

machinima



Second Front, *28 Avatars Later*, 2007, 04:56, Second Life Machinima still. Courtesy of Second Front, www.secondfront.org

What is the future for Machinima?

I personally see Machinima's potential heading in three major areas. One is the continuing transformation of culture and commentary. Machinima plays a significant part in gaming and even internet culture now, and provides a relatively cheap and easy way for people to express their ideas and comment on the world they play and live in. It significantly lowers the barrier of entry to creatively express your thoughts, and with that, broadens our cultural views. There are many amazing movies out there that would not make sense if they weren't filmed in a computer game context.

Second, the approachability and ease of making films with computer games allows for a more creative and critical view on the games that we play. It adds a layer of creative experimentation to almost every game that the game designers did not intend. Telling a story is a very individual and personal thing to do. The amount of exposure to how video games work and what you can make out of them adds a new layer of media literacy that I feel is very important in a time of massive media exposure.

The last area is that of real-time performances, much like theatre. With computational possibilities and connectedness, a whole new way of storytelling is possible, one that transcends our perception, performance and engagement with theatre and live performances. This is obviously more based on technology than content, but combining the approachability of video-games and the immediacy of theatre provides an amazing playing field that we've only slowly started to explore.

Friedrich Kirschner is a filmmaker, visual artist and software developer. He re-purposes computer games and realtime animation technology to create animated narratives and interactive performances. Currently, he's working on an open-source realtime animation tool called moviesandbox.

For more information on his practice, visit <http://www.zeitbrand.de/>, or view his work online at <http://vimeo.com/fiezi>.

For more information on moviesandbox, check out <http://www.moviesandbox.net/>.

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EXHIBITION DATES

20 July to 7 August 2010

PUBLISHER

QUT Precincts
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Qld 4000 Australia

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CRICOS No. 00213J

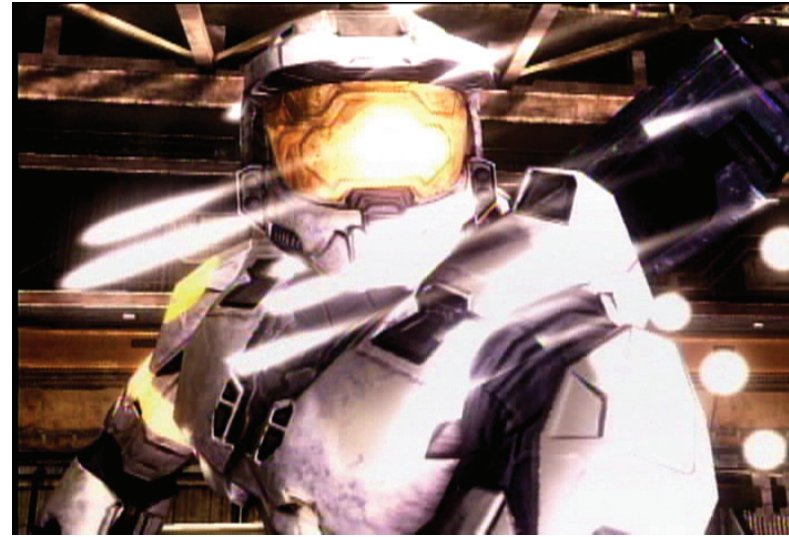
Cover image: Brigit Lichtenegger, *4Jetpacks4*, 2009, machinima still. Courtesy of Brigit Lichtenegger, Bryn Oh, Nonnatus Korhonen, Glyph Graves, Creative Machinery and the Virtual Art Initiative.

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Machinima artist Friedrich Kirschner talks with Olivia Porgand, a member of QUT's Machinima Curation Team

How would you define Machinima in its present form?

Machinima in its present form is probably best defined as "Filmmaking using Video Game Technology". It's a term often used by Paul Marino, the Director of the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, and I feel it encapsulates the current state of Machinima quite well. Most works people will stumble upon will use settings within existing games to tell a story.



Chris Burke, *This Spartan Life*, 2005-. Halo 2. Courtesy of the artist.

How important do you think the notion of narrative is when constructing a Machinima work? Is it possible to make Machinima without a narrative?

Narrative is a broad term. Today, we design everything from Computer Operating Systems to elevator controls with "narrative" in mind, so it's hard to say that time-based work like Machinima movies can have no narrative. Most Machinima movies relate to a very classical idea of narrative, with character arcs, dialogue, story development and so on. But of course there are the odd ones out: films that are based on mood, visual expression, or document special events, like protests or performances in Multiplayer game environments. I think the term narrative is as much applicable to Machinima as it is to Animation in general.



Friedrich Kirschner, *Person 2184*, 2005. Unreal Tournament 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

How has Machinima changed from its beginnings in Doom and Quake to the present day? How many of these changes have been affected by the evolution of the game engines themselves?



Alan Sondheim, *What Remains*, 2007. Second Life. Courtesy of the artist and Sachiko Hayashi.

However, I do think that most of the evolution of filmmaking in games was stimulated by people eager to tell their stories with the limited capabilities they had access to. Game developers soon recognised the potential of user-generated content in marketing their products. There's still a fair share of user-created tools, hacks and add-ons for popular games that provide additional functionality for filmmakers, and with the rise of Massively Multiplayer Games, a whole new way of documenting and reporting on in-game occurrences has found its way into Machinima.

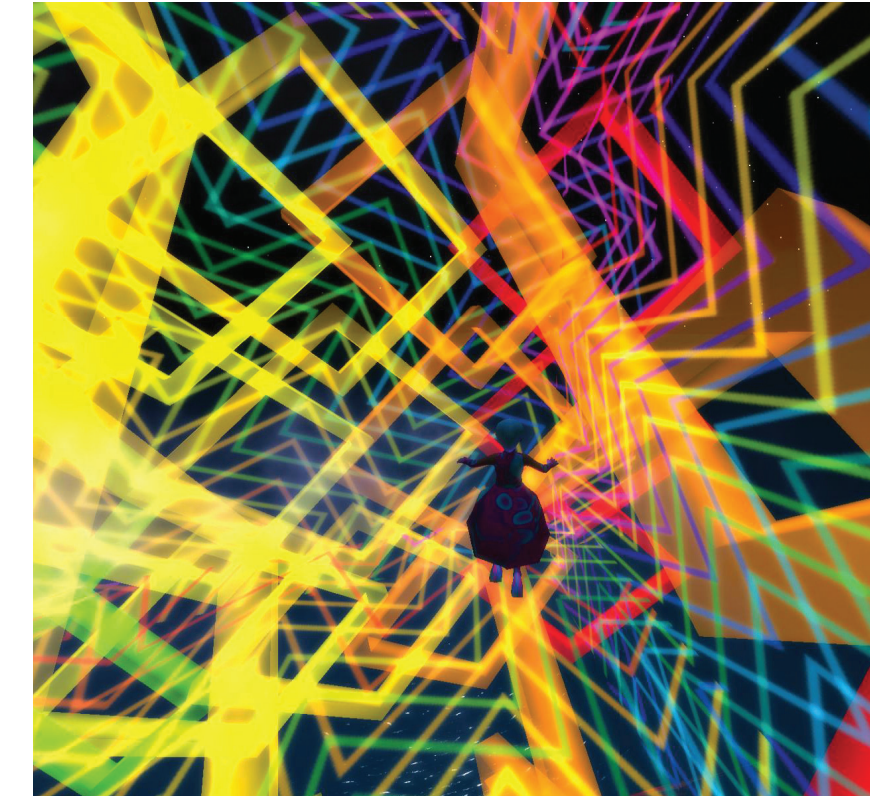
Many Machinima works over the years have been focused on the characters offering a critique of the game engine. Is this still a relevant practice today or has game-critique reached its limitations?

I think for as long as video games are based on exaggerated characters and ridiculous settings, critique comes naturally. Machinima is a way for people to play with the content, stereotypes and tropes that are presented to them.



Clan Phantasm, *Devil's Covenant*, 1998. Quake 2. Courtesy of Eric Bakutis and Clan Phantasm.

Well, of course the graphics are shinier and have more polygons. As well as this, though, there are some more subtle changes. The first Machinima tools, like Keygrip 2 for Quake 2, had highly advanced functionality for filming and editing Machinima for the time. While most games are now developed with editing tools to create custom levels and import characters and animations, in the early days not much work was going into tools specific for filmmaking. Until YouTube arrived, game designers weren't aware of the marketing potential of user-generated movies. Now we have games with direct-to-YouTube functionality (*Spore* by Electronic Arts), built in editors with video effects (*Skate 2*, also by Electronic Arts) and so on. Also, in recent years, more and more "Machinima only" software has appeared on the market, like iClone, Moviestorm, and Muvizu. And then there's *SecondLife!*



Lance Shield, *Broken Rainbow Cloudy Night*, 2008, 03:09. Second Life Machinima still. For Real-Un-Real, The Danish Arts Council, Netfilmmakers.dk, Annette Finnsdottir (the Director of Netfilmmakers.dk).

Currently some schools are trialling Machinima-based projects for senior students. What do you believe the benefit would be in teaching Machinima-making skills to this age group?

As mentioned above, Machinima can be a way to express your ideas and feelings within video games. Given that these games play a significant role in people's lives, it is important to understand how to become literate in a medium that technology defines and where content is largely dictated by economic considerations. Machinima provides a counterpoint to the simple narratives presented in many videogames. Using Machinima as a creative way to approach video-games in a school context opens the possibility for dialogue and creative exploration of this otherwise rather hidden area of people's lives.



Sachiko Hayashi, *N00sphere Playground*, 2008, 02:50. Second Life Machinima still. For Real-Un-Real, The Danish Arts Council, Netfilmmakers.dk, Annette Finnsdottir (the Director of Netfilmmakers.dk).

What influence do independent Machinima-making tools such as moviesandbox have on the Machinima genre?

Moviesandbox is designed as a film-making and performance tool with little initial resemblance to the aesthetics and conventions of video games. It brings the speed and usability of real-time camera control and animation to content creation. Right now, most tools provide an easy and intuitive way to collage pre-made objects and characters together to create your movie. With moviesandbox I explore ways of creating individual content and providing a space for more individualised aesthetics, with the hopes that the real-time feedback and manipulation options can be put to use in more forms of storytelling, like theatre, performance or interactive storytelling.