Chapter XXII
Machinima in Second Life

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a brief history of machinima, films created by computer users within virtual worlds, and focuses on machinima produced within the social virtual world of Second Life, on how to create machinima in Second Life, and on highlighting select examples of Second Life machinima. This chapter also connects user-produced content, like machinima, with the openness and rules of the platforms in which content is created. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of legal thinking surrounding user-created content, including machinima, and points to the rise of the player-producer in these systems.

INTRODUCTION

Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking. Anthropology and developmental psychology may study social and individual histories of such world-building, but the search for a universal or necessary beginning is best left to theology. My interest here is rather with the processes involved in building a world out of others.

Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking (1978)

When we watch a film, we appreciate it emotionally and aesthetically. When we watch the Coen Brothers’ No Country for Old Men, for example, we are too chilled watching Javier Bardem as a psychopathic serial killer and too absorbed in the horrifying yet beautiful frame of boot scuffs on a police station floor to think deeply about the details of how the scene was shot, the editing tools used, or any legal issues the Coen Brothers may have encountered in adapting a novel to a screenplay. Like a “real” film, machinima films work aesthetic wonders and move us emotion-
ally: try to watch the machinima film *Watch the World* without at least a few tears sneaking out. When watching a machinima film as we would any other, we may not think deeply about the characteristics of the virtual world (the platform) in which it was produced.

When we think about the creation and distribution of machinima specifically, however, as this chapter does, it can be difficult to separate the final work from the virtual world in which it was created. This is because the platform a machinima artist selects strongly influences the genre, point of view, perspective, set, lighting, characters, and objects visually apparent in the final cut. A machinima film created in a first-person shooter (FPS) massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) like Halo looks quite different than one created in Hello Kitty Online (Sanrio Town), with pale pink landscapes and places named Flower Kingdom. Ford 2007 used two different game engines, The Sims and Half Life 2, to produce the same film script. Ford notes that each game engine effects genre and thereby intrinsically changes the dynamics of the “same” story being told. In addition, as for most films, the production process and the constraints of time and budget inevitably influence the type of machinima produced and its level of sophistication (Ford 2007).

The virtual world selected for a machinima production also influences more than we can see. Less obvious but just as, if not more, important than aesthetic impact is the degree of a virtual world’s openness: the content creation tools it provides (or doesn’t) to users, such as camera controls, avatar customizations, in-game video recording, and its terms of service (TOS) and end-user license agreement (EULA), which usually describe what content users should or should not create, how content should or should not be modified, what content (if any) users own, and consequences for content modification.

This chapter aims to contribute to the awareness of machinima and related cultural, technical, and legal issues by describing what machinima is and who creates it, as well as a brief history of how machinima evolved along with virtual worlds and tools that enabled users to create their own content within these virtual environments. This chapter also focuses on the history, content creation tools, machinima, and TOS of Second Life, a social virtual world, and provides a brief tutorial on how to create machinima in Second Life. This chapter concludes with a brief overview of recent and emerging legal questions on user-created content, copyright, and machinima specifically.

1.0 WHAT IS MACHINIMA?

“Machinima” combines “machine,” “animation,” and “cinema” to describe computer-animated films that are shot within video games or social virtual worlds and primarily distributed online. Machinima is also defined as “a computer movie made using a real-time, 3D game/virtual-world engine instead of a special application dedicated to making computer movies” (Rymaszewski 2007). These definitions make an important distinction between MMORPGs and virtual worlds, like Second Life, that are not games but are more social virtual worlds.

Though MMORPGs and social virtual worlds like Second Life may look like the same 3D spaces occupied by avatars, these terms are not interchangeable or synonymous. Put simply, *social virtual worlds are not games*. The primary purpose of social virtual worlds is the creation of meaning through the manipulation of the world and communication with others within the world, while *structured play is the primary purpose of game play worlds* (Damer 2007). Throughout this chapter, the term *social virtual world* will be used as shorthand for “a 3D, online, collaborative, virtual world that is not a game.”

At present, machinima means more than just “a specific type of film:” Machinima has