

# **Whose life is it anyway?**

## **Identity, Surveillance and Power in the Digital World.**

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## **Abstract**

Throughout its initial conception, anthropological studies of the virtual world have been very limited in numbers. A drastic shift began to occur in recent years as the virtual world has become accessible to a wide array of people, therefore allowing more individuals to connect with the virtual world. Through online role-playing games and social media, the inhabitants within these worlds are afforded with benefits that will not only enrich their lives, but are otherwise unobtainable in the physical world. Drawing from Michel Foucault and Thomas Mathiesen's models of panopticism and synopticism, this thesis seeks to discuss how surveillance is practiced, and how power is structured in the virtual world. The first section compares the Terms of Service documents within the internet to the erection of a central watchtower under the possible occupation of guards who survey everything within their gaze, and explains how the constant evolution of the internet rendered panopticism to be inadequate in governing the domains within the internet. The second section discusses the ways which the advanced two-way medium of the internet has increased the ability of individuals to attain the roles of surveilles in the virtual world, and how personal freedom is exercised through careful negotiation of power with other individuals.

**Keywords:** Internet, Surveillance, panopticon/panopticism, synopticon/synopticism

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction & Literature Review



*“On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.”*

**On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog. From The New Yorker, by P. Steiner, July 5, 1993. All Rights Reserved.**

I remember the first time I set foot into the virtual world. Deep within the crevasse of cyberspace I experienced ‘life’ as I had never before. In this new world, I am born a baby, a ‘highly intelligent’ baby unlike any other before me. Life then begins to take its ‘normal’ course of action as my adolescent years of puberty flashes by at the click of a button, providing me with a ‘realistic’ experience of struggle, character building, and most importantly, what it meant to grow up harshly. Be it an apocalyptic wasteland filled with hidden pre-nuclear war gems, dungeons littered with treasures, a vast galaxy consisting of many uncharted star

systems, or the anonymous internet and its immense fortunes of knowledge and wisdom, a young pubescent needed not turn to drugs or alcohol when there were limitless experiences and monumental life events presented before me. As a Lone Wanderer or a scruffy-looking nerf herder, armed with my 'realistically' earned skills and aloof sense of superiority, the world was mine for the taking, and the limit, my imagination.

### **1.1. Aims & Rationale**

Virtual worlds allow for the creation of new identities that are separate from that of our real life; a person deriving from a position of privilege and comfort can easily assume the guise of an individual who, through personal experience of hardship and intolerance, may have produced identities that are classified in society as "*urban*", or "*street*". After all, be it the vast realm of the internet or an anonymous chatroom, the malleability of identities ensures that no one truly knows if you are human, a robot, or even a dog. What was once a vision of the future has become a reality as people of all ages can now be seen utilizing the opportunities provided by the internet, and in doing so, blurring the boundaries between what is considered to be of the real world and that of the virtual. As wonderful as this reality may seem, it is only to be expected that an assortment of questions about how individuals make sense of this separate identity will begin to emerge.

This study will conduct an ethnography into the internet in order to theorize how individuals with the ability to watch the actions of others are in fact responsible for the freedom that an individual experiences within the domains of the internet. The first domains to examine will be two massively multi player online role-playing game(s) (MMORPG(s)) of The Elder Scrolls Online (ESO), released in 2014, and Final Fantasy 14: A Realm Reborn (FF: XIV), released in 2013, which were the second and third most popular MMORPGs at the end of 2016. Their inclusion in this study is not due to favoritism or preference, but due to other more notable MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft and EverQuest® always being utilized as the key examples for studies that centered on the virtual world (Delwiche, 2006; Langer, 2008; Golub, 2010; Thorhauge, 2013). Another added benefit for newer MMORPGs is the fact that few people have studied them since their initial release. Following that will be the free-to-use social media platform, Facebook. First released in 2004, Facebook has been

chosen in favor of other forms of social media, such as Twitter, and Snapchat, due to its popularity and usage statistics.

Many MMORPGs allow for their players to embody another self by including elements that completely differentiate a person from his/her actual human self. For the most part, these virtual worlds allow people from all walks of life to experience situations not only from the eyes of another person, but also to face adventure without the risk of grievous harm and life-threatening injuries, and explore a vast world without permanent repercussions on their real life. Previous statistics from *Children Now*, a community-based organization in California estimated that at least 145 million people in the world play video games on a regular basis, making it clear that games connect people together as a common interest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Leonard, 2003; Monson, 2012). Despite their primary labelling as being nothing more than games, the increasingly immersive nature of current MMORPGs has evolved to the point in which it is somewhat possible for an individual or collective group to feel as if the virtual can somehow mirror that of the physical.

The MMORPG of ESO serves as the eighth installment of the latest expansion in the growing series of Elder Scroll games which originally debuted in the 1990s. In order to bring the format of the game to a contemporary standard, ESO is the first in the series to be presented in the form of an MMORPG instead of a role-playing game (RPG). In addition to this, the game itself is designed to consist of over 10,000 non-player character(s) (NPC(s)) meaning that the gaming world is itself populated with more characters than there are in smaller towns across the physical world, a feat which landed the game in the Guinness Book of World Records in 2016. The game is made to appear as lively and as realistic to the physical world as possible. This involves, within the game itself, books with stories about the lore and history of the world which a player can leisurely read at their own liking, presenting players with a world inside another world.

Additionally, more advanced features include the programming of specific timetables for the artificial intelligence (AI) within the game. This progressive development in its design creates NPCs who are all scripted to work, eat, and even sleep like normal people in the real world, presenting an increased sense of realism. As if the world could not be livelier, for players who really want to further live in the world presented by ESO, they could also purchase and own a home which they could refurbish and live in. This portion of the game

also comes with over 1,300 items which the player could choose from in order to decorate their house to their liking.

FF: XIV is the second game to be presented in the form of a MMORPG in the long running franchise of Final Fantasy games dating back to 1987. Unlike that of ESO, FF: XIV consists of fewer NPCs populating the gaming world itself, therefore encouraging more of a focus from players to interact with each other. These virtual interactions could occur in a one-on-one setting, or even through the involvement of larger groups that consists of multiple individuals from across the real world. Much like ESO in which the world can be studied by reading the in-game books detailing the lore and history of the world, FF: XIV also allows for the players to do the same by choosing to explore the gaming world or listening to storytelling NPCs.

Unlike ESO, players who wish to purchase a home for their virtual character are free to do so, but must act quickly as the world itself only consists of limited spaces for building houses. Should an individual be unlucky enough to miss out on the opportunity to attain a property of their own, they are instead required to settle for smaller apartment homes which are also populated with other players; housing is a complicated matter, and this harsh reality from the physical world extends itself into the virtual world.

In an attempt to further mirror the game closer to the physical world, there were even efforts by the game's creators to mimic real dates and events which corresponds to the time of the real world depending on when the game is accessed. FF: XIV and ESO like many other MMORPGs would feature holidays that have been programmed to coincide with actual events such as Halloween on October 31<sup>st</sup>, and New Year's on January 1<sup>st</sup>. While many of these exist merely as an Easter egg set in order to acknowledge the actual days, players who choose to partake in the activities held on such days often find themselves rewarded; just like how a child would receive candy for going Trick or Treating, a player could for example receive in-game benefits.

Given the multitude of factors that bridges the gap between the real world, and that of the gaming world, I believe that MMORPGs present us with a perfect environment in which to conduct an ethnographic study as they are built on the basis of being made to feel as more than just gaming worlds. These are meant to be domains in which an individual is afforded

with the freedom to be whoever they want to be, and to live out fantasies of their own. Additionally, many MMORPGs, ESO and FF: XIV included, often provide players with the option to spend real world money for cosmetic items that allow for further customization of their avatars, thereby actually bridging the gap between both the physical and the virtual.

Aside from games, there is also social media which has become an important part of social life in the globalized world. “Examples of social media include (but are not limited to) discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasting, social network sites, video sharing, and microblogging ... social media delivers content via a network of participants where the content can be published by anyone but is still distributed across potentially large-scale audiences” (Page, 2012, p. 5).

The ability to produce content on social media is not restricted to certain members of the privilege or elite, but is accessible to any individual from any culture or community. Anybody with the proper technology and knowledge is able to assume a position in the virtual space of social media. In order to understand the scale in which social media has been adopted by people for everyday uses, we need only defer to numbers and statistics. It was previously recorded that there were 500 million active users on Facebook in 2010 (Page, 2012). In 2017 however, these numbers have increased to 2.07 billion active users (Statista, 2017). This means that approximately (mathematical accuracy not withstanding) every 1/3.7 people in the world use Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat at least once, if not more times a day.

Facebook allows its users who sign up to create customizable profiles that include their name, occupation and so on. Within their respective profiles, the users have the options to add ‘friends’, post status updates, message each other, share photos and videos, and even join specific groups centered on almost anything in the world. Content on Facebook is not necessarily restricted to the domains of the virtual world. The people within are free to communicate or comment on factors that relates back to the physical world. While social media itself may lack the graphical and visual immersion that a MMORPG in this day may bring, what is important to note here is that both online role-playing games and social media allow for the transcendence from the barriers of the physical world in order to communicate with others through the virtual world. They are settings in which a person is afforded with the freedom for free inquiry that is otherwise improbable, or restricted in the reality of real life.



A research into the virtual world is of great relevance today at a time when its grasp on the lives of many individuals, including our very own, has reached a peak. While many are and can still be made aware of the distinction between the physical and the virtual, the line between the two is increasingly blurring as the generations pass, therefore creating an illusion that they are somewhat symmetrical in reality. It is predicted that by the 2030s, the virtual world will eventually be regarded as the primary medium in which our daily livelihoods are carried out (Metzl, 2008).

Why bother with existing in the real world when technology and the virtual world can offer us with a better life, a life that is filled with benefits that are otherwise unobtainable in the physical world? While these separate identities can provide an escape from the mundane world and on certain occasions make our lives somewhat easier, I believe that it is important to understand just how much control we actually have in regards to our actions and choices within the virtual world. Even though they are not physically present in the technical sense, these places within the virtual world are still heavily influenced by the real world, and should be approached accordingly. As we begin to approach a new era rife with computerization and digitization, it is difficult to comprehend what has yet to exist in the near future when we do not even fully understand what state we are existing in.

In this thesis, I wish to describe the complex relation between power and surveillance in the virtual world. I intend to illustrate, via ethnographic fieldwork, how social media and MMORPGs have been heavily influenced by surveillance, and how the constant presence of individuals serving as watchers of each other is linked to the levels of freedom that an individual is free to exercise when they take part in their respective activities within the virtual world. By utilizing the metaphors of the panopticon<sup>1</sup> and synopticon<sup>2</sup>, I will interpret how the dispersal of power amongst the inhabitants has increased, as surveillance within the virtual sphere evolves from the initial existence of a few guards occupying a single watchtower to that of increased surveilles over a wider area.

I believe this will allow for us to find out whether domains with dispersed power structure can achieve stability, especially as to what happens when players are confronted

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<sup>1</sup>. Panopticon – a model of governing in which the few watch over the many.

<sup>2</sup>. Synopticon – a model of governing in which the many watch over the few.

with rules in the virtual that forcefully enforce certain behaviors, how meaningful can a virtual identity truly become.

## 1.2. Virtual or variable?

First coined in 1984, the science fiction novel entitled *Neuromancer* by William Gibson introduced the concept of “cyberspace” as,

[a] consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators in every nation ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data (Gibson, 1994, p. 69).

Despite being written as a work of fiction a decade prior to the emergence of the virtual world, a term in which many scholars use synonymously with cyberspace, Gibson’s definition of cyberspace nonetheless describes the online virtual world that many individuals actively engage in today. Unfortunately within the academic field, even with the terms of virtual or cyberspace as the most commonly used words to describe the internet and its world beyond ours, scholars have often argued for the need of a better word to better define the differences between the physical and the virtual (Reed, 2014). We could easily argue that the physical represents the world with real people, and that the virtual is defined through a set of imageries as per Gibson’s definition of cyberspace; sadly, this dichotomy between the physical and the virtual still would not accurately represent the nuanced nature of the two.

Through Gibson’s description, cyberspace as a concept is somewhat multiple in its existence, involving the experience of billions of people and the data from every computer in use. Moving beyond the fictional representation of the internet and approaching it in the context of the real world, given the advanced capabilities of technology in the modern era, the “graphic representations of data” in modern society has evolved beyond the simplicity of standard computers and extended to a vast array of devices (smartphones, iPads, Blackberries, and PlayStations) used for different purposes. To simplify, the concept of the virtual that we experience is not just a matter of existing in an entirely different world which is separate from that of our physical existence. The involvement of a user in this reality of cyberspace or the virtual is actually defined through a multitude of factors.

Much of the Western world is synonymous with the ideals of free speech and equality, but the same, however, cannot be said for some other parts of the world. Citizens within China for example are forced to utilize their own version of social media, the aptly named Renren, due to a ban from the Chinese government in regards to the use of Facebook; meanwhile in Russia, an individual can still be imprisoned for choosing to speak out against the government. In the physical world, an authoritarian state is more likely to impose on its people bigger and stricter regulations on internet freedom, while a democratic nation might be more lenient on its people. Unlike Gibson's vision of an all-encompassing cyberspace that is accessible to any individual, the reality of a user's access towards the internet lies within the fact that many, although not all, individuals are forced to conform to a set of dynamic values that are enforced upon them. This, as a result, will severely limit the ability of many people to utilize the internet as desired.

Considering the fact that each and every user is required to comply with government regulations in the physical world, or a localized set of rules within cyberspace, the virtual world is in fact more appropriately defined as a sphere that consists of many variables that differ from person to person. These variables are beyond a user's control, and consists of a user's experience of the online world which is not simply a matter of choosing whether to access cyberspace or not. A person could be entering the virtual world for the purpose of gaming, communication, or the gathering of information; it is an experience that is unique in its choices and outcomes to each and every individual. Additionally, access to cyberspace is not something to be taken for granted, as it is also conditioned by differences in technological privilege, knowledge of the internet, and geographical positioning. Many of us take our access into the virtual for granted due to the common abundance of computers and software that we have at our immediate disposal. While the internet can be accessed from almost any part of the world, it is important to keep in mind that individuals who wish to access the internet are still situated within the physical world in which different individuals have different privileges.

Moving further into the environment of the internet, there is also the mechanisms of surveillance acting to ensure a sense of order. Despite its initial induction as a governing force to mediate the actions of individuals through the threat from guards who may or may not be watching, as modern technology evolves, we must also account for the fact that the

mechanisms of surveillance and the surveilles themselves will continue to change in their functioning and become more subtle. The fact that people within the virtual world can either choose to hide their entire self under the blanket of anonymity, or display their actual nature to others, ensures that the possibility of assuming or encountering a full or fragmentary identity is never-ending. This, as a result, will require for us to carefully account for, and to consider an unpredictable number of variables regarding the roles in which people will come to assume or interact with. Common perception of the internet may be to simply regard it as an environment in which individuals simply log into or out of, without any other factors to consider. The internet is actually more complicated, with many dynamics acting to decide if a person is in a position to utilize the internet to its full potential, or will be limited in what they can do.

I will from here onwards be utilizing my personal term of “multi-mutable realm” when describing the virtual world. I believe, that the term multi-mutable not only provides a better description of the adaptable nature of the internet, but also of the many variables within its domains that can be taken into consideration. The terms of virtual world or cyberspace, while commonly seen as being associated with the internet in contemporary society, only describes the internet as a simulated environment that is digitally generated to existing beyond the physical sphere. Through this description, these terms fail to consider the complex nature of its domains and adaptable nature. In the real world, the power relations between the individuals who use the internet can also vary. Any given individual who can use the internet does not have to be of the same ethnic origin, gender, status, opinions, age, privileges, or geographical space. The internet is not just a digital environment that consists of imagined spaces and imageries, but is also meant to cater to an improbable number of different demands for a world of infinite possibilities. We may be restricted to who were are in our physical reality, however, our mutable identities can become so much more.

From here onwards, my definition of the physical world refers to the social with its own characteristics which are conceptualized by the involvement of real people in real physical space, and the mutable or multi-mutable as a realm of the internet, contents within, and the roles of people who are always changeable. In order to avoid confusion with terminologies, I will be using the term “mutable” when referring to a single domain (Facebook, or a MMORPG by itself), and “multi-mutable” when referring to the internet as a

whole. I wish to stress the importance of defining the “multi-mutable” as a realm instead of a world of its own. This is largely due to the fact that while the imageries and spaces of the internet are essentially of a different place to the physical, they are still in essence located in the physical world. We are not being teleported into outer space or accessing a portal into a different dimension. When we enter the multi-mutable realm, we are still situated on the planet Earth.

### **1.3. Literature Review**

Anthropologists in the 80s to 90s held a skeptical view of the newly emerging digital technology. Upon its initial emergence, many that were unfamiliar with new technology struggled to comprehend the purposes and nature of the multi-mutable realm. Early studies did not even focus on the multi-mutable realm, but on the inequality that such advancements might bring. The primary argument at the time was that class inequality in modern society was an impediment to an individual’s ability to obtain equal access and exposure to the multi-mutable realm (Escobar, 1994). Similar to the ability to understand cultures and languages in the physical world respectively, in the multi-mutable realm, “equal access is not achieved simply by installing computers and fast Internet connections in schools and homes” (Wilson, 2000 in Wilson & Peterson, 2002). Equal access in the case of the multi-mutable is constrained by to an individual’s ability to attain knowledge of the technologies and the culture of the internet within a broad social context.

Attention towards the multi-mutable realm only started recently, and anthropological researches that study the scope and varying factors within its domains are still relatively few in numbers (Wilson & Peterson, 2002). In 2002, Hofstede & Peterson introduced the concept of a “*Synthetic Culture*” into the academic field. A synthetic culture is utilized as an alternate look into cultures that does not conform to the physical setting. They “enable an understanding of culture as being a group with common and collective expectations and behaviours. This negates our understanding of culture being necessarily tied to visible characteristics such as race, religion, nationality” (Hall et al, 2014, p. 294).

Within the growing literature analyzing the internet’s growing importance in modern society, Boellstroff argued that, “we ought to imagine virtual worlds as being like Pacific

islands, and thus amenable to study using traditional anthropological methods” (Boellstroff, 2008, in Golub, 2010, p. 20). This was an attempt to resort back to classical ethnographic methods utilized by scholars such as Malinowski in order to theorize the multi-mutable realm itself as a field site. Unfortunately Boellstoff fails to consider that the multi-mutable realm as an environment is not restricted to only existing in the digital sphere as the contents within can expand into the physical setting.

In many cases, in order to transcend the barriers of MMORPGs or social media itself, the companies behind popular internet domains often arrange for physical world gatherings, expos, and events dedicated to promoting new advancements or expansions that can be attended by any member of the general public; in other words, the popularity and scale of the multi-mutable realm will extend far beyond the goals of canonical ethnography (Barthes, 1992 in Wilson & Peterson, 2002 in Golub, 2010), and forms a level of interconnectivity between the physical world and the multi-mutable realm. Boellstroff’s method would not work in the multi-mutable realm as it does not follow the structure of the Pacific Islands, which are physically bounded themselves. To suggest that the multi-mutable realm can be approached in a similar way as in the case of the pacific islands grossly underestimates the variables that the cultures within the multi-mutable are comprised of.

Unlike the physical world, the cultures within the multi-mutable realm are comprised of multiple points of entry which require exploration from both the physical world, and from within the multi-mutable realm. We cannot separate the two from each other without losing a part of the values or beliefs that exist in these two realms. Boellstroff’s main focus on the multi-mutable realm without the inclusion of the physical may have allowed for it to assume the position of a classic field site of ethnographic observation, but in doing so it severely reduces the scope and understanding of the multi-mutable realm to a smaller frame situated within the boundaries of the virtual world, missing the contents of the physical world in which it is embedded.

The concept of the multi-mutable as a community that draws comparison to the physical has been proposed since the late 1990s (Kendall, 1998; Metzl, 2008). Much like the physical world, in order for the multi-mutable community to function as a whole,

users will need to sacrifice enough anonymity to ensure meaningful accountability, and submit to a set of rules that will govern interaction among those inside the walls.

They will have to agree about how rules are to be set, who decides if they should be changed, how disputes are resolved, and how common goods should be distributed. In short, they will need to either develop and perform the functions of government, or submit to the rules created by corporations or other entities that can address these needs (Metzl, 2008, p. 249-250).

While similar, what sets these online communities apart from those of the physical is the ability to challenge the rules that are enforced by the corporations.

Despite the studies of MMORPGs gaining more traction in academic studies (Waskul & Lust, 2004; Delwiche, 2006; Langer, 2008; Golub, 2010; Thorhauge, 2013), there exist within the academic community many challenges and gaps in regards to how an individual within the gaming space may respond to surveillance. Kirkland (2005) and Tulloch (2010) have examined the game space, goal-oriented creation, and the narrative method of games in order to show how players construct and demonstrate their subjectivity to the game based on context and past experiences. Unlike books and movies, video games are not only played, but are read, as well as watched. This presents a good opportunity to see how the individual will react to the expectations of rules set in these domains, as the direct involvement of the player with the narration of the game will require them to act out specific actions, and in doing so turns them not only into players, but also readers and authors (Kirkland, 2005). When set in the position whereby they have the ability to become a watcher, it is worthwhile to see whether a participant will affirm the pre-existing community, or whether they will act to challenge it.

Studies focusing on social media in the multi-mutable realm, though vast in numbers, are not usually conducted in the manner that this research hopes to do so. While studies have largely covered the issues of privacy, stalking, and the contents within (Westlake, 2008), what is lacking is a focus on individuals who use fake profiles. Fake profiles especially in the multi-mutable realm is not an unusual occurrence. It is not uncommon for Facebook to consist of “fake identities such as William Shatner or Sir Isaac Newton ... fake profiles of faculty ... fictitious profiles for pre-existing fictional characters, pets, or wholly invented personas” (Westlake, 2008, p. 29). While all users are somewhat playing with their mutable identities to a degree, a deeper look into people who deliberately act with fake identities, and how they approach the multi-mutable realm compared with how a gamer approaches the world could provide a new insight into how the enforcement of rules are challenged.

More recently with increased surveillance in the physical world becoming a public mainstay of daily lives, surveillance techniques such as CCTV cameras, security guards, or police patrol officers have sparked interest in how surveillance through newer technological developments can unknowingly affect us. In an offline context, surveillance systems in the forms of panopticon and synopticon has been theorized in many articles. There are many studies to support the fact that physical institutions such as schools and universities have come to adopt the architecture and power structure of a panopticon (Goldstein, 2004; Hope, 2005; Lewis, 2013; Van Heertum, 2013). Additionally, the studies centered on synopticism have stated that it acts as a reciprocal partner to panopticism, and have been utilized primarily for theorizing mass media (Bauman, 1998; Penfold, 2004; Couch, Thomas, Lewis, Warwick Blood & Komesaroff, 2015), and crime control in modern society (Lippert & Wilkinson, 2010; Haggerty, Wilson & Smith, 2011).

There are, however, articles which details the limits of panopticism and its ability to function under contemporary surveillance (Welch, 2011; Gane, 2012), arguing that the harshness of the panoptic model of governance having a tendency to generate more resistance from those under survey, than instilling discipline to those under their watch. The metaphor of synopticon has also been challenged by scholars in recent years. Doyle (2011), argues that Mathiesen's position of synopticon "neglects resistance, alternative currents in media production and reception, the role of culture and the increasing centrality of the internet" (Doyle, 2011, p. 283). The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen broadcast television steadily decline due to the evolution of the internet, therefore fragmenting the masses of audience that it once brought together, and creating the need to reconsider the dramatic and increasingly diverse shifts in technology since the 1990s (Doyle, 2011). Televisions and newspapers are sources of information from a past era, and people in contemporary society are more likely to consult other easily available means such as the multi-mutable realm in order to attain news and information on varying topics. While many of the post-panopticon arguments of late in the academic field tend to branch off into territories concerning mass media, play, and entertainment, we will for this study kept our focus on surveillance in the multi-mutable realm.

Early studies regarded the multi-mutable realm as a mode of resistance against the physical world (Kovacs, 2001). Using the state of modern society as an analogy of a



panopticon, it was argued that the birth of the internet as a space of free speech would distance individuals from the morals and rules of the physical world (Kovacs, 2001). This quickly changed as the governments from the physical world decided to monitor the actions of people on the internet, thereby undermining their freedom by attempting to instill a sense of order. Faced with a changed environment in the internet caused by the presence of governmental regulations, studies radically shifted towards labelling the internet as having adopted the governing mode of a panopticon.

Tsui (2003) focused on how the Chinese government attempted to regulate content within the internet, comparing the position of the Chinese government to the guards in a centralized watchtower. By detailing accounts of how the government were forcefully closing internet cafes around China to prevent individuals in the physical world from undermining the government's attempt at blocking certain websites, Tsui argues that the very nature of anonymity via the internet which the government attempts to neutralize, represents panopticism which attempts to situate everybody within the dormant gaze of a watchtower (Tsui, 2003). These actions, according to Tsui (2003), allows the government who represent the majority to continuously maintain its dominance over the ordinary individual who is assigned the role of the minority.

Krueger (2005) argues in a study into the reactions individuals displayed towards surveillance from the government that the multi-mutable realm presents a structure that is poorly fitted for panopticism to function. Drawing comparisons to Mathiesen's synopticon, Krueger argues that the two-way watcher and watched situation presented by the internet renders internet surveillance from panopticism an impossible task (Krueger, 2005). For the most part, recent studies continue to utilize the panopticon metaphor as an application to the collection of online data from the government, and argues that government surveillance in the form of panopticism suppresses the behaviors of individuals about sensitive online activities by upholding the power relations of the physical world (Carr, 2015; Stoycheff, Liu, Xu, and Wibowo, 2019).

Rayner (2013) classified Facebook and Twitter as the virtual panopticons in modern society. By comparing the act of creating content on social media as a similar event to a potlatch, in which people within tribes give gifts for approval, Rayner classifies Facebook and Twitters as spaces of judgements (Rayner, 2013). Rayner makes this association by comparing

the followers of an individual user to a group of judges, believing that the judged individual has their behavior altered in order to produce content that will intrigue their followers. These spaces of judgement according to Rayner “shapes the identities that we craft on social media ... it can lead us to play out our identity that we think will impress our followers” (Rayner, 2013).

Governance aside, additional methods of surveillance were further contrasted between the physical and that of the multi-mutable. There were comparisons made between the uses of credit and loyalty cards in supermarkets and retail stores (Hope, 2005; Lewis, 2013), and ‘data mining and information collecting’ through the use of surveillance bots. Both of these actions within the physical world and the multi-mutable realm display how the construction of a profile on any given individual can be easily achieved through the simple act of shopping, or a standard activity such as posting a message, or liking something on social media. What is more alarming is the fact that these invasion of personal privacy is often easily achieved through the advanced nature of surveillance without the knowledge of the individual that is affected (Van Heertum, 2013).

Short of preaching about a future in which machine overlords watch our every move, in the world today it becomes practically impossible to wonder through any aspect of the physical or the multi-mutable without leaving behind a trail of footprints. This development of surveillance has also increased and moved into the domain of MMORPGs, with the introduction of “*micro transactions*” (in-game currency). Their introduction in many MMORPGs, as a way for gaming companies to make more money, also serves to bridge the gap between the physical and the multi-mutable (Beard & Kunz, 2007). To explain the process of micro transactions, a purchase for an in-game content through micro transactions requires a direct payment of cash from an individual in the physical world. It is essentially online shopping within the domains of a video game.

Proper examination of Terms of Service (TOS) documents within the multi-mutable have increased in years. First published in 2004, *The Laws of the Virtual worlds* by Lastowka and Hunter is an anthropological study that raised the question as to whether properties within gaming worlds could be potentially considered legal properties. The study focuses on the construction of written documents, and their governance regarding properties ownership in the multi-mutable realm. Lastwoka & Hunter argue that the investment of actual money

from individuals means that property interest within the multi-mutable will bleed into the physical world (Lastowka & Hunter, 2004). This means that there is essentially no disconnection between the assets that exist in the real world and those in the multi-mutable realm. The fact is that the multi-mutable has come a long way since its initial conception. MMORPGs today exist as more than just a game, and the inclusion of more people into the multi-mutable will required a shift in the forms of the governance of written documents in order to cater to the increasing number of individuals who will demand more rights (Lastowka & Hunter, 2004).

The need to resolve rights within the multi-mutable meant that there was a need to approach the multi-mutable in a way that was different from the physical. In 2011, Roquilly defined the multi-mutable realm as being more than simply gaming environments, and linked gaming companies to real world businesses. Like any successful business model in the real world, game companies are under orders by the government to maintain control over the services they provide to the public, hence the inclusion of the TOS forms as a central component. By keenly examining the specific TOS of twenty multi-mutable realms based on popularity, age, and type, Roquilly concludes that many of the TOS present are in fact not legally secure, and consists of large grey areas (Roquilly, 2011). Roquilly argues that the high level of insecurity present in these contractual forms is partly due to their designs. “Their allocation of property rights is highly contestable and they are designed in a way that makes them difficult to understand and disproportionate in terms of the reciprocal rights and obligations of the parties involved (game companies/users)” (Roquilly, 2011, p. 660).

While research has already been conducted into the nature and purpose of these documents, there are still few researches that focus entirely on the user’s perspective towards the rules and guidelines of the TOS forms in the multi-mutable realm. When we think about it, the TOS documents are basically figurative watching towers from which an invisible guard representing the authority of the corporations may or may not be keeping watch over a users’ actions. In addition, the power of surveillance in the multi-mutable realm is not only held by the corporations and their deputies. In this essay I intend to use the frameworks of panopticism and synopticism to examine the user’s perception of the surveillance and power structure in the multi-mutable realm and the way they negotiate with and position themselves in such power and surveillance systems.

While studies have focused mainly on comparing the properties of the multi-mutable realm to the social theories of contemporary society, many often link the concept of surveillance or authority back to the governance in the physical setting. Far surpassing the predictions of Metzl (2008) that modern society will become fully dependent on the internet by the 2030s, the multi-mutable has already become a place in which normal and everyday communications are performed; we have now approached a reality in which people are actually dedicating a big part of their lives to this new realm. For the purposes of studying MMORPGs, I intend to place my focus on individual behaviors in the multi-mutable realm at a more personal level. Rather than treating characters in the multi-mutable realm as a character that only exists as an avatar, I will instead examine the relationship between the individual and his/her mutable self as a conscious portrayal. As for social media, I am particularly interested in seeing how a person in Facebook associate and dissociate themselves from their physical self, and if this could potentially subvert the authority of Facebook.

## **1.4. Chapter Outline**

This thesis will set out to identify and answer a series of questions through several chapters.

Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical framework and research methods used in this research. It will first talk about how the utilization of the metaphors of panopticon and synopticon might help to understand the power structure and surveillance in the multi-mutable realm. Then research methods will be discussed, including the design of this research, the recruitment of informants, and the general process of the research. A brief introduction to each of the participants will also be made in this chapter.

Chapter 3 will focus on Michel Foucault's metaphor of panopticon and sees the TOS documents as a representation of the possible occupation of a central watchtower by guards for the domains of Facebook, ESO, and FF: XIV. This will be informed by an analysis on the TOS forms for each particular domain, and the role that these play on the creation of the mutable self. I will show how surveillance from the figurative watchtower in panopticism is negated by the constantly evolving nature of the multi-mutable realm, and why the metaphor

of panopticon alone is inadequate in interpreting the regulation of power within the multi-mutable realm.

Chapter 4 will move forward to Thomas Mathiesen's 1997 metaphor of synopticon, and asks if increased surveillance from the watchful eyes of the many others allows for a true display of the physical individual's actual self. I will use synopticism in order to interpret how the two-way medium of author and audience interactions in social media and MMORPGs disperses power between the inhabitants of the multi-mutable realm, and attempt to show how panopticism and synopticism both serve to govern individuals in the multi-mutable realm.

In the final chapter, I reflect upon the convergence between the physical and the multi-mutable, and upon the journey this study has taken to attempt to merge the two.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Framework & Methodology**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I explain how and why I will utilize the metaphors of panopticon and synopticon to examine a users' experience of power and surveillance in the multi-mutable realm. I will also detail the necessary preparations and precautions that were considered before conducting the research into the mutable domains of Facebook, ESO, and FF: XIV. An ethnographic research into the multi-mutable realm could be conducted in a similar way to that adopted in the study of the physical world. However, we must also consider the fact that the variables within the internet will present some difference from the physical world, and these variables are subjected to change at any moment. Technology is after all a "new, and not so new, phenomena" (Wilson & Peterson, p. 449).

#### **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

In 1876, Edward B. Taylor (as cited in Boellstroff, 2006, p. 30) termed culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Culture, according to this definition, dictates human behavior, thoughts and beliefs; it teaches us how to behave in a manner that is socially acceptable within a particular group. Later scholars narrowed down the concept of culture and proposed a "semiotic definition that frames culture in terms of schemas, cognitive maps, and meaning" (Boellstroff, 2006, p. 30). Culture in this definition would equate the way a person would make sense of events or interactions occurring in their setting. What may be seen as common practice to people in one culture might seem offhand, or barbaric to people in another.

In 2010, Hofstede et al (as cited in Hall et al, 2014, p. 294) redefined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". This meant that the enactment of interactions, practices and rituals

would seek to associate an individual within or outside of the boundaries of the many societies that have been founded throughout the world (Hall et al, 2014). This means that culture itself is defined through factors such as religion, ethnicity, and social categories that are visible through actions such as thinking, or displayed through behavior around other members within the same culture (Hall et al, 2014). Individuals come to form culture through the sharing of a system of values that each member of the group will not only follow, but uses to indicate as to whether another individual is part of the group or not.

Pizarro, Detweiler-Bedell & Bloom (as cited in Hall et al, 2014) linked culture to the concept of a “*moral circle*,” which “is formed by those who adhere to a common purpose and group identity and those who follow a common set of moral rules and who trust each other” (Hall 2014, p.294, citing Hofstede et al. 2009). Within the moral circle “unwritten rules for behaviour are used to monitor our own and other’s performance. All kinds of covert and overt feedback signals and sanctions are used to try to enforce good behavior” (Hall et al, 2014, p. 295).

Aside from the obvious fact that the multi-mutable is partially imagined and constituted through a series of variables, the groups within the multi-mutable domains are often viewed as a separate community of their own beyond the realm of reality (Boellstroff, 2006). This has resulted in a serious lack of studies that properly examine the social difference between the multi-mutable and the physical. Much of the multi-mutable realm is composed of fictitious and realistic cultures that may or may not be surrounded by individuals that differ and conform to the actual human self, therefore coming to no surprise that many people will attempt to shape the environment into something that suits their behavior and values. This being how moral circles are conceived.

The multi-mutable realm can consists of many different types of moral circles. They can range from a small gathering of friends to whom the rules will only apply to, or to bigger and more dominant circles that will be haphazardly formed by varying individuals from an entire domain. In the multi-mutable realm, whether in a MMORPG or social media, the members who can be considered as part of a moral circle will consists of those who know and follow the set of rules, or are known to the members of the moral circle. Every culture has its own set of rules and regulations, and where there are rules, there is always someone watching. In order for these groups to persist, there will always be individuals from a moral

circle who will act as watchers for deviant behaviors from individuals outside of their community who may potentially threaten their setting.

In order to achieve a sense of competence with the dominant moral circles in an environment, an individual must learn the culture, language, and values that are preached (Hall et al, 2014). In the case of moral circles, the levels of trust amongst the members are very important. This means that if an individual is to break or overstep the values that are enforced, they will find themselves facing repercussions of some sort, or regarded as belonging outside of the moral circle. Such is the dominance of larger moral circles, it is even possible for the values that they preach to become the main guidelines for how to function should there be no other static form of regulations.

While the study of the multi-mutable have begun to progress, few have fully examined the similarities and differences between the multi-mutable and the physical realms. The concepts of panopticon and synopticon, which were first adopted in the study of the physical world, provide two windows through which the comparisons can be made. In 1791, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham envisioned a model for a prison which would 'alter behavior', 'train' or 'correct individuals'. Within the inner ring of this annular prison, there was a central watchtower where the guard could gaze from one end of the building directly into the other end. This architectural composition, which many institutions, such as schools, workshops, and hospitals would eventually come to adopt, became known as a panopticon.

Eventually in 1975, French philosopher Michel Foucault would develop his model of panopticism based on the concept of surveillance within the panopticon. Taking the concept of criminal trials as an example, Foucault details the history of how punishment evolved from the public and brutal displays of hangings into a form of unseen enforcement by a few individuals in power. By building on Jeremy Bentham's model of a prison, Foucault's panopticism is a mode of governing that places an individual, or a group of individuals, under the supervision of an elite group of authority figures who possess the power to enforce punishment to whoever is deemed as being in the wrong.

At the beginning of his book "*Discipline and Punish*", Foucault details the account of a brutal execution that occurred in Paris during the 16<sup>th</sup> century which gathered large crowds of people who bore witness to the spectacle. In order to show a dramatic change of scene,



Foucault then fast forwards to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This time, the focus was placed upon a town infested with a plague. Foucault then relays the harsh reality of surveillance at the time by documenting how each street was under watch by a syndic with the power to lock the doors of each house under his authority. In this situation, only a few such as guards and the aforementioned syndics had the power to move outside the house while the residents were forced to remain indoors (Foucault, 1995). The level of surveillance increased as each inhabitant's personal information such as documents, name, age, and gender were made available to the syndic in order to enforce a permanent system of residential hierarchy (Foucault, 1995).

Foucault focuses on the assertion of invisible surveillance which would reinforce compliant behavior from its individuals under the 'pain of death', as the penalty for infection or sickness put the individual in quarantine until they died. Foucault insisted that "this invisibility is a guarantee of order" (Foucault, 1995, p. 200). As the individuals are constantly uncertain as to whether they are being watched at any given moment, they must act accordingly to the rules if they wish to avoid being punished for any sort of misconduct. Simply put, "the more numerous these anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (Foucault, 1995, p. 202).

This model of governing, according to Foucault, was a means to display the fact that human culture has always been influenced by surveillance (McGrath, 2004), and that the higher the level of power that an individual possess, the more freedom they would have to do whatever they wanted. Panopticism proved so influential that it has seen widespread success throughout the academic field from its initial emergence, and even up until recently scholars and journalists such as Stoycheff, Liu, Xu & Wibowo (2019) have still been applying this theory into the description of the multi-mutable realm.

Overtime the practice of surveillance slowly deviated from Foucault's idea of the few elites in charge. The mid-1990s saw scholars such as William Bogard (1996) argue for the need to go beyond the original panoptic model proposed by Foucault. In 1997, Norwegian sociologist Thomas Mathiesen introduced the concept of synopticon. In his article "*The Viewer Society*", Mathiesen believed that there were "wider ramifications of Foucault's

thesis" (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 281) for having overlooked the opposite process of modern surveillance. Mathiesen argued against Foucault's view of the role of the watcher being restricted to the authorities, stating that increased exposure from newly developing technology increases the possibility of the many observing or watching the few. This 'viewer' society, as Mathiesen described, is a contradiction to Foucault's thesis, and people in modern times have abandoned the situation in which the many were seen by the few (Mathiesen, 1997), as people were now situated into a two-way society.

Mathiesen argues that the growth of mass media and the evolution of technology represented a technical development, and a change in the roles of people regarding social conditions and events. This development enabled for communication over a large geographical scale, and was fundamental to the development of the synopticon, as more and more people could see the few through newspapers and televisions (Mathiesen, 1997). This means that information and news are no longer restricted to the guards in a watchtower or the elite few, but freely available to all. Individuals who are previously relegated to the role of being watched, were now able to watch or obtain information on other people, something that was previously impossible without having the privilege of being a member of an elite group.

Mathiesen claimed that synopticism as opposed to Foucault's panopticism shifted the balance of surveillance in contemporary society; the easily conveyed news by the few (news anchors, reporters, etc.) upon the hundreds and thousands (viewers) within mere moments would help to spread to the general public what was believed to be the correct view or opinion. In the case of the multi-mutable realm in modern society, social media in particular functions as a public domain in which content that is published can be viewed by anybody; ordinary people now have the ability to convey any news or information to anybody that they wish to regardless of status or rank.

Showcasing the similarities between the panopticon and synopticon, Mathiesen (1997, p.215) argued that,

the creation of human beings who control themselves through self-control and who thus fit neatly into a so-called democratic capitalist society, is a task which is actually fulfilled by modern synopticon, whereas Foucault say it as a function of Panopticon.

This according to Mathiesen, meant that individuals in society actually engage in a two-way role of being the watcher and the watched in order to ensure the correct functioning of behavior. While the original model of panopticism restricts power to the authorities, synopticism creates an inverse panopticon in which the observed are also in possession of power. The synopticon is reciprocal to the panopticon, meaning that panopticism and synopticism both serve to control discipline and behaviors that are encountered in modern society through the hidden apparatus that is surveillance (Mathiesen, 1997).

synopticism, through modern mass media in general and television in particular, first of all directs and controls or disciplines our *consciousness* ... in my words – inducing self-control and making us fit into the requirements of modernity (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 230).

As a direct contrast to Foucault, Mathiesen believed that human society has evolved beyond the concept of the few watching the many and instead predicated the success of the many ordinary individuals watching the few. While Mathiesen does not account for the eventual influence of the internet, he does predict that new emerging technology and the privatization of television and radio will be responsible for new forms of communication, and coincidentally, this perfectly describes the current influence of the multi-mutable realm.

In modern society, the role of being both the watcher and the watched is not an uncommon situation to find oneself occupying. In more recent years, this inverse of power is even encouraged and given to members of the majority instead of being withheld from them. Take for example a public ad from The Department of Homeland Security in the US in a post-911 world. Common individuals now find themselves expected to serve as both watchers and surveilles in order to ensure the safety of their community. The idea that anybody has the right to observe and report is authorized and in many cases encouraged by its campaign, which is conveyed by those famous words “If you see something say something” (Lewis, 2013). As the nature of social interactions continue to alter in the multi-mutable, individuals will inevitably find themselves being encouraged to act in ways which comply with both the expectations of panopticism and synopticism.

Since both the metaphors of panopticon and synopticon were established before the age of the internet and the dominance of the multi-mutable realm, it is only to be expected that neither Foucault nor Mathiesen had accounted for the need to theorize models of governing for an environment which was yet to exist. However, while scholars throughout

the academic field have for many years utilized the theories of Foucault and Mathiesen in theorizing media, freedom, and power in the physical world, there has yet to be any significant study that draws on how panopticism and the synopticism can allow for us to interpret power relations in the multi-mutable realm. When we consider the fact that the multi-mutable realm is becoming increasingly predominant in modern society, it only stands to reason that panopticism and synopticism can transcend beyond the physical and give us a better sense of how the multi-mutable is governed.

In order to address the issues presented in this thesis, I will borrow Michel Foucault and Thomas Mathiesen's models of panopticism and synopticons to interpret how surveillance regulates the levels of power that surrounds the multi-mutable realm as well as users' behaviors and practices in such contexts. It is important to acknowledge that surveillance first exists in the physical setting, however the practices of ordinary and everyday people in the multi-mutable realm provide us with the ability to critically examine the practice of surveillance in the multi-mutable realm. Social behaviors in the physical world have always been watched and mediated by members of the appropriate authority in order to ensure full compliance of the rules, thus affecting the way in which people present their public and private self. The multi-mutable realm is shaped by people who come into it with this experience in mind, but are forced to conform to a new set of rules, a digital sort.

Using these two frameworks, I provide a study structured into 5 chapters, supplemented with an introductory and concluding chapter that seeks to reflect upon how surveillance which has regulated behaviors in the physical world, has done the same for the multi-mutable realm. I attempt to see whether surveillance within the multi-mutable has managed to follow the same pattern of development that we see in the physical world or if the structure of the multi-mutable realm provides us with a different outcome.

### **2.3. Methodology**

I focus on three different mutable domains for the duration of the study, namely that of Facebook, ESO, and FF: XIV. Aside from the obvious requirement of a good understanding of the mutable domains that I wish to conduct my study in, and a well-established level of trust with my participants, I see it as necessary to approach the multi-mutable realm as an

environment which does not only exist to serve the needs of a single individual when required. This means that the internet in its entirety cannot be turned off and ignored without other individuals still being able to utilize it. A culture may require the involvements of a collective group of like-minded individuals to create, but they also do not cease to exist simply because the members may not be present. Like the physical world, the existence of the multi-mutable will continue to persist unless completely destroyed. Additionally, I acquired the TOS for each respective domain and studied them in detail.

To briefly explain the TOS, it is the summary of the specification of rules that an individual must abide by upon the initial use of a product. As the game or Facebook page exists within the boundary of the multi-mutable realm, the TOS constitute as the gateway between the multi-mutable realm and the physical world. These documents generally consist of anywhere from 15 to 18 paragraphs, with each paragraph dedicated entirely to the enforcement of a particular rule. This can vary from the simple rule regarding personal privacy, the privacy of others, and even special provisions which are applicable to users outside a particular state. Ideally, it is also possible to view them as similar to by-laws for physical organizations, save for the fact that they exist to govern the digital aspect of things. It should be noted that the governing rules of the TOS applies to entire services, websites, and even apps.

The participants that were inducted into this study are all part of the millennial demographic, a demographic that is estimated to consist of around 75.4 million people out of the world's current 7.6 billion people. These individuals were chosen largely on the basis that members who come from this age group were born within a certain period into an era of new technology and either form the status quo, or at the very least provide the basic demography upon which new technologies are marketed towards. This is not to intentionally discriminate against the older or younger generation, but merely to focus more on a group of individuals who were more likely to be experienced and consistently active users in the multi-mutable realm. Another benefit was that the group of similar ages with shared experience of important world events (9/11, induction of smartphones, birth of the global internet, to list only a few) would shape a similar worldview towards the physical and the multi-mutable.

Despite having dabbled with a few MMORPGs in the past, I have never remained a part of one for a long-term period, therefore, a full incursion into a MMORPG was a relatively

new experience for me. As for the participants, I began my contact with the community in the form of casual games early on by joining gaming sessions. This provided first-hand experience and knowledge of what the games entailed; additionally, in order to expand my knowledge of the stories and lore, I consulted several secondary forms of sources such as wiki pages, internet forums, and even engaged in light discussions about the gaming world itself with other players. I attained access to the mutable domain of ESO via utilization of the gaming console and copy of the game from an intended participant, and as for FF: XIV, I immersed myself through a free trial version of the game. After concluding my introductory contact with MMORPGs, I began my recruitment from a small group of casual gamers and ended up being able to recruit one constantly active player each from ESO and FF: XIV respectively.

Overtime, I slowly altered my presence from the gaming sessions from that of an in-game party member and assumed the role of a participant observer. Throughout my time as a participant observer, I proceeded to record certain actions as notes, including player moves, decisions, and adherence or rejection to the values of the moral circle within the domains of the internet. To minimize the interruption of the natural behavior of the participant or the gaming progress, I did not make any video or audio recordings when the participants played their games, or scrolled through their Facebook pages. I also left the choice of the time and place for the observations entirely up to the participants to decide to prevent the research from being too controlled.

Once the observations were completed, the next portion took on the form of interviews which were used as clarification for the behaviors of the participants in the MMORPGs. I first posed my questions to the interviewees in separate interviews about what they thought of the TOS documents. After the first interviews regarding the TOS documents, additional interviews would question the participants in order to determine the motivations behind particular actions or reactions. I conducted these interviews based on gaming sessions that I sat in for the MMORPGs, and the content that I was allowed to scroll through on a Facebook account. In this stage of the research, I focused on the two-way communications that occur between the participants and the mutable domains that they were part of.

For the social media users, due to the somewhat volatile nature of discussing fake profiles, a decision was reached to only recruit a small number of participants. Unlike the

assuming of a mutable self in a MMORPG, because of the extra level of privacy implied by fake profiles and their users, I deemed it best to only conduct my recruitment from individuals that I already knew in person. Through this method, I was only able to recruit one participant as the majority of participants with fake accounts are understandably very careful and often desire to keep that as a personal secret. The observations of the fake social media account were conducted with extreme care. As expected, the single participant wished to keep certain parts of the fake profile private, therefore an agreement was reached in which I was only allowed to look through certain conversations and parts of the profiles that were deemed as acceptable by the owner. In order to widen the scope on social media users, I recruited two additional participants who did not resort to fake accounts. My observations of this aspect of the research usually consisted of having a look through new and recent feeds in their user profiles before posing questions regarding the nature of surveillance and governance to participants.

## **2.4. Participants: Case studies**

The participants (all names are presented in the form of a pseudonym) for this study consist of members who are all fluent in English as a primary language, and adept towards the domains of the multi-mutable realm. Provided below is a brief description of each participant regarding how their personal backgrounds and ethnicity influenced their approach towards the multi-mutable realm. Due to the element of gender swapping in several created avatars, the participants requested and felt a lot more comfortable to have their genders kept secret throughout this study. In order to create an equal standing with all five participants, each and every one of them will have their gender kept anonymous. The participants will each be represented as an individual as opposed to a collective group. This means that the opinions and comments that they convey are not meant to represent the millennial demographic as a whole. This is merely a small group of participants who will provide an insight into how different individuals may view the multi-mutable realm. Cautions should be taken in any attempt of generalization from this limited research.

## **Tomorrow Lander**

*Tomorrow Lander* has spent his/her whole life situated in New Zealand. He/She described his/her family as *“different, and unorthodox”*, resulting in him/her possessing a *“twisted sense of humor, and an inability to agree with or get along with many people from the same culture”*. *Tomorrow Lander* attributed his/her fondness of the multi-mutable realm due to its diverse setting, stating that individuals in the multi-mutable realm all come from different backgrounds. He/she remarks that *“people in the internet are all different in terms of ethnicity ... all have different point of views, and are less likely to see me as weird”*.

## **One Wolf**

*One Wolf* comes from a middle class family situated from outside of New Zealand. He/she describes his/her physical self as *“quiet, low maintenance, but also as an extraverted introvert; preferring solitude over the presence of people, but also desiring the company of others on occasions”*. *One Wolf* often found himself/herself trying out new things that severely contradict with the beliefs of his/her strict religious parents. Having been *“exposed to different lifestyles and cultures”* due to living in several different parts of the world, *One Wolf* often interacted with individuals from different backgrounds, stating that, he/she likes to know what *“life from a different point of view feels like”*.

## **Jabba**

*Jabba* having moved to New Zealand from overseas comes from an *“average family ... average, not rich or crazy rich, but not poor”*. He/She described difficulty in transitioning into a new culture and found it difficult to connect with different people. *Jabba* prefers to *“remain behind the scenes as much as possible”*, citing difficulty encountered by others due to the *“color of my skin and the way I talk”*.

## **Rocket Launcher**

*Rocket Launcher* is an ex-military personnel originating from New Zealand. *Rocket Launcher* stated that the multi-mutable realm helped by providing an escape from a *“difficult*



*family situation*". Having travelled extensively through different parts of Britain and Europe during his/her time with the military, *Rocket Launcher* claims *"I know how to put myself in somebody else's shoes and see what point of view they are coming from"*. He/she described this knowledge has having helped immensely in the domains of the multi-mutable realm by shaping him/her into someone that *"people are drawn to, and is easily likable"*.

### ***Deathblade***

*Deathblade* has spent his/her whole life in New Zealand, being proud of his/her ethnicity and culture. *Deathblade* regarded his/her family as extensively liberal, *"I could come home with a person of any ethnicity and tell my parents that I'm homosexual or bisexual and they'll be totally fine with it"*. *Deathblade* cited his/her interest in the multi-mutable as a preference and desire to escape from reality, he/she said that *"I've just always liked games and technology, and the real world sucks"*.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

Despite a growing proportion of studies that focuses on the multi-mutable realm, many of these studies need to be expanded not due to shortsightedness or errors, but due to the continuously evolving nature of technology itself. Our created identities in Facebook and MMORPGs may provide us with endless hours or amusement as they bend to our control, however, we are also not at the point in which we can be fully aware of who wields the power to control this other self when we exist in social media, or a MMORPG. The dominance of the multi-mutable has in more recent years begun to overtake the dominance of the physical. Individuals of the newer generations are now more comfortable spending their entire lives across the vast new realm than they are in reality.

In this thesis, I aim to discover how my participants will either seek to affirm or challenge the moral circles within the domains of the multi-mutable realm when taking part in their standard activities. This will allow us to find out if it is possible to create identities that can transcend the boundaries between the physical world and the multi-mutable realm.

I believe this to be an important factor to consider when thinking about the eventual dominant role that the internet will come to play in future societies.

## Chapter 3

### Terms of services: surveying the multi-mutable realm

Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action (Foucault, 1995, p. 201).

#### 3.1. Introduction

Technology since the early 2000s has been accelerating in a rapid growth as advancements in modern society continues to evolve from that of the previous generations. Despite past assumptions that the multi-mutable realm resembles an uncharted and lawless landscape without the existence of governance (Slouka, 1995; Zizek, 1995; Dean, 1999), we should be aware that the multi-mutable realms of today are changing in their code of conduct. This change in authority at the behest of the government in the physical world, arrived in the form of TOS documents, which served as a power technique with the function of preventing malicious individuals from abusing the settings of a particular system (Smith, 2007 in Williams & Smith, 2007). It symbolizes a system of rules that ensure appropriate behaviors within their respective domains.

Jeremy Bentham drew upon his model of a prison in order to apply it towards physical institutions, places in which identities and the individuals are not only tangible, but are also fully accountable for their actions. Eventually, this design was adopted by Michel Foucault as a powerful model for the social analysis of the physical society. Differing from the initial design of Bentham's architecture, Foucault believed that the effectiveness of panopticism was due to the continued concealment from an individual as to whether they were being watched or not,

an individual in a panopticon never sees, and is only ever seen ... Each individual ... is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front ... but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication (Foucault, 1995, p. 200).

We can see how this approach may work when the individual restricted in a physical world setting has nowhere to hide. This approach, however, does not work for the multi-mutable

realm as the purposes of these worlds are built to allow for an increased sense of anonymity and invisibility.

In this chapter, I set out to show why the model of panopticism never worked effectively in the multi-mutable realm. The TOS is erected as a watchtower at the request of the government to maintain a sense of order in the multi-mutable realm. Their induction into the domains of the realm essentially mimics the system of surveillance in the model of panopticism as the corporations who control the specific domains are supposed to be the watchers over people within the varying domains. In this chapter, I will examine the dynamic power relations that occur within the multi-mutable realm between the individuals and the way rules are enforced via TOS by asking the following questions.

1. How do individuals within the multi-mutable realm attempt to circumnavigate the restrictions that the TOS has posed during the process of presenting their mutable identity?
2. Can the creation of anonymous identities allow for individuals to negotiate the positions in which they could occupy within the hierarchy of the multi-mutable realm?
3. Does the existence of the TOS prevent individuals within the multi-mutable realm from developing connections to their invented personas?

I answer these questions by analyzing several TOS documents in the domains of FF: XIV, ESO, and Facebook, and then examine and discuss with my participants their practices in the multi-mutable realm, with the aim to understand the dynamics between the surveillance system and the behaviors of people in the multi-mutable realm.

### **3.2. Why do people ignore the TOS?**

The TOS forms selected for this study were obtained from their respective websites prior to the end of the year 2017. This means it is possible that the versions used in this study may not account for any revisions made to them in future versions. Prior to actually discussing the contents of the TOS, I requested each of my participants to separately relay their knowledge

and experience of encountering the TOS documents. It came to no surprise that none of them had actually taken the time to read or even skim through the forms during the registration of their accounts. Furthermore, just about each and every one of the participants claimed to not only know what the TOS was all about, but to deem it as completely irrelevant. As the participant *Rocket Launcher* puts it,

*Rocket Launcher: Nobody thinks about these sorts of things ... everyone knows what it's about, who would want to steal my identity anyway? It's not as if I'm some sort of top executive in Google or something, there's no point.*

This decision to ignore the TOS was supported by *Tomorrow Lander* who regarded the judgement to read the TOS as a matter of choice,

*Tomorrow Lander: I think that it is up to the individual if they want to delve into the complexities of the virtual world, or to ignore it as it is and move on to the entertainment.*

It appears that even when the TOS is encountered, the bland, generic nature of writing, and lack of formatting used to structure the TOS ensures that almost everybody except for the most pedantic of individuals will have little to no desire to properly navigate through any portion of the document. Based on the common attitudes displayed, the only thing we have to do when encountering the TOS is go to the part where we select "I Accept" and move on. Statistically speaking, it is estimated that only a small proportion of people who after fully reading the TOS actually understands everything within (Grimes, 2007 in Williams & Smith, 2007). When asked to describe the actual contents of the TOS, and what these documents actually entailed in the multi-mutable realm, the most common responses usually consist of phrases such as,

*One Wolf: How not to be a [censored], not that it matters.*

*Jabba: Don't do things that aren't allowed.*

*Deathblade: It's about the things you are or aren't allowed to do.*

TOS documents are often presented in the form of a hyperlink that will either redirect a reader to a completely different page (Marotta-Wurgler, 2011), or are themselves located someplace hard to see. This attempt to present them invisibly creates a scenario in which many individuals either take no notice of them, or do not view them as important as the

corporations themselves appear to be more intent on ensuring that the individuals who enter into the multi-mutable realm can do so quickly and easily. The nature of identities in the multi-mutable realm are different than that of the physical world. They allow for the user to experience the new realms awaiting them without permanent repercussions on their actual selves. This fact is more obvious based on how the participant *Rocket Launcher* regarded it as pointless to compare identities between the physical and the multi-mutable.

The landscape of the multi-mutable realm is unlike that of the physical world. When conceived, Foucault's model of panopticism did not have to account for the abstract setting of the internet as it had yet to exist. At its emergence in a period in which individuals were constrained to the barriers of the physical world, scholars were optimistic of the levels of freedom that the multi-mutable realm would grant for many.

When one enters cyberspace, one can abandon almost all things "real" about one's self; name, face, gender, age, nationality, and religion all can be erased, hidden, or changed. The inhibitions and restrictions that accompany one's place and identity in the real world can vanish in the virtual one ... Similarly, activities and behavior that are rendered impossible or impracticable by law, moral edict, or social pressure become possible once the contextual reality that gives those commands their authoritative force fades away. In the real world, one's conduct is governed largely by one's location in space, which creates physical limitations on behavior and helps to determine applicable law, and cultural context, which defines social behavioral expectations and norms. The virtual world for many seems different from the real world in a moral sense, and that difference has varying degrees of impacts (Kovacs, 2001, p. 757-758).

Having realized the potential of the multi-mutable realm, many people to this day still believe that the internet would present the solution to escape from the restrictions of rules and regulations that constrains them in the physical world without any serious consequence.

The TOS acts as a gateway into the multi-mutable realm, yet many people do not see it as something that is worth paying attention to. Consider the basic life lesson to staying alive. Many of us, although not all, would know to look both ways before crossing over to the other side of the street. In the physical world, we are often prepared to sacrifice a minute portion of our time examining the road before setting out on foot to ensure that we can safely reach the destination of our journey without the consequence of any negative implications. Why are we unable to spend a minute reading the TOS before entering into the multi-mutable realm? Are we so empowered by the lack of physical consequence that we would ignore any given rule in the multi-mutable realm?

### 3.3. Analyzing MMORPGs

We will first focus on the MMORPGs of the multi-mutable realm. Like other domains of its kind, entry into these new worlds begins with the creation of an online user profile, presumably following the rules specified by the TOS. In MMORPGs, a user account almost always exists in the form of an avatar which the player is able to freely customize in appearance, and to name as they desire.

Through a quirk of fate, *Tomorrow Lander* wished to create another avatar in order to start a new game in FF: XIV; this provided me with the opportunity to experience and to observe the processes of creating a mutable self. Taking place before a 12 inch computer screen, the process itself was fast and simple. The process of creating an avatar included options such as selecting a gender, adjusting physical stature/attributes, choosing a hairstyle, selecting skin/hair colors, and inserting a name for the new character. After having witnessed the creation of a new avatar, I was notified by *Tomorrow Lander* that he/she had already been through this process several times since initially playing the game, nine times to be specific; this number had increased to a total of 11 separate avatars for FF: XIV by the conclusion of this thesis. Taking note of a dishonest gender representation in the portrayal of the newly created avatar, I asked *Tomorrow Lander* to give a brief contextualization of the outcome for his/her avatar.

*Tomorrow Lander: My avatar's name and creation are taken from previously encountered characters in the virtual world that I'm fond of ... they're always the opposite gender to myself in real life, but of the same ethnicity and race ... they all have similar traits across ... all red hair, and mostly the same name from one of three possible choices.*

*Tomorrow Lander* further defined the avatar as “Characters that are separate from me (*Tomorrow Lander*), it's another person and I'm doing their story ... this is more about them and their story than it is me”.

As gender swapping and the act of copying trademarked characters from other mutable domains played a prominent role in *Tomorrow Lander's* character creation, I deferred to the TOS for FF: XIV, particularly to subsection 3.4 headlining the rules for *Impersonation*. While

the written nature of this section is subjective to different interpretations and somewhat confusing in its own right, I proceeded on to the interview.

*Interviewer: Subsection 3.4 basically says that you may not impersonate any person or entity ... This means you cannot deceive or mislead other people to your identity, this potentially means that gender swapping is actually a breach of the rules.*

*Tomorrow Lander: The people who I interact with all know who I was before I started playing FF: XIV, and refer to me by my actual name. As for the impersonation part, my characters aren't based on real people in any way ... they're an idea of a person. Also just because you're presented with the option to be male or female, it doesn't mean you have to pick the one you are in real life. If you read further into the subsection, it says, for your safety, we encourage users to safeguard their privacy, remain anonymous ... if they wanted us to remain anonymous, why give us the option to pick a gender or to customize everything about our character? I think that part of the TOS is contradictory, you need to be cautious about how you approach it.*

*Interviewer: But the whole gender swap can still be considered as misleading to other people.*

*Tomorrow Lander: People do it all the time ... you roll with the punches.*

What *Tomorrow Lander* is meaning to say is he/she always approaches the MMORPG with an awareness that identity is fluid. He/she states that, "*People do it all the time*", therefore insisting that the physical and the multi-mutable are not meant to be seen as the same for the domains of FF: XIV. While identities in the physical world are tangible and limited to who a person truly is, individuals and scholars have known for a long time that identities within the multi-mutable are elusive in their conception, thereby providing individuals with more options to be whomever they desire to be.

The Internet has created a space in which one can shed the name, identity, and social status handed down and created by the structures of disciplinary power ... And most importantly, can do it anonymously and *invisibly* (Korvacs, 2001, p.777).

The constant creation of new and separate identities shows a lack of long-term attachment to the experiences in the multi-mutable, and his/her statement of how the characters are always separate from himself/herself shows his/her understanding of a



distinct disconnection between the mutable identity and his/her physical self. *Tomorrow Lander* is only in FF: XIV to play the game several times over, and it serves no other purpose for him/her beyond that.

*Interviewer: Would you say that your current character is an expression of the freedom that you have come to expect from the game? Regardless of what the TOS says?*

*Tomorrow Lander: Yes... but it's because the TOS is not perfect, it controls what you are or aren't allowed to do, but you also need someone from the outside to come in to promote creativity. If they refuse to let anyone do that, they're stifling our creativity.*

*Interviewer: What if the TOS is suddenly altered to include heavier restrictions? What if you have to be exactly who you are in real life?*

*Tomorrow Lander: That takes away half the freedom from the player ... I don't think people will like that ... I know I will probably leave if that happens.*

*Interviewer: What about the people that you currently interact with? What happens if you leave?*

*Tomorrow Lander: I'll still talk with them elsewhere, it doesn't have to be on FF: XIV, we knew each other before we started playing this game.*

*Tomorrow Lander* believes that in order from the multi-mutable realm to function to its full potential, MMORPG domains such as FF: XIV cannot be restricted by watchers who attempt to reduce the freedom and anonymity that is available to each player. The internet is meant to be a safe haven for those who wish to assume the role of someone that is unrelated to their physical self. *Tomorrow Lander* believes that the gaming corporations will find themselves losing their players and subscribers if they are to suddenly include more restrictions in the TOS. If this is to happen, the TOS as a watchtower will have succeeded in allowing the guards to enforce their rules, but it will also be rendered pointless as there will be no one left for the guards to survey.

While the nature of the TOS is subjective in its own right, what is important to note in *Tomorrow Lander's* case is the fact that the attachment displayed towards the mutable domain is not only minor, but his/her relationship with the other gamers within FF: XIV is not

restrictive to only existing within the domains of the multi-mutable realm. This means that *Tomorrow Lander* has the knowledge of who the other individuals are in the physical world and the multi-mutable realm, whereas the watchers within FF: XIV are restricted to only having information about these individual's fictional selves. Individuals are all visible to the surveillance of the physical setting, however, they have the option to present themselves anonymously while subjected to the gaze of the TOS in the multi-mutable realm. The TOS is just a set of rules, it cannot do any watching of any sort and must rely on a guard who occupies the tower to regulate the rules.

The surveilles in a watchtower can attempt to regulate the behaviors of the individuals when they are present and accounted for in the multi-mutable realm, but cannot do the same for people's behaviors when they are anonymous and invisible. The internet allows a person to "abandon the traditional norms and rules of society that are taught in schools and enforced in prisons" (Korvacs, 2001, p. 777), leading directly to constructed identities which may not reflect the actual behavior of their respective owners.

This direct contrast of settings presents a complication for surveillance that is seeking to produce compliant behaviors from its inhabitants. Because the TOS has also insisted that the gamers within the multi-mutable realm act with greater anonymity, *Tomorrow Lander* is able to assume a higher degree of invisibility in the hierarchy of FF: XIV than expected due to the ability to assume a position that is separate from his/her physical self. The fact that his/her identity is intangible essentially disrupts the application of panopticism, which can only ever truly work when those who are being watched are fully visible in every aspect.

*Tomorrow Lander* has not broken any rules in the portrayal of his/her character, as the guidelines from the TOS regarding privacy and presentation of the self are inconsistent. Unlike the physical institutions such as schools and workshops that derive their functions through the application of strict rules and instilling paranoia into the subject under watch, the expectations that come from the TOS in FF: XIV is not presented clearly at this point, therefore creating a context in which its guidelines are both difficult to uphold and follow. Gender swapping in FF: XIV can be argued to be misleading to other individuals, but it also ensures a sense of anonymity towards strangers which is encouraged. Two contrasting arguments are both supported by the TOS.

A far cry from *Tomorrow Lander's* avatar is that of *One Wolf's* creation of his/her character in ESO. Despite not having the opportunity to sit in with *One Wolf* during the process of creating his/her character, *One Wolf* described a strong attachment to his/her current avatar as part of his/her personal self, and explained the decisions that were taken into account during the creation process. An interest in medieval fantasy was a big part of his/her mutable self. *One Wolf* explained that he/she took the character from a work of fiction that was similar in spirit and lore to the multi-mutable realm, and combined it with his/her own personal experiences in order to act as he/she would be expected to, if he/she existed in that world.

In a situation that drew a sense of similarity to *Tomorrow Lander*, *One Wolf* took inspiration from another trademarked source, in this case, J.R.R Tolkien's fictional realm of middle earth, and inserted traces of it into the world of ESO. *One Wolf* is not the only player to have attempted to shape this mutable realm towards his/her own preference. Deferring to a TOS form that differed from that of FF: XIV, there was a different matter in regards to the discussion of the personal self. Unlike the guidelines from FF: XIV, the TOS for ESO seemed as if it attempted to encourage the players to base their created avatars on their actual identities, therefore creating a link between their avatars and their physical selves in an attempt to prevent individuals from acting under the guise of anonymity.

*Interviewer: Section 1 of the TOS says that you may not select the name of another person. That means you have to use your own name.*

*One Wolf: My character does not even have a name ... he/she goes by the title of his/her vocation. Just because that isn't my actual real name or even a real name, it doesn't mean that it can't work, what about people who go by nicknames or change their names in the real world, are you saying that they're wrong?*

*Interviewer: The TOS also specifies that you may not select any third party's trademark, copyright, or other intellectual property infringement.*

*One Wolf: I'm not directly using Tolkien's work here, it's just an idea of what could be. Go around and explore any other medieval themed MMORPG, you will find that they all have some similarities there. They're (Tolkien and ESO) are both deeply influenced by Scandinavian culture ... and it's not hard to see the similarities between the two ... they're*

*plenty of people in the game who take inspiration from other forms of history and lore that are present in the game ... I'm pretty sure that I'm not the first person to come up with this.*

*Interviewer: You don't think that you have to change anything or would do anything differently about you character?*

*One Wolf: Did I create everything about my avatar from scratch ... no. But neither did Tolkien or the Elder Scrolls game. They took inspiration from other works before them ... I'm not saying they stole ideas, just that we're all doing something similar. We're all artists here, they've given me the stage, and I'm improvising as I go along.*

*Interviewer: You're saying what you've done is okay? That it is your right as a MMORPG player to do this?*

*One Wolf: I'm not saying it's ok to lie or to plagiarize, I have the right to be inspired by an idea and to utilize it in one way or another. Like I said earlier, it's a grey area if you think about it ... I'm not wrong because I did not lie or steal an idea completely, but I'm not right because it's not entirely my idea. If I pretended to be someone that I'm not supposed to be, then you can say I'm in the wrong.*

While *One Wolf* has encroached into a morally ambiguous area by not necessarily following the rules, the guidelines as to what can or cannot be considered as an illegitimate avatar in a MMORPG is not so easily established, as the gaming worlds are themselves works of fiction that are self-interpretive for each individual. The multi-mutable realm, while requiring the involvement of people from the physical world, is not a concrete institution in which people are denied the freedom to disguise themselves. MMORPGs due to its setting in the multi-mutable realm, a realm of variables, tend to offer more options for an individual to hide their true self and become whoever they wish to be. However, much like that of *Tomorrow Lander*, the avatar created by *One Wolf*, while intangible, is not seen as a challenge to the hierarchy of the multi-mutable as it is still primarily used in order to participate in the game; attachment to it is only demanded when utilized in the domains of ESO as it serves no other purposes besides that.

*Interviewer: Would you say that you are oriented towards this mutable realm based on what you want, instead of what they tell you to do?*

*One Wolf: Besides using the mechanisms of the game to play the game, I would say yes. If I'm expected to do everything that I'm told to do, I wouldn't be here.*

In order to contextualize *One Wolf's* closing statement, he/she approaches the domain of ESO with the belief that while there are rules for how to function and behave, many other rules that serve to ensure continued functioning of the mutable domain can be ignored. While governments have attempted to limit individuals in the physical world for attempting to circumnavigate the rules regarding the uses of the internet (Tsui, 2003), we have to see *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf's* situation in a different light. *One Wolf* does not believe that surveillance and the consequences are anything to worry about as the physical corporations themselves are presumably uninterested in conducting any serious forms of surveillance themselves. MMORPGs, while an escape from the barriers of the physical world, are not an illegal source of escape from the restraints of the government in the real world. Many of these gaming corporations are aware of this, and therefore encourage their players to embrace the ability to become someone else. Because of this, the corporation of ESO does not worry about having left the watchtower unoccupied.

The process of creating their avatars, while often going beyond the written rules of the TOS, is in no way a subversion to authority. *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* are still playing the game, which is the main purpose of a MMORPG. The main issue lies within the fact that the TOS documents are often written in a self-contradictory way, and can therefore be interpreted very differently depending on the individual themselves. While their created personas may vary ever so slightly from their actual selves, the control that *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* were able to direct into the customization and creation of their mutable identities signifies that they actually have a lot of choice in deciding how their avatars would be. *Tomorrow Lander* only wanted to play the game, while *One Wolf* wanted to apply his/her personal outlook into the avatar.

The two participants approached their respective mutable realm very differently. For *Tomorrow Lander*, it became a matter of being someone else because it was allowed. For *One Wolf*, it was about blending personal interest into the mutable with a little artistic liberty.

Identity within the multi-mutable realm is merely a mask in which people utilize for different purposes whenever necessary. The relationship between the gamers and the game at this stage is more likely to be seen as mutually beneficial instead of having their behaviors trained or altered from a centralized system of surveillance; there are rules, but they do not really matter. While we are only at the very first stage of the study and have not begun to explore deeper into the actual worlds within MMORPGs, these multi-mutable realms are at the moment places in which a person is provided with the chance to leave behind the burdens of reality and to become who they really want to be.

Foucault's model of panopticism stresses invisibility and the assertion of unknown surveillance in an environment to retain power and dominance over its subjects. So far this does not seem to be the case in a MMORPG, at least not at this very stage. When we closely examine the structure of MMORPGs, all the laws and rules concerning the display of the created self in ESO and FF: XIV have a passive existence, waiting for the player to read and follow instead of having it enforced upon them. The corporations behind the MMORPGs may have created the domains of ESO and FF: XIV, however, they have little interest in maintaining a system of hierarchy. Both *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* are in a ramified position in which there is a visible lack of enforcement of rules and the option to easily circumnavigate it. Individuals are expected to follow the rules specified in TOS, but there is no real threat if the expectations are not met, at least not at this stage; there is in existence a watchtower (TOS), but it also lacks the presence of guards who convey a sense of surveillance from it.

The realms of the multi-mutable will no doubt have a range of people who come together to form moral circles of their own based on similar values and rules. However, until we move further beyond the visible and current structure of the TOS, and into a situation in which surveillance is more active and numerous in its gaze, the levels of power in which an individual is free to exercise is not very easily contained by the watchers who are attempting to utilize the TOS as a tower. This puts the participants in a dynamic position that will never be available in a strict model of panopticism in the physical world, as individuals confined to that version have little to no ability to anonymously display their actual selves from the visible eye of a watcher who might be invisible.

*Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* shows a lack of fear regarding the fact that their MMORPG avatars are essentially an anonymous scapegoat set in place of their actual selves.

The fact that they exaggerate and lie about who they really are is of no concern in a MMORPG. I believe this points to an indication that the identity of the multi-mutable realm is less grounded than that of the physical world, and mainly exists in order to be utilized in ways in which the physical identity cannot possibly do so. These avatars may have already allowed *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* to go beyond who they are in real life and assume roles in which they could never do so in the physical world, but it has not fully overtaken their identities as a whole. Even if *Tomorrow Lander* or *One Wolf* were made to leave the domains of FF: XIV or ESO, they may lose the added benefits of being able to play make belief in the multi-mutable, but they can still continue without any real repercussions to their physical lives. This means that the authority of the TOS does not have full sovereign over the players in the realm of an MMORPG.

The model of panopticism is not adequate to describe the domains of a MMORPG in the multi-mutable realm, as the authorities in the domains do not have complete control over the identities of players, with many individuals not really existing in the game as their actual selves. The fact is that the TOS was erected based on the request of the government as a means to keep order within the multi-mutable realm. However, because MMORPGs are not physical institutions in which an individual is forced into without any means of escape, and the gaming corporations themselves have little to no desire to act as watchmen over the people within their domains, the watchtower is often left unoccupied in most cases. In a state in which there is no authority figure regulating their power by watching over those within their gaze, the power structure of the multi-mutable realm will begin to alter.

### **3.4. Analyzing social media**

Moving on to Facebook, I consulted with three other participants on the creation of their social media accounts. Generally, these accounts on Facebook consists of a picture of the physical self and is accompanied with the individual's real name and relevant information. Unlike a MMORPG, the creation of multiple accounts is usually prohibited and even banned in more recent years, while accounts that are centered on real people are utilized mainly for sharing stories, and to communicate with others. This however, does not mean that people

are always honest about who they are as Facebook also has a tendency to be dominated by fake accounts.

These identities can range from “William Shatner or Sir Isaac Newton, ... fake profiles of faculty ... fictitious profiles for pre-existing fictional characters, pets, or wholly invented personas” (Westlake, 2008, p. 29).

Just because fake accounts can be created in Facebook, their existence does not have to be disclosed to anybody. The creator of a fake account can do so anonymously at his/her own discretion, leading into a situation in which many people can simply choose to lie about who they really are, or what they actually do in the physical world.

I began first with *Rocket Launcher*, who relayed a brief description of his/her profile.

*Rocket Launcher: I use Facebook to connect with my family and friends, and to meet other people. People seem to like me and want to be around me because I’m good at telling stories, that’s how I got so many friends.*

While discussing his/her profile, *Rocket Launcher* provided me with a glimpse of its contents. Though nothing about the created profile could be deemed as amiss, I decided to bring in the TOS for Facebook which stresses honesty,

*Interviewer: Section 4 of the TOS deals with issues of personal information, have you ever knowingly provided any information on Facebook that could be potentially seen as false?*

*Rocket Launcher: I may lie about certain things, but that’s only because everyone else does it. Nobody really cares.*

There is a strong emphasis from *Rocket Launcher* about how people have a tendency to lie because there are no actual consequences for behaving that way. Most people are used to all the lies within Facebook that they do not actually notice it as a breach of rules.

As we scrolled further through the profile, we encountered a photo that could be deemed as inappropriate from a certain point of view.

*Interviewer: What about content that may be infringing on the rules listed, subsection 3.7 for example, you may not post content that is pornographic, (I focused on this statement in regard to a posted photo that presented Rocket Launcher in the nude with only a banner covering his/her privates).*



*Rocket Launcher: I'm allowed to put up photos like that if I want to... it's not considered as offensive just because a few people think it is, that's their problem.*

*Rocket Launcher's* decision to demonstrate an opposition to conventions of social structures displays a sense of rule breaking. This refusal to match the established normality demonstrates an increased defiance, and presents a challenge towards the panoptic mode of governance which attempts to produce individuals who comply with and abide solely by the rules and regulations of the TOS. In addition, the ability from *Rocket Launcher* to see what others are thinking of his/her profile contradicts the overall structure of the panoptic metaphor, in which individuals are supposed to be subjected to invisible surveillance, and must continue to act without the knowledge of what their watcher thinks of their behavior. (We will expand on this two-way concept in the following chapter).

*Interviewer: Do you think that the TOS documents did or could potentially affect how your mutable identity is created?*

*Rocket Launcher: Yes, but it's not because of the TOS, they're just a place holder for an authority figure. If Facebook is unhappy of my content and chooses to remove it, it's basically because of the moderators, not the TOS... they're (moderators) like the police who can watch over others.*

According to Page, social media consists of "situated identities such as administrators, moderators, and members reinforce a hierarchical model of influence" (Page, 2012, p. 25). This insists that there is an obvious hierarchy that is present in the domain of Facebook which affords certain individuals with more power over the others, clearly signifying the "strict spatial partitioning" (Foucault, 1995 p. 195) that is practiced by panopticism in a physical setting. Additionally, the statement from *Rocket Launcher* provides a distinct comparison of the TOS to assuming the metaphorical structure of a watchtower, but here the moderators can be any individual with the option to utilize it as a means to govern the users within their domain. In this stage one could easily ask what the difference between Facebook and a panopticon is. In Facebook, the moderators can be of any individual, ranging from those who are self-appointed, to others who are more experienced and actively chosen by the corporation for the purpose of performing the role of an invisible watcher.

To further explain how an individual can assume the role of a self-appointed moderator, we have to know that Facebook allows for people to create varying moral circles based on content or values which they may all share. Upon the creation of these groups the people within are free to include into such group people who may share the same interest. In this state, the creators of these moral circles are themselves free to assume the role of a self-appointed administrator or moderator. This, in addition to their title, imbues them with the ability to watch over the behavior of others within the group and to remove those who may be seen as acting against the intended purposes of such a group. In this case, the power structure of the panopticon, while still present to a degree, does not fully encapsulate the domains of social media as a whole, as the increase in numbers of individuals in charge has essentially decentralized the existence of the TOS as a primary vantage point in which to watch over the people.

*Interviewer: You're comparing the TOS documents to Miranda Rights, and the moderators to the prosecutors.*

*Rocket Launcher: Basically, the TOS just says what is right and wrong, and it's up to the people in charge to then act upon anyone who is doing the wrong thing.*

*Interviewer: What about the individual who uses Facebook, how does this whole moderating thing affect them?*

*Rocket Launcher: They have to decide how to use Facebook based on their own judgement, decide what is right or wrong.*

*Interviewer: You mean to say that people are free to police their own actions in Facebook?*

*Rocket Launcher: Yes, this is our world.*

As *Rocket Launcher* deemed the moderators as the prosecutors, he/she seemed to be aware of that fact that the TOS as the central watchtower was sometimes occupied and served as a mechanism for active surveillance in search of malicious actions. Therefore, individuals while afforded a sense of freedom for lying are still to a degree subject to being watched, and have to be careful with what they actually do on Facebook. In Facebook, "Members may contribute but do not have authority to edit or delete posts, while

administrators have overall responsibility for the forum's site design and hold final authority for allowing or disallowing membership of the site" (Page, 2012, p. 25-26).

Much like how prison guards are separated and often invisible to the inmates in a prison, the moderators and admins are also lurking behind a separate computer screen of their own, thereby still instilling a sense of invisibility and being in a position in which they can exercise a greater power of control over many. The fact that some individuals have the ability to attain higher roles aside from that of the surveyed also indicates that we have now encroached into a domain in which people can attain increased power in the multi-mutable realm that is unavailable in the physical world.

As *Rocket Launcher* has mentioned, governance in Facebook is not only up to the guards, but open to people who can also act upon what is wrong. This shows that surveillance within the multi-mutable could potentially work in a fashion which extends beyond the idea of centralized power in the hands of a few who perform surveillance following the TOS, over to a new model of surveillance in which many can watch over the few. There is evidence to suggest that the multi-mutable realm has begun to move ahead into such new modes of surveillance. Interestingly enough, Foucault may have even foreshadowed this possible outcome himself by stating that, "the more numerous these anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (Foucault, 1995, p. 202).

This potentially means that surveillance in Facebook and the multi-mutable realm in general will eventually evolve to include more watchers over the general populace than a simple few elite. If real life has taught us anything, it is that with proper training and guidance members of the public can become police officers. As the corporations owning the domains of the multi-realm might be reluctant to assign guards to do the watching, the power to surveil can be earned by those who are willing to exercise it. In this way, the power of surveillance is no longer restricted to the hands of a few, but it is dispersed to many.

Facebook is meant to connect people and allow for simultaneous communications, and the only way to truly accomplish this is to engage in a two-way interaction of a viewer and a watched. Facebook would not be able to function if individuals were all restricted to solitary states without the ability to view and respond to the contents of other individuals

and vice versa. While *Rocket Launcher* has helped to see Facebook as akin to an institutionalized setting based on the induction of moderators as the authority figures, he/she has also brought up factors that serve to contradict the structures of panopticism, as an individual is not only being watched, but also has the potential to watch others.

We see this two-way watching and watched position to be evident from how *Rocket Launcher* was able to know that other people considered his/her questionable photo to be offensive. This deviates from the model of panopticism, as individuals within Facebook are all visible to each other, contradicting the concept that members within a panoptic space are solitary and confined, and only visible to the eyes of the privileged guard. *Rocket Launcher's* indication that there are many others who actively act against the expectations of Facebook by lying and exaggerating the contents of their user profiles signifies that there is already in existence a moral circle in Facebook that is born out of the involvements of its users, generating their values that might challenge the expectations of its creators.

The rules of practice and standards of behavior of moral circles that are generated by the users throughout the domains within the multi-mutable realm will complement the TOS. The TOS is now no longer the single source of power that can be utilized to monitor the actions of the people. The dynamic values and the rules that have been co-generated by the users have now come to become the primary source of power in which individuals who participate in the multi-mutable realm have come to be judged by.

Unlike *Rocket Launcher*, another participant *Jabba* conveyed an opposite manner and approach towards the multi-mutable realm. As he/she has a Facebook account that is almost spotless (it has very little content), I decided to skip the TOS forms, and instead engaged *Jabba* for a brief discussion regarding his/her personal Facebook account.

*Jabba: I only got Facebook because people told me to, I don't actually do much with it ... I just make one to two comments here and there to make it seem as if I'm actually making an effort.*

To contextualize his/her statement, *Jabba* predominantly uses Facebook in order to signify to his/her friends and family that he/she is still alive. His/her use of Facebook as a tool for communication with others is marginal at best, while the sharing of personal content almost never happens.

*Interviewer: Are you honest about the information you present on Facebook?*

*Jabba: I'm honest enough about it, I don't choose to tell about or show everything happening in my life, but I don't lie about what I put on there.*

*Interviewer: Was the TOS a main factor when you were creating your profile? If so, did it influence the things you did?*

*Jabba: No, I skipped it knowing that it doesn't matter. I know not to do anything offensive or illegal.*

*Interviewer: Are you saying that you personally know how to self-regulate your own behavior, and that you apply this control to your own actions when you use Facebook.*

*Jabba: Yes, I know how to watch over my own actions.*

Unlike *Rocket Launcher* who created his/her Facebook profile for attention, the deliberate lack of detailed information from *Jabba* creates an incomplete profile. This draws comparison to previous participants such as *Tomorrow Lander*, reminding us that we need to consider the idea that different individuals may also utilize Facebook for different purposes. While this is not a challenge towards the preexisting structure of Facebook, much like the situation surrounding *Tomorrow Lander's* case, the lack of attachment towards the mutable self as an identity prevents *Jabba* from being completely considered a permanent and active member of Facebook, as his/her minimalist profile could be viewed as only being partially visible. By actively withholding his/her complete self from Facebook, *Jabba* has created difficulty for the functioning of panoptic surveillance which requires the full identity of the user to be revealed.

While the lack of attachment could be due to *Jabba* as a particular individual who is uninterested in participating within the domains of Facebook, we can still see his/her behavior as a demonstration of refusal to conform to the expected behavior that is required for surveillance purposes by choosing not to follow the requirements of Facebook. The panoptic prison requires a structure in which every member is coerced to conforming to the rules it sets or be punished for disobeying the rules. The TOS for Facebook does not have the power to impose its rule on users, as it is only able to account for what the moderator is able

to view of a user's profile, much of which is intangible and hidden under the guise of anonymity.

There is little tangibility to the construction of an identity in the multi-mutable, and little that can be done in terms of punishment if an individual is to step out of line. True to its form, anyone may choose to enter or exit the governance of Facebook as they see fit. However, individuals under the governing model of panopticism must conform to the rules, and not simply choose to act in any way that they see fit. Each participant has paid very little attention towards the ways in which they could be potentially infringing on the regulations that the TOS is attempting to uphold, something that could not happen if panopticism was supposed to be acting as the primary mode of governance.

*Jabba's* decision to skip the TOS document, stating that he/she knows how to watch over his/her personal actions signifies the knowledge that the TOS despite being present as a watchtower is rarely occupied by a watchman, or even if there is a watchman, this watchman has little to no interest in watching over those within the domain. Most of the participants in this thesis are well aware of the fact that the physical corporations themselves are not very interested in providing governance over the domains they have created. This has as a result led to a situation in which many corporations have allowed the participants to watch over themselves instead of allocating authority figures who represent the corporation to do the watching. *Rocket Launcher* has already pointed out how individuals are themselves also in possession of administrative rights, and *Jabba* is technically altering the power structure of Facebook by choosing to police his/her own actions instead of having somebody else do it for him/her.

The last participant *Deathblade* would provide an interesting perspective on the matter as he/she, unlike the other participants, is in possession of both a real and a fake Facebook account. We will for this study only focus on the fake account, as it provides an additional outlook on the ways people attempt to subvert authority in Facebook. At first glance, the structure and presentation of the fake account could easily be taken for an ordinary account, with a normal name, a non-descript profile picture, and appropriate likes and tag of certain things across the pages. When I asked about the possible breach of rules that a false account could entail, *Deathblade* had this to say,

*Deathblade: I never read the TOS. Also, I'm not using this account for anything other than to dissociate myself entirely from my primary account. This account is what I use in order to like, watch, and tag stuff that I wouldn't want other people to know about.*

*Interviewer: Not having read the TOS form aside, were you aware that this is an ethical breach of Facebook's code of conduct, and you could be banned for doing this?*

*Deathblade: I knew ... I didn't care ... but only because that is just the way it is. People do these sorts of things all the time.*

*Interviewer: Was this a way of trying to assert some sort of freedom? Who do you think is in control of you in Facebook?*

*Deathblade: I'm in control in regards to what I do on Facebook, but there are people who become servants to the almighty Facebook God, they lose perspective of who they are, what they can or cannot do. Facebook is what it is, people escape into it.*

Unlike that of the other participants, *Deathblade* has gone an extra step against the TOS by attempting to impose his/her own sense of invisibility against the surveillance system that expects a detailed account from each and every individual. We can view the complete ignorance of the TOS for Facebook as a resistance to the expectations of its surveillance system. Additionally, we see from *Deathblade* why the ability to become anonymous is so valued in the multi-mutable realm, as the ability to do so essentially gives individuals the ability to fully express their true manner in a way that is unrestricted by the rules and regulatory standards of contemporary surveillance.

Unfortunately in early 2018, it was brought to my attention that *Deathblade's* fake account had been rendered inactive due to his/her refusal to provide a valid cellphone number for verification purposes. What is interesting to note is that after having strolled through Facebook's TOS in search of a detailed outline, it was found that the requirement for a user to provide a cellphone number was never mentioned nor hinted at.

This lack of grounding in the multi-mutable realm regarding an individual's identity creates difficulty for the surveillance system to properly function in its intended form. As surveillance will not function if the identities in and out of the multi-mutable realm do not match, Facebook has attempted to solve this dilemma by asking for a single cellphone number

per account, in order to ensure that the users are in fact genuine. While this requirement for increased data and detailed profiles on its users draws comparisons to the functions of panopticism in which every individual has his/her details made available to the authorities, it also draws attention to the fact that the TOS documents are themselves unable to fully account for the mechanism of governance needed for the multi-mutable realm, since the multi-mutable realm constantly presents new situations that were not foreseen when the TOS documents were drafted.

*Interviewer: Why didn't you provide a cellphone number? That was all you had to do.*

*Deathblade: Because then ... they would know who it is based on the number, they would know where I'm located in the world.*

*Interviewer: Is this something you would ever consider doing again? If you had the chance?*

*Deathblade: I don't see why not ... you can't really blame me for wanting to use another profile to do something that I don't want other people knowing about ... if the option exists, I'm going to do it.*

*Deathblade's* ability to completely disregard his/her fake account when it was rendered useless shows evidence that identities in the multi-mutable realm, while valued, are not necessarily essential to a person. The refusal to provide a number for verification signifies his/her refusal to conform to Facebook's authority and power structure when expected and shows a level of malleability in how identity in the multi-mutable is constructed. To some people, identities in the multi-mutable can be meaningful, but are otherwise expendable when compromised or no longer required. They are ultimately intangible, and therefore separate from that of the physical world. *Deathblade's* fake account can be seen as an attempt to rebel against the potential destructiveness of surveillance which attempted to prevent an individual from further keeping his/her actions invisible through the act of anonymity. It is, however, also an acquired trait within the mutable domain of Facebook marred by the common knowledge that no one on Facebook is every truly themselves, something which has happened despite the presence of attempted governance and surveillance.



The acts of resistance displayed towards the panopticon metaphor need to be understood as a non-passive integration into a time when physical world is demanding a sense of order to be achieved in the multi-mutable realm by removing the ability for individuals to assume their anonymous identities. Confrontation with surveillance in the physical world is not entirely unheard of. These consisted of events such as revolts against the panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1980) which threatened to reduce freedom, and imposed harsher conditions on individuals. The panoptic model of surveillance is not always perfect; prison riots and asylum cultures which attempted to hide individuals from the panoptic gaze are several examples of retaliation by the many towards centralized surveillance. In 2004, McGrath argued that “under contemporary surveillance, we see ... a proliferation of excess crimes, deaths and sexual exhibitionism” (McGrath, 2004, p. 8). While McGrath highlights the failure of the panopticon in the setting of the physical world, it is fair to say that the acts of resistance seen in the multi-mutable realm also points to the fact that a centralized notion of surveillance will not work there either.

While the knowledge of surveillance and its ability to counter deviant behaviors were acknowledged by the participants, it made little impact in how they chose to conduct themselves as none of the participants believed that they had to change anything about the created profiles. It is still suitable to label a portion of the multi-mutable realm as a panoptic sphere. An increase in resistances displayed towards the TOS shifts power towards the position of the masses (users) against the few (surveillance from a single watchtower), as the institutionalized features of a panopticon only accounts for a portion of the position an individual may find themselves in when participating in the multi-mutable. Many if not all the participants enter their respective mutable realms knowing that they will not only be watched, but also have the ability to watch how other individuals act to resist surveillance. Through their actions of communication and observations of other individuals, they knew that the TOS in general is never really going to matter that much.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I set out to discuss why the metaphor of the panopticon is inadequate in understanding the power structure of the multi-mutable realm. Identity in the multi-

mutable is as complicated as it is complex and fluid, the ways in which individuals may choose to utilize their identity varies. Despite the panoptic structure still being a part of the power structure and surveillance system within the multi-mutable realm, the multiplication of identities that we have witnessed from many of our participants have managed to subvert the power structure in a way which cannot be solely explained using the panopticon concept.

Advanced technology and the evolution of the multi-mutable realm have shifted the very nature and way in which people behave and interact. This rise in digital technology has led to an easier way of assuming a fragmentary measure of one's actual identity by allowing us to create exaggerated avatars and fake online profiles in which we are free to use in order to represent ourselves. Panopticism in the form of the TOS as the central watchtower in the multi-mutable realm was erected as an attempt to account for those situated in the digital setting. This, however, creates a complex situation for surveillance as it only exists in order to assure compliance to the TOS guidelines. The guards within the watchtower are not meant to negotiate or to compromise with the individuals that they watch, as doing so will completely undermine the static rules of the TOS

The environment of the multi-mutable allows for individuals who may not even be authority figures of a corporation to occupy the watchtower, and to take the position of the watcher if they possess the ability to do so. In this state, the watcher who might be an ordinary person can see the actions of others within their particular domain. These individuals, however, are also aware that they cannot be seen from such a virtual watchtower when they leave into the physical world, as it is only restricted to functioning in the settings of the multi-mutable. The rules of the digital sphere are of no matter to an individual until they choose to enter into it.

While these exercises of power from the participant in no way signifies a complete destabilization of the hypothetical prison, the resistance users demonstrate shows their ability to attain a role beyond that of the observed acting confirmatively in fear of punishment. Despite limited choices regarding the matter, through the uses of Foucault's theory, we have deduced that these fabricated mutable identities can in fact provide an individual with the ability to potentially threaten the order of the hierarchy within the multi-mutable, as surveillance cannot properly function with the inclusion of individuals whose identities are not fully accounted for. To label the multi-mutable realm as a panopticon would

be partial at the very least. The subversion of power structures within the multi-mutable realm propels us forward into a situation that demands for a greater emphasis to be placed on the connections between the individuals that inhabit the varying domains.

## Chapter 4

### Supplementing panopticism: synopticism in the multi-mutable

Synopticon: The concept is composed of the Greek word syn which stands for 'together' or 'at the same time', and opticon, which, again, has to do with the visual. It may be used to represent the situation where a large number focuses on something in common which is condensed. In other words, it may stand for the opposite of the situation where the few see the many (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 219).

#### 4.1. Introduction

Since the turn of the century, scholars have argued that we are living in a post-panopticism world in which many themes of panopticism proposed by Foucault continues to persist. This happens as the advancement of new technology and its ability to negate matters such as distance renders panopticism and the limited scale of its gaze irrelevant (Bogard, 1996; Ajana, 2005). The central watchtower in a panopticon could potentially provide a vantage point to survey anybody within its vicinity. However, as has been discovered in the previous chapter, the tower is unable to provide a guard with the ability to survey individuals who can move outside of their general vicinity. At a time when new forms of communication begin to overtake traditional media, many individuals find themselves crossing over into the online domain in order to connect with other individuals.

In his 1997 article "*The Viewer Society*", Norwegian sociologist Thomas Mathiesen argued that the evolution of technology such as television, radios, and newspapers allowed people to converge on, and to become the watchers of others. This, in contrast to Foucault's model of panopticism, implies a shift in the distribution of power of surveillance, as the convenience provided by new technologies of communication allow ordinary people to assume a different role other than that of the surveyed. Mathiesen argued that synopticism produced a shift in the balance of surveillance in contemporary society by creating an inverse panopticon in which the observed are also themselves in possession of power. We see this to be more evident through the internet which acts as a further development in that direction. This means that the governance of the panopticon and synopticon can both serve to discipline and control through the hidden apparatus of surveillance (Mathiesen, 1997).

By approaching the multi-mutable realm as an analogy to a democratic society in which power is synonymously regulated by each and every individual, this following chapter will utilize Mathiesen's model of synopticism to theorize how varying levels of power are dispersed within the multi-mutable realm, and how surveillance is performed by and between users. I aim to achieve this by focusing on the role every individual can play in the system of surveillance, and the levels of power that individuals are free to exercise by assuming the role of the watcher and the watched at the same time. By observing how my participants approach the rules within their mutable domains whereby the many watches and are watched by the many, I hope to find answers to the following questions:

1. Has dispersed surveillance introduced in recent years negated an individual's ability to truly exist in the multi-mutable realm as desired?
2. Are individuals within the multi-mutable realm still afforded with the opportunities to assume different identities in light of surveillance that has not only increased, but altered in its mechanism?
3. Has surveillance in its dispersed form damaged or improved the expected levels of freedom that many come to expect?

This new approach to how power is regulated within these mutable domains may in fact allow us to consider how two mechanisms of surveillance, synopticism and panopticism, mutually reinforce each other in the age of the internet.

## **4.2. What does synopticism reveal about power in MMORPGs?**

Starting with the domains of MMORPGs once again, I sat in another session with *Tomorrow Lander* while he/she was in the realm of FF: XIV. Having played the game wholly from the start to finish eight times, *Tomorrow Lander* sets out once again to finish FF: XIV for the ninth time with a newly created avatar (see chapter 3).

*Interviewer: Why are you doing this? (By 'this', I am referring to Tomorrow Lander creating different characters for different play troughs, as opposed to sticking with the same avatar like most other players would).*

*Tomorrow Lander: Mostly because I'm allowed to do it. There's always almost something to learn, never a point where you know everything about everyone. Despite there being a similarity, the characters are always separate.*

*Interviewer: What is your relation to the multi-mutable realm? Are you an occasional visitor, or a permanent resident?*

*Tomorrow Lander: Permanent resident, I try to fit into the world even if it seems a bit odd. It's a seamless story that feels cohesive to me.*

Despite a lack of attachments to the longevity of his/her created avatars, *Tomorrow Lander* still believes that the multi-mutable realm is not merely a metaphysical plane that is only constituted by the act of playing games. By classifying himself/herself as a permanent resident of the multi-mutable realm, *Tomorrow Lander* emphasizes his/her commitment to the community in the multi-mutable realm, therefore, cementing his/her right to participate in the domain of FF: XIV.

*Interviewer: Do these separate characters allow for an honest display of your personal self?*

*Tomorrow Lander: It shows that I do what I want, but it depends on the situation. People have things about them that will translate between the real world and the virtual world.*

*Interviewer: Can you give me an example?*

*Tomorrow Lander: There's always a mischievous aspect despite trying to distance myself from it.*

*Interviewer: Mischievous as in breaking the rules?*

*Tomorrow Lander: Depending on the situation maybe... but always almost yes.*

*Interviewer: Does the same thing go for your physical self?*

*Tomorrow Lander: Most of the time, but there is a difference with the people who know me. I'm kind of an [censored] with my free company (in-game moral circle) ... I'm more cheeky ... I will admit that my language and actions with certain people can get a little perverted, and I'm a bit more foul-mouthed if the environment allows for it*

*Interviewer: You mentioned that things get perverted, how does that happen in an MMORPG?*

*Tomorrow Lander: I sometimes have my avatar in nothing but their underwear chasing other players around (I should note that Tomorrow Lander only ever does this with his/her in-game group of friends) ... can you imagine what would happen if I did that with strangers or people I didn't know ... I have more restraint in real life because it is expected of me, but in the virtual, you can say or do what you want to if the environment allows for it.*

This discussion with *Tomorrow Lander* shows that his/her behavior in the multi-mutable realm depends on the surveillance that is present, presenting different ramifications of himself/herself in different contexts. Increased surveillance from fellow players has managed to restrict the individual from truly expressing their actual selves in the case of *Tomorrow Lander*. However, what he/she said above also showed that the ability to act out in the way as desired could also be negotiated with the individuals that are present in the game. In FF: XIV, foul language is often considered a behavioral breach of the ethical codes due to its potentially offensive nature when directed at other individuals. It should be noted that this rule applies to many, if not most MMORPGs in general.

*Tomorrow Lander's* choice of presenting himself/herself as a bit of a troublemaker by using foul language when tolerated demonstrates his/her awareness that surveillance within the mutable domain of FF: XIV is present, but the restrictions that it imposes can vary depending on the individuals that are present within the situation. In the previous chapter, we discovered that the static rules of the TOS have been replaced by the dynamic values of the moral circles that inhabit the varying domains of the multi-mutable realm. In the present state in which surveillance does not attempt to enforce the written regulations of the TOS but of what the moral circles deems as acceptable behavior, individuals within the multi-mutable realm will find themselves in a state which presents them with the ability to negotiate with

the authority figures and among themselves against the rules that are no longer existing in written forms.

To better contextualize the setting, *Tomorrow Lander* already has played the game at least eight times over (this increased to a total of 10 times at the conclusion of this thesis), therefore, he/she has already had the opportunity to interact with, and observe the many moral circles within FF: XIV. This means that *Tomorrow Lander* is now very knowledgeable of the types of people that inhabit FF: XIV, and the varying types of attitudes and restrictions that these other players may set on certain behaviors. While MMORPGs tend to provide the options for their players to mute or ignore other players, these games are predominantly centered towards interactions with other players with individuals often having to work together in order to overcome certain in-game challenges in order to progress with the game. This means that interactions with others are inevitable for players such as *Tomorrow Lander*. The forced interaction, however, becomes an exchange in which *Tomorrow Lander* is able to discover and to talk with other players about how the rules are constructed within the MMORPG of FF: XIV. This coincidentally provides him/her with the knowledge of how to better negotiate his/her position with the different moral circles in the domains of FF: XIV.

With the watching eyes of peers replacing an elite authority figure, we begin to see how synopticism can help us interpret power relations in FF: XIV differently from that of panopticism. There are a set of rules that forbid the use of foul language in the TOS as it is considered offensive, but a resistance to the rules can be seen among the players (*Tomorrow Lander* and other players using foul language on a regular basis). Instead of having this rule enforced by a single authority figure, the rules are negotiated and reshaped silently through the social fabric of FF: XIV on a daily basis, with all individuals within allowed to contribute in the process (Mathiesen, 1997). What is generated and enforced through the participation of individuals is no longer based on the static rules specified in the TOS, but flexible and negotiable rules that are constantly changing in accordance with the individuals who are present.

To explain it in simple terms, it is put to the responsibility of the individuals that are present to decide if the use of foul language is wrong or acceptable depending on the situation. *Tomorrow Lander's* is well aware of this system of governance within FF: XIV, hence his/her choice to only use profanity, and perverted jokes if he/she is surrounded by his/her



group of friends, or others who allow for it. Unlike surveillance by the single center of power in the model of panopticism, it is left to the moral circles of FF: XIV instead of elite authorities to be responsible for filtering information and to decide as to whether someone has crossed the line. The number of individuals who can assume the role of watchers has greatly increased within the multi-mutable realm. This ensures that the authoritative position of the TOS which formerly represented a centralized watchtower has now become decentralized in its structure as surveillance evolves to consist of many surveilles dispersed everywhere as opposed to a few guards within the watchtower.

As stated by Mathiesen, synopticism not only shifts the polarity of power between its inhabitants and the authorities, but allows for many ordinary individuals to assume more dominant roles. This reversal in the dispersal of power, while shaping the behaviors of individuals through surveillance, also contradicts that of panopticism which requires its inhabitants to assume a submissive stance towards surveillance. Through the ability to become the watcher of others by actively participating in the game as nine different characters, while in many cases, the other players do not know that the different avatars are played by the same person, *Tomorrow Lander* is continually able to gain new insight into how the people from different moral circles react to certain situations, and is able to apply this knowledge when he/she comes under watch by others. This early foray into the MMORPG shows that rules from the TOS are not necessarily fading away, but are expressed differently when surveillance moves beyond the model of panopticism. These rules are reinterpreted and reshaped by the many individuals who participate in the gaming world and at the same time enforce what is considered to be of good behavior.

With *Tomorrow Lander* having provided us with a glimpse into the domain of FF: XIV, I joined *One Wolf* again, as he/she sets foot into the vast open-ended world of Tamriel (the fictional world of ESO). The day is Turdas (Thursday) and the weather is forecasted to consist of a light breeze in the air. We began our journey by watching as the sun rises and the mountains glow in the mutable realm of ESO; it is Tuesday and raining in the physical world. A casual roam around the wilderness is not an unusual session for *One Wolf* who relies heavily on occasions such as these to continuously immerse himself/herself into the world of ESO.

*Interviewer: Are you in any way trying to enact your physical self via this mutable self?*

*One Wolf: Mentally and theoretically yes ... physically ... well ... no. I don't have nearly infinite stamina to continuously run for hours without a break ... or the ability to jump and fall down a mountain without dying. I try to ... but no, not really ... it's different in the virtual world ... it's easier here ... you don't have to leave the house ... people tend to be different here.*

To explain this part of the conversation, *One Wolf* is implying that the multi-mutable, due to its existence outside of conventional physical bounds, offers a situation in which people can become less focused on the issues of the physical world, actual pain, and life-threatening injuries in particular. While this may seem as being quite an obvious benefit of the multi-mutable, it also shows evidence as to why the idea of consequences within the multi-mutable realm are not as feared as those in the physical. Surveillance in the multi-mutable may threaten to inflict repercussions if individuals are found to be guilty. However, these consequences are not as harsh as they would be in the physical world. It is very unlikely for *One Wolf* to be subjected to any physical punishment or pain if his/her avatar were to be penalized for breaking the rules in ESO.

*Interviewer: How are they different?*

*One Wolf: It's just the way things are in the virtual. It's different here in the game, you're free to assume any part you want ... free to work with anybody that you want to.*

Because the multi-mutable features a stronger sense of anonymity, there is still more freedom available to an individual that is not even acknowledged in the physical world. To clarify, *One Wolf* means that social barriers from the physical world do not matter in a MMORPG, as people from all walks of life can assume any positions that they wish to in ESO, giving them more freedom to act in ways which will not comply with their physical life. This lack of concrete identity which is afforded through the blanket of anonymity would present not only a challenge for the panoptic surveillance model, but also presents a shift in the levels of freedom in which an individual is afforded with. Anybody in the multi-mutable realm can assume the position of a watcher at any time if he/she wishes, something that is impossible in the physical world.

*One Wolf: I'm not really in the game to play the game ... I'm still playing the game ... just that I'm playing it as a display of who I am ... Someone who is there to keep the peace.*

*Interviewer: How exactly do you keep the peace?*

*One Wolf: By helping people out here and there when they need it ... If I see another player being attacked, I'll join in the fight to help them, if someone is harassing other players, I'll make them stop. It's the simple things like these that effects the world.*

*Interviewer: Are you a moderator?*

*One Wolf: No ... I'm a self-regulated player.*

Like the situation with *Tomorrow Lander*, we see a polarity shift within this space that was not accounted for by the model of panopticism alone. Despite the fact that there is still the element of surveillance present, there is a complete reversal in the way it is achieved. In this situation, the power to exercise surveillance over other individuals allows players such as *One Wolf*, who would have been tied to the fixed role of the surveyed in the structure of a panopticon, to have the ability and power to monitor and punish offending players who choose to act against the appropriate settings of the game. While the *One Wolf's* actions of following and forcing others to abide by his/her own rules represent the idea of a self-policing individual, his/her act of personally choosing to do as he/she desires can, however, also been seen as an effect of the increased levels of power endowed with and assumed by individual players, which we can interpret through the perspective of synopticism.

To contextualize his/her statement of "*I'm not really in the game to play the game ... Someone who is there to keep the peace*", *One Wolf's* idea of keeping the peace means that he/she is allowed to assume the role of judge, jury, and executioner in the event of a crisis. This ability to see himself/herself as a figure of authority shows that surveillance is dispersed to every member of the community, as ordinary participants can now choose to observe and surveil other people. In addition, it shows the adverse effect of what can also happen when individuals are free to exercise more control over their levels of power in a manner that is unrestricted by the power structure that was attempted by panopticism.

This situation with *One Wolf* shows that there are elements of both panopticism and synopticism present within the multi-mutable. There is now the added position of being able to assume the role of a watcher. However, there is also the fact that everybody (*One Wolf*

included) is themselves continually under watch in order to maintain a sense of good behavior.

It should once again be noted that *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* are approaching their respective MMORPGs very differently and under different mindsets; while *Tomorrow Lander* prefers to play the game several times over under the guises of different avatars for enjoyment, *One Wolf* focuses on making his/her avatar a proper member within the domains of ESO. Due to the existence of varying moral circles, there was an occasion in 2017 when *One Wolf* was temporarily suspended from ESO for the use of profanity during a conversation with strangers. This punishment, although limited to one occurrence for *One Wolf*, provides us with proof that increase in the dispersal of power and the ability to assume the guise of a watcher does not necessarily provide a single individual with immunity from punishment for acting against the rules within the multi-mutable.

*One Wolf: I was notified that my account had been suspended due to use of offensive language. I wasn't even using it in an offensive manner, I was using it as part of a casual conversation as many people tend to do so. People use these sorts of words all the time ... I was just unlucky that someone at the time happened to have taken it the wrong way and went ahead and made a big deal about it.*

*One Wolf's* temporary suspension shows that it was not the game creators or moderators who were directly responsible for the suspension of his/her account, but another individual in the conversation who did not approve the use of profanity. The TOS may have stated that foul language is forbidden, but it is always left to other individuals to report or act against instances of rule breaking. The tower cannot prosecute anybody, only people are free to do that.

*Interviewer: What does this tell you about the power relations within ESO?*

*One Wolf: It's unpredictable ... some people react more to certain things, while some are more likely to let it slide. I can help people or target them when they do something bad, but I can also be a target from other people if they don't like the way I act or talk.*

Surveillance in the multi-mutable realm could potentially come from any individual, and any single person that is lurking behind a computer screen can potentially see everything if

he/she chooses to do so. Synopticism has allowed us to interpret a setting in which individuals within the multi-mutable realm exist in an environment in which any given person is expected to follow the rules enforced by the moral circle under the gaze of not just the authorities, but of all of its inhabitants. *Tomorrow Lander* and *One Wolf* both acknowledged that they were not only being watched by others, but also had the opportunity to be the watcher at the same time. Increased surveillance has not triggered an increase in restrictive behaviors, but it has instead created an environment in which the ability to do as desired has to be carefully traversed and negotiated.

*Tomorrow Lander* was able to get away with deviant behaviors because he/she was primarily acting out in a situation in which the surveilles of the moral circle were already accustomed to, and were also tolerant of such behavior. *Tomorrow Lander* is accustomed to the different sorts of values, and knows not to overstep into a morally ambiguous area when he/she is in the presence of lesser known individuals. This situation took a different shift for *One Wolf* who has not taken the time to learn about the varying customs of different moral circles, and instead, continually chooses to act out and use profanity amongst other individuals who are often complete strangers. In the realm of a MMORPG individuals are free to assume their desired roles based on the setting, but they just have to be careful about how they traverse the individuals who are surveilling the situation around them.

We can see that there is a clear indication of complying with Mathiesen's theory of synopticism based on how the gamers themselves have become surveilles of each other. Despite gaining an increase in the distribution of power that allows him/her to become a watcher of others, *One Wolf* is still in a position in which he/she needs to be careful not to go against the dynamic values of the moral circle in the domains of ESO. Synopticism creates an environment in which surveillance is no longer a matter of avoiding the panoptic gaze of the watchtower. In order to traverse the dispersal of surveillance in synopticism, an individual can negotiate with, but must be careful not to overstep their position with the individuals who may be present.

### 4.3. What does synopticism reveal about power in social media?

Taking a turn from MMORPGs, we return once more to social media. Unlike that of MMORPGs, my observation of my participants in social media takes a different form. I mostly sat and watched while they showed me around the many pages and comments in their Facebook accounts. I began again with the participant *Rocket Launcher*.

I met *Rocket Launcher* on a casual day of the week while he/she was in the process of updating his/her Facebook account status after returning from an overseas trip. A sudden change of profile pictures from *Rocket Launcher's* in Facebook is not an unusual occurrence. I was notified that he/she does this five or more times a year in order to update people on what is currently happening in his/her personal life. We began by focusing on the newly selected profile picture,

*Rocket Launcher: I have this photograph of me where it looks like I'm really high up and climbing a mountain when I'm actually like a few inches off the ground ... it was some good camera work from my friend.*

*Interviewer: Why did you pick a photo like that?*

*Rocket Launcher: Why not ... it makes me look like I'm very adventurous and interesting.* (While *Rocket Launcher* is an active individual in the physical world, this photo and many others within his/her profile are greatly exaggerated in order to seem more exciting).

*Interviewer: Isn't it a little deceiving to exaggerate that much?*

*Rocket Launcher: People do these sorts of things all the time, it's a trend.*

This early portion of the interview shows that there are in fact rules that determine how an individual is allowed to depict the mutable self in Facebook. However, individuals no longer defer to the TOS as a guideline that states what can or cannot be done, making it different from the structure of a panopticon. Facebook's TOS may have stated that an individual is not allowed to provide information that is false. This rule from the original TOS is, however, ignored as the dispersal of power to each and every individual has increased. The user's within the community of Facebook have been able to form their own moral circle as a primarily indicator for filtering content and behavior.

Having changed his/her current profile picture, *Rocket Launcher* diverted my attention to another photo that he/she plans on using as the profile picture for his/her the account in the next few months. (I was presented with a photo of *Rocket Launcher* pretending to camp in the woods, and feasting on chicken that has been disguised to look like a wild animal).

*Interviewer: Tell me more about this trend.*

*Rocket Launcher: There are articles about it all over the place ... Facebook has become this place where everybody knows that no one is telling the truth, maybe some people do, but it's never without a small lie or exaggeration to a degree.*

*Interviewer: So Facebook expects the people who use it to lie?*

*Rocket Launcher: No, just that you when someone is telling the truth it makes them sound boring and uninteresting ... like someone who isn't worth paying attention to, someone who has no place here.*

This trend that *Rocket Launcher* has brought up is technically the dynamic values of the moral circle of Facebook. Despite the initial induction of the TOS prohibiting the act of lying and predicating honesty, the moral circle which has dominated Facebook has instead imposed a system of values that encourages the increasing number of users to emphasize lies over truths in Facebook. This has resulted in a situation in which Facebook users such as *Rocket Launcher* will not be penalized for lying in his/her profile as it is technically not a breach of the rules, at least not to the moral circle which is now in charge.

While progressing onwards, I asked *Rocket Launcher* to present me with an example of the surveilles of a moral circle at work. Strolling through his/her collection of photos, I am directed to an image of *Rocket Launcher* lying in bed with the caption “*Just woke up*”, and a torrent of emoticons following it which I did not understand. Like the people who exist outside of the moral circle of Facebook, I am not well versed in the lingo that Facebook users utilize.

*Rocket Launcher: That photo took ages to prepare ... I was already up for hours trying to get the right look and pose, making sure the lighting was perfect.*

*Interviewer: Won't people know the photo is fake?*

*Rocket Launcher: Nobody cares ... look at the comments.*

*Rocket Launcher* presented me with a full view of every comment on the photo. It has an extreme amount of likes with an abundance of positive and encouraging comments such as “*looking great*”, and many more that I was unable to understand in a grammatical sense. Comments on Facebook are often posted with a strong disregard for proper grammar and punctuation. As we proceeded to read through the comments, *Rocket Launcher* finally scrolled down to a remark from another individual whom I will refer to with the pseudonym of *Facebook User 1*, who noted the false nature of *Rocket Launcher’s* photograph. We have finally arrived at an individual who does not adhere to the dynamic values practiced by the moral circle of Facebook. With *Rocket Launcher’s* permission, I proceeded to read the following comments in response to the negative comments, which transpires into a torrent of verbal attacks on *Facebook User 1* for revealing *Rocket Launcher* as, to put it nicely, an individual with too much time on his/her hands.

*Rocket Launcher: Nobody cares whether I’m telling or showing the truth or not. We only care about whether someone is trying to destroy our way of life.*

*Interviewer: Way of life?*

*Rocket Launcher: The freedom to be who you want to be. Facebook lets you be more than you really are in real life, that’s why people like it. Here I can be someone who survives in the wilderness and no one can take that away from me. Nobody from the outside can tell me where I can or can’t go.*

Due to Facebook being created for the purposes of sharing content and information, surveillance is something that is necessary in order for the domain to function. People like *Rocket Launcher* and those within Facebook have to be watched by others in order to be able to ensure a continued communication among Facebook users.

*Interviewer: What about the moderators or other people?*

*Rocket Launcher: I’m not doing anything wrong ... they are only supposed to act when someone is harassing the members of the majority, they’re probably aware of what is happening with my account and photo, that it’s all lies but don’t have to do anything about it because it’s not an actual problem.*



*Interviewer: What about the angry comments directed at Facebook User 1? Won't that lead to a bigger problem?*

*Rocket Launcher: He/she knows what he/she was getting into with that negative comment ... there's nothing there that we can't handle ourselves. (By 'we', Rocket Launcher means the community within Facebook).*

While Facebook consist of authority figures such as moderators who should be present, it is instead, the members of the moral circle of Facebook who take on the authority roles, and deal with the contradictory behavior and comments that can potentially subvert the level of freedom that the users are themselves in possession of. Even if this technically results in a torrent of verbal abuse directed at *Facebook User 1*, it presents quite a dramatic shift from the private and solitary state of punishment from panopticism; in the synoptical power structure within Facebook the public repercussion for *Facebook User 1* insists that punishment within Facebook has evolved into a mode in which the many can converge on and see a particular individual receive their punishment.

Unlike MMORPGs, we should be aware that increased surveillance via synopticism is actually necessary in order for a domain such as Facebook to function. Facebook users are put in a position whereby in order to communicate, they need not only to have the power to assume the role of the watcher, but are also watched by others. We can see how this is evident from *Rocket Launcher's* interview, based on how he/she not only has the ability to contribute content (comments, and photos of fake rock climbing and survival), but how he/she is also in a position to publically view the contributions of others (*Facebook User 1* receiving punishment). This is a two-way scenario which would not have occurred without *Rocket Launcher* or another individual initiating a form of communication to begin with.

*Rocket Launcher's* case presents a new outlook on surveillance. We can attribute the structure of Facebook to having followed the principles of one-watching-the-many which based on how any individual is given the freedom to view the profiles of other people, but the presence of the many watching the one is also evident based on how a photo or comment is visible for everyone to see.

Synopticism has allowed us to interpret a scenario in Facebook in which the regulation of individuals' behaviors in the community is actually derived from whether the surveilles agree

with the actions of a particular individual, or if they believe it to be against the dynamic values of the moral circle. We have established that the TOS as the central watchtower in panopticism no longer functions effectively. This decentralization of its power structure is largely due to the fact that the power of surveillance has been dispersed amongst the members of the common majority as opposed to only imbuing it within the elite members.

As the collective majority of individuals are in the position to exercise surveillance, they are able to form their own dynamic values or trend which is informed upon by their very own unwritten rules for behavior as a replacement of the TOS. *Rocket Launcher* was well liked within Facebook because he/she acted in ways which conformed to the values of moral circle, whereas *Facebook User 1* potentially counteracted the beliefs of the dominant majority. Increased surveillance has essentially linked together the people who agree with the messages that are produced and upheld by the moral circle, and a hierarchy no longer matters within the domain of Facebook. In short, an individual is either with the common majority of individuals who abide by the principles of the moral circle, or they are against it; it is simply the case of the majority versus the minority.

I approached my next participant *Jabba* for a casual talk about his/her Facebook account. Starting with *Jabba's* profile picture, I was certain that it was not an actual image of the individual I saw before me. The profile picture I saw consisted of a fresh-faced individual 'enjoying' his/her formative years, whereas the individual next to me painted a picture of an individual who maintains a calm exterior after having given up on life.

*Interviewer: About your profile picture, when was the last time you changed it? This photo has to be at least 10 years old if not more.*

*Jabba: That was the photo I had when I first created my account, when I cared a little. People have been saying that I should change it.*

*Jabba* began to change his/her photo. Unlike that of *Rocket Launcher's* exaggerated self, the image that was selected is one that consisted of the vast emptiness of outer space (It is literally a googled image of space).

*Jabba: It's better than putting a photo that will draw a lot of comments or questions.*

*Interviewer: Won't putting a photo like that make people comment more? Won't they ask about why you don't have a picture of yourself?*

*Jabba: The opposite ... I don't have any exaggerated photos or anything that people can see ... I just look like someone who isn't going to be interesting and not worth paying attention to.*

*Jabba* presents a dishonesty due to the fact that the photo presented does not consist of the actual self. The TOS of Facebook specifically states that a user's profile must consist of information that is both accurate and up to date. However, just like *Rocket Launcher's* mountain climbing photo, it is also not a photo that acts in direct violation of the values from the moral circle of Facebook. Profile photos in Facebook are meant to be a display of the actual image of the user. At least that was the initial purposes when it was first created, but as evident in the photos of *Rocket Launcher* and *Jabba*, nobody really cares as long as it does not offend the common majority.

This also confirms the fact that surveillance in Facebook actually comes from the many individuals who are present, as opposed to the notion of a single guard.

*Interviewer: Have you ever tried to be more involved in Facebook?*

*Jabba: I've been asked to and I tried ... it wasn't worth it.*

*Jabba: People hold grudges against you or other users if you don't agree with them ... it doesn't matter if they're in the wrong. I just don't have the time to dedicate my entire self to something this pointless.*

*Interviewer: Are you implying that these people have been brainwashed?*

*Jabba: In one way ... yes. Facebook is like an institution that makes people think a certain way and only come to agree with those who think like they do.*

There is still the existence of a panoptic power structure based on how the moral circle of Facebook not only enforces a certain type of behavior, but seeks to root out individuals who choose to disagree with their rules. However, what sets Facebook apart from a panopticon is the fact that increased surveillance occurs through the induction of ordinary individuals as watchers. Synopticism is also a surveillance system, and its inclusion in the

multi-mutable realm presents us with a situation in which panopticism and synopticism have mutually reciprocated in utilizing surveillance as a way of ensuring that the individuals within the domains of Facebook are acting in an orderly fashion, and not attempting a revolt of any sort; it is still all about instilling a sense of discipline and creating individuals who will learn to abide by the 'proper' behavior.

*Interviewer: How do we avoid falling prey to this institution?*

*Jabba: (Switches off the computer and points outside the window). You go outside into the real world.*

*Jabba* displays a different approach to Facebook from that of *Rocket Launcher*. His/her approach is nonchalant as indicated by the application of a picture of outer space instead of his/her actual self, showing a lack of connection to his/her mutable identity, and once again creates difficulty in considering his/her Facebook account as genuine. *Jabba* has provided a personal comparison of Facebook to an institution intent on brainwashing others. Despite the fact that this may sound similar to the intended purpose of panopticism, we can also see how the metaphor of a hypothetical prison is unsuitable at the same time. This happens because the dispersed power of surveillance in the multi-mutable realm that we have interpreted matches the idea of synopticism while challenging the model of panopticism. This is made visible as the values of the moral circle formed within the domains of Facebook is allowed to take precedence and impose its very own set of values over the rules set by the TOS.

Individuals such as *Rocket Launcher*, who follow the values of the moral circle (exaggerate and lies) is afforded with the privilege of having more freedom to do as he/she desires, and the support of other individuals as long as he/she does not contradict their unwritten rules. Increased surveillance in synopticism seeks out individuals who are seen as potentially dangerous, but the potential danger in this case is represented by the people who contradict the intended purposes of the moral circle (*Facebook User 1* calling out *Rocket Launcher's* photo as a time waster).

With the contrasting behaviors *Jabba* provided in comparison to *Rocket Launcher*, I turned my attention to *Deathblade's* fake account. In order to avoid confusion with the previous chapter, I should note that this event took place chronologically before the untimely

locking of *Deathblade's* fake account. Due to the volatile nature in regards to the fake account, I was only provided with limited access and view of the contents displayed before me as *Deathblade*, who is unwilling to divulge every single detail, takes control of the mouse and carefully selects what he/she thinks suitable for discussion. After several minutes of scrolling through content, *Deathblade* finally settled on several posts and videos of materials that he/she has 'liked'. Much like how I have disguised my participant's real names under pseudonyms, I will also do the same for the fake account under the name of *Sidewinder* as requested by *Deathblade*.

After carefully scrolling, *Deathblade* presents me with varying displays of 'likes' of materials that could be considered as feminist, chauvinist, or extremely left-winged, contents and materials that *Deathblade* believed to be against the dominant moral circle within Facebook.

*Deathblade: They're just stuff that I don't want people to give me [censored] for in real life.*

*Interviewer: What about the people who already know this about you in the physical world?*

*Deathblade: Nobody knows that I'm Sidewinder on Facebook ... nobody can link this back to me.*

*Deathblade* is insisting that increased surveillance from synopticism potentially complicates not only his/her situation in the multi-mutable, but that of his/her physical counterpart. Knowing that his/her preference for certain contents would go against the moral circle of Facebook, *Sidewinder* was created as a foil to prevent other people's ability to trace the contents within the fake account to his/her physical self.

*Interviewer: Are these opinions and causes that you support?*

*Deathblade: Not necessarily, some I just find to be interesting.*

Despite the ability to assume a fake account (until Facebook locked it down), we can see how increased surveillance actually complicates the situation for people with different interest and outlooks from that of the moral circle. Left-winged, feminist, or chauvinist propaganda may not be considered as illegal content, but because they disagree with the

values of the moral circle, individuals who are associated with content such as these could possibly face potential repercussions.

*Interviewer: Is it just about keeping a sense of privacy for a public part of your life?*

*Deathblade: Pretty much, I do suppose that it helps you look at other people's perspective on things such as politics, where some people are just crazy supporters of certain political parties. I mean, if people knew about some of the things that Sidewinder likes or does on the internet, no one will look at me the same way.*

To put this into context, Deathblade means that the members of the moral circle in which he/she is currently assumed to be a part of, may begin to view him/her differently if they were to know of his/her true feelings on several matters. Had *Deathblade* not created the alias of *Sidewinder*, he/she may very well be on the receiving end of many complaints or forms of abuse from individuals who are attempting to enforce their own idea of good behavior.

*Interviewer: Is there a reason for that kind of behavior?*

*Deathblade: It's a matter of culture, it's complicated.*

To contextualize, the culture to which *Deathblade* referenced, is the moral circle that is derived from the physical world, which has been transplanted to and allowed to dominate that of the multi-mutable realm. To better explain, the metaphor of the TOS as the central watchtower was intended to be used to restrict an individual from exercising increased power by subjecting them to the fixed role of the surveyed. By closely surveying the individuals within its gaze, the watchers who occupy the watchtower could prevent any group of individuals from attempting to form a moral circle of their own, as the individuals did not want to suffer the consequences for breaking the rules. However, in a synoptical power structure in the multi-mutable world, the inhabitants are themselves now in possession of equal power.

Individuals who continually enter the multi-mutable realm are free to form their very own moral circle based on values that are derived from the physical world, and to enforce its dynamically created values in the mutable domain of Facebook. Left-winged and feminist content are not debates that only exist in the multi-mutable realm, but are discussions which has its origins grounded in the physical world. These facts show that a moral circle has

managed to take precedence over the domain of Facebook, and such a moral circle is inexorably linked to that of the physical world, which was always the point, as Facebook was meant to foster connections between individuals in the physical world. Synopticism has in actual fact allowed for the transplanting of power relations from that of the physical world into that of the multi-mutable realm. The people who manage to assert their dominant values over those of the minority have been allowed to do the same in the multi-mutable realm.

Social media and MMORPGs may both exist in the multi-mutable realm, but are composed of very different principles in regards to what they are utilized for. With the introduction of content that deals with broader social issues, political or feminist, as indicated through *Deathblade's* fake account of *Sidewinder*, we see social media potentially become an imagined space of opposition and contest that inexorably links the content back to the physical world.

Surveillance by the many in Facebook is a complex matter, *Rocket Launcher's* case for example sees surveillance and visibility as something that is not at all a negative experience, at least not for somebody who asserts and preserves the values of the moral circle. For some people who do not belong or are seen on an equal level with the moral circle, individuals such as *Jabba* and *Deathblade*, it is a nuisance that prevents freedom and the full expression of their actual personalities. However, as more individuals such as *Deathblade* begin to actively undermine the current moral circle located within, it could potentially become impossible even for increased surveillance to account for all forms of resistance and opposition.

Synopticism presents an alternative mode of governing to panopticism, however, it is the moral circle of the community that fully informs what these modes of governance truly aim to do. Opposition towards panopticism and the TOS that participants expressed in the previous chapter was representational of a prison revolt against the guards. The participants all chose to ignore the TOS, and circumnavigated the authority of the metaphorical watchtower. Through the supplementation of synopticism in which every individual now has equal right to participate in the multi-mutable realm, resistance towards power has taken on a different meaning. Moving past the metaphor of a prison revolt, individuals are no longer fighting a battle against the guards in order to come to an agreement of who is right or wrong.

The contesting of power between individuals such as *Rocket Launcher*, the moral circle of Facebook, and *Facebook User 1* are composed of individuals who are all free to assume the role of the watcher and the watched. Similarly, *Jabba* and *Deathblade's* opposition against the moral circle within Facebook is still a confrontation between individuals of the same level of hierarchy. We are now interpreting a situation in which many individuals within the multi-mutable realm begin to contest for their right to regulate their personal degree of power through a civil war of sorts. The transplanting of the moral circle from the physical world has radically shifted the dispersing levels of power within the multi-mutable realm; the situation has now become a case of the majority vs the minority. Freedom in this sense is no longer gained by avoiding the gaze of the central watchtower, but by careful negotiation with the values of the collective majority.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we interpreted how power in synopticism has allowed for the dominance of the moral circle to not only move beyond, but to decentralize surveillance from that of the TOS which originally acted as a central watchtower. The powerless individual who was once fixed into the roles of the surveilled like prisoners in a panopticon is no longer present. Each participant seems to embrace the idea that they are surveilled, but can also surveil others. In this reverse state of power regarding surveillance, individuals will instead find themselves not only being able to watch, and listen to other individuals, but also with the added ability to participate and make their voices heard.

Because of the reversal of the roles regarding surveillance in a synopticism which focused on bringing together the mass of like-minded individuals, synopticism has allowed for the multi-mutable realm to become a place in which multitudes of people who share the same ideologies and opinions have come to assume a dominant authority role. Despite the fact that there were attempts to subvert or dissociate an individual from the gaze of the many, we have deduced that the regulation of varying levels of power is afforded based on whether an individual acts in accordance with the values of the moral circle, or if they choose to oppose it; you are either with the moral circle, or against it.



We see strong evidence of how the self-appointed watchers within these communities enforce their own set of rules and display their increase power over individuals when they are seen as overstepping the boundaries. As the participants of a particular mutable domain are themselves free to resolve their issues in a public display based on the unwritten rules of the moral circle, we can see how the more modern systems of surveillance are differing from panopticism. Foucault's metaphor of panopticon relied on the existence of a few individuals in power to threaten the many with pain and harsh discipline to its in order to instigate a sense of control. This as we discovered in the previous chapter was marginal in its effect. While the multi-mutable realm has come to embrace surveillance as a key component pertaining to the enforcement of set morals and values, the metaphor of the panopticon remains in the past as we begin to embrace an increase in the number of individuals who are free to practice their power of surveillance as the new form of governance.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Considering the broad impact that the internet has on modern society and its inhabitants, it is difficult to believe that the multi-mutable realm had rarely been the focus of anthropological studies until very recently. At a time when the majority of people place little attention on the TOS and breaks the established rules of the multi-mutable realm without consequence, this thesis has decided to interpret how Michel Foucault and Thomas Mathiesen's model of panopticism and synopticism allow us to interpret the regulation of power dispersal within the multi-mutable realm.

We have to take into consideration the fact that MMORPGs and social media exists as two very different domains that are perpetrated for very different reasons. For the most part, MMORPGs exists as gaming environments in which its players are free to leave the world behind, and to enjoy a fantasy domain. Communication with others is encouraged but optional and entirely dependent of what the player wishes to do. Social media on the other hand was created to allow for communication and interactions with other people.

In chapter 3, we set out to see why the metaphor of a panopticon cannot be used to adequately describe the domains of the internet. This was achieved through the comparison of the TOS documents of several domains to the representation of a centralized watchtower that was erected as a request to maintain a sense of order within the multi-mutable realm. The TOS only represents a localized set of rules and regulations, much like the watchtower in panopticism. It cannot do any watching of its own and must instead rely on the appointed guards who occupy its structure to watch over those within its gaze, and to enforce the rules through real or threatened penalty. These dominant watchtowers can be occupied by authority figures from the corporations in charge, who will assume the role of guards that have the ability to watch over the citizens within their gaze, and to enforce what is deemed to be of proper behavior.

The only issue with this hypothetical prison lies within the fact that many of the corporations themselves have little to no interest in performing the duties of watchmen, therefore leaving the watchtower unoccupied. Many of the individuals are well aware that

these watchtowers are often left empty, creating a situation in which individuals who break the rules directly in front of the central watchtower have nothing to fear as there was little repercussion in the form of threats. In a hypothetical prison taking the form of a panopticon, individuals are expected to be fully visible to the watching eyes of the guards. But this is not the case in the multi-mutable realm, as many if not all of its members are also endowed with an increased ability to avert the gaze of the watchtower through the means of anonymity and invisibility. Identities and their connection to the physical self are intangible in the domains of the multi-mutable, as members of a domain of a multi-mutable realm often have the choice to create their avatars and user profiles not based on their own identities in the physical world.

People utilize different aspects of the multi-mutable realm for diverse reasons, and surveillance aimed at coercive governing for the entire multi-mutable realm does not work when the domains within the internet are used for different reasons (gaming, communication) as opposed to a single purpose. While we are all permanent residents in the physical world and bound to the laws imposed upon us from physical society, the multi-mutable realm presents us with an entirely different approach to our mutable selves in terms of authenticity. Despite it still being practically impossible not to leave a footprint of data and information behind, the ability to become anonymous and invisible in the multi-mutable realm allows us to fake, or to pretend to be someone else entirely, thereby creating a completely different mode of action and resistance towards the hierarchical nature of panopticism.

In chapter 4, we discovered that synopticism had shifted the power from the small minority of elite individuals, and on to the mass group of the majority. New advancements in technology and the multi-mutable realm have created an environment in which the TOS, while still in existence, has been replaced by the formation of varying moral circles that are based on set dynamic values and rules that are shared by the people. In this state, we no longer interpret a situation in which the small group of elite individuals can wield power over the majority. We have approached an era in which governance within the multi-mutable realm is enforced by the majority of individuals who are not only subjected to the fixed role of the surveyed, but have also attained the power to become watchers for deviant behaviors.

The freedom to do or to act as desired is not restricted in synopticism, but must be carefully negotiated depending on the individuals that are present. An individual is usually allowed to act in ways which would have never been allowed under the governance of panopticism. The difference in this state is the fact that they have to be careful with how they go about breaking the rules. Increased surveillance within the multi-mutable realm could potentially come from any individual behind a computer screen of their own. Synopticism has managed to create an equal setting amongst the participants with the ability to prevent an individual from going mad with power.

We are instead under the watchful gaze of ordinary citizens that could possibly be any given individual at any given time. Advanced technology, namely the internet, is an important part of today. It is noticeably absent from the writings of Foucault, and though present within Mathiesen's, is relatively brief and its eventual influence and dominance is largely unaccounted for. There are elements of both panopticism and synopticism existing in the multi-mutable realm, the two forming a mutually beneficial relationship as neither one of them could adequately govern their particular domains alone.

In conclusion, we would like to assume that the multi-mutable realm is a place in which individuals are properly governed and afforded with equal privileges and rights. Far from this truth, the multi-mutable realm is in fact an environment subjected to constant change and fluctuation in its regulation of power. In this current state, as long as an individual agrees with the dynamic values of the moral circle that inhabits their domain, all will be fine. You are either with the majority, or you are against them.

## Glossary

**AI (Artificial Intelligence):** intelligence displayed by machines in contrast to those of living beings.

**Avatar:** a graphical representation of a user in the online world.

**ESO (Elder Scrolls Online):** a MMORPG game released in 2014, and the second most popular MMORPG in 2016.

**EverQuest®:** a MMORPG released in 1999.

**FF: XIV (Final Fantasy 14):** a MMORPG game released in 2013, and the third most popular MMORPG in 2016.

**Millennial(s):** Individuals who are born around 1981 to 1997, often defined as a generation marked with an increased use and familiarity with digital technology.

**MMORPG(s) (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game(s):** a combination of a role playing game set online in which players interact in a massive virtual world.

**Moral Circle:** a community formed by individuals with dynamic values of their own.

**NPC(s) (Non Player Character(s):** characters existing in a MMORPG that are not controlled by other players.

**Panopticon/Panopticism:** a generalized model of functioning in which the few watch over the many.

**RPG(s) (Role Playing Game(s):** a genre of game in which the player assumes control over the actions of a character in a well-defined world.

**Synopticon/Synopticism:** a generalized model of governing that is reciprocal to the panopticon in which the many watch over the few.

**TOS (Terms of Service):** a contract which governs a user's behavior when using a software.

**World of Warcraft:** a MMORPG released in 2004.

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