CONCEPTUALIZING ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS AS THIRD PLACES:

AN ANALYSIS ON SECOND LIFE AND FACEBOOK

FIRAT ERDOĞMUŞ

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

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Fırat Erdoğmuş

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This thesis has been approved accepted on 3 September 2009 by:

Ass. Prof. Cengiz Kırlı
(Thesis Advisor) ----------
--

Prof. Şevket Pamuk

--

Assoc. Prof. Asım Karaömerlioğlu

--

An abstract of the Thesis of Fırat Erdoğmuş, for the degree of Master of Arts from the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University to be taken in September 2009

Title: Conceptualizing Online Environments as Third Places:
An Analysis on Second Life and Facebook

This thesis analyses the digital environments Facebook and Second Life. Based on a cyberethnography carried out for over a year that was supported by personal interviews, the qualities of communication and interaction on Facebook and Second Life and the dynamics of social relations that stem from these environments are discussed. While doing these, apart from analysing both Facebook and Second Life in their isolated contexts to be able to grasp their particularities, based on their common points inferences about digital environments in general are also made.

The analytical framework wrapped around the possibilities of examining digital sites with the use of Ray Oldenburg's conceptualization about "third spaces" forms the main problematic of this thesis. According to Oldenburg's categorization, unlike home environments, named as "first places", and the work environments, named as "second places; places such as cafes, coffeehouses, bars, libraries, open air public gathering places -i.e., "third places"- are locations where people are able to interact with others more freely, without the entangling of the roles that await them in other settings. Because of this, these places are environments which -at the individual level- provide people with relaxation, comfort, entertainment and exposure to new ideas, and which -at the societal level- strengthen bonds of solidarity that keep communities together and contribute to the development of a culture of democracy by promoting dialogues among participants.

In this thesis, the eight properties that according to Oldenburg are common in third places are respectively elaborated, and a set of criteria is formed on the basis of which to judge whether an environments is a third place. In this context, metaphorizing the concept of "place" and utilizing Oldenburg's eight criteria defining third places, it is argued -based on the communication and interaction within users from Turkey on Facebook and Second Life- that digital "places" can and should be conceptualized -with regards to their functions- as third places.

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Başlık: Çevrimiçi Ortamların Üçüncü Mekanlar Olarak Kavramsallaştırılması:
Facebook ve Second Life Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Bu tez, Second Life ve Facebook adlı internet ortamlarını inceliyor. Birebir görüşmelerle desteklenen bir yılı aşkın bir siberetnografi deneyimine yaslanan saha çalışmasından yola çıkılarak, Second Life ve Facebok'taki iletişim ve etkileşimin nitelikleri ile bu ortamlar vesilesiyle gerçekleşenn toplumsal ilişkilerin dinamikleri anlaşılmaya çalışılıyor. Bu yapılırken; Facebook ve Second Life ortamları kendi özgüllükleri içerisinde ele alınıp, kendi bağlamlarında incelendiği gibi; bu mecraların ortak özelliklerinden yola çıkılarak dijital ortamların geneline dair kimi çıkarımsamalar da yapılıyor.

Tezin problematiğini; dijital ortamları, Ray Oldenburg'un "üçüncü mekanlar" adını verdiği kavramsallıştma ile inceleme olanakları etrafında örülen analitik çerçeve oluşturuyor. Oldenburg'un kategorizayonuna göre; "birinci mekan" diye adlandırılan ev ve "ikinci mekan" diye adlandırılan iş ortamlarının aksine; kafeler, kahvehaneler, barlar, kütüphaneler, açıkhavadaki buluşma mekanları gibi yerler -yani "üçüncü mekanlar" insanların, diğer bağlamların kendilerinden beklediği rollere girmek zorunda kalmadan, göreli daha özgür bir biçimde başkalarıyla etkileşime girdikleri muhitlerdir. Bundan dolayı, bu mekanlar; bireysel açıdan rahatlama, konfor, eğlence, yeni fikirlere aşina olma, güvenlik gibi arzu ve ihtiyaçların tatmin edildiği; toplumsal açıdan da, cemiyetleri bir arada tutan dayanışma gibi bağların güçlendirildiği ve bu mekanların, kişiler arası diyaloğu teşvik etmesi münasebetiyle, bir arada yaşama ve demokrasi kültürünün geliştirildiği ortamlardır.

Bu tezde; Oldenburg'un üçüncü mekanların sahip olduklarını iddia ettiği sekiz ortak özellik sırayla ele alınıp; bir ortamın üçüncü mekan olup olmadığını sınamak için bir dizi kriter. Bu çerçevede; "mekan" kavramının metaforlaştırılmasına başvurarak; ve Oldenburg'un üçüncü mekanları tarif eden sekiz kriteri vesilesiyle, Facebook ve Second Life'ın Türkiyeli kullanıcıları arasındaki iletişim ve ettkileşiminden yola çıkılarak, dijtal "mekanların", işlevleri açısından üçüncü mekanlar olarak kavramsallaştırılabilecekleri savunuluyor.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What is Happening There?

Two Internet environments are discussed in this thesis, Second Life[1] and Facebook[2]. Second Life (SL) is a real-time textual, audial and visual online environment which enables its users to interact with each other through virtual characters they create, providing a high level of social network experience. My interest in SL arose from the opportunity it provides the researcher to concretize and observe an increasingly more popular trend, online communication, with over 15 million registered users, approximately 40,000 online users at any given time, and an average of 20 active hours a week per user[3].

As for the relationship of this environment to Turkey, among the grids (lands on which residents hang out and interact) of SL, there are places that claim to represent parts of Turkey, such as Ortaköy, İzmir, Sultanahmet and even a separate Turkey island. In these "places", users from Turkey (whose numbers are roughly estimated to be around some thousands at the moment, but expected to grow significantly soon) participate.

Facebook is a social networking site that enables people to get in touch with others by using the software after logging into it. Through Facebook, people are

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[1] *Second Life.* Available [online]: "http://www.secondlife.com" [24 August 2009].

[2] *Facebook*. Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com" [24 August 2009].

[3] *Second Life Official Press Release*. Available [online]: http://secondlife.com/statistics/economy-data.php [24 August 2009].

provided with opportunities to interact with others within the limited time of three minutes they create at their offices, or while making Internet research about a topic, or as in the case of the writer of these pages while writing a master's thesis, and perhaps most importantly, without having to give up the comfort of their houses or running the burden of carrying their bodies to the places where they might meet others.

At the time where Internet communication is becoming the norm, rather than an exception, this trend seems to carry a potential to become even more widespread. At this point, it is important to draw attention to the particular significance Facebook has, with having more than 250 million registered users all around the world, the numbers of which are increasing at a tremendous speed[4]. Yet, what is even more significant for social scientists studying Turkish society is the fact that Facebook is the second most visited website in Turkey, with a total number now of well over 6 million users[5].

What I have intended, using the aspects about Turkey in the Second Life environment and the users from Turkey in Facebook as the site of my empirical research, is to mediate on the microsociology and the quotidian performance such media have made possible and given access to, or - to put it briefly- try to answer the question that anyone not familiar with such environments cannot avoid to ask: "What are all these people doing there, sitting in front of a machine made of silicon, plastic and electrical wires and calling it socialization?"

[4] *Facebook Official Press Release*. Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com/press.php" [24 August 2009].

[5] Alexa Internet, Inc*., Facebook Usage Statistics.* Available [online]: "http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/facebook.com?q=facebook" [24 August 2009].

The emerging theory on the subject provides some explanations by identifying the most important characteristics of these environments (such as an unprecedented level of interactivity, spontaneity and an entangled relationship between the so-called "virtual" and "real" environments). And on that basis, speculations about the personal motivations of participants are made on a variety of factors ranging from urges such as "escapism" and "voyeurism / exhibitionism" to needs and desires for "social recognition" and "alternating identities" or to just simply concerns about "accessibility".

More social scientific perspectives rely on the historical factors, such as the tremendousness of recent developments in information technology and the transforming affects of late capitalism, for giving meaning to the general inclination towards such media of communication. A specific one of these that I find particularly interesting to think with in my research is Andreas Wittel's concept, "network sociality"[6] Wittel, based on an inspiration from Manuel Castells's notion of "network society"[7] argues that a shift on the social sphere has been taking place from a model of communication and socialization based implicitly on "*Gemeinschaft*" –or community- towards that based on "network sociality". Moreover, this cultural hypothesis claims that social identity is increasingly dislodged from traditional sites of social interaction (such as family, work, localized communities or affiliations) and progressively embedded in the medium of information technology.

I analyzed the validity of these arguments for the Second Life and Facebook users form Turkey, and discovered the aspects conforming to the general trends

6 Andreas Wittel, "Toward a Network Sociality", in *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 6 (2001), pp. 51-76.

7 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society and Culture*, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

worldwide, as well as those specificities of this particular context. I carried out an ethnographic research that will enable a more in-depth analysis and a "thick description" to take advantage of this environment that equips the social scientists with data of unprecedented nature in terms of the abundance and profundity about the "everyday of the ordinary man".

In doing that, I specifically drew upon Ray Oldenburg's concept of third places and how they can be conceptualized in relation to the digital environments that I have studied. Oldenburg coined the term "third place", in his seminal work about the quotidian socialization dynamics of the American people, "The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts At the Heart of a Community"[8]. Using Occam's razor in a quite efficient and effective way, Oldenburg divides individuals' social lives into three categories and matches each category with a certain type of locality, first, second and third places, corresponding to the home environment, the work place (or school), and "the core settings of informal public life" respectively[9].

Thus, the main question that this thesis tries to answer is whether it is possible to try to conceptualize the digital environments in general, and the sites of Facebook and Second Life in particular, by using the conceptual framework offered by Oldenburg for analyzing concrete, brick-and-mortar places. So, this thesis is an attempt at metaphorizing the "place" element in the concept of third place that was originally used in its literal meaning by Oldenburg. Apart from the possibility of such conceptualization, whether it is a handy, productive tool for the social

[8] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts At the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999).

[9] Ibid., p. 16.

researcher is also important, of course. And lastly -and related to the two questions above- is if there are significant benefits, at the individual or societal level, of communication and interaction through these digital environments.

I argue in this thesis that as far as the Facebook and Second Life users from Turkey that I have analyzed are concerned, it is possible to answer all the three questions above with a "yes". But before diving further into the details and potential insights of the study, it is essential to draw a quick picture of the social setting in which all these communication and interaction are taking place, and embed this setting into the broader social and historical context, with regards to the general dynamics of ways of socialization.

A prominent media sociologist from Turkey, Orhan Tekelioğlu, in a recent article written for a daily Turkish newspaper, argued for the presence of a kind of yearning and nostalgia among the upper middle classes for the "traditional values of family life", "neighbourhood" and "social tissues of the older type"[10]. The article was, in fact, about the reception of *Canım Ailem* a TV series the main plot of which is constructed around the aforementioned notions for which the upper middle classes are said to have developed a kind of nostalgia.

Tekelioğlu finds it suitable to fit *Canım Ailem* into the genre that also includes series such as "*Bizimkiler*", "*Çiçek Taksi*", *Şaşıfelek Çıkmazı* and *Yeditepe İstanbul* (it is possible to enrich that list further, the foremost examples would be *Perihan Abla*, *Süper Baba*, *Baba Evi*, *İkinci Bahar* and now-popular *Yaprak Dökümü*). He also claims that all these series can be grouped under the lowest common denominator of being productions that have come into existence as a kind of reaction against the disappearance of the neighbourhood and the home and that

[10] Orhan Tekelioğlu, *Aileler Dağılıp Mahallleler Yok Olurken*, Radikal, 11 January 2009.

aim to re-establish –at least in fiction- the now-lost ties of the family life. But what could be the reason for such nostalgia and enjoying watching on TV what is said to have been lost?

Of course, this must have something to do with the nostalgia fashion or stemming from the fact that the very notion of nostalgia is problematic itself. Nostalgia is, above all, ahistorical, frozen and, as David Lowenthal says, is "memory with the pain removed"[11]. Of course, these are all true and worth-mentioning, yet they are truths of general validity and are not very useful in explaining the peculiarities of the context about which Tekelioğlu writes. And that explanation, we encounter in the article by Tekelioğlu where he supports his hypothesis with statistical data about the ratings of the series and underlines interesting point. In the week the article was written, *Canım Ailem* ranked third among the audience from the AB group (the group with the highest and second highest levels of income), but it could only be ranked twelfth among the general audience.

Considering the general distribution of income and the intra-city allocation in terms of income levels, we understand that the aforementioned sensitivity particularly belongs to people from the higher classes. So, it is the nostalgia of those who have left and not that much of those who have stayed. Tekelioğlu illustrates this point by the symbolic image that the people who are eager to watch these series are living in well-protected satellite towns with high walls, in isolation and without awareness about even their neighbours next-door.

Though an up-to-date and interesting example, it is certain that this is not the first body of literature about the transformations taking in cities or people's reactions about them. This is perhaps the central theme around which the whole genre of

[11] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 8.

modernist fiction narratives[12], as well as a whole body of social science literature, is centred on[13]. Tönnies, for instance -writing on the eve of the turn of the twentieth century-, differentiated between "*Gesellschaft*" - that refers to groups that are sustained by being instrumental to their members' individual aims and goals- and "*Gemeinschaft*" - that, on the other hand, refers to groupings based on feelings of togetherness and on mutual bonds-[14]. Unlike Gesellschaft, Gemeinschaft involves a common geographic location and a common history or tradition that is apparent in a shared value system of a homogenous group whose participants are linked together by *sentimental attachment*.

More recent sociologists who have had the opportunity to witness further consequences of the process that was already in effect during the times of Tönnies but accelerated and became deeper especially during the later quarter the twentieth century, carry this line of thinking toward its logical ends. Richard Sennett, for instance, discusses the differences between the experiences of a father and a son, mentions the decline of deep long-term relationships, which have been replaced by flexible short-term connections[15]. The factor underlying this difference is similar to the differentiation Tönnies made: due to a number of processes, a change from the culturally homogenous to the individual, impersonal, diversified. And this process is related to the orientation of what he calls the "new capitalism" towards techniques of production, lifestyles and mentalities featuring increased flexibility and risks,

[12] To give a few names from the world and from Turkey,: Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, William Faulkner, A . H. Tanpınar, Oğuz Atay are among the most prominent ones.

[13] To name just a few, George Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Ferdinand Tönnies.

[14] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963).

[15] Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

replacement of linear time by serial time, a series of losses (of trust, commitment, loyalty) that come as a by-product.

Sennett, focusing on the "personal consequences of work in the new capitalism", tries to understand how [and if] people can generate meaning and identity, maintain truthful and lasting relationships under the aforementioned conditions, and if it is possible to create a persistent narrative in an environment where change becomes a value in itself and resistance towards change is taken as a sign of failure. Thus, the abilities of networking and 'moving on' become more important than solving problems and friends become transient and malleable. If related factors such as the increasing trends for nuclear families, deurbanization, deindustralization and the vital role "speed" has come to play more and more densely in the urban life are also taken into account[16], the chaotic nature of such an environment, which Zygmunt Bauman explains by *liquid modernity* characterized by the privatization of ambivalence and increasing feelings of uncertainty, can be better grasped[17].

Manual Castells, from a more macrosociological perspective yet in a similar vein of thought, argues that "networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies. The diffusion of a networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture"[18]. So, for Castells, networks have become the basic units of modern society - hence the term "network society"- and they are functional in almost all aspects of not only the

[16] Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University, 1986).

[17] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

[18] Castells, p. 500.

society, but also economy and technology[19]. And all these environments are marked by highly specialized interpersonal networks that are based on "weak ties" in a constant process of change[20].

Andreas Wittel, in his study based on ethnographic case studies, "Toward a Network Sociality"[21], develops Castells's notion of "network sociality" by combining his macrosociological perspective with that of Sennett and focusing on the specific role new media plays in that process. He announces the "rise of the network sociality" and commodification of social relations, which, according to him, has become both instrumental and functional. He relates the underlying reason behind the turning of social bonds into commodities to the breakdown of traditionally secure ties. This process, based on individualization and communication technologies, brought with it a higher degree of mobility, choice and a greater amount of social contacts[22]. He notes the important characteristics of this form of sociality to be intense but ephemeral relations, the shift from narrative to information, the assimilation of seemingly dichotomic notions, such as work and play, the possibility of the blurring of the boundaries between the private and public spheres, and the deeply embededness of all these in the communication technology[23].

Similarly, Robert D. Putnam argues in his now-classic book, Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital, that there has been a decrease in all the forms of in-person social intercourse in the USA, which causes a poverty in social lives, dysfunction in community-building activities and even a weaker democracy as a

[19] Ibid., p. 501.

[20] Ibid., p. 386.

[21] Wittel.

[22] Ibid., p. 52.

[23] Ibid., pp. 66-69.

result of less civil engagement[24]. Furthermore, he relates this process to the development and spreading of media that came as a by-product of the developments in the communication technology.

Although I am not that sure about the direction of causality in Putnam's argument (and, if a specific direction really needs to be pointed out at all), I believe that it is important to grasp the two phenomena he points out and try to mediate on the interaction between them: 1) Societies are being atomized. 2) Information technology is transforming the ways we are interacting with others.

The recognition of these two phenomena can be said to be the two invisible building blocks of this thesis. Yet, I believe that, for avoiding unnecessarily simplified, technodeterminist explanations, each facets of the social reality should be separately paid the attention that they deserve to receive. And, that is what I have intended to do in the relationship with my material. I have deliberately chosen two media, Second Life and Facebook, which could easily be categorized under the common heading of "digital communication sites", but which also had a number of different characteristics, hoping that this would be a remedy against the homogenization and thus essentialization of the digital media in general, and the sites that I have analysed, in particular.

I believe that such an analysis will have a lot to contribute not only to the ongoing debates about the possibilities and limitations about these media bring about but also will be enabling for testing the validity of these hypotheses[25]. Thus, I believe, based on this and similar analyses, it will be possible to enlighten some

[24] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[25] For instance, about the tension between structure and agency, Jan van Dijk claims that it is possible to conceptualize the two notions dialectically and that theories of structuration are likely to hold in these environments. For a thorough elaboration of the issue, please refer to Dijk's book: Jan van Dijk, *The Network Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).

answers to the questions put forward in the beginning of this chapter about the possible reasons of the nostalgia and yearnings, as, after all, as Joshua Meyrowitz accurately claims, media networks are not simply channels or conduits of communication, they are becoming social environments themselves[26]. But before passing on to my analyses, let me first explain how I webbed my methodology throughout the ethnographic phases of this study, and discuss the organization topics, arguments and chapters within this thesis.

Methodology and Organization

Looking from the viewpoint of a student of a digital world in the process of carrying out a research and willing to end it with the production to share my opinions and findings, I have to admit that the choice of methodology and its underlying theoretical considerations have been the parts I had the most difficulty in deciding on the path I should follow.

Would I be relying on statistical data that I would gather, and base the whole research on the answers people submitted to multiple-choice questions? And the significance of this question, I believe, multiplies when one considers the unprecedented opportunities such media may provide researchers for analysing the quotidian and the seemingly insignificant segments of daily life that, in fact, constitute a portion not possible to neglect -in terms of both the proportion of time spent and the function played for communication and social interaction.

At this point, I think it is time to clarify a few points about my position with regards to conceptualizing the online realm and its relationship to the "real life". First

[26] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 308.

of all, despite the fact that I find it essential to take into account the particularities of each of the online and offline worlds, I have not considered them in isolation from one another. Quite on the contrary, I have elaborated being online and being offline, following the illustrative point Natalia Rybas and Radhika Gajjala emphasize in their article about digitally mediated identities, as intersecting and interweaving experiences[27]. Thus, all that is said in this dissertation about the online and offline worlds have been conceptualized around the metaphor of the two sides of the very same coin, both carrying the potential of affecting what goes on in the other, although possibly not in a symmetrical way.

A logical consequence of such an understanding is related to how to elaborate what is going on inside the online world. I have stated above that I have chosen to consider that domain as a separate part of life. Despite acknowledging the presence of different instrumentalities and different technical (technological, temporal, spatial, etc) dimensions in the digital worlds, as my very use of the term suggests, I have elaborated them not as simply texts (in the narrow sense of the term), but as domains quite the way an ethnographer may define her object of study. Of course, it is possible and even necessary to interpret them as texts (in the widest sense of the term), yet as Jonathan Sterne argues, the ultimate goal should be to reach an understanding of the character of cultural and social life by examining the *relationships* among people, places, practices and things[28].

This does not mean that the world as a whole with each of the individual elements constituting it should not be analysed as a text to be decoded and

[27] Natalia Rybas and Radhika Gajjala, "Developing Cyberethnographic Research Methods for Understanding Digitally Mediated Identities" *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 8 no. 3. Available [online]: "http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0703355" [24 August 2009].

[28] Jonathan Sterne, "Thinking the Internet: Cultural Studies versus the Millennium," in Steve Jones (Ed.), *Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999) p. 262. Emphasis is mine.

deciphered[29]. That is, of course a vital element to be taken into account if one is to reach a "thick description" of the environment she studies[30]. I argue that this is one of the necessary conditions, but not the sufficient one only by itself. What is also needed to be done is to grasp how the factor of "agency" enters the picture, and keep in mind that actions of the all parties involved are also worth of thorough elaboration: How does an individual (let this be a single user of the digital world) or a group of them as a whole (a subcategory of the users, young professionals, for example, or the users in the Turkey network in SL) or a corporation (the Linden Labs, for instance, with the profit orientation or the institutional framework) create and play within the available space of actions so as to reach certain ends? Or using the terminology of Michel de Certeau, how does an actor find his way through the actions made available to her by the specific opportunities and limitations that the world as a system brings upon[31]?

On the light of these, I argue that a decoding, deciphering reading that brings into light the structural and "stable" dimensions of the digital environment of Second Life and Facebook is to be balanced by an analysis underlying the "contingencies" of the specific outcomes that have come to presence or may come in the future.

An approach that I believe to be enabling for such kind of an elaboration is suggested by the "epistemologies of doing" framework that Rybas and Gajjala suggest in their study about understanding digitally mediated identities[32]. They

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[29] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

[30] Clifford Geertz, "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[31] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[32] Rybas and Gajjala, paragraph: 1

underline the significance of focusing on the "subjective experience of participating, building and living the digitally mediated identities" and argue that the subjects/objects produce selves by engaging in practices of everyday life through a number of means such as the manipulation of images, video and audio interfaces, typing and creation of avatars[33]. In doing this, they get inspiration from Sally Munt while using the notion of the "dialogic performance of technospatial praxis"[34]. And they claim that cyberselves are produced at the intersection of the online and the offline by the dialogic performance of technospatial praxis and argue for a radical contextualization and informed methodologies with which practices can be studied[35].

Having acknowledged that the researcher is to focus on the subjective experience of participating and the dialogic performance of technospatial praxis brings about the ultimate question: how! It is certain that for being able to accomplish the aforementioned ends, it is necessary for the researcher to develop a method to participate in the community and the environment one is to study and generate a written output of her participation. And that is exactly what anthropologists have been doing since the most primary works of the founding fathers, such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas, namely ethnography[36]. And Daniel Miller and Don Slater define it to be "a long term involvement amongst

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[33] Ibid., paragraphs: 9 and 10.

[34] Sally Munt, "Technospaces: Inside the New Media," In Sally Munt (Ed.), *Technospaces* (London: Continuum International, 2001) pp.1-18, quoted by Rybas and Gajjala.

[35] Rybas and Gajjala, paragraph: 32

[36] For influential works by the founding fathers, please refer to the following sources:

Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Group and the Individual in Functional Analysis," in *The American Journal of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

Franz Boas, "The Aims of Anthropological Research," reprinted in *Race, Language and Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1940).

people, through a variety of methods, such that any one aspect of their life can be properly contextualized in others"[37].

So, my work has benefited from ethnography as I intend to reach a "written representation of culture"[38]. And as ethnography means studying the familiar making it strange and studying the strange making it familiar, I have chosen to refer to comparisons as much as possible, those between the tow media, Facebook and Second Life, as well as comparisons between the traditional third places that Oldenburg has defined and the digital ones that I have analyzed.[39].

For experiencing and "living inside" the sites I have analysed, I registered to and starting using intensely these media: I have a Facebook profile and a personal Facebook page of my own for almost two years now and active academic interest in the site for the last fourteen months. Apart from participating in the medium for an average time period of one and a half hours every day (with very little exceptions), I have deliberately examined hundreds of users' profiles, their web pages, groups, discussion forums within the environment, forum sites and other web sources related to Facebook without being a directly an extension of it. Lastly, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 people from Facebook.

[37] Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2000). pp. 21-22.

[38] This is John Van Maanen's very simple, yet powerful definition of ethnography. For the source, please refer to John van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[39] Rybas and Gajjala, paragraph: 6.

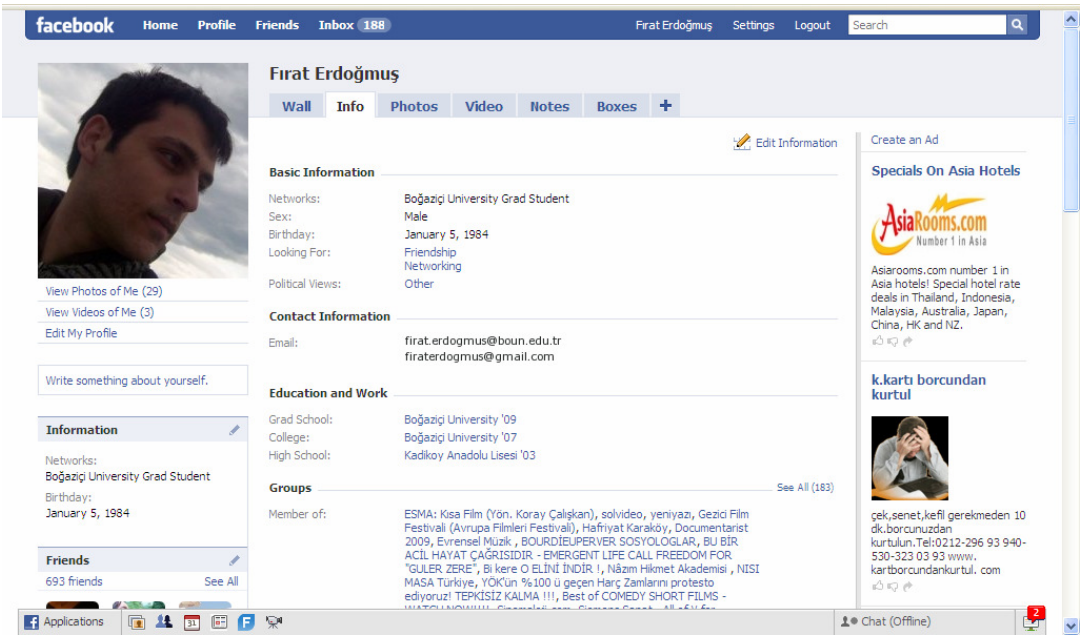

Figure 1: "Snapshot from a Facebook Profile Page"[40]

As for Second Life, my relationship with Second Life has been less frequent, but denser. Unlike Facebook, I was not an active participant in the digital world of Second Life before I started my academic study on it, although I had logged in a couple of times to have an idea of "what was going on inside". Since I started actively being involved in Second Life in June 2008, I have been logging in and now I am a resident of the world (to be more, precise, my avatar, Tequilibrium Lemon is). I have logged in, on average, once a week for eight hours. During this time, I have discovered and participated in the localities claiming to represent parts from Turkey, have met hundreds of people, have saved thousands of lines of chat with participants and taken tens of snapshots from this digital world.

Tequilibrium Lemon is now an avatar with moderate recognition by the Second Life users in certain localities in Second Life. Lastly, after the formulation of the main problematic of the thesis and while trying to grasp the extent to which

[40] Snapshot of the Facebook profile page of the author, by the author.

Oldenburg's concept of third places might be used in understanding such media, apart from the "regular chats" and "public talks" I have been carrying out in Second Life, I specifically engaged in dialogues with 15 people inside this digital world for having a better idea about their perceptions of the medium and the experience corresponding to it.



Figure 2: "Tequilibrium Lemon Posing"[41]

Let me now pass to the organization of this thesis. Now that I have introduced my objects of study and the main problematic, drawn a general framework about the setting and discussed the methodology that I have used during the process of gathering input for elaborating my hypothesis, I would like to move on to more detailed and more specific analyses. For this, in the two chapters to come, I will respectively elaborate Facebook and second Life on their own and try to identify the basic dynamics of participation in these media. Then, in the forth chapter, I will discuss in detail Oldenburg's concept of third places, by paying specific attention to

[41] Snapshot by the author.

their functional characteristics and touching upon the fact that they do are not able to function as they have been in the contemporary world. Then, in the last chapter before the conclusion, I shall bring together the empirical and theoretical dimensions of my thesis, and demonstrate how it is possible to think the environments of Facebook and Second Life with Oldenburg's third places, and why the encouragement of such media might be beneficial at both individual and societal levels. In the last chapter, I am going to give a brief summary of my arguments and conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

FACEBOOK

> "welcome.. How'r u? How's it goin'? what r u doin?
> make yourself heard of…
> this Facebook is unbelievable :)"[42]

What I intend to do in this chapter is to mediate on the nature of the dynamics of communication and interaction in Facebook. What can be instantly identified by anyone having a critical stance towards this medium is that the particular type of communication realized through Facebook revolves around the axis of exposing oneself and looking at those that have exposed themselves. These two notions form the backbone of my analysis. Actually they have been the source of main inspiration since one of the people I have interviewed voiced the concepts, "everyday voyeurism and exhibitionism".

So, to have an idea of the nature of the dynamics of communication in Facebook may not even necessitate the existence a critical eye. Yet, I believe in the necessity of diving into the depths of this metaphor and try to understand the apparent and not-so-apparent characteristics of Facebook in particular communication through cyberspace in particular that make such a medium particularly attractive. And the aim of this chapter can be summarized as an initial attempt for developing the tools of such an analysis.

[42] This quote is taken from a "wall-post" I came come across during my investigation of the profiles that I selected. The original sentences in Turkish are as follows: *"hoşgeldin.. Naber? Nasılsın? napıyorsun? haber et kendinden.. bu Facebook inanılmaz birşey:*)

After this relatively long introduction of what I aim to look at in Facebook, let me pass on to why I believe in the benefits of such an analysis. First of all, I believe it to be an evident fact that the advancement of online communication has brought about unprecedented opportunities of optimization in both material (such as issues about spatial factors and affordability) and non-material dimensions (such as those temporal and psychic aspects). To open up this proposition, it is possible to refer to various examples. Those who have not been able to communicate due to the presence of thousand-kilometre distances between them are now able to interact at almost no cost thanks to the cyberspace, so are those who – despite living very close to each other and not having a constraint about location- were not able to have a friendly chat due to the fact that their routines do not coincide with each other's or that they do not have enough time or energy left for such interaction.

Thus, thanks to their access to a medium such as Facebook, people are provided with opportunities to interact with others within the limited time of three minutes they create at their offices, or while making an Internet research about a topic, or as in the case of the writer of these pages while writing a final paper, and perhaps most importantly, without having to give the comfort of their houses or running the burden of carrying their bodies to the places where they shall meet others. The conclusion of a recent study on Facebook summarizes these observations as follows:

> "The system offers an unprecedented efficient and extensive opportunity to establish, maintain, and strengthen ties with family, friends, neighbors, students, and anyone else who provides the camaraderie, aid and welcoming feelings evocative of network capital".[43]

[43] Jeff Ginger, *The Facebook Project - Social Capital and the Chief* (2008). Available [online]: "http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/3669" [24 August 2009], p. 15.

At the time where Internet communication is getting to become the norm, rather than an exception, this trend seems to carry a potential to become even more widespread. At this point, it is important to draw attention to the particular significance Facebook has, with having more than 250 million registered users all around the world, whose numbers are still increasing at a tremendous speed[44]. Yet, what is even more significant for social scientists studying the Turkish society is the fact that Facebook is the second most visited website in Turkey, with a total number now well over 6 million users[45].

But, this is not even the whole reason for the attractiveness of the site for the social scientist from Turkey. A perhaps at least important one is displayed by the fact that, in terms of "Traffic Rank"[46], www.Facebook.com is the second "densest" site among all the webpages people from Turkey visit. This means that Facebook deserves attention not only by the high number of people using it, but also by the peculiar situation that it has become "a relatively regular part of the lives of its users".

The significance of such bit of information and the legitimacy of studying Facebook is thus even magnified when we take into account the fact that it is not the exceptional acts of great people, but, on the contrary, the ordinary, the repetitive that can even be names as banal that have a determining role on social life. Parallelly, statistics display that a Facebook user visits on average 12 different Facebook pages

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[44] *Facebook Official Press Release*. Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com/press.php" [24 August 2009].

[45] Alexa Internet, Inc., *Facebook Usage Statistics.* Available [online]: "http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/facebook.com?q=facebook" [24 August 2009].

[46] Traffic Rank is a combined indicator of frequency and intensity of the usage of a web site: More details are available at [online]: "http://www.alexa.com/site/help/traffic_learn_more" [24 August 2009].

every day[47]. If we also take into account the fact that important number of people who have opened an account but do not use the medium cause the statistics to even underestimate the true averages, the density of people's experience with Facebook is once again underlined[48].

Conceptual Framework and Method of Analysis

The main framework I have employed in my analysis elaborates Facebook as a medium where the boundary between, using the terminology proposed by Markus and Nurius, "'now-selves", established identities known to others, and the ''possible selves, images of the self that are currently unknown to others", are blurred and where there is space for the construction and representation of "hoped-for-possible-selves", which are socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes that they can be established given the right conditions"[49].

Let me illustrate this with an example. If an ordinary individual (i.e. someone with an anonymous *now-self*) believes that he or she has the potential of becoming a famous movie star, but has not been able to realize that potential due to unfortunate conditions that have not provided an opportunity, then her hoped-for-possible-self is a celebrity. Please note that notions such as true or false selves have no relevance in this discussion, as the matter is not about deceit of but about construction and representation of identities in the extent of this paper.

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[47] Alexa Internet, Inc., *Facebook Usage Statistics.* Available [online]: "http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/facebook.com?q=facebook" [24 August 2009].

[48] Shanyang Zhao et al., "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships", in *Computers in Human Behavior* 24, no.5 (September 2008), p. 4.

[49] Ibid., p. 4.

Following this, it is important to realize the fact that the actualization of hoped-for-possible-selves depend on a number of factors (depending on the particularity of the hoped for property) and that a very important one of them is the presence of physical "gating features"[50]. In the rest of this paper, I shall draw on the tremendous space Facebook provides individuals with (enabling them with a number of tactics and strategies to neither completely reveal nor completely cloak their properties[51]) in their play between now-selves and hoped-for-possible-selves.

Acknowledging the liminality of that kind of a space and the opportunity it provides in crisscrossing boundaries was an important aspect to be taken into account[52]. Yet, it brings to mind a related question, namely, what is it that makes people want to construct and represent identities based on properties which they do not for the time being possess. Of, course it is possible to provide a variety of answers from different disciplines and different schools of thought. But, in this paper, I shall draw on Pierre Bourdieu's notions of forms of capital, and argue that among other reasons, acquiring, increasing and displaying different forms of capital is an important motive underlying people's actions in general and practices of communication in Facebook in particular[53].

Before further elaborating this notion, let me first summarize the methodology I have followed in the collection of empirical material. I should emphasize that my main object of analysis was, based on the inspiration I got from

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[50] Zhao et al., p, 3.

[51] De Certeau, pp. xx-xxii.

[52] For a discussion on the concept of liminality, please refer to Turner: Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[53] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Edited by J.G. Richardson* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241-258.

Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description" and his insightful discussion of the distinction between a wink and a blink which displays the particular "significance of the context", the structural dynamics of the content of Facebook and people's utilization of its elements[54]. For that, I started to regularly "hang out" in Facebook, pay special attention to the details, record particular elements that I found interesting and make generalizations based on them.

After this first phase of "getting to know the environment", I tried to systematize my investigations. For that, first I examined around a hundred user profiles in my "Friends List"[55]. Apart from that I made some investigations based on the "Turkey Network" in Facebook in which all users logging in from Turkey are recorded and their main tendencies are listed. These investigations of mine include those about tastes, such as the most popular books, artists or movies, as well as general characteristics of the users, such as gender, age and civil status. Lastly, I selected from the network a group of 30 people whom I did not know in person and examined their Profile Pages.

Besides, I made in-depth interviews with 15 people to get to know of their habits of using Facebook, their ideas and particular experiences about the medium. For following the contemporary debates about and having an idea of widespread beliefs on Facebook, I relied on national daily papers, came across some articles in popular magazines such as Tempo[56], and browsed entries in Vikipedi[57] and Ekşisözlük[58].

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[54] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[55] "Friends List" is an element in Facebook through which users are able to examine the "Profile" pages of the people who give them the necessary authorization.

[56] *Tempo Magazine*, 10 November 2007.

[57] *Vikipedi*. Available [online]: "http:// www.vikipedi.org" [24 August 2009].

Let me lastly mention about the statistical sources that I relied on. Regarding general and international data on Facebook, I relied on two sources: the official press release of published by Facebook[59] and the respectable Internet information provider Alexa[60].

Identity, Symbolic Capital and Facebook

The prominent Turkish sociologist, Şerif Mardin attended some conferences on the anniversary of the popularization by the national media of the notion of "mahalle baskısı"[61] that he made use of in previous articles. In the one that took place in Boğaziçi University which I also attended, he – although with quite implicit connotations- argued that the underlying actions that prepared the ground for "mahalle baskısı" were *looking* and *being looked at*, and that these actions were based at the fundamental level on relationships between different sexes[62].

Although I do not agree with Mardin's conclusion that this axis of "looking – being looked at" necessarily have to be peculiar to *eastern* societies (the epistemological bases and the postulate of which I do not share), I agree with him that looking – as well as acting with the knowledge of being looked at- is an important act that makes it possible to judge one's self and other members of the

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[58] *Ekşisözlük*. Available [online]: "http:// www.eksisozluk.com" [24 August 2009].

[59] *Facebook*. Available [online]: "http:// www.facebook.com" [24 August 2009].

[60] Alexa Internet, Inc., *Facebook Usage Statistics*. Available [online]: "http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/facebook.com?q=facebook" [24 August 2009].

[61] "Mahalle Baskısı", whch can be translated as "the pressure from neighborhood" with a word-by-word translation, addresses the pressure on individuals by the people with whom they share neighborhoods.

[62] *Şerif Mardin Speech* (Boğaziçi University, 28 May 2008).

society based on certain codes, evaluate and define hierarchies[63]. For Bourdieu, individuals aim to join the more powerful segments of the society and for that try to maximize the differing forms of capital that are distinct yet inter-related categories. And among these different forms, symbolic capital is a crucial source of power, as it is the main basis on which symbolic violence is imposed by the powerful towards the powerless.

It is at this point that the aforementioned axis of "looking" enters the picture. A peculiar characteristic of symbolic capital is that for its accumulation it is a necessity that the individuals' merits are recognized and appreciated by others. So, symbolic capital needs "the eye of the beholder" to realize. Having said this enables us with conceptualizing the domain of social interaction not only as a space of communication of messages, feelings and ideas, but also as a medium governed by continuous power relations stemming from interpersonal relations.

The construction of identities, the seemingly more individual dimension of the very same phenomenon of self-representation, is by no means a less-social process. Zhao underlines the fact that identity is an important part of a person's thoughts and feelings and that identity is the aspect of our concept of self by which we are known to others. So, for the construction of identity it is not enough for an individual to just possess certain characteristics. For it to become part of his identity there must be a coincidence of those messages sent by the individual and their reception by other people[64].

So, the individual needs (not only due to his desire to accumulate symbolic capital, but also out of the wish to construct a desired identity on the basis of which

[63] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

[64] Zhao et al.

he can interact with his environment) to present his self as well as coincide to a party willing to recognize the messages he sends. Yet, at this point, we are faced with the internal tensions of the act of self-representation. The individual, wishing to build symbolic capital based on his merits, wants to transmit his properties promising to possibly provide him with prestige to the widest possible audience at the least costly way.

Yet, traditional modes of relation not only possess inherent constraints (in terms of temporal and physical properties) but the traditional aspects of communication such as customs. For example, it is by no means possible for an individual to make a peculiar characteristic known to all of his friends due to the fact that the individual most likely does not possess the required energy and time that is necessary to arrange the meetings to come together.

Moreover even if we assume for just a second that it were possible, there would still be the problem of conforming to the established norms of communication. I shall try to illustrate this with an example. Let us consider a person who has just returned from a very expensive restaurant and is burning with the desire to make it known. What would happen if he, instead of waiting for the particular conditions where he can communicate this, would right away rush on crying it out? His behaviour would be seen as improper, he would be labelled as tactless, and the result would be just the opposite of what he intended, making him fall to a position suffering from the lack of symbolic capital.

My hypothesis is that Facebook possesses some specific characteristics that enable the individuals to bypass the aforementioned tension between acting out and keeping silent. In the following sections, I shall try to categorize and analyze them, and point out the particular conditions that have made them possible.

Facebook's Characteristics

Liminality: "Online & Onymous"

The first of these characteristics that I shall try to analyze is related to the nature of communication in terms of the relationship between two dimensions. The first of them is whether it is a traditional face-to-face relationship or an online one made possible by the advancement in computer technologies. The other dimension is the nonymity / anonymity axis[65].

The interaction of these two dimensions brings about four logical categories: *face-to-face & onymous*, *online & anonymous*, *face-to-face & anonymous*, and *online & onymous*. The relationships belonging to the first category, such as a dinner with a friend, are those with the greatest benefit, in terms of the permanence and reliability, but provide very little space for the individuals to play with their identities and acquire extra symbolic capital. Regarding identities, the presence of the physical body in these encounters prevents people from claiming identities that are inconsistent with the visible part of their physical characteristics.

Regarding the accumulation of symbolic capital, the very presence of the body and the apparent display of personal characteristics, which are direct indicators of *habitus* and class position[66], seriously limit the possibilities of building extra symbolic capital. Referring to the discussion, this category is the realm of the "now-self", not only because of the presence of the corporeal body, but also as a result of the fact that "… shared knowledge of each other's social background and personality

[65] Zhao et al., p. 4.

[66] Bourdieu, *Distinction.*

attributes renders it difficult for an individual to pretend to be what he or she is not"[67].

The second category, an example of which can be random online chat, can be conceptualized as the other pole of the first one. In this kind of a space, it is possible to gain easy access to the accumulation of symbolic capital, as it is just the matter of a number of clicks to completely "wear" an identity that has nothing to do with the "now-self" and represent one's identity completely through the hoped-for-possible-self. Yet, this is the very kind of problem of such a medium.

In such a medium, it becomes possible for individuals to interact with one another in a fully *disembodied form* that reveals nothing about their personal characteristics. Thus, a 70 year-old French man can easily claim to be a 19-year old African woman, and it would be too costly (if possible at all) to find out if the claimed identity corresponded to the real case or not. So, in short, it can be argued that such a medium is not likely to be one where identities and symbolic capital are distributed, due to the unlikeliness of the establishment of a stable relationship, as it fails the reliability and permanence criteria. So, in such a medium, users create hoped-for-*possible*-selves, but the problem is that everything is possible!

The third category, although it exists logically, is not much likely to happen in the real life. Although bars and cafes can perhaps be thought to belong to this category, it is not a frequent habit for people to start interacting on no basis, and those that somehow start do not usually continue for long. So, I shall not elaborate this as a real category and pass on to the next category in which I am particularly interested.

[67] Zhao, et al.

The last category, *online & onymous* environment, is the one Facebook belongs to. In this medium, the online relationships are anchored by references to real properties (such as real name, pictures, friend lists, etc.). And, "… unlike the anonymous setting in which individuals feel free to be whatever they want to, the onymous environment places constraints on the freedom of identity claims"[68]. So, there are fixers of identity in such a medium, but the beneficial point for the individuals aiming to make use of it is that they do not fix *that much*.

Hence, in the case of Facebook we have a *liminal* medium in which real users are displaying information likely to resemble –but not necessarily correspond to- the current reality, but still have a lot of opportunities to "stretch the truth a bit" away from their now-selves towards their hoped-for-possible-selves[69].

And this was what I exactly came across in my analyses of users' Profile Pages. Let me tell about the nature of the tactics users are employing in their modes of self-representation. Unsurprisingly, Facebook users may emphasize those properties that are desirable (like a charismatic free time activity or the best-looking part of the body). Yet, this act of display contains at the very same time, the tendency to hide those parts they regard as socially undesirable (such as too much weight or ignorance about a particular issue).

Durability

Another characteristic of Facebook that, I believe, makes it attractive is the durability of the transmitted content, which, in turn, enables users to make use of

[68] Ibid.

[69] Jennifer Yurchisin et al., "An Exploration of Identity Re-creation in the Context of Internet Dating", in *Social Behavior and Personality* 33, no. 8 (2005), p. 742.

their past efforts of capital accumulation as well as identity construction and self-representation. If the regularity of the use of Facebook mentioned in the first part of this article is an important property preparing the grounds for durability[70], the particular structure and architecture of Facebook is what makes it come true.

Let me explain how it is possible: Facebook is designed in such a way that almost all the communicated content is stored to be reached later at will. Yet, what is even more important is that with the presence of "Profile Pages", they can be reached even without will. Or to explain it better, let me describe in detail the dynamics of *looking at friends' profiles*:

In Facebook, the elements that a user make use of (such as information he willingly displays, the photos he posts, the music he listens to, the groups he joins, events he attends, and etc.) are automatically added to his "Profile". As a result, anyone who looks at that profile has instant access to all those elements (including those he comes across without the particular will to look at), providing the individual with a disclaimer of identity to hang on and a symbolic capital constantly and automatically accumulating.

On the basis of these, I believe it possible to argue that the communication through the Internet in general, and through Facebook in particular, that –as explained in the first part of this paper- has already managed to transcend spatial constraints, also has found a way to do away with temporal constraints, for the purpose of the transmission of not only textual or graphical messages, but also of readily constructed identities and accumulated social capital. In addition, the individual draws the benefits of these at no extra cost and even if he is not using Facebook anymore: Once his profile is there, friends come by themselves and, as

[70] Ginger.

viewers, receive the messages already sent by our individual. So the process is so robbed of the painful effort and externalized from the individual that the mechanism works even if he is not aware of anything.

Another aspect of Facebook can be explained by Thorstein Veblen's well-known concept, "conspicuous consumption". Here I will also use another related conceptualization of his, "conspicuous leisure"[71]. This term refers to visible leisure utilized for the purpose of displaying social status. These forms of leisure seem to be totally motivated by social factors, such as taking vacations in distant, exotic places, taking photographs and bringing souvenirs back. In societies where stratification exists, conspicuous leisure comes into existence as a significant phenomenon and is come across frequently.

Yet, it has a peculiarity. Under normal circumstances, the display of conspicuous leisure, unlike conspicuous consumption, is not that easy and straightforward, as conspicuous leisure can not be exhibited by the shoes one wears or the car one buys. This necessitates extra effort to express, such as talking about the vacation in an invitation.

"Fortunately" Facebook makes the display of these forms of leisure easier than ever. Now, thanks to Facebook, people write the places they have visited or post their photos more comfortably than ever. In this way they don't carry the burden of any extra effort to express these.

An additional form is related to the concept "online leisure". Facebook provides the opportunity for people to display their "online leisure" as well. In Facebook there are numerous activities that can be evaluated in this category. As an illustration, there is an activity of growing flowers online. This illustration led me to

[71] Thornstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Fairfield, NJ : A.M. Kelley, 1991).

question on this issue: "What can motivate a person to do such an unnecessary act: to grow a flower in cyberspace?" It is evident that through Facebook, people have the opportunity to display that they have the time, energy and means to do this. However trivial it may seem, it is still a significant message sent to other members of society. Besides, they do not have to deal with the troubles of the world. Perhaps in this way they can show that they do not need to work thanks to his/her wealth as I often came across in the profiles I viewed. The existence of such groups as "*Bebek'li Türkler*" (Turks of Bebek) can also be seen as an attempt at the display of social position[72].

Interactivity

Apart from all these, the most important characteristic to which Facebook owes its popularity is the high level of interactivity, enabling the construction of symbolic capital based on social capital[73]. Facebook contains many applications all of which contribute to this process in ways peculiar to the particular nature of every one of them. Yet, the common property they share, which makes them all enable the transformation of social capital to symbolic capital, is simple but effective architecture. In brief, in all these applications, the preferences and actions of those people in the "Friends List" of an individual, are reflected, in one way or another, automatically in the "Profile" of that user.

[72] *Bebek'li Türkler*. Available [online]: "http://www.Facebook.com/group.php?gid=5149353348" [24 August 2009].

[73] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital*, pp. 241-258.

The simplest and most superficial one of these applications is also the one utilized the most, the total number of people in the "Friends List"[74]. The significance of this was also indirectly demonstrated as the result of my coming across a "Facebook Group" in the "Turkey Network" that was founded with the aim of protesting those tricksters who, in order to seem more charismatic, manipulated the number of those in the "Friends List": "*Arkdş listesine tanımadıklarını ekleyip çakma statü yapanlara sinir olanlar"* [75] (Those who are ticked off at people who add people to their friends' list just to increase their status)

Similarly, yet even a more provocative case displays, based on two Facebook groups, both the role of the number of friends in the accumulation of symbolic capital plays and the role language plays in the quest for hegemony, competition and symbolic violence. First, a group, called "*Facebook Türkçe Olsun, Kimse Mağdur Olmasın*[76]", was founded to support the efforts for the translation into Turkish of the interface of Facebook so that it will be easier for them to draw benefits of the program. Then, those who, in my opinion, did not want to lose their privileged minority position of belonging to that special group of people using Facebook, founded a counter-group, called "*Facebook türkçe olmasın buraya da ameleler dolmasın*"[77], accompanied by a poster of the movie "Talihli Amele[78]" (starring İlyas

[74] I made this generalization based on the people whose ideas about Facebook I was able to learn (be it through an interview I made, or by the answers people provided me with in return for my interviews, or those whose ideas I happened to come across indirectly, such as those users of Ekşisözlük or Vikipedi).

[75] Please note that this is the original spelling. The web page of the group can still be reached [online] at "http://www.Facebook.com/group.php?gid=5863878039" [24 August 2009].

[76] *Facebook Türkçe Olsun, Kimse Mağdur Olmasın*, Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5149353348&ref=search&sid=591343716.3175940878..1" [24 August 2009]. The name of the group means "Let Facebook be available in Turkish so that nobody is disadvantaged".

[77] *Facebook türkçe olmasın buraya da ameleler dolmasın*, Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5149353348&ref=search&sid=591343716.3175940878..1" [24 August 2009]. The name of the group means "Let Facebook not be available in Turkish so that

Salman), and an introductory note as follows: "seviyeyi düşürmemek için.ve türkçe bazi chat sitelerine dönmemesi için baslatilmiş bir grup :)" [79].

In this chapter, I demonstrated why I elaborate Facebook as not only an area of communication, but as a social space enabling both the accumulation of symbolic capital and prestige as well as the transformation of other forms of capital to the symbolic, and its creation, based on the tense nature of the dialectic between self-representation and identity construction, of an area of play between now-selves and hoped-for-possible-selves.

I have furthermore mediated on the possible reasons that might have made Facebook that popular and argued that the unprecedented coexistence of the three characteristics, namely, *liminality* (in terms of being both online & onymous at the same time), *interactivity* and *durability*, and the diverse opportunities they provide in terms of the accumulation of symbolic capital and the construction of hoped-for-possible-selves might be one of the important reasons underlying this phenomenon.

Before explaining the role that these dynamics play with regards to social relations and community building and elaborating the site with analytical tools from Oldenburg's analyses, I shall now pass on to the chapter where I discuss Second Life. After discussing Oldenburg's framework in detail in the next chapter, I shall elaborate the relationships of Second Life and Facebook to third places together.

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*amele*s do not crowd here". Please note that *amele*, which originally means worker, is a pejorative word used for addressing lower classes.

[78] Ibid. Talihli Amele means, "The Fortunate *Amele*".

[79] Ibid. This note means "a group opened for keeping the quality high and avoiding that here becomes another Turkish chat channel".

CHAPTER THREE

SECOND LIFE

Second Life (SL) is a digital world launched in 2003. It is a real-time textual, audial and visual online environment which enables its users to interact with each other through virtual characters they create, providing a high level of social network experience. While SL is sometimes referred to as a game, in general it does not have points, scores, winners or losers, levels, an end-strategy, or most of the other characteristics of games. Users, often called "residents", can visit this virtual world almost as if it were a real place. They explore, meet other residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and buy items (such as virtual property) and services from one another. As they spend more time in the world, they learn new skills and mature socially, learning the culture and manners of a virtual environment.

To illustrate, let me describe what the SL experience is like: After downloading the necessary client programme form the SL homepage, users are required to choose a name (surnames are randomly generated by the programme) and pick up an avatar (representational body) of their choice from the many available alternatives (enabling them to decide upon their sex, race and other bodily considerations). This avatar can be –and actually *is*- played with after the resident has mastered the technical tools and has gained considerable in-world knowledge about where and how new bodies are created and/or older ones are modified.

After registering with their chosen account, the SL adventure starts from the initial starting location in the world designed by the Linden Lab (the producer and owner of the world) themselves... The user then gains control of the avatar she has chosen and is ready to start participating in the world. Through a combination of controlling the keyboard and the mouse simultaneously (which takes some time and effort to master properly), she can walk, jump, stand up, sit down just like the way a real-life character can. The very design of the functioning of the world resembles real life in many ways. And these "many ways" comprise many different dimensions: if the physical properties and ratios of objects is the ontological dimension that has made this similarity possible, real life-like sensory perceptions and affects are just another.

Resembling the Actual World

Second Life is a continuous and persistent world resembling Earth's surface quite successfully[80]. Based on mathematical equations modelling the various forces in effect on Earth, the designers have been able to create many resemblances such as the presence of atmospheric forces on Earth, clouds form and drift, that of the rotation of the Earth in the universe, the sun rises and sets, gravitation due to the Earth's mass, objects falling as results of the SL World's gravity that is very similar in terms of both the gravitational force and its corresponding effect[81].

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[80] Cory Ondrejka, *A Piece of Place: Modeling the Digital on the Real in Second Life* (June 7, 2004). Available [online]: "http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=555883#" [24 August 2009], p. 2.

[81] Philip Rosedale and Cory Ondrejka, *Enabling Player-Created Online Worlds with Grid Computing and Streaming*, Available [online]: "http://www.gamasutra.com/resource_guide/20030916/rosedale_pfv.htm" [24 August 2009].



Figure 3: “A Party Environment”[82]

These can be considered to be the base and the general laws of the functioning of the world. However, the resemblance of Second Life to actual Earth-like properties is certainly not limited to these. On the contrary, the properties that I would like to discuss from now on have been far more influential on my judgement that the logic of the SL world is based on the idea of the preservation -although not totally mimicking- of an important part of the actual offline world in which we live.

This part that I am referring to includes all of the ingredients of the word apart from the aforementioned infrastructure and contains various categories such as locations (cities, towns, villages, islands, mountains, rivers, beaches, streets, boulevards, cafes, bars, and of course clubs), objects (from the smallest bits of souvenirs or jewellery to bigger and complex objects such as vehicles or furniture), animals and plants, and more importantly their outlays (the way all these details are in relation to each other), the various types of technical details (animations of the

[82] Snapshot from Second Life, by the author.

actions of avatars, videos, other visual or audio properties), and –of course- the static and dynamic properties of the avatars.

My argument is that in the creation and organization of all these aspects of the Second Life world, either intentionally or not, there is a directly recognizable resemblance to the objects of the actual world, their properties, the ways that they function and the ways that they are perceived by human beings.



Figure 4: "Couple Having an Intimate Relationship"[83]

This seemingly small bit of information, which in my opinion influences the experience of *all* that is going on inside SL (as, in the final analysis, all kinds of experience requires bodies, places and technical details) is valuable for three reasons in three different layers. First of all, as the official producers of SL announce in their web page[84], a very important part of all the content of that we encounter in the world

[83] Snapshot from Second Life, by the author.

[84] As explicitly stated in the introduction animation to the web site of Second Life, Second Life is an online digital world imagined and created by its residents. Please see *Second Life Home Page*, Available [online]: "http:// www.secondlife.com" [24 August 2009].

of Second Life is produced directly by its residents[85], which means that a great deal of the aforementioned properties have been made real by the effort –and more importantly by the *imagination*- of the very people who are also the consumers of the same content.[86] This, practically means that almost all the things that we see in the world of Second Life are shaped by the collective efforts of individual and independent contributors and this collective -*but not orchestrated*- creation process brings about a dream-world with a great deal of similarity to the actual world.

A second aspect that also is related to the point above, but which also has other, far-reaching ends, is the almost-too-apparent-to-name fact that avatars, themselves -even if nothing else were to be created by the residents- are a hundred percent the production of the above 15 million *users* of the Second Life World[87]. So, all the people participating in the Second Life world -as if they were God himself or an aesthetic surgeon or a fashion designer, or a tattooist, or better perhaps all of these at the same time- are the *producers* alongside being the consumers of the bodies and bodily dispositions that they possess. So, all the bodies that a SL resident comes across –and that I, as a resident and researcher of this medium, have personally encountered- do up to a certain extent possess self-made bodies which resemble very much the actual bodies that actual people in the actual world possess[88].

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[85] Ondrejka, p.1.

[86] Although not directly within the extent of this thesis, such bits of information have great potential to contribute to the discussion on the not-so-clear-cut boundary of the "production" and "reception" of any kind of material and the corresponding claims of originality and authorship.

[87] Linden Research, Inc., *Economic Statistics,* Available [online]: "http://secondlife.com/statistics/economy-data.php" [24 August 2009].

[88] I discuss below what is meant by this phrase, "up to a certain extent", and why I consider it to be especially crucial.

The third dimension that I will mention in a second is what completes the picture, and complicates it even more when the first two dimensions are also taken into account: This resemblance takes place, unlike in the actual world, in a medium where most of the physical, biological and even chemical laws are redundant and out of context, and thus where most of the outside forces that have a determining affect on our behaviour through our bodily necessities are not even present. To quote these three dimensions together so as to illustrate their combined effect, let me go point by point. In this realm of Second Life, people are participating and representing themselves with bodies that they have created for themselves in a world where more than 90 % of practically everything involved has been created collectively by themselves, and, naturally, this world is, on the final analysis, devoid of the ontological laws and bodily necessities in effect in the actual world. And the interesting thing is that all the resemblance of the Second Life universe to the actual one that we are living in takes place under these conditions.

The peculiarity of this situation can be illustrated as follows: Let us just think of a universe full of cafeterias, restaurants, dining halls and even with the concrete pieces of food and beverage, and let this also be a universe nobody needs to eat or drink anything, nor would they have been able to do so, even if they desired to. Weird, isn't it? And this is exactly what is happening in the universe of Second Life. The list of examples to quote about this situation can be extended easily: Without the necessity to protect one's skin from the hot, the cold or occasions of physical damage, everyone is fully clothed… The presence of all kinds of transportation vehicles (and even "domesticated animals used for purposes of transportation) despite the fact that there is not even the smallest need[89]… The presence of hotels,

[89] Apart from the ability to walk and run without fatigue, it is also possible to fly and even to teleport oneself to a desired location in Second Life.

and houses and even a real estate market, in the absence of the need to sleep for even a second or shelter from outside forces[90]… To give a final example, people have sex with others using their avatars in Second Life, and I believe it is quite obvious that avatars do not have physiological needs, hormone levels or glands…

Now, how should these interesting yet floating anecdotes be conceptualized? Two points of view are possible, and I believe them to be both valid and not oppose to but complement each other: The first possibility suggests that –as it is nonsense to speak about the needs of the representational body (avatar) in the medium- what matters is the needs of the body of the person controlling the avatar. From this point of view, it can be understood up to an extent why people engage in sexual activities using their avatars. Because their own bodies are in need of sexual gratification, and through the symbolic intercourses they engage in in the digital world, they satisfy themselves (either just metaphorically, or even perhaps, by masturbating in front of the computer screen, literally). Thus, the seemingly unnecessary details that we encounter in this digital world do correspond to the satisfaction of *actual* needs of *actual* bodies.

Yet, claiming that this postulate is able to explain wholly all the peculiar details listed above would be too optimistic, because, apart from the instant gratification of actual bodily needs, those constructed dramas also correspond to

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[90] Actually, this is an issue that can and should be dealt with as the topic of a single master thesis on its own, because of the huge volume of transactions in the real estate market in Second Life. Anshe Chung, the woman who became a millionaire out of the real estate business in Second Life [or "the unreal estate millionaire", as she is called by some] is a flesh and blood example of this situation. One of the earliest examples of the press coverage of her fortune and her official webpage depicting the current activities of her "Anshe Chung Studios" are, respectively: Paul Sloan, *The Virtual Rockefeller*. Available [online]: "http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2005/12/01/8364581/index.htm" [24 August 2009].

Anshe Chung Studios. Available [online]: "http://www.anshechung.com" [24 August 2009].

other, not-so-directly-gratifiable needs on deeper levels[91]. For example, unlike the sexual interaction anecdote mentioned about above, whether or not an avatar is drinking beer in the SL world or not does not have such a direct relationship with the body of the person controlling it. Thus, it is legitimate to argue that the beer is not being utilized for the purposes of serving the actual body of the person controlling it. But the beer is there and people are dressing up their avatars with its appearance and animating their avatars as though they are actually drinking it. Why?



Figure 5: "Beer"[92]

[91] And in some occasions, on such deep levels that it becomes disputable whether calling them "needs" in the narrow sense of the term would be accurate. I personally believe that it would not be suitable to call it simply a need or necessity in this narrow sense. Yet, I also believe that for the purposes and neatness of this thesis, that considering Maslow's categorization of the different levels according to which needs can be categorized and thus assigning a more general meaning to the notion of necessity enables me, by bypassing the discussion about needs, to focus on the exact point that I wish to concentrate on. Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", in *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943), pp. 370 -396.

[92] Snapshot from Second Life, by the author.

My explanation is that people are doing what they find it attractive, and this attractiveness, as argued above, does not stem from the actual needs that they satisfy, but from their symbolic meanings and their instrumentality in acting as transmitters of messages. So, obviously, when we come across an avatar drinking beer or sporting a tattoo or wearing fashionable clothes, we should also see them as "texts" in the wider sense of the term, as described by Roland Barthes[93]. From such a point of view, these things that we encounter are attractive not solely from what they contribute to their owners by just being used, but also through their connotative properties and their symbolic values[94]. So, all that we encounter in this world can be treated as "signs". They are loaded with connotations and their messages that on different levels can be taken as codes to be deciphered, since, as symbols, they function as things "that stand for something else"[95].

So, what is happening in SL is that people are using these symbolic elements as opportunities to realize their desired versions out of the entangled processes of self-representation and identity formation. The presence of a can of beer in SL may have no meaning on its own and so may an avatar's drinking action of the beer. Yet, when it is witnessed that this particular avatar is drinking beer, we find ourselves within a set of significance relationships. What does the hegemonic meaning of beer correspond to? What are its alternative connotations? What is a person that drinks

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[93] Roland Barthes, "Written Clothing," in Rethinking Popular Culture: *Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies, Edited by Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson* (London: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 432 - 445.

[94] I do not wish to describe the symbolic value of an object and the direct benefits it gives to its consumers as two distinct and mutually exclusive categories. Yet, I believe that the motivations for consuming a glass of water and a diamond ring are quite distinct from each other. I do not also wish to take sides by categorically dividing the consumed content and pejoratively assigning the name "conspicuous" as Thornstein Veblen did, but, as I have explained above, I find his treatment of the consumed good in categories meaningful. For Veblen's discussion, please refer to: Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

[95] *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1993).

beer in a public place likely to turn out? What if she is at a party or in a public park, or in front of the Blue Mosque?



Figure 6: "Drinking Beer"[96]

Another important axis to think with is the space such an opportunity provides the users of Second Life with in terms of the accumulation of social and symbolic capital. For Pierre Bourdieu, individuals aim to join the more powerful segments of society and for that try to maximize the differing forms of capital that are in distinct yet inter-related categories. And among these different forms, symbolic capital is a crucial source of power, as it is the main basis on which symbolic violence is imposed by the powerful towards the powerless, and social capital, defined by Bourdieu as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised

[96] Snapshot from Second Life, by the Author

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition", is the significant element that links other forms of capital[97].

This kind of an analysis about the nature of different forms of capital and the extent to which agents are able to play around them is quite important for this thesis and will be revisited in the chapters to come. However, for the time being, I would like to go back to my discussion about the resemblance of the universe of SL to the actual world. Considering the fact that the representation and construction of self are simultaneous processes and that identity necessitates "the eye of the beholder" to realize, the reasons behind the aforementioned resemblance become clearer. As the cofounder of the company behind Second Life, Cory Ondrejka said in an article about Second Life, "[It is] like the real world, only better"[98]. I agree with Ondrejka's point. In my opinion, too, as a result of the factors causing the resemblance that I have tried to explain before, the general atmosphere and the dominant mood of the SL experience is like that of the actual world.

But, why better? Exactly for the very same reason. It is *like* the actual world, but not the actual world itself. So, the agents have a number of strategies and tactics[99] to exploit, such as possessing a little (and sometimes not that little) more fit bodies than those they do in the actual world, for example. I will also elaborate on this topic in the chapter where I will be dealing with the opportunities SL provides its users in terms of playing with social and symbolic capital. However, to illustrate this point in passing, I wish to draw your attention to a quite extreme, but actual, event that drew much public attention and that received significant press coverage.

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[97] Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital*, pp. 241-258.

[98] Ondrejka, p. 2.

[99] De Certeau, pp. xx-xxii.

It is about a real-life couple that came to the point of divorce after the wife caught her husband cheating on her with a virtual character in Second Life. This is a very interesting case, which urges us to rethink our conceptions of loyalty and adultery (as it is quite hard to identify exactly the boundaries between desire and action and between intention and fault). Yet, this is not the point on which I would like to focus. I am interested in this particular example because it provides a concrete demonstration of how different people and their avatars can be. Please refer to the two pictures below, depicting the actual-life bodies and Second Life avatars of the aforementioned couple, respectively. I believe it explains what I meant above, while discussing the opportunities to play a little (and sometimes not so little) with the bodies that SL users possess[100].

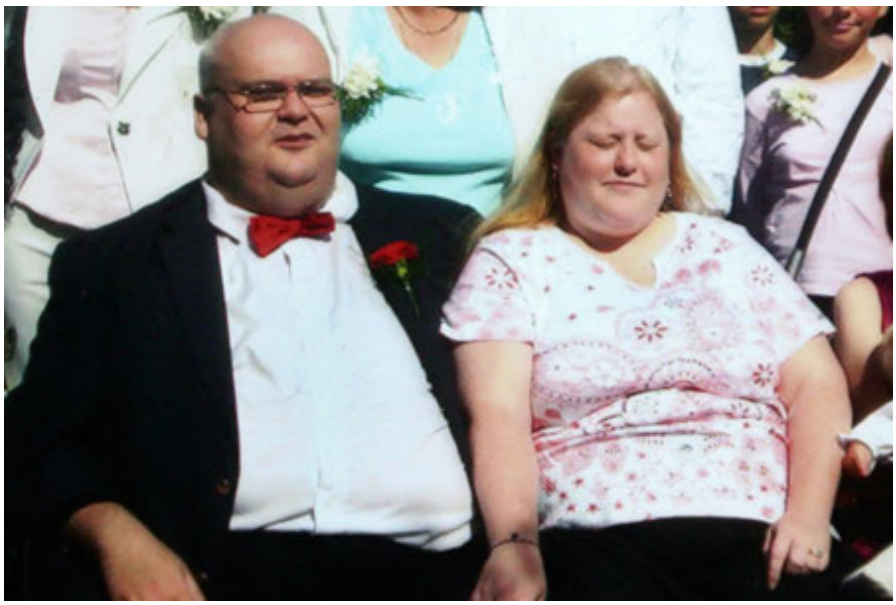

Figure 7: "The Actual Bodies of the Couple"[101]

[100] An account of the event can be reached via the web site of the British Magazine, Metro, where the two pictures that I have utilized are also taken from:

Metro Magazine, *Second Life Sex Causes Divorce*. (13 November 2008). Available [online]: "http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article.html?Second_Life_sex_causes_divorce&in_article_id=402338&in_page_id=34" [24 August 2009].

[101] Ibid.



Figure 8: "The Avatars of the Couple"[102]

Before moving on to the next part, I would like to make sure that I have been able to explain two important points about this "opportunity to play with actuality". I do not wish to draw a perfectly smooth picture of SL, where all kinds of representation relationships revolve around the "resemblance of the world" axis. It must be noted that there are a number of counter-examples, *fantastic* places or locations with experimental or thematic designs. However, I can confidently claim that they are extreme and -statistically speaking- abnormal. And more important for the aims of this thesis, as long as the locations in SL on which I have focused my ethnography are concerned (the places from Turkey and places where users from Turkey participate), I can claim even more confidently that the resemblance of the

[102] Ibid.

actual world is the norm, and not vice versa. The second point is about the limitations of this resemblance that I have referred to above -in the part in which I claimed that SL residents possess self-made bodies- as "up to a certain extent". And I want make clearer what I intend to mean by using that term.

That "Certain Extent"

First of all, this phrase refers to the limits that are possessed by the very nature of the act of creation itself- and, correspondingly, that can be generalized to creations of any kind. Let me make myself clear: I do not mean that there are practically no limits to the act of creating the bodies in Second Life and fall into the naïve position of pragmatic liberals who base their analyses on the false notion of a self-realized man in the absence of boundaries and limitations. Of course, the Second Life resident is constrained in her production by factors such as time and technical ability. So, the entitlements and capabilities that Amartya Sen has drawn our attention to -though not necessarily about online contexts- are fully in operation in the digital realm of Second Life[103]. The uneven nature of the distribution of entitlements and capabilities to Second Life residents (that come as the by-products of the various inequalities in both the actual and digital spheres) is an important limitation factor.

Sen's point is meaningful as it reminds the researcher of digital environments about the possible mismatch between what a user *desires* (in terms of the certain ways she takes part in the interactions in the medium, the ways she represents herself, and in general , the ways she communicates and forms herself) and what she

[103] Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (New York: North-Holland, I985).

is able to *engender*. This claim is practically operational as it alerts the researcher against taking for granted the things she encounters through her ethnography and pushes her not to lose track of the simple fact that what she has sensed or witnessed does not necessarily have to correspond to the forms that were intended to be transferred by the senders of the messages, or to the real situations of the things, themselves.

Based on this, in all the participant observations that I have made, the interviews in which I have taken part and the material I have analysed, I have tried to look beyond what was already transparent and find my ways to reach the not-so-apparent intentions, preferences, priorities and tastes of the users.

A deeper point, fed by a more radical line of thinking, needs to be made. My intention to look beyond the easily seen and grasp that which is beneath should not be seen as an attempt to reach a reified notion of the "essential characteristics" of the users. This would not only be a futile attempt due to the dynamic nature of these priorities, preferences and tastes (they are by nature changing the moment the researcher is trying to fix them by defining), but also –and more importantly- it would mean assigning them a presumed independent existence and thus overlooking the significant role that a number of forces play upon in all their moments of development and change starting right from the seconds of their very formation.

In this vein of thought, it is essential to keep in mind -both during the process of making observations and while drawing generalizations based on their analyses- the significant points that Pierre Bourdieu and those following his channels of analysis have enlightened us about the formation of tastes, that forces such as status,

race, gender, ethnicity, and of course, class positions are inherently effective in determining aesthetic characteristics, including priorities, preferences and tastes[104].

To revisit the annotation that I have made about *the certain extent* up to which the bodies in the digital world of Second Life are made by the people controlling them in light of the argument made above, I would like to underline my awareness of the fact that all data that I have encountered throughout my ethnography were made available after having passed already through the filters (limitations and shapers) that Sen and Bourdieu have drawn our attention to. This situation, which can also be read as the *impossibility* of reaching unmediated data about the pure essence of the objects being analysed, is also what I believe *empowers* the informed researcher who is not after idealistic notions of pure essences or unmediatedness, but is trying to find his way about the social and society through a holistic view of thick descriptions[105].

To concretize this claim and relate it to the research I have carried out, I would like to suggest identifying those limiting and shaping factors as much as possible, and to try to come up with maps depicting the forces in effect during the shaping of a particular preference and its representation in the medium. So, it is possible to identify and define those factors in effect for any Second Life resident (from the individual who "just hangs out every now then in SL" to the one who takes this digital world seriously and sees it as a part of his life and even to the workers of corporate bodies who are actually doing their routine tasks while participating in SL) or for groups of users possessing similar characteristics (young, urban, self-employed users from Istanbul, for example).

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[104] Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

[105] Geertz, *Thick Description.*

Three-Dimensional Analyses

The necessity of a kind of analysis informed with the aforementioned issues also comes from the three-dimensional analyses it enables us to make: It not only enables us to familiarize ourselves with the conditions of the agents performing in this medium (thus, reach a higher level of awareness about what is going on *within the online world*), but also, through those links, we are presented the opportunity to reach data *about their offline lives*. The third and more specific contribution comes from the *possibility of connecting these two types* of different aspects about the lives of the agents who we have attempted to place between the lenses of the magnifying glass.

It is through such an analysis that I have been able to draw conclusions while working on such an environment that has had its share of chaos both in terms of ontological and epistemological issues. I would like to wait until a later part to share fully those generalizations that I have made[106], but I will share just three bits of my conclusions for making clear my distinction about the three types of advantages mentioned above the use of this kind of methodology has allowed me.

Within the Online World

About the familiarization as a researcher with the online context itself, a behavioural pattern that I have encountered many times and mostly from the same people in SL, a pattern that I have found difficult to understand, will be given. Before describing what I have found *weird or uncommon* in those people's style of

[106] Please refer to the fifth chapter of this thesis for this.

communicating, I wish to briefly describe how a -statistically speaking- "normal" conversation takes place. The mainstream way of making friends and engaging in conversations in Second Life is as follows:

First, you go to a specific location (that you have either found through the search engine in the game or that has been suggested by a friend). In such a location, people are most of the time gathered together (perhaps in a café, or around a campfire or on a dance floor), and there is a conversation going on. In a playful mood, people are taking part in a light conversation, and you join by contributing every now and then. After that, if it happens that you enter a deeper conversation with someone, you may continue to chat one to one (perhaps in another place or perhaps in the private chat option that the client programme of SL makes possible). In both cases, there is a pattern of what I would call "the deepening of the conversation", according to which a smaller number of people gradually focus on a limited number of topics that have been introduced in the public arena where everyone chats together, and parallelly isolate themselves from the larger group where they have encountered each other and talk more personally, openly and usually at a higher speed of reaction than would have been in the public chat.

This, as I mentioned, is the general pattern in SL for getting to know someone better through conversation[107]. People follow such a pattern when they have the impression that they are meeting a potential kindred spirit. Of course, I do not claim that this type of an interaction is possible on every occasion and for anyone, as I am aware of the fact that the coming true of such a correspondence is dependant on a

[107] I have found it necessary to include the term "through conversation", as there are other means for that in Second Life. Some of these means are analogical to the offline contexts (such as observing the person's interaction with others or drawing conclusions from appearances), while some are genuinely unique to online contexts (such as examining the profile page of the avatar in which information had been submitted by the user, or checking the list of groups, friends or favourite places that were inscribed to the avatar's information page.

variety of factors, it should not be expected of these instances of "deepening of the conversation" to be the dominating type of interaction in Second Life[108].

Also, there are people who seem to be more willing to engage in such discussion (by contributing more to the discussions and including personal aspects in their messages, for instance) potentially and those who seem to be less (those who never talk or type in the most extreme, to illustrate). In addition, there are some instances that are more enabling for the realization of such deep communication (for instance, five people gathered around a campfire around midnight, when there is not much distracting stimuli, talking about their former relationships) and there are some that are not that much enabling (for example, at 22:00, the busiest hour in Second Life and on the day in which the champion of the football league has been determined or during the celebrations for the championship itself).

I also would like to note that none of the types of interactions that I have described above fall into the category that I have described as "weird". My observation on weirdness is not about the different *contingencies of situations*, but about the *behavioural patterns that people follow*. I have described the normal pattern of the possible "deepening of conversation" above, and I argue that if two people have started to engage in such a dialogue and if one of them does not suddenly say a totally contradictory phrase, and if both of them have the time and concentration to focus on the dialogue[109], their communication has a *tendency* to lead to a deepening state.

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[108] Although I would argue that the chances of such a correspondence are much more likely than a similar actual-life context,, due to a number of reasons such as the relative lack of time and place constraints in Second Life, the relative freedom from sanctions in Second Life in the case that things may go away from the desired way, and of course, the relatively bigger pool of people than can be correspondent at any particular moment in Second Life.

[109] For the rigour of the argument that I am presenting here and to avoid digressions, I will not fully discuss until a later part of this thesis the particular significance of these two notions, time and concentration, which I believe occupy an important –although functioning in ways much different

Now, let me turn back to the aforementioned cases that I cite as diverging from the normal. I have encountered some people in some situations in which although the initial stages of the process that I have described above have taken place (corresponding in public, finding common points, starting to talk more openly and personally and etcetera), the conversation did not seem to "deepen". I tried to figure out if messages that could be offensive had been sent by mistake, looked for the traces of disagreement in points of view and tried to figure out if, without realizing, I might have given the other party the feeling that I was not willing to carry on the conversation, but none of them was the case[110]. But, neither of these was the case!

Yet, some of the people with whom I was trying to communicate (more precisely, the subgroup whose behaviour I described as weird and uncommon) gave me the impression that they were not that keen on carrying on the conversation. I formed such an impression because of the fact that they were writing back to my sentences a long time after I had typed them and the replies were unusually short[111].

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than the offline contexts- place in the determination of what type of communication a potential dialogue may lead to.

[110] I can tell this that confidently thanks to the property in the client programme of Second Life that I had enabled in the beginning of my ethnography. With the help of that function, which automatically recorded all the conversations I was involved in and those in the making of which my avatar was present, I had the chance to revisit the conversations with a certainty that is not always given to social scientists: I could have a look at the exact words anyone had said, the gestures and comments they had typed , and as not only what was written but also exactly what time they were written was recorded, I was also able to identify the periods in which a conversation accelerated or slowed down.

[111] I wish to underline a difference in the mood of communication between online and offline contexts here. The usual trend in online contexts about typed communication is towards being as simple and short as possible (using abbreviations, slang words and metaphors, instead of writing long passages that make everything as clear as possible. That, probably, among other reasons, due to the fact that unlike face to face correspondence in which our bodies and perceptive abilities are utilized directly,, in the online contexts there are mediating tools in both perception (such as the monitor of the computers) and sending of the message (such as the keyboard) processes. However,, I should also note that conversations of deeper nature are exceptional to this case. And the mediation of the monitor and keyboard has the potential to help people express themselves more openly and in more detail then would have been in most offline contexts.

After wrongly assuming for some time that those guys were not the "socializing type", I came to realize the simple fact: they lacked fast and continuous access to the world of Second Life and their late (and in some cases never-coming) replies were just because of that handicap. I then learnt through my interviews that some part of this accessibility problem was due to inadequate technical infrastructure (a slow PC, dial-up connection instead of broadband, etc.), and that the majority of the rest were people who were trying to sneak out to SL during office hours and were being disturbed by office tasks or by facing the unexpected presence of their colleagues or bosses near them!

This was an example illustrating how the choice of the aforementioned methodology enabled me to better familiarize myself with the very context I was researching. In light of the thick description (that enabled Clifford Geertz to differentiate between a wink and a twitch[112]), I was able to tell between a user who did not have the opportunity to carry a conversation deeper from one that was not very interested in further communication. This was an example belonging to the first category of advantages I listed above, as it contributed, among other things, to my awareness of what is going on *within the online world*.

About Offline Lives

The second type of advantage, as noted above, is related to the actual offline context in which the person controlling the avatar we encounter in SL is physically situated. I have argued above that through those links that SL establishes with the online and offline experiences of its users and that the researcher of this medium is

[112] Geertz, *Thick Description.*

able to identify, we are presented the opportunity to reach data *about their offline lives*. I would like to demonstrate how this can be done by quoting a trend that I have come across:

Throughout my ethnography, I have realized that SL has some peak hours during which a lot of people simultaneously participate, and some not-so-crowded periods of time. As I tried to grasp more deeply what was going on, familiarize myself with the environment and get to know a portion of the users in person, I came to realize that it was possible to identify the personal peak hours on a user-per-user basis. More specifically, I can argue that it almost became possible for me to identify which users were likely to hang out at a specific location at some specific time of the day, and whether or not a particular user would be online at a particular hour of the day.

In the later parts of my research as I got to know about the offline lives of some of the people I knew in SL, I was going to discover particular reasons for that. I would learn that some of them only logged in during the day and on weekdays, as they could connect easily from their offices and that they did not prefer to log in from home. I also learnt about some others with an inverted SL routine: They did not have the opportunity in their work environments to participate in SL, and thus, could only connect at nights from home. What was common in both cases was that I was able to reach significant information about their offline lives -about their work environments, conceptions of home, daily routines and ways of allocating the time they chose to spend on work and leisure- to which I otherwise could not have had easy access.

At the Intersection of the Online and the Offline

The third and more specific contribution comes from the *possibility of connecting these two types* of different aspects about the lives of the agents who we have attempted to place under the lens of the magnifying glass. Hobsbawm argues about the use of "micro" methods in history and social sciences and the potential that such methods possess for contributing to more "macro" analyses[113]. For Hobsbawm, "the microscope" is and should be employed in a complementary relationship with "the telescope", for being able to grasp the motley nature of the societies and social relations[114]. Thus, it becomes possible to draw conclusions about general trends and societies while analysing only a subset of its members and analysing them by focusing on a subset of their lives. And this the framework around which I have tried, in this thesis, to bring together the online experiences of SL users from Turkey and their offline ways of socialization.

This part, which fills the backbone of the analysis, and around which the central hypothesis of my study has been built around will be elaborated in detail in the chapter "The Conceptual Framework". More specifically, I will try to test the validity of the hypothesis whether (and if so, to what extent) online environments in general –and the digital world of Second Life in particular- has the potential to function the way Ray Oldenburg has conceptualized the functioning of cafes, coffee shops, bars and other "third places"[115]. Yet, I would like to exemplify the fruitful products of such an analysis before waiting for that chapter to come, so, I would,

[113] Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (New York: The NewPress, 1997), pp. 186-191.

[114] Ibid., p. 190.

now, discuss an observation that I made regarding a subgroup of users in Second Life.

Among the people I met in Second Life, there is a category I found appropriate to define as "*evkızları*"[116]. These are young, unmarried women who are living with their parents and who are not able to leave their houses at night (and in some cases even during the day) to socialize for a number of reasons (ranging from security concerns to the domination of women by patriarchal forces). Whatever the reasons, it is a phenomenon that causes a significant number of young women in Turkey to miss opportunities for socialization in which they could do a variety of things from making new friends to finding boyfriends or to simply engaging in a conversation with people other than their families, neighbours and close girlfriends whom they could meet at home.

As for the relationship of these women with Second Life, based on the interviews I have conducted in SL, I believe that it is possible and legitimate to argue -at least regarding the ones I have come across- that the engagement of *evkızları* in Second Life is a liberating and enabling experience for them. Here is where the online experience meets the offline circumstance. I believe that even this singular anecdote examined under "the microscope" has a lot to say to not only to the students of digital worlds, but also to those analysing Turkish society (and perhaps even more to say to those in the second category, from the conditions young women are living in, to general concerns about "the security of the streets", and, of course, about the mainstream moral codes and their manifestations on women).

[116] A one-to-one translation of this term would be "housegirls".

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: OLDENBURG'S THIRD PLACES

The Guy on the Walky-Talky

> "Hello hello! I'm looking for a female friend. I'm new around here. I have a good job. I'm looking for someone to meet and get closer. Hello hello! I'm looking for a female friend." [117]

So spoke the young man I heard on the walky-talky 17 years ago. I had bought a small walky-talky that I used from time to time. While trying to communicate with my friend next-door, the signals were somehow jumbled and I was able to hear the voice of the young man. Although I tried a couple of times to respond to his message and learn more about the guy that I had found rather extraordinary, it was of no use.

Yet, I remember having reached a quick conclusion about him and labelling him a "kind of sexomaniac". I would later learn, however, that I would have to revisit that conclusion of mine in the days to come, when I heard the same guy on other occasions claiming that he was looking for friendship and not necessarily with those from the opposite sex, and, more importantly, when I heard other people voicing similar desires. Anyway, as an eight-year old child, I had not thought deeply about it and I can say that this small memory of mine was forgotten until I started to think about modes of communication during the writing of this thesis.

[117] The original message was in Turkish and was as follows: *"Alo alo! Bayan arkadaş arıyorum. Buralarda yeniyim. İyi bir işte çalışıyorum. Tanışıp kaynaşabileceğim birini arıyorum. Alo alo! Bayan arkadaş arıyorum!"*

Now, looking from where I stand -from the August 2009 and being a researcher of communication and socialization dynamics- I think I am more able to place some kind of meaning on this instance and draw some analogies between that unexpected male voice coming from the Istanbul of almost two decades ago and what I observed during the research I carried out in the Internet medium. But, to be able to jump two steps forward and demonstrate the how and the why, let me first go one step backward and try to explain the conceptual framework that I have utilized in thinking about these issues.

Oldenburg coined the term “third place” in his seminal work about the quotidian socialization dynamics of the American people, “The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts At the Heart of a Community”[118]. Using Occam’s razor in a quite efficient and effective way, Oldenburg divides individuals’ social lives into three categories and matches each category with a certain type of locality, the first, second and third places corresponding to the home environment, the work (or school), and "the core settings of informal public life", respectively[119]. This is the main framework that I will draw upon in the rest of this chapter by mainly focusing on Oldenburg’s third places, or “great good places” as he alternatively calls them[120].

I would like to stress at this point that, as in the case of all kinds of generalizations, there can potentially be (and actually are) phenomena that cannot be explained under such a theoretical scheme. I believe my research has benefited from looking at the analyzed material using Oldenburg’s conceptualization and that a map that conceals some of the details by presenting the world from a bird’s eye point of

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[119] Oldenburg, p. 16.

[120] Ibid., p. 4.

view is a beneficial thing to utilize at the beginning of every journey, as it provides one with the ease and comfort of being able to determine the initial and final points of his journey as well as a tentative route to follow.

Of course, this does not mean that the map is to be utilized the way it is for each and every case. On the contrary, it has to be redrawn taking into the consideration such factors as the passage of time since the moment of its original making, or such as the inherent subjective conditions of the drawer or the evolutions and/or revolutions that has taken place in the meantime. In addition,, considering that the aim of a journey (or an academic study) is to grasp the reality in all its crimpy, motley nature and with peculiarities that do not conform to the norms,
I believe that there should come a moment in which the voyager does away with the map and tries to see what really is going on around himself with his own eyes.

Yet, having considered all these factors, I still believe in the potential benefits of the presence of a map in the hands of the social researcher, and that is why I have utilized Oldenburg's conceptualization in my study, after having made it pass through the filters of my criticizing and modifying eye and after transforming the map into what I think would have a better explanatory capacity, of course.

So, what does Oldenburg claim and how does it enrich what I shall tell about walky-talky guys looking for "female friends" at the beginning of the 1990s and the nature of socialization through the Internet towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century? Basically, Oldenburg elaborates the notion of third places through four axes: First, he approaches the issue socio-analytically and suggests certain functional criteria by the help of which certain places can be met under the

lowest common denominator of being third places[121]. My study has benefited from such a categorization and I will deal with this aspect in the pages to come.

Then, focusing on empirical evidence, he historically explores and cross-culturally surveys some concrete third place examples such as German-American beer gardens, an American Main Street, the English pub, the French café, the American tavern, and classic coffeehouses from their origins in Saudi Arabia, to England, and then Vienna[122]. This part of his analysis enables researchers to see the functioning of the criteria he has suggested and presents concrete examples for solving the problem of the ability to generalize his categorization for contexts time periods other than the post-industrial American society on which Oldenburg focuses.

The two remaining axes that Oldenburg touches upon are related to the present condition and the future of third places in particular and American society in general. We are presented the transformation in the life-style of American society and the corresponding transformation in the urban landscape that has caused, in Oldenburg's terms, a "problem of place" in America[123]. Having made the diagnosis in the third axis of his study, as part of the forth and last axis, he presents a prescription for urban developers and policy makers advocating the promotion of classical third places for the general benefit of society[124].

As for these two dimensions and their relationships with the point of view presented in this thesis, I agree with the historical analysis that Oldenburg makes. I also believe, as I have tried to explain above, that this trend, which has been in effect for a long time, accelerated historically around the last quarter of the twentieth

[121] Ibid., pp. 20 - 23.

[122] Ibid., pp. 89 - 203.

[123] Ibid., pp. 3 - 19.

[124] Ibid., pp. 284 - 296.

century damaging, as a result, the conventional channels of socialization. Furthermore, I believe that this trend is by no means limited to American society and that the zeitgeist of our age that is fed by a number of different dimensions is in effect in many localities of the world, including, of course, the geography which this thesis analyzes. This is the critical observation that lies at the heart of both the motivations for and findings of this thesis.

Because I agree so much with Oldenburg's diagnosis, I find it necessary to distance myself from his prescriptions. This is so, first, because of the fact that I find his solutions, although well-intentioned, unrealistic. Of course, as someone writing about these issues almost two decades later, and having had the opportunity to observe and analyze what has been going on in the world within that period, I accept that it would be unfair to expect from Oldenburg to reach the sharp conclusions that we are able to claim today about the irreversibility of these changes. But considering the tremendousness of the changes through which the world has gone, I also believe that it would be too optimistic to expect from some "good" policy makers and urban planners to resist -the way Cervantes portrayed the romantic Don Quixote[125]-by coming up with solutions to a trend that was born from and raised by the inner dynamics of the very functioning of the late capitalist world economic system[126].

The second reason that makes me seek the solutions to the problems that Oldenburg describes, not necessarily in the channels that he suggests, is my opinion about the implicit conservative tone in Oldenburg's proposal. Although I agree with his point that an era -that was marked by different kind of socialization dynamics than those that we have today- is over, I do not share the optimism for drawing a

[125] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote.* Translated by John Michael Cohen (London : Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1954).

[126] Bauman.

"those golden ages" picture, most importantly because of the fact that I believe in the possibility of building better forms of living together than the ones that we had "in those days", since after all, the smoother a system functions the more difficult it would be to replace it with another -and even a better other- one. I prefer to focus on the potential opportunities that can come out of the tearing down of established and institutionalized mentalities, norms and socialization dynamics.

These being said, I can proceed with the details of Oldenburg's framework and why I find it particularly inspiring to utilize for the setting (the Turkey of 2009) and the medium (communication and socialization through the use of digital technologies) that I analyze here. In drawing the boundaries for the notion of third places he suggests, Oldenburg and Brisett set sail by stating what third places are not: 'Third places exist outside the home and beyond the 'work lots' of modern economic production"[127].

The starting point of such an analysis is the division of time spent in daily places due to the division of labour in the modern ways of production. Unlike the "work environment" that is characterized by the tasks and responsibilities stemming from the organization of labour and the "home environment" that is associated with family life and the roles corresponding to it, "third places" are locations where "people gather primarily to enjoy each other's company'[128]. They make participating people feel as if they are spending their time in a "home away from home"[129] because of the fact that, as Charles Soukup accurately summarizes, they enable social interaction based on "sociability, spontaneity, community building and emotional

[127] Ramon Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett, "The Third Place", in *Qualitative Sociology* 5, no. 4 (1982), p. 269.

[128] Ibid., p. 269.

[129] Oldenburg, p. ix.

expressiveness"[130]. Furthermore, they make possible the forming and sustenance of intimate personal ties and help individuals for "keep in touch with reality"[131].

So, it is obvious that for Oldenburg third places have a crucial role in creating a lively and humane atmosphere where individuals can enjoy their social lives. This is by no means the only benefit Oldenburg attaches to third places. From a macrosociological point of view, he explicitly voices his sympathy for informal public gathering places by stating that "in places where people meet for no obvious purpose there *is* a purpose"[132]. According to Oldenburg, these are the places where community bonds are strengthened, and through the possible space they open for conversation and mutual understanding, collective action problems are to be solved.

As another positive unintended consequence, Oldenburg claims that these kinds of places enable the formation of public dialogue and promote more democratic forms of governance. I believe that approaching the issue from such a dimension brings Oldenburg's concept of third place closer to a more widely-known similar concept, Habermas's public sphere[133]. But it should be noted that Oldenburg makes no reference to Habermas's concept. I believe that there can be two reasons for this. The first one is related to the late popularity problem of Jürgen Habermas. Although Habermas published his book in 1962 in German, an English translation was not produced until 1989.

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[130] Charles Soukup, "Computer-mediated Communication as a Virtual Third Place: Building Oldenburg's Great Good Places on the World Wide Web", in *New Media Society* 8, no. 3 (2008). Available [online]: "http://nms.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/8/3/421" [24 August 2009].

[131] Oldenburg and Brissett, p. 280.

[132] Oldenburg, p. ix.

[133] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Translated by Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

The second reason might be related more to the conceptual framework of the scholars. Although the two concepts look similar, they differ on two important points which may be a limiting factor for the coexistence of the two notions in the same context. First of all, for Habermas, the public sphere is deeply historicized and it is an institution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was transformed in the first part of the twentieth century. Oldenburg, on the other hand, claims that "all cultures have an informal public life"[134]. I believe that this dissonance in claims is, in fact, related to the second factor that will be mentioned here: he diverts from Habermas in the process of defining the boundaries of his notion. For him, "the third place" is literally a *place* -and thus exists in all societies independent of the time and place-, whereas for Habermas the concept of public sphere is categorically bourgeois and is meaningful only context-specifically, in certain countries such as England, France and Germany.

Because of the aforementioned reasons that make Habermas' and Oldenburg's analyses diverge, and out of my belief in the necessity of keeping the theory part of a research as simple as possible[135], I shall leave aside Habermas' and others potential contributions to my analysis, and will base my conceptualization mainly on the framework suggested by Oldenburg. Let me now pass on to the defining criteria based on which Oldenburg's analysis enables the researcher to define the borders of what a third place is.

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[134] Oldenburg, p. ix.

[135] Please note that this position does not advocate "simplifying the truths" until they match our theories. On the very contrary, as I have also discussed in the methodology part of this thesis, I believe that social reality should be grasped with all its motley nature. However, for being able to achieve such an end, the best way seems to be keeping the theory as simple -with enough conceptual tools and explanatory power, of course- as possible, and focus on the reality -the ethnography part- for tracing the richest possible observations, including, without doubt, its different dimensions and even inconsistencies.

Defining Characteristics

The following table is taken (after being slightly modified) from Constance Steinkuehler's and Dmitri Williams's co-authored article inquiring about Oldenburg's concept of "third place" and the potential ways, in terms of social engagement, of thinking it with the massively multiplayer games accessed through Internet[136].

Characteristic	Definition
Neutral Ground	Third places are neutral grounds where individuals are free to come and go as they please with little obligation or entanglements with other participants.
Leveler	Third places are spaces in which an individual's rank and status in the workplace or society at large are of no import. Acceptance and participation is not contingent on any prerequisites, requirements, roles, duties, or proof of membership.
Conversation is Main Activity	In third places, conversation is a main focus of activity in which playfulness and wit are collectively valued.
Accessibility & Accommodation	Third places must be easy to access and are accommodating to those who frequent them.
The Regulars	Third places include a cadre of regulars who attract newcomers and give the space its characteristic mood.
A Low Profile	Third places are characteristically homely and without pretension.
The Mood is Playful	The general mood in third places is playful and marked by frivolity, verbal word play, and wit.
A Home Away from Home	Third places are home-like in terms of Seamon's (1979) five defining traits: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth.

[136] Constance Steinkuehler and Dmitri Williams, "Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as 'Third Places'", in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11, no. 4 (2006), p. 8.

Let me now analyze these criteria in more detail, by presenting some real-world daily examples so that in the chapter where I will be arguing for the potential benefits of considering the *functioning* of socialization through online communication in a way *similar to* Oldenburg's third places, I can have the grounds to make comparisons and draw analogies on.

Neutral Ground

Individuals are free to enjoy the benefits of third places without necessarily having to obtain permission from anyone. To elaborate this idea using Oldenburg's international diplomacy metaphor of "neutral ground", third places can be compared to international territory (or international seas) on Earth that do not belong to any particular country. In such a setting, nobody is required to act as a guest and "eat what is served"[137] or even needs an invitation to participate. Similarly, nobody needs to "play host" for anyone[138]. This makes third places differ dramatically from home environments.

Third places are also void of the rigid hierarchical structure of work environments and the corresponding rules dictated from above that workers are expected to follow. Unlike the work atmosphere, voluntary contribution is the norm and the rules in the third space are determined through collective negotiation wherever it is possible. When this is not possible -unlike the work and home environments that take would radical efforts to stop participating- one can always

[137] This phrase comes from the Turkish saying, "*Misafir umduğunu değil, bulduğunu yer*", which means that the guest does not eat what he expects but what is served.

[138] Oldenburg, p. 22.

leave instantly and start participating in another third space that would appeal more to her preferences.

Because of this voluntary nature of participation, third places promote sociability and mutual empathy. Oldenburg bases this claim to Richard Sennett's phrase, "people can be sociable only when they have some protection from each other"[139] and carries his argumentation one step forward by speculating on the crucial role of such environments on the general affluence of societies by stating:

> If we valued fraternity as much as independence, and democracy as much as free enterprise, our zoning codes would not enforce the social isolation that plagues our modern neighbourhoods, but would require some form of public gathering place every block or two[140].

So, according to Oldenburg, this neutral nature of third places that enables voluntary participation results in contributing to fraternal ties within the members of the society and a more democratic environment. I totally agree with this phrase. And apart from the many historical examples that could be put forward as instances supporting this claim, I find one particularly important to mention, the recent developments in Venezuela towards a more equal and democratic society. and the testimony of a prominent Turkish journalist, Ece Temelkuran, who had the opportunity to follow these changes and developments with her own eyes underlines the significant role that the embededness of these changes in the daily lives of the masses played and argues that it was made possible thanks to the effective

[139] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1992), p. 331.

[140] Oldenburg, p. 23.

functioning of communication and socialization channels within local communities[141].

Leveler

> Levelers was the name given to an extreme left-wing political party that emerged under Charles 1 and expired shortly afterward under Cromwell. The goal of the party was the abolition of all differences of position or rank that existed among men. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the term came to be applied much more broadly in England, referring to anything 'which reduces men to an equality' "[142].

In the paragraph above, Oldenburg describes the metaphor "leveler" that he found appropriate to list among the defining characteristics of third places. Furthermore, he notes that the newly established coffeehouses of that period, in the atmosphere of decaying of the feudal order, were literally referred to as levelers.

Generalization of the use of the term to all third places underlines their inclusive character and the lack of any prerequisites, requirements, roles, duties, or proof of membership for acceptance and participation in those places. Apart from this openness in terms of being able to participate in those places, another dimension is stressed, one related to the quality of participation dynamics in those places. As Steinkuehler and Williams rightly point out, "third places are spaces in which an individual's rank and status in the workplace or society at large are of no import"[143].

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[141] Ece Temelkuran, *Biz Burada Devrim Yapıyoruz Sinyorita* (İstanbul, Everest Yayınları: 2006).

[142] Oldenburg, p. 23.

[143] Steinkuehler and Williams, p. 8.

What does this claim tell the social researcher? To me, it tells of the great opportunities these places provide for witnessing and observing social life in ways that would not be possible in other settings. For example, everybody who has spent even a very little amount of time in a work environment knows that there is a limit to what one can say to his boss, a two-fold limit, to be more precise. First of all, speaking about the obvious limit, because of the way power in the workplace is asymmetrically distributed, being independent of the personal traits of the people in higher positions, the boss is the person who dictates the last word in a dialogue (especially if there are conflicting opinions). So, there is a certain point until which a conversation can potentially lead to, but after that point is reached the case will be closed, in the presence of all those feelings and thoughts that the person in a lower status has not been able to express.

The second dimension, which is not as easily visible, and which, in my opinion, is in fact more limiting due to its opaque nature, is about the predetermined nature of the content of the conversations. So, apart from the limit that determines until which point a conversation will be carried out that I mentioned in the prior paragraph, there is another limit: the limit that determines *which* subjects can be communicated in the work environment and *how* those are to be covered in the conversations. A broken heart is not usually something to be exposed in business environments. In the rare cases that they are exposed, they are most likely to be treated as a threat to the achievement of the most efficient production processes, and not as the precious feelings of a dear human being.

The same line of thinking can be extended to cover the home environment as well. Although the content of the limits are different now, the presence of the limits is the same. There are also things which can be communicated with a father or a

mother. As a person living in and writing from Turkey, I should add that there are even things one cannot do around them. And I am not referring to "extreme" things, but writing about a culture in which if a younger person talks about an issue in the presence of those older, it is regarded as a sign of disrespect, or a young person sitting around the same dining table as older people in the presence of guests may not be allowed at all.

These limits are not confined to issues about age or maturity, nor are only related to the tensions between the ordinary inhabitants of a household. For instance, the title of a guest in a house may dramatically affect the hosts' behaviour towards her, the hosting procedures differ when the guest is a close friend than when it is a distant relative from another city who only visits rarely. The change of the dramaturgy of the meeting, of course, changes the density and content of the conversation between individuals.

In a third place, however, not only it one more likely to meet and interact with people that do not necessarily belong to one's home or work environment or even share a similar personal background, ethic identity or social position, but also the chances that the conversation to be carried out with people from home or work settings is richer, more intimate and based on more mutual understanding. In other words, they are the potentially ideal locations to see how cheerful one's father can be when telling jokes to friends at a *rakı masası*[144], or to learn why the girl in the office, who is paler these days, keeps looking at the photograph of a boy and whenever she takes a coffee break has tears in her eyes.

[144] "*Rakı masası*" is the name given to the gathering of people around a table for drinking the traditional Anatolian alcoholic drink, rakı,, which is usually associated with a setting of intimacy, sincerity and enthusiasm.

Please note that what I have claimed above does not imply that no prior inequalities and their corresponding differences in terms of statuses exist in third places. Of course, such a world would be very sweet. We would never need to do anything to get rid of factors causing inequalities or limiting people's freedoms of self-expression: just putting everyone into third places would suffice! But, unfortunately, the world does not function in such a way and as I argued in the previous chapters of this thesis, the lack of formal constraints on freedom does not automatically imply its presence. In the final analysis, it is the individuals with all their bodily, mental, social dispositions that participate in these environments with all those characteristics and properties inscribed in them. This is exactly why examining those environments, deciphering their codes and getting to know their dramaturgy is meaningful not for the narrow aim of understanding the studied environment, but also for what those may tell us about the rest of the society. Yet, having made these annotations, I would like to once again express my belief in third places as being levelers, or to be more precise on the light of the annotations made within paragraph, as being more leveler-friendly environments than the first and second places.

Conversation Is the Main Activity

Having stated the first two characteristics of third places, being neutral grounds and levelers, it is now possible to pass on to the third one: Third places are spaces in which conversation is the main focus activity. For Oldenburg, the tone of this conversation is such that playfulness and wit are the major collectively valued aspects[145]. Since everyone is free to participate without entanglements (neutral

[145] Oldenburg, p. 16.

ground) and the participating sides are considered to be equal (leveler), third places function as a kind of *agora*[146], enabling a meritocratic socialization environment. Apart from this, as it can be easily noticed, all the examples that I have referred to above in the concretization of the first two characteristics involve conversation playing an important role, and for some of them conversation plays "the lead role".

I have tried above to demonstrate the importance of conversation in socialization and the facilitating role third places play for making fruitful conversations to materialize. However, I believe that it is possible and beneficial to broaden the scope of what is understood by "conversation", and restate Oldenburg's proposition as, "communication and interaction are the main activity". This is possible because Oldenburg, himself, does not limit the potential connotations of the term "conversation" in his book, and I believe it to be beneficial due to the fact that what is experienced in terms of socialization that promotes mutual understanding in third places is more than just the speech itself. Bodily gestures, for instance, are fully in operation when friends are sitting in a café. Perhaps more importantly, the very act of sitting there together -independent of the specific content of conversation- contributes to the participants' thoughts and feelings for each other, the community they belong to, and even the world in which that they live.

People with dissimilar views, when they want to get beyond the distances in their mentalities invite one another for a cup of coffee. Friends who have not seen each other for a long time express their feelings while drinking a cup of coffee together. When someone wants to be closer to a person she finds attractive, she

[146] Agora is the name given to public gathering place in the ancient Greek city-states where all participants are free to enjoy the freedom of speech.

invites him for a drink. In all these instances, it is not the specific sentences that matter and determine the tone of the interaction, but the very action itself[147].

Furthermore, I would also like to draw on some of the "extras" of participating in a third place. These are the places where people come together with "friends of friends" with whom they would otherwise not likely have many opportunities to get to know better. Sometimes in priorly arranged settings (as in the case of a reunion where partners are also invited) and sometimes in spontaneously happening contexts (such as coming across an old friend and inviting him to join them while sitting in a café with another friend), these places have the potential to function as bridges enabling interaction and communication between individuals from different backgrounds. Last,, when someone is in a third place, unintended consequences are always potentially in affect: someone may join the people sitting in the adjacent table after eavesdropping on their conversation[148], another one might make friends (and later become comrades) with a person on a main street after receiving positive feedback about the fanzine that she is distributing on the street[149], and as in the case of the box-office hit Turkish movie, *Issız Adam*, someone may come across the love of his life while searching for an old book in a bookstore[150].

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[147] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[148] This happened to me when I was sitting in a cafe in Taksim,. When I talked about the instance to my friends, many of them reported that they had a similar story.

[149] I witnessed such an instance in Kadıköy, seeing the process of how one of my friends made a new friend thanks to her distributing his fanzine on the main street.

[150] Çağan Irmak, *Issız Adam* (Turkey: Most Production, 2008).

As of 12 August 2009, this movie ranks 10th most widely watched Turkish movie of all times, and got a reception from mostly urban young people as "telling their own story".

The box-office numbers are can be reached in the website of SinemaTürk 2.0:

SinemaTürk 2.0, *Gişe Bilgileri* (12 August 2009). Available [online]: "http://www.sinematurk.com/gise.php?action=goToBoxOfficePage&firstLoad=1" [24 August 2009].

Accessibility and Accommodation

The characteristics that are put together below, I believe, are the most straight-forward ones among all the eight criteria that Oldenburg lists. Oldenburg, simply, summarizes his argument about these dimensions of third places as follows:

> Access to them must be easy if they are to survive and serve, and the ease with which one may visit a third place is a matter of both time and location.[151]

The argument is so simple in itself that I could even argue that one does not need to make deep analyses or even need to be a social scientist to come up with such reasoning: For any place -and also for a potential third place- to be able to function, access to it should not be too costly (using the term in the widest sense so that it includes the opportunity cost of time, as well), and the place should be able to "welcome" its potential participants independent of the nature of the modality of their visits.

Furthermore, Oldenburg acknowledges the fluid nature of people's (both from the viewpoint of a single individual or from a larger scale of analysis, of groups in general) in arrivals and departures to third places, and the presence of inconsistencies when different hours of the day, days of the week, or months or the year are compared. He also notes that, unlike those activities in the first and second

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For an idea about the reception of the movie, please refer to Ekşisözlük, the most popular youth internet portal in Turkey , where there are than 1400 entries just under the heading Issız Adam: Ekşisözlük, *Issız Adam*. Available [online]: "http://sozluk.sourtimes.org/show.asp?t=%C4%B1ss%C4%B1z+adam" [24 August 2009].

[151] Oldenburg, p. 32.

places, the activities in those places are mostly not planned, scheduled, organized or structured:

> Those who have third places exhibit regularity in their visits to them, but it is not that punctual and unfailing kind shown in deference to the job or family. The timing is loose, days are missed, some visits are brief, etc.[152]

Thinking about some brick-and-mortar third places such as certain pubs that a group of friends hang out at or the favourite cafes of famous writers, or drinking houses that become meeting places for people from similar occupations, or, as the very use of the term suggests, locals (which, according to Oldenburg, received such a name for having become some peoples local places), the accuracy of this claim is obvious. Yet, I believe that there is more to think about this issue: The important and deep aspect that lies behind such a simple stream of reasoning is the fact that for the smooth-functioning of third places the aforementioned propositions are not only bare necessities, but they are also what gives the place its charm and essence:

> It is just these deviations from the middle-class penchant for organization that give the third place much of its character and allure and that allow it to offer a radical departure from the routines of home and work. [153]

So, as seen above, these are also the most crucial of all the aspects that make a certain locality qualify to be a third place. And, in my opinion, it is exactly the failing of these two criteria in today's world (and even more so than the 1980s that

[152] Ibid., p. 33.

[153] Ibid., p. 33.

Oldenburg formulized his theory, I would argue) that has come to cause "the problem of place," Oldenburg puts forward. It is exactly because of this fact that these criteria form the backbone of my thesis.

As elaborated in the part of this thesis in which I tried to present a picture of the setting (in which reasons such as the economic organization, the social scene and technological developments that underlie the change in the ways social relationships between people and within societies are experienced and defined). I believe that it is even less likely in the contemporary world to create such *places*, in the literal use of term that refers to concrete places. That is the primary reason behind my motivation to look for alternative environments that can meet the functions third places have come to posses in other *places*, in the metaphorical use of the term referring to abstract places, such as Second Life and Facebook that came into existence thanks to the new media and digital technologies.

The Regulars

Places have certain properties, like people. In some of these places, as in the case of people, these characteristics are more volatile and change unpredictably than others. Just as in the case of people, these locations cannot qualify to offer the familiarity and relaxation that more consistent ones provide us with. We define such people as full of adventure and interesting, yet seldom choose our best friends among them, most likely because of the difficulty in establishing a long-lasting sustainable relationship that can at the same time be dense. In the case of places, it is exactly the same. When we want to break up our routine and do "crazy" things, we go to places in which we normally do not spend much time. Yet, as the previous sentence

implicitly claims, there *are* places that we regularly go to (our favourite third places) and feel comfortable in, because of the fact that these places have relatively stable characteristics. But, what is it that gives a place its dominant characteristic tone?

> It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some of the gang will be there[154].

As seen in the quotation above, Oldenburg provides a clear-cut answer to this question: the people that attend regularly to a third place, or to put it briefly, *the regulars*. Yes, this is simply a phenomenon: Looking from the viewpoint of individuals, every person has a favourite café, a most preferred restaurant, a favourite street to wander, etc. From the spatial dimension, in every place there are people that come on a frequent basis and spend time there, and the collective participation of these people in the third places contribute to its identity.

Like a chicken and egg problem, it is difficult to identify which one of these two intertwined phenomena is *the original cause* (if at all). Yet, it is a fact that these two produce and reproduce each other in a sustainable way: a certain type of individual tends to go to a certain third place with a specific character (logically because he or she finds the character of the place in conformity with their preferences), and as those certain type of individuals spend their time there, they contribute to the strengthening of the characteristic mood, and as the place has a strong mood, it is able to attract more people with similar preferences, and so on, and so forth.

So, we have a place that has a certain characteristic and a certain group of regulars that can be grouped under a certain common denominator. The above

[154] Ibid., pp. 33 - 34.

argument is as practically valid as it is logically consistent, as well. Let me try to show that my argument is not only about abstract concepts, but is deeply rooted in small (and sometimes not so small) details that matter for the potential participants of third places. Let me briefly illustrate this with a hypothetical café: In the obligatory equilibrium between supply and demand (for participating in a café), they (the mood and regulars) codetermine many important elements one would especially care when choosing a café to spend some of his free time, from the music that plays in the background, to the content of issues generally discussed by people going there, to with whom one would like to go there, to the type of person would one be likely to meet there, and, consequently, the general codes of the language (in the widest use of the term) that people participating in such a third place would be using.

A Low Profile

This criterion underlies the fact that third places are characteristically cozy and without pretension. Oldenburg also stresses that ideal third places are plain and ordinary places, where pomposity and majesty are essentially defied[155]. To illustrate this with an example of a concrete third space, let me first turn on to the case Steinkuehler and Williams suggest on the line of thinking with Oldenburg, and then mediate on it:

> The run-down real-world coffee shop or bar, complete with sawdust or scattered peanut shells, maximizes comfort by removing the trappings of pomposity[156].

[155] Ibid., p. 36.

[156] Steinkuehler and Williams, p. 17.

To carry the categorization one step further, let me even sharpen the argument. I claim that third places are *wonderful* places. They are wonderful, but not wonderful in the sense that the term is generally used. They do not present a totally upsides down world full of amazing spectacular details. No, a third space is not some kind of "Wonderland"[157]. On the contrary, as stated above, it is a cosy and ordinary place. "As a physical structure, third place is typically plain"[158]. It is not necessarily elegant, and it does not need to be so, as long as it is tranquil and comfortable enough.

Third places are wonderful not for possessing the rarest of the beauties in the world, but for possessing the most common ones, and presenting them to their participants in large amounts and whenever needed. Thanks to the inspiration of the Louis Armstrong classic, "What a Wonderful World", I find it suitable to compare the experience of enjoying a third place to resting in a rose garden under a tree on a day in which white clouds are happily wandering on the blue sky:

"I see trees of green, red roses too.
...
I see skies of blue, and clouds of white.
...
And I think to myself... what a wonderful world...
The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky" [159]

Furthermore, as the lyrics of the song rightfully suggest, this wonderfulness is only achieved at the presence of dear beloved ones, he indispensable elements in third places, friends:

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[157] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Penguin, 1994).

[158] Oldenburg, p. 36.

[159] George Douglas and George David Weiss, *What a Wonderful World* (US: ABC Records, 1968).

"I see them bloom, *for me and you*.
And I think to myself... what a wonderful world.
...
Also the faces of *people going by,*
I see *friends shaking hands*, say how do you do?
They're really saying, *I love you.*
...
And I think to myself... what a wonderful world
...
Yes I think to myself... what a wonderful world"[160]

The Mood is Playful

Oldenburg states that third places are spaces where frivolity, verbal word play and wit dominate the general mood, and seriousness and rigidity are essentially antagonistic to their vibrant character[161]. So, unlike the work atmosphere where everything is supposed to be done for a purpose, communication is narrowly instrumental and the big aim that dictates all these is the achievement of higher efficiency and better organizational structures, in third places people are free to "just spend" their time, "say stupid things" and "make mistakes". In fact, these are not only tolerated in the relaxed environment of these spaces, but they are also more than welcome. Lapses, slips of the tongue and malapropisms, for instance, do contribute to the playful atmosphere of the conversation in third places.

And the people participating in and contributing to this atmosphere are like playmates. Unlike in the case of the home atmosphere, they do not need to have a metanarrative (like blood bond, kinship, etc.) to keep spending time together. They do come to and keep staying in third places because they are having fun, because

[160] Ibid. The emphasis is mine.

[161] Oldenburg, pp. 37 - 38.

they are relaxed, because they feel that they are understood, because they feel like sharing something, and because it makes them feel good. Being void of the hierarchies in effect in the first and second places, they come to the third place as *equals*, and they *choose* to be together there.

Based on the feeling of belonging to a shared and separate realm, in these places, "joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation"[162]. Yet, the fact that third places are characterized by such traits as joy and frivolity does not mean that serious and significant topics cannot be made part of the conversation in those places. So, it is perfectly possible to talk about "serious issues" in a playful mood, or refer to connotations of verbal play after someone' makes a slip of the tongue.

Theoretically speaking, different combinations of the tone and content of a conversation may exist, and although these two dimensions are potentially correlated, it would be unrealistic to claim the presence of a deterministic relationship between them, and naïve to state that this correlation is unidimensional. The surrealist artists, I believe, demonstrated very well the practical functioning of such a theoretical possibility. Let us just remember Luis Buñuel's groundbreaking movie, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, which radically criticized established institutions such as bourgeois society, the church or the military[163], or Salvador Dali's influential painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, which problematized major philosophical themes such as the irrelevancy of time and the entanglement of life and

[162] Oldenburg, p. 38.

[163] Luis Buñuel Portolés, *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie* (France, Italy, Spain: Dean Film, 1972).

death[164], both of which refused to speak in the conventional realist and "serious tones", but also managed to communicate ideas and feelings about "serious matters".

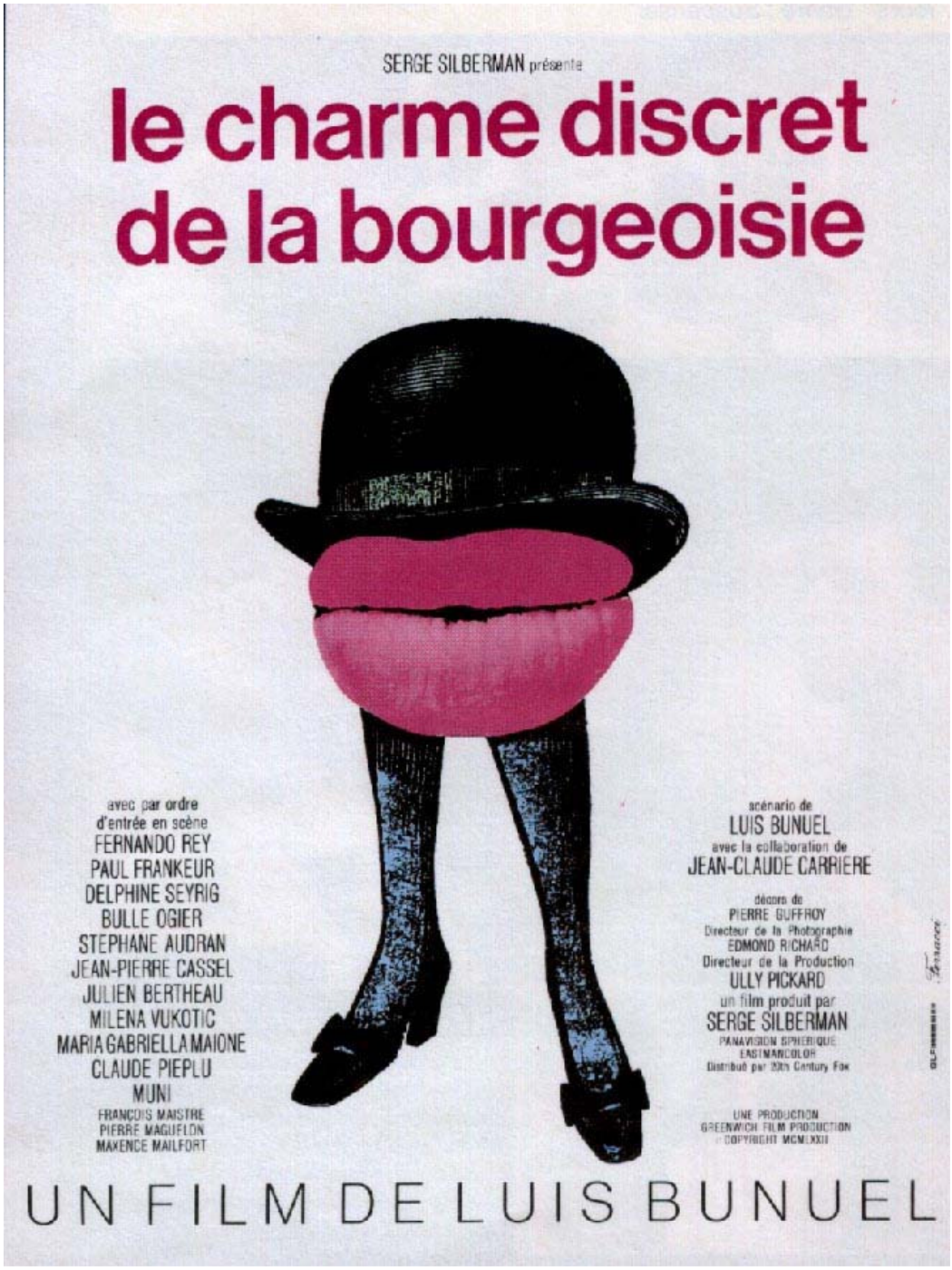

Figure 9: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie"[165]

[164] Salvador Dali, *The Persistence of Memory* (New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1931).

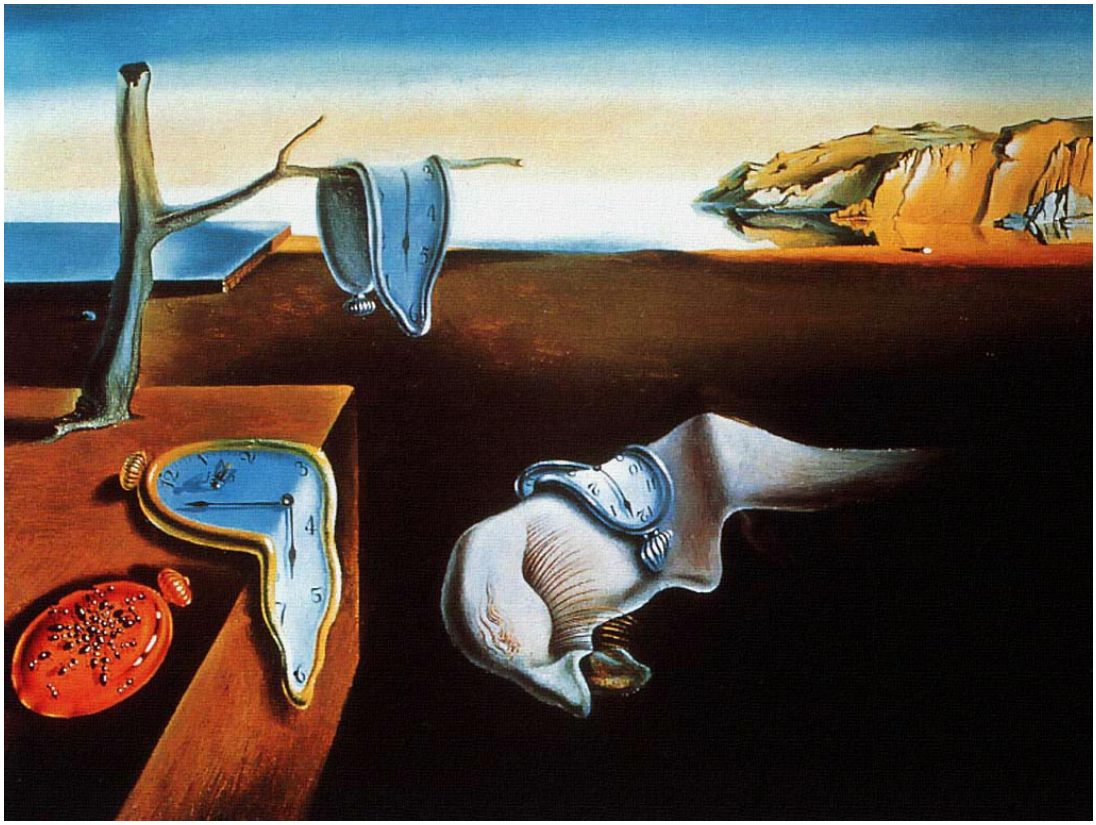

Figure 10: "The Persistence of Memory"[166]

I hope that I have been able to demonstrate up to now the possibility of effective communication about serious issues by using "not so serious tones". Now, I would like to carry this line of thinking to one step forward, and argue that to be able to face any situation (from the most personal one to the biggest issues about humanity) properly, taking a parodizing stance towards it is not only beneficial, but essential. Ece Temelkuran, in her book about the traumatic nature of inability of conversation between the Armenians and the Turks due to the presence of a big black hole in their shared history, the catastrophes of 1915, underlines the necessity of true

[165] A poster of the movie can be reached through the website of Wikicommons: Wikicommons, *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie*. Available [online]: "http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/ea/Discreet_charm_of_the_bourgeoisie_poster3.jpg" [24 August 2009].

[166] A digital reprint of the painting can be reached through the website of Wikicommons Wikicommons, *The Persistence of Memory*. Available [online]: "http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/dd/The_Persistence_of_Memory.jpg" [24 August 2009].

dialogue between the people of the two nations, and this dialogue necessarily includes -apart from feeling sorry for the deep sufferings- transcending unspeakable prejudices by smiling together at jokes told about them[167].

This is not limited to traumas that nations suffer. Let us just think about an emotional affair that left us with a broken heart. At first the pain seems unbearable, then dies down in time, but when does that magic moment come in which one can confidently say that "it does not hurt anymore"? Of course, when one is able to make peace with the memories and is able to parodize the experiences, thoughts and feelings. To talk about one final dimension about the necessity of taking a parodizing attitude, I would like to emphasize that this is exactly how Michel Foucault describes a social scientist's attitude towards history should be parodizing the linearizng narratives on history by tracking accounts of accidents and errors and pointing out the essential disparity of things[168].

A Home Away from Home

Finally, Oldenburg claims that third places are settings where one could find many of the positive things associated with homes, and sometimes these properties are even more available in third places than homes. Drawing on the study of a psychologist, David Seamon, in which he listed the essential characteristics of

[167] Ece Temelkuran, *Ağrı'nın Derinliği* (İstanbul, Everest Yayınları: 2008).

[168] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice : Selected Essays and Interviews. Edited, with an introduction, by Donald F. Bouchard , translated from the French by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1977).

homes, Oldenburg lists five defining traits of home-likeness: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth[169].

So, a third place is a concrete space around which we organize our comings and goings, "where we expect to see familiar faces, and where unusual absences are noticed and queried"[170]. Moreover, we develop a feeling that we in a way belong to the third places we regularly attend and that it belongs to us. This relationship of possession does not take its roots from actual ownership, but out of a sense of appropriation and control over the setting. In the final analysis, regulars of a third place, as Oldenburg states, "are members in good and full standing, a part of the group that *makes* the place"[171]. This situation is not one about abstract feelings, but also come as differences in concrete real-life settings, the regulars of a third place are usually given privileges that transient casual customers do not have, such as extra discounts and special treatment by the staff of the third place in which they hang out.

The third place is also an environment of regeneration for its people who go there, a mental, spiritual and social kind of regeneration. For instance, when people go to a bar, cafe or pub after work, they feel that they are restarting the day in these environments. This is a very wide and easy to observe phenomenon, to see how this functions, it is enough to spend some hours in Nevizade Street[172] on a Friday night in the summer and observe how people's faces turn from stressed and moody expressions into relaxed and cheerful ones, as time approaches to midnight and they leave behind their concerns about their works and enjoy the atmosphere.

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[169] David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (New York: St. Martins's Press, 1979), quoted by Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, pp. 38 - 41.

[170] Oldenburg, p. 39.

[171] Ibid., p. 40.

[172] A street in Taksim, Istanbul, which is full of bars and pubs that mostly students and young professionals attend during of hours.



Figure 11: "Nevizade Street on a Summer Night"[173]

The third space also shares with home environment the property of making it possible for its attendants to have feelings of being at ease. People feel relaxed and comfortable there, and this enables them to enjoy the freedom to be, which involves the active expression of personality, the assertion of oneself within the environment"[174].

Lastly, and according to Oldenburg, most importantly, the third place has a *warm* atmosphere and -considering the lack of warmth experienced in many of the

[173] A night view from Nevizade Street. Available [online]: "http://www.cooltownstudios.com/images/turkey-nevizade_socak1.jpg" [24 August 2009].

[174] Oldenburg, p. 41.

homes unlike how they are supposed to be, and no need to mention that warmth is certainly not an adjective associated with work environments- this makes them indispensable for their regulars. Third places, because of being congenial environments marked by the combination of cheerfulness and companionship that emerge out of friendliness, support and mutual concern, Oldenburg claims are more homelike places than homes themselves[175].

[175] Ibid., p. 41.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTUALIZING ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS AS THIRD PLACES: ANALYSES ON SECOND LIFE AND FACEBOOK

In the preceding chapters, a picture of the social and technical setting in which communication and socialization takes place in the contemporary world was presented, and an elaboration was made on the conceptual tools utilized in the analyses. In this chapter, first the two "places" I have dealt with in my research will be presented, Second Life and Facebook. Then, the results of the research that was carried out will be given and demonstrate why I consider that these sites can (and should) be examined using the theoretical framework that Oldenburg developed for analysing brick-and-mortar third places.

In this part, I am going to demonstrate how and why it is possible and beneficial to conceptualize sites of online interaction as third places. To stay loyal to the integrity of the point-by-point framework that Oldenburg has drawn, I am going to elaborate each of the eight defining characteristics one by one and, by using concrete examples that I have collected throughout my research, try to illustrate the point that I have made.

Neutral Ground

> Third places are neutral grounds where individuals are free to come and go as they please with little obligation or entanglements with other participants[176].

Online sites do not belong to anyone. Or, to be more precise, they have legal owners, the owners of the websites and the software who can claim legal possession over them, but because of the participant nature of collective contribution to these environments, everyone acts *also* as an owner. Just as the fact that a café has an owner does not prevent the participants from feeling that they are on neutral ground, the ownership structure of neither Facebook nor Second Life affects their participants' enjoying of benefiting from these environments in ways that they desire.

Users have full control over many of the properties in these sites. In Facebook, the profile page of a person belongs to, and is controlled directly by, that person. One may choose what to include (which photos to display, which quotes to use to describe the self, which groups, fan pages or causes to join, and even which third party applications to utilize) on the profile page. On the personal home page in Facebook, which is formed by making a combination of data from the user herself and her friends, one may choose to restrict certain people (friends with dissimilar preferences, for instance) or certain type of data flows (like blocking "feeds" sent from a certain application).

[176] Steinkuehler and Williams, p: 8.

Similarly in Second Life, one has almost full control over his avatar (from the sex, race, age, height, weight, facial and bodily hair, to clothes, piercings, tattoos and virtually everything that a body contains) and on the other details of his profile (like "favourite places", "snapshots from memorable instances", "about me" section and etc.). In addition to this, the striking figure about the user-created nature of the digital world of Second Life that I have quoted in the previous part, namely, the fact that more than 90 % of all of the content has been created by the participants themselves, This, I believe, also demonstrates the extent to which this world was *made* by its residents.

To approach the issue from a framework analyzing the nature and different aspects of the concept of possession, I believe it to be fruitful to refer to the Roman Law, which is one of the foundational reference points of contemporary legal systems. According to this legal code, the three rights, namely *usus*, *fructus* and *abusus*, come attached to the possession of a good, which mean the right to use, the right to benefit from fruits and the right to misuse[177]. As far as these three rights are concerned, I find it legitimate to claim that although the users are not the legal owners of the sites on which they participate, they can be to be quasi-owners, as they can enjoy the three rights listed above: They are able to use these media whenever and as much as they desire, they can gain (both monetary and non-monetary benefits from them), and in the unlikely case that they want to use in unwise ways.

Unlike in the case of ownership described in the legal framework, the participants also enjoy the comfort of not having the responsibility to necessarily have to care about what is going on within the environment, or as Oldenburg puts it,

[177] Turhan Esener, *Turkish Business Law* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2000).

"play host" for anyone[178]. Correspondingly, even if they wished to exercise such power, it would not be possible as nobody has the authority over other users by controlling the periods or ways of their participation.

Up this point I have tried to demonstrate how the "neutral ground" characteristic of third places is created and recreated in the two "places" that I have analyzed. For this, I have from time to time employed a comparative framework contrasting the properties of Facebook and Second Life with first and second places. Apart from them, there is one last dimension I would like to mention related to the voluntary nature of participation stemming from the "neutral ground" characteristic: The communication and interaction in these two environments promote sociability and mutual empathy.

In Second Life, for instance, the general environment I have come across throughout my research was as such: The general user has certain favourite locations. In those locations regulars know each other, and towards outsiders, they have a protective and helpful attitude. Instead of direct benefits from each transaction and relationship, having a mood based on reciprocity, they usually help newcomers learn the skills necessary to participate in the world, or give away objects for each other to use, for instance.

[178] Oldenburg, p. 22.



Figure 12: "A Friend Giving Away "Horses" in a Celebration"[179]

In Facebook, in groups, fan pages, wall posts or responses to status updates, the exchange of good wishes or sentences expressing solidarity is a very common occurrence. During the last days of the writing of this thesis, for instance, I received many private messages inquiring about my progress, wishing me good luck and asking if I were in need of any help[180]. What is more interesting was the use of the two common features of "wall posts" and "status updates". The difference of these two media from a private message is that the communication carried out there is visible to everyone in the friends' list creating a quasi-public space for multi-dimensional communication.

Although very valuable for me, this was an example about the micro or personal type of fraternal ties mediated through Facebook. However, this is by far the only dimension. As will also be argued below, these media also function as

[179] Snapshot from Second Life, by the author.

[180] Using this opportunity, I would like to once again thank everybody who encouraged and supported me during the writing of this thesis.

moderators of social dialogue and political action. Many of the people I interviewed about Facebook stated that their political awareness was increased through the posts made by friends and that witnessing that many people have similar sensitivities and preferences encouraged them to be more actively related to politics.

I would like to mention two instances related to this. The first one is what I name as the Hrant Dink Memorial Activity. On January 19 each year since the assassination of the socialist journalist of Armenian origin[181], Hrant Dink, people change their profile pictures and represent themselves in front of the general public of Facebook with a photograph or a poster of him. This collective action, apart from functioning as a solidarity promoting event among those who are already concerned about the issue, also worked as a kind of a news medium, by carrying the case to the agenda of those who were either totally unaware of the situation, or had forgot about it with the passing of time.

The second instance is related to the nationalist mobilization in Facebook. As Didem Türkoğlu illustrates in her master's thesis, "Snapshots of Popular Turkish Nationalism: Neo-Kemalism, Bestsellers and Facebook," Facebook is also a medium where the mainstreams political orientations are represented, voiced and organized[182]. In her study after tracks of snapshots of Turkish nationalism in different media, she underlines this point by stating that "Facebook has become an important field to claim "popular support" even if it is basically a networking site"[183].

[181] For an idea about the assassination and its aftermath, please see the BBC article available [online]: "http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6279907.stm" [24 August 2009].

[182] Didem Türkoğlu, *Snapshots of Popular Turkish Nationalism: Neo-Kemalism, Bestsellers and Facebook*, Unpublished Master's Thesis (Boğaziçi University Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, 2008).

[183] Ibid., p. 1.

The two examples I have quoted above, although belonging to different and even opposing political orientations, can be collected under the common denominator of having some kind of popular awareness and support before having been made an issue on the Internet. The example that I am going to mention now, however, is quite an opposite case: The groups formed in Facebook to publicize the terrible conditions under which a branch of textile workers, jean-sanding workers, in Turkey, works. This was an issue that was not covered extensively in the mass media until quite recently. However, the Facebook group supporting their struggle for survival has already been founded and functions as an alternative communication and organization medium.



Figure 13 "The Home Page of the "Solidarity with Jean-Sanding Workers Group"[184].

Before continuing my analyses with Oldenburg's second characteristic of third places, "being a leveler", I would like to make a final remark about the first

[184] Snapshot from Facebook, by the author. This page is available [online]: http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=30264517688#/event.php?eid=86807768548&ref=ts" [24 August 2009].

characteristic, “being on neutral ground”. First of all, as might already be noticed, I have tried to take the notion in the widest possible range of the term, touching upon connotations in many instances. Apart from trying to be fair towards this crucial characteristic by paying it all the attention it deserves -by including neighbouring concepts, connotations and postulates in my comments-, I also had the aim of trying to present an idea of the very high limits of where mediating on these media can lead to. I believe(d) that the most suitable heading under which such mediation is most meaningful would be the first one of all the eight characteristics. However, I should also note that all the ideas and concerns that have been voiced under the heading of this part are essentially critically related to the “neutral ground” characteristic of third places in general -and of Facebook and Second Life, in particular.

Leveler

Up to now, I have tried to demonstrate how the “neutral ground” characteristic of third places is in effect in Second Life and Facebook touching the aspect from different dimensions. In particular, I have stressed the two consequences arising from the fact that these sites do not belong to a subset of users but are enjoyed collectively and non-exclusively: 1) nobody has to necessarily care for what is going on within the environment, or “play host” for anyone, 2) related to the previous aspect, nobody would be -even if they desired so- capable of exercising authority over others’ patterns of participation.

Because of this, unlike the case in first and second places, established hierarchies do not exist in those two media. Please note that by this I do not intend to mean that no hierarchies exist within these media. Claiming such a thing would not

only be inconsistent with the suggestions of what a whole body of social sciences literature suggests, but also in nonconformity with the observations of my research about these sites. My point is that hierarchies exist, but they are not based on relationships of seniority or traditional family roles (as in the case of first places), or power stemming explicitly from the formal organization of duties and responsibilities (as in the case of second places), but out of the charisma of some of the participants from the viewpoints of the general population of users, on a meritocratic basis. For instance, in Second Life, the moderators of groups, the designers of shops, islands or those with better technical skills and / or local knowledge of this digital world are more respected (everyone wants to make friends with them, when they are present in a group, they are the main focus of attention, they are kind of trendsetters, etc) than ordinary participants.

So, in these media, fewer hierarchies exist and because they are based on charisma and meritocracy, they have a dynamic, freer nature based on more equal terms. In my opinion, the most important reason underlying such a condition is the "neutral ground" characteristic of both Second Life and Facebook that I have elaborated above. A second, yet highly interrelated one is the voluntary nature of contribution in these sites. Since anyone who is not happy at all with what is going on in these "places" can leave instantly, unlike in the case of the first and second places, for the sustainability of these sites they have to function in ways so that users will find staying more attractive than leaving at any given time. The way for this, as far as I have observed, is "collective decision-making whenever possible" over issues that have a potential for disagreements.

In Facebook groups, for instance, after a group has been created, the remaining content is generated by the collective effort of the members. Members

write to the "wall" of the group, they post photos and videos, they make comments on previously added material, and even invite other friends to join them. When they feel that somebody is disturbing the general mood of their group, they voice their concerns, and if this is repeated, they can even get the "unwanted member" thrown out.

A similar mechanism is in effect on Second Life, with even more space for active users for affecting the content. Participants' collective preferences contribute to the local decisions in a potentially very influential way: From the general rules and regulations in effect at a certain place, to the kind of music playing there and even to collective organized action. Based on this, it is possible to come up with the usual point against democracy claiming that the majority eventually dictates its preferences in such a setting. But, this is not the case here, directly because of the voluntary nature of participation in a setting within the general sites of both Facebook and Second Life.

These patterns of participation, I believe, are in perfect conformity with the "leveler" characteristic of third places, in which -as argued above- an individual's rank and status in the workplace or society at large are of no import and acceptance and participation are not contingent on any prerequisites, requirements, roles, duties, or proof of membership[185].

Conversation Is the Main Activity

I have argued above, based on the inspiration from Oldenburg, that third places are spaces where conversation is a main focus activity, and that because of the

[185] Steinkuehler and Williams, p: 8.

neutral ground (everyone being free to participate without entanglements) and leveler (participating sides considered to be equal) characteristics of third places, they function as a kind of *agora,*, enabling a meritocratic socialization environment. This characteristic is perhaps the most easily suitable one among the eight defining traits of third places, as long as the two sites that I have analysed are concerned.

Taking also into account the modification I have suggested (claiming that, instead of just *conversation*, *communication* and *interaction* should be taken as the main activities in third places), I believe that this postulate fits the online third places that I have analyzed. This is so, first of all, because of the fact that the main activities in these sites are "typing" and "reacting to what others have typed".

So, language, the basic element of communication, is the main mediator in these environments: Users type private messages to each other in both Second Life and Facebook. They type what they want to say out loud to large audiences in a public places in Second Life, they type their comments to others' statuses and shared links in Facebook, they type wall posts to groups conversations, etc.

But that is even not the whole story. Using the wider definitions of communication and interaction (such including in these categories diverse actions the blink of an eye or the nodding of a head even in situations where no single word has been said), it is acknowledged that almost every action a user makes on those sites is also an element of this set. For instance, the use of the "I like this" button after a friend has shared a link, a comment, a picture, video, etc. in Facebook is a way of transmitting messages to that person and to the general participants of this environment.

This observation of mine has also been verified by the statements of the interviewees I talked to about Facebook and Second Life. Second Life users stated

that the act of making their avatars dance harmoniously meant more to them than just moving their bodies together, and involved the implicit exchange of feelings of togetherness, friendship and community. Similarly, those talking about their Facebook experiences stated that many non-written aspects of the medium actually involved the exchange of messages about the general nature of their relationships, as well specific feelings they had in particular times. An example of this situation is the *poking* action. Interviewees have reported that, by the use of a "Poke this person" button, they are able to send the message, "I am thinking of you at the moment, I wish we could be together now". And reacting to the poke with a counter-poke would mean "I am feeling the same way".

So, as seen in the examples of different instrumentalities of communication in these two digital third places, the communication and interaction are basically the two motivations in Second Life and Facebook. While some of them involve more verbal modes, in others other factors are also in effect. Yet, what is common in all those instances is the fact that as a result of their participation in these sites, individuals are able to dispel moods of isolation and loneliness, and replace them with feelings of connectedness and being together.

And perhaps the strongest enabling factor for this is the *practicality of the experience* itself. Just like individuals were once able to envision the concept of nationhood based on their practice of reading the daily newspapers[186], I would argue that the actions, thoughts and feelings (of sitting in front of a computer, looking into the screen, typing out thoughts and feelings with the keyboard, sharing them in Second Life or Facebook, and, of course, seeing through their screens and deducing that others are doing exactly the same) that come as a by-product of participating in

[186] A point whose macrosociological effects (the possibility of "imagining a community", for instance) have been demonstrated in Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

these environments contribute very much to the general atmosphere of connectedness and togetherness in these digital third places.

Accessibility & Accommodation

I argued in the previous chapter that for a potential third place to be able to function properly, access to it should not be too costly (using the term in the widest sense so that it includes the opportunity cost of time, as well), and the place should be able to "welcome" its potential participants independent of the nature of the modality of their visits. Oldenburg stated this situation as follows: "Access to them must be *easy* if they are to survive and serve, and the ease with which one may visit a third place is a matter of both time and location[187]" drawing our attention to the availability of third places in terms of both time and place constraints.

The underlying reason for this argument comes from the fact that people already spend most of their time in the basic institutions of home, work or school and that third places can accommodate people only when they are released from their responsibilities in these places. Thus, claims Oldenburg, "[t]hird places must stand ready to serve people's needs for sociability and relaxation in the intervals *before*, *between*, and *after* their mandatory appearances elsewhere."[188]

Behind this seemingly straightforward observation lies the source from which third places derive their power: their potential to create an alternative locality of spiritual and mental regeneration. This is valid for all kinds of third places, including the online environments that I have been analysing. However, with digital third

[187] Oldenburg, p. 32.

[188] Ibid., p. 32. Emphasis mine.

places, there is more, much more than that! Yes, these sites, too, serve people's needs for sociability and relaxation in the intervals "*before*, *between*, and *after* their mandatory appearances elsewhere"[189], but they also serve these needs *within* those appearances!

Thanks to the developments in the digital communication and interaction technologies, it is not only a theoretical possibility, but also frequently used opportunity to enjoy participating in these environments *at* home, *at* work or *at* school! Among the people I have interviewed about Facebook, everyone who has access to Internet at work, stated that they logged into Facebook from their work environments. I also witnessed many status quotes either claiming this directly such as "Ali Desidero is @ office" or stating their location implicitly by such quotes as "Ayşe Teyze … could still not leave her desk" [190]. Interestingly, the use of Facebook at work was even made an issue by a labour organization: In United Kingdom TUC, the national trade union centre in the UK, representing the vast majority of organized workers stated that "[w]orkers should be given time to use social networking websites such as Facebook in their offices"[191]. Similarly Patricia Wallace, author of the 2004 book "The Internet in the Workplace: How New Technology Is Transforming Work", underlines the fact that employees have found ways to alleviate their work loads by making small escapes to Internet sites[192].

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[189] Ibid., p. 32.

[190] The names have been modified by the author.

[191] An article covering the story can be reached through the online magazine, Mail Online: Mail Online, *Let Workers Use Facebook during Office Hours*, Say Union Bosses. Available [online]: "http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-478699/Let-workers-use-Facebook-office-hours--say-union-bosses.html" [24 August 2009]

[192] Patricia Wallace, *The Internet in the Workplace: How New Technology Is Transforming Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

What can be said about Second Life regarding this issue? First of all, the aforementioned situation is certainly not specific to Facebook. Many of my interviewees stated that they log into Second Life from their offices. However, proportionally speaking, the use of Second Life in work environments is less common than the use of Facebook. This is probably related to the fact that Second Life, because of being an audio-visual world based mostly on spontaneous interaction, requires more concentration and larger periods of time than the mostly text based and Facebook, in which asynchronous modes of communication mostly dominate.

What is interesting about the patterns of participation in Second Life,, however, is that a great majority of all that is going on within this world takes place during the night time, which the users are mostly at home. An important proportion of my interviewees stated the period between dinner and bed time as their regular hours to log onto the computer. This phenomenon can be easily observed even by making rough comparisons between the numbers of participants in many of the places inside the digital world of Second Life at different times of the day. Similarly, most scheduled events -such as parties, celebrations, weddings, competitions- take place during these hours. This shows that the digital world of Second Life, which I have claimed functioning mostly the way third places do, is enjoyed mostly when people are in their homes, first places. The case that I have named as *evkızları*, the young women who are not usually allowed to go out during nights by their parents, that I have mentioned in the previous chapters is also an example of this phenomenon.

Another theoretical possibility arises by the interesting combination of physical and digital third places. It is perfectly possible for an individual to log into

Second Life or Facebook, while he (or to be more precise, his actual body) is in a brick-and-mortar third place. It must be noted that although some of my interviewees stated that they had had such experiences and although I personally observed people logging into Facebook using their laptops in various cafes in Istanbul, I should note that this is still a weak trend among the users. But it must also be noted that although still weak, this trend is growing fast.

All these possibilities suggest that the digital sites of Facebook and Second Life not only function as third places in terms of the characteristic analyzed in this section, but also function even better than traditional physical third places. Another dimension related to this phenomenon is the potential effect of such developments in transforming the traditional categorizations that have been utilized in defining and separating different places from each other. An office environment, for instance, in which a worker can communicate and interact with her friends from all over the planet or enroll in another (and digital) world, would definitely be different from the ones on which Oldenburg made his conceptualizations. A similar line of reasoning is also valid for home environments and even traditional third places themselves.

The Regulars

The crucial role that regulars play in the functioning of third places was explained in the previous chapter: they are the tone-setters of their environments, they attract newcomers, keep the participants in touch and give the spaces their characteristic moods. They help feelings of togetherness bloom among participants, contribute to the creation of safer places based on mutual trust, and, most

importantly, they enable the formation of common languages belonging to the third spaces in which they participate.

Based on my cyberetnographies, it can be claimed that both in Second Life and Facebook all that has been pointed out above is fully in effect. However, although those elements function in both sites, they function differently. The biggest difference -and probably the one from which all the others are born- is the difference of the two media in terms of the scale dimension of their third space characteristics. I would simply argue that while Second Life can be conceptualized better as an "umbrella third space" in which all different localities (all audio-visual settings such as cafes, clubs and even whole islands) function as third places in their own, Facebook is to be understood as a single third place (although it is not perceived in exactly the same way by every one of its contributors) that has subsets some of which possess some of the characteristics of third places, but never all at the same time.

This claim of mine, of course, is among other things related to the fact that Second Life is a world (although a digital one, still a world with an internal consistency of physical laws). Because of this, a subset of it would still be able to refer to a locality (although virtual). For Facebook, on the other hand, the metaphorical use of the notion of "place" is deeper: Not only due to the fact that it is not an actual place (a property also present in Second Life), but also because it is not even a "place" in a digital world. Why, then, to insist on trying to think about this environment within Oldenburg's concept of third places? The answer is simple for me: The basic motivation for Oldenburg in distinguishing these categories was based on their functions. Not only Second Life, but also Facebook manage to possess the eight defining characteristics of Oldenburg, and when passed through the

"functionality filter", manage to qualify as third places (and, I would argue that they would even function better than actual third places in many instances).

Hoping to have made clear once again my *pragmatic* intentions underlying the insistence of my conceptualizations, let me now try to concretize how and why "the regulars" characteristic is satisfied in these two sites, and then focus on the essential difference between them that I have suggested above as well as its postulates. So, let me first go one by one and then make a comparison between the two sites. Let me start with Second Life.

All of the people I corresponded with stated that they had favourite locations in Second Life where they spent most of their time. They have furthermore added that in those places, they were more or less able to expect whom to come across. Part of this phenomenon is related to the fact that there are so-called owners and managers in each place in Second Life. Even the so-called public places, streets, parks and even the digital replica of the Blue Mosque and the square surrounding it, in fact have owners. And these owners and managers of localities are most of the time present in these environments. Apart from that, there are also others who have neither official possession nor organizational responsibility, but spend most of their time in their favourite locations. Most people who come and go to these places know them and they are in touch with a majority of them.



Figure 14: "Ramadan Celebration at the Blue Mosque"[193]

The domination of the places by the regulars is even more straightforward in Facebook. This is so, firstly because of the fact that the whole idea underlying Facebook is based on the interaction with regulars, *the regulars of our lives*. In Facebook one is able to interact with "friends" in many ways such as instant messages, asynchronous messages, photo and video posts, wall writings and status updates, and in all of these, the messages are sent to and received from the regulars of that user's actual and/or virtual life.

But the most crucial dimension of Facebook in terms of keeping in touch with the regulars is directly the home page. On the home page, all the recent activity of not only the user but also his friends are displayed chronologically. This includes all the elements described in the previous paragraph and the responses that other friends give to them. This means that whenever a user logs onto Facebook or whenever he reloads the page, he is provided with various kinds of data from friends (some from

[193] Snapshot by the author.

close friends, some from more distant ones and some -although very little compared to the other two categories- from just people added in Facebook without having prior knowledge in real life. Please see below the snapshots from my homepage in Facebook that I have divided into five consecutive parts.

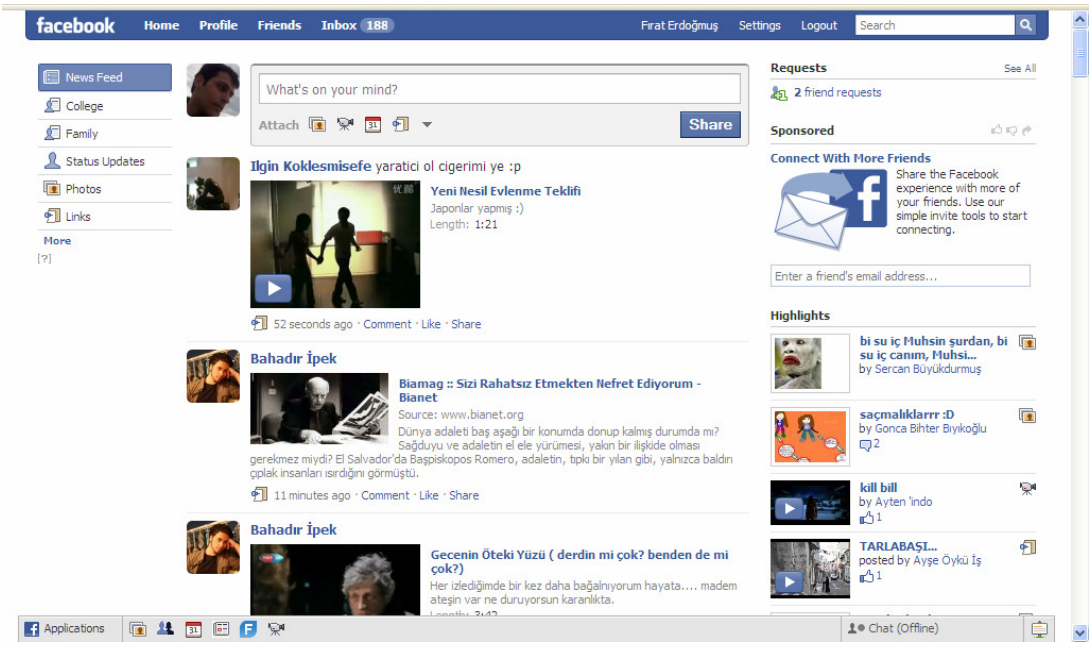

Figure 15: "Snapshots from My Facebook Homepage - Part 1"[194]

[194] Snapshot by the author.

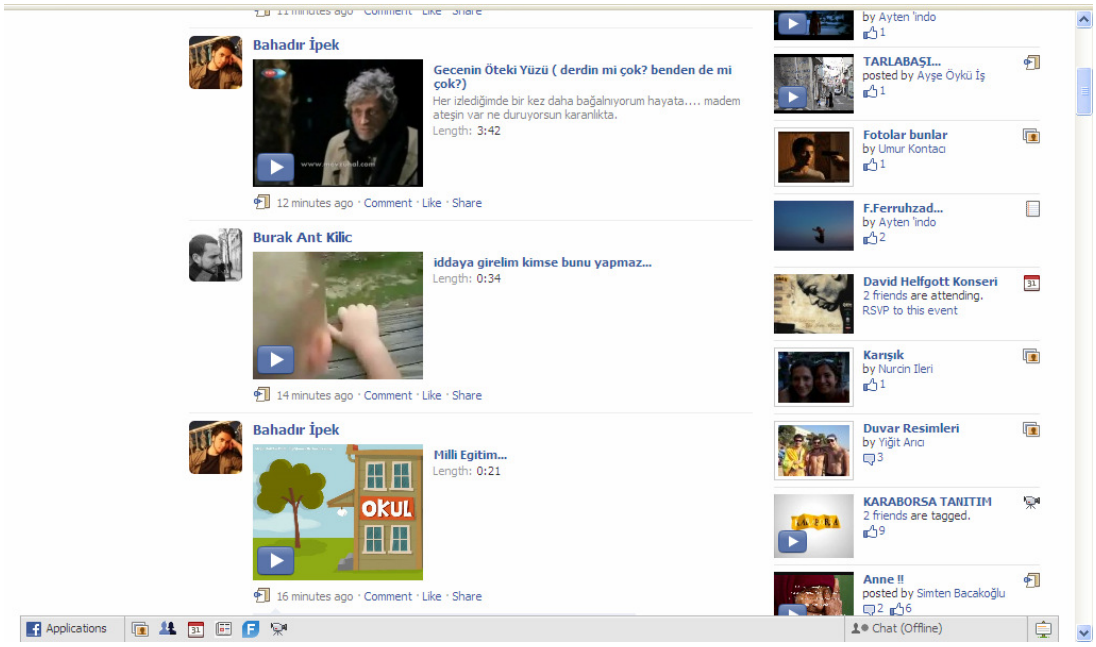

Figure 16: "Snapshots from My Facebook Homepage - Part 2"[195]

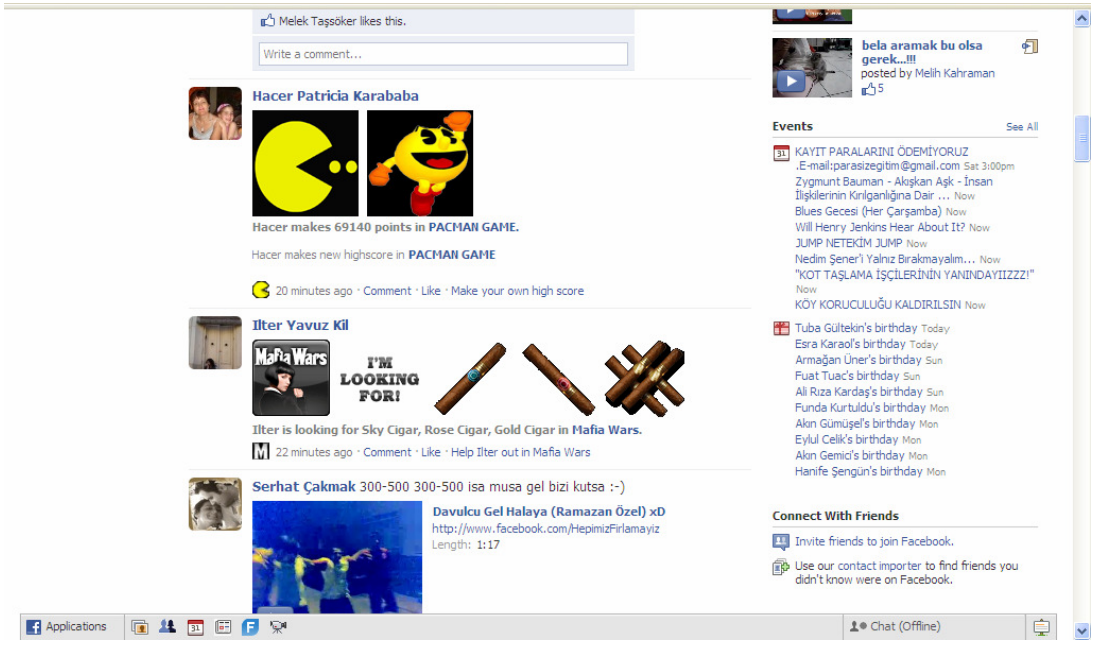

Figure 17: "Snapshots from My Facebook Homepage - Part 3"[196]

[195] Snapshot by the author.

[196] Snapshot by the author.



Figure 18: "Snapshots from My Facebook Homepage - Part 4"[197]



Figure 18: "Snapshots from My Facebook Homepage - Part 5"[198]

[197] Snapshot by the author.

[198] Snapshot by the author.

Let me now pass on to my general analyses about the relationship of regulars in these two media and the accumulation of social capital. I have elaborated in the previous sections Pierre Bourdieu's framework about different forms of capital acquired at the individual level and argued that both Second Life and Facebook function in such a way that they enable individuals to accumulate social capital. Yet, referring to the two types of social capital, Robert Putnam suggests, *bridging* and *bonding*, I argue that they function differently[199].

Second Life seems to function more as a kind of bridging environment. Putnam states that bridging social capital functions as a kind of social lubricant that make individuals from different social backgrounds come together. Although it does not help very much for the creation of stronger ties among individuals based on which emotional support is provided to each other in a long-term reciprocal relationship, it is beneficial for enabling access to new information sources, broader social horizons and different world views[200].

This nature of the digital world of Second Life arises from a combination of reasons such as the anonymity and spontaneousity of the interaction, the fact that the users within the same locality may belong to different backgrounds, are from different cities, different age groups and education levels. Although this situation does not keep the users from socialization with each other, it limits and shapes the tone and deepness of the dialogues between them. An important outcome of this situation is the fact that people who have become friends in Second Life (those who communicate with each other almost regularly in this digital world) rarely see each other in the offline contexts of the actual world, while those corresponding via

[199] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

[200] Ibid.

Facebook either already see each other as parts of their routines (as in the case of family members, classmates, co-workers, etc), or they especially organize meetings to be able to see each other

So, for Facebook, the picture is quite the opposite, and the dominant type of social capital accumulated through participating in Facebook is the "bonding" type. In contras to the bridging type, Putnam describes the bonding social capital to be exclusive, occurring when strongly tied individuals provide substantive emotional support for each other through continued reciprocity[201]. And although it enables the creation of stronger personal connections and contributes to the strengthening of social bonds established already within communities, it indirect leads to an atmosphere with less diversity in terms of worldviews, narrower horizons, and sometimes even insularity[202].

The basic reason is that Facebook, from its very foundation as an environment connecting students of the Harvard University[203], is based on the idea of "networks" and functioning essentially as a medium to connect those who are part of the same network in the actual, offline world. Every user who registers with Facebook enters personal information to the software about her already established networks (education, current occupation, hometown, current location, and etc). So, the site partly functions based on the notion of shared histories.

But, if *shared histories* is one of the founding blocks of Facebook, *proximity in terms of preferences* is definitely the other. Both of these are exemplified in the "suggesting function" of Facebook. When logged into the homepage, the software

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[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

[203] *Facebook Official Company Timeline.* Available [online]: "http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?founderbios=#/press/info.php?timeline" [24 August 2009].

automatically suggests users a variety of things, people that they may know, groups that they might like, celebrities of whom they might be fans. The interesting thing is that a great majority of my interviewees reported that the software was unexpectedly right in the guesses that it made. And the underlying twofold logic is quite simple: 1) if an important number of your friends know a person, you might probably know her, too (shared histories reference), 2) if those with similar preferences as you have a certain taste for something, then, you might probably like it (proximity in terms of preferences).

A Low Profile

As explained in the previous chapter, third places are usually plain and homely environments to which pomposity, exaggerated elegance and pretension do not belong to. This being the case, the communication in these environments is marked by transparency, openness and sincerity. As long as the two digital media I have analyzed area concerned, the fulfilment of this characteristic is not easy to directly grasp. This is so, first of all, because of the fact that the interaction through the digital world (by the use of Internet, computers, screens, mousse and keyboards) automatically mean that there is *extra* mediatedness in the nature of this communication[204]. When exposed to a funny joke, a participant in these environments -to be able to show to the others that she has enjoyed the joke and is

[204] Please note that I have deliberately chosen to use the term "extra" in this sentence,, because, unlike what the commonsense tells us, the offline life is far from being unmediated. Yet, I believe that the presence in the digital communication of extra devices through which we perceive (such as a monitor or a speaker) and of those through which we express ourselves (such as a mouse, a webcam or a keyboard) adds another dimension of mediatedness that is not present in the actual world.

laughing or smiling- needs to type or to use her mouse to animate her avatar so as to be able to express herself.

This is the common reason behind the mediated nature of both Facebook and second Life. Apart from this common mediatedness, there are the individual reasons in both of these sites that seem to have the potential to undermine openness and transparency. In Facebook, for instance, as argued above, the axis of self-presentation and identity construction works such that people present and construct themselves as being closer to their hoped-for-possible selves than offline environments. From one point of view, this could be taken as a sign of pretension and insincerity. As for Second Life, the situation seems to be even weirder. I explained in the previous sections how easy it is in this digital world to play with identities and assume a totally different body and claim to be a totally different type of person just at the cost of a few hits on one's keyboard. From such a point of view, it does not seem to be a kind of medium in which openness, transparency and sincerity dominate, does it?

I argue that it actually is, and so is Facebook -although the reasons making this claim accurate are different from one another. Because of this, I will elaborate each of these two environments on its own, and after depicting the different factors and forces in effect in each one of these, try to explain why I still believe that -despite all these factors- both Facebook and Second Life are cozy spaces marked by low profiles and sincere and transparent modes of communication.

Let me start with Facebook. The first thing to note about Facebook is definitely the simplicity of the site in terms of layout, design, choice of colours and, etc[205]. Although Facebook is in fact a customizable medium, unlike most other

[205] Actually it would be inaccurate to claim that Facebook has had the same layout and graphical properties since the time it was founded. It has gone through many changes (some of them

customizable media such as *blogs* or *myspace* pages[206], the change of layout is very limited in Facebook. After all, this is an environment in which it is not even possible to change the background colour or the fonts of the letters unless one knows how to use scripts.

This was about the simplicity and plainness dimension in Facebook. But what could be said about the more crucial ones such as openness and acting without pretension? It would be naïve to claim that the dynamics of interaction in Facebook automatically ensure the presence of an environment possessing those characteristics. But, although not an automatic one, there are factors that feed this tendency. As I was in most of the cases that I analyzed, especially for the users who logged into Facebook more frequently and spend more time there, it is possible to create a quite sincere and open environment.

After all, in Facebook one is able to reveal information about all aspects of one's life, working conditions, family issues, future plans, general moods, relationships, friends, backgrounds, etc. Besides, the amount of transferred data is so much that after some point, sincerity is like the only option that people can have, as it would be too difficult to sustain a false narrative with that much of input. Those inputs are not only fed by the users themselves, but are also contributed by the friends in Facebook (as a wall post, or the uploading of a picture for instance).

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minor ones, some bigger and more influential). However, the simplicity -although many more features have been added to the site since then- is one of the properties that was kept, independent of the changes in the website.

[206] See the sites Blogger, Wordpress or Myspace for instance, which can be reached, respectively:

Blogger. Available [online]: "http://www.blogger.com" [24 August 2009].

Wordpress. Available [online]: "http://www.wordpress.com" [24 August 2009].

Myspace. Available [online]: "http://www.myspace.com" [24 August 2009].

So, the more people use Facebook (the more data they send and the more feedback they receive through it, the more they manage to make Facebook a routine, ordinary and expected part of their lives), and the more able it is function as a third place. This is where the agency of the users of this site enters the picture. Depending also on their circumstances and the contingencies of their specific conditions, they can choose whether to utilize Facebook as a kind of third place, where denser, sincerer and more frequent interactions are present, or to use it just as a simple stage to make their shows (their quests through what they would like to be seen like) go on. This is actually quite similar to what Oldenburg defines as one of the necessary conditions for the functioning of brick-and-mortar third places:

> The contributioon that third places make in the lives of people depend upon their incorporation into the everyday stream of existence[207].

How about in Second Life? Most of the details listed above for Facebook are not valid for Second Life. First of all, it is an anonymous environment. Leaving aside deep personal details such as background and personal connections, it is not even known for sure who the person owning the avatar that one is interacting is. But, both my personal experience in this digital world and the statements of the people I have corresponded with show that this situation actually turns out to be an encouraging factor for creating sincere, open modes of communication.

Because of the lack of the danger to lose connections with people in a community (which is highly effective in all nonymous contexts, including, of course, the interactions with the people in the actual world), people can express themselves more freely in this environment. For instance, one of the people I came across in

[207] Oldenburg, p. 37.

Second Life stated in the forth sentence of our conversation that he was a gay man. When he learned that I am not a homophobic, he started talking about even more intimate details about himself. It is hard to even imagine such a sincere dialogue taking place in actual life contexts.

Of course, for the same reasons, there is the risk of misrepresenting oneself (as the reality-checking option of others is highly limited). But, what I have witnessed again and again was that as people log into Second Life more frequently and more regularly, they start forming an internally coherent identity (whether it does or does not correspond with that person's actual identity is not an issue here, as what matters is the internal consistency of the characters who enter relationships based on sincerity).

This situation is most visible in the appearances of locations within Second Life and the looks of the avatars. Although virtually anything is possible in this digital world, what I have over and over observed is that the most popular locations among the users from Turkey look like actual-world places (some of them even referring explicitly to them, such as the digital replicas of the Clock Tower of Izmir, the square around the Blue Mosque, or the famous night club Reina). Similarly, the avatars -while they can be anything from a mythological creature to a science-fiction character- of those that are regulars in this world are extraordinarily human (although probably more good-looking than ordinary humans). So, I believe that what Oldenburg claimed about the brick-and-mortar third places, namely the positive correlation between he regularity of participation as well as "incorporation into the everyday stream of existence" and their "low-profile" characteristic is verified in the case of Second Life users from Turkey that I analyzed.

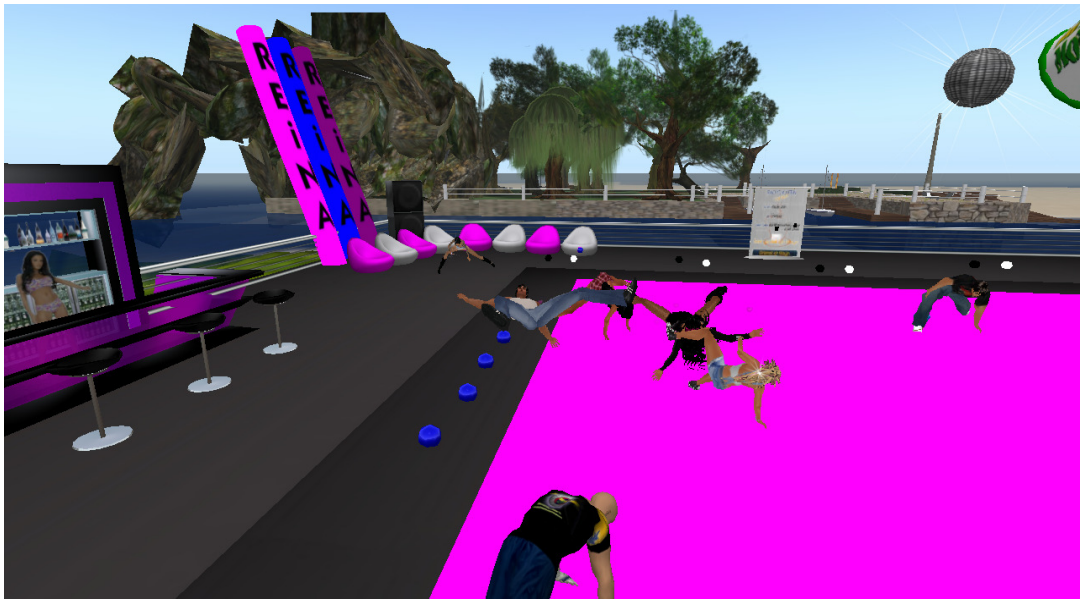

Figure 19: “People Clubbing in *Reina* in Second Life”[208]



Figure 20: “The Clock Tower of Izmir in Second Life”[209]

[208] Snapshot by the author.

[209] Snapshot by the author.

The Mood is Playful

A playful mood is one of the most-straightforward characteristics of third places as far as the two sites that I am interested in particular, and all the digital third spaces in general, are concerned. This is not only due to the strong fact that computers, the Internet and interaction through the Internet have always been associated (by both the users as well as the non-users of these media) with games and playfulness. This can sometimes lead to such strong misconceptions and lapses of the tongue that it is not uncommon for a non-user to ask a Second Life resident if he has *played* Second Life recently[210].

Yet, although wrongly used many times, I believe that the play element in these media is quite effective, and even one of the most important factors that give them the attractivity in the eyes of those using them. First of all, they are fun: Everyone (both from Facebook and Second Life) that I have asked about their motivations for participating in these environments listed this among the factors. Some (probably the more self-aware ones) also reported that they provided relaxation and functioned as "escapes" from their boring routines. Facebook, for instance, is now the subject of a joke among a group of Boğaziçi University graduate students: "When there is no other opportunity for procrastination, Facebook is there to help you"[211].

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[210] This has happened to me so many times for instance. And based on Tom Boellstorff's monograph on Second Life, I understand that it is a very common phenomenon. For the monograph, please refer to: Tom Boellstorff, *The Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[211] At this point I have to admit being part of this community myself, as well. And I am referring to both the community among which this joke is popular, and, unfortunately, the community of procrastinators through Facebook. Actually, there is a group about procrastination called the "Institute for Advanced Procrastination Studies" of which I am a member, and a discussion forum within the group called "Myspace-Facebook Professorship of Social Network Procrastination". These are available, respectively, [online]:

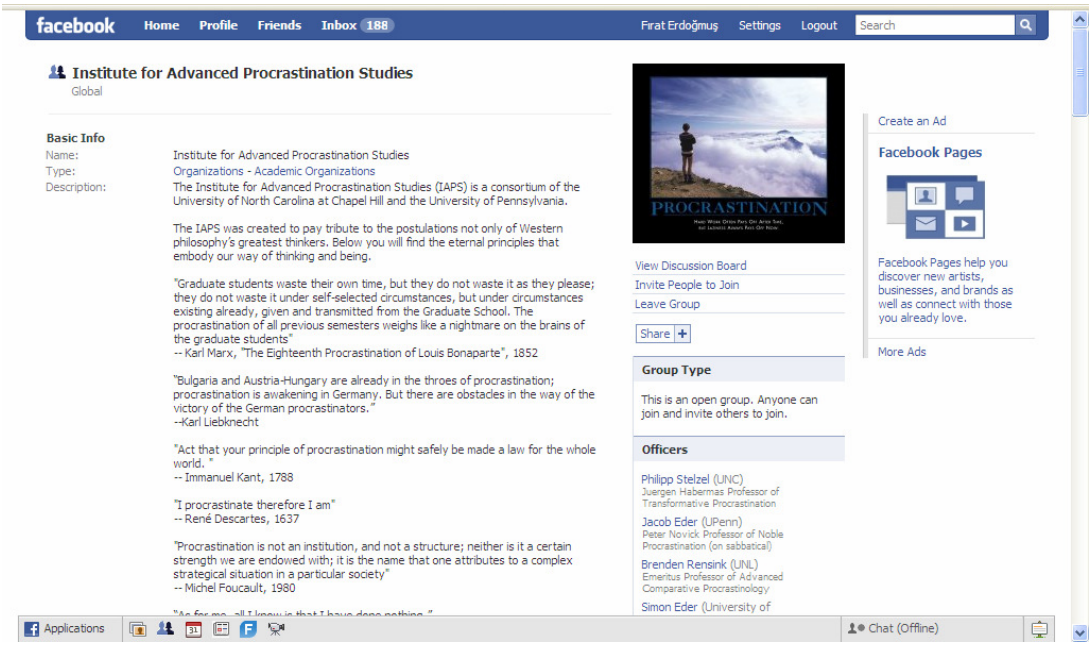

Figure 21: "The Institute for Advanced Procrastination Studies"[212]

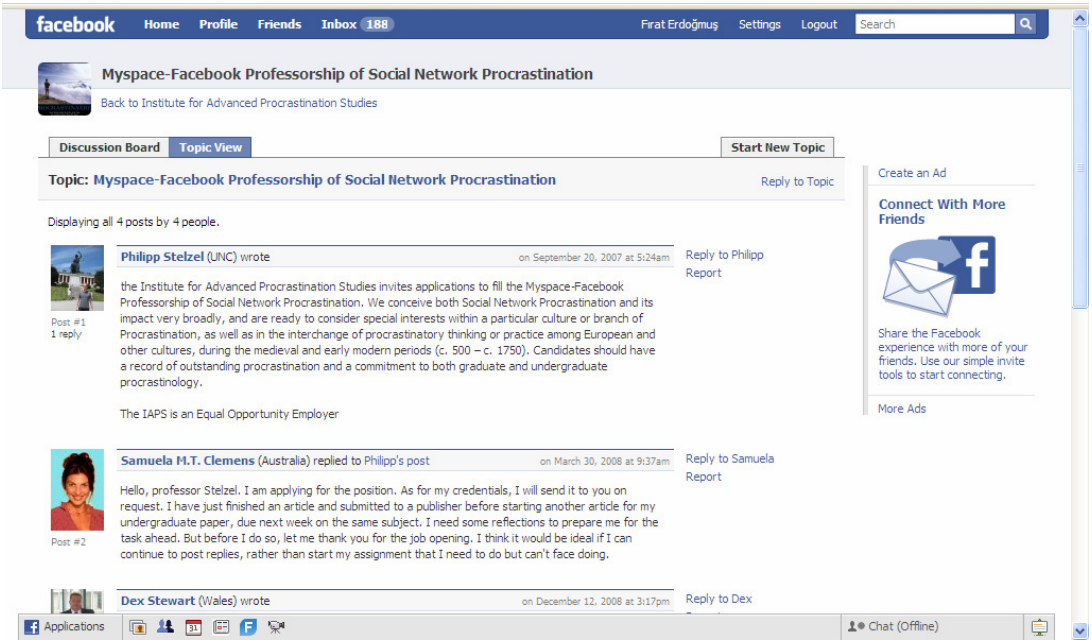

Figure 22: "Myspace-Facebook Professorship of ... Procrastination"[213]

"http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=4856847961&topic=8608#/group.php?gid=4856847961" [24 August 2009].
"http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=4856847961&topic=8608" [24 August 2009].

[212] Snapshot by the author.

[213] Snapshot by the author.

The other important reason is related to the concept of "play" and our relationship with it. Johan Huizinga, who wrote extensively about the "play element of culture" sets the scene of the play in his book, Homo *Ludens*, by identifying three characteristics that play must have: "Play is free, is in fact freedom", "play is not ordinary or real life, "play is distinct from ordinary life both as to locality and duration"[214]. So, play needs a place and time of its own, or as Oldenburg puts it while relating the concept to his argumentation about third places, its own "playgrounds ... temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart"[215].

Having acknowledged this, one is faced with the tremendousness of the opportunity digital sites create to users. It has been argued above, in chapter about the setting how speed has become a factor dominating our lives. Given this, and the possibility of being part of any environment within the digital web literal at cost of just one click of the mouse in milliseconds, we are provided with the opportunity to make easy escapes to the playgrounds of Second Life or Facebook. What is more, as I have argued above, is the opportunity of being able to participate in these environments not only *before*, *between* or *after* people's presence in other environments (such as school, work or home), but also *within* them.

A Home Away From Home

I noted in the previous chapter that we develop a feeling that we in a way belong to the third places we regularly attend to and that they belong to us. I have

[214] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 7 - 8.

[215] Oldenburg, p. 38.

also stated that a third place is a concrete space around which we organize our comings and goings, "where we expect to see familiar faces, and where unusual absences are noticed and queried" [216]. Lastly, I have demonstrated how third places fulfil the five defining traits of "home" environments (namely, rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth) that Oldenburg suggested with an inspiration from Seamon.

I shall now try to demonstrate why and how I believe the digital third places that I have analysed function in a way to meet these conditions. Let me start by noting that participation is a regular part of daily life for the regular users that I have described above. Because of this, when a resident goes to one of her favourite places in Second Life, she knows whom she will probably meet and that she will be welcomed there by them. Based on the very same reason, exceptional absences are acknowledged and made part of the public conversation when a regular who has not logged in regularly comes back to this digital world.

A similar mechanism is in effect in Facebook as well. The regulars know whose status updates, photo or video uploads, or wall posts they will probably come across when they log in. And when they do not see one of the "usual suspects", they explicitly ask that person if there has been a problem and where he has been. Similarly, those who are missing from the environment for some time feel the need to share some of the reasons behind this and state the peculiarity of the situation. For example, one of my Facebook friends from whom I did not see or hear for some time, after I sent her a message asking where she'd been and why she hadn't been

[216] Ibid., p. 39.

online replied as follows: “Do not even ask! My life has been badly shaken in the last week. I couldn’t even log into Facebook. The situation is that bad...”[217].

So, similar to the conclusion that Steinkuehler and Williams made about massively multiplayer online games, in Second Life and in Facebook, “regularities exist, irregularities are duly noted, and, when concerning the welfare of any one regular, checked into”[218]. This situation creates a sense of rootedness and provides the users with feelings of support and warmth which are usually lacked in not only work environments, but also in homes, and enable the imagination of a “shared sense of home” [219].

I argued above under the “Regulars” heading that it is actually the regular participants that *make* a place. As long as Second Life and Facebook are concerned, this hypothesis is valid not only metaphorically (as in the case of brick-and-mortar third places), but also literally (an unprecedented property). It is, valid metaphorically, because what determines the tone of the conversations, what indirectly affects the type of interactions and what thus shapes the user profile (by attracting new people with similar preferences, or by implicitly making those with quite dissimilar preferences to wish to leave) is the regular cadre of regularly attending users.

What becomes even more interesting, however, is explicit when the phrase is taken in its more literal interpretation. As I explained above, each user’s home page in Facebook is in fact a combination of the feeds from friends that she has chosen to add, herself. Thus, it is actually valid to claim that this environment is *made* by its

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[217] Actually, this is the translated version of the original message in Turkish, which was: *“Sorma! Bir haftadır hayatım altüst oldu, facebook’a bile giremedim, o kadar yani..”*

[218] Steinkuehler and Williams.

[219] Ibid.

contributors. For Second Life, the situation is even more evident, because, as I have noted above, more than 95 % of everything in this environment is user-created content.

As for the other three characteristics, I noted above how Facebook and Second Life are perceived by their users as "escapes" from the boring routines. These two media are able to give their users such a feeling, because of the spiritual regeneration they can provide their participants with. Furthermore, as also argued in this chapter, these environments are able to promote support and mutual concern among their users. This enables a combination of cheerfulness and companionship that contribute to these digital environments' giving their users feelings of warmth. What is more, the cozy nature of these sites that deter pretension and encourage openness and thus create feelings of being at ease. Consequently, when all these effects are combined, the criteria that Oldenburg lists for "a home away from home" are satisfied, and we have environments that equip their participants with the "freedom to be ... [that] involves the active expression of personality, the assertion of oneself within the environment"[220].

[220] Oldenburg, p. 41.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

I discussed two Internet environments in my thesis, Second Life and Facebook. I examined the possibilities of conceptualizing them with Oldenburg's framework about third places. For doing this, I elaborated them one by one and tried to grasp the inner dynamics of these sites, as well as the motivations and perceptions of their participants. I voiced the concerns of social theorists about the problem of the loss of ground for groupings based on feelings of togetherness and on mutual bonds and the corresponding nostalgia among Turkish middle classes for those values. Demonstrating the universality of this situation, I elaborated on the possibility that communication in digital third places could bring about benefits at the personal and societal level.

Second Life (SL) is a real-time textual, audial and visual online environment which enables its users to interact with each other through virtual characters they create, providing a high level of social network experience. As for the relationship of this environment to Turkey, among the grids (lands on which residents hang out and interact) of SL, there are places that claim to represent parts of Turkey, such as Ortaköy, İzmir, Sultanahmet and even a separate Turkey island. In these "places", users from Turkey (whose numbers are roughly estimated to be around some thousands at the moment, but expected to grow significantly soon) participate.

Facebook is a social networking site that enables people to get in touch with others by using the software after logging into it. Through Facebook, people are provided with opportunities to interact with others within the limited time of three

minutes they create at their offices, or while conducting Internet-based research about a topic, or as in the case of the writer of these pages while writing a master's thesis, and perhaps most importantly, without having to give up the comfort of their houses or running the burden of carrying their bodies to the places where they shall meet others.

At the time where Internet communication is becoming the norm, rather than an exception, this trend seems to carry a potential to become even more widespread. At this point, it is important to draw attention to the particular significance Facebook has, with more than 250 million registered users all around the world, whose numbers are still increasing at a tremendous speed. Yet, what is even more significant for social scientists studying Turkish society is the fact that Facebook is the second most visited website in Turkey, with a total number now well over 6 million users.

What I intended, using the aspects about Turkey in the Second Life environment and the users from Turkey in Facebook as the site of my empirical research, was to mediate on the microsociology and the quotidian performance such media have made possible and given access to. In doing this, I considered the online and offline domains in isolation from one another. Quite on the contrary, I elaborated being online and being offline, following the illustrative point Rybas and Gajjala emphasize in their article about digitally mediated identities, as intersecting and interweaving experiences.

In terms of methodology, despite acknowledging the presence of different instrumentalities and different technical (technological, temporal, spatial, etc) dimensions in the digital worlds, as my very use of the term suggests, I elaborated them not as simply texts (in the narrow sense of the term), but as domains quite the

way an ethnographer may define her object of study, having acknowledged that the researcher is to focus on the subjective experience of participating and the dialogic performance of technospatial praxis.

Regarding Facebook, I have argues that the particular type of communication realized through Facebook revolves around the axis of exposing oneself and looking at those that have exposed themselves, enabling the presentation of selves and the construction of identities, through the presence of "eye of the other". I also argued that for the accumulation of social and symbolic capital, Facebook had many advantages that not only environments in offline contexts, but also most of the ones in online contexts lack. I discussed the factors underlying this phenomenon such as the unprecedented benefits and efficiency brought about by information technologies and argued that the concepts of time and space have been transformed as a result of this process.

Then, based on a distinction between now-selves and hoped for possible selves, I argued that the attractiveness of Facebook at the individual level also stems from the playground it provided with regards to the possibility of being represented as closer to the possible-selves than now-selves. Lastly, I described the three characteristics of Facebook, namely, its online and onymous liminality, durability, and interactivity, which I believed enabled Facebook to function efficiently and effectively in the axis of looking and being looked at that made the self-representation and identity construction possible.

Then, in the chapter about Second Life, I elaborated the possibility of seeing this whole world as a text in the wide use of the concept. Then, drawing on the concrete material from my experiences within this world, I noted "the resemblance of the Second Life world to the actual world" as a key property, especially because of

the fact that more than 90 % of this universe has been created by its participants. In an environment with almost no pre-given laws and a freedom to choose among virtually everything, it is significant that in the digital world of Second Life most places resemble actual places on Earth, objects looking like actual objects and avatars -although certainly more aesthetic- inspired directly from real-life human bodies. I argued that this situation might be stemming from people's unsatisfied needs to socialize in ordinary settings -as opposed to fantasy worlds, for instance, and might be related to the opportunities that are lacking in the actual world but are provided in the Second Life universe.

I furthermore pointed out the big area of freedom for self-fulfilment, yet took a stance against the false notion of a self-realized man in the absence of boundaries and limitation, and argued for the existence of *a certain extent* after which individuals are subject to a number of factors. First of all, using Sen's concept of entitlements and capabilities, I argued that factors such as availability of time or the level of technical skills worked as limiting factors.

Furthermore, taking the analyses even deeper and acknowledging the fact that what one is able to accomplish is limited to her imagination, desires and thus her tastes, I claimed, relying on Bourdieu's analyses that forces such as status, race, gender, ethnicity, and of course, class positions are inherently effective in determining aesthetic characteristics, including priorities, preferences and tastes.

Thus, I noted that, based on these reasons, analysing the online context of Second Life has enabled me to draw conclusions not necessarily only about just online contexts, but also about the offline contexts of those participating in the online environments, as well as the relationship with regards to the lives of the participants, between the online and offline contexts.

Then, I moved on to the concept of third places, and with the inspiration from Oldenburg, categorically defined the third places (location such as cafes, bars, open hangouts and libraries), unlike the first places (home environments) and second places (offices or schools) to be the core settings of public life. Then, I elaborated in detail the eight characteristics that Oldenburg suggests in identifying third places.

I demonstrated how third places act as "neutral grounds" and "levellers" for their participants, argued about the reasons and consequences of the fact that "conversation is the main activity" in third places, stated that for a third place to function, it must be practical and efficient with regards to "accessibility and accommodation", advocated for the key role "the regulars" in these environments play for giving them their characteristic moods, demonstrated that in third places "the mood is playful" and witty and there is "a low profile, and claimed that third places for their participants are like "a home away from home" and supported this claim by showing how third places satisfy Seamon's five essential home characteristics: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth.

In the final chapter, I brought together the empirical and theoretical sides of my research, and carried out a mental experiment for conceptualizing online environments as third places, based on my concrete analyses about Second Life and Facebook. I argued that Second Life and Facebook fulfill Oldenburg's eight criteria of third places, and can potentially function, in terms of not only contributing to personal benefits such as relaxation or the accumulation of social capital, but also social good, such as the formation of bonds between the members of a society.

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