Blackless Fantasy

The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

Tanner Higgin
University of California, Riverside

This article focuses on questioning and theorizing the visual and discursive disappearance of blackness from virtual fantasy worlds. Using EverQuest, EverQuest II, and World of Warcraft as illustrative of a timeline of character creation design trends, this article argues that the disappearance of blackness is a gradual erasure facilitated by multicultural design strategies and regressive racial logics. Contemporary fantasy massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) privilege whiteness and contextualize it as the default selection, rendering any alterations in coloration or racial selection exotic stylistic deviations. Given the Eurocentrism inherent in the fantasy genre and embraced by MMORPGs, in conjunction with commonsense conceptions of Blacks as hypermasculine and ghettoized in the gamer imaginary, players and designers do not see blackness as appropriate for the discourse of heroic fantasy. As a result, reductive racial stereotypes and representations proliferate while productive and politically disruptive racial differences are ejected or neutralized through fantastical proxies.

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Scholars and game designers have identified that video games deploy Black characters in two extremely limited and reductive forms. Ernest Adams (2003) notes that the first of these forms is often "simply to add visual variety" (para. 13), and the second form, as focused on in the work of David Leonard (2006a), depicts Black characters as "extreme and blatant racial tropes" (p. 83).[1] Because video games both model and shape culture, there is a growing danger and anxiety that some games are functioning as stewards of White masculine hegemony. Browsing the shelves of your local Game Stop will probably validate this claim. Black and brown bodies, although increasingly more visible within the medium, are seemingly inescapably objectified as hypermasculine variations of the gangsta or sports player tropes, which reduce race to an inscription of the "fears, anxieties, and desires of privileged Western users" (Nakamura,

Author's Note: Please address correspondence to Tanner Higgin, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521; e-mail: thigg001@ucr.edu.

3

2002, p. 6) while ignoring any differences that could pose an unmanageable political threat. Critiques of this nature are undoubtedly important in the struggle over Black cultural politics; however, game scholars must be continually disloyal to their methodologies in order to adapt and combat the cunning positioning of racist discourse. This is especially true when considering the work of theorists such as Constance Steinkuehler (2005) who have enlightened the academic and professional community to the increasing social and cultural importance of games and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) that act as "sites for socially and materially distributed cognition, complex problem solving, identity work, individual and collaborative learning across multimedia, multimodality 'attention spaces' and rich meaning-making" (p. 20). Without adaptive and robust studies of race within game culture, we run the danger of fashioning a field incapable of adequately addressing the hegemonic proclivities of what appears to be one of the dominant emergent media forms of the 21st century. This is particularly significant given the historical interest of play, including the entire lineage of video games, in rehearsing and staging various conflicts and confrontations with monsters, aliens, and bogeymen of all kinds (racial and otherwise).

Lisa Nakamura's (2002) cybertype is an indispensable tool with which to begin this study because it seeks to describe how new media "propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism" (p. 3). It is this concept that the following argument will build from and subsequently seek to adapt, revise, and expand. As Nakamura explains, what makes the cybertypes different from traditional stereotypes is that they are, borrowing Lev Manovich's terminology, transcoded by the computer. Through this process, the "cultural layer" or the ideologies regarding race that circulate in the material world are interpreted and reformatted by "computer/human interfaces, the dynamics and economics of access, and the means by which users are able to express themselves online" (p. 3). This format change facilitates a technologized malleability and reworking of racial stereotypes and has generated a form of pervasive blackness in video games that honors a hypermasculine, material, anti-intellectual, and violent cybertype.

The task of this article is to use cultural race theory and the concept of the cybertype in new ways, pushing beyond the scrutiny of hypermasculinization and ghettocentric representation toward a theorization and understanding of the cybertypes that circulate in the ostensible absence of blackness in fantasy-based MMORPGs adhering to a multicultural ethic. The geographic focus is solely on the cultural intersections between U.S. culture and these games, although I hope that these theories will also be in part applicable to more global perspectives. The purpose of this analysis is twofold: first, to expose how productive racial diversity in games has eroded because of systematic discursive occlusion, and second, to understand why games provide spaces where minstrelsy[2] is often the only

intelligible technology of racial signification. I am using the term *blackness* in a very conscious and specific way. In a fantasy setting, one cannot speak of particular nationalities or ethnicities (beyond narrative explication); however, as has been mentioned and will be discussed further, these gamespaces still interface allegorically with racial identity formations in the physical world. To this end, I use blackness to refer to the ontological condition of being labeled and understood as Black—in the manifold forms that this is realized in the physical and game worlds. This includes how blackness has been circulated and managed in the visual and cultural imaginary as well as understood to be a politically constructed and biologically influenced, but by no means determined, category. I also intend to tether blackness to its history of racial subjugation and White supremacy. In the simplest of terms, I will use blackness as *not White* in the specific circumstances of the game world and as informed by culture and politics.

MMORPGs deploy cybertypes in a more expansive manner than has thus far been theorized. Furthering the work of Nakamura in direct application to World of Warcraft, Galloway (2007) argues that "race is unplayable in any conventional sense for all the tangible details of gamic race (voice, visage, character animation, racial abilities, etc.) are quarantined in certain hard-coded machinic behaviors" (p. 96). The players of World of Warcraft cannot manipulate their race as they can their class, so although they can add certain modifications through the chat channel or through naming, they cannot actually modify race substantively. In this way, the onus is on the game itself in that it "assigns from without certain identifiable traits to distinct classes of entities and then builds complex machineries for explaining and maintaining the massive imperviousness of it all" (p. 96). As Galloway explains, this cybertyping should result not in a condemnation of the supposed racist practice of the game itself but in the understanding that the codification of race is often an effect of mediation itself and its technical requirements. Galloway's more direct application of the cybertype to World of Warcraft is certainly applicable and acceptable, and I agree that the end game should not be a critique of racist ideology. However, this version of cybertyping is not exclusive. In light of the increasing extramediation of online gaming via voice chat, machinima, blogs, live game play broadcasts, and modeling software, in conjunction with the performative[3] activities of players in games (as acknowledged by Galloway), we must also recognize how race is just as much a discursive construct as it is a coded one. Theories that rely solely on the interpretable logics of the game's technical design cannot adequately account for how players deal with issues of race on an everyday basis.

This is not to say that design decisions are not important to this trajectory of inquiry—quite the contrary. Although there are no reliable statistics on the amount of Black avatars in these games, and any study attempting to track blackness would be futile (what shade of skin truly is black, after all?), any player can affirm that Black characters are both a rarity as player characters and

nonplayer characters in most every MMORPG. This is an everyday reality that is an effect of the actions of both the designers and the players. Because of the relatively blackless worlds of MMORPGs, cybertypes are not entirely produced through code, text, or representation but also are produced via a selective transcoding of cultural data and demarcated by the subdued discursive presence and absence of blackness. This omission of Black characters from the discourse devalues the potential of video games to provide productive racial experiences because they reinforce dominant notions of Blacks as incapable of being functional members of society. These games, although masquerading as progressively engaged through a strategy of colorblindness, function as hegemonic fantasy by filtering the racial imagery that threatens the safety and political coherence of White dominance.

The impetus for this project was the viral Leeroy Jenkins video, compounded by my own experiences as a player of a Black avatar in World of Warcraft—both objects and methods of study not reducible to the machinic architecture of the game. This video was released in the summer of 2005 and was distributed by the World of Warcraft guild Pals For Life as a form of guild promotion. The video was a machinima[4] parody of an often experienced mishap in group play—the abrupt slaughtering of a dungeon party preparing for battle attributable to an absent-minded person charging into battle early. The comedic foil of the video, Leeroy Jenkins, is a stereotypical Black character who has many connections to the "Zip Coon" made famous in minstrel shows. Leeroy's name is, similar to Tyrone, a stereotypical African American name. His voice, performed by a White man, is an exaggerated version of the deep and stumbling voices associated with characters from minstrel shows or their legacy in radio, television, and film. Similar to the character of the Zip Coon, Leeroy is comedic because he attempts to assimilate into the group but eventually screws everything up— proving his idiocy. Hence, after Leeroy charges into the pack of monsters alone, the rest of the group can be heard cursing Leeroy for his stupidity. At the end of the video as the group is killed, Leeroy acts as if it was not his fault and exclaims, "At least I have chicken." Although notable for its status as an Internet phenomenon, having garnered millions of downloads and mentions in *PC Gamer* and *Jeopardy*, this video is even more notable as distributing the first massconsumed representation of blackness in MMORPGs. What is striking is that this singular and widely consumed representation was a traditional cybertype like those detailed by Nakamura. However, this *representational* cybertype is also a symptomatic annunciation of the embedded and selectively transcoded cybertypes that freely circulate in the absence of blackness. These cybertypes are those of the everyday within the game world and therefore are exchanged without repercussion. They are the commonsense notion that Blacks are not heroes, paladins, or mages; this is a fact substantiated by the incredibly small number of Black avatars populating the worlds, Web sites, promotional materials, and

history and lore of fantasy MMORPGs. Blackness is only allowed visibility in very specific and calculated moments that enact the desires of the dominant audience and fit into their cultural imaginary. One of the more striking examples of this trend can be found in the officially licensed World of Warcraft Trading Card Game, which has immortalized the Leeroy Jenkins character with a card. Not surprisingly, Leeroy's brown skin has been whitened. This decision might have been motivated by a need to ensure mass consumability and to officially refute any potential racist content in the original video.

Given this climate of denial, very little has been said about the video's derogatory content. It has, for the most part, been embraced as harmless fun. On the discussion board for the Wikipedia entry for Leeroy Jenkins, one participant brings up the issue but is quickly dismissed:

Original Comment: Am I mistaken, or is this whole character a giant racial stereotype? HELLO?!—yuletide

First Reply: I'm confused. He's a character in a game. He doesn't have a race. I'm White and I love chicken. I would lord my possession of good chicken over anyone I met. I would especially use it to deflect or downplay blame. Maybe the person who is racist is you. Megan 02:24, 20 March 2006

Second Reply: Maybe it is, why would that be so remarkable? The video is nothing but a bit of comedy after all. 132.162.213.109 05:00, 13 March 2006

Third Reply: I think you're mistaken. Why's it a stereotype? Because of the chicken comment? Even if it is, so what? Surely in some countries people are still free to say what they want, whether or not some folks will be offended by it. Sukiari 22:03, 14 March 2006 (Racism? section, n.d.)

This hostility to the question is rooted in the same contemporary tendency to immediately disregard any claims of racism as unnecessary or unproductive. Perhaps the most dangerous of all the comments is made by Megan, the first replier, who states that Leeroy does not have a race because he is a character in a game. This dichotomy devalues the political importance of gamespace and is ignorant of its allegorical relationship with the inappropriately termed "real world."[5] Her comment is illustrative of the myths of liberal freedom accompanying online sociality and MMORPGs wherein race does not and should not matter because everything is just made up of pixels. Disturbingly, what this implies is that in the real world race is not made up but is verifiable and very real. Beyond the troubling implications of Megan's comment in regard to race outside of gamespace, what this also claims more directly is that in the virtual everyone finally gets to be White. The White dominance of gamespace has been recast as a racially progressive movement that ejects race in favor of a default, universal

whiteness and has been ceded, in part, by a theoretical tendency to embrace passing and anonymity in cyberspace. When politically charged issues surface that reveal the embedded stereotypes at work amid an ostensibly colorblind environment, they are quickly de-raced and cataloged as aberrations rather than analyzed as symptomatic of more systemic trends. In a recent discussion of the Grand Theft Auto series, Leonard identifies a similar form of selective attention given to the game's violent and sexual gameplay. Prompted by the complete lack of interest in the racist content of the games Leonard (2006b) states that the Grand Theft Auto debate is

> not truly about violence, or even the affects [*sic*] of violent [*sic*] on youth, but their exposure to particular types of violence, with violence committed by gangsters and criminals, particularly those of color, who also seem to represent a disproportion-ate number of these characters, against the state identified as a significant threat against the moral and cultural fabric of the nation. (p. 53)

In this passage Leonard explicates the central issue of his article, that the focus on violence without any concern for race reveals embedded and politically sanctioned assumptions that African Americans and Latinos are inherently violent and thus dangerous for White youth culture. In so doing, Leonard brings into relief the political efforts that endorse these assumptions and the fears and desires of dominant culture that are scripted onto black and brown bodies. The same can be said for the exuberant embrace of the comedy of Leeroy Jenkins and the vehement defense and negation of any critique of the cybertypes it deploys and exposes as operative in gamespace. There are important questions to be asked about why Leeroy is one of the only significant representations of black-ness in World of Warcraft and why his character depends on Black stereotypes, but these questions are buried beneath claims of comedy and the insignificance of race in the game world.

Ignorance of race, however, is not a pervasive trend in the community. Some interesting discussions have been held regarding similar issues on Terra Nova, a popular and insightful blog about virtual worlds. On May 16, 2006, an entry by Greg Lastowka (2006) entitled "Cultural Borrowing in WoW" pointed out how many of the races and cultures in World of Warcraft can be interpreted as appro-priating cultural identity and then refashioning it within the game world. At the end of his piece Lastowka says, "I guess what I'm curious about is how people feel about cultural borrowing in WoW, and more broadly, about the appropri-ate limits (if any) of this kind of thing. Is there a point where crypto-cultural references become offensive? Can they be offensive if they are not perceived by the players?" (para. 15). The resulting discussion is enlightening for a variety of reasons. Although no definitive conclusion was reached, a range of interesting opinions were voiced. In particular, many respondents were quick to defend the

Horde races, which have been primarily under fire as appropriating various forms of ethnicity or blackness.[6] For example, the Trolls have pronounced and unquestionable Jamaican accents and the Tauren are a mystical and tribal culture with Native American architecture and dress, among many other resemblances. Interestingly and controversially, many players believe the Horde races to be the more evil faction, perhaps because of their ugliness compared with the Alliance races. This, in conjunction with their alleged cultural borrowing of blackness, has caused some criticism. However, as Charles Wheeler points out, "We've learned that, contrary to early portrayals of orc [*sic*] as bloodthirsty savages their pre-demon corruption culture was relatively peaceful. Furthermore, we learn that the alliance races have their own fair share of unreasonable prejudices" (Lastowka, 2006, Comments section). In support of this claim, other respondents mentioned that the Human race within Warcraft history has operated internment camps in which Orcs were held. Wheeler concludes that "Blizzard[7] appears to be using their fictional world's unfolding history to mimic the dissolution of traditional (American) colonial narratives." Other respondents echo this claim, stating, "the Horde [are] the 'good guys'" and "the great secret of Warcraft is that the Horde are the heroes" (Lastowka, 2006, Comments section).

Although this discussion is generative in terms of clearly making race an issue and for its critique of colonialism, one must be wary of judging racial representations within the Warcraft universe as good or bad and reifying dominant notions of what constitutes certain racial identities. There is a larger problem of race within MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft that is ignored by the focus on whether certain representations are offensive. Illovich, another respondent, touches on this potentially more productive critical turn:

Great post. To add fuel to the fire, what about the construction of humanity vs. non-humanity in WoW? Although we're wondering about what it means to co-opt/borrow from cultures of stereotypes of cultures, I think it's worth noticing another insidious bit of racialist re-inscription (god, I love writing all radical = P) in the coding of humanity as European.

It is completely unambiguous that, even though you can pick a number of skin tones in WoW for your human character, the culture of humanity is clearly European. There is no existence of non-European humanity in Warcraft lore whatsoever.

So when you look at WoW (and frankly a lot of western fantasy) under a filter checking for racism/nationalism you can see that in general humanity is portrayed as European and other cultures are coded not only as "other" but even not quite human. That's pretty disturbing, from my perspective. (Lastowka, 2006, Comments section).

Amid the obsession of evaluating the diversity of World of Warcraft against cultural equivalents, Illovich jolts the conversation out of that critical trajectory

into the realization that "there is no existence of non-European humanity in Warcraft lore whatsoever." David L. Eng, using the work of Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes, has theorized this type of moment as a profound revelation that facilitates a revision of dominant inscriptions of race. Eng (2001) explains that Lacan's given-to-be-seen "is that group of culturally sanctioned images against which subjects are typically held for their sense of identity" (p. 43). In a sense, the given-to-be-seen is an expectation or a cultural repository of common sense conceptualizations of racial identity. Eng is interested in how one can "look awry" at this set of assumptions and thus escape hegemonic cultural dominance of the visual. To this end, Eng deploys Barthes' "punctum," which, as he paraphrases, "activates unconscious aspects of personal memory that allow [Barthes] to resist the cultural normativity of the studium" (p. 54). The studium is, in very simplistic terms, the visually normative, the mythic, and the obvious qualities of the visual that conceal problematic differences. In Eng's primary example, one can look at the famous Promontory Summit photograph, which depicts the nailing of the final spike in the first Transcontinental Railroad, and be unconsciously "pricked" by a punctum (whatever that might be) into recognizing the complete omission of Chinese laborers in the photograph. In much the same way, one can play World of Warcraft and be dazzled by the rather commonplace cultural borrowing or ethnic mash-ups of the fantastical races and then suddenly recognize the more arresting situation of pervasive whiteness. The amalgams of stereotypes populating these worlds are obviously troublesome; however, allowing them to monopolize attention focuses analysis on cultural static and the given-to-be-seen rather than the more profound erasure of difference that causes these symptoms. The lack of a Black race to carry the mark and burden of the cybertypes explodes racial signifiers, scattering them over the fantastical races that stand in for racial difference. In the void, new cybertypes are produced through visual absence, reinforcing the idea that Blacks simply do not belong in this space. The Terra Nova debate resists the profound punctum that this absence of blackness offers in revising the structural deficiencies in the fantasy MMORPG that fashions humanity as almost exclusively White.

Given the velocity and ubiquity of liberal integrationist strategies of racial representation and multiculturalism, why is it that no one seems disturbed by the portrayal of humanity as White in MMORPGs? This is an immensely complicated question with more than a few answers, the most important being that fantasy as a genre implicitly skews, distorts, rearranges, and blends cultural signifiers to create what amounts to an entirely different world with, in many cases, its own stand-alone cultures, races, sciences, languages, and so on. The tendency then is to accept as harmless any creations within a fantasy world because of its extradimensional construction. Such an assumption is dangerous given that fantasy worlds are populated by re-imagined signs with real and significant meanings outside of the fantasy. Thus, a fantasy world's products

cannot be solely regarded within the internal logic of that world because the various meanings of its parts still have an originary meaning that cannot be discarded without losing the decipherability of that product. To put it another way, a human race in a fantasy world is still processed and rendered intelligible by its formations in the physical world no matter how that fantasy might manipulate it. Fantasy or not, a race is termed *human* with the specific and calculated intent of transplanting cultural understanding of the words *human* and *humanity* so it can be modified in the fantasy world as necessitated by the diegesis of the game while maintaining a needed intelligibility. Therefore, when one sees a race called "human" within a MMORPG and it is westernized as well as White with different shades of color for diversity (but nothing *too Black*), a powerful assertion is made. This assertion is that humanity will only be understood within the fantasy world if it is primarily coded White. The player base has affirmed this understanding by choosing largely White human avatars in order to match the discursive framework set up by these racial logics.

These games follow established norms and expectations of the genre that have been present since its very inception. As is commonly known, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis are responsible for creating the contemporary subgenre of fantasy called *high fantasy* based on the creation of parallel worlds. One of the primary aims of the project of high fantasy in the 1950s was to create a form of western European mythology. Given this motivation, it is not surprising that the race the reader is meant to identify with as ancestral, whether it is the "humans" or the "men" and so on, are almost always White, and any racial variations, although providing differences in physiology, rarely add diversity that would remove the characters from a proto-European geography. In addition, given this spatial orientation in a mythological other-Europe, any ethnically equivalent races are often portrayed as exotic and borrow racial stereotypes. As would be expected, this has been an intense subject of discussion in *The Lord of the Rings* community because Dwarves, with their large noses, greedy behavior, and short stature, can be equated to many racist Jewish stereotypes. Additionally, the Men of the South, who appear in both the books and the end of the *Return of the King* film, have troubling connections to blackness. These former Men, bearing darkened skin, have been corrupted by evil and, rather strikingly, echo a racist understanding of blackness as revealing a dark and tainted interiority. The intention here is not to argue with or against the theory that high fantasy is inherently insensitive to racial difference but merely to situate the ancestry of contemporary MMORPGs that rely heavily on these formative texts as points of cultural reference. Rather than modeling themselves on more contemporary conceptualizations of humanity and racial difference, MMORPGs adopt the fantasy tradition and continue to present worlds that contain Europeans surrounded by fantastical races that, inevitably, provoke discussions such as those mentioned earlier on Terra Nova. These whitewashed environments with a

myriad of resemblances and specters of the Other are examples of *optic whiteness*, a term introduced by Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* and theorized by Harryette Mullen (1994). In Ellison's book, the secret of the spectacular whiteness of the paint Optic White is that it is composed of 10 drops of black. Theorists such as Mullen and W. T. Lhamon, Jr., have interpreted this as a metaphor for whiteness relying on a manufactured opposite for its own meaning. As Lhamon (2004) writes, "Blackness produces optic whiteness," but this relationship is obscured because "optic white [prefers] to escape or efface; to repress or deny this past" (p. 113). Therefore, blackness in MMORPGs not only is scattered and diffused through a lens of fantasy but is intentionally obscured to erase any troubling political connotations. Nevertheless, the world of the MMORPG depends on the history of blackness to provide thematic and historical meaning to its conflicts. For example, as referenced earlier in the discussion of World of Warcraft, the conflict between the races of the world of Azeroth bears similarities to imperialism and colonialism, among other things. Although the game can be considered productive in the sense that it problematizes notions of good and evil and corrupts the traditional virtuosity of the Human race, the visual absence of blackness maintains an optic white and depoliticized environment that depends on racial exclusion.

Significantly, what is being imagined and performed in the fantasy world can then be learned and exported into the physical world. In "The Play of the Imagination: Beyond the Literary Mind," Brown and Thomas (2007) discuss the ability of virtual worlds to "create the possibility of experiences which are impossible in the confines of physical space" (p. 163). Using the work of John Dewey and his concept of the "play of imagination," Brown and Thomas posit that virtual worlds represent spaces of imaginative possibility and experimentation free of the bounds of the physical world. One can assume that these boundaries are not all physical in nature but are also social, political, and cultural. Within these gamespaces, categories such as humanity can be re-imagined regressively just as much as they can be expanded. In another article titled "You Play World of Warcraft? You're Hired!" Brown and Thomas (2006) explain that the unique form of "experiential learning" that takes place within a virtual world can actually provide players with job skills that can be easily translatable into the workplace. For an example, the authors explain that "the process of becoming an effective World of Warcraft guildmaster amounts to a total-immersion course in leadership" (p. 120). What does it mean, then, that this training is taking place in an almost exclusively White world? At least most workplaces now, even with the continued presence of inequality, make an effort at equal opportunity employment. Subscribing to a complacent and politically unaware stance in dealing with blackness threatens to cultivate the gamer population's fear of race and a belief in the adequacy of stereotypes to articulate blackness. Once matured, these digitally reinforced antiprogressive attitudes will migrate into

the outside world. Meanwhile, a focus on difference in itself is devalued as a productive point of articulation. However, MMORPGs can just as easily be engineered to represent race responsibly and engage with it in ways that highlight both its cultural significance and its social injustices. Therefore, it is important at this juncture to critique the three examples of games that exemplify and chart strategies of racial representation and the gradual disappearance of race: EverQuest, EverQuest II, and World of Warcraft. The goal of my analysis will be "to use simulation as a means of consciousness raising," as Sherry Turkle (1995) has proposed (p. 71).

EverQuest, which debuted in 1999 and continues to be published by Sony Online Entertainment, was not the first MMORPG released, but it is credited as significantly advancing the genre into the elevated status that it experiences today. EverQuest is of concern to this project because it is one of the only MMORPGs to feature an entirely Black race of playable humanoid characters called the Erudites. The result is that EverQuest succeeded *empirically* at integrating Black bodies into gamespace yet still maintained a troubling binary through the inclusion of an all-White Human race. Although undermined by the attribution to the race of the overly antistereotypical trait of highest base intelligence and the accompanying physiognomic cue of high foreheads, the Erudite race forces a confrontation with blackness in the game world and confidently discards any racial ambiguity. Unfortunately, this confrontation was often limited by the lack of Erudite characters actually being played given the geographical position of Odus, the Erudite continent of origin. Whereas 11 of the 12 races of EverQuest at release were located on Norrath's[8] two main continents of Antonica and Faydwer, the Erudites were sequestered on their own continent, a substantially smaller and less appealing collection of areas that were far less populated in response. This spatial division of blackness from the rest of Norrath has obvious metaphoric connections to the situation of Black characters in video games and Black culture in the outside world. The more tangible effects that this separation had were not only a practical discouragement of Erudite players but an exoticization of blackness. Although the Erudite race had the possibility of populating blackness in the game world, their lack of functionality from the onset positioned them as more of an exotic curiosity or an interesting but not compelling alternative to the more popular races such as Humans and Wood Elves. It is worth noting the possibility that the Erudites were not constructed as an entirely Black race as a political statement but instead were pragmatically Black, that is, necessitated by a lack of technological capability to provide the customization, including colorization, of Human avatars that populate more recent games. If this were true, then it would demand a revision of the belief that greater graphical technology, which in turn affords the user dynamic avatar customization, increases racial presence in digital media via personal choice. It is a compelling theory, particularly

because of the race's evolution or devolution in EverQuest's graphically advanced sequel.

One of the features that Sony used to market EverQuest II was the sophisticated character customization system. Customers who pre-ordered the game received the character creation tool prior to release, allowing them to design their characters while they waited for the game's debut. Upon installing the software, fans of the original game would recognize that most of their favorite races from the first installment were included with new, highly detailed renderings that held close ties to the original conceptions as represented in EverQuest. The one notable exception was the transformation of the Erudite race from the Africanized equivalent models of EverQuest into skeletal, Caucasoid, and vaguely extraterrestrial beings lacking the high foreheads of their predecessors and washed out in shades of gray, purple, and blue with glowing tribal tattoos. Met with little dissent or objection, this change was seen as an acceptable ejection of blackness compensated by the injection of brown coloring options for the other traditionally White races such as the Human and Barbarian. This ostensibly represents a form of progress in finally acknowledging Humans as being more than just White. Consequently, the new ability for players to color races brown rather than enforcing a default Black race has resulted in an even more pervasive whiteness. This reveals, rather strikingly, the racism present with fantasy MMORPGs. Prior to EverQuest II, one could argue that the lack of Erudite players was attributable not to a fear of a nonhegemonic blackness or a repression of blackness but to the undesirable starting continent of Odus; EverQuest II disproves such a theory. Erudites, along with all of the other races, are joined together in two starting areas, necessitated by the postcataclysmic storyline that has destroyed most of Norrath. Therefore, all players are automatically grouped together cooperatively and have access to the same resources. Lacking any geographic reason to detract from the Erudites as a choice for players, they were unfortunately also de-blacked, a decision that must have been made in order to improve their appeal to players and, of course, increase profitability. Perhaps a more radical change would have been the renaming of the Human race and the preservation of the Erudite race, thus attacking the problematic identification of humanity with whiteness as well as forcing an intriguing confrontation with blackness into a space that consistently tries to escape it. But suggestions like this are why academia has a hard time interfacing with industry.

The new Erudites appear as colored in between, casualties of the negotiation between Black and White that, once again, ends in a privileging of whiteness. Their new tattoos, apparently having developed culturally in the 500 years between the two game settings, mark their spectral bodies. These emergent body texts, given contemporary theory on the meaning of tattoos, can be read as symptomatic of the disembodying effect of digital media and the malleability

and tenuous nature of identity and the body struggled over in a medium of dynamic re-imaging capability. As Taylor (1997) has written, the increased popularity of tattoos reveals an attempt to "mark the body at the very moment it is disappearing" (p. 129). The tattooed bodies of the Erudites, although severed from blackness, are still symptomatic of the erasure of race from gamespace. Blacks fade away at the interface, relegated to a mere colorization of— or should I say deviation from—a default White body. Black avatars become exotic aberrations and stylistic options, and blackness is reified as a fun diversion rather than a politically and socially occluded condition with a history that is foundational and must be preserved and engaged.

World of Warcraft and the Warcraft universe, as has been mentioned, are devoid of a default Black race, but whereas EverQuest II allows players to color a few different races Black, only the Human race in World of Warcraft is capable of this transformation, with rather disappointing results. Given the limited options for physical customization available, as well as the lack of variety of skin tones, and exacerbated by the privileging of European culture and bodies, the task of creating black or brown equivalent bodies in World of Warcraft yields unsatisfying approximations. As with EverQuest II, the motivation behind limiting blackness to a variant is rooted in an ineffective but nonetheless popular multicultural policy, ignorant of the dire need for a continued struggle over cultural notions of race. Merely allowing for the choice of a Black avatar is considered sufficient, and no attention is given to encouraging diverse world populations or perhaps dismantling the fantasy tradition of conflating race with species type. As the editors of *Race in Cyberspace* argue in their introduction, often more progressive perspectives, enlightened by a social constructivist understanding of the origins of race, want to "turn off" racial discussion because "race shouldn't matter." However, the editors state: "While we sympathize with the noble belief in egalitarian tolerance at the heart of such a response, we also recognized that the way the world *should* work and the way the world *does* work are two very different things" (Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000, pp. 1-3). The multicultural discourse of new liberalism, under the assumption that race doesn't matter as much as it used to, unproductively abides by, as Robyn Wiegman (1995) terms it, an integrationist aesthetic:

> By securing the visible, epidermal iconography of difference to the commodity tableau of contemporary technologies, the integrationist aesthetic works by apprehending political equality as coterminous with representational presence, thereby undermining political analyses that pivot on the exclusion, silence, or invisibility of various groups and their histories. Given the logic of White supremacy, very little presence is in fact required for the necessary threshold of difference to be achieved. (p. 117)

Operating under this logic, the designers of fantasy MMORPGs such as EverQuest II and World of Warcraft use advances in graphics technology to represent race through shades of color that, in the context of the game world, deviate from a White norm. This is also a trend motivated by interests of capital in maintaining a consumable product. To this end, the meaning of design decisions such as those of racial customization must also be looked at as driven by the market and dependent on political economy. In reference to this issue, Castranova (2005) states that "in my experience, the embedded messages seem to be consistent with the norms of the society that emerges, but it is not clear that the messages actually induce the norms. Rather, because MMORPGs are profit-seeking entities, it seems likely that the embedded messages are designed to make the world comfortable to as many people as possible" (p. 78). Therefore, these changes are not only politically flawed but also funded by what will be the most appealing. To rectify these problems, game companies can be educated about competent strategies of racial representation, but actually disrupting what is comfortable might infringe on the all-important bottom line. It most likely will be up to the indie community to offer alternatives to the often exclusionary and insensitive values and mechanics of the mainstream, which maintains what Tracy Fullerton (2007) has termed *hegemony of play*. Maintaining a position of colorblindness in MMORPG design, although done with good intention and meant to communicate the constructed and biologically dubious nature of racial distinction, is complicit in dominant racially regressive politics by not resisting the structural proliferation of White avatars—an inevitability given the historically Eurocentric nature of fantasy as well as the racist expectations and assumptions brandished in video games.

Leonard (2003), using a study conducted by Children Now, reports that less than 40% of video game characters are Black and 80% of that small number are sports characters (Revealing Numbers section, para. 2). One can safely assume that a majority of the other 20% fall into versions of what Adam Clayton-Powell III has called "high-tech blackface" (Leonard, 2004, p. 1). Black characters within video games almost exclusively function as synthetic sites of racial tourism and minstrelsy, wherein White fantasies and desires of hypermasculinity and sexuality can be inscribed on the Black body and performed without punishment. Almost all leading Black men are sports players or gun-toting gangstas, and Black women are completely invisible. Blackness, as it is culturally rehearsed within games, does not fit into the heroic world of the MMORPG. Furthermore, given the current proliferation of Black stereotypes within games, it is naïve to think that players, when given the choice, will view blackness as a suitable identity to assume within the game world. At the very least, inserting a default Black race structurally encourages a Black presence. Without one, and given the current racist climate, blackness disappears almost completely and cybertypes are generated and freely circulated within this void. Players are left

to assume that blackness no longer holds any importance or value in the type of social heroic fantasy of MMORPGs; instead, blackness has been exposed as a constructed White variant and returned to obscurity. This, in effect, severs blackness from its potential to be a politically radical signifier and shuts out productive political content from the game world. Furthermore, the increasing number of video games that prominently feature various forms of commodified and "safe" blackness attest to the filtration of Black characters within the medium and the very limited forms of Black representation that are deemed consumable. Blackless MMORPGs illustrate that Black heroes, devoid of rippling muscles, a gangsta ethic, and bling, do not fit into the needs and desires of White hegemony and are thus removed from circulation.

One of the pitfalls of encouraging the presence of blackness and other minorities within MMORPGs has been detailed in Patricia Hill Collins' research on Black feminism and visibility. Her work scrutinizes the claim that the increased visibility of Black women, and other raced individuals as well, within public spaces and the media is entirely desirable. Collins (1998) posits that Black women entering the public sphere are facing a "new politics of containment" that has appropriated visibility to the ends of White supremacy and Black disadvantage while "claiming to do the opposite" (pp. 13-14). Rather than using a tactic of segregation, as was the case when Blacks were exterior to centers of power, surveillance subdues Blacks who have now entered the public and private spheres that were formerly White exclusive. Given the White dominance of the technologized public sphere and tools of media, the visibility of Blacks remains at the mercy of dominant culture and its disciplinary mechanisms. Consequently, the complex and surreptitious contemporary practices of racial segregation and subjugation are hidden, whereas their effects such as poverty and violence are emphasized and scrutinized publicly (p. 35). The result is that "Black women remain visible yet silenced; their bodies become written by other texts, yet they remain powerless to speak for themselves" (p. 38). More often than not, inscribed upon these bodies are the anxieties, fears, and desires of White hegemony. Obviously, one can connect this theorization to the problem of gangsta blackness and the Black sports player in games. Anne Anlin Cheng, in her defense of "passing" as a productive escape from surveillance, echoes Collins' critique of visibility. Cheng (2005) explains how a rhetoric of visibility "elides the contradictions underpinning social visibility and remains ineffective in the face of the phenomenological, social, and psychic paradoxes inhering in what it means to *be* visible" (pp. 553-554). In her terms, then, minority players can use the game and its pervasive whiteness as a safe space to "pass." For Cheng, passing or "'disguise' has become a mode of sociability" that escapes surveillance and containment and allows for, in some situations, ontological rewards (p. 554). Therefore, what must be championed are cognizance and resistance to forms of mediated visibility in favor of more agentive, politically

capable, and meaningful forms of representation. Visibility hollows out Black representation and corporealizes it, projecting on the body the desires of the dominant cultural imaginary. It is mere inclusion and presence wholly devoid of nuance and the undermining of expectation that representation allows.

In light of the work of Collins and Cheng, the character creation tools of fantasy MMORPGs can be viewed as simply enhancing visibility. Blackness is only produced within the game world as an exterior painting of the body equivalent to an aesthetic choice. It does not, for the most part, exist outside of that activity. This conflation of blackness with colorization suppresses political complications of difference in favor of the festishization of the body. Compare this with EverQuest, in which blackness was represented by the Erudite race instead of being a color selection. The Erudite race is not entirely dictated by player choice because the Erudites populate an entire continent and, as one of the static races of the game, are included in all multirace environments. They also possess their own culture and history rather than assuming those of another race, awarding blackness some semblance of importance. Such structural differences within the game world eradicate some of the pitfalls of visibility and invest the Black body with meaning outside of fetishistic constructs of exoticism and unintelligibility. Conversely, World of Warcraft and EverQuest II attribute no significance to differences in colorization, endorsing the well-rehearsed "we are all the same on the inside" mantra. But this gesture is ultimately undermined by the reliance of the world on endless racial conflict articulated around incommensurate biological, cultural, and philosophical divides. Naturally, the players adopt this combative subjectivity and fully embrace the constructed and encouraged environment of racially motivated violence. Implicated in Collins' critique of visibility-as-containment is the fact that the public sphere is a collective cultural consciousness fashioned through media text, sound, and imagery. Because of a deficiency in minority involvement in the creation of this media content, racial visibility is primarily shaped by the perspectives and desires of Whites. Game worlds, although programmed and maintained by mostly White developers and publishers, are real-time media events. Although the tools of visual stylization are restricted and limited and the ability to manipulate one's character is determined by the parameters of code, the player is still able to performatively engage his or her character as he or she sees fit without the intrusive censoring body implied in the broadcast media forms that Collins studies. Although this does not free the player from power, it nonetheless facilitates a far more dynamic and discursive visibility that creates a semi-autonomous form of representation. Yet all this, so far, appears to be so much hot air. Even if the opportunity is there for performative interventions that call attention to the excesses and political baggage of gamespace, Leeroy Jenkins stands as the most visible surfacing of blackness thus far.

Given the cultural disparities between the physical world and the game world, one must acknowledge that part of the appeal of gamic fantasy for some players

must be the statistically, politically, and rhetorically different cultural landscapes that games present. Castranova (2005) has stated that "going to a synthetic world may not necessarily be an exit from prison, but it is certainly an exit, and all exits are inherently political statements, according to political scientist A. O. Hirschman. Using a synthetic world can therefore be construed as a rebellious act, an exit from ordinary life, a rejection of the world that has been built on Earth" (pp. 76-77). Although the rhetoric of escape and asylum evident in this statement would imply that most physical world refugees are seeking greater freedom, expression, and acceptance in synthetic worlds, it must also be assumed that some are also in search of the antithesis. In the midst of bigotry, activist design and play can begin with the simplest of strategies: calling attention to the constitutive excesses of gamespace, scrutinizing the restrictions or parameters of the machine and code, and countering racist expectation of parody or stereotype. There truly are myriad unexplored possibilities available to MMORPGs, if structured properly, to become productive sites of race education. As Kang (2003) argues, "Cyberspace creates novel communication platforms that open up new possibilities in both individual identity and social interaction. By designing cyberspace appropriately, we may be able to alter American racial mechanics" (p. 58). What the work of Collins and Cheng teaches us, then, is to proceed cautiously in the political project of making race an issue in MMORPGs and to ensure that each platform is designed to allow for responsible representation rather than disciplined visibility.

One of the most promising opportunities for performative intervention can be found in the fact that digital media technologies, according to Hansen (2004), have created networked environments of social interaction where "the only way to acquire an identity is to 'pass,' to perform or imitate a role, norm or stereotype that is itself a cultural performance." This emphasis that activities like character creation place on the malleability of identity and performance situates everyone, Hansen argues, "in the position previously reserved for certain raced subjects" (p. 112). Although Hansen's theories rely very much on online environments that do not actually call attention to and involve the material body, they still map fairly well onto MMORPGs where distinguishing someone's identity outside of the game is difficult. What is useful about Hansen's argument is that he is exploring the possibilities of passing in relation to performativity, rather than relying solely on notions of productive passing. Performatively engaged Black passing has the potential to corrupt the cybertypes of discursive unsuitability by highlighting the process of passing that everyone in online space engages in to some extent. In addition, reflection on this activity could expose how the real world is dependent on socially and culturally negotiated race and gender identities that must be performed correctly for fear of disciplinary retribution. Thus, a revision of the idea of productive passing in cyberspace (i.e., masquerading as an online identity different from the one you identify with in

the physical world) is in order. Infiltration through passing, although presenting opportunities for subversion, has done little to combat the whitening of cyberspace. Passing may grant access to resources but has little structural or political impact. Performances of radical and progressive blackness, however, offer the potential for a full-scale alteration of the landscape of difference within these virtual spaces. As an effect, gamespace not only will become far more diverse but will become a new site of performative negotiation where activists can stage projects that interface with the burdens of raced subjectivity and the mechanisms of policed stereotype and repetition on which all identity hinges.[9]

For these performances to be most effective, game design and mechanics must support and encourage Black characters from all players who do not rely on cybertype—here we return to Fullerton's project of combating hegemonic play. When World of Warcraft players choose an agile Night Elf or a muscled White Human, such players, in many cases, are indulging in their own fantasies of altered identity. After all, it is the point of the genre to enact and perform fantasies. Obviously, not everyone who plays these games does so, but as implicated in the need to customize and create avatars and characters, everyone, to some extent, is engaging in a fantasy of identity creation. To this end, players fantasize about being an attractive and strong paladin or a quick and nimble hunter. Importantly, however, their attributes and performances are motivated both by their own conceptualization of the character and by the attributes, history, context, and culture given to the races by the game itself. Consequently, when blackness has no preset qualities to influence role-play (as in the intelligent and elegant Erudites), the player is completely free, if not encouraged, to indulge in dominant fantasies of blackness and enact a form of virtual minstrelsy. Thus, for politically cognizant performances of blackness to proliferate within these worlds, they must be supported by proper contextual game environments. Until then, the onus is on activists to initiate intrusions that have the potential to suffocate cybertyping.

Stuart Hall's (1996) call for a shift in Black cultural critique "from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself" (p. 442) serves a timely purpose in the current historical moment of video games wherein representations are a primary site of contestation. Hall asserts that representations within games are both reflective and constitutive of culture but also that the mere recognition of the existence of these stereotypes is not enough. Instead, the scholarly community must be tasked to revise critiques that judge representations as good or bad based on an essential ideal that solidifies and thus entraps raced identity. Representations must be analyzed in regard to how they are constructed as well as the structural and political circumstances that generate and support them. Only when these regimes and practices are exposed can they be systematically demolished. Reversing the trajectory of disappearing race in MMORPGs is daunting but entirely feasible if efforts are directed toward a

struggle over politics from both sites of production: the game companies and the players. As Ernest Adams (2003) blatantly states, "[game] publishers follow the money" (para. 8) and the money continues to be in manufacturing blackless environments that feed a predominantly White audience's desire for superiority. Therefore, Hall's insistence on investigating the power structures behind representation are of dire importance in devising the correct ways in which to actually alter this market rather than simply document and address its faults. The attention of the public, media, and academia must strive to contextualize the profit-centered business strategies of game companies within racial discourse.

I am fully aware of the danger of attempting to offer practical suggestions for change, but I persist nonetheless because I feel it is a useful intellectual activity and, if nothing else, a lightning rod for debate. Although I will offer a few solutions, this is not meant to be an exhaustive or definitive list. Neither is it intended to be prescriptive. Instead, it is an experiment in positing actionable strategies for change along with my critique. My hope is that the following suggestions can themselves be critiqued, modified, adapted, expanded, and eventually implemented rather than read as definitive assertions meant to be accepted or denied. To begin I suggest that game companies must understand the importance of tearing fantasy from its Eurocentric and colonial roots as well as destroying the connotation of humanity with whiteness. In conjunction, races that have a fixed and recognizable connection to real-world ethnicity should be recognized as a viable and productive form of representation and characterization. The industry must task itself to separate from an integrationist aesthetic wherein race is considered to be progressively addressed via token strategies of inclusive representation. Shades of color that deviate from a White norm, as part of this project, rely too much on a fictional colorblind player base. In turn, these whitewashed worlds reify commonsense notions of race and exclude blackness from the discourse, only exposing it in racist spectacle. Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, although not a MMORPG, is still a massive virtual high-fantasy world that implements some of these strategies. The game does not contain any races explicitly named Human but instead offers a variety of choices, some reminiscent of Europeans such as the Nords, Bretons, or Imperials, all of whom can be colorized. Most important, players can also select the entirely Black and Brown race named Redguard.[10] The result is a game world populated seamlessly with dynamic and fair characters of all races that simultaneously creates a unique realm of fantasy while maintaining meaningful connections to the diversity of the physical world, although Oblivion is still firmly fixed within the traditions of high fantasy in that race continues to be an immutable and deterministic quality of being. To my knowledge, there have yet to be any MMORPGs that attempt to disrupt or play with the notion of race as geographically and biologically fixed. Such an experiment would undoubtedly be fascinating and capable of profound transformations in the way race circulates conceptually and in the way it is cognitively

processed and performed, but this experiment would be difficult to introduce into a mass market obsessed with the competitive antagonism of distinct races as the condition of play.

Following Hall's classic critique, it would seem that to accomplish these strategies, the optic white environments of MMORPGs need to be self-consciously motivated by a racially diverse customer base that exposes its hegemonic ideology and brings issues of race into relief. The video game market now generates more money than the film industry each year and is increasingly focused on audience reception. However, online game demographics and game sales provide no current or future motivation to cater to a Black or Brown audience. This is rooted in a lack of access to games by historically disadvantaged minorities. Games as well as the consoles and computers required to run them are expensive as well as overwhelmingly marketed to the upper stratums of society. Minority communities are also being bamboozled in online games because they are marginalized by a dangerous 20% gap that is growing between Black households and other households with access to broadband (Raphael, 2001, p. 15). This gap is facilitated by a lack of federal policy regulating broadband monopolization or funding initiatives to provide municipal and universal broadband at competitive prices. Therefore, in the absence of a diverse customer base, MMORPGs cater to a narrow audience far more amenable to the consumption of racially regressive games. This is not to say, however, that the issue is easily remedied through technological accessibility and affordability. One must be critical of the interests of minority access efforts because they often are far more concerned with the development of easily exploitable bases of consumers than with democratization of the disadvantaged. These types of projects are obviously diametrically opposed to the project of creating racially meaningful game worlds.

Attention must be also drawn to inequities within the industry itself. There are few prominent game designers that are not North American, European, or Asian.[11] This is a reality that Guins (2006) situates as an effect of the deep roots of play in western traditions as well as the origins of game technology in predominantly upper class White educational institutions. Unfortunately, statistical evidence as to the racial composition of those who play and design games is sparse, although Nielsen reports that African Americans and Hispanics spend a greater proportion of entertainment money on games than do Caucasians.[12] The Entertainment Software Association's Web site contains a variety of numbers that dissect the gamer community by age and gender but make no mention of race.[13] In addition, although Nick Yee's wonderful Daedalus Project has been an immense benefit to the academic gaming community in collecting all kinds of information about virtual worlds, his studies also lack attention to race.[14] Without this type of information to identify and analyze not only who is playing games but what types of characters they are playing, consciously and unconsciously exclusionary game creation will persist. The lack of statistical data on

race reinforces one of the primary arguments of this article, that race continues to be considered a non-issue within cyberspace and gaming. This deference to whiteness as the cultural root of games and the subject position of the player base is in direct conflict with the rich history of Black technocultural production as evidenced by the Afrofuturist movement and the cyberfantasies of hip-hop and techno. Guins excavates how the digital was a consistent source of fascination and experimentation for Black artists and how the aesthetic strategies they pioneered significantly inform the sonic landscapes of games (pp. 114-155). Researchers who study race in games and are interested in cultural politics should focus on the diversity of the gamer population, democratic access, industry inequities, and the history of the relationship between Black cultural production and the video game industry.[15]

Perhaps the greatest lesson of all in examining the disappearance of race in MMORPGs can be found in their reflection of the cultural politics of contemporary America. In the course of this discussion I have intentionally committed one glaring oversight. That is, the feedback loop inherent in the technology and play of these games implicates American culture itself in the rendering and creation of these fantasy worlds. The game world is not simply a sandbox where entirely new sociopolitical situations are designed and enacted and then exported into the physical world. Games are also necessitated and deeply informed by the epistemic contours of contemporaneous American culture and its history. Gilles Deleuze (1992) addresses this issue best in his "Postscript on the Societies of Control" when he states that "types of machines are easily matched with each type of society—not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them" (p. 6). For this reason, MMORPGs can be overhauled and refined infinitely and still not account for the unfinished project of racial understanding initiated by the civil rights movement. What game worlds can offer, however, are dynamic and exciting tools with the potential of supplying progressive discursive space for imagining and implementing new forms, methods, and strategies of equitable human community and culture, both within and without, to further the movement. By no means is this how these worlds are functioning now or how they are understood. It's time to change that; let's get started.

Notes

1. I would also like to call attention to two blogs that often address race in games: http://microscopiq.com and http://tokenminorities.wordpress.com/

2. Minstrelsy is a form of performance associated with minstrel shows. These performances are considered the first form of American theater; they became popular in the early to mid-19th century and have continued in various forms to the present day. They were usually comedic and musical performances involving White and Black entertainers in blackface. The characters and content of these

shows were often derived and, in many cases, constitutive of Black stereotypes and are considered offensive and derogatory.

3. I am drawing on the conceptual foundation of the performative as developed by Austin (1962) and modified by Butler (1993, 1999). There is a great distinction to be made between performance, as a set of practices in the interest of temporarily playing a character or mode of self, and the performative, a discursive production that, through various acts of the body (speech, gesture, and so on), both constructs the self and calls attention to the constructedness of identity. Gender performativity and race performativity, when deployed radically, are denaturalizing activities that expose ostensibly fixed categories as copies without an original put in place to maintain certain power relationships.

4. Machinima is a form of animation recorded using real-time virtual spaces, such as video games, and then edited and distributed predominantly over the Internet.

5. It is useful at this point to mention Wark's (2007) central argument in *Gamer Theory* that the separation between the so-called real and game worlds is a useless distinction to cling to. In actuality, gamespace is a perfect and fairer construction of our increasingly ludic day-to-day lives. Wark encourages players to seek out the disjunctions between their daily lives and the allegorical reflections of video games in order to identify points of resistance or ideological weakness.

6. World of Warcraft contains two separate warring factions, made up of five races each. The Horde is composed of Orcs, Trolls, Undead, Tauren, and Blood Elves, and the Alliance is composed of Humans, Night Elves, Gnomes, Dwarves, and Draenei.

7. World of Warcraft game developer.

8. Norrath is the name of the planet or world of EverQuest.

9. Devising a robust theory of performativity in gamespace is beyond the scope of this article but is something I plan to develop in the future. However, I call attention to the play style of pacifism as just one example of performative activity in gamespace. Pacifists progress through MMORPGs without committing acts of violence. By engaging in this day-to-day activity in the gamespace, pacifists can, through their own virtual performances, address and undermine the masculinist suggestions and boundaries that are set up by the competitive structures considered necessary fixtures of the MMORPG genre. For more information, see http://www.wowinsider.com/2008/01/08/15-minutes-of-fame-noor-the-pacifist/

10. Redguards, unfortunately, are still attributed the rather stereotypical traits of being athletic and proficient with weaponry.

11. The International Game Developers Association reports that only 2% of developers are Black: http://www.igda.org/diversity/report.php

12. See http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/04-07-2005/0003338769/

13. See http://www.theesa.com/

14. See http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/

15. If you are interested in learning about the experiences and opinions of Black professionals in the video game business, see MTV's Multiplayer blog, which ran a feature interviewing a select few: http://multiplayerblog.mtv.com/category/Black-professionals-in-games/

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Tanner Higgin is a PhD student in the English department at the University of California, Riverside. His research focuses on the culture and politics of video games with a specific interest in issues of power, race, and gender. He has a chapter in *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto*, has contributed to the Media Commons *In Media Res* project, and is at work on a chapter for a collection on war and video games.