not been one for me, again we have to keep the uniqueness of every play instance in mind- the negotiation of the "I" which plays happens also in relation to what else this "I" is, thus in relation to other roles and identities it has. While it is possible to convey that some players keep in-game and out-game identities totally separated, I does seem that the (i) social nature of the play in World of Warcraft; (ii) the tendency to the playspace to expand beyond the arena due to that and; (iii) the long period(s) of time players often play World of Warcraft all do encourage the different roles and identities we have to mix and become fluid in relation to each other.

When I started doing the field research period for this study, I also became to see that this effected to my identity in the game and how I related myself as player and how I related to the rest of the playspace:

> "While I always say personal stuff should not affect the way you do things, we simultaneously are people which have both private and public life and often WoW sits between those two. While all of us define the boundaries of what is private and what is public differently, for number of reason for me WoW falls between those two categories: I played from home which is the ultimate area of

privacy, my dwelling of safety. At the same time, I study it and it is mingled

with my study thus as consequence it does not have clear position of being

neither clearly private or clearly public and consequently those two heavily

mingle in my life, especially because how I study WoW is through my

experience of it. While this mingling between personal and professional,

private and public, can be seen as great strength in regards of my study, it also

complicates sometimes drawing the line between those two" - [44]

This question would come up also later on, as sometimes I would recognize myself pondering

if I can act in a certain way in the game as I am not there solely as a private person anymore.

Thus while I continued playing the game throughout the field research period as I had played

the game before, I became more self-aware during my play activities and would not only

ponder my behaviour through and as Aniar, but through other, more "real-life" or public

identities I have. Most likely this also affected my behaviour sometimes (which brings out

interesting questions in relation to autoethnography and practice studies), while it did not

dominate it: More than once I realized I identify myself first and foremost as player. And at

the end this pondering did, certainly, bring the different roles and identities I have closer to

each other.

In addition to the aspects mentioned here – the experiencer, the social circle, the game, and

the everyday roles and identities – the "I" who plays is also constructed in relation to its play

history.

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[44] This quote is from my post from our online guild forums when we the leaders of the guild discussed about problems in regards of one of our players who had a tendency to overstep my personal boundaries (or that was how I experienced it) and I was contemplating on the effect it had on me and pondering the strength of my reaction (19.06.2013)

Lastly, tensions do not only erupt between the players, in relation to the game, and inside the "I" which plays about what belongs to the playspace, but this discussion is also held in the larger societal level: Is it abnormal to spend so and so much hours "merely playing the game" and so forth. We can also see new areas where (digital) play negotiates its way towards to: Up to date example of this is current e-sports scheme which seeks to as it is to "legalize", justify, the position of gaming and playing digital games in the larger sport scene. And there is change, advancement: Some of the games taking place in the latest Assembly[45] in Helsinki were broadcasted by Yle, the national television of Finland.

5.5 Construction of a playspace

The playspace is a space which is marked away from other spaces by the playful mindset players maintains while occupying it. The playful mindset is marked by the increased sense of trust and enabled by the different ontological structure play has in relation to our everyday spaces and especially in relation to the narratives. To play is then to displace, allow becominess of the other in oneself. The playspace (of World of Warcraft) requires the presence of the game, but is not reducible to it.

I have throughout the research paper stressed how the playspace described here has always been constructed in relation to my own play activities and cannot be taken to be constructing a general model as such. It has been the individualized play activities in relation to an individual which have been constructing my playspace. Regardless, the construction of the playspace has never happened in a vacuum and some general tendencies have been found out and can be suggested to be part of creation of playspace in general. The playspace in World of

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[45] Assembly is a demo and computer game party which is organized every year in Helsinki and its one of the largest of its kind in the world.

Warcraft is always negotiated in relation to the other players played with, in relation the arena of the game, to one's physical surroundings and in relation to the self, the self being both the "I" which plays having historicity constructed in relation to the play and that which falls outside of the area of the play. Thus if we wish to understand the play in relation to World of Warcraft it is not sufficient to analyze solely the game itself, while the game constantly modifies the playspace and its limits. The playspace also expands beyond the area of the game by; having causal connection to our bodies and being affected (and affecting) our immediate physical surroundings; by the virtual platforms we use as extensions of the play; by discourses and meaning players bring to the game; and by changes it introduces to the "I". These all together construct the shifting temporal and spatial frames of play, the playspace.
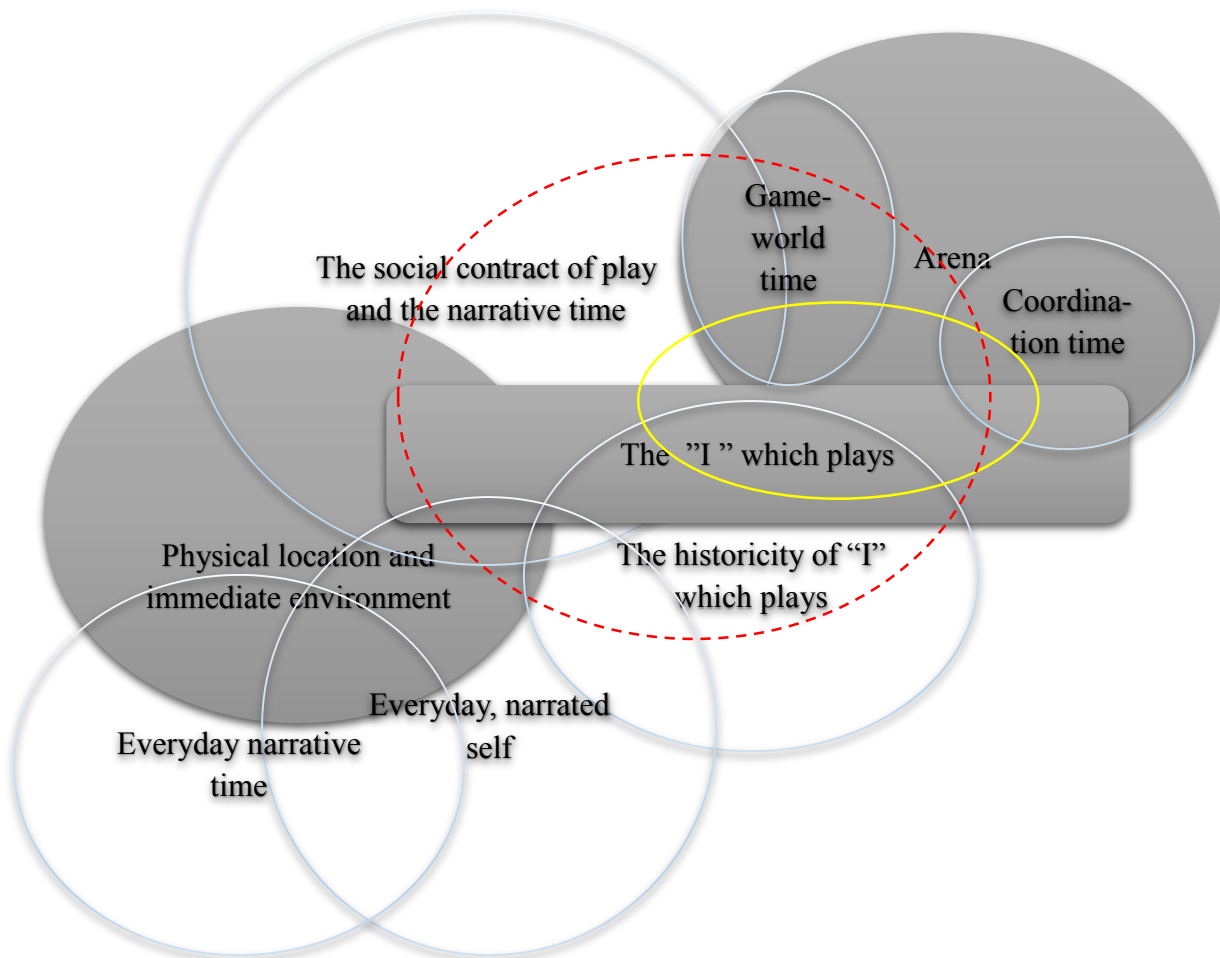
Picture 10: The red circle marks the, albeit shifting, location of the playspace, the wider "here". The yellow lines marks the area of flow-state and primacy of embodied empathy.

6. Conclusion

The function of this research, and consequently its value, has been mainly on three factors. Firstly it has attempted to understand the experience of the play in relation to the frames of the playspace. The aim of this has been to bring closer on the one hand the game and on the other hand the play and the players' experience and focus on the interconnectedness of the two, while simultaneously highlighting the irreducibility of the latter to the first. Secondly, it has attempted to suggest a new way of discussing the magic circle and its boundaries by defining its limit through the spatial and temporal frames. The third point it makes is methodological: It stresses the importance of experience and engagement while studying the interactive event of play.

This threefold function of the research has not always been in its favour. At points it has amounted to lack of clarity and structure. Sometimes it apparent that the research (and the researcher) would have benefitted from more stern and focused direction. Nevertheless, if the research manages to raise thoughts of any kind in the plain of any of its functions, it has served its purpose.

The research started with the questions of how does the play experience of World of Warcraft is constructed and where does it happen, thus what are the temporal and spatial frames of the play. Subsequently, a set of more specified research questions were introduced at the end of the chapter 2. First of these inquired the relationship of the magic circle of Huizinga (1938) to play in World of Warcraft. It was noted that while the concept of magic circle does help us to understand how play differentiates itself from the everyday, the boundaries of the magic circle should not been seen as absolute kind. Instead, we do better if we understand them as

fluid and changing. It was then analysed through Stenros (2014), Ricoeur (2004) Salen and Zimmerman (1995) and Zagas and Mateas (2007), few to mention, how exactly are the boundaries of magic circle fluid. I there followed the threefold division of Stenros (2014) to exemplify the different temporal and spatial frames which construct the area where the play takes place. It was concluded that the play extends beyond the area of the game (arena) through both spatial and temporal extension. This area of play is, nevertheless, experienced as rather unified and coherent as the different temporal frames intersect and are constructed in relation to the game, even if not always determined by it. The point of intersection for all the frames is the "I" which plays, thus the player. Hence each player carries with her individualized playspace, but this playspace exist always in relation to the others. Playspace is constructed from the relationship player has with arena, the social frame, her own threefold relationship of the playing self or the avatar and the historicity she has.

Playspace as a concept and tool for research requires considerable amount of work and empirical verification. The next step would be to revise the categories it suggests and start doing empirical testing on each of them, while simultaneously polishing them and re-structuring their theoretical roots. Especially interesting is its relationship to what Stenros (2014) calls the protective bubble – how much does it actually differentiate from pre-existing phenomenological and even psychological models? A careful scrutiny is called for. Despite the workload, this kind of research could amount to be highly beneficial as it could offer clearer understanding of boundaries of the play in a constantly ludificating society.

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Appendix A:

World of Warcraft related terminology

/say- in-game emote of a player saying something to one or more players near this player

/yell- in-game emote of a player screaming

AB- short for Arathi basin, one of the battlegrounds in World of Warcraft

Addons- exterior programs that help or modify the in-game interface.

Alliance- Another of the two in-game factions.

Assassin- Pervasive game also known as killer.

Azeroth- One of the planets in the World of Warcraft game-world and the so called old world as it was the only planet in the original World of Warcraft

Battleground- Area where players can join in player versus player combat. Usually random players are joined together.

Battleground chat- Chat window specific for chatting in Battlegrounds.

Battle.tag- a communication channel allowing players to contact each other if they play any of the games by Blizzard (WoW, Starcraft, Heartstone, Diablo3) or have the launcher of the Blizzard games open.

BG- short for Battleground.

Blackrock mountain- in-game region that links two World of Warcraft questing area zones, and holds the entrance of three raids and two dungeons.

Blood Elf- One of the playable races in World of Warcraft

Boss- very powerful non-player character found in raids or instances, and even in the game world.

Cataclysm- Third expansion, released on 7th of December 2010.

Character- Player controlled unit in the game which also determines the location of the interface in relation to the game-world.

Chat channels- Variety of in-game communication channels.

Chatlog- A tool which allows recording of all the chat channels

Chat windows- special window for the chat channels in the game interface.

Class- Player chooses what class her character is and this determines the set of skills the character has to great extent. The classes in World of Warcraft are: Death Knight, Druid, Hunter, Mage, Monk, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock, and Warrior.

Commondor 64- old game console.

Dalaran- Capital city

Death knight- in-game class, introduced in the expansion Wrath of the Lich King.

Deathwing- A non-player character, also known as the world destroyer in Cataclysm. A raid boss.

Deepwing Gorge- One of the battlegrounds

Dragon Soul- raid instance

Expansion- new in-game content, which continues the story line.

Faction- there are two factions in World of Warcraft, Horde and Alliance.

Gear- The armour character wears in the game

General chat- usually used by people looking for groups and general discussion.

Guild- a community of players running under the same banner.

Guild chat- specific chat channel for the guild.

Guild master- the leader of a guild.

Horde- Faction of Orcs, Trolls, Tauren, Blood Elves, Undead, and Goblins.

In-game capitals- capital cities for all the different factions in the game like Horde

(Orgrimmar, Thunderbluff, Silvermoon, Undercity) and Alliance (Stormwind, Ironforge,

Darnassus, The Exodar).

Key bind- a setting that allow you to determine what button to press for a specific skill, spell

etc.

Lag- also known as high latency, when player experience an internet issue which makes the

game not operating on full potential.

Lag7- Software program for hacklag

Late Vanilla- determined by the end of Vanilla, and the incoming of the Burning Crusade

expansion.

Launcher- World of Warcraft launcher, released in 14th of August 2013, can provide news

about the World of Warcraft game, patch notes, hotfixes, and it can start the game.

Levelling- The journey of a player to reach the highest level.

LFG- abbreviation for Looking for group.

Local defence chat- chat channel that can be used by non-player character to signal attack on a major point of the map, like cities caps etc.

Lich King- End raid boss of the expansion Wrath of the Lich King.

Mist of Pandaria- fourth expansion, released on 25th of September 2012.

MMORPG- Massively multiplayer online role-playing games.

MUD- abbreviation for multi-user dungeon.

Night elf- One of the races in World of Warcraft

Noob- in-game term for new people in the game, usually used as an insult.

NPC- Non-player character, game character.

Orcs- One of the races in World of Warcraft

Orgrimmar- capital city for the Horde, home of the Orcs and Trolls.

Party- made of 2 up to 5 players that allows you to complete a quest or a dungeon

Patches- small or big updates for the main game, can include Hotfixes of the game can include some game mechanics change.

Pet battle- special feature of the game, introduced with the expansion Mist of Pandaria, allowing players to use their in-game pets to fight each other.

Powned- in-game term for winning against someone or being defeated by someone, depends on context.

PvP- short for Player versus Player.

PvE- short for Player versus Environment.

Quests- an mission that a player can complete and gain rewards (experience, items, gold).

Race- Horde races: Orc, Troll, Tauren, Undead, Blood elf, goblin. Alliance races: Human, Dwarf, gnome, Night elf, Draenai, Worgen. And the most recent Rage that can choose their faction at a certain level is Pandaren.

Raid chat- chat channel for raid groups.

Raid- a gathering of 6 or more players that allows you to do more challenging tasks in-game.

Rated battleground- premade battleground, where the people you join with are picked

individually, and player fight for gaining personal rating.

Rating- person rating that a player can gain buy doing player versus player activities.

Screenshot- Print screen a picture of the game.

Server- also known as World of Warcraft realm, it can be classed by PvP server, PvE server, RP (Role playing)server, RPPVP (Role playing, player versus player) server.

Silvermoon- capital city of the Blood elf.

Tauren- One of the races in World of Warcraft

The burning crusade- First expansion, released on 16th of January 2007

Trade chat- trade chat used for players to promote items they want to sell/trade

Troll- One of the races in World of Warcraft

Undead- One of the races in World of Warcraft

Vanilla- in-game term, the early days, the main starting game.

Warlock- One of the classes in World of Warcraft

Well of eternity- a great pool of water infused with raw magic.

Whatsapp- adroid application for smart phones.

Whisper chat- specific chat window for a private conversation.

WoW- Abbreviation for World of Warcraft.

Wrath of the lich king- second expansion, released on 13th of November 2008.

WTS –abbreviation for want to sell.