

# Operational Logics, Paratexts and the Production of Knowledge: The *Diablo III* Case

**Mateusz Felczak**

Institute of Audiovisual Arts, Jagiellonian University  
ul. Gołębia 24  
31-007 Kraków, Poland  
0048 604 91 30 20  
[mateusz.felczak@uj.edu.pl](mailto:mateusz.felczak@uj.edu.pl)

## ABSTRACT

The focal point of my presentation will be the internet-based paratexts available in an open access form on the world wide web. The analyzed materials comprises Reddit and official Battle.net forums posts dedicated to the *Diablo III* (Blizzard 2012) and its first expansion pack, the *Reaper of Souls* (2014). Drawing on the classic Gerard Genette's definition of paratexts in the theory of literature, I would focus on their characterization as an "undecided zone between the inside and the outside" (Genette 1991) of a particular work of art. Thus, I will try to interpret the fan-based paratexts as a specific place that belongs to the game diegesis. The content of such paratexts has a crucial impact on the evolving game states. My approach will diverge from the popular conceptualization of the fan-based content presented by Henry Jenkins (2006), as I am particularly interested in the interplay between the human and technical level of knowledge production. *Diablo III: Reaper of Souls* (2014), with its unique model of updates, patches and minor adjustments is a good case study for analysis of the process of transferring the data from the obfuscated area of cloud-based computing to the game's interface. In my presentation I will use the broad conceptualization of the interface as a medium which connects the graphic user display with the gameworld interface (Jørgensen 2015). The study will focus on the data gathered shortly before and during the 6<sup>th</sup> Season of the *Diablo III: RoS* (from April 29, 2016 till approximately July 15, 2016) and will also involve the materials gathered during gameplay sessions. The same time frame applies to the specific representations of paratexts, ranging from the in-game chat transcripts to community-based game guides posted on the forums or YouTube.

Such holistic approach allows treating the game interface as a broad platform meant for conveying meaningful interactions performed by the game agents, among which in case of action-cRPGs two are of crucial importance: the human player and the code-driven machine. To link these two instances we need to think of a theory that addresses numerous layers of game without favoring any of them. I would argue that such idea may be the operational logics, introduced by Noah Wardrip-Fruin. It can be summed up as a method of tracing and interpreting the patterns of the interplay among the data, process, surface, interaction, author and audience (see Wardrip-Fruin 2009, 13). It is crucial to note that the patterns between computational elements (for example, different pieces of data) are treated equally to the human (audience)-

Proceedings of 1<sup>st</sup> International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG

© 2016 Authors. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

computer interaction. The only visible outcome of the data processing is available through the surface which consists of various displays and tangible hardware. In the case of the newest, always-online iterations of the *Diablo* series, the “author” part is responsible for programming particular visuals and data, but putting it to work is a direct result of a real-time negotiation between human and computer agents. The software studies perspective may provide an explanation to the observation made by Jørgensen, that “during our first encounter with a new game, the game world might appear both alien and familiar at the same time” (Jørgensen 2013, 78). It is familiar, because it comprises elements which on a first, conceptual level were designed by a human (author), but it is alien – and avatars are also alien to the players – because ultimately they are governed by the set of rules established on a computational level, as an interpretation (or conceptualization) of data through the power of processing. Each computer game (and, to some extent, also every interactive program) has on both ends a human actor, but in the case of the *Diablo III*, the meaning is conveyed during the absence of the initial human author.

Working on such theoretical framework, in my analysis I will focus on tracing the areas where the information presented in the form of paratexts influence the gameplay of the vast demographic of players (thus establishing the so-called “meta”). Then, I will discern the fields of interplay between the game elements, both computational and social, that are intertwined in the ongoing process of determining the game’s popularity, often involving the discourses of balance and power play (Taylor 2014). The significance of this study’s outcomes is founded in the new method of analysis of the high-budget games, combining the paratexts with game’s mechanics in the given point of time, and with gameplay practices of the active players. Similar research angle have been approached in the area of e-sports (Egliston 2015). However, the goal of my presentation is to show the interplay among the paratexts, human and software-based phenomena in one of the most popular triple A title that is aimed at the widest audience possible in the computer games market. To sum up, using the aforementioned methodological tools, I would like to present a framework for a dynamic and simultaneous analysis of the triple A games and their post-release development.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Egliston, B. (2015). “Playing Across Media: Exploring Transtextuality in Competitive Games and eSports”, in Proceedings of DiGRA 2015: Diversity of play: Games – Cultures – Identities.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jørgensen, K. (2013). *Gameworld Interfaces*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.
- Taylor, T.L. (2009). *Play Between Worlds. Exploring Online Game Culture*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.
- Wardrip-Frun, N. (2009). *Expressive Processing. Digital Fictions, Computer Games, and Software Studies*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.