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Interface as Exordium: The Rhetoric of Interactivity

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Abstract

In this article, I outline how the interface of new media functions rhetorically as an exordium to engage users and to dispose them to persuasion. The modular, networked, and interactive nature of new media requires an interface: a central place of interaction for the technological, human, social, and cultural aspects of new media. I propose that the interface functions rhetorically through three modes of interactivity, including multi-directionality, manipulability, and presence. By understanding these modes of interactivity and how they function to create various degrees of interaction and engagement, we can begin to develop the analytic tools needed to increase critical awareness of the interface. A rhetorical understanding of the interface enables us and our students to see that the shape and design of the interface is not natural and inevitable. The design of the interface is a design of human experience and, as such, the interface becomes a locus of power. The modes of interactivity it deploys are capable of enabling empowerment and enacting rhetorical patterns of control.

Keywords: Interface; Exordium; New media; Rhetoric; Interactivity; Directionality; Manipulability; Presence; Immersion; Flow

> Traditionally, texts encoded human knowledge and memory, instructed, inspired, convinced, and seduced their readers to adopt new ideas, new ways of interpreting the world, new ideologies. In short, the printed word was linked to the art of rhetoric. While it is probably possible to invent a new rhetoric of hypermedia that will use hyperlinking not to distract the reader from the argument (as is often the case today) but rather to further convince her of an argument's validity, the sheer existence and popularity of hyperlinking exemplifies the continuing decline of the field of rhetoric. (Manovich, 2002, p. 77)

1. Introduction

Lev Manovich's claim that rhetoric is a declining field, especially in the face of new media, is unsettling. It is as though the ghost of Peter Ramus rose from the grave to once again curse rhetoric. For, like Ramus, Manovich reduced rhetoric to rhetorical figures and then proceeded to whittle them down from hundreds to two and, then, to one (2002, p. 77).

Although Manovich's diagnosis of the health of rhetoric demonstrated more a limited view of rhetoric than reality, his comments highlighted important questions concerning the relationship between rhetoric, composition, and new media. Though these questions were not new (the online journal *Kairos*, which "examines digital and multimodal composing practices," was started in 1996), they were becoming increasingly relevant across disciplines of writing and rhetoric. And, to be honest, Manovich's assessment of rhetoric also serves a rhetorical purpose for this paper. As a provocative statement, it is used here in the hopes of capturing the audience's interest. This is a standard rhetorical

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strategy for beginning a composition. It is what Cicero referred to as an exordium, a rhetorical means for ensuring that the audience becomes and remains susceptible to persuasion.

Manovich's claim that rhetoric is more closely aligned with printed text also raises another question: do we need a new rhetoric for new media? Perhaps not, but what we do need is an expanded understanding of how rhetoric functions in new media. New media, for example, like traditional compositions requires an exordium, but in new media the interface, not the introduction, functions as the exordium. In understanding this, we can begin to examine more closely how the interface functions rhetorically by asking how it makes the audience/user "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" (Cicero, 1960, p. 41). The interface as exordium changes the ways in which the exordium functions. It uses three modes of interactivity as the available means for preparing and engaging the user/audience, including multi-directionality, manipulability, and presence. Through these modes, we can begin to build more effective ways of talking about and analyzing the interface.

2. The interface in new media

"Interface," however, is a complex and often contested concept. At its most basic and broadest, the term refers to "a means or place of interaction" or "a meeting-point or common ground between two parties, systems, or disciplines" ("Interface"). Within this general definition, whenever two things come into contact and interact, an interface exists. The interface facilitates and defines interaction, and it takes both concrete and abstract form. For example, the printed text, with its type, layout design, and pages, functions as an interface. The page is the point of contact with the book as object, with the content as ideas, and with the author as a constructed ethos. The page as interface defines the interactions that will occur: reading and turning. But in a technology-rich society such as ours, the interface is most commonly associated with digital communication technology.

In terms of computer-mediated communication, definitions of interface can cover a range of issues "including the physical arrangements and ergonomic configuration of computer systems, user operation of programs, and how the user interacts with the content to solve a task or to learn material" (Marra, 1996, p. 115). Definitions of the interface focusing on the physical human-computer interface (HCI) center on objects such as the mouse, keyboard, screen, and touchpad. Definitions that focus on user operation generally center on the "symbolic software that enables humans to use computers, and to access the many layers of underlying code that cause software to function" (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003, p. 388). The "symbolic" components are generally understood as text and/or graphics of the graphical user interface (GUI) such as the files, folders, and windows that presently appear on many computer screens as part of popular software programs. User operation-centered definitions commonly equate the interface with the screen in terms of the images and objects represented there. But as Brenda Laurel (1990) pointed out, understandings of what constitutes the interface are continually changing; at first the interface was "commonly understood as the hardware and software through which a human and a computer could communicate. As it has evolved, the concept of the interface has come to include the cognitive and emotional aspects of the user's experience" (p. xi). The interface has become so pervasive, Manovich (2002) argued, that it has become "a key semiotic code of the information society as well as its metatool" (p. 66).

Basically, the interface is a place of interaction whether the interactions are between user and computer, user and software, computer and software, user and content, software and content, user and culture, and the user and other users. In fact, it would be impossible to separate out the various interactions as they layer over each other: a user communicating with another user requires interaction with the computer, the software, the graphics, and a set of cultural norms. The interface is the common meeting point and place of interaction for the technological, human, social, and cultural aspects which make up computer-mediated communication and, more specifically, new media. As such, the interface becomes central to building and determining relationships: "It reflects the physical properties of the interactors, the functions to be performed, and the balance of power and control" (Laurel, 1990, p. xii).

Given the significance and pervasiveness of the interface, how the interface functions is of primary importance. The most commonly recognized function of the interface is to enable the user to use technology to get a task done (or at the very least to make it easy to use the technology). Popular approaches to designing user interfaces frequently argue that the interface should be invisible. Donald Norman (1990), for example, argued that "an interface is an obstacle: it stands between a person and a system" (p. 209). He stipulated that both the interface and the computer should not attract attention (p. 210). In *Design Wise*, Alison J. Head (1999) noted that "many software developers say that the best designs are ones that users never give a second thought about. They describe this quality as invisibility, and it is the

hallmark of effortless user interaction and good design" (p. 4). Steve Krug (2006), author of the popular guide *Don't Make Me Think*, agreed, stipulating that for web design, "your goal should be for each page to be self-evident, so that just by looking at it the average user will know what it is and how to use it" (p. 18).

The notion that an interface should be user-centered, task-oriented, and invisible can lead to prescriptive, sometimes problematic, and uncritical approaches to interface design. The implications of the invisible interface have long been a concern in the field of composition. In 1994, for example, Cynthia L. Selfe and Richard J. Selfe questioned the notion of the invisible interface. Instead, they argued that teachers of English needed to recognize computer interfaces as maps that "order the virtual world according to certain historical and social values that make up our culture" (p. 485). Such maps draw borders "along the axes of class, race, and cultural privilege" (p. 491). Selfe and Selfe (1994) argued that teachers of writing needed to increase critical understanding about interfaces, to participate in software design efforts, and to re-conceive, revise, redesign interfaces.

A decade later, in 2004, Anne Frances Wysocki and Julia I. Jasken drew attention to the importance of seeing the interface with a critical eye. They noted that awareness about the interface has not increased but rather appears to have decreased. In their study of 14 guides and handbooks, Wysocki and Jasken (2004) noted that "students are thus most often constructed by the handbooks as people who should care only about function and who compose for audiences who care only about ease" (p. 43). Their analysis revealed that most handbooks focus on the technical requirements for creating interfaces but appear to treat the interfaces themselves as arhetorical. Wysocki and Jasken reiterated that teachers of writing need to involve themselves and their students in the redesign of interfaces. In addition, they argued for the need to view interfaces as being more pervasive than just the computer screen. They called for the development of reflexive interfaces, "interfaces that encourage their audiences to question how interfaces construct and shape those who engage with them" (2004, p. 46). But as Jeffrey Grabill (2003) pointed out, "interfaces are difficult to talk about" (p. 465). Their invisibility makes them seem "natural and inevitable" (p. 468). The question is, how can teachers and students of writing talk about the interface so that they can see the rhetorical implications that interfaces may have? What questions do we need to ask to bring the rhetoric of the interface into full view?

3. Rhetoric of the interface

In explicating the rhetoric of the interface, I propose to examine the rhetorical modes of the interface within new media. Because the interface is the means and place of interaction, it follows that the interface functions rhetorically by creating interactivity. In other words, the modes of interactivity are the rhetorical modes of the interface. New media, of course, relies heavily on the interface with interactivity commonly defined as new media's distinguishing characteristic. As Leah Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (2006) argued, new media provides users "the means to generate, seek, and share content selectively, and to interact with other individuals and groups, on a scale that was impractical with traditional mass media" (p. 25). The modularity of digital media places the user in a more active relationship. Users have more opportunities to intervene by manipulating objects. Through hyperlinks they can choose paths that they want to follow and create alternate organization of information and objects. New media requires action (clicking, scrolling, dragging, typing, sending, receiving, downloading—to name a few). By converting these actions to interactions, new media actively involves and engages the user in using, playing, exploring, experimenting, discovering, and sharing. High levels of interactivity produce high levels of engagement, exemplified in experiences of immersion and captivation. Interactivity is, as a result, associated with "attitudinal dimensions of acceptance and satisfaction" (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997, n.p.). Rhetorically, higher levels of interactivity and thus involvement produce higher levels of acceptance, making the user more disposed to persuasion. Although we commonly think of interactivity in terms of navigation, it is more complex. Interactivity is created through three primary modes—multi-directionality, manipulability, and presence. Each mode contains strategies and enacts models for creating various degrees of interactivity.

4. Multi-directionality

Multi-directionality is a mode of interactivity associated with systems that have networked and nodal points of contact and interaction. New media relies on such a global, network-based system. As Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) explained:

> 'network' denotes a broad, multiplex interconnection in which many points or 'nodes' (persons, groups, machines, collections of information, organizations) are embedded. Links among nodes may be created or abandoned on an as-needed basis at any location in the system, and any node can be either a sender or a receiver of messages—or both. (p. 24)

As a network, new media gives rise to hypertextuality, a means for linking the objects (discrete units of data) of new media to other objects outside of themselves. Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly (2003) described this as a form of intertextuality: a method by which objects can draw upon and refer to other objects for contextualization and to build meaning. Michael Joyce (2003) posited that hypertext enables users to "create, change, and recover particular encounters with the body of knowledge" according to their own needs and interests (p. 615). Through the linking afforded by hypertextuality, users gain more control over how they discover, view, and connect the discrete units available in the network. Users can create their own paths and organizational structures, increasing what Manovich (2002) described as the variability of new media.

This networked/hypertextual attribute emphasizes the potential for multi-directional communication. With this attribute, new media goes beyond the one-to-one and one-to-many models of communication that characterized "old" and mass media, facilitating instead many-to-one and many-to-many models of communication. Sally J. McMillan (2006) referred to this facility as multi-directional. The multi-directional nature of new media means that the user is no longer limited to the role of receiver. The degree to which the user can exploit this multi-directional communication determines the level of interactivity. At the lowest level of interactivity, the user is limited to the role of receiver, gaining access to the message or information but unable to send information or messages back to the sender. McMillan (2006) called this the monologue model of interaction, where one-way dissemination of a message or information is the primary purpose (it is generally considered the model for mass media). Higher levels of interactivity occur when users can function as both sender and receiver.

Multi-directionality applies not just to the roles users can play in a network (receiver, sender, or both) but also to the messages the users communicate. Sheizaf Rafaeli and Fay Sudweeks (1997) argued that interactivity "is the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages" (n.p.). The degree to which messages relate back to previous messages correlates with the degrees of interactivity. To send a message without referring to a previous message or without expecting a response produces the lowest level of interactivity. To send a message that refers and responds to another message would represent a higher level of interactivity, but this would constitute, according to Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997), being reactive. To be fully interactive, the user would not only respond to previous messages but refer back to specific content and indicate how content is related to that of earlier messages. In other words, the communication moves from an exchange to an intertextual dialogue as it becomes more interactive.

The two primary aspects of multi-directionality that create interactivity, then, are permitted roles of the user within the network (as receiver, sender, or both) and the referential and intertextual nature of the messages. In new media, the use of feedback features offers one example of the use of multi-directionality to increase interactivity. On most web pages, the user functions as a receiver, viewing, reading, and listening to the content provided. In the feedback model of interactivity, the user acts, in a limited way, as a sender by submitting information. Commonly, this type of interaction is carried out through forms. Generally, a direct response to the user's feedback is not expected or given, so no real dialogue takes place. This model is often used in marketing where companies seek information from consumers to improve service, products, and sales.

The "review" is another example of how multi-directionality creates levels of interactivity through a feedback model. A "review" consists of asking users to fill out a form in which the user rates and comments on a product or service. Once the review is submitted, it is posted with other reviews. The user functions in the role of sender, but there is generally limited response and little, if any, references to previous messages. To facilitate a response and thus increase interactivity, companies will often include rating systems. Netflix, for example, enables users to rate the review as "helpful" or "not helpful," and Netflix lists the results ("Member Reviews," n.d.). It also enables users to rate movies, and it not only communicates the results to other users but also uses the results from a given user to make recommendations to that user. The user participates as both receiver and sender but the referential nature of the messages is limited.

In terms of the multi-directionality, higher levels of interactivity can be created through a responsive dialogue model. In the responsive dialogue model (McMillan, 2006), the user functions as both sender and receiver: he or she can send

messages and information and expect a response. At this level, messages take on a more referential quality. This form of interactivity most often occurs in chat rooms and via instant messaging tools (McMillan, 2006, p.213). Companies and online media such as newspapers often add blogs in an attempt to add this form of interactivity. The multi-directional mode of interactivity is the most commonly used of the three modes; greater levels of interactivity are achieved when it is used in combination with one or both of the other modes: manipulability and presence.

5. Manipulability

Whereas networked systems give rise to the mode of multi-directionality, digitization gives rise to the mode of manipulability. The digital nature of new media, for example, means that media can be dematerialized and subject to algorithmic manipulation. Objects such as images, sound, text, animations, video, and behaviors become units of numerical code. As Lister et al. (2003) noted, the objects become separated from physical forms such as photographic print, book, and film. As discrete units, the objects become modular and thus changeable. They can be copied, re-sized, combined, and recombined. As data, they can be stored in small spaces and accessed rapidly in non-linear ways (Lister et al., 2003, p. 16). They are easy to manipulate, and certain manipulations can be operationalized and automated. Its digital nature grants new media freedom from fixity such that it can be "adopted and used in unanticipated ways—reinvented, reconfigured, sabotaged, adapted, hacked, ignored" (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006, p. 5).

This mode of interactivity is defined by the degree to which users can influence or manipulate the form and content of new media communication (Kiousis, 2002; Steuer, 1992). In the mode of manipulability, the lowest levels of interactivity occur when the user cannot change the form of the interface and cannot create content. In new media, this consists of providing the user with packaged content. In the packaged-content model (McMillan, 2006), interactivity is limited to intellectual engagement, reading and interpreting information (as would happen with a book), and basic navigation such as clicking on links to follow information presented in a mostly linear sequence. A higher level of interactivity is created through a content-on-demand model (McMillan, 2006). In this model, the user interacts to request information (as in search engines and databases) and to customize the interface. Customization options provide users with the limited abilities to change the form of the interface and the means by which they will access data.

In new media, the mode of manipulability, as a means for creating interactivity, occurs most often as customization. The interfaces for web-based search engine portals provide an illustration of interactivity based on customization. MyYahoo!, for example, offers the user some control over the design of the interface and the hypertextual structure it contains. The user can change the appearance of the interface by choosing from a limited range of color palettes, background images and patterns, layout grids, and font and searchbox sizes. The user can also add or remove content by selecting predetermined categories (e.g. entertainment, money, sports) and then choosing from another limited range of options under each category (e.g. TV listings, People, Movie showtimes). Each of these options offers the user a set of links that will be updated and changed regularly, but the user cannot select the specific links that will appear. The included links are determined by a media corporation. For example, the user could select top news stories as determined by specific news outlets such as *USA Today*, CNN, *The New York Times*, or NPR. The user can also select the top news stories as determined by Reuters or by the Associated Press. The choices, however, are not as broad as they may seem. If the user, for example, selects "world news" and chooses Latin America, he or she will not receive news from organizations in this area. Instead, the user is granted choices that are deemed top stories by Reuters or AP.

This form of customization engages the user by offering a limited set of choices. Although it affords the user some power to manipulate the interface to match his or her interests by altering the appearance and navigational starting points for paths through the Internet, the user's choices remain contained. The options are predetermined by the commercial and political interests of the corporations or organizations who create them. As long as the user's interests and needs fit within these other interests, the user will feel empowered and engaged. The user is given limited power to construct him- or herself as a user. If the user's interests and needs fall outside of those reflected in the options, the user's interaction becomes more limited, consisting of entering terms into the search engine, filtering through a list of search results, and selecting options that appear to fit, which is interactivity more closely related to the multi-directional mode than to manipulability. In terms of new media, customization offers a relatively low level of interactivity in terms of manipulability.

Google offers another example of the use of the mode of manipulability to increase interactivity through content creation. Like Yahoo!, it provides the opportunity for users to customize its interface by selecting "gadgets" and "themes." In terms of interface layout options, iGoogle appears to offer fewer choices than Yahoo!: the user simply

selects a theme or drags "gadgets" to alter placement in a predetermined grid structure. However, the choice of themes seems substantial, with over 1100 options that the user can browse through and select. The "gadgets" (HTML and JavaScript applications that are embedded into web sites) are the content-related options. In Google, a user also selects from categories (news, lifestyle, finance, sports, etc.). But each category of "gadgets," like the themes, appears to offer a greater number of choices. It is not the number of choices, however, which increases the interactivity of Google but rather the ability to create a "gadget." The choices are more extensive because, unlike Yahoo!, Google enables users to create content. According to the iGoogle (2008) disclaimer, most of the content is developed by its users and content is included without charge. Nor does iGoogle "accept payment for better placement" ("Themes," n.d.). For the general user, creating a "gadget" is limited to a customization/feedback model. The user selects from one of the various options available (Daily Me, Daily Photo, GoogleGram, etc.) and then fills out a form ("Make Your Own Gadget," n.d.). With a knowledge of JavaScript API, however, users can create their own "gadgets" and submit them for distribution to the iGoogle directory, provided the users agrees to the terms and conditions stipulated by Google ("Gadgets," n.d.).

Within the mode of manipulability, the ability to create and add content offers the highest levels of interactivity. Wikipedia, along with other web sites using wiki software, exploits this mode of interactivity. A wiki is basically a collaborative web site that allows users to add pages and produce and edit content. Anyone with access to the Web can, ideally, create and change content. Wikipedia, for example, claims to have approximately 75,000 editors/creators ("Wikipedia: About," n.d.). Users, however, are not given access to layout and design of the interface. To engage in content creation interactivity, users must have access to technology and, usually, specialized knowledge. To develop a gadget in iGoogle, for example, the user must have a working knowledge of JavaScript API. Wikipedia, on the other hand, requires writing and research standards that demand good literacy skills. The limitations for participation are openly acknowledged by Wikipedia: "While *most* articles may be altered by anyone, in practice editing will be performed by a certain demographic (younger rather than older, male rather than female, rich enough to afford a computer rather than poor, etc.) and may, therefore, show some bias" ("Wikipedia: About").

6. Presence

Whereas the first two modes of interactivity, multi-directionality and manipulability, arise from a particular phenomenon, networked systems and digitization, presence as a mode of interactivity materializes as a result of the convergence of media with computer technology that has formed new media. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), for example, described new media as a combination of "the artifacts or devices that enable and extend our abilities to communicate; the communication activities or practices we engage in to develop and use these devices; and the social arrangements or organizations that form around the devices and practices" (p. 7). The third mode of interactivity, presence, is a product of the integration of system attributes with user perceptions. System attributes include features such as speed; range, the number of actions the system makes available to the user; mapping, "the ability of a system to map its controls to changes in the mediated environment in a natural and predictable manner" (Steuer, 1992, P. 86); responsiveness, the ability of the system to perceive the actions of the user and respond intelligently (Krueger, p.379); and time flexibility, the degree to which timing responds to "the demands of the situation rather than immediacy" (Downes and McMillan, 2000 p. 168). System attributes combine with users' perceptions such as immediacy, movement, and connection to create in users an experience of interacting socially and of being in a particular place or space. In this mode, interactivity increases with the degree to which the user experiences presence: both social and spatial.

To elaborate, social presence refers to the "ways that the communication systems enable individuals to feel as if they are co-present even when they are not physically in the same place or time" (McMillan, 2006, p. 218). It includes within it the user's experience of person-oriented environments and interpersonal communication (Rice & Williams, 1984, p.57). For users, this translates into whether or not they perceive others as present in the environment created by the medium and whether or not they can gather appropriate contextual and personal information to adequately interpret situations and gain a sense of being connected with others and the system. Generally, face-to-face interaction offers the highest levels of social presence because participants can not only hear the message but also hear intonations and see body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Attributes of new media, however, can compensate for the lack of face-to-face non-verbal cues. For example, asynchronous communication, a result of time flexibility, allows more time for users to develop relationships. The use of images, video clips, and audio can also enhance the social presence in new media (Ha & Lincoln, 1998). Higher levels of social presence, because they produce the perception of being more connected and involved, are generally associated with higher levels of interactivity. The user's purpose, however,

can mitigate the effect. A user who is truly focused on completing a task will not be interested in achieving a sense of connection with others, so social presence would not be a factor in increasing interactivity.

Spatial presence refers to a user's sense of being present in a "place" or a mediated environment distinct from the place in which the user physically exists. The spatialization of new media, particularly the Internet, originated when Norbert Wiener coined the term cyberspace (Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort, 2003, p. 65). In new media, the concept of feeling present in another place is often associated with the concept of telepresence, "the degree to which users feel that mediated environments take precedence over physical environments" (Kiousis, 2002, p. 367). Originally, telepresence referred to technology that enabled users to manipulate a representation to remotely operate another piece of equipment or technology (Fisher, 1990; Manovich, 2002). The term has been extended to new media that use remote devices such as cameras to view remote locations, but these devices do not permit remote operation of other devices. The term has also been applied to web navigation where, "by following hyperlinks, the user 'teleports' from one server to another, from one physical location to the next. . . to explore a multitude of documents located on computers around the world, all from one location" (Manovich, 2002, p. 164). The use of the term telepresence is most often related to virtual reality. Virtual reality, as it relates to new media, takes two forms: one is the "immersive, interactive experiences provided by new forms of image and simulation technology" and the other is the metaphorical 'places' and 'spaces' imagined to exist in communication networks (Lister et al., 2003, p. 35). The perception of existing in a place and manipulating and moving through a space, whether simulated or imagined, creates interactivity.

It is useful to view this mode of interactivity, presence, in terms of the distinction between immersion, flow, and engagement articulated by J. Yellowlees Douglas and Andrew Hargadon (2001). Accordingly, immersion refers to a highly focused state in which an individual loses his or her sense of self (captivation). Immersion is dependent on schemas. Schemas function as cognitive frameworks: they map experience and outline the scripts and actions required for given situations (ordering food in a restaurant, for example) (p. 155). Schemas are highly normative: they indicate what conventions are in play and "shape our perception, navigation, and interaction" (p. 155). They dictate the genre, the audience, and the expected experience (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001, p. 156). Immersion occurs as long as a single schema is enacted and maintained for the user.

Flow, a concept developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), refers to a condition in which an individual loses a sense of self and time and becomes intensely focused on the task at hand (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001, p.163). It is generally associated with exploration and perceptions of being challenged but in control (McMillan, 2006, p. 219). Flow differs from immersion because it involves "extending skills to cope with challenges and a sense of performing well" (Douglas & Hargadon, 2001, p.163). Flow constitutes an intermediary state between immersion and engagement. According to Douglas and Hargadon (2001), engagement, the highest level of interactivity, occurs when multiple schemas are invoked and the user/reader must draw from an array of schemas and secondary material, deliberate about disruptions and violations of conventions, and confront situations without scripts (pp.160–161). Engagement, the final state, requires reflexivity and the ability to generate and test new schemas (to create new maps).

J.K. Rowling's official web site (Lightmaker, 2006) illustrates how web-based new media can make use of the mode of presence to create interactivity. The site uses the familiar metaphor of the desktop, but unlike the standard office desktop, the user views the fictional desktop of the author of the *Harry Potter* book series. It contains desk-related objects such as erasers, a calendar, paperclips, pens, a cell phone, a rolodex, and glasses. It also includes other objects such as an open diary, a tabloid newspaper, a daily newspaper, and miscellaneous personal objects. Sounds are heard in the background (wind, cars, a dog barking, birds). No navigation menu is visible. Instead, the user must move the cursor over the representation of the desk to discover how to move through and access content in the site. Objects move, special sounds occur, and text appears as the user slides the cursor over certain images on the desk. The objects act as links to other areas in the site: the pencil sharpener leads to the rubbish bin, glasses transport the user to a library, and a hair brush leads the user to a bulletin board. The links draw from the user's knowledge both of desks and of the *Harry Potter* stories. The hyperlink objects are portkeys (objects used to teleport characters from one location to another). Users who are familiar with the books will know that you must touch the portkey to return to the original location.

The site clearly invites users to explore and apply their knowledge of the stories to the puzzles in the site. Users will feel some connection to the author as they collect notes and information about the creation of the book. They will feel connected to other fans as they read questions from fans and read the answers provided by the author. Both social presence and a sense of place are used to create interactivity. But the exploration remains contained within the schema presented. Social presence is also limited because no direct interaction takes place. At this site, a user will

likely experience moderately high levels of interactivity associated with immersion and flow, but the user will not be challenged to reflect on the nature of the interface or to map alternate or new schemas.

Presence as a mode of interactivity, as discussed here, involves representing and mapping social and spatial relationships through attributes of the medium and technology to create an experience of social connection and/or being present in a place or space. Interactivity increases with the degree to which a user experiences presence with others or with a place. Gaming virtual technology tends to exploit both attributes of presence. But few, if any, new media works create interactivity through reflexivity that asks users to generate or test new schemas.

7. Interface as exordium

By outlining the three modes of interactivity employed in the interface of new media, I have sought to identify how the interface functions rhetorically. The rhetorical modes of the interface, however, are not modes of argumentation but rather the modes of the exordium. In *De Inventione*, Cicero identified the exordium as the first element in arrangement, followed by the narrative, partition, confirmation, refutation, and peroration. The exordium, he argued, prepares the audience by making them "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" (Cicero, 1960, p. 41). As most commonly understood, exordium refers to the beginning or commencement of a speech or piece of writing. To create an effective exordium, Cicero suggested, the speaker or writer would need to make a careful study of the context, including an understanding of the audience's predisposition to the subject or case.

Although Cicero divided the exordium into two species, the introduction (principium) and the insinuation (insinuatio), the terms exordium and insinuation, over time, have almost completely disappeared, being replaced in modern composition by the sole term "introduction." The introduction's rhetorical significance, however, is now often defined according to its ability to capture the interest of the reader and "hook" the reader into reading the body of the text. In contemporary writing handbooks, the rhetoric of the introduction has been reduced to the selection of effective devices, including the personal anecdote, the detailed description, the interesting quotation, the intriguing problem, the insightful analogy, and the provocative statement (Hult & Huckin, 1999). The assumptions behind such advice ground the introduction in the practices of oral and print media. It is assumed the audience will hear or read linearly, and this limits the rhetorical impact of the exordium to making a good first impression.

In recovering the term exordium, I wish to reject the common understanding of the term as introduction and instead turn to the original but less-known meaning of the term. According to Charlton Lewis and Charles Short's *Latin Dictionary*, exordium originally referred to "the warp of a web." It comes from the verb "exordior," which means "to begin a web, to lay the warp" ("Exordium"). In new media, the exordium is not the introduction but the interface. Like the warp in a woven fabric, the interface as exordium is ever-present throughout a new media composition. Instead of making a good first impression, the exordium works continually to engage the audience not simply in action but in interaction. As users experience higher levels of interactivity, they experience higher levels of empowerment: they become senders and creators of messages and content. They experience higher levels of control: they choose between options and customize the interface to reflect their tastes, if not interests. They experience higher levels of connection in terms of both social and spatial relationships: they meet, communicate, and build relationships with others, and they explore and encounter new spaces and environments while sitting alone in a single place. Increased interactivity results in increased attentiveness, and increased feelings of empowerment, control, and connection result in increased levels of acceptance. By creating higher levels of acceptance through interactivity, the interface as exordium succeeds in making the user "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" and thereby susceptible to persuasion (Cicero, 1960, p. 41).

8. Seeing the interface

The purpose of this essay is to explicate the rhetorical role of the interface as exordium and to outline the modes of interactivity through which the interface fulfills its function. I wish to end, however, by returning to the question of how it is we can see and talk more critically about the interface. By understanding the modes of interactivity, multidirectionality, manipulability, and presence as the means by which the interface functions, we can develop questions that will help us to critically examine the interface. Each of the modes of activity discussed here operates to make the user/audience more disposed to persuasion. The examples illustrate how new media can use the interface to create interactivity to build a favorable relationship with the user so as to persuade the user to accept the messages contained

within the content, to continue to use a particular site, or to perform certain actions. To examine the interface, we need to ask questions about the modes of interactivity. The following are questions that can serve as a heuristics for examining the interface.

To begin, the interface should be examined in terms of multi-directionality. Does the interface enable the user to act as both receiver and sender? To what extent is each of these roles (receiver and sender) facilitated, limited, or constrained? Are there expectations (explicit or implicit) and/or restrictions regarding who can participate? How interactive is the exchange? Can the user refer back to other messages and participate in real dialogue? Is this practice encouraged or discouraged? How and why?

The next step would be to examine interactivity according to levels of manipulation afforded the user in relation to the interface and the content. Can the user change the interface? What choices are offered to the user? To what degree do the choices enable the user to tailor the interface to his or her needs and interests? How are the user's choices limited? Who determines what choices are available? What interests do the choices reflect? Can the user manipulate and create content? What constrains and limits the user's ability to manipulate and create content? What technologies, skills, and knowledge would the user need to manipulate or create content?

Finally, the interface would be examined according to how it engages the user through representations and schemas of social connection and physical place. Is the user given knowledge of other participants? If the communication is textual, how much time flexibility does the user have to create and send messages and thereby build connections with others? Does the interface provide visual and audio information about other users? If so, what are the backgrounds and characteristics of the other users? Does the interface itself have a character or agency? If so, to whom would this character or agency appeal? What schemas are being invoked by the interface? What cultural, political, economic backgrounds and interests do these schemas reflect? Who would be familiar with the schemas needed to interact with the interface? Who would be excluded? How accurately does the interface map to the user's experience and potential responses? How reflexive is the interface? Does the interface enable the user to map and follow alternate paths? Is the user asked to remain within a given schema or can he or she draw from other schemas and his or her own knowledge?

By asking these questions, it becomes possible to see how the interface as exordium defines users' actions, determines the extent to which users can participate in dialogue and the creation of content and meaning, and positions users within certain social, political, economic, and cultural schemas. Such analysis enables us and our students to see that the shape and design of the interface is not natural and inevitable. The design of the interface is a design of human experience, and, as such, the interface becomes a locus of power. The modes of interactivity it deploys are capable of both enabling empowerment and enacting patterns of control (Marshall, 2004, p. 27). To see the interface, we must see how it functions rhetorically through modes of interactivity to prepare the user/audience to accept particular world views and constructions of relationships, and for this we need to reshape our notion of the exordium and add interactivity into the discourse of rhetoric.

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