

The Production of Machinima: A Dialogue between Ethnography, Culture and Space

Dr. Gareth Schott

Senior Lecturer

School of Arts, Screen and Media Programme,

University of Waikato,

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand

E-mail: g.schott@waikato.ac.nz

Abstract

Irrespective of the growing call for the legitimization and commercialization of machinima, as a mode of digital filmmaking using videogame hardware and software, this paper upholds an interest in the emergent play practices of gamers, rather than filmmakers, that embraces not only the curiosity and discovery exhibited within the fluid peripheries of the virtual worlds they inhabit, but also extends to delving into open-source 3D engines of games such as Half Life (Valve). It is this kind of playful exploration that was responsible for the initial emergence of machinima but also, we argue, for its continued and increasingly popular application as a key mode of articulating game fandom and the pleasures of play. Machinima is therefore examined here for its novel contribution to the existing multiple media channels adopted and utilized by participatory cultures that form around specific texts. Communities that are characterised not only by a shared practice (game playing) and heightened levels of appreciation, but also by the execution of creative practices that enunciate and define their specific 'tastes' whilst also transforming game texts to serve their alternative interests. Such practices are indicative of a contemporary fan-base that is no longer content with singular media experiences.

During the last fifteen years, sporadic academic accounts of fandom have presented compelling arguments for treating fans as more than just avid, loyal consumers of the mass-produced commodities of popular culture, but as audiences that possess active, critical and productive relationships with popular texts. In line with the broader sub-culture of fan communities (see Brooker, 2002) game players also perform a broad range of practices in communication of their fandom, including the more traditional composition of fan-fiction and creation of fan-art, often rooted in a desire to expand fictional worlds and deepen accounts of character motivation and game ecology (see Schott & Burn, 2004, for accounts of fandom practice directly spurred by game texts). In doing so, standalone game-titles, yet to receive a high profile Hollywood adaptation, attain fan-generated cross-modal representation through the remediation of game content within other complimentary media such as film or graphic novels (print media that also offers its readers a heightened sense of spatial dynamics). Such practices serve to further integrate the distinctive aesthetic, physics and possibilities offered by game worlds with other mediums¹, an increasingly popular strategy amongst more mainstream narratives such as the hypertext, artificial-reality inspired *Matrix* whose cross-media convergence was transversely played out across live-action, animation and games formats. The affordances connected to different representational media are regularly being exploited to offer audiences' different entry points and experiential engagement with the same narrative form.

When examining games, the significance usually given to an 'authoritative original' or 'primary' text by cultural and media studies appears to be eroding and giving way to what Aumont (1997) has referred to as "stratified time in which we move through different levels simultaneously, present, past(s), future(s)" (129-130). For players/fans, time (and space) surrounding this popular media artefact is collapsing allowing its different elements and treatments to casually co-exist. Indeed, a spatial conception of the networks of representations connected to a particular game such as Half Life would only serve to undermine the fluidity of the processes of connection and disconnection that operates in and around the different depictions of its universe and characters across different media. Within creative practice such as player-created machinima (or gamics such as *Apostasy*) it is possible to locate the presence of multiple interpretations of characters' identities, personality, temperament and motivations that do not imply a convergent stability or an end-point of unification, but the normal state of a continual *process* where moments of convergence are matched by equal moments of divergence.

Unlike traditional accounts of fandom and its practices, such as Lewis' (1992) early proclamation that;

We all know who fans are. They're the ones who wear the colors of their favorite team ... Fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences (1)

¹ According to the Half Life web-site, Source's shader-based renderer, operates much like the one used at Pixar to create movies such as *Toy Story*® and *Monster's, Inc.*®, thus contributing to one of the most realistic environments ever seen in a video game.

Those that explore game media technologies as a source and means of filmic expression, operate a different form of fandom to that described above. In Fiske's (1992) account of fans, as those who engage in a broader range of 'producerly activity' than conventional audiences, we find a more faithful prediction of the rise of digital subcultures characterised by a 'consciousness of difference' (Hebdige, 1997) with regard to the nature of production, ownership, agency and authorship. A consciousness that very quickly led to the initial subversion of game software to produce alternatively animated films using game engines and continues to define players' treatment of game texts as objects that are not just revered by players/fans for what they are but what they enable. Understanding machinima as displays of interest, affection and attachment so often associated with fandom, is not adequately rationalized as a similar kind of 'response' to celebrity or stardom that has seen fans attributed with a sense of 'passivity'. Instead, the manner in which fandom is manifested within digital and virtual cultures demands an alternative account from those previously framed within the relationship between an 'audience' and object of fandom. Machinima practices arise from, and exist within a game culture propagated by the hybridisation of players/authors in which the act of playing itself constitutes 'presence' or virtual embodiment within a gamescape (King & Krzywinska, 2003) thus granting players the capacity to effect change by activating, producing and reworking assemblages of 'narratemes' (Cubitt, 2006).

Prior to the increased awareness of machinima, Henry Jenkins (1992) began arguing that fans have been characterised almost exclusively in terms of their relationship with consumption rather than production. Attempts to aim similar charges at videogame culture and its players are quite easily dismissed care of the distinct media experience that game texts *offer* (rather than deliver). The distance between player and screen-mediated objects of fascination are collapsed by players' acceptance of the presentational truth on offer (van Leeuwen, 1999), leading them to assume responsibility for the interactive unfolding of plot (rather than story) in which the "simple conflicts of survival, prosperity and progress" (Lindley, 2003, 4) are realised. Such immersive qualities function to place the player unselfconsciously within a performance that reduces the need for the same levels of 'slavish' forms of consumption in order to achieve a quantitative sense of immediacy with the objects of fandom that generates devotion.

Shifting the Educational Landscape

Cultural hierarchy may traditionally separate the practices of fandom from more valued cultural artefacts such as high art or literature. Yet, Jenson (1992) is one voice that has been eager to question the boundaries and practices that separate aficionados (such as scholars) from fans, arguing that devotion and loyalties to high cultural forms (as opposed to the popular, inexpensive and widely available) are not that qualitatively different in terms of levels of knowledge, expertise, research and time investment. When it comes to a consideration of the value of machinima, such distinctions are collapsed further not just by the existence of academic and scholarly works such as Matt Hanson's (2004) *The End of Celluloid* and general 'game studies' research (e.g. Carroll & Cameron, 2005). Indeed, the boundaries between fans/players/scholars/filmmakers are consistently being blurred (e.g. Machinima scholar Paul Marino's contribution to the Half Life and machinima community with his own Half Life 2 music video *Still Seeing Breen*). An outcome of this hybridisation, which Copier (2003) originally introduced in relation to players/designers/scholars, is the expansion of media and film production practices to include the themes of technoludic cinema (Bittanti, 2002) and game mediated film techniques (e.g. the teaching practice of *C-Level's* Brody Condon). Thus the generative and productive cultures of gaming are not simply being subjected to Aristotle's *contemplative ideal* within academic accounts but are actively transforming and generating new forms of creative practice and research methods.

Another form of intersection that illustrates the transformative qualities of machinima, is its advancement from shadow cultural economies (Fiske, 1992) into the creative industries, evident through the exploitation of its source and techniques by high profile media organizations such as *Industrial Light and Magic* (who used *Unreal Tournament* to storyboard the recent *Star Wars* prequels), *The History Channel* (who used *Rome: Total War* to recreate scenes for *Time Commanders and Decisive Battles*) and *MTV* with their machinima program *Video Mods*. The argument that this form of fandom practice can be singled out as an inane distraction when compared to the more worthy practice of furthering knowledge associated with say academia, is becoming less convincing when it is the outcomes of spontaneous learning within 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1999), not just the scrutinizing of 'prestige conferring objects' (Jenson, 1992), that is now guiding the content and coverage of scholarly pursuits and industry practice.

Players Operating as Digital Ethnographers

The legitimacy and authenticity given to time spend immersed in virtual locations by players is evident in players' desire to capture and share significant aspects of their 'everyday' practices either in real time action or as a scripted performance.

In the case of MMOGs, the evolving socio-cultural practices amongst large populaces are increasingly subjected to an array of documentation practices that allow players to re-live key moments (such as levelling up) or social events such as successful raids (or unsuccessful raids, as captured in the *World of Warcraft* film *Leeroy*). While online configurations of *Half Life* have produced machinima documentary works such as the instigation of political protest *Velvet Strike* (Ann-Marie Schleiner's infiltration of *Half Life* mod *Counter Strike*), even the player-to-game experiences of a text like *Half Life* produces equivalent levels of player appropriation, active negotiation and reconfiguration of its material resources (de Certeau, 1984). The active culture surrounding the game text is defined in part by the practice of assembling and producing machinima artefacts that communicate the different pleasures of the particular space of *Half Life* and the possible manifestation(s) within it (e.g. *Raining Men Half Life 2*, Baron Von Fuchenstein Productions, 2005). While machinima works, such as the Barney-as-cyborg recital of Edgar Allan Poe poem *A Dream Within a Dream* (Tom Jantol, 2005), *The Life of Raphael Carter* (Ride The Emu Productions, 2006) and *Fight* (Andy12343, 2005), illustrate the possibilities for broadening developers' creations (which themselves can be understood in terms of their *provenance*, that is, the use of existing semiotic resources by developers in the construction of their text; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) in a way that does not comprise its principal state, but instead develops and examines the robust nature of the original gaming context.

Fan-generated machinima also functions to obscure the boundaries between game-media and other media spaces, such as enactments of song narratives as found in *Stacy's Mom* by Fountains of Wayne (Nick Powell, 2006), the mock chat show *Select Start: Episode 1* (Select Start, 2006) that features an interview with 'Doom III' creator John Carmack and *Duct Tape Infomercial* (Teckno Studios, 2006). Such works present re-configurations of, and addendums to the game's presentational context. In doing so, players engage in the construction of an anthropology of 'themselves,' reminiscent of the UK mass-observation movement devoted to researching 'everyday life' in real-world settings. The key difference is how the creative practices of *Half Life* players reflect and express their media intake and preferences as well as media literacy. This is particularly evident in the production of the cross-media narrative assemblage of *A Few Good G Men* (Glass, 2006), a *Half Life* reenactment of the court scene between Jack Nicholas and Tom Cruise that gives heightened narrative and textual structure to familiar game characters via the technological agency of the player/director.

As a source of fan/player fascination, the game text of *Half Life* constitutes a popular groundbreaking First Person Shooter (FPS) series that generates fan-created machinima reflecting players' affinity with the *mise en scene* of the game environment, their desire to extend, reflect upon and find humour in the narrative context of the game as well as celebrate the source responsible for its digital exchanges. Following the first instalment of *Half Life* in 1998, the second *Half Life* game utilises the suspense, challenge and visceral charge of the original's real-time game-play with players again gazing at the crowbar wielding arms of embodied research scientist Gordon Freeman as they move their way through an alien-infested Earth. New levels of player immersion are achieved in the second game via an increased array of human emotions possessed by in-game NPCs that enable greater levels of responsiveness to the player. Likewise, material objects within the game environment (from water to steel) respond as expected in relation to each other, as they mimic the laws of mass, friction, gravity, and buoyancy.

Beyond the inventive application of machinima by players/fans to extend the boundaries and deepen understanding of the *Half Life* game, a common practice amongst fan sub-cultures, *Half Life 2* players produce an interesting brand of machinima that demands a different kind of explanation and theorisation. A key aspect that makes fan-expression surrounding *Half Life* interesting is how a great number of the available audio-visual and still image work² utilises the outcome of another fan-product, Garry's Mod (or G-Mod), a popular 'sandbox' modification that enables gamers to appropriate and apply the contents of *Half Life* for their own pleasures. One of its defining features as a modification platform, ragdoll posing, arose from *paidea* (Caillois, 1958) linked to modification practices whilst engaging in constructing new configurations from pre-existing objects. The account given on the Garry's Mob website outlines the process:

I decided that it would be cool to pause one object in mid air while you welded it to something else. I programmed this in and it worked great. Then I did it on a ragdoll. I was amazed, I could put them in any position. I felt a hot throbbing on the back of my head - I realised how big this was going to be for people taking screenshots as soon as I did it. The first pose was Alyx and Kleiner having sex.

² G-Mod's rag-doll capacity has been used to create still-image narratives such as *Lamar's Big Day*, a children's picture book narrative parody that presents an anthropomorphic 'day in the life' portrayal of a deadly zombifying parasitic *Half Life 2* 'head-crab' as a loveable pet-like character.

The second was Alyx holding Kliener (sic) above her head. As soon as I did this I rushed to the forums to post my results. No-one could believe it.

Skimming over the first application of Garry's Mod ragdoll tool, what makes this account significant is the manner in which it illustrates the excitement derived from its potential contribution to the community and the immediate desire to share the outcome of play. Indeed, this process has a role in pushing the degrees of freedom given to players to construct their own configurations (or set constructions), including the representational motivations more readily associated with, and limited to, the construction of avatars in MMOGs (Carr et al., 2006). For example, with 'Face Poser' players are given the autonomy to change facial features by drooping eyelids, the wrinkles around the mouth or the height of the eyebrows. The representational motivations of playing in these spaces are not just confined to characters, as it is possible to alter the colour, transparency or apply a material quality (flowing water, stained glass, swirling energy fields) to any object. Inanimate objects are also given a more dynamic quality as they become easily attachable through welding, rope, springy elastics, ball-and-socket joints, and pulley systems and set in motion by keypad-controlled thrusters and wheels of different varieties. In an age of ubiquitous creativity these tools reflect the catalytic nature of the game developers' innovation as well as an ethnographic articulation of a new sense of spatial (dis)order within these new cultural domains. Thus, the quotidian machinima practices of fans utilising these tools not only articulate and embody the social experience within the Half Life 2 gamescape but also form a dialogue between ethnography, culture and space.

Transforming Spatial Practices into Cartographic Tales

Reflecting for one moment on Marino's (2004) definition of machinima as 'animated filmmaking within a real-time virtual 3D environment' (p.1), his words cleverly suggest the importance of what it means to engage with virtual spaces and how the process of play shapes our understanding of what occurs when the virtual becomes actualised in an animated film. The definition implies that the multiplicity of choices potentially generated through interaction within a virtual environment become *contained* as a singular and repeatable trajectory of actual choices made by the producer of machinima as a final outcome. Using Cubitt (1998) as platform, Shields (2003) states that virtual environments are characterised by four elements including:

- The primacy of navigation and movement;
- Smoothness or unity of the digital environment, which includes a computer-generated character or avatar representing the user;
- A single 'point of view' which represents the user's position and outlook onto the VE;
- [and] implied off-screen spaces (p. 60-61)

These elements are utilised by fans as the producers of machinima in a process that sees the openness of choice, connected to spatial practices within Half Life's game space or Valve's modification interface, displaced by a map of *particular choices* channelled into an animated film. It is this displacement of possibilities within the virtual environment and its capture as a sequential film that has become the celebrated outcome of machinima production. Yet an understanding of machinima as a communication channel for fans and players of Half Life seems to require an examination of the spatial practices involved in the process of its production.

Laurie Taylor (2005) is a notable scholar for her examination of spatial practices within video games, underlining it as an essential conceptual avenue for understanding the experience of video games and implicitly as a useful approach for our own engagement with machinima. Her argument has been inspired by the spatial theorising of Lefebvre³ but is also driven by Aarseth's (2001) own belief that 'the representation of space is the defining factor in video game play' (p. 1). She acknowledges that:

games are created by mathematical programming code and that they are thus created with a necessarily logical and systematic language. This means that all video game spaces can be represented as geometrical spaces: spaces defined by the programmatic ordering of space according to a predetermined logic of its boundaries. Yet to equate video game spaces with only their geometrical equivalent is to ignore the broader context and significance of the spatial logic and experience of gaming. (p. 1)

Her discussion of FPS-style games, the basis of Half Life machinima, is fascinating as she does not believe that representational spaces are present as she argues 'there is no emotional, social, or personal significance to any of the rooms, hallways, or corridors in these games insofar as the narrative or player is concerned.'

³ Lefebvre discusses three types of interconnected approaches to spatiality – perceptual space, representation of spaces and representational spaces.

Furthermore, she states that 'even their geometric space is skewed by having the screen act as the player's viewpoint, forcing the player outside the game world and requiring inaccurate spatial reasoning within that skewed perspective' (p.3). Encounters with Half Life machinima and the potency of its spatialities has produced a slightly different track of thinking that consequently contains some disagreement with Taylor's account of the nature of FPS games and their spatiality when applied to machinima. Certainly the spatial focus in cultural theory evidenced through Lefebvre and continued with Soja (1996) gives a potent framework for understanding the experiences of the virtual environments presented in machinima. In that sense there is agreement with Taylor as to how the understanding of gaming through the examination of spaces, however they might be articulated, is a powerful analytical tool. The question we ask is, whether or not this is the most useful for our understanding of the relationships between the producer of machinima, player engagement with the potentialities of the virtual environments within the game world and the relationships with the cultural contexts that they are embedded in as players and fans?

Reynolds and Fitzpatrick (1999) discussing de Certeau's conceptualisation of space and spatial practice suggest that, for him, space was 'the product of the subject's interaction with the existing environment' (p.2) and further that stories themselves are treatments of space in that they 'spatialize by enumerating possibilities, by demarcating the boundaries of what is possible within a given place' (p.6). These ideas offer clues to a slightly different take on the spatial practices that generate the production of Half Life machinima. Machinima can be understood as reflecting the actual spatial practices generated through the choices made in the virtual environment of the game but also these practices reflect the explorations and demarcations of possibilities within these environments as different stories or strategies are constructed to develop different approaches to machinima. These stories and strategies are shaped by the agendas and intentions of those producer players/fans who express their own pleasures as part of a gaming community. This means then that spatial practices, although an essential part of machinima production need to be considered within the context not only of the virtual environments of the games used as a basis for machinima but also in the context of the cultures of play and production that the strategies of spatial practices are influenced by.

It seems useful to understand fan production of machinima as a reflection of a process of performance that is shaped by not only actions within various spaces but also other dimensions of experience stemming from the culture of gaming. We strongly disagree that FPS spaces cannot be, or are not, affective spaces contributing to the emotional resonances of a game playing experience. This is even more the case in machinima when the environment itself is foregrounded, for instance, within the multitude of domino Rube-Goldberg style machinima works, where the environment has its own contribution to the feel of the work. Environments, however they are constructed, actively affect the experience of viewing in numerous ways especially for players who have an investment in the particular game engines that are used to produce machinima.

Although machinima registers a process of performance, both the performances of creation and the performances of viewing when the work is actualised as final product, it is not the same performance space as in an interactive game, where different combinations of actions and different trajectories can be developed each time. The myriad of possibilities open to production choices are contained by the final decisions made to establish the finished product. Machinima, so far in its evolution, is more like a film than a game, but that might not always be the case as new techniques, new tactics of presentation and a stronger experimental aesthetic begin to question the strictures of the single pathway mapped by current machinima practice. Machinima is a spatial production but currently a spatial production that seeks to confirm a particular and fixed spatiality allowing a particular and fixed performance for viewing but these spatial practices will change as new conceptions of the possibilities for machinima are created. These possibilities might come from outside the domain of gaming culture from practitioners who are not so caught up in the expressions of their particular pleasures of the games world and its community of fans.

The production of machinima can therefore be viewed as a cartographic practice, that is a mapping of particular actions that trace out particular desires including those of narrative, technical prowess and the expressions of pleasure. This perspective is useful as it continues to acknowledge the importance of the spatial but also establishes the notion that machinima production is a registration of particular performances symptomatic of the desires that are shaped by the conditions of previous game experience and the investment in particular cultural practices. Machinima maps these cultural practices of game players as expressions of their experiences and pleasures in their own productions of machinima. Furthermore, there is an exchange of these maps in relation to other players/viewers within gaming cultures, an exchange that suggests particular readings and interactions with these maps allowing an appreciation of shared knowledge, pleasures, as well as the display of skills which signal the conditions of production implied by the mapping process.

What might this mean then when we attempt an actual analysis of the types of machinima produced specifically through Half Life platforms? How might Half Life machinima be classified and analysed in an attempt to make some sense of these new and vibrant practices that have appeared since the late 90's? Spatial production has a role but more importantly given the focus of cultural practices of players/authors/filmmakers it is crucial to recognise the pleasures of these practices and how these are manifest in the strategies and conditions of production that have arisen so far.

One approach that seems to reflect similar strategies of earlier machinima and earlier platforms is the speed play of such works as *Half Life Completado en 45 min* (Phase Zero 2003), *HL2Done Quick* (HL2QQ, 2006), *Half Life 2 Runthrough in 3 Hours* (Not Me, 2006). In these examples the mapping is one of the display of skill as part of an earlier investment and development of knowledge in the game, that is, a display of how the player has been through the game enough times to be able to navigate with considerable speed and presumably, as part of a competitive agenda, to get through the game as fastest player. This display and implicit competitive attitude is similar to another approach previously cited that seems to be obsessively interested in the domino effect. Here the machinima is a mapping of skill, which has its own competitive streak the display of technique coming from investment in Garry's Mod and its manipulative possibilities. Such machinima as *HL2 Rube Goldberg Device: Reloaded* (Deans 2005) and *Asskicking Device* (Matthias Seidel, 2005) are two excellent examples of this approach. The strategy based on the idea of dominos tumbling against each other but broadened to explore connective possibilities within the G-Mod environment maps both the imaginative and technical skills of the producers coupled with a wonderful sense of humour, a dimension that is apparent in many of the machinima works available. For example in *Asskicking Device* exploding drums connect with intricate pulley systems, rocket propelled sleds, rolling drums and metallic sheets in a trajectory marked by explosions and debris which finally operates a swinging arm with a boot on the end kicking Breen, a prominent character in the Half-Life environment, in the backside.

These works display sophistication in manipulation that becomes part of the pleasure of display and these can be associated with similar displays of manipulative skill derived from the G-Mod repertoire. Examples of such works include *Garry's Mod - The Catapult Part 1* (Digital Pimps Video, 2006a), *Garry's Mod - Building Catapults* (Digital Pimps Video, 2006b) and *Garry's Mod - Thruster Man* (Digital Pimps Video, 2006c) with the latter exploring the possibilities of reconfiguring the physics and gravity for the G-Mod environment. This process is extended to displays of construction and the creation of different machines that are shown for their multiple add-ons established through the component choices with G-Mod. *Garry's Mod - The Kill Car...* (Digital Pimps Video, 2006d) is a useful example of this common approach. The justification from the designer is that it was made to "look badass.

It isn't the best performer but it does look cool" (Digital Pimps Video, 2006) and this reinforces the particular strategies of display and shared pleasures that we are exploring. Another pleasure is mapped in stunts performed in the environment as well as in a similar vein, the actual pleasures of shooting and destroying things, a simple and real pleasure that all gamers experience in the Half Life environments. Here we have a pleasure of spectacle rather than any narrative agendas and what is mapped are the shared and exhilarating experiences of exploiting the possibilities of the physics engine and more often the possibilities of shooting other characters in the game world. Examples of this are numerous but a few typical examples include *Stunts of Garry's Mod 3 Remix* (Stunt Finland Product, 2006), *Half-Life Enhanced* (Ryan Bloom, 2006) and *Bargaining with Larry* (Slight Miscalculation, 2000).

This latter work also signals another approach to machinima that of the imitation of previously established genres, including music video, drama, parody and fantasy. Again *A Few Good G-Men* (Randall Glass, 2006) is a famous and sophisticated version of this type of display, where the skills displayed are those of simulating a scene from the film *A Few Good Men* (Reiner, 1992) by using the possibilities inherent in the games engine. *Half-Life 2: The Matrix Reloaded* (Unknown, 2005) is similarly inspired by cinema but in this case rather than a direct simulation it is a capturing of some of the aesthetics and unique techniques of the film in terms of bullet time and the acrobatic gravity defying movements of the characters. Other genres adapted and often parodied include commercials such as *Nike Basketball Spoof - Half-Life 2* (Unknown, 2006), music videos, *Half-Life 2 Session* (Monkey Junkey, 2006) and numerous trailers anticipating the next Half Life experience. *Half-Life 2 Unofficial Trailer* (Crepuscular, 2005) is an example of this latter genre adaptation which, given the format, is another example of the display of pleasure and aesthetics that the producer/player celebrates. The trailer has also been utilised to anticipate machinima that have a much stronger sense of an independent feature while utilising the experience of the virtual environments of games as well as the conventions and codes of the cinematic experience.

For example *The Last Trailer* (Unknown, 2006) anticipates a forty-minute feature released on July 15th 2006 while similarly the trailer *The Life of Raphael Carter Trailer* (Ride the Emu, 2006) announces the production of another machinima series also based on the Half Life 2 games engine.

Machinima is still heavily bound into the pleasures of the game playing and fan experience but there are growing indications evidenced through the investment in features, for instance, that suggests this capture is porous and open to new possibilities. The potential for new directions and even an escape from the model of conventional cinema as a basis for machinima production is growing and as new energies are invested, possibly from sources outside the territories of the game world itself the characteristics and energies of machinima will also change. One new direction could be anticipated by the introduction of the portal tool that offers a new relationship to dimensionality ('where the impossible is easy,' Valve) and therefore challenging the assumptions of the three dimensionality of the virtual environment. The portal tool allows movement through walls, floors and ceilings, breaking boundaries and offering new possibilities for trajectories that have not until now been able to be explored. This tool indicates the future for new approaches to spatiality and new approaches to an understanding of what machinima might become as it evolves through the multiple investments of players, designers, programmers and above all the fans that feed the desire to celebrate and explore games worlds in all of their manifestations.

Conclusion

This paper has begun to conceptualise the dialogue that exists between creative exchanges of fans/players that have been shown to emanate from ethnographic practices within game spaces. In doing so, fans of Half Life 2 have constructed a body of work that reveals the spatial pleasures that initially arise from 'everyday' experiences within game-play but go on to be elucidated within the cartographic practice of machinima production, through the mapping of particular actions that reflect particular desires and pleasures enclosed within the representational spaces of Half Life. Through examining a particular group of machinima producers, such as Half Life fans, it has been possible to uncover the practices that shape their particular modes of filmic expression that also acknowledges how machinima is contributing to an articulation of a shared community of game-player interests and investments. In opening up its software for player manipulation, Half Life 2's developers have enabled fan/player have been able to absorb and translate game playing practices into another form of cultural activity, producing machinima that combines emergent digital authorship with cultural appropriation in a manner that seamlessly and effectively integrates and absorbs other texts. Even the level of the environmental journeying of players, found within virtual Rube-Goldberg works, suggests a complex combination of self-reflexive referencing that acknowledges and combines the experiences of the gamer and a more universal, accessible and interpretable forms of expression. Machinima has therefore effortlessly developed into a key mode of communication contributing to the social nature and interpretive and cultural activities of game players.

References

- Aaresth, E.J. "Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer Games." In *CyberText Yearbook 2000*. Edited by M. Eskelinen and R. Koskimaa. Finland: Research Centre for Contemporary Culture, 2001.
- Aumont, J. *The Image*. London: British Film Institute, 1997.
- Bittanti, M. "The Technoludic Film: Images of videogames in films (1973-2001)." *Gamasutra*, 2002. http://www.gamasutra.com/education/theses/20020501/bittanti_01.shtml. (accessed July 21, 2006).
- Brooker, W. *Using The Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans*. London: Continuum, 2002.
- Caillois, R. *Man, Play and Games* (Meyer Barash trans.). Paris: Libraririe Gallimard, 1958.
- Carr, D., D. Buckingham, A. Burn and G. Schott. *Computer games: text, narrative and play*. London: Polity Press, 2006.
- Carroll, J. and D. Cameron. "Machinima: Digital performance and emergent authorship." In *Changing Views: Worlds in Play*. Edited by S. de Castell and J. Jenson. <http://www.gamesconference.org/digra2005>, 2005.
- Copier, M. "The Other Game Researcher: Participating in and watching the construction of boundaries in game studies." In *Level Up*. Edited by M. and J. Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University Press, 2003.
- Cubitt, S. *EcoMedia*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.
- Cubitt, S. *Digital Aesthetics*. London: Sage, 1998.
- de Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.
- Fiske, J. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom." In *Adoring Audience: Fan culture and popular media*. Edited by L. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Hanson, M. *The End of Celluloid: Film futures in the digital age*. Mies, Switzerland: Rotovision, 2004.

- Hebdige, D. "Subculture – The meaning of style." In *The Subcultures Reader*. Edited by K. Gelder and S. Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Jenkins, H. *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Jenson, J. "Fandom as Pathology: The consequences of characterisation." In *Adoring Audience: Fan culture and popular media*. Edited by L. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992.
- King, G. and T. Krzywinska. "Gamescapes: exploration and virtual presence in game-worlds." In *Level Up*. Edited by M. and J. Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University Press, 2003.
- Kress, G and T. van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Lefebvre, H. *The Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith (trans.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
- Lewis, L. *Adoring Audience: Fan culture and popular media*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Lindley, C.A. "The Gameplay Gestalt, Narrative and Interactive Storytelling." In *Level Up*. Edited by M. and J. Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University Press, 2003.
- Marino, P. *3D Game-Based Filmmaking: The Art of Machinima*. Arizona: Paraglyph Press, 2004.
- Reynolds, B. and J. Fitzpatrick, J. "The Transversality of Michel De Certeau: Foucault's Panoptic Discourse and the Cartographic Impulse." *Diacritics* (1999): 63-80.
- Schott, G. and A. Burn. "Art (Re)production as an Expression of Collective Agency within Oddworld Fan-culture." *Works & Days, Capitalizing on Play: Politicized Readings of the Computer Game Industry* 22, 1 & 2 (2004): 251-274.
- Shields, R. *The Virtual*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Soja, E.W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Taylor, L. "Toward a Spatial Practice in Video Games." <http://www.gameology.org/node/809/print>, 2005 (accessed 12th August 2006).
- van Leeuwen, T. *Speech, Music, Sound*. London: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- MACHINIMA CITED**
- Andy12343. *Fight*. <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=947>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2005.
- Baron Von Fuchenstein Productions. *Raining Men Half Life 2*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7356984709167873032&q=Raining+Men+Half-Life+2>, (accessed 5th August 2006) 2005.
- Bloom, Ryan. *Half-Life Enhanced*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3727012644573081667&q=Half+Life++Enhanced>, (accessed August 11th 2006) 2006.
- Crepuscular. *Half-Life 2 Unofficial Trailer*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4569118562410446787&q=Half+Life>, (accessed 13th August 2006) 2005.
- Deans. *HL2 Rube Goldberg Device: Reloaded*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8926325136071596338> (accessed 11th August 2006) 2005.
- Digital Pimps Video. *Garry's Mod - The Catapult Part 1* <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1721653051496074082> (accessed 11th August 2006) 2006a.
- Digital Pimps Video. *Garry's Mod - Building Catapults*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5360416366205364131>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2006b.
- Digital Pimps Video. *Garry's Mod - Thruster Man*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2734636983605561768> (accessed 7th August 2006) 2006c.
- Digital Pimps Video. *Garry's Mod - The Kill Car...*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2674781752015900247> (accessed 7th August 2006) 2006d.
- Glass, Randall. *A Few Good G-Men*
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1153050993840275715&q=A+Few+Good+G-Men>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2006.

hl2world. *Half Life 2: Roses*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1755906818814428637&q=Half+Life>, (accessed 4th August 2006) 2005.

HL2QQ. *HL2Done Quick* <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7597745302270855580>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2006.

Jantol, Tom. *A Dream Within A Dream*. <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=1235>, (accessed 3rd August, 2006) 2005.

Jenkins, Leeroy. *Leeroy*

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6582317322132450178&q=Leeroy+%2B+World+of+Warcraft>, (accessed 28th July, 2006) 2006.

Monkey Junkey. *Half-Life 2 Session*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8472215197162441594&q=Half+Life>, (accessed 13th August 2006) 2006.

Not Me. *Half Life 2 Runthrough in 3 Hours*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8074474733129207640>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2006.

Phase Zero. *Half Life completado en 45 min*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=164552782388117758>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2003.

Powell, Nick. *Stacy's Mom*. <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=2672>, (accessed 5th August 2006) 2006.

Ride the Emu Productions. *The Life of Raphael Carter Trailer* <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6613253768632793169&q=The+Life+of+Raphael+Carter+Trailer>, (accessed August 14th 2006) 2006.

Ride The Emu Productions. *The Life of Raphael Carter*. <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=1815>, (accessed 5th August, 2006) 2006.

Seidel, Matthias. *Asskicking Device* <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6148878850469533200>, (accessed 8th August 2006) 2005.

Select Start. *Select Start: Episode 1* <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=2347>, (accessed 5th August 2006) 2006.

Slight Miscalculation. *Bargaining with Larry*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6817309207655042106&q=Bargaining+with+Larry>, (accessed 12th August 2006) 2000.

Stunt Finland Product. *Stunts of Garry's Mod 3 Remix* <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5839477166896459760>, (accessed 9th August 2006) 2006.

Teckno Studios. *Duct Tape Infomercial* <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?streaming=2255>, (accessed 5th August 2006) 2006.

Unknown. *Half-Life 2: The Matrix Reloaded*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6027747168354232684&q=Half+Life>, (accessed 11th August 2006) 2005.

Unknown. *Nike Basketball Spoof- Half-Life 2*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5301679985197343272&q=Half+Life>, (accessed 10th August 2006) 2006.

Unknown. *The Last Trailer*.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=877414835031514095&q=The+Last+Half+Life>, (accessed 13th August, 2006) 2006.