12 Cheats or Glitch?: Voice as a Game Modification in Machinima

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Machinima is defined by Hugh Hancock (a machinima director and, more recently, the author of *Machinima for Dummies*) as "a technique of making films inside virtual realities." The word *machinima* mixes the idea of cinema, machine, and animation. It is the encounter between a film and a game, in which gamers become film directors. As a technique to produce films, machinima is a new cinematographic genre.

Voices in machinimas appear as the human side of the virtual game environment. Behind the gamer performance that produces character actions, dialogs create the sense and the drama of the movie. Voices, through dialogs, songs, or voice-overs, also become game modifications, as they transform the original game function and offer a new set of meaning to the virtual realities initially created by game developers.

Background: Games and Machinima

A videogame is a means by which we learn to control the 21st century. By playing, we situate and understand ourselves as citizens of hyperactive electronic space.
—Justin Hall

Video and computer games are the major entertainment industry in the twenty-first century, more popular than cinema and the music industries. For the new generation, this interaction between a machine and a human body even takes the place of another powerful mass medium—television. Michael Stora, a French psychoanalyst who uses video games to treat autistic patients, says: "Playing time is a pleasure time. It is a time where we can take a revenge on the images and manipulate them as they manipulated us before."[3] However, although games do involve interaction, there is still an

element of passive consumption, entertainment, and passing time in these digital media. During play, one often loses the notion of time: we wander in a virtual world fighting against each other or building worlds endlessly. Therefore, I would argue that games may be more usefully analyzed as objects of mass consumption rather than as sites of interaction, action, or even perhaps, play in its fullest sense.

While playing games, the gamer's body is mainly immobile—except, at the time of this writing, with the new Wii console. The body is like a statue, but the hands and the eyes move nervously and in a compulsive way. What is happening with the gamer's own voice is outside the province of this chapter, though it does come to the fore in machinima—perhaps suggesting something of what goes on among game players.

In the art world, works making games, modifying games, and using games for machinima can be seen as following in the footsteps of Dadaism and Surrealism, which saw play and entertainment as the most subversive and also as the ultimate forms of art. Even outside of an art context, it is important to remember that as soon as the first personal computer was created, MIT computer scientists hacked the computer code to conceive the first digital creation: *Spacewar!* And *Spacewar!* was a computer game. So, if computer game history is related to the roots of digital creation and to digital code hacking, machinima can be understood to follow this tradition.

Machinima represents the particular moment when gamers begin to produce content and where games become tools of expression. These movies are mostly narrative, but they can also be experimental, artistic, or related to music, documentaries, ads, and feature films. They can be seen as a new way of representation in the digital age, along with 3D animation, digital cinema, or video.

It is interesting that the word "machinima" came about in a way similar to the origins of the term "net.art."[4] Both were born in the mid-1990s and have a relationship with an e-mail exchange and a misspelling. The original name was "machinema," which merged machine and cinema, but the "e" disappeared, misspelled by Hugh Hancock, who replaced it with an "i": the word "machinima" sounded better and was used from then on.

The machinima movement began in the mid-1990s when game developers created the functionality to record game action in real time, like in the game *Doom*, released in 1994. This allowed gamers to show each other their gaming skills, by exchanging demos of their actions. What were called

"speedruns" appeared and consisted in the best-timed performances of the gamers to finish *Doom* levels.

Although it is not possible to delve too deeply here into the history of machinima, it is relevant to mention what the demoscene is and how it can be seen as the early roots of machinima. The demoscene is part of the hacker scene. It began in the 1980s when developers hacked games and then created some credits titles, putting their signatures on the cracked game. A major community was born, exchanging these "intros"; then the game-hacking culture grew up by developing audiovisuals to improve their skills in sound, image, and computer code development. The demoscene was huge in Europe and meetings often happened in stadiums. These audio-visuals were rarely narratives, but as the technology evolved they became real digital animations.

As Hugh Hancock writes of machinima's history:

Machinima grew out of hacks made to the game *Quake*, which allowed players to edit recordings of their gameplay into real movies. And while most of these movies were the equivalent of hip-hop songs explaining how tough and macho the game player was …, some filmmakers were using these *Quake* hacks to make real films.[5]

From death matches to fan demos, some "real" films emerged and were put online by gamers on websites. Teams called the "clans" were created. One of them, the Rangers, are known as the first directors of a narrative *Quake* movie, *The Diary of a Camper*, released in 1996, which added dialog on the screen. A new cinematographic genre had emerged and continued to evolve with new technologies: new game engines (*Quake II, Quake III Arena, Unreal Tournament*), graphic rendering, and real-time video capture tools like FRAPS (which comes from frames per second), and others. Within a few years, the movement became popular and received quite positive recognition from the media. In 2000, the website machinima.com was launched by Hugh Hancock and allowed the community to put their movies online and also to find tips, tutorials and all the resources they needed to create their own machinima.

As machinima developed, makers made use of new tools to work with a wider range of games, including massively multiplayer games. In the first version of one of the most popular games, *The Sims*, the developers discovered that some players used this community building game to create stories told in photographs. In 2004, the second version of the game was created with a complete series of tools for movie making. This is the easiest way to

create machinima. And with this type of game, machinima makers emerged as people who weren't just hard-core gamers or 3D animation directors, but those who found it cool to express themselves by using *The Sims* to tell stories. This is how in 2005, April G. Hoffmann, a sports trainer in her normal life, became famous with her serial *The Awakening*. Made with *The Sims 2*, her movies tell the story of people who awake in a place they didn't know and where strange things are happening. For one of the first times, the movie wasn't so much related to the themes developed inside the game; thus from fan movies, or game fan communities, the machinima movies became more diverse in terms of content, stories, or genres.

During the riots in Paris in 2005, Alex Chan, a graphic designer based in the northern suburbs of Paris, directed the short film *The French Democracy* using *The Movies* game engine, from a game created by Peter Molyneux. This was the first political machinima. It explained how and why the riots began. Alex Chan had never made a movie before, but faced with the media coverage of the riots, which was massively biased against the youngsters, he decided to give them a voice by the means of a game. He directed the movie in one week, subtitled it in English, and posted it on *The Movies* website. Alex Chan's movie was downloaded more than a million times.

This brief history demonstrates that machinima can be a means of political, social, or artistic expression and open to a wider audience than the games were initially designed for. The main question for this chapter, to which I will now turn, is concerned with the role of voice within machinima and the complex ways voice can relate to image. I will begin by looking at the technical process of recording and editing voice performances.

Recording and Editing Voice in Machinima

There are many different techniques for directing machinima: human action, scripting, and artificial intelligence. Paul Marino explains:

Character control in Machinima production can be approached from two different directions: scripting based (or algorithmic) or human controlled (or interactive). The scripted approach is much like animation and the human-controlled approach is more akin to puppeteering/acting . . . the person triggers the character's actions as needed, either to pre-recorded dialogue or dialogue performed in the moment. From here, you can see this technique's affiliation with live-action filmmaking.[6]

Game actions are recorded in real time, thanks to tools like FRAPS for the video capture and then edited with some specific editing tools like Keygrip.

Most times, the sets, the designs, and the games characters are used without any computer code modification. But for "serious" machinima productions, some directors modify the game characters and environments, as the German artist Friedrich Kirschner did for *The Photographer* and *Person 2184*, using *Unreal Tournament* and the Ill Clan respectively, with Quake. For the first-person shooter games, the game is often modified in order to hide the weapon of the character controlling the camera—otherwise, there would be always a weapon in the foreground of the image. The dialogs are mostly done in real time, recording the actor's performance live. For that purpose, machinima makers use microphones and headsets to communicate during the action.

Hugh Hancock also discusses the possibilities of recording dialogs from different locations; however, in his view, it is always better for a director to communicate live and directly with his actors. Nevertheless, there are some makers who do record dialogs separately and then edit to the images after the shooting. It mostly depends on whether the dialogs are scripted. Some machinima movies are subtitled, rather than using recorded sound, to make it easier and faster to create them. Subtitles may also deal with language hegemony. Alex Chan chose to subtitle "The French democracy" in English to be able to post it on *The Movies* website, but also because he wanted it to be watched by the international machinima community. As Cillian Lyons, resident machinima artist and producer for Machinimasia (The Asian Machinima Festival), also explains, voice is something they specially discussed for Asian movies because the majority of the machinima community is English-speaking.[7]

Editing voices in machinima is a bit like in traditional filmmaking, except for the fact that you are actually monitoring puppets. Also, unlike traditional animation, you don't have all the facial animations at your disposal. Tones and expressions of voices make the difference between each character. As Hugh Hancock reminds us:

Unlike a live film director, you can't really just let an actor's performance carry the moment. Your audience will get bored watching your characters, even in the tensest of verbal confrontations. Cut to a wide shot or a reaction shot as needed.[8]

Voice in machinima isn't limited to narrative movies with dialogs, but also appears in songs for video clips directed in game engines. Since 2003, machinima have also been used to make video clips, called Video Mods, played initially on MTV. One of the most famous Video Mods is *I'm Still*

Seeing Breen. Paul Marino, directing in the game engine of *Half Life 2*, used the software Face Poser for the lip-synching. He explains his work with Face Poser:

In *Still Seeing Breen*, I used the *Half-Life 2* SDK (software development kit) & Face Poser, which uses voice analysis software to automatically lip sync the characters to spoken text. This represents a large leap in productivity, as animators are no longer required to spend time creating the lip sync by hand. As a result, this allows for more experimentation, as the workload doesn't factor so much into the effort. Seeing this, I decided to attempt a music video, with a lead character singing the lead track.

However there was an additional challenge in that the music was already mixed down—with the vocals and instruments together in the same file. This causes a problem with the voice analysis software in FacePoser, as it can only analyse a clean vocal track in order to create the lip sync automatically. What I did to get around this was to sing the song myself and record that as a WAV file. Then use FacePoser to analyse that file for the lip sync. Once the lip sync character worked correctly, I captured the character to video, deleted the audio of my singing and then merged the character video with original song file. It was a creative work around of sorts, but worked extremely well.[9]

Relation of Voice to Image

Apart from the gamer's performance that creates the action in the movies, voices are the human side of machinima. As machinima are entirely shot in 3D environments of games, they are made of digital images. These images are part of already existing worlds, and even if machinima directors modify them, they remain digital and mostly unchanged. Each of these worlds bring their own visual imaginary: a fantasy world with *World of Warcraft*, an urban modern life with *The Sims*, futuristic landscapes with *Halo*, or a violent suburb atmosphere with *Grand Theft Auto*, for instance.

More than an aesthetic, it is a 3D vision of the world—a digital representation of it. And in these environments, voices transform the meaning of the scenes. Originally imagined by hard-core gamers, machinima are a way to come back to the virtual universes with which they feel so comfortable. Voices are a tool to appropriate these worlds by adding their own stories, thanks to dialogs between characters. Voices bring sensitivity, a sense of humor, or an absurd touch to these virtual spaces. In *366 Days*, a one-hour, twenty-minute video created by the French artists Ultralab, *Unreal Tournament* landscapes are mixed to video and graphic design. This video is a

fiction telling the story of an intelligent agent born inside a video game that wants now to take the control of the world. The agent talks through a voice-over in a poetic monologue that creates a dichotomy between the emotion held in the text and the violence of the fights from the games images.

Games are created to be fun, rather than to make you laugh or cry—even though this sometimes happens. Nevertheless, machinima voices offer a new set of emotions and allow us to perceive images in a different manner by getting closer to game characters and landscapes. It also brings an "as if analog" feeling to the machinima—a counterpoint to the digital. There is a sort of uncanny feel here, as the voice and image are out of phase with the warmth of the voice and the coolness of the image. The performed and scripted quality of the voice gives a not-digital feel to this very digital world. Polygons and avatars take a new dimension, a new personality—as if a human body would fill them up and breathe inside.

Furthermore, the voice works to bring about a reverse engineering of a mass consumerist object into a tool of narrative and artistic expression. With machinima, we can talk about an emerging game play: an unsuspected use of a game for an artistic objective. Here play operates in the fullest, most artistic sense of the word. Even though, of course, now ads are also created using the machinima techniques—for commercial purposes— nevertheless, machinima remains a tool that is available to anybody who has a game engine at home and who wants to express himself or herself by combining voice with the games' visuals.

Voices in Machinima as a Situationist Détournement of Video and Computer Games

By using virtual spaces and changing the perspective as an artistic strategy, machinima allow a distanced critique of a simulated world. They tend to erase the boundaries between reality and fiction and redefine the transgressive power of the game. "There, where the real world is changing into simple images, simple images become real human beings and efficient motivations for an hypnotic behavior."[10] They reactualize the Situationist conception of cinema, in which images, voices in dialogs or interviews or voice over, act as different layers of content. Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, in a joint text written in 1956, added to the Situationist theory of détournement[11]

the point that cinema is the most efficient method of détournement where détournement tends to pure beauty. It doesn't need to be a parody or a critique of a movie. In this text, both authors argue for the strategy of diverting a movie like the racist one *Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith by just changing the soundtrack in order to denounce the horrors of the war and the KKK activities.

Some machinima, like *This Spartan Life* (TSL) by Chris Burke, or *Landlord Vigilante*, written by artist Eddo Stern and writer Jessica Hutchins, could, I would argue, be compared to Situationist movies. *This Spartan Life* is a talk show about digital and gaming culture directed in the virtual space of the network game *Halo 2*. Chris Burke, aka Damian Lacaedemion, has special guests in the game: for instance, he interviewed Bob Stein on the future of the book and Malcolm McLaren about the 8bit music and the roots of punk music. As the talk show is filmed, players are fighting around Lacaedemion and his guests. Sometimes, other gamers, who don't realize that a talk show is happening live in the game, actually kill the guests. For instance, while Damian Lacaedemion was defending Malcolm McLaren against futuristic monsters, we could follow McLaren walking through the digital landscape, in the shape of a strange purple animal, talking about "magnificent failures better than little successes."12

Landlord Vigilante combines the visuals of a car chase with the musings of a cab driver about the economy. It allows a second level of reading the images. Based on a true story about their ex-landlady, *Landlord Vigilante* is an artistic monologue of a women cab driver (figure 12.1) directed in the game *Grand Theft Auto*, according to its makers,

because of its gritty depiction of Los Angeles and prospective violence, and the Sims, which is property/real-estate oriented. Each game presents a "world" or narrative arena confined by a set of prescribed, "rules"—we wanted to stretch and play with those rules to tell our own post-traumatic story.[13]

Why do I compare these machinimas to Situationist movies? Because, thanks to the voices, they add an artistic or a theoretical content to the images of violent games, and for that reason they are close to a Situationist film like *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* This movie, produced in 1973 by the French director René Viénet used a martial arts film—*The Crush* by Doo Kwang Gee—overdubbed with French revolutionary philosophic ideas. It was a radical critic of cultural hegemony designed to entertain and amuse, while demonstrating a number of artistic and political points.

Figure 12.1
Landlord Vigilante 1, the woman cab driver in action , excerpt of a machinima created by Jessica Hutchins and Eddo Stern, 2006
Image courtesy of Eddo Stern.

With machinima, the images come from a video or a computer game but are then transformed into short films. Though the Situationists had the idea of using a movie as the most efficient détournement because of cinema's capacity to reach a popular audience, new kinds of audience encounters are now possible with the extensive games audiences. Machinima began in the gamers' community, but it has expanded very quickly. The audience tends to be quite young and movies are often downloaded millions of times on websites such as Machinima.com or *The Movies,* You Tube and Dailymotion also distribute these films widely. Among the varying kinds of machinima, some like TSL or others mentioned earlier offer an alternative vision of the world. And it is voice, in particular, which gives the deturned edge to these machinima.

The Influence of Theater and Improvisation in Machinima Performance

As Roland Barthes wrote, the grain of the voice is an "erotic mix between the language and the tone."[14] In the human voice, the body travels from thought to its expression as language. Joseph Beuys once said during a conference given at the Dokumenta VI in 1977, that voice is a sculpture of the

thought.[15] It is the information sculpted by the air through the organs. It transforms the immateriality of thinking into materiality by bringing the body inside the sound.

Voice reflects the idea of alterity and the relationship to another person. Voice is the simultaneous presence and absence of human corporeality. Voice is the content and the meaning in language but also the sound of a person and their body through time and space. With recorded voices in cinema, the grain of the voice takes another dimension: it is the "anonymous body of the actor in my ear."[16] As we move into the digital domain, this materiality of voice is essential to machinimas and their virtual game spaces. Besides the narrative in the dialog writing, the voice over represents a huge part of machinimas. Paul Marino talks about it as the "humanness that is otherwise missing from the digital package":

Without the vocal performance, we lose all connection to relationship—between characters, between creator and audience and between audience and the narrative. The vocal work in a Machinima piece grounds the work in reality. It makes it not only digestible, which is paramount, but also makes the piece much more enjoyable.[17]

That is why the machinima Film Festival, which Marino founded in New York City, has a Voice-Over Performance prize. Voice represents more than half of the work of making machinima. As Burnie Burns, one of the author of the serial *Red vs Blue*, points out:

We spend most of our production time on the audio and voice work. In a 40 hour work week, 25 of it is spent in the writing and recording of the audio. I feel that the only way to differentiate a character from the others is through the voice. Since the videos are made in another medium, typically a "borrowed" medium, the actor's voice can make the project stand out.[18]

The voices of actors in machinimas "animate" the virtual spaces. They give life and personality to digital puppets, which were not a priori conceived by the game developers to have dialogs with each other. And as machinima directors cannot play with the facial expressions of their digital puppets in the way cinema does with live actors, or in traditional animation, they need to work very precisely on the voice-over. As Matt Dominianni, cofounder of the ILL Clan explains:

I think good voice-over work is a very important part of Machinima, since in most Machinima the characters are not very expressive. Traditionally, animation is an art form that allows for an unlimited degree of expression, and in particular when we

think of animated characters we think of exaggerated facial expressions. But Machinima is different because the game assets don't usually allow for much more than a static face, or in some cases a helmet with a mask covers the face. So it's really key that the voice-over work be as good as possible, giving the characters distinct, recognizable voices.[19]

The Ill Clan is one of the most famous in the machinima world. In 1998, they directed *Apartment Huntin'*, a great success in the *Quake* movie community. They are also known as the first to have performed a machinima live before an audience, in 2003 at the Florida Film Festival. In that performance, they improvised dialogs with the audience who were reacting to the story that Ill Clan were developing and filming live. The Ill Clan came from improvisational comedy and this has greatly influenced the way they make machinima and also explains how they managed to bring machinima to the live stage. Thanks to their theater experience, their work with dialogs is a wild mix between improvisation and scripted segments:

When we started doing the voice-over work for machinima, we improvised most of the dialogue. We would write an outline, based on the action we knew we wanted to happen, and then improvise dialogue to help get us from point a to point b. Later, with *TrashTalk* the scripts became more refined and most of the lines of dialogue were written in advance. Being improvisers though, we often would stray from the script. Also with *TrashTalk*, we recorded the dialogue at the same time that we controlled the characters, which makes it easy to go off on an unscripted tangent, and in my opinion gave the show an unpredictable nature that I really like.[20]

For Matt Dominianni, the main difference between improvisation on stage and with machinima is the absence of the body and its physicality. That's why the voice performance is so important, as it needs to give a personality and a clear intention to each character and be very expressive. Each character has to get its personal style, a special tone of voice, a certain type of reaction, vocal twitches, and a particular rhythm. To handle this kind of performance, the French directors of the award-winning film *Bill & John: Danger Attacks at Dawn*, appealed to a theater teacher in order to learn how to act and to understand the main principles of theater. Bertrand Le Cabec explains:

It was necessary, given our actors' weak talents and our lack of experience on the subject, to make these characters credible . . . to differentiate each character well, and between the characters, and also to act as truly as possible.[21]

Bill & John tells the story of two advanced pilots inside a military flight simulation game: *Lock On: Modern Air Combat*. The directors took the opposite

of the cold atmosphere of the game by the use of hilarious and absurd dialogs between the two pilots. The first scene begins with two military flight aircrafts on the ground, and one of the pilots amazed by the beauty of a flight aircraft yells:

What-the-fuck, mo-ther fu-cker, that's fucking beautiful! Hey John! See, even after all these years, I'll never get tired of it . . . That's when I think to myself . . . " "Bill! You piss me off! You've been pissing me off for ages! But now you're really pissing off! You yell, you yell! It pisses me off hearing you yelling from the minute you get up . . . and you, you, and you yell, You never shut up." "Well, You're in a great mood this morning . . . we're gonna have a great day." "But do you realize that because of you . . . we are stuck in these shit wrecks!"

As they try to take off, the more foolish of the two pilots has forgotten how to begin and launches a missile instead: "All right, now, let me see, slowly give it some gas . . . and ease up on the brakes. Wrong switch. So, brake, switch . . . and releasing brakes. Wrong switch again. Oh right . . . there it is . . . and let up on the brakes."

The authors played with the rhythm of each scene during the editing:

The silences in the sound track were more than essential to give life to characters we do not see on the screen but from which we guess the gesture. . . . The succession of uncontrolled events provoked by the two protagonists creates a distance effect which puts the spectator in the skin of an accessory witness.[22]

In a game, the imagination of players is driven by the actions of the play, scripts, and maps. In machinimas, our imagination can fill the empty spaces between the dialogs and, as with books, we can imagine what is happening in between. As in traditional cinema, we find elliptic narration in machinimas, which allows us to take an active part in the story and to go back to a more personal perception of what the images mean.

Bill & John reminds us of Beckett's absurd theater, where clownish characters hold discussions in strange spaces—cold and mostly empty. This confrontation between humorously edged and warmly human dialogs and "cold" digital spaces is also prominent in the voice performances of the famous machinima series *Red vs Blue*. Shot in the futuristic game *Halo 2*, it tells the story of the battle between Red and Blue. These two characters seem to be lost in the game space, talking endlessly about the meaning of life and death. The dialogs' script and its deep sense of humor is what made the series enormously successful and allowed machinima in general to achieve significant success.

Interviewed about the link between the dialogs written for the serial *Red vs Blue* and the Theater of the absurd, Burnie Burns agrees: "Yes, especially the early episodes. We wanted to know what would happen to videogame characters after the games were turned off. It's funny to think that these guys would have a life where they wait for someone to come along and play their game."[23]

This shift in meaning isn't only used for comic effect in machinima. To create a fictional effect and an artistic work by a détournement of game images, Eddo Stern and Jessica Hutchins worked differently with voice. *Landlord Vigilante* is a monologue and the tone of the voice is monotonous. Based on a true story that happened to the authors with their ex-landlady who tried to dupe them, as mentioned previously, we follow the thoughts of a woman cab driver. The authors chose third-person narration because it "gives the whole (first-person) monologue a disembodied, artificial feeling. Maybe these qualities allow it to be perceived as a subjective work of fiction, instead of blatant slander!"[24] Watching *Landlord Vigilante* is like traveling constantly from the text of the voice to the images, as if sometimes they couldn't be connected to each other, operating on different levels of perception.

To create their character, Stern and Hutchins hacked three different games: *The Movies*, *The Sims*, and *GTA San Andreas*. (figure 12.2) They also used images from the Net to make the fourth one, but for the voice they kept one young woman's voice:

We decided to conflate the disparate Leslies into one character by use of one voice for her monologue. To make the voice of the narrative more obviously disjointed and unnatural, we recorded the voice of the writer (an obviously younger female voice) as Leslie's voice. . . . We think the use of an unnatural voice for the character persistently disturbs audience immersion in the narrative and doesn't allow for suspension of disbelief. We're not sure if that's effective or not, but you could say the technique refers to the social atmospheres created in online role-playing games, or internet chat rooms, where the actual people behind the avatars you're interacting with aren't necessarily who they appear to be onscreen.[25]

This unnatural voice deals with the complexity of human identity and the boundaries between the fake and the reality. We are lost, because we'd like to believe in 3D images, but we know that it's a fiction, and the monologue reinforces this feeling, because it doesn't seem to take any side. It doesn't entirely reveal the identity of this woman.

Figure 12.2
 Landlord Vigilante 2, one of the faces created for the cab driver character, excerpt of a machinima created by Jessica Hutchins and Eddo Stern, 2006. Image courtesy of Eddo Stern.

Natural Voice versus Special Effects

Unlike in the fictional machinima I've been discussing, the work on voices in interviews done with machinima has to sound as natural as possible, because the people are real. However these, too, create a strange sensation. The voices of the people are real, they are talking about very diverse subjects related to reality, but their visual representations in the game—as digital puppets—make the whole thing funny, although strangely so. During the French presidential elections, Alex Chan transformed voters' interviews into short machinimas. During the day, he went out onto the streets in order to interview people about French identity, left or right wing, and then during the night, he replayed these interviews in the game *The Movies*, keeping the voices as he had recorded them. The result is very bizarre, because the characters in *The Movies* are created to move and follow a series of actions and not to stand up as in an interview. So as the "voters" played in the game move like jumping jacks, this creates a distortion between the meaning of what is said, the reality of natural voices and the images on the screen.

In *This Spartan Life*, Chris Burke, alias Damian Lacaedemion—the host of the show—also interviews real people while they are playing the network game *Halo*. During the interview, the host and his guests move through the game landscapes as discussed earlier. Because they are real people, the voices must sound as natural as possible. Chris Burke, a sound engineer, invites his guests to his New York Studio Bong + Dern, where their voices are recorded before being edited on the videos. He explains,

Our goal with TSL audio is to reinforce the fact that the "characters" are actually real people in the real world who are making the show on Xbox Live, inside *Halo*.

Since we cheat in order to get a clean recording in the interviews, we then go back and dirty the audio up again in the mix. This is to put the voices into the XBox Live space. If they are left dry, we feel they sound like they exist outside of that sonic space. I have experimented with several variations, even playing the audio back through the Xbox Live headset to add the streaming sound. We have settled on a series of audio plug-ins that overdrive the audio a bit and add a slight distortion and EQ to approximate the Xbox Live headset sound. . . . We avoid panning and spatializing with reverb, etc. because our goal is to not interfere with the fact that these are real people operating avatars in an online game. The audio should sound like the game experience. Infrequently we break that rule and add echo or other effects if it is dramatically justified or just funny.[26]

Burnie Burns also relates that initially they recorded voices with a very cheap speaker on a telephone but now use very expensive software to achieve the same effects.[27]

Conclusion

Even though there are some machinimas that are not dubbed with voice for technical or linguistic reasons, I have tried to demonstrate that voice in general constitutes the major game modification in machinima. Following the hacking tradition, voice gives another dimension to the use of games, transforming them into a form of expression. Voices in machinima provoke a shift in meaning similar to the way that Pascal Bonitzer discusses in relation to voice-over in cinema—they reopen the doors of our imagination as we watch preexisting digital images.

"To bring the focus to the off screen space, as another screen space," writes Pascal Bonitzer, "is to displace the focus from the gaze onto the voice, to release the voice from the dictates of the reality of the image."[28] Voices move our mind to another range of perception, diverting us to immerse

totally in digital images and allowing us to keep a critical distance while getting closer to characters.

Notes

1. Hugh Hancock and Johnnie Ingram, *Machinima for Dummies* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Wiley Publishing Inc, 2007) 10.

2. In Justin Hall's official website : http://interactive.usc.edu/members/jhall/ (accessed August 15, 2009).

3. Interviewed by Isabelle Arvers by email in 2002 while preparing the exhibition Playtime—the gaming room for the Festival Villette Numérique in Paris.

4. The legend says that one day, the artist Vuk Cosic received an anonymous e-mail with this sentence: "Everything is possible with the emergence of the Net. Art becomes obsolete." But because of a bug, the only word readable was net.art.

5. Hancock and Ingram, *Machinima for Dummies*,12.

6. Paul Marino, *The Art of Machinima* (Arizona, Paraglyph Press, 2004), 26–27.

7. Cillian Lyons, "The voice matter is something we have discussed previously for machinima and more so how it relates to Asia and as a foreign language as the majority of the community would be English speaking. Then also depending on the software of choice for the production would also depend on the voice or audio." E-mail message to the author, February 24, 2008.

8. Hancock and Ingram, *Machinima for Dummies*, 165.

9. Interview by Isabelle Arvers with Paul Marino, major figure in the machinima world, a maker, and founder of the Machinima Film Festival, January 2008.

10. Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, 1967, (Editions champ libre, Paris, 1971). "Là où le monde réel se change en simples images, les simples images deviennent des êtres réels, et les motivations efficientes d'un comportement hypnotique." ["When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings—dynamic figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behavior."] Translation from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (Paris, 1967). Translated by Ken Knabb, K.Knab, *Bureau of Public Secrets*, http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/debord/1.htm, accessed August 19, 2009)]

11. Guy Ernest Debord and Gil J. Wolman, *Mode d'emploi du détournement*, initially published in *Les lèvres nues,* no. 8 (May 1956).(See translation in K.Knab, A User's Guide to Détournement, in *Bureau of Public Secrets*, http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm#1, accessed august 19, 2009)

12. Malcolm McLaren interviewed in the machinima *This Spartan Life,* episode 3, directed by Chris Burke, 2006.