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THE MYSTICAL MYTHOLOGIES IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE OF
M.M.O.R.P.G. AN EXPRESSION OF EXPERIMENTAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract: The present paper aim is to tackle the contemporary issue of the transformation of religious beliefs and theologies, in their particular form of mystical beliefs, under the pressure of the world spread phenomenon of virtualisation of the ontological sensitive space of humanity. Therefore, we are interested to approach the manner in which the peculiar case of Massive Multiplayer Online Games, as a global virtual space, creates the favourable environment for the transformation of the secularized mythologies, with all their inherent mystical elements, into a proto-religious phenomenon. We want to put into light, starting from the fundamental religious dogmas and deconstructing them into their core mystical-magical forms, the emergence of a new form of mysticism, deeply rooted in the already pre-existent religious beliefs, endowed by a new, syncretic magical substrata, itself emanating, as well, from previously real-world archaic existing magical human expressions. The main issue at hand is represented by the coherence and theological validity of this post-modern, pop-culture influenced, type of theology, which takes the form of an „experimental theology” within a human predefined virtual world (that of M.M.O.R.P.Gs). To arrive to a possible conclusion regarding this question, we will try to analyse this new type of theology under the scrutinising eye of the already existing theologies (and their common validity elements in the ontological space). The secondary issue, which emerges and will be analysed in the present paper, is the possibility of global acceptance of this new form of virtual theology (as an evolution of particular human theologies) as well as its possible moralising power, descending from the virtual world to human living reality.

Key words: M.M.O.R.P.G., religion, mysticism, magic world, virtual world, sacred, profane, games, experimental theology, ontological space, globalisation.

1. Introduction

In the last 50 years we have witnessed a sharp, never seen before, increase in the technological development of the human world. From apparition of the first transistor in 1947, to the first central processing unit in the early 1960s, to the microcomputer revolution of the 1970s was nothing more than a blink in the history of technological evolution of humanity. From 1965 when Gordon Moore stated his prediction, based on observation, (Moore's Law) regarding the yearly doubling of the computing power of processors, we have seen, especially in the recent years, an even sharper un-predicted increase of processing power as well as a globalisation of informational technology. From the most technologically advanced countries such as Japan, South Korea, U.S., Germany, or China to the least developed ones, we are more than entitled to admit the fact that this new century is of technological pre-eminence. Thus, modern humanity is under the sign of a possible future *technological singularity*, and we may add that this future might not be as distant as one might believe (Leibovitz 2013, 19).

But, before this future becomes a sad reality, we are all witnesses to a global technological driven world. The signs of this hyper-technologization are more than obvious even to the most ignorant of perceivers. We are surrounded by technology in our private space, in public spaces, at our jobs, during our free time, we spend enormous time in the virtual world, we interact more and more in the virtual world (sometimes more virtually than in reality). For modern humans, technology is something inherent, inevitable, thus we are almost completely dependent on technology and the benefits that it provides us in our daily lives. Nonetheless, we are bound to accept the fact that there is more than one downside to all this hyper-technologization. One of which might be the dissolution of the boundaries of reality. We find it more and more difficult to perceive where the virtual world ends, and ontological reality begins. Presumably, one might even ask if our ontological reality might not even outstretch itself to grasp the virtual world itself, thus itself becoming a part the reality we know, perceive, process, and in which we act as rational beings (Poole 2010, 43).

The purpose of this present article is to explore this extended environment in search of a possible answer to a more metaphysical question: Is a theology possible beyond the boundaries of first level reality? More exactly, can we actually generate a theology proper to a global virtual world? An indirect issue that emerges from this question is the following: Can we actually make a clear distinction between these two levels of our mundane reality, thus setting a clear boundary, or separation,

between a canonical theology and a pro-theology, an experimental emerging theology?

Given the vastity of this problematic, we will focus only on a particular aspect of the virtual reality which surrounds us, that of the virtual world of Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. The main reason for which we opt to analyse this particular side of the virtual reality which extends from our own is because the world of M.M.O.R.P.G.s is a predilect environment for the development of human interactions of a particular type (Mihai 1983, 19).

Post-modern society is in a continuous process of globalization and digitalization. Human culture escapes geo-political limitations and globalizes in turn, already being able to speak of a culture of a global community (society) that is deeply infused with beliefs, precepts, signs, symbols, meanings and meanings that would have been before. defining for a particular society / particular culture (identifiable in a precise space of *oikouménē*), but which are now popularizing, globalizing and, to a large extent, transcending real space - through digitization - into a new ontological space: that of the virtual. In this context, we are witnessing a dissolution of the old socio-cultural paradigms, a trans-cultural and trans-generational mix.

Globalization (Tia 2009, 378-394). is a defining process for post-modern society and implies the pre-existence of a global market and consumption system. Capitalism is the socio-economic system that can make globalization possible. In the absence of a global market and self-regulatory market mechanisms, but which transcend geographical and geo-political boundaries, the consumption of artefacts of any kind, including cultural and artistic, would become almost impossible, and with it globalization, as we define it today, it would not exist.

Capitalism, despite its historical antiquity, was not always in sync with globalization because we cannot talk about globalization in a strong sense (in the sense of consuming goods and artifacts from all corners of the planet) in the Victorian period, despite the complexity of markets and of the variety of goods and products coming from different areas of the globe, as we cannot speak of globalization even during the Communist Bloc.

Globalization, in the modern sense, involves a popularization of consumption, a trivialization of consumed goods, mass production, and so on. Therefore, in the triad capitalism-consumerism-globalization it appears necessary not only the dissolution of borders and the uniform dissemination of a global trading and trading system, but also the presence of a tripartite alignment at the level of the individual / consumer: psychological (ideological) - procedural (mechanical insertion in the pattern of multi-market consumption and acquisition of "global" goods) - informational (immersion in a global informational pattern

involving the assumption of a multi-culturalism, the assumption of technology, the assumption of cultural and identity differences, the assumption of languages global circulation as a means of information transfer, etc.).

Therefore, we cannot talk about a pop culture in the sense of democratizing the artifacts of human society as a whole, without associating it with a democratization and popularization of consumption and a global market system. Specifically, we cannot talk about a pop culture outside the globalization of consumerist capitalism and the free market.

In this context, Prof. Dustin Kidd, sociologist and pop culture expert, defines pop culture as: "A set of practices, beliefs and objects that bring together the most widely shared meanings of a social system. This includes, among others, media, entertainment and recreation objects, fashion and trends, as well as linguistic conventions. [...] The association of pop culture with mass culture leads to a focus on the position of pop culture within a capitalist economic mechanism of production. Through this economic lens, popular culture is seen as a set of goods / goods produced through capitalist processes driven by an economic motivation of profit and sold to consumers. In contrast, the association of popular culture with folk culture leads to a focus on subcultures such as youth or ethnic culture. Holistic approaches examine the ways in which pop culture begins as a collective creation of a subculture to be later appropriated by the market system. From the point of view of a sociological analysis of pop culture, important issues include: the representation of specific groups and themes in the content of cultural objects or practices, the role of cultural productions as a form of social reproduction [mimesis nt], and the extent to which the public exerts influence. in determining the meanings of the pop culture it consumes" (Kidd 2017).

Another definition, but completely different, of pop culture is brought to our attention by Prof. Monica Spiridon, it defines pop culture as follows: "Popular culture is a slippery slope that defies rigorous definitions and comfortable reduction to models. The notion itself as such must be approximated in an area of conceptual intersections, wear, abuse, antinomies or, worse, apparent synonyms. Its object of study can be conveniently identified by progressive and restrictive delimitations, in the perimeter of large areas where common categories have stabilized such as: cultural industry inherited from critical theories, mass culture or media culture, in their general meanings" (Spiridon 2013, 59).

As we can see, globalization is taking place in tandem with an unprecedented development of technology. Facilitating the means of communication and cultural transfer, in parallel with a dissolution of local identities, particularized, in favor of a global identity (as the forerunner of a global culture) accelerates the consumption of popular artifacts. The dissemination of information (through the media and technology), as well

as the hyper-technologicalization of everyday life create the basic elements for a global culture, for a global tribe.

The paradox of this digital globalization is the emergence of a split between an open and a closed society, in the sense that, with the popularization of cultures, globalization and liberalization of information, there is a tendency to close and constrain due to digitalization and hyper-technology.

Manuel Castells, in *Communication Power* (Castells 2009, 117), proposes a bipolar explanation of cultural transformation and evolution between: "the opposition between globalization and identification and the cleavage between individualism and communalism", defining them in the same place as follows:

Cultural globalization as: "the emergence of a set of specific values and beliefs that are widely shared around the world".

Cultural identification as: "the existence of a specific set of values and beliefs with which certain human groups to recognize themselves. [...] May also be formed on the basis of identity-building projects." [see the case of M.M.O.R.P.G.s as an identity construction space n.a.]

Right individualism: "a set of values and beliefs that give priority to meeting the needs, desires and projects of each individual [...]".

Right communalism: "a set of values and beliefs that place the collective good of a community above the individual satisfaction of its members. The community is defined, in this context, as the social system organized around the sharing of a subset of cultural and / or material attributes".

While individuals can access the global tribe with relative ease, they risk losing their identity outside the technological world, with dependence on technology being one of the factors in community alienation. To the extent that cross-cultural permeability makes its presence more pronounced, cultural individualism becomes superfluous. Belonging to a certain culture, attachment to certain local cultural and social paradigms, as well as adherence to certain beliefs, beliefs and moral values / principles becomes irrelevant in globalization. The more popular access to technology, the more "flourishing" and permissive the culture of the global tribe - global proto-culture is a form of pop culture that shares both the element of generalization and the element of non-substantiation. Simply put, by opening up to lending and syncretism, the global culture of the global tribe is becoming popular, with technology facilitating the transfer to individuals. At the same time, the ontological foundations (present in the real world) of the culture or of the original beliefs are lost in virtuality, and the dependence on technology deepens; in other words, no cultural or social artifact makes sense outside the virtuality of the global world - the particular becomes global and the global particular, without knowing which element was the basis of which.

The ontological-virtual space becomes the global place without borders of trans-cultural and trans-generational fusion, respectively the element that leads to a dissolution compared to the old pre-existing socio-cultural paradigms. Instead, this leap, this evolution has its own elements of risk, through this very dissolution and rupture from the ontological-real world.

In our paper we would like to think, among other things, this rather paradoxical situation, a situation to which we believe that common sense does not relate very well. Because, in general, around these two opposite terms two camps are created: the camp of the realists, those who glorify the real, the truth being for what is real, and the camp of the virtualists, not to call them supraleasts. But as I said, things are not so simple, and a classification in one of the two camps we think is wrong. That being said, we would like to try an approach from another position through the example of video games from a theological and philosophical point of view, because during this chapter we will use Martin Heidegger's thinking, namely his text *The Question of Technique*. Even if in this text the mentioned author thematizes the concept of *techne* in the Greek world, and then compares it with that of technique in the modern world, we believe that this text is useful for the subject of our paper, because video games can be seen as a stage of technology development. So Heidegger's attitude towards technology can also be applied to the context of video games.

Above I was talking about video games as presenting a danger in that they can alienate the player from reality. So the usual theological attitude is to demonize them and index them as the work of evil. But we do not believe that the mere fact of demonizing and damaging them is a genuine attitude towards them, but rather we should think about their state, given that they are a reality, be it virtual, in other words, a virtual one. reality. As Heidegger says, the goal is to prepare a *free relationship* with video games. "The technique is the one on which our question persists, and in this way we would like to prepare a free relationship with it" (Heidegger 2011, 120).

Because simply saying a categorical *no* to technology or games in general would only mean ignoring them. And to say a simple *yes* would be to be obsessed with them. Therefore, a possible experimental theology could take place on the condition that we maintain a "technophilic" position (yes categorically to the technique) or a "technophobic" position (a categorical *no* to technology): „It is not about a glorification or a demonization of the technique, but about the notification of a factual situation in which we are fully situated, to which they are exposed, without understanding it in substance. Heidegger's interpretation is an attempt to understand. An attempt which, without a doubt, goes further than other interpretations given to the technique. What matters here is not to recognize one authority or another, but to finally ask ourselves

what the situation of man in the twentieth century is. What matters is to keep our freedom to start an interrogative process that puts us in question. There is nothing easier than getting drunk on the success of the technique or condemning the technique simply by showing the negative aspects" (Biemel 1996,154).

As Walter Biemel points out, our attempt is not to fit into a camp, but to place ourselves in an interrogative process without accepting prejudices or preconceived ideas. To question and question ourselves philosophically and theologically in the context of the 21st century, face to face with technology, with all the stages of its development, with its excesses, its defects and its gains.

As we showed above, video games really contain several risks: user derealization, breaking the boundaries of reality - virtuality, among others. But the negative parts do not exhaust their substance. So, against those who demonize video games, we can say with Hölderlin and Heidegger that where danger lurks, salvation can also occur: "This would then be the starting point for a transformation - a possible transformation in the sense of what salvation brings and which can occur just when the danger is greater" (Biemel 1996,164).

2. What Defines the Virtual World of M.M.O.R.P.G.S?

Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games has a series of aspects which it defines this virtual world. Firstly, M.O.R.P.G.s is defined by its complexity; by comparison to other virtual human generated environments, these worlds excel at the level of complexity of its details. The human player emerges himself into a vast real-world type structure which mimics, as much as possible, the complexity offered by the real world. Even though the basic elements are human generated, this environment is willingly autonomous, independent, and self-generative. Once the "world" is set in place by its founders, the dynamicity and auto-emergence are assured by the artificial intelligence which powers the virtual environment.

Furthermore, all M.M.O.R.P.G.s imply a level of non-structuralism (one could call it "fluidity"), by this we understand the possibility of the human player to change the environment, adapt it, and, more importantly shape or reshape it as much as possible. This latter aspect brings an increase to the possibilities of further development of the AI generated environment, as well a continuous adaptation of the structure of this "metaphysical" world to the needs of the users/gamers. In this way, the users can always improve, perfect, the world in which they immerse into.

Another aspect of these virtual worlds is that they mimic the reality in the sense they are permanent, offering a continuous virtual experience, increasing its dynamicity, and feeling of reality, or better said perfectible

copy of one ontological living reality. This aspect brings a better coherence to the game architecture generating a “complete” (standalone) universe, in itself. By this systemic architecture of the virtual world, the “creators” try to achieve a surrogate for the ontological reality. The picture is completed by the fact that these worlds are populated by a vast number of human users / gamers which are connected (immersed) at the same time – ranging from thousands to millions of users.

The way the virtual environment is conceived brings way to some important aspects regarding the way it actually involves the auto-generative of a virtual copy of the real world. Firstly, it creates a place with its proper culture, an in-game culture, specific to every type of M.M.O.R.P.G. but with roots deeply embedded in the cultural background of its “inhabitants”. Another particularity, which is mostly present in these types of worlds, is the fact it can give way to very complex social interactions on different levels, covering a large palette of fundamental human needs.

In this way, the virtual world of M.M.O.R.P.G.s creates a “virtual tribe” – an semi-enclosed community with its own culture, core beliefs, ideologies, patterns of behaviour, moral standards and codes of conduct, rules and regulations, legal and illegal behaviours – accepted / non accepted (which are at first stated in the games rules, but always open to change and adaptation), allegiances to causes and principles, etc.

The sentiment of belonging to such one particular group / tribe is one of the major motivation factors for which one individual would wish to immerse himself into the virtual community.

Another aspect which represents a key adherence factor is the possibility of reality escapism. For a vast majority of individuals, a reality which fails to be under one’s control doesn’t offer the motivation to be part of; thus, escaping into a virtual world (surreal) would offer more incentives.

Furthermore, the human beings have a fundamental trait which follows them for the vast part of their lives, that of gamification. An important element of our culture and society is the possibility and will to play, regardless the age. Like Huizinga states in his famous book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, play is a condition as well as the drive for the generation of our entire culture (Huizinga 2014).

Jean-Jacques Wunenburger stats in his work *Sacred* the following: “The game is for the body what the symbol is for the spirit, both being oriented towards supernatural endings of exploration of the invisible loads of thing” (Wunenburger 1999, 58).

3. Real World vs. Virtual World – Ontological World vs. Metaphysical World

Up to this point we have briefly presented the major attributes of the world of M.M.O.R.P.G.s, and what makes them distinct from other facets of the virtual world in which we interact, and on which we are so depended of. (Morris 1967, 201).

In the following part of our work, we will approach the first major implication of this virtualisation of the ontological sensitive space of humanity via the online game world. As we have pointed out earlier, these virtual worlds are a copy of our ontological reality, the more accurate one is, the better experience it generates. But we should point out that this fidelity doesn't imply a simple mimetic act, but it revolves around the actual complexity level one virtual world has to have.

In order for one such virtual world to be perceived as a Universe in itself it has to cover the same cultural, social, economical aspects of our real world, even if the "storyline" is projected in a post-apocalyptic future, or as far as a full-of-Gods-Golden Age set in an "out of the time" past. This *imago mundi*, is a copy of the ontological world, of the real world, and very often the "architects" of these games set their story in a familiar context – by familiar we understand the fact they make appeal to our vast cultural and historical background in order to shape the surreal world. It is not erroneous to state that our culture, and its artefacts represent the starting point, the substrata, of this "magical" worlds. The creators of these games put together different cultural elements in order to create them; by so doing, they give way to a melange of elements which compose our real world. These global virtual spaces are populated with mythological and mystical elements, the thrive upon a mix of pre-existent cultural artefacts, "real" or slightly reinterpreted Gods and Goddesses, magical elements, etc. all "transplanted" in this "metaphysical" space. It is not very difficult to find, as part of the game architecture, very clear elements of major religions.

An important argument of our work is that the virtual M.M.O.R.P.G. framework is already pre-infused by an already pre-existent core of myth, mythology, mystics, ritual, and, more importantly, of religiosity (theology) – all the prerequisites of a fully sustainable ontological reality. These virtual spaces are comprised of a puzzle of complex reality-based elements, further shaped by the imagination and inventiveness of their creators. Nevertheless, the moment it becomes of interests, from a philosophical approach, is that in which it is "inhabited". Once the real-life users (gamers) start interacting with and within the virtual world, it develops into a complex, and autonomous environment.

The virtual environment is further developed by the cultural infusion of the players. "Hiding" behind his avatar, one player infuses the virtual tribe with his own cultural, ideological and theological convictions or

beliefs. Thus, the virtual world is bound to become a “metaphysical” world (in the sense that it transcends the ontological, real world) of cultural, social, and economical melange. Given the fact one major attribute of these gaming worlds is that it transcends “humanity’s real ontological boundaries”, covering, indistinctly (ignoring real social, economical, cultural, sexual, age, or other types of differences), it becomes a global market for human cultural artefacts. It is as much a space of borderless cultural interaction, as it is one of cultural-mystical and religious syncretism. Being a globalising universe (phenomenon), it becomes a permeable environment to all very personal or small communities’ beliefs and convictions. This free circulation of cultural artefacts coming from gamers of all ethnic, cultural, or economical backgrounds further instates the gaming worlds of M.M.O.R.P.G.s as perfect environment for the fusion of moralities, and social behaviors (including social emergent religious morality, common morality, superstitions, magical and mystical elements, theological convictions and beliefs). Its global character, and its benevolent adhesion of one user/gamer, facilitates the inoculation of ideas, transforming every user into a cosmopolite cultural influencer. The pre-existent game architecture provides the perfect basis for innovation. (Brent 2010, 218).

It would be important to stress that, aside its global aspect – through expansion, it also provides a globalizing universe – through inclusion; in the sense it makes one individual be part of a global borderless melting pot of proto-global culture and emerging new-wave spirituality. In this aspect, we wouldn’t be mistaken in affirming that, by the way this virtual space is conceived, but moreover, by the way each avatar contributes to it, it becomes a favorable environment for the transformation of the secularized mythologies, with all their inherent mystical elements, into a proto-religious phenomenon.

Being part of a global tribe, one user becomes, *volens nolens*, a global citizen within a globally articulated community, thus receiving a global citizenship within the gaming universe itself. It is to be discussed in which way this virtual world remains as virtual as it is meant, or it actually becomes, by means of this translation from reality, an extension of our ontological reality into a virtual environment. At first glance, we might assume that it loses its “metaphysical” character, transforming itself into “just another facet of our reality”.

4. Myth, Mythology, Mystic, and Religious...

We have already pointed out that a large part of the M.M.O.R.P.G.s human generated universes have got a mythical and religious fundament. They are mostly a derivation of pre-existent ontological “worlds” and cultures – Nordic, Egyptian, Asian, South American, Ancient European

Antiquity, Christian Medieval etc. – such as seen in games like: World of Warcraft, Lord of the Rings Online, The Elder Scrolls Online, Guild Wars 2 – and this influence is visible even in games which are placed in a distant future – such as: EVE Online, DC Universe Online, Star Wars: The Old Republic, TERA, or Star Trek Online. Even though in some these elements are more visible than in others, by reasons of factual constraints, we will not be able to point out which are the particular elements comprising these game universes underlayers, but is imperious to stress that M.M.O.R.P.G.s thrive on the creation of a “fully articulated” society, of a global society based on an very obvious magical and spiritualist element with specific rules and mechanisms.

Furthermore, the way the “online communities” are build are a clear reminder of their real world infusion; they offer a complex social and civil structure, highly similar to medieval human societies for example, starting from the individual as micro-part of a larger community (such as a guild, or class), shaped around a pseudo-medieval city with “fully” functional structures such as temples, shrines, altars, gathering places, open markets so on an so forth, or any reinterpretation of these ones, but holding the same public/civil function. Player are motivated by the game mechanics to take part in magical, or mystical processions, liturgical processions, mass prayers, as means of game incentives, or to deliver incantations, blessing or communions for other players so they achieve buffs, protections, healing or any other type of battle stance attributes.

By so doing, each avatar (gamer) contributes to the development of the virtual world into a very organic and autonomous way, independently, within the framework provided by the “community standards and rules”, infusing their own beliefs and personal convictions, as well as their individual transcendent, ultra-personal morality, all in order to complete the game’s universe (Heidbrink, Knoll, Wysock 2015, 6).

Thus, we might state that the online virtual gaming world surpasses its original framework, and goes beyond its composing elements, transforming itself, by means of social, cultural aggregation based on the mystical, magical and religious elements, into an auto-generative world. A proto, new-wave global world with its proper theology that we might call “experimental” theology or religion.

Every “mainstream” fundamental religious dogma is, in a certain manner, and up to a certain level, a cumulus of mystical and magical forms. Once they are deconstructed in basic elements and permuted into the “metaphysical” space of M.M.O.R.P.G.s they give way to the emergence of a new form of mysticism; one deeply rooted in the already pre-existent religious beliefs, endowed by a new, syncretic magical substrata, itself emanating, as well, from previously real-world archaic existing magical human expressions.

The virtual online space becomes a space of religious beliefs, as it is one of cultural, or socio-economical cooperation. By means of syncretic

derivations, and “perversion” of already real-life validated theologies or beliefs, we are bystanders to the apparition of (meta)theologies, of one would call them “experimental” theologies. In hyper technologized and more and more demystified modern world, the online virtual world acts as a surrogate of religiosity, which, for the time being, upholds its axiological neutrality – being beyond good or evil (Corneliussen, Rettberg 2008, 58).

We, as humans, like Eliade pointed out, are in constant search of the sacred even if we are in a modern world dominated by science and epistemology. In a demystified profane world, like the contemporary one, we are more and more anxious, unrested. We cannot deny the fact that religiosity is a fundamental part of our human nature, and that the modern society seems to fail in delivering us the required magical element we yearn for. In this situation, we are motivated to find a “relief” from this demystified reality. The supra technologized reality rarely offers us the sought after debouche. One might argue that it is by this increase of technology that we are losing a great part of the sacred; thus we inclined towards escapism into the virtual world, away from reality.

Our mystical search, combined with this search for a lost sacred world pushes us exactly into a world of technology, into the world of virtual, augmented, reality. The virtual space becomes a space for magical, mystical and religious beliefs and processions. It becomes the space in which the *homo religiosus* can thrive, and, step-by-step one builds an allegiance for a mystical-religious community in the online. We are faced with a different type of movement, an ascending one, an inverse movement which start from the reality and ascends towards the sacred Imaginarium, but, in the case of M.M.O.R.P.G.s this imaginary space is no longer a *Civitas Dei*, but a “metaphysical” projection of our reality, which, as we have seen, turns out to be just an extension of our ontological reality.

5. M.M.O.R.P.G.S Between Indulgence and Damnation

One major problem caused by this escapism is the possible dissolution between the virtual and the real. The overlapping of moralities and beliefs, the interference between the social-cultural or religious limits of one’s particular community, and the globally derived ones could create concurring factual results, more exactly a failure to respond to the localized cultural paradigms, or requirements.

Another problem that might be generated by the search for surreal mystical experience is that of a real loss of contact with reality, and a total immersion into a deformed reality, with values, norms, principles, and theologies completely inadequate to day-to-day living.

A third possible risk that one user (gamer) might find himself confronted with is finding himself in the posture of being manipulated by

the virtual reality. More exactly, we might witness a massive Orwellian type of manipulation through the virtual world, a manipulation in which one search for a mystical experience might turn to be the exact weapon used against him. The God of the World (the M.M.O.R.P.G. world), the Game Master, might manipulate the community exactly through the religious element.

A fourth, and very important risk in our opinion, is that of the creation of a pseudo-theology, or of a pseudo-religion, and by so happening, our reality might find itself infused by this self-generated virtual theology. This type of virtual theology is what we have already named earlier an “experimental” theology.

6. The Virtual World and the “Experimental” Theology

Before we conclude our paper, we should point out the main issue at hand, the issues is represented by the coherence and theological validity of this post-modern, pop-culture influenced, type of theology, which takes the form of an „experimental theology” within a human predefined virtual world (that of M.M.O.R.P.Gs).

This “experimental” theology is as much an attempt to bring theology in the virtual world, as it is a social experiment at a virtual level. The human experience (in the virtual environment) is the generator of religiosity; by so being, it lack the fundamental element of canonical religious experience: that of connectivity with a genuine metaphysical space, and if we are to reduce it to the major secularized theologies: the revelation.

In this situation, we would be more inclined to say that, a discourse about God, in this level of reality, is limited only to language, with no appeal to a genuine essence. If this is the case, this “experimental” theology is reduced to open theism, and a sort of social psychologism. Nevertheless, it is still to be discussed if we were to extend the genuine theology (discourse about God) from the real world into the virtual world, one will not keep the validity argument of the existence of God, even if is just throughout his avatar, and not through his own persona (Corneliussen, Rettberg 2008, 62).

Another argument against this type of theology is that of the existence of a genuine “metaphysical”, transcendent, space which validates all major religions, and theologies. Paraphrasing Plato, we may say that this “experimental theology” lacks the “world of ideaeas” to which all imperfect copies should aspire to. The “Ideal State” in this case is nothing more, nothing less than an ontological space positioned into a human made, technological and A.I. powered, virtual space – even so, it remains a “real” ontological space, thus any type of religion emerging

from it would lack the access to a purely metaphysical level. (Coeckelbergh 2007, 32).

To conclude, the last aspect, which is to be analysed, is the possibility of global acceptance of this new form of virtual theology (as an evolution of particular human theologies) as well as its possible moralising power, descending from the virtual world to human living reality.

Even though we partially reject the possibility of such type of proto-religion, we cannot neglect that this globalized virtual theology might find itself in the position of a type of evolution of particular, secularized human theologies. What we argue is the fact that, up to a point, the syncretic aspect of this type of theology might be of real value to the moralisation of the players. A coherent and positive approach to the construction of this meta-religion might generate some sort of benefits in the ontological reality. An uniform increase in the morality of such a large group of individuals (gamers immersed in the virtual world) might have a real value for the communities in which they dwell. Furthermore, it is still to be seen in which direction such an “experimental” theology will direct itself and evolve into, thus we are still in a situation of “beyond good or evil” which, from a philosophical approach, stops us from any further conclusions – without failing the neutrality and objectivity required by such type of analysis.

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