Avatars & interaction in gaming:
Dysfunctional Interaction or a Practice of Players

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Abstract
In Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG) you act and react on other players avatars in ways that resembles face-to-face interaction. At the same time, the avatar-interaction is restricted in the technological-embedded environment. Research indicates problems concerning interaction inside these worlds, namely whether the systems resemble ordinary human face-to-face interaction in an adequate way. The assumed insufficient avatar-mediating interaction apparatus is in this paper used as a thinking tool. As a point of departure MMORPG’s is seen as having a history of social life, one that has created specific domains and discursive practices. Examples of avatar in-game text chat from initial research on a Role-Playing (RP) server in World of Warcraft (WoW) are used to illustrate such domain. This indicates that the textual interaction system built-in has done language expressions utterly crucial to be able to interact with other avatars and to know how to act in a competent way to others utterances. In relation with face-to-face interaction, avatar-to-avatar interaction in a RP server is done with the heritage of RP which demands competence of framing the interaction activity such as both in-game issues and RP could coexistence to let the other person now what you are doing here and now, a so called metaframing activity. Thus, the avatar interaction is not foremost seen as an insufficient environment for interaction, but instead as a domain in itself.

Keywords:
Avatar-Mediated Interaction, Discursive practice, Role-play, Gaming, MMORPG

1 Funded by LINT (Learning, Interaction and the development of narrative knowing and remembering) which is a large research project concerning how practices of learning and remembering are transformed through the use of external, digital tools. Lint is funded by The Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and The Swedish Research Council program.
**Introduction**

Presenting your avatar in a virtual world is an interesting way of doing something quite ordinary, if seen from what we – as humans - do in everyday life. This assumes you are familiar with the virtual world’s bodily movements, languages (discourses) and cultures. As human beings we have been socialized since birth into how to do social contacts and small-talk in meetings with other, both with intimate and non-relatives. Also, in interaction with others you take for granted that the conversation is a giving and taking. Sometimes you have a certain focus by asking a question or its just small-talk, the conversation can in this sense have an open ending. During the last decades numerous computer games and virtual environments that host avatars have been constructed (cf. Malliet & de Meyer, 2005). These worlds, now populated with avatars acting, socializing and gaming/playing, have varying resemblance with the real world in regard to how humans interacts in everyday life. Though, if we look at how avatars act within a MMORPG as of in a small talk situation or as a RP event there is some things to consider. This is what this paper is about, namely how a friendly advance to another avatar captures some uncovered aspects that is not in the same sense as prominent in face-to-face interaction, where there are other mechanisms to judge or frame a conversation and to sort out what is going on.

This paper takes as starting point issues concerning how much avatar-mediated interaction resemblance face-to-face interaction. Arguments have been raised that developers of MMORPG have focused graphical realism over how avatars in those worlds interact with each other (Moore, Ducheneaut & Nickell, 2006). The authors therefore argue that avatar-mediated interactions are different from or miss some aspects of ordinary human interaction. When investigating avatar-interaction in several online worlds, both gaming and more social virtual environments, Moore et al. (2006) point out some aspects where the interaction system included in those worlds fail to support basic human interaction. In mediated communication a technology come in between humans in their interaction with the result that some part or parts of the communication could be a difficult task. As Moore et al. (2006) puts it “While what participant are doing with their bodies in a face-to-face social setting is observable and therefore accountable, this is not the case in mediated communication. In forms of social interaction that are mediated by a technology (e.g., Telephone, mobile phone, email, instant messaging), participants have varying degrees of access to what the other is doing in his or her physical environment.” (p. 9). By showing interaction between avatars in MMORPG problems to conduct avatar interaction is exemplified; for example not knowing why another avatar is not responding to a question (the player might be busy talking to someone outside the game or to someone else in-game). Another design proposal concern the chat tools used and argue for a word-by-word implementation to produce a smoother turn-taking activity.

From a design perspective the author’s remarks is a highly interesting and valued approach. Though, at the same time you say that the interaction systems
are insufficient, avatar-interaction is flourishing inside virtual worlds. What this paper will bring to focus is on the one side the social system tools used in conversation in virtual worlds and on the other side to question comparisons between face-to-face interaction with avatar-to-avatar interaction. A contrasting between face-to-face interactions with avatar interaction can be useful to understand what interaction mechanisms that exist today in MMORPG’s. In other words, relating how interaction is done in face-to-face interaction to avatar-to-avatar opens up for how humans normally behave and vice versa. The focus in this paper is not primarily as a contrast or comparison to face-to-face interaction, instead taking departure from the activity situated in a specific discursive practice. In the continued analysis of avatar in-game chat the thinking tool – avatar-to-avatar and face-to-face – is useful because it keeps reminding of the ubiquitous presence of how humans act face-to-face in relation to avatar-to-avatar. Thus, the paper aims to focus the virtual world in itself and not foremost as something being missed or problematic in the virtual world.

The problem

While Moore et al. (2006) focus on how social systems built-in MMORPG support interaction in a way that optimally resemblance the configurations of human interaction face-to-face, this paper take an interest on a conversational level. More precisely, how communication between avatars can be understood as of what mechanisms in an encounter makes the interaction done and accountable in this game world setting. As a departure in how to study the avatar-to-avatar in-game chat conversations the paper uses the concept of discursive practices. Also, mechanisms at work in face-to-face encounters and the concept of framing the gaming situation are used to analyze the avatar conversation. There are indications that how avatars in a MMORPG interact with each other, on a social level, are depending on the server-type (Taylor, 2006). In this paper, examples of how avatars do small-talk, role-playing attempts and both in World of Warcraft (WoW) on a RP-server will be discussed. The choice is based on the assumption that RP activities are supposed to influence how conversations is constituted, as of being ‘in-character’ or ‘out-of-character’. This paper will use Moore et al. (2006) view of MMORPGs, i.e. as imperfect interaction systems compared to face-to-face, as a thinking tool for scrutiny existing interaction taking place in those environments today. This brings forward an interest in how avatar-interaction, as of conversation, is done within this quite rough supported interaction milieu. We could say interaction is insufficient, but at the same time it does flourish, both textual, emoting (avatar embodied interaction) and speech interaction, in online game environments. The purpose in this paper is to discuss interaction in MMORPG’s, more specific focusing RP servers and encounters in those, as a discursive practice in itself. More specific, how this is stated in avatar-interaction as of text-in-interaction and what mechanisms are involved in this conversation.
Background

The theoretical point of departure for the analysis is a sociocultural perspective. According to this theory, contexts and practices form human thinking, acting and communication at the same time as thinking, acting and communication establish contexts and practices. An interplay depending upon material and socio-historical conditions (Säljö, 1999; Wertsch 1998). From this point of view language is seen as the most important mediating tool in human meaning making (Säljö, 2000). The concept mediation relates to artificial objects or artifacts that act as agents between the human and the world. Therefore, mediating tools influence human action, communication and thinking (reasoning). In relation to the interaction in RP servers some things could be said to the interest in this paper. First, the avatar mediated interaction is made in a discursive practice. A discursive practice, accordingly to Säljö (2000), must be seen in relation to the concept of knowledge, that is to say knowledge is discursive. Discourses have developed under a long period and the written language have often facilitated or functioned as an aid in knowledge progression (Säljö, 2000). Second, to be able to “be” and “act” as an avatar in a MMORPG human reasoning must take part in knowledge situated in linguistic systems, as terms and concepts (c.f. Säljö, 2000; Gee, 2003). To be able to visualize and analyze an object or event and understand this through certain linguistic concepts is about knowledge in a specific formation of concepts – in other words about a discourse (Säljö, 2005). Also, the meanings of words in a discursive practice take place in a discourse, in a specific context. As of this line of reasoning a competent player in WoW and of the specialized discourse of RP in a RP server has become part of a social practice and discourse. Someone that is part of a social practice and its discourse could be said to be part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Earlier research has indicated a specific discourse in game activity which player does acquire (Linderoth, 2004). Studies have shown how terms and expressions that have a specific meaning in everyday life, acquire a clearly-defined meaning in gaming contexts (Hoyle, 1993; Johansson, 2000; Linderoth, 2004). These observations indicate that gaming constitute a practice of its own and obtain signification for players in its own conditions. In the next section I will take a brief departure in earlier research in face-to-face mechanisms, how players frame the game activity (where RP activity is brought up) and end with a short glimpse of the sociohistory of RP gaming.

Dynamic mechanisms in interaction and in-game activity

There is a substantial field of research concerning everyday face-to-face interaction. One that has aimed to understand meaningful human encounters is Goffman (1956; 1963; 1983). According to Goffman face-to-face interaction “…comprise all those instances of two or more participants in a situation joining each other openly in maintaining a single focus of cognitive and visual attention – what is sensed as a single mutual activity, entailing preferential communication rights” (Goffman, 1963, p. 89). Persons together might engage
in a talk, as of a small talk, gaming or formal discussion according to Goffman. In presence of others, humans use certain performances to be in control of the information given to other in face-to-face interaction (Goffman, 1956). Thus, in everyday life we use among other things clothing, facial expressions, body language, the setting surrounding the persons to present certain information about ourselves. Hence, this implies that there are mechanisms involved in a face-to-face interaction.

Goffman (1983) presumes other social interaction besides face-to-face, for example the telephone, as versions of the fundamental situation (i.e. two or more individuals in the same physical environment). In relation to avatars in MMORPG, avatars do give away information – as of what level, gear, clothing etc. – which can influence avatar interaction. Also, in contrast to a face-to-face gathering, in MMORPG’s the gaming activity between players involve other types of mechanisms. Observations of gaming interaction show players meaning making as a process that move back and forth between different definitions of what is relevant in the game at the situation at hand. Thus, it has been argued that computer games constitute three frames; rules, theme and ordinary life (for further discussion see Linderoth, 2004; 2005; Fine, 1983). Rule based framing concern what could be done with features in the game context. The theme oriented framework constitutes according to Linderoth, among other things, what Caillois (1961) call mimicry. Thus, mimicry framing consists of an as if activity where the players act as the game affordance something that does not show explicit in the game environment.

**Role-Playing as a game within the game**

In relation to avatar-to-avatar interaction on a RP server, the layered framing activity assumes to be at work as described above. Hence, the paper focuses how different layers of meaning become in an avatar encounter on a RP server and the discursive practice that accept text-produced layered conversations. In other words the socio-dramatic or as if framing in relation to other framings in conversation with other avatars. On RP-servers there exists a discursive practice of using different form of bracketing or separating when in character (i.e. an as if framing of being the game character) or out-of-character (i.e. as of not being the game character and thus framing the conversation more freely) (for a discussion concerning IC and OOC see Hendricks, 2006). The interest here, in relation to face-to-face comparisons, is what a player must be competent in to frame the discourse used in conversations (and therefore also competent in the RP server ways of talking/chatting). As pointed to before, there are mechanisms that influence how conversation is framed in MMORPG’s, the same way Goffman argues that face-to-face encounters have. For example a avatars level, gear, clothing etcetera can be seen in as equivalent in relation to human presentation of self. Though, a difference in the situation is, of course, that the in-game activity, as of chat, heavily relies on the textual presentation of what is going on. This of course could be misunderstood, and therefore be seen as
insufficient, before discussing a excerpt of two avatars a short comment on the socio-history of MMORG’s is done.

MMORPG’s socio-history
By just taking focusing a technical understanding of the interaction systems in online games or a detailed understanding of everyday human interaction as Moore et al. (2006) did, some crucial activities to understand what is going on in conversations within virtual worlds. The social arena and the technical social systems in MMORPG and RP-servers have a history and culture from older forms of interaction and social play. If seen from our human history, as hunters, gatherers and survivors, participatory story circles is assuming to be our oldest art form (Kelly, 2004). Though, the predecessor of the digital game development of MMORPG have a more specific origin starting in 1970s with the RP game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and the electronic text game adventures called Multiple User Domains (MUD) (see more detailed discussion in Mortensen, 2006; Kelly, 2004).

D&D is a pen and pencil role-playing fantasy game (Fine, 1983) which take the genre of fantasy worlds stemming from especially Tolkien as background. In these physical setting players act in real-time within an adventure as an archetypal figure and a Dungeon Master operate by certain guidelines as a director for the adventure. The in-character activity, as described above, was originally done in presence of other humans. The other origin is from the MUD which is a textual computer adventure that was played by typing in commands to what a program responded to or other players (Mortensen, 2006; Kelly, 2004). Some of the MUD’s made use of the pen-and-paper roleplaying activity. Thus a textual virtual world, where you describe your character by text to others, and the in-character activity went into a digital form. Then MUDs graphical counterpart came to existence in the late 1990, the MMORPG.

MMORPG of today have also taken in interactional patterns from Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Instant Messaging (IM), such as abbreviations of common activities (for example “AFK” stands for away from keyboard) (Ducheneut & Moore, 2005).

Avatar-interaction in MMORPG is done with in-game chat, add-on program for speech (or built-in), and emotes (textual and/or graphical information about an avatars movement, feelings, attitudes etc). In this paper the focus is on how in-game chat conversation is unfolding as avatars use text as a way of framing an encounter with another avatar.

Findings
The following excerpts is taken from initial research in a project concerned with MMORPGs blurred avatar interaction patterns when role-playing is involved. The chosen excerpt has an experimental setting. The goal in these interactions was to let other avatars react to and frame a conversation that had a “soft” RP invitation. Several avatar-conversation attempts were done.
The excerpt chosen capture similar interaction patterns found in those who responded to the invitation. I, as Tela, am opening a conversation (with the in-game chat function) with passing by avatars. As a way of starting a small-talk and/or role-playing activity I set out in World of Warcraft to interact. The setting was chosen out in the “wild” and in areas where quest is done. This was explicit done to open up for layered framing in conversations and even trying to confuse other avatars on what is going on. In crowded areas, such as cities or some places in larger towns, role-playing is a more common framing activity in RP servers when starting interacting with someone. Also, the environments in crowded areas has a status of interaction both OOC and IC concerning other content than in-game questing and the like. In the setting that was chosen there are NPC characters that could disturb the conversations. Since the purpose was to increase the number of frames that the avatar-interaction could hold a plot/backstory was set up for the character Tela. Tela belongs to the race Draenei in WoW which have a specific back-story in the game-history that was used for Tela’s IC role-play. Draenei is a people that have a past of wanting to do well, care about the nature and fight the evil which is used in the conversation.

In WoW you can, for example, use “Say” mode or “Whispering” mode to contact other avatars, when using Say everyone can hear you and the Whispering mode is only for the intended avatar. In the conversation both was used. The avatar names have been changed, due to confidentiality.

Picture 1: The setting for a small-talk
The excerpt below is showing the avatar Tela and an unknown avatar passing by. The setting is in an area with a quest quite close by. The surrounding is close to the mountains with a path leading up to a cave, the path is concealed by a tree (see Picture 1). Nearby, Kobolds are walking, and in the encounter below one attacks the avatars. The focus in the interaction is in the framing of the encounter. More specific, how the interaction is dynamic in ways of both fitting a more mundane question of what the other is doing (small-talk), an in-game issue (quest) and at the same time fitting adequately in the attempt of RP. My involvement in the interaction is an attempt to do an avatar-to-avatar encounter which could possess both responses from a small-talk and/or that of RP from bypassing avatars. Brackets is used to manifest what is happening in the surrounding of the avatars and physical expressions that the avatars are doing (emotes).

(1) Small-talk invitation
Tela stands on a mound and starts to express avatar emotes when an avatar approaches (Kana) (line 1-2). Because Kana doesn’t react on Tela’s emotes, an utterance is done, a greeting (line 3). In line 4 Kana responds and introduce an in-game issue for a quest nearby. Kana can be seen assuming her answer to Tela’s question is a relevant account for this situation. Thereafter she comes towards Tela and do a emote greeting, Tela respond by bowing before Kana (line 5-6). If contrasted with IRL greetings this “looks” more polite and as if the avatars had met before.

1. Tela    You gaze off into the distance. ((Emote))
2. Tela    Tela wrinkle’s her forehead ((Emote))
3. Tela    To Kana: Greetings, it’s a nice day…so what are you up to?
4. Kana   Kana whispers: Haha I’m headed for the cave in north east. Gonna find that crystal
5. Kana   Kana greets you with a hearty hello! ((Kana comes towards Tela)) ((Emote))
6. Tela    You bow before Kana. ((Emote))

(2) Continuation: In-game issue (questing) and in-game attack
Kana continues to speak with the in-game quest in focus in line 7. You can say Kana specify exactly what quest she is referring to here – probably to see if Tela already done this one. In other words framing the activity by the rules of the game (Linderoth, 2004). Tela is introducing what she is doing in line 8. A meeting with a made up avatar – starting her IC plot. Kana asks if Tela and the third avatar involved have plans going up to the cave where she got her quest (line 9-10). Tela specifically asks Kana if she has seen the fictitious third avatar, and while Kana answers both avatars get attacked by a kobold walking by (line 11-13) (see Picture 2).

7. Kana    Kana whispers: Yer doing The Princess Trapped?
8. Tela  
   To Kana: Well, I was supposed to meet someone here...but I guess she is late...

9. Kana  
   Kana whispers: Ahh

10. Kana  
    Kana whispers: Are you two headed for the cave?

11. Tela  
    To Kana: You haven't seen Hermoine?

12. Kana  
    Kana whispers: Um nope, don't think so ((A Kobold attacks the avatars))

13. ----  
    Drywhisker Kobold attempts to run away in fear! ((Both avatars and pets attacks Kobold and it dies))

(3) Continuation: **RP invitation and quest invitation**

In line 14 Tela is presenting herself as of in-character by utterance the made up plot. The response take about one minute, where Kana utterance “I see…”, Kana seems to accept Tela’s utterance. When Tela continues with the in-character telling in line 17, Kana responds by taking the conversation back to the in-game issue – the quest (line 18). Thus, Kana choose not to participate in this activity.

14. Tela  
    To Kana: I'm quite fed up with this, Miss Hermoine is also a Guardian of Honor, we are supposed to guide a person - you know to see the "Holy light" as we Draenei always speaks of. I'm quite tired of it.

15. Tela  
    Tela breathe a deep sigh

16. Kana  
    Kana whispers: I see, so this is the place where you planned for it to be done?

17. Tela  
    To Kana: Yes, or I thought so... But maybe there is a change of plans...

18. Kana  
    Kana whispers: Ahh well if you need a hand in that cave... I'm hear to help :)

Thereafter the avatars say farewell.

This avatar-interaction does float, in some sense, between different focus of interest. As for Kana it mainly concerns a quest, a game-related object in a small-talk. The experiment intention was to open up for both this kind of small-talk and a role-playing event. The setting, in the outback and not in a town, open
up to this sort of layered framing where there is more competing of which frame is given priority. Within a RP server there are some knowledge and behavior that you could assume from your fellow players, the main assumption is that of the activity of role-playing. This presumes some skills in how and when you do this (for example using brackets when not IC), of course this can’t be taken for granted, but one assumption is to be open towards activity of this sort.

The conversation taking place could both be seen as something that functions as a small-talk, which turns out to an invitation to questing. At the same time, the attempt of role-playing does not develop with Kana as an actor. Though Kana is not dismissing the attempt, she doesn’t either take on the opportunity that is embarked on her. It is necessary to say that Kana isn’t taking the bait just of one cause. There can be plenty of reason why she didn’t. As of not being a role-player (it isn’t a demand on the player in a RP server). Another cause, in line with Linderoths (2004) argument concerning game activity in relation to the rules of the game, is the setting where the interaction takes part. Kana is refereeing to a quest close by; therefore this is the main framing of the interaction. She might not have the time or think it’s interesting to invest the effort in the invitation.

Other RP/smalltalk attempts show interaction where avatars are responding to the RP framing which continues and ends in different ways. There are also encounters which frames the conversation as of OOC, a “fun” spectacle by taking in ordinary life. For example when answering the question if they had seen Hermoine with “no, potter just here around and looking for her too.. “ and referring to Hermoine as Harry Potter’s friend.

The excerpt could be said to contain a metaframing discourse. Metagaming is described by Waskul (2006) in a RP activity as the ability to “distinguish between the knowledge they have as a player and knowledge they presume their fantasy persona has” (s. 28). In relation to Kana, metaframing in this situation refer to the ability to manage to hold the conversation in focus of a in-game subject (the quest) and at the same time being able to take part of a frame that Kana doesn’t take an active role in (the RP attempt). A blurred event that is open to interpretations situated in a discursive practice where knowledge about how to do smalltalk and RP is set. This could be contrasted with what is going on in text-chat system in MUDs, where earlier research has stated that multiple topics are handled smoothly (Curtis, 1997). Multiple topics are in the MUD due to constrain of the media which the players/users adapt to. Whereas the metaframing skill introduced here is caused by discursive practices (probably starting in the RP history and the practices that developed along the technical systems).

**Discussion**

The aim of the paper has been to argue that the activity in a MMORPG function within a specific domain. In this domain, there are more nuanced and diverse
discursive practices. By taking departure from a role-playing server within WoW, avatar-interaction could be seen as working in different shifts of meaning-making processes within a textual conversation. The excerpt has shown, in an experimental way, how avatars could frame an “open” attempt to a role-playing event. Both as an in-game small-talk concerning some game related “mission” and at the same time accepting the more off-game content of a story that is an open invitation of a role-playing interaction. These clarifications and adjustments could be seen from quite different angles;

a) On one hand as an insufficient communication tool as Moore et al. (2006) take departure from. For example, due to not seeing word by word when the conversations unfold the in-game chats in MMORPG makes conversation difficult. This is done IRL which make possible a focused and fluent interaction.

b) On the other, as something that exists in this domain, a sort of communication that imply certain skills regarding the avatar to act as a social being in this world. This assumes some previous knowledge and skills, as a way of framing the conversation within an in-game context (as of questing and other related in-game contents) or off-game context (as taking in IRL as of Harry Potter looking for Hermione), or as of RP (IC). If seeing the avatar-interaction examples in this light – with the ability to move and shift between layers without questioning the shifts – you might say that the communication works. The players follow each others framing and so to speak know what is going on here and now. Even if the avatar-interaction doesn’t show if the players is socialized into a RP mode of behaving it does show that the gamers is fully capable of handling the situation at hand.

“Success in creating an avatar interaction that looks, feels, and behaves realistically to players will require a technical understanding of real life face-to-face” (Moore et al, 2006, p. 3). A technical understanding of face-to-face interaction, as the authors states, does outline aspects of how encounters is done and could therefore point out essential interaction patterns that is lost when social systems for avatars is implemented. Though, what are missed with this focus are interaction patterns that have been developed inside MMORPGs since the 90s and that flourish in MMORPG’s today. Also the inheritance of role-playing interaction could be missed with a focus of what constitutes normal interaction between humans. The example of avatars textual interaction show the avatar-interaction as constituted in a specific practice where the participants in the conversation manage different frames at hand without issues whether or not one is following the others “doing” (utterances) here and now.

Thus, in summary it works to talk about avatar interaction as something else than what we do with our human bodies in a face-to-face encounter. At the same time you can talk about avatar interaction as something that imitates human’s everyday interaction, as Moore et al. (2006) do. What I claim here is to focus and understand interaction in MMORPG as something "else” – a own domain.
Though, it builds on assumptions concerning how the activity in human meeting is done and looks – avatars has in some sense physical and communicative similarities with human beings. There are other mechanisms (the so called metaframing) influencing how communication are being made in virtual game meetings. In contrast with other server types in WoW, as of pvp, those also have a discursive practice (for example the use of leet language). Though, the metaframing occurring in the excerpt might not be as outstanding. Either you are familiar with the leet discourse or you adapt to how to use it. There will also exist layered framings as of focusing the rules or letting in the outside world become part of the conversation, but the *as if* character (IC) is not assumed to be a competitive framing in most conversations.

The interesting with the extract is the layered frames at work and that the activities in the conversation make it work. In relation to face-to-face it is problematic to comment on such contrasting with the avatar-interaction. It resembles a “fools” way to contact someone in comparisons to normal interaction face-to-face. Instead relating it to ordinary pen-and-paper role-playing activities or live action role-playing games (larp) might be more suitable.

Another aspect concerns the mechanisms or resources in face-to-face interaction that avatar-interaction miss or doesn’t support. This could be seen in relation to another project we are involved with (focusing gaming functions of disabilities and inclusion). Hence, computer gaming environments has unique possibilities due to the fact that they don’t resemblance face-to-face interaction. Players with different stigmas, for example speech disabilities, could in that sense interact in virtual worlds where they are not judged by face-to-face interaction. This makes it possible to be judged from other mechanisms, conditions in the avatar-to-avatar interaction. Such aspects of the avatar-interaction scene will also be neglected if compared to face-to-face encounter. It is an arena for interactions on it own.

Moore et al. (2006) focus how social systems in MMORPG’s support the interaction human’s uses in face-to-face interaction. Thus, they are not interested in the gaming context and the impact on the interaction of the practices evolved in these worlds. In this paper the focus was instead on how avatar communication works on a conversational level set in a game (WoW) including the RP activity. What I have argued for here is an understanding of interaction in MMORPG on its own terms and not as a representation of face-to-face interaction. In other words, which mechanisms that is fundamental to be able to make meaning of utterances in chat encounters. The assumed insufficient social systems work as a thinking tool and opens up for aspects that also could be hidden by focusing the technical challenges. Thus, abilities players in those worlds already have acquired are something that these practices rely on. What is aimed here is how the artificial world of humans as avatars demand skills and abilities situated from this specific domain. Instead of asking
which features of IRL can be implemented into virtual worlds, questions of how players actually behave and solve encounters by using mechanisms of the virtual worlds is stressed. In this sense, to be able to participate in these milieus you need to be a participant in the RP server’s community of practice. Thus, the social system in MMORPG will lead to problems in interaction with other avatars for a non-experienced player. This assumes that after the player gets used to manage the missing awareness information a focus on other mechanisms will take over. In other words, the player will not react in the same way on other avatars as they would do towards another human being IRL. Even the information you get IRL that somebody is whispering to another is invisible in this environment. A competent player focuses the attention on other social mechanisms. In the extract this mechanisms can be seen as a so called metaframing skill. This communication is set in a discursive practice and has a dynamic character. Hence, the player must be aware of the framing activities (cf. Linderoth, 2004; Fine; 1981) involved in the game discourse, namely the ubiquitous presence of the framing as of RP (in-character), in-game issues (out-of-character) and the possibility of the coexistence of both.

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