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Process, Paratexts, and Texts: Rhetorical Analysis and Virtual Worlds

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Abstract

This essay addresses how rhetorical analysis can be applied to the study of virtual worlds. Rhetoric, which focuses on persuasion and ways of knowing, offers a strong, qualitative methodological approach for scholars engaged in virtual worlds research. A background in the history of rhetorical studies is complemented by analysis of how rhetoric has been applied to virtual worlds and game studies to develop a perspective for analysis of three kinds of texts found in the discourse of virtual worlds. These three types of texts: in-world play structures, or procedures; texts surrounding the worlds, or paratexts; and primary texts of virtual worlds, like narrative and images; provide rhetorical scholars plenty of surfaces to critique. Patch 3.3.0 of World of Warcraft is used as a case study to demonstrate how to engage in rhetorical criticism of virtual worlds and how the various texts are presented in practice.

Keywords: rhetoric; process; procedural rhetoric; paratexts; text; World of Warcraft.

Process, Paratexts, and Texts: Rhetorical Analysis and Virtual Worlds

The primary purpose of this essay is to bring the tools of rhetorical analysis and extant bodies of research in virtual worlds and game studies into conversation. This means making a number of adjustments to existing literature, as most work in rhetorical studies is focused on analyzing public speech. Three key types of discourse within and surrounding virtual worlds offer texts rhetorical analysis is well suited to address. First, there is the actual in-world play that links to the processes of computer games and connects to Ian Bogost's (2007) articulation of procedural rhetoric. Second, there are the texts surrounding worlds, like forums, blogs, and other extra-world discussion that exemplify what Gérard Genette (1997) deems as paratexts and are used by Mia Consalvo (2007) to examine cheating in games. Finally, there are the primary texts of virtual worlds, the images, words, and other elements that impact virtual worlds in dynamic ways, as in the case of Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca's analysis of clothing in the World of Warcraft (WoW). Although rhetorical analysis can likely apply to phenomena in virtual worlds that fall outside of these three categories, I believe they are central to recognizing how discourse functions shape engagement in virtual worlds. Thus, they offer a strong framework for outlining ways in which scholars could pursue future projects that use elements of rhetorical criticism to analyze virtual worlds.

Demonstrating the ways in which rhetorical analysis can come to bear on virtual worlds will take three steps. First, I will offer a review of relevant pieces of material in rhetorical studies, with a focus on defining what rhetoric is and developing it as a perspective for the analysis of virtual worlds. Second, I will engage in a discussion of relevant research in virtual worlds and game studies to demonstrate how scholars have pursued their projects. And third, I will use WoW patch 3.3.0, Fall of the Lich King, as a case study for the three kinds of texts found in virtual worlds.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is a complicated, oft misunderstood subject that, when put in the title of a course, is almost guaranteed to scare students away. For the purposes of this essay, a brief historical overview will set the table to focus on contemporary rhetorical theory and how it can be used to analyze the study of virtual worlds. Rhetoric is an ancient term, dating back to Plato's Gorgias, when it was roughly connected to the art of persuasion. The study of rhetoric was particularly important in ancient Greece, owing to the role of public speech in the governance of society. Although it was a contested term, with Plato positioning himself against the *sophists* - paid teachers of speech - the field of rhetoric developed standards and expectations for oratory. Aristotle added several categories for rhetoric, sorting oratory by approach and desired ends, uniting much of the work of Plato and the sophists.[1] However, in contemporary times, rhetoric has taken on a negative connotation, often used to describe phenomena like talk without substance, "empty rhetoric," or as part of a cover up of "real" facts, as when something is described as rhetorical posturing. In the popular vernacular, rhetoric is often symptomatic of empty promises, like the "mere rhetoric" of a politician's campaign promises. It is within this backdrop, a history that stretches to classical times and contemporary misunderstanding of its subject matter, that the academic discipline of rhetoric is set.

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[1] For an overview of classical rhetoric, see (Bogost, 2007). For depth in the history of rhetoric, see (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990). For illustrations on rhetorical criticism, see (Burgchardt, 1995).

As could be expected of a discipline with this amount of history, there is difference of opinion about how to define the field. In the interests of an easily defensible starting point, Campbell and Huxman state "rhetoric is the study of what is persuasive" (2009, p. 5). In terms of the discipline, they argue that "the discipline of rhetoric examines the symbolic dimensions of human behavior in order to offer the most complete explanations of human influence… rhetoric is the study of the art of using symbols" (2009, p. 14). Rhetoric was initially used to understand and to further the study of oratory, and was tied to the analysis of what made particular appeals more or less effective. In contemporary times, many rhetorical scholars have moved beyond the study of speech, as speeches are less integral to contemporary culture than they were in ancient Greece and mediated communication plays an increasingly important role in how people are persuaded. As such, rhetoricians have begun to analyze elements of communication like images, online discussion, and virtual worlds.

Twentieth-century rhetoric offers a number of modifications to classical rhetorical studies that are worthy of note in the journey to reaching Campbell and Huxman's definition. Defined primarily in terms of "persuasive uses of language" (Campbell, 1970, p. 101) throughout its history, contemporary rhetorical studies are marked by a meta-discourse focused on redefining the role of the field to better address how symbol use fits within our lives. Much of this introspection was driven by the work of Kenneth Burke, who argued that language has a symbolic dimension and, as humans are defined as symbol-using animals, "the whole overall 'picture' [of reality] is but a construct of our symbol system" (1966, p. 5). For Burke, rhetoric is connected to language use and, for humans, language is "*a symbolic means for inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*" (1969, p. 43; emphasis in original). Burke adjusts the focus of rhetoric, often preferring to study its role in creating identification among people, rather than the persuasive force of symbol use. In doing so, he offers a means of analysis that could be quite useful to the analysis of virtual worlds because we can study elements of the "picture of reality" furthered by particular worlds and how the elements in those worlds facilitate identification.

The study of language use is also addressed in the subfield of argumentation theory. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca contend that "there is no neutral choice [in language]—but there is a choice that appears neutral… What term is neutral clearly depends on the environment" (1969, p. 149). This is a shift in looking at language, as it is the beginning of an approach where critics see the persuasive force in all things. Symbol and language use is deployed strategically to emphasize certain things and minimize others. Those following in the wake of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca could study not only the clearly persuasive messages but also the subtly persuasive ones, as a truly neutral presentation, a language without rhetorical force, simply does not exist. Further, those languages that appear neutral may be even more interesting as objects of study, as we do not clearly see the power behind how those symbols are used.

This broader notion of rhetoric is often connected to the work of R.L. Scott. For Scott, "rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth" (1967, p. 13). Given this frame, rhetoric "is a way of knowing; it is epistemic" (Scott, 1967, p. 17). This idea has been expanded by other scholars, to the end that "one of the assumptions implicit in much of contemporary rhetorical theory is that there is no way to ground representations of reality (rhetoric) in a reality independent of discourse" (Cherwitz & Darwin, 1995, p. 192). Functionally, this means that rhetorical analysis shifted from identifying how to persuade to examining the strategic function of symbol use in a given context. In the wake of Scott's work, "rhetoric is a unique cultural practice" that is predicated on "locating the substance

of rhetorical knowledge in the creation of a situational truth" (Greene, 1998, para. 6). Scholarly focus shifts from "how one resides in a framework of meaning and interests" to "how one articulates and uses these" (Lyne, 1998, para. 14).[2] The general perspective behind this way of looking at rhetoric is that "everything, or virtually everything, can be described as 'rhetorical'" (Schiappa, 2001, p. 260). In the end, rhetoric changed. No longer relegated to advising on how to craft the best speeches or even necessarily placing the focus on persuasion, rhetorical analysis can be seen as a way of thinking about how knowledge is produced and deployed strategically. Rhetorical analysis is a tool that can be used to investigate how situational truths are constructed and, in turn, how those truths function.

In addressing how rhetorical criticism works in the wake of this turn toward "big rhetoric"[3], rhetoric can be seen more like a perspective than as a subject with a distinctive object of study, like speech. David Zarefsky writes that, as the number of "texts" rhetoricians have sought to analyze has expanded, the dynamic "in effect identifies rhetorical criticism with a mode or perspective of analysis, rather than with a distinctive critical object. Rhetorical critics bring to any object the focus of making arguments about how symbols influence people" (2008, p. 634). In the end, "rhetoric offers another perspective, one that accounts for the production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of messages" (Zarefsky, 2008, p. 635).

Rhetorical analysis, particularly in the wake of the shift toward a broader understanding of text and performance, is well suited for analysis of virtual worlds. In the wake of "big rhetoric," the tools of rhetorical analysis offer a perspective for scholars interested in studying how knowledge and situated truths are established in virtual worlds. Rhetoric can address the entire discursive environment of virtual worlds, as "virtually everything can be described as rhetorical." This does not mean that all insights granted by rhetorical analysis of virtual worlds will necessarily result in papers worthy of publication, but it does mean that the many dynamics of virtual worlds can be commented upon by an understanding of how particular symbols have the power to persuade, shape meanings, and aid in the construction of our perspectives and beliefs. Rhetoric can look at the play in worlds and how the dynamics of design shape the ways in which a world is constructed. The paratexts are particularly appropriate for rhetorical analysis, from the blog posts that discuss a game to the impacts of the promotion of Second Life on its public image. Finally, the primary texts of the world, from the clothes to the lore, are all dynamics that help shape a particular way of viewing the world and ones that a rhetorician is well suited to critically analyze.

Given this brief breakdown of key tenets in rhetorical studies, it is appropriate to turn to the second relevant body of literature that bears on how rhetoricians can engage virtual worlds, that of game studies.

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[2] In this article Lyne also raises the question that software may be epistemic, as Scott postulated for rhetoric. This may be a site of potential connection to Bogost's procedural rhetoric.

[3] The history of this turn toward big rhetoric can be seen in both Schiappa and (Gunn, 2008). Gunn also provides a rhetorical analysis of the discipline as a whole.

Game Studies and Virtual Worlds

Reaching beyond virtual worlds and looking to game studies for theoretical and critical analysis offers a platform upon which to refine and apply the tools of rhetoric to more completely illustrate how to analyze virtual worlds as rhetorical texts. There are four key pieces to reviewing this research. First, a general overview of methodology in game studies illustrates the lack of established methods in the field. Second, discussion of Ian Bogost's procedural rhetoric will develop tools to analyze processes in virtual worlds. Third, I will outline existing research that uses elements of rhetoric to analyze either virtual worlds or games. Finally, I will address a handful of projects that could potentially be enhanced by the addition of a rhetorical perspective, yet do not necessarily claim it.

As an emergent area of study, the analysis of virtual worlds and games do not yet have established methods upon which to rely in the criticism of texts. Further complicating things is that virtual worlds and games are more like collections of texts than a clear, stand alone discipline. Because of this, research generally borrows from existing methodologies in other disciplines, which are then applied to games or worlds. This dynamic is likely to change as more is published in the field, but there are several scholars who have addressed some of the ways in which games could be analyzed systematically. Jesper Juul analyzes the dynamics of computer games, arguing that the formal rule systems of games and programs make them fundamentally different than traditional narratives (2000). Interaction in a virtual world is subject to a certain set of rules that facilitate some interactions and prohibits others, whether that be Neal Stephenson's Metaverse, where Hiro Protagonist is a preeminent sword fighter because he wrote the code (2000), or the inability to kill players of the same faction who are stealing your herbs in WoW. In discussing analysis of games, Espen Aarseth outlines three keys: study of game design, rules and mechanics; observation of others; and playing the game as part of research (2003). These criteria are quite broad, which makes them flexible enough for many different projects, including the study of virtual worlds. Consalvo and Dutton refine this approach, advocating four categories for qualitative analysis of games: Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map, and Gameplay Log (2006). Both of these articles are useful, but they are more aimed at identifying aspects of a world one needs to investigate than providing a clear way to engage in analysis. Further, while all mentioned elements deserve attention in the analysis of virtual worlds, the depth and detail of a world can be so much larger than an offline game that something like an object inventory may near impossibility. Perhaps the most appropriate guidance for approaching research comes in the form of these guidelines to which researchers should attend. Thomas Malaby and Timothy Burke add that "the empirical character of virtual worlds demands a multidisciplinary, methodologically polymorphous approach" (Malaby & Burke, 2009, p. 325) and Robert Brookey cautions that virtual worlds "require greater responsibility and renewed social concern" (2009, p. 103). Rhetoric offers both flexibility and critical force to attend to the ways in which texts are made to mean, while fulfilling the baseline expectations held by extant methodological guidelines.

Ian Bogost's conception of procedural rhetoric is the most established method of game studies analysis predicated on a rhetorical approach. Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as "a practice of using processes persuasively" (2007, p. 3). He argues that, in video games "the main representational mode is procedural, rather than verbal" (2006, p. 168), which necessitates developing a mode of procedural rhetoric to address texts that are not spoken or written in a conventional sense. Inspired by his descriptions of rhetoric, he contends that "Following the

classical model, procedural rhetoric entails persuasion—to change opinion or action. Following the contemporary model, procedural rhetoric entails expression—to convey ideas effectively" (2008, p. 125). To this end, a key take away from his argument is that "video games make claims about the world. But when they do so, they do it not with oral speech, nor in writing, nor even with images. Rather, video games make argument with *processes*" (2008, p. 125; emphasis in original). Procedural rhetoric seeks to analyze how games use processes to "dictate how actions can and cannot be carried out" (Bogost, 2007, p. 3) and how those processes persuade players.

Although I think the notion of procedural rhetoric is quite useful in analyzing virtual worlds, I believe there are three key limitations in this approach, especially if one sought to make it the exclusive manner in which to use rhetoric to analyze games or virtual worlds. First, isolating procedures from other elements of discourse is problematic, specifically in the case of virtual worlds. In some ways, virtual worlds are richer than video games as they depend on a level of interaction with other people, which may happen outside of the processes of the game. Although something like the specific chat channels enabled or disabled by a virtual world could be considered an aspect of its procedural rhetoric, the discourse in those channels may be quite similar to traditional reading and writing. There are also dynamics inside and outside of the game that can shape how it is played, from Dragon Kill Points (DKP) (c.f. Silverman & Simon, 2009) to the clothes players wear (c.f. Klaustrup & Tosca, 2009) to theorycraft (c.f. Paul, 2009). Separately, one could read Bogost's approach to procedural rhetoric as a paratext that reshapes how games are designed. Bogost presents a rearticulation of what games do, altering the structure of future processes. In effect, if his academic project is successful in changing how games are designed, his work is a demonstration of the rhetorical force of both paratexts and processes. Second, virtual worlds are iterative, malleable texts, rather than relatively stable, fixed ones. Although updates are relatively common for PC games and increasingly part of the console gaming experience, virtual worlds are almost defined by their patches, updates and expansions. As virtual worlds are in a state of flux the surrounding discourse can be quite influential in shaping the iterative construction of the procedures built into the game, creating an even stronger link between paratexts and process. Third, Bogost contends that "Video games have the power to make arguments, to persuade, to express ideas. But they do not do so inevitably" (2008, p. 137) and gives "the name *persuasive games* to videogames that mount procedural rhetorics effectively" (2006, p. 46; emphasis in original). This pair of statements is incompatible with the big rhetoric approach, which would hold that all games are persuasive and they are inevitably so. Whether or not those games and worlds are successfully persuasive or to what ends they persuade is secondary, but all games are persuasive, whether the persuasion is to buy the game, level in a certain way, follow a given narrative, buy extra goods in a "free-to-play" game, absorb the capitalist lessons of *Animal Crossing* (c.f. Bogost, 2008) or the political messages in *Tax Invaders* (c.f. Bogost, 2006).

A handful of other scholars have also sought to employ the tools of rhetoric to analyze elements of games or virtual worlds. Gerald Voorhees argues that "the form of the player-game interaction has to be taken seriously if critics are to come to terms with the rhetorical force of *Civilization*," (2009b, p. 256), as it is the player-game interaction that connects the game to the mind and actively ignores the constraints imposed by the body, internalizing the role of agent in the game. Voorhees also analyzes the changing character representations over the course of the *Final Fantasy* series, contending that "When every representation is in some way ideological it is not possible to speak about representation without also considering it rhetorical" (2009a, para. 9).

Looking at online discussion boards, Moeller, Esplin and Conway contend it is the

discussion boards where players "push the boundaries of what is considered *ethical* or *sportsmanlike* in a medium where testing the boundaries of an environment and the limits of the rules is encouraged and expected" (2009, para. 1). My work has also sought to apply elements of rhetorical analysis to virtual worlds, analyzing welfare epics and the reward system of WoW (Paul, 2010), how the development of a player originated notion of 'theorycraft' shapes play and design in WoW (Paul, 2009), and how Kenneth Burke's concept of identification helps understand why guilds come together and fall apart (Paul & Philpott, 2009). The common thread through all of these projects is that they are interested in how certain elements of virtual worlds or games function to structure the way those texts are understood and encountered. All of these pieces can help scholars interested in virtual worlds take a deeper look at their research object of choice and articulate the ways in which virtual worlds persuade to a variety of different ends.

There are a number of research projects studying elements of virtual worlds that offer potential links to a rhetorical perspective by critically analyzing discourse in a manner congruent with a rhetorical approach. The context for rhetorical analysis is largely set by understanding the vast number of interrelated forces that shape interactions in virtual worlds. In critiquing the concept of a magic circle, Mia Consalvo articulates what can be seen as a call for rhetorical analysis in the massively multiplayer online (MMO) game genre, stressing the importance of "the need to understand how players understand, contextualize, and challenge MMO games" (2009, p. 411). Consalvo goes on to explore how structures, real-life influences, and game play experience interact, stressing the importance of examining the interrelation of the various factors that shape play interactions in games and virtual worlds. Similarly, T.L. Taylor offers a list of interrelated factors that shape games and their play, including technological systems and software (including the imagined player embedded in them), the material world (including our bodies at the keyboard), the online space of the game (if any), game genre, and its histories, the social worlds that infuse the game and situate us outside of it, the emergent practices of communities, our interior lives, personal histories, and aesthetic experience, institutional structures that shape the game and our activities as players, legal structures, and indeed the broader culture around us with its conceptual frames and tropes (2009, p. 332).

All of these dynamics offer surfaces on which rhetorical analysis could help to explain why or how key forces interact and the ways in which they remake or influence the virtual world. In doing this sort of analysis, rhetoric can help explicate the persuasive forces that help dictate how knowledge is created and how the terms are set for "what counts" in virtual worlds and games.

Beyond the overarching context of worlds and games, several essays address specific instances of discourse where a rhetorical perspective might be useful. Silverman and Simon argue that DKP systems have a tangible impact on the way players interact in virtual worlds, arguing that "Players do not work together because the prospect of a reward gives them an incentive to do so. Rather, by playing a certain way (i.e., as a power gamer), they begin to perform a rational subjectivity that views the game in terms of incentives and rewards" (2009, p. 364). One could argue that DKP functions symbolically as a player generated rhetorical message that reshapes the way those participating in DKP systems see the game world, redefining the relative "truths" in the game. Certain games put players into situations where they must allocate scarce resources and the systems they derive function rhetorically to persuade players to alter the ways in which they play. Adam Ruch performs a critical reading of WoW's End User License Agreement and Terms of Use documents to construct an argument about how Blizzard presents itself in relation to the players of the game. In doing so, WoW is constructed as a service within

which items are accessed, rather than obtained. Ruch's analysis is insightful and largely based on a legal reading of both documents, but a rhetorical reading may offer other insights. Lisa Nakamura argues that "Player-produced machinima accessed from warcraftmovies.com make arguments about race, labor, and the racialization of space" (2009, p. 135). In this case Nakamura argues that machinima, which is discourse from outside the game, shapes the ways in which players conceive of representation and behavior within the game. Nakamura's work expands the kinds of texts that may be of interest to scholars analyzing virtual worlds, demonstrating how a paratext can function to influence interaction in online worlds. These three essays look at different aspects of online worlds, yet the common thread among them is that the texts they study shape the ways in which virtual worlds are encountered and could be complemented by a rhetorical perspective.

There are a variety of ways for rhetorical analysis to aid in the analysis of virtual worlds. With all the surfaces, interactions and topics in these online environments, there is plenty of room for analysis of the ways in which persuasion occurs and how knowledge claims are shaped. Given the overview of what rhetoric is and pertinent research in extant analyses of virtual worlds and online games, the best way to give an example of some of the ways in which rhetoric provides a useful perspective for the analysis of virtual worlds is to look at a case study, WoW patch 3.3.0.

Fall of the Lich King, Rise Of Rhetoric: WoW Patch 3.3.0
Patch 3.3.0 introduced a number of changes to WoW (WoWWiki, 2009b), some of which were regular bug fixes and several of which fundamentally alter the ways in which WoW works. This patch has been hailed as "maybe even the best [patch] Blizzard ever did" (Tobold, 2009b) and prompted the Best Patch Ever edition of a weekly feature on a prominent WoW-focused blog (Whitcomb, 2009). In addition to the generally positive response to the patch by commentators, the changes made by the patch illustrate each of the three types of discourse in virtual worlds: A reconstruction of the procedurality of WoW; paratexts which reshape the context for both the game, the patch, and the newly enabled procedures; and alterations to the core texts of the game. To show the greatest range of appeals for rhetoric I will give an overview of the changes in the patch, briefly discuss the ways in which a rhetorical approach could aid in analysis of each of the three kinds of discourse, and provide an extended example of how rhetorical analysis is particularly well suited to analyze interactions between process and paratext.

The title of the patch, Fall of the Lich King, refers to a key piece of Warcraft lore that was central to the most recent expansion of the game, the opportunity for players to fight the most prominent enemy in *Wrath of the Lich King*, Arthas Menethil. 3.3.0 introduced Icecrown Citadel, which contains three new five person instances and a raid instance. The Ashen Verdict were added to the game, as a new faction dedicated to fighting Arthas. The patch made numerous adjustments to each class in the game and fixed several bugs. There were also ways in which core aspects of the game were altered, including the dynamics of leveling early in the game (Schramm, 2009b), the debut of a raid browser that makes it easier for players to find other players with whom to raid (Reece, 2009a), a new default user interface for quest tracking that is designed to make questing easier (Sacco, 2009a), and perhaps the most profound change, a new dungeon finder system (Reece, 2009b). The dungeon finder is supported by a "luck of the draw" buff, which makes groups more powerful when using the system to meet new people, encourage players to use the system to find pick up groups (PUGs) (Sacco, 2009b). In part, virtual worlds are interesting because they are not stable texts that are predefined and fixed; changes and

updates are part of what makes them particularly important objects of study and patch 3.3.0 shows how a world can be altered in a single patch.

The processes of WoW, the procedural dynamics of the game, were changed in many ways. The most straightforward, banal aspects of the changes were the class and bug fixes. Although some of them may close loopholes that players found a way to exploit, they do not typically reshape the procedural rhetoric in a substantive manner. However, the other changes to process, the dungeon finder, leveling and quest user interface changes, have a significant impact on how the game will be played. The dungeon finder facilitates temporary connections with new people, displacing the need to find and sustain connections on your own home server, as it enables cross-server matching to widen the pool of players from which the matchmaking system can draw. Leveling and quest changes make the game easier, especially for new players. In the case of the questing interface changes, Blizzard has integrated partial elements of player designed modifications into the default user experience to make it easier to move about the game world and complete quests.[4] This may also displace the market for the external modifications, as they may become less relevant because Blizzard has filled the perceived need for information about how to complete quests. Although not all of these changes are necessarily worthy of a standalone essay about how they impact the procedural rhetoric of WoW, all do show how virtual worlds are malleable, which means the processes within them, thus the procedural rhetoric, is dynamic.

As WoW has a lively, large community of players, any large-scale change in the game world creates a ripple effect throughout the paratexts surrounding WoW. Patches are an occasion for commentary and discussion about what works well and potential negative effects of what was done. The announcement of the patch created a flurry of analytical posts speculating on what the changes will mean for WoW and reflecting on the actual impacts of those changes. Paratexts ranged from topics like how to best maximize the opportunity to make more gold in the game (Carbon, 2009; Crashumbc, 2009) to documentation of various changes that were not mentioned in the patch notes (Kazanir, 2009) and ruminations on what the changes will mean for each of the classes in the game (c.f. WoW.com, 2009). All of these paratexts, and the many more that were spurred by the patch "work to shape the gameplay experience in particular ways" and demonstrate how "the creating of a flourishing paratexts has significantly shaped games and gamers in the process of creating new markets" (Consalvo, 2007, p. 9). Specific paratexts, especially those that focus on the debut of the dungeon finder are especially relevant in how they reshape what constitutes the procedural rhetoric of WoW. Generally these paratexts recontextualize WoW, constructing it as a 'talk-about-able' object, shifting the process of "playing" WoW from being contained within the frame of the game itself to extending into a discussion of how it is designed, how it works, and how changes will impact the ways in which different communities of players approach the game. In these cases, paratexts expand WoW and the discourse that could be analyzed by rhetoricians. Many of these texts may be interesting or informative, but certain strands could be used by a rhetorician to articulate how the discourse of WoW reconstructs the ways in which 'proper' knowledge is formed within the paratexts surrounding WoW.

Although the textual changes in patch 3.3.0 were substantial and advance the narrative story surrounding WoW (c.f. Holisky, 2009), I am unable to come up with ways in which

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[4] For more about how user modifications change the playing experience, please see (Nardi, 2010) and (Taylor, 2006).

analyzing the narrative alone would produce a sound, interesting rhetorical analysis worthy of a paper. This could be in symptomatic of a general inability to find strictly narratological approaches to game studies (c.f. Frasca, 2003), but in this case the narrative does not really alter the fundamental story of WoW. Certainly, there are new characters introduced and a new big bad to vanquish, but this chapter is not substantively different than any other in WoW's story and has strong parallels to many other tales. The primary textual development in 3.3.0 extend the game and keep the story moving, rather than redefining how the story is structured. The stronger analyses of primary texts in virtual worlds may be less likely to rely exclusively on the stories and more likely to focus on other elements of the text, like the content of quest dialogue or in-game images, including gear and character design. However, those examples seem less likely to be fundamentally altered by a single patch, and are instead shaped over the design and run of the game.

The relationship between procedure and paratexts are where I see the most utility for rhetorical analysis in critiquing how the intervention of patch 3.3.0 alters structures of knowledge in WoW. A particularly appropriate surface for this analysis is the new dungeon finder system, which is at the center of the praise for the patch and stands to alter the ways in which players come together in an allegedly massively multiplayer game. This combination of a change in the way WoW works, or process, and the reaction from players, or paratexts, can be addressed in three phases. First, it is necessary to provide a brief background of the history of grouping systems in WoW and an outline of the new system, dungeon finder. Second, I will outline some of the commentary about the dungeon finder, with a focus on how it alters social relationships in the world. Third, I will discuss how a rhetorical perspective offers a point of view that can articulate the magnitude of the change the dungeon finder could invoke on the world of WoW.

Groups in WoW consist of five players who can join together to enter into dungeons, or instances, to fight powerful monsters and obtain various rewards. Typically, these groups contain a healer, a tank, and three damage dealers. In the launch version of the game there was no built in system by which players could meet others interested in running dungeons, beyond their guild or friends list. This put a particularly heavy emphasis on joining a guild and fostering relationships with other people in order to put oneself in a position to construct groups and reap the rewards of successfully completing dungeons. Since the launch of the game, Blizzard tried multiple iterations of systems to make finding other people with whom to work easier, although the interventions were plagued with problems or underuse.[5] Groups found through these systems, PUGs, were derided by many as subpar, inferior, and risky. The ideal way to find a group was to gather people one already knew; these groups, premades, were seen as far more attractive by most WoW players, although they required being in either a prominent, active guild or having a lengthy list of friends who played a wide range of classes. The dungeon finder makes forming a PUG easy and smooth, quickly matching players from multiple realms together in groups. Although it does not ensure a successful run, it provides players with a quick way to find other people with whom to group. One WoW designer has gone so far to say that the dungeon finder is the coolest feature integrated into WoW (Gunslinger, 2009).

There are several themes in the reaction to the dungeon finder, beyond a general appreciation for how much easier it makes finding a group to run dungeons. By making meeting

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[5] A thorough breakdown of the history of group-making systems is beyond the scope of this paper due to space, but an overview can be found at (WoWWiki, 2009a).

random people easier, Blizzard has redefined how to play part of the game, which necessarily has collateral impacts on relationships within it. One observer praises the system, stating that it "finally managed to get rid of any need for friends to do dungeons" (Tipa, 2009), while another worries that the patch may threaten "the already weak social fabric of the game" (Syncaine, 2009). The change may also alter the skills of players, as the system could lead to a situation where "in a few months, there are going to be some sick skilled tanks available. Imagine leveling to max purely by running dungeons with PUGs. Those tanks who come out of that are going to be really good" (Rohan, 2009). It will also likely alter the ways in which reputation works within the game, as grouping in WoW becomes increasingly anonymous. Mike Schramm ponders that "Gone may be the days when you build up a good reputation by saying 'remember me if you need a good DPS [damage dealer] at the end of a run. It'll be interesting to see what methods we replace that with" (2009a). The lack of an ability to build up a positive reputation is also complicated by the ease of having to live with a negative one, with some hypothesizing that the system has led to more negative behavior, like ninja looting (Tobold, 2009a).

Rhetorical analysis is useful to virtual worlds scholars because it can help to combine these two discrete kinds of discourse to develop a critical point of view with which to analyze elements of what makes procedures and paratexts meaningful. In this case, rhetoric proffers a position from which one can identify how the dungeon finder system fundamentally alters the ways in which grouping in WoW works, which aids in splicing the paratexts surrounding the implementation of patch 3.3.0. It also provides a point of view from which to analyze how those processes and paratexts construct persuasive appeals to shape the construction of knowledge in virtual worlds. In this case, it is likely that the dungeon finder system will resignify connotations of PUGs, encourage a different distribution of player classes in the game, as tanks and healers generally experience a shorter wait for instances than damage dealers, and relationships among players will be fundamentally altered. It is likely that the meanings of guild will change, particularly if the system is expanded with similar success to raiding encounters.[6] The addition of the 'luck of the draw' buff and rewards for using the system are both introduced as new procedures that reshape how players perceive grouping with those they do not know. Working with random people is easier if everyone is made more powerful through a new systematic buff and there is a reason to use the system when given specific incentives for doing so. In the case of the dungeon finder, procedure and paratexts come together to reshape concepts fundamental to life in WoW's virtual world, altering notions about how a group should be gathered, what classes to play, how to conceive of reputation in the game, and why one needs/wants to join a guild. Both procedure and paratexts function rhetorically, persuading players and arranging the terrain on which knowledge is built. Analyzing design and changes in process, as well as paratextual interventions, helps to explain how things work in the virtual worlds in which we participate and why certain interventions in them are particularly meaningful.

Conclusion
Rhetorical analysis offers virtual worlds a perspective for analysis of discourse, especially the procedural, paratextual, and textual discourse that typify virtual worlds. The tools of rhetoric help analyze how things work, what they do, and how these kinds of texts interact with each other to shape the context of virtual worlds. Rhetorical analysis has evolved to focus on how various appeals function to persuade, to construct knowledge, and shape how we perceive the

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[6] There was also a new looking for raid interface added with the patch (c.f. Reese, 2009a).

world around us. Porting these tools to virtual worlds with care can give added perspective on the various dynamics that make worlds work and why we find them interesting and meaningful.

The purpose of this piece is to provide a starting point for understanding how integrating rhetorical analysis into the methodological toolbox for analysis of virtual worlds can aid in research. As such, this essay is best read as a launch point, a beginning guide. Hopefully, this will contribute to an increasing application of a rhetorical approach into the analysis of virtual worlds that will continue to chart how to best engage in rhetorical criticism of processes, paratexts, and texts.

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