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# Deus Ex Machinima: A Rhetorical Analysis of User-Generated Machinima

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DEUS EX MACHINIMA:  
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF USER-GENERATED  
MACHINIMA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
Professional Communication

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by  
Sean Jacques Cecil Callot  
May 2009

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## **ABSTRACT**

Beginning with corporate demonstrations and continuously evolving into today, machinima has become a major expressive art form for the gamer generation. Machinima is the user-centered production of video presentations using pre-rendered animated content, as generated from video games. The term “machinima” is a combination of “machine” (from which the video content is derived) and “cinema” (the ultimate end product). According to Paul Marino and other members of the machinima community, Hugh Hancock, the creator of Machinima.com, first coined the term in 2000. Video productions of this kind have been used in various capacities for the past several years, including instruction or marketing, as well as rapid prototyping of large-scale cinema projects (Marino).

In this thesis, I will briefly outline the current research on machinima. I will then build a methodology for my own rhetorical analysis of machinima as they formulate the promotion of their arguments. This methodology will include examples from major rhetorical theorists, including Lloyd Bitzer, Kenneth Burke, and Gunther Kress and Theo VanLeeuwan, among others. I will then apply my analytical tools to modern user-generated machinima from a variety of sources as a series of case studies. These cases include non-profit and for-profit examples, as well as educational and entertainment examples. Finally, I will explain how this framework may be used as a guideline for rhetorically sound and effective machinima.

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I also want to thank my family, who have always encouraged me to follow my dreams, even when those dreams involved playing video games for hours and hours on end. I'm sure they had no idea that the years I spent fiddling around with video games would eventually lead to a course of graduate study. All the same, I would not be here if not for their love, support, and desire to see me succeed. My friends, who have essentially become included in my family, are also deserving of my gratitude.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Beginning with corporate demonstrations and continuously evolving into today, machinima has become a major expressive art form for the gamer generation. Machinima is the user-centered production of video presentations using pre-rendered animated content, as generated from video games. The term “machinima” is a combination of “machine” (from which the video content is derived) and “cinema” (the ultimate end product). According to Paul Marino and other members of the machinima community, Hugh Hancock, the creator of Machinima.com, first coined the term in 2000. Video productions of this kind have been used in various capacities for the past several years, including instruction or marketing, as well as rapid prototyping of large-scale cinema projects (Marino).

By taking video game content and modifying or remediating that content to serve a different purpose, members of the gaming community recount their in-game exploits or build entirely new creative projects, including situation comedies, music videos, and demonstrative tutorials, with limited technological or financial resources. Software developers, especially in the gaming industry, also use their own game engines to build gameplay movies. These gameplay movies are often created in order to develop the plot of the game’s narrative or to reward the player for progress through the game, as in early linear game narratives. Video game advertising also uses in-game graphics, including both still images and video content, to advertise the various aspects of a game.

Corporate-produced machinima is great, but user-generated machinima videos have emerged as a major art form from the gamer generation’s experiences. It is my hypothesis that machinima exists as a larger part of the discourse community, and that a successful machinima project has to be designed with an understanding of the rhetorical, historical and cultural context in mind. Machinima is a form of rhetoric that speaks to the rhetorical situation of the gamer generation. In order to best examine evolving discourse

communities of the gamer generation, it is important to understand the emergence of machinima and the means by which machinima producers build their arguments. It may then be possible to make use of machinima for directed communication purposes, such as teaching, marketing, or promotional purposes. Understanding what kind of rhetorical decisions a machinima artist makes, especially the importance of the audience in the planning and production phases of machinima production, can help guide the production of effective machinima as technical communication. This thesis will establish a set of guidelines for the production of rhetorically sound and effective machinima.

In this thesis, I will briefly outline the current research on machinima. I will then build a methodology for my own rhetorical analysis of machinima as they formulate the promotion of their arguments. This methodology will include examples from major rhetorical theorists, including Lloyd Bitzer, Kenneth Burke, and Gunther Kress and Theo VanLeeuwen, among others. I will then apply my analytical tools to modern user-generated machinima from a variety of sources as a series of case studies.

## **Literature Review**

Beginning in the late 1970's and continuing to today, the concept of a computer-generated entertainment system has provided writers, researchers, and countless children and adults with more interactivity in their play. This gamer generation, as John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade explain in their book, *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, begins with children born after 1970 in the modern developed world. These children grew up with technology and games as a part of their culture, rather than as a distraction (Silverthorne). Beginning with the first AI-driven game, *Pong*, and the two-dimensional adventure game *Super Mario Brothers*, and evolving into the life-like graphics of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and *Assassin's Creed*, these games have stirred the imagination of gamers and researchers alike. Playing

and beating the latest game became a driving force for children and adults through the 1980's and 90's, in much the same way Saturday morning serial movies, comic books, and cartoons in earlier decades.

### *Cutscenes and Machinima as Narrative Devices*

One major aspect of many video games is the use of narration. An engaging storyline provides the player with an impetus to complete the game. By finishing the game, the player finishes the story. This ownership of the story, placing the player in the story as the main character of that story, could be one of the major reasons narrative videogames have become so popular. One of the earliest examples of narrative gaming, *Super Mario Brothers*, includes a sizeable (for its time) amount of pre-rendered game content that is used to tell the story. At the conclusion of every four level world, the player is treated to a very short cut scene of Mario running through a castle to rescue the princess, only to be told, "The Princess is in another castle." This simple industry-produced machinima not only gives the player impetus to continue, but also keeps the player immersed in the game world. Games such as *Golden Axe 2* use title screens to achieve a similar effect, although with lessened effect. The player simply reads the title screen for hints as to the next level's objectives and gets ready for the next combat (Sega).

As technology advanced, so did industry-created machinima. Throughout the 1990's, games incorporated varying levels of narrative machinima to provide context for in-game action. Some, such as the *Wing Commander* series, combined stand alone cut scenes, either animated or live-action, with some in-game narrative content. According to a variety of game scholars, including Paul Marino of the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, *Wing Commander* demonstrated the norm of video game animation prior to the widespread use of machinima in the latter half of the 1990's. *Wing Commander's* design team added animated cut scenes, such as Figure 1, which exist independent of the



Figure 1: Screenshot from *Wing Commander* introduction cut scene. This is an example of animated cut scenes before the use of machinima became widespread.

game engine. Players only encounter these cut scenes between missions in the game. The cut scenes provided narrative context for the mission content, thus providing an impetus for the player to continue the game (Roberts). The result of this combination of cinematic cut scenes and gameplay is that *Wing Commander* remains one of the most popular games of the early 1990's, spawning a cartoon series, a feature film, and a litany of sequels, expansion packs, and spin-off games (Wing Commander CIC).

Where *Wing Commander's* use of cinematic animated cut scenes was considered revolutionary, some games took the next step and fully integrated cut scenes into the main gameplay. The *Final Fantasy* franchise is possibly the best-known example of this kind of combination of narrative gameplay and game content. Players remarked that due to the seamless integration of game content into the narrative cut scenes, such as those found in *Final Fantasy VII*, they felt as though they were playing through a movie (McLaughlin).

Modern games, driven by the powerful processors available in the fifth and sixth generation consoles such as the Xbox or Playstation 3, have embraced the full integration of game content with narrative machinima content. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* most notably combines in-game narrative, effectively placing the player's avatar in the middle of a swirling war between strong non-player characters. The player is a critical link in the avatar's piece of the war, but ultimately is powerless to change the outcome of the conflict. By using machinima content throughout the gameplay, the player is fully immersed in the experience.

It is important to note that this thesis will not directly address this kind of industry-created machinima content. While this kind of machinima is important to the history of gaming, and doubtlessly influenced user-generated machinima developers, the content those developers produce themselves speaks directly to the kind of discourse participation educators or industry can use to connect with the gamer generation. Their use of narrative cinema, especially machinima as seen in *Final Fantasy*, can be seen as a direct precursor to the kind of narrative user-generated machinima the gamer community produces.

Building upon the aforementioned industry accomplishments, early gamers realized that their game consoles and personal computers could be connected to a video recorder in order to produce simple movies of their conquests (Lowood 60). Gamers eventually built upon this concept to produce full movies of their gaming excursions (Lowood 60). Shortly after gameplay videos began circulating across Gopher message boards and between friends, recorded on VHS videotapes, gamers realized their games could also be used to produce simple computer-generated animated short films. In 1993, for example, I produced an early descriptive machinima using a VCR and the Super Nintendo game *Wings 2: Aces High* for a history presentation on World War I aviation. These kinds of videos foretold the beginning of what would come to be known as user-generated machinima, a cinema production created using animated content produced

exclusively through machines. Recently, more advanced machinima projects have entered some areas of mainstream entertainment. Wildly popular television shows such as *South Park* and *CSI: New York* included video game-generated content in their 2007-08 seasons. Radio and television news programs have also reported on commercially successful machinima projects, such as *Red vs. Blue*, a comedy series solely utilizing Microsoft's wildly popular *Halo* series of games (Chong).

While little scholarly research has been conducted regarding machinima as a whole, there has been a fairly large body of research into the parts and concepts that comprise the whole. These parts include the video games that are used, available software tools, and copyright concerns. Additionally, artists have taken to using tools similar to those used by machinima creators to remediate video games for their own artistic goals.

#### *High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima*

Henry Lowood's article "High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima" lends the most directly pertinent information to the scholarly examination of machinima projects. He begins by calling video games the "art form of the digital age." (Lowood 59) Lowood explains that machinima projects combine gameplay communities, subversion, and gameplay performance into a single art form. Much of the introduction material from this proposal comes from Lowood's historical analysis into the development of the first generation of machinima. He places a heavy emphasis on the fact that, since machinima is produced entirely using open-source or commercially produced computer software, movies made from video games reduce the cost concerns inherent in making movies. When producing a machinima, even in the earliest days of graphics-intensive video games, gameplay is the key (Lowood 61). id Software, a pioneer in early three-dimensional first person shooter (3D FPS) game development, embraced the game communities which emerged around their flagship games, *DOOM* and *Quake*, allowing

gamers access to level design tools and early gameplay display capture software. The graphics and gameplay were top quality for their time, but id Software took a step further and opened the source code of their games to gaming communities. This, Lowood insists, gave gamers the opportunity to improve id Software's creations and maintain a vested interest in the game. Gamers were able to build new levels of the game, apply new "skins" to enemy characters, and even build entirely new games (Lowood 63). Minor changes to the game engine, such as replacing an avatar's skin or adding a new map set, became known as a modification or "mod." More sweeping changes, such as reimagining *Doom* in a completely new setting, such as the Super Mario universe, became known as total conversions, or "TCs."

When id Software released the successor to *DOOM*, titled *Quake*, game developer John Carmack described it as "the coolest thing anyone has ever seen..." (Lowood 65). Again, id Software made all the development tools available to the gamer community, including a dynamic rotating camera tool. While *DOOM* only supported two-dimensional sprites in their animation, restricting camera views to the first-person, *Quake* offered true three-dimensional avatars for both players and enemies. By creating true 3D rendered characters, true third-person camera angles were finally possible through the revolutionary rotating camera tool. In 1996, this tool helped to build the first true user-generated, story-driven machinima movie, entitled *Diary of a Camper* (Lowood 67). *Diary of a Camper* tells the story of a team of gamers engaging an opposing gamer in multiplayer combat. The term "camper" refers to the tactic of positioning one's self in a defensible position and not moving. In this video, the protagonist team, a self-styled guild called the Rangers, take fire from the camping opponent and return fire with devastating results. The camper is killed, and his remains are shown to be John Romero, the lead designer of *Quake*.

This first machinima, Lowood explains, demonstrated what could be done using the kind of tools that were originally reserved for game developers. Subsequent examples of machinima projects offer variations on this basic theme. Lowood's article demonstrates the kinds of creative opportunities available to talented gamers with a desire to remediate traditional media into something completely different. However, Lowood does not examine the creative and rhetorical choices machinima artists make.

Jim Andrews examines the remediation of games into artwork in his article, "Videogames as Literary Devices." Andrews provides several examples of artists incorporating video games into their larger projects. For example, one piece called *Pac Mondrian*, which combines the classic video game *Pac-Man* with a Piet Mondrian painting, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, uses the *Pac-Man* game engine as a metaphor for running through the very real streets of New York City (Andrews 57; Hennessy et al). This kind of remediation is very similar to the production of machinima in that it re-imagines the game in a different context. Similar projects Andrews describes further demonstrate this kind of mash-up as works of art using new media. Hennessy's explanation of Mondrian's original work, which combines the emotions he felt when first experiencing the rhythms of New York jazz music with the city layout of the area surrounding Broadway, also demonstrates how different kinds of media can be combined to create new artwork (Hennessy et al)

### *9/11 Survivor: Failed Rhetoric*

A simple modern search of machinima on Machinima.com demonstrates that narrative machinima is the norm. However, there are art projects which take a much more abstract approach to remediating video games. Rebecca Cannon's article "Meltdown" touches on certain key aspects of remediating video games for rhetorical means. While her work focuses on artistic modification of game engines, such as the work of the anti-



Figure 2: Screenshot from *9/11 Survivor*

war gamer community *Velvet Strike*, she also addresses a non-playable encounter called *9/11 Survivor*. This user-created gameplay modification was designed to depict the plight of a survivor of the World Trade Center attack of 11 September, 2001. This piece of user generated content, built using the *Unreal Tournament 2003* engine, follows a businessman in one of the towers contemplating what had just happened before jumping to his death. The player has no control over the action whatsoever. The only control the viewer, now relegated to an observer stance, maintains is to change the camera angle around the central character (Cannon 49). Technologically, this “mod,” or user generated modification, emulates the earliest gameplay videos Lowood described, where the videos had to be played using game engine itself, as opposed to watching a streamed video. However, the makers of the mod, unlike the pioneers of machinima described earlier,



Figure 3: A screenshot from *9/11 Survivor*

were pilloried by the public and castigated in mass media. Cannon explains that the modders were simply using their preferred medium to express their level of concern. It should also be noted that *9/11 Survivor* was created as a class project, indicating some of the teaching possibilities of machinima in a pedagogical setting (Cannon 51).

*9/11 Survivor* opens just after an aircraft struck one of the World Trade Center towers. The avatar, a character dressed in a business suit, wanders around a couple of floors looking for a way to escape. Finding no clear, safe path, the avatar eventually jumps from a presumably high window (Kinematic Collective). This mimics the suicide methods several survivors of the initial attack on the World Trade Center used when they realized they were cut off from the ground due to the position of impact of the airliners. The publication of this mod on the project web page, as well as several community web

sites, was met with fierce resistance. Death threats were sent not only to the three-person development team but also to the professor, Brody Condon (Clarke 89). Within a couple of weeks, the mod was taken down and the development team had been forced to change email addresses, telephone numbers, and the students' credibility was seriously hurt.

What happened? Why would a class project draw so much ire that its creators were forced to make major changes to their lives? Cannon suggests that the students in question had no understanding of the attacks since they were not involved directly with anyone who was killed in those attacks. They had no connection to what they were graphically depicting in this demonstration, and therefore had no sense that making a game might be going too far. Cannon proposes that this disconnect led to a sense of apathy, which guided their disregard for their audiences. I suggest that by failing to understand the emotions connected to those who lost family members in the attacks of 9/11, these students failed to address their audiences' expectations and emotional desires. They made poorly-informed rhetorical decisions and were vilified as a result of their failures.

Cannon's article comes closest to a true rhetorical analysis of machinima. She examines artistic mods in light of the arguments their creators are trying to make. However, she does not apply traditional rhetorical theory to these projects. Her analytical approach is primarily artistic, and while she does address the artists' original interests in using video games as media for building arguments, she focuses primarily on the technical and artistic aspects, not rhetorical or literary constructs. In light of this limited body of research, it becomes clear that a gap exists in the field of rhetoric. Machinima projects have received focused attention from artistic inquiries, technical researchers, and members of the academic community at all levels. A rhetorical analysis of several machinima projects as case studies would at least partially fill the gap in the research.

## **Toward a Rhetoric of Machinima**

In order to explain how machinima projects can be analyzed and how understanding rhetoric can help produce more effective machinima, I've designed a composite analytical apparatus. By combining several rhetorical theories with the goal of analyzing the rhetorical situation, language, and visual and audio components, it is possible to produce a comprehensive analytical tool to examine machinima in their entirety. Chapter 2 will explain the theories that comprise this apparatus, which is comprised of these five research questions to be applied to each machinima piece.

- 1) What is the visible exigence of the situation for this piece of machinima? What problem does this piece attempt to address?
- 2) Who is the audience? How much information about the video's topic or game does the artist expect the audience to have? Is this piece available for free or is it a for-profit piece of machinima?
- 3) What are the rhetorical and technological constraints of the situation? Does the machinima attempt to push past rhetorical constraints? If so, how?
- 4) What kind of language is used? What does the verbal language, including song lyrics or slang, lend to or take advantage of the specific rhetorical requirements of the situation?
- 5) What visual components are present? Does the artist emphasize realism in this project through the use of high modality propositions? Or is the argument supported by low modality components?

This chapter on methodology will also explain the use of case studies as the primary research technique, as well as explain a categorization system for machinima. This section will explain what kinds of machinima are out there and why the three specific examples I've selected provide sufficient examples of the larger body of machinima. I will also explain what kinds of rhetorical choices may be made by explaining how I made those choices in the production of a machinima music video.

The next three chapters will apply this research mechanism to three individual machinima projects from different sources. Chapter 3 examines *I'm Still Seeing Breen*, a short form music video produced using the tools available in *Half-Life 2* and its Source SDK engine. The producer of this video, Paul Marino, synchronized the mouth movement of one character with the lyrics of Breaking Benjamin's song "So Cold." According to his blog, Marino intended for this video to be an introduction to machinima for his audience, as well as a kind of teaser for those interested in machinima production. This video is available on *YouTube.com* and *Machinima.com*.

In Chapter 4, I examine *How to Build a Flag that Waves in the Wind*, a short form tutorial machinima produced in *Second Life*. This tutorial, made by Torley Wong (aka Torley Linden) helps newcomers to the *Second Life* building toolset understand some of the most complex design tools in a fun, low-pressure environment. By combining an electronic soundtrack with his quirky sense of humor, Wong creates an inviting and enlightening instructional experience, highlighting the teaching utility of machinima. The video is available either from the *Second Life* website or on *YouTube.com*.

In Chapter 5, I analyze *Red v. Blue*, a machinima situation comedy series produced using Microsoft's *Halo*, *Halo 2*, and *Halo 3*. Set on the battlefield of Blood Gulch, this comedy series depicts the hilarious misadventures of two combat teams fighting a war they do not understand. This series is available either on the creator's website, *gamerawr.com*, or on DVD.

Finally, I will make recommendations for further research and explain how, by understanding and applying rhetorical theories throughout the machinima design process, machinima artists can increase their chances for making an effective and popular machinima video. I also will explain the pitfalls of disregarding the importance of audience in marketing to the gamer generation, and how well-constructed, rhetorically-sound machinima may bridge this gap.

## **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY**

In order to address the nature of user-generated machinima as a form of rhetorical participation in the gamer generation, a concrete understanding of the applicable rhetorical theories and principles is necessary. Different theorists and definitions of rhetoric guide each portion of this study. In order to effectively explain the evaluation criteria for this discursive rhetorical analysis of machinima, a series of concepts must first be explained. Chief among these are the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke, Lloyd Bitzer, and Kress and VanLeeuwen. This chapter will explain these theories.

This chapter will also illustrate how these theories were applied during a school project the author created in preparation for this study. This machinima video, entitled *A Day in the Life in World of Warcraft*, was published in April 2008 as part of a larger visual communication project. The video combines animation from Blizzard's Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMO) *World of Warcraft* with the song "A Day in the Life," by the Beatles.

Additionally, this chapter will clarify the analytical process of this thesis, including the use of case studies and the selection criteria for the test video projects. This necessitates the creation of a classification system of machinima based on technological criteria. By establishing a set of criteria through which machinima may be classified, this thesis and future studies will be able to more thoroughly explore the nature of machinima in various discourse communities, as well as other settings.

### **Key Rhetorical Theories**

#### *Kenneth Burke- Drama and Language*

The first and possibly most important theory to apply is Kenneth Burke's rhetorical pentad. This portion of the analysis evaluates the effectiveness of the machinima from an independent observational point of view (Burke 1298). The five

components of Burke's dramatist rhetorical pentad refer to the various components of any rhetorical situation and are especially effective at examining the particular components of each piece of a rhetorical presentation. The "act" of a piece of rhetoric refers to the action or conduct of the "agents" (actors or rhetors, as the case may be) take within consideration of the "scene" (rhetorical situation) and with use of various props or "agency." The fifth component, the purpose of a dramatist rhetorical situation, is the most difficult portion of a rhetorical analysis to understand and examine. However, it is possible to focus on the act, agent, scene and agency to produce enough of an analysis to extrapolate a number of possible purposes (Burke 1298, 1300).

Burke further advocates, in his book *A Grammar of Motives*, that rhetorical analysis may be undertaken by examining the relationships amongst these five components. By creating pairs or *ratios* between any two of the five dramatic components, rhetoricians may analyze the effectiveness of each of these ratios within the text. According to Burke, analysis of this type will reveal consistencies and contradictions between a rhetor's arguments and the evidence presented.

Burke's dramatic approach to rhetorical analysis emphasizes the use of symbolic interpretation of language. In the same way actions on a stage represent actions on a larger scale, a symbolic interpretation of language emphasizes the understanding of how language represents the speaker's understanding and subsequent labeling of reality (Burke 1340). This is different from what Burke calls the scientific interpretation of language, which states that words are direct representations of what actually exists. A dramatic approach to the interpretation and understanding of language recognizes the effect a speaker's background influences, experiences, biases, and prejudices all have on his or her observation of the world and, therefore, on his or her description of that world. This system of background influences is described as the observer's orientation, while the limitations the observer's orientation applies to the available vocabulary for any given

situation is a terministic screen (Burke 1341).

For example, a war correspondent with military experience is possibly more likely to be sympathetic to a soldier's situation than a war correspondent without military experience. His orientation has been shaped by his experience, and the words he uses to describe what he sees, or his *terministic screen*, has been shaped by that orientation. Therefore, when embedded with a combat infantry squad, the correspondent will most likely report favorably on the actions of that squad. If the squad is ambushed, the reporter's language will typically describe the enemy's tactics as "treachery" or some other term with an equally negative connotation. This is because the correspondent's terministic screen selected a term that expresses his emotional connection to the squad and his disdain for the enemy, and deflected terms that would provide a less-biased interpretation of the circumstances. This is the case Michael Moore and other journalists propose in their analyses of the early days of the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 (Moore).

Additionally, the role of a war correspondent is to report to the civilian population back home what is occurring during the execution of military action. A war correspondent may be more successful in building a favorable pathos-based argument through the use of his terministic screen. As a sufficiently large group of correspondents build similar cases and inundate American audiences with a pro-military message, eventually the audience begins to adopt a pro-military terministic screen (Moore). Statements that reinforce the audience's orientation are selected by the terministic screen while statements that oppose the audience's orientation are deflected (Burke 1342). The result is that a skilled rhetor will examine the audience and design his terminology to coincide with the audiences pre-existing terministic screen. By working from within these pre-existing conditions, it becomes possible to manipulate the audience's perception of reality and build effective arguments (Kuhn 7). Thus analyzing the language of a

given piece of rhetoric is a critical portion of a discursive rhetorical analysis. Since this thesis examines machinima videos as discursive rhetoric in this same vein, it follows that linguistic analysis should be a significant portion of the analysis.

The examination of language is not limited to the spoken dialogue of a given piece of rhetoric, however. Since machinima are audio-visual presentations, it is important to understand the visual components each artist uses and how these components are distinct representations of their perceptions of the reality of a given situation. Not only do the visual components provide a window into the artist's orientation, but they also help to explain the rhetorical situation each piece of machinima hopes to address.

#### *Lloyd Bitzer- The Rhetorical Situation*

Given the aforementioned possibilities an analysis of the artists' orientation and terministic screens at examining the rhetorical situation, Lloyd Bitzer's guidelines for an analysis of the rhetorical situation would prove to be an effective theoretical construct. Where Burke's pentad focuses attention on the finished work itself, and the agents who created the rhetorical work, Bitzer attends to the surrounding situation that a rhetorical presentation hopes to address. (Bitzer, 4) In this case, Bitzer explains that three aspects of a rhetorical situation, the conditions surrounding any piece of rhetorical content, should be thoroughly understood. The first is the exigence of the situation. Bitzer describes this as imperfection of the situation marked with urgency. This is "a deterrent, an obstacle, something waiting to be done..." (Bitzer 7). There has to be some gap or some condition which effective rhetoric hopes to address.

The second portion of Bitzer's rhetorical situation examines the audience. Ideally, this audience would be comprised of members of a community that is not only interested in the rhetorical presentation, but Bitzer proposes that a proper rhetorical audience is capable of exacting some change to address the exigency (Bitzer 7). In limited

circumstances, such as scientific or poetic discourse, an audience is not necessary, as these pieces of rhetoric exist for different reasons than more conventional forms of discourse (Bitzer 8). By understanding what rhetorical audience a certain piece of rhetoric is addressing, an analysis of rhetorical effectiveness may be made. This kind of an audience analysis also presents an opportunity to assess the limitations of any given piece of rhetoric outside its intended audience.

Third, each rhetorical situation also includes a set of constraints, which “are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.” (Bitzer 8) These constraints may be comprised of the community’s belief system, traditions, external facts, or previously presented by other rhetors. It may be understood, as previously stated, that Burke’s explanation of a community’s terministic screens can be described as constraints to the rhetorical situation.

In the case of digital media, however, there are several other constraints to consider in producing an effective piece of rhetoric. These constraints include not only legal considerations but also technological considerations that must be addressed prior to producing a piece of machinima. A thorough explanation of the technological constraints and considerations a machinima artist must understand follows in the second portion of this chapter.

### *Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen- Visual Rhetoric*

Since machinima projects are audio and visual presentations, a prevailing theory of visual rhetoric is necessary for the development of a comprehensive rhetorical analysis. According to Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, visual representations that represent a real-life entity, such as a human actor, tend to be more or less effective based on the level of realism, or *modality*, of the representation. The more believable a proposition is, “verbal, visual or otherwise,”

the more likely the audience will associate themselves with it (Kress and Van Leeuwen 154). More believable assertions are said to have a higher modality than less believable assertions. This, it would seem, is one of the critical components to building and assessing the viability and effectiveness of a visual argument. By combining verbal and visual propositions of either high or low modality with varying cinematographic techniques, Kress and Van Leeuwen assert that a rhetor can build an effective argument.

Applying this theory to a rhetorical analysis of machinima, an art form that requires the creative use of various representations of reality, provides an important aspect to the overall structure of an analytical system. Videogame animation, by its nature, offers various levels of realism based on the theme of the game's setting as well as the technology available. Depending on the game designer's intent, the animation techniques can either approach true to life realism, as is the case in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* or *Half-Life 2*, or may represent more fanciful or even surrealist representations, as in *Psychonauts*. Each of these games uses different animation techniques to embody different artistic visions and to produce different argumentative propositions. If the goal is to produce an immersive and realistic environment, as in *Half-Life 2*, then an animation and physics system with high modality is necessary. If the case is to produce a surreal and entertaining distraction with no regard for realism, such as with *Tetris*, then an animation system with high modality is unnecessary. Since machinima specifically is created using videogame animation, it is necessary to include an examination of the modality of the game engine in any rhetorical analysis.

### **Technological Methodologies and Procedural Rhetoric**

At the time of this writing, a simple search on YouTube, the largest network of user generated video content on the Internet, returns over eight thousand examples of machinima using a wide variety of video games and music. Some use game content from

massively multiplayer role-playing games (MMOs), most of which are played on personal computers, while others use console-based game content as the source of the game footage. Recording from either of these sources is a technical challenge each machinima developer must master in order to generate effective and interesting video content.

Machinima.com, an online community dedicated to user-generated machinima content, provides explanations of the kinds of tools available for recording game content and editing that content into a true machinima. Some games offer tools in the game program to create machinima, such as *Second Life's* video recording subroutine. However, most games, such as *Half-Life* or *Call of Duty 4*, do not have such a subroutine, so it is necessary to run an external tool to capture the video content. Among the most common tools for machinima content are using capture programs such as Fraps, which offers a partially functional free trial for first time users. Fraps operates using remediating VCR controls, which harkens back to the original method of machinima production (Lowood). The advantage Fraps offers over other screen capture software is that the operator not only can record content, but can opt to either record the in-game soundtrack or just record the visual content. This helps to simplify or eliminate subsequent steps in the editing process.

The question of frame rate often becomes the first rhetorical decision a machinima artist has to address during the creative process. Choppy animation looks amateurish, and can quickly label an artist as ineffective. Since the goal of most user-generated machinima is to produce a polished video, a realistic frame rate is absolutely essential. Additionally, Fraps records at sections of the screen, up to full screen at full resolutions, and full frame rates, which can exceed 60 frames per second. Other programs record at much lower frame rates, often as low as ten or fifteen frames per second. As a point of reference, standard definition television cameras record at a frame rate of 29.97 frames

per second. High definition television cameras record at 60 frames per second, and videogames can often display gameplay at 75 frames per second or higher. Lower frame rates than this look less fluid or even choppy, even though this helps to reduce file size. Fraps and similar software provide the necessary capture rates at original resolutions, allowing machinima artists the ability to produce high quality video content. Further, Fraps produces high quality AVI video files, which is the top recommended video format according to several machinima community and video production sites (Machinima.com). High quality raw video files are essential for the subsequent editing portions of the machinima production process.

Video capture programs such as Fraps provide important video and audio capture options for videogame content produced on personal computers. However, some of the first and most successful machinima videos were created from console games. A significant number of videos available through Machinima.com and YouTube.com are made using Microsoft's best-selling *Halo* series of videogames. This series is available exclusively on Microsoft's X-Box and X-Box 360 game consoles, which offer no video recording options of their own. This lack of recording technology built into the console necessitates the use of a secondary system, which acts as a limiting factor for machinima production. Ian Bogost explains that limiting processes in a system forces the user to make selections based on the available options. The available options form a *procedural rhetoric*, which influences the user's decision-making process. Procedural rhetoric refers to the intentional limitation of technological options, including interface options. These limitations prevent or guide the user to make certain choices in accordance with the designers' wishes. A skilled user will work within the system to achieve the desired objective (Bogost). Machinima videos produced using console game animation are made by skilled artists who not only have a passion for games but also demonstrate the skill and tenacity, as well as availability of technological resources, less dedicated artists lack.

The presence of technological hurdles, such as difficulties in capturing video game content and editing that content into a usable format, presents another rhetorical choice each artist must consider. As such, the procedural choices an artist makes during the creative process is an important step in the machinima development process.

### **Rhetoric and Technology in Action: *A Day in the Life in World of Warcraft***

In March, 2008, as part of a semester-long visual communication project, I decided to create a machinima music video to describe my project theme. This case demonstrates the kinds of choices an artist has to make throughout the process of planning, recording, and editing a machinima video.

The theme I was examining throughout this project was an idea about the nature of gaming and of game culture. Beginning with the visual representation of adversarial and non-adversarial gaming, I decided that an analysis of game culture would not be complete if I ignored the fact that some gamers take their passion for play a little too far. I wanted to examine escapist gaming, a phenomenon of which my colleagues in the gamer generation are often all too aware. Escapist gaming, as has been my experience, describes a state of mind in which a player becomes so enamored with the game world and so disillusioned with the real world that they decide to remain in the game world exclusively. There have been several reported incidents of gamers losing their jobs, friends, family, and even their lives due to their addiction to videogames. My fiancée and I have both lost friends to their desire for and addiction to escapist videogame practices. According to David Kohn of CBS News, in his article “Addicted: Suicide over Everquest?” at least one gamer killed himself as a result of his addiction to an MMO.

As Burke would say, the choice of game engine amounted to a part of my selection of an appropriate setting to address my audience (Burke 1298). Burke explains

that the setting in which a piece of rhetoric is situated, such as the game engine to be used in a machinima project, prepares the audience's expectations for the coming rhetorical message. In order to examine the kinds of difficulties people face when dealing with escapist gaming, I decided to create a machinima music video using one of the most addictive MMOs on the market. *World of Warcraft*, at the time of this writing, boasts an in-game population of over ten million players worldwide and has been in continuous operation since November 2004. I already understood the game and camera controls, as well as the engine's cartoonish visual aesthetic. Since it appeared relatively easy to manipulate as compared to some other escapist games, such as Valve's *Counterstrike* or Sony's *Everquest*, I decided to use characters, settings, and animation from *World of Warcraft* in my machinima design. Additionally, the distinctive aesthetic of *World of Warcraft* and the sentiments of addiction associated with that MMO address the needs of setting.

At the time of my experiment in machinima production, *World of Warcraft* did not offer an in game recording subroutine. I decided to use Fraps to capture the video content I would need, since Fraps captures onscreen footage at 60 frames per second. Another screen recording program I tested called Jing, which records at 15 frames per second, produced footage that looked choppy and amateurish. Fraps also came recommended by several community-produced tutorials on machinima production from both *YouTube.com* and *Machinima.com*. In this case, my position as a member of the gaming community helped to inform my decision and address one of the major procedural and technical constraints machinima artists must address.

Having decided how to address the visual components of my machinima, at least in abstract terms, I then had to determine what song to use for the soundtrack to my music video. I didn't want to use a song that my audience would not recognize, but I had

to find a song that addressed issues of escapism. I'm also an avid fan of The Beatles, especially with regards to their album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The encore track from this album, entitled "A Day in the Life," tells the story of an unnamed character going through his daily routine, punctuated by interesting and exciting stories in the media of the day. As the character progresses through various parts of his day, it becomes clear through the whimsical music during his stories, and the bustling city must that plays under lines about his daily grind, that the band was trying to make a statement about the character's desire to enjoy a more interesting and exciting life. I decided to combine this song, with its clearly scene-centered organization and character-driven action, with a series of visuals staged and recorded in *World of Warcraft*.

Burke informs this decision of language, both visual and musical, through his concept of orientation. Both the setting and the music were recognizable to my audience, which consisted of graduate students, game enthusiasts, and other members of the education and gamer communities. By selecting material that is familiar to my audience's set of experiences, I addressed the audiences' needs for familiarity in language. Since both the song and the game engine are so widely recognized, combining the two to form the language through which I create my message increases the likelihood that the audience will recognize and associate with that message. Burke's concept of familiarity of language, as informed by terministic screens, directly influenced this decision.

Further, by analyzing and understanding my audience, and tailoring my musical selection to that audience analysis, Bitzer might say that I demonstrated an understanding of both audience and constraints (Bitzer 7). My audience demonstrates a wide variety of musical tastes, ranging from classical to modern pop. The amalgamation of musical styles present in "A Day in the Life," while possessing a distinctly modern tone, is familiar to fans of many musical genres. The song is familiar to many members of my audience, especially those born after 1970, the gamer generation. The work of the

Beatles, according to many music critics and present-day musical acts, are some of the most widely known and influential pieces of music today. By selecting one of their works and presenting it, unedited, as the soundtrack for my video, I demonstrated my understanding of the importance of their work and my cognizance of the audiences' musical tastes.

By presenting the piece unadulterated, however, I also demonstrated my understanding of the constraints present in selecting such a recognizable piece of music. To edit or modify the song could have created a sense of dissonance, which was not my goal. This dissonance could have been disconcerting for my audience and set them against my rhetorical aim. I would have broken a constraint associated with using a song by the Beatles and my project may have been received poorly. This would not only have adversely affected my professor's evaluation of the project but would have also marginalized me in the eyes of members of my community. Both of these risks were not worth modifying the song, so I left it as is.

The next step in preproduction was to "cast" my main character. I created a character whose appearance and clothing were similar to that which John Lennon wore in 1967, when the song was released. I chose to create John Lennon for several reasons. First, John Lennon is the lead singer who tells the story in "A Day in the Life." Since I wanted to create a narrative machinima, I wanted the main character to resemble a member of the band. Therefore, it made sense to create a *World of Warcraft* version of John Lennon. Second, John Lennon is a highly recognizable member of the band. With his long hair, long brown beard, and penchant for wearing white, Lennon stood out among his more non-descript band members. Also, those distinctive character components are available in *World of Warcraft*, which presents another advantage of the choice of engine, both as a rhetorical setting as a procedural choice. To build a convincing

character depiction within a fantasy setting was my goal, and by selecting a system that provides the necessary tools as well as the desired fantasy aesthetic, I gained a rhetorical advantage. If the character looks right, that character helps to immerse the audience in the rhetorical setting.

Ultimately, choosing to create a representation of Lennon helped to establish my *ethos*, or moral grounding, in this project. Using a character styled after Lennon, and going to great lengths to make my character look as close to Lennon as possible, demonstrated that I understood the song and the historical context of The Beatles at the time the song was released. I also demonstrated that I understood how the *World of Warcraft* game system works, establishing my credibility as a gamer. These seemingly simple choices became the basis for my entire rhetorical presentation. Later decisions in the production process, such as the selecting combat and non-combat animations to punctuate certain points in the song, or selecting an urban non-combative setting for some scenes and a rural setting for more exciting scenes, helped to reinforce my credentials. Over the course of the video, I wanted to illustrate an understanding of my rhetorical situation, including the audience, exigence, and constraints, and, most of all, an ability to address that situation through a machinima video. This experience established my desire to examine machinima more closely, as well as demonstrated the need for an artist to understand how adherence to the principles of rhetoric can strengthen a project.

### **A Composite Research Methodology**

Combining the three components of Bitzer's rhetorical situation with Burke's rhetorical pentad and terministic screens, as well as Kress and Van Leeuwen's theories of visual modality and any supplemental theories as necessary, produces an effective methodology for examining a piece of machinima. As such, this analysis will apply the

aforementioned rhetorical techniques to pre-selected machinima projects by examining each film in light of several research questions. This analytical methodology works as a kind of case study, according to Mary Sue MacNealy's definition of a case study in her book, *Strategies of Empirical Research Writing*. According to MacNealy, a case study allows the researcher to examine a series focused questions in the context of a few examples, which then can guide and refine further research opportunities. The case study research methodology clarifies and identifies variables for future quantitative analysis in later research. In the case of this thesis, my goal is to identify an interrelationship between the application of rhetorical principles and the success of the artist's argument.

To guide this research, I have established a set of five research questions, influenced directly by the rhetorical theories I've described above, which will help to clarify and explain the successful practices of each of the examined machinima artists. The first of these research questions is what is the visible exigence of the situation for this piece of machinima? In this question, I will apply Bitzer's definition of exigence and examine the historical context into which this video was introduced. This will help to develop an understanding of why the artist chose to use a certain type of game over another, as I did during my pre-production process.

The second question to answer is who is the audience? What groups or subgroups are going to see this video? Bitzer states that for a rhetorical situation to exist, there must be an audience who is capable of addressing and changing the exigent conditions of the situation. I will examine each video for evidence that the artist identified their audience, selected an audience that will be empowered to address the situation the video describes, and how the artist developed their rhetoric to address that audience.

Third, what are the rhetorical and technological constraints of the situation? Are there technological limitations the artist had to overcome? Are there certain things the artist cannot say or show, or that would be inappropriate based on the audience's

expectations? By examining what social or technological limitations are in place, and how the artists either circumvented or pushed past them, I will be able to determine how the artist chose to situate their piece of rhetoric into the gamer community, as well as the mass media.

Fourth, what kind of language does the artist use? By applying Burke's ideas of orientation and terministic screens, I will be able to understand more about the artist's techniques of persuading the audience, as well as adhering to the socially-constructed set of constraints I assessed earlier. This linguistic portion of the analysis will extend not only to spoken dialogue or voiceovers, but also the use of slang or even song lyrics.

Finally, what visual components are present? Does the artist emphasize realism in this project through the use of high modality propositions? Or is the argument supported by low modality components? Are there other visual aspects the artist uses, such as salience, arrangement and framing, or the use of established visual semiotic devices? Each of these components, as described by Kress and VanLeeuwen, helps to establish the overall argument in very specific ways. By identifying their importance, the analysis will be able to address the entirety of the video's argumentative structure.

### **Selection of Analytical Examples and Classificatory Criteria**

This analytical methodology will be applied to the three machinima videos I described in Chapter 1. These machinima represent a cross-section of the current field of machinima. The various types of machinima from which this thesis' examples are drawn can be described based on several descriptive criteria. As with any kind of film project, machinima videos are designed with specific goals in mind based on the artists' desires. As such, many of the common film categories may be applied, such as comedy, horror, action, documentaries, etc. However, since machinima is such a user-focused film genre, there are some specific classificatory criteria that should be delineated in order to draw a

representative sample from the population, as I have done in this thesis.

One of the easiest distinctions to make between various forms of machinima is the distinction between user-generated and industry-generated machinima. Industry machinima, such as the in game cut scenes in modern videogames, are produced using the game company's own production staff. According to Matt Kelland of Moviestorm, an open-source machinima production studio, every major game company has their own machinima production company to make their own machinima. These machinima tend to have more customized components, such as special settings or effects developed by the game design team. They have a wider range of options because their technological and financial resources, as well as staff, are greater than the standard user's machinima efforts. User-generated machinima is generally limited to the tools and techniques the artistic community has developed, as well as the stock game engine with few, if any, modifications. Each of the machinima examined for this thesis is an example of user-generated machinima, due to the emphasis of these projects on community participation.

The second classification criterion describes the duration of the machinima. Most machinima projects, either industrial or user-generated, are short films. The deciding factor between short and long form films is often not only the extent of the artist's creativity but also the amount of time and resources available to put toward the project. According to Paul Marino's blog for the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, the average machinima project requires roughly one hour of production and post-production time for every thirty seconds of finished screen time. There are very few user-generated machinima artists who can put forward that much effort in addition to their professional careers, so short form projects tend to be the norm.

Longer machinima projects, such as feature length films, are often the realm of for-profit teams such as Rooster Teeth, the creative team behind *Red vs. Blue*. Therefore, this second criterion describes the difference between short and long-form projects. For

this thesis, I've selected two short-form videos and one feature length, or long-form, video. Incidentally, the two short-form videos are available for free on *YouTube.com*, while the feature length video was only available for purchase on DVD at the time of this writing.

The final classification criterion I considered when selecting these test examples was the distinction between educational and entertainment machinima. At the time of this writing, most machinima are divided between tutorials, and entertainment. Machinima is well suited to both of these ends. Tutorial machinima provide viewers not only with an aural explanation of how to use the subject software, but a visual exposition of the software in action, including the exact commands and on screen results. The nature of tutorial machinima is explained more fully in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Entertainment machinima, on the other hand, take advantage of the unique production capabilities of the engine to achieve visual effects that not only speak to the audience's entertainment desires but also allow the artist to do what would normally be impossible. Blowing up a tank, for example, is all but impossible for the average gamer to achieve in the real world. In an action videogame engine such as *Call of Duty 4*, on the other hand, tanks explode with reasonable frequency. Entertainment machinima videos also include music videos. The unique properties machinima offers entertainment are further explained in Chapters 3 and 5.

As I've explained throughout this chapter, by examining several machinima projects with a clear analytical methodology in place, I will demonstrate that development of machinima projects are guided by rhetorical principles. The next three chapters will apply the methodology described here to three pieces of machinima, each selected based on the classification criteria to provide a clear cross-section of the machinima community.

### CHAPTER 3: I'M STILL SEEING BREEN

One of the first types of machinima videos for new machinima developers to produce is the music video (*Machinima.com*). The act of recording video game content, playing a music track in place of (or, occasionally, in addition to) the video game soundtrack is a relatively simple way to remix the game experience to express the artist's vision. This type of digital remix is also a good way for new developers to gain valuable experience in video and audio editing techniques. Music videos, beginning with short films by several popular artists in the 1960's and '70's and evolving into MTV in 1981, are familiar to most members of the gamer generation. Even the oldest members of the gamer generation, those born in the early 70's, remember the emergence of music videos throughout the 1980's and 90's, as well as their influence on popular culture throughout that time. These short musical films also provide a large variety of options for personal customization and demonstrate technical and artistic prowess to members of the machinima community.

Machinima artist Paul Marino combined video game footage from Valve Software's *Half-Life 2* with the song "So Cold" by Breaking Benjamin to produce the powerful machinima music video "I'm Still Seeing Breen." This video is visually intricate and combines several different aspects of the game engine and software development tools with a song that professes a very clear message. By combining the visual aesthetic of *Half-Life 2* with the maudlin "So Cold," Marino offers not only an interesting exercise in machinima technique but also addresses sentiments many gamers experienced during a turbulent time in history.

In this chapter, I will briefly explain the game engine and the song used in this machinima video. I will describe what these elements add to the video in terms of rhetorical concepts, with an emphasis on Burke's rhetorical pentad and Bitzer's rhetorical

situation. I will then summarize the video, with specific analysis of key moments or cinematic components. Finally, I will conduct an analysis of more general themes, within the framework of my five research questions.

### **The Game: Half-Life 2**

More advanced machinima projects require more advanced tools to achieve their goal. *I'm Still Seeing Breen*, for example, makes full use of Valve's Source Development Kit (SDK). This video is visually stimulating and is a great example of the power available to a creative and technically savvy machinima artist. This video is created combining Valve's best-selling game *Half-Life 2*, a first-person shooter, with the song "So Cold" by Breaking Benjamin. The video creates an atmosphere of depression, angst, resistance to adversity, and cooperative strength through its use of images from a war-torn Eastern European city and the power of the song.

The game *Half-Life 2* (hereafter *HL2*) is epic in scope, telling the story of a human resistance against alien invaders who have enslaved humanity. Designed using Valve's revolutionary Source physics engine, *HL2* places the player in the protective suit of Dr. Gordon Freeman. Dr. Freeman is an MIT-trained physicist who, in the original *Half-Life*, opened a dimensional gate that instigated an alien invasion. Dr. Freeman spends both games surviving the consequences from that accident, escaping from top-secret government facilities, fighting against insurmountable odds, and eventually leading a rag-tag group of rebels in an insurgency against their otherworldly controllers. The game emphasizes the hopelessness of the human situation during the invasion and occupation, while simultaneously demonstrating that a motivated resistance can hold out against an overwhelming combat force.

The game environment of *HL2* emphasizes the adversarial conditions against

which Dr. Freeman struggles. Crumbling neighborhoods reminiscent of the Jewish ghettos of World War II Poland house the enslaved human populace, while enormous alien walkers patrol the broken streets. Masked police officers routinely seize civilians on the streets, beat them with electrically charged sticks, and drag them into secret prisons. Resistance to the occupying alien forces is met with overwhelming force. Large floating video screens display the face of Dr. Breen, the civilian collaborator assigned to oversee the civilian populace for the alien overlords. Dr. Breen routinely explains the kinds of behavior that will result in punishment, and the list of prohibited actions seems to grow longer with each passing moment. The player is immersed in a sense of overwhelming despair and terror based on the surroundings.

Burke would say that by using this kind of visual aesthetic in the setting, the audience is prepared for the overall tenor of the rhetoric that emerges from this set to address darker emotions and sentiments. The use of setting in this case is reminiscent of H.P. Lovecraft's use of dreary New England villages to set his macabre tales. Lovecraft routinely set his weird stories in foggy, dark, wet towns such as Innsmouth, Massachusetts. By creating a depressing setting, Lovecraft places the reader in the mindset that this tale is going to be dark and frightening. *HL2* follows in this tradition through its construction of a depressing and, at times, terrifying setting.

What makes the game environment so effective, however, are the anamorphic avatars that populate the world. The characters of the game have a fully articulated set of limbs, allowing for the realistic depiction of actions such as walking, climbing, punching, dodging, or even cringing in pain. Each character can bend and move in a fashion that looks realistic, rather than robotic. This is accomplished by applying a reactive layer on that simulates muscle and other fibrous tissue over the skeletal layer, which is how humans in the real world are constructed (Valve). This combined with the game's



Figure 4: Screenshot of *Half-Life 2*

artificial intelligence is one of the major selling points of the *Half-Life* franchise (Valve).

These avatars also have fully articulated facial features. By virtue of the high polygon count system which allows for flawless articulation of avatars, as seen with the full body movement described above, Valve's animators were able to design avatar facial movement to express emotions. Avatars can smile, frown, scream, cry, or express any of a number of emotions using this system. Speech in the game is matched perfectly with lip and facial movement. Cut scenes, rendered using the in-game engine and integrated seamlessly into gameplay, make full use of the characters expressions. The avatars come alive through these mechanisms, which is instrumental in creating an immersive game experience.

Finally, in the interest of supporting user-generated content, Valve Corp. released the same level development and animation tools they used to create *HL2* as a set with the retail version of the game. With this set of tools, known as the Source Development Kit (SDK), members of the user-generated content community are free to produce whatever

content they wish, using the same modeling, articulation, lighting, particle effects, physics engine, and even lip synchronization system. Mod designers can build elaborate and beautiful levels, as long as the created levels conform to the visual aesthetic of *HL2*. By combining custom level designs with customized characters, animation, and expressions, a machinima artist can create startlingly lifelike video productions.

### **The Song: “So Cold”**

Since *I’m Still Seeing Breen* is a music video, the artist has combined the video content with the band Breaking Benjamin’s song “So Cold.” Breaking Benjamin, named for the band’s frontman Ben Burnley, describes itself as emotional hard rock. The band’s website makes numerous references to “hard-charging rhythms, sharp hooks, and soaring vocals,” on their website. Their musical emphasis is on strength and unity to overcome challenges. They acknowledge that their main audience is the “alt-rock crowd,” a population that includes a sizeable percentage of the gamer population (Breaking Benjamin). This connection between gamers and popular music helps to provide some details to the audience analysis that must accompany any piece of rhetoric (Bitzer).

Breaking Benjamin wrote their song “So Cold” with very dark and dreary emotions in mind, if we are to take the minor chord in which the song is performed to be any indication. The somber mood the song embodies is also augmented by periods of strength, especially in the refrains and “breakdown“ sections of the song, which are epitomized by hard electric guitar riffs and more pronounced use percussion as compared to the main stanzas of the song. Arranged and performed for their 2004 CD *We Are Not Alone*, the song was evidently influenced by the public sense unity against a common cause, even if that unity meant sacrifice (Breaking Benjamin).

The song is ubiquitous in the gamer generation’s experience, especially in films

targeted to the gamer generation. According to their website, Breaking Benjamin wrote this song after being inspired by a zombie movie, *28 Days Later*. The song was also included in the comic book movie *Hellboy*.

An examination of the lyrics further underlines the sense of despair, anger, and call for strength through unity that the music track establishes through the lead-in. Here are the lyrics in their entirety:

Crowded streets are cleared away  
One by one  
Hollow heroes separate  
As they run

You're so cold  
Keep your hand in mine  
Wise men wonder while strong men die

Show me how it ends, It's alright  
Show me how defenseless you really are  
Satisfied an empty inside  
Well that's alright  
Let's give this another try

If you find your family  
Don't you cry  
In this land of make believe  
Dead and dry  
You're so cold  
but you feel alive  
Lay your hand on me  
One last time

Show me how it ends, It's alright  
Show me how defenseless you really are  
Satisfied an empty inside

Well that's alright  
Let's give this another try

Show me how it ends, It's alright  
Show me how defenseless you really are  
Satisfied an empty inside  
Well that's alright  
Let's give this another try

Its alright (x9)  
-*Breaking Benjamin, "So Cold"*  
2004

These lyrics, even taken out of context, build and maintain a sensation of communal anger, despair, and finally consolidation against a common enemy. Even a cursory rhetorical examination of this song demonstrates a dark feeling that closely matches the emotional statements *HL2* embodies. Given that the song was included on several soldiers' playlists during the author's tour of duty in Afghanistan, it may be understood that the song's emotional drive struck a chord with those who were actively sacrificing themselves for a higher cause.

## **The Video**

The video "I'm Still Seeing Breen" opens with a montage of scenes from the *HL2* game environment. These scenes are selected to demonstrate the overarching feeling of hopelessness and helplessness that permeates the first half of the video. This montage, as Burke would explain through the dramatic concept of setting, sets the prevailing mood by showing not only how devastated the cityscape has become over the course of the occupation, which is never outwardly addressed in this video but, rather, requires some prior understanding of the *HL2* storyline. The sensation that something is amiss



Figure 5: Screenshot from *I'm Still Seeing Green*

is expressed very clearly, however, between the shots of destroyed buildings, dimly lit and cramped interrogation chambers, and fascist dystopian symbols such as masked policemen, bizarre flying machines, and enormous television displays emblazoned with the overseer's face. The concept of these displays figures prominently into later scenes in the video.

The camera system is assembled to mimic the single-camera shooting technique that is ubiquitous in television dramas, such as *Homicide: Life on the Street* or *The West Wing*. This gives the audience a feeling of involvement in the same way a first person shooter involves the player deeply into the game environment. By using this type of perspective, the viewer is placed in the thick of the action and quickly is incorporated as an observer-member of the drama, as Kress and Van Leeuwen explain. Additionally, by choosing close shots of characters in remorseful poses, such as seen in Figure 5, Marino



Figure 6: The G-Man as seen in *I'm Still Seeing Breen*

takes advantage of the high modality of the animation system. The characters, such as those on the couch in Figure 5, are trying to comfort each other in light of the conquest of their world. The montage of distressing scenes lasts for roughly a minute, during which the introductory instrumental portion of the song is played. The song's introduction highlights the central theme as played on a rhythm guitar while a haunting version of this theme is played using what appears to be a synthesized guitar. This combination helps to emphasize the eerie nature of the song. This portion of the video also refers to the first "act" of *HL2*, during which the player is unarmed and acts as another cog in the machine (Valve).

Immediately following the bridge from the intro to the first verse is a series of close ups from a black screen that first introduces the narrator, an older gentleman

wearing a suit and tie. Members of the audience who have played *HL2* recognize this character as the “G-Man,” an enigmatic character who seems to manipulate the events of both the original *Half-Life* and the sequels from behind the scenes. The lyrics of the song, originally performed by Breaking Benjamin vocalist Ben Burnley, are synchronized with the G-Man’s lip and facial movement. This was accomplished using the *FacePoser* program included with Valve’s SDK package. In the context of the previous scenes, it appears as though the G-Man is providing narration for the events of the video. This, again, refers to the G-Man’s role in *HL2* as a kind of narrator, as the first scene of the game provides a prologue for the events that occurred between the original *Half-Life* and the sequel. The G-Man sequences are interspersed with additional scenes from the game environment. Transitions between the G-Man scenes and game environment scenes are applied so that they resemble the transitional techniques for-profit music videos use. The action generally cuts hard in time with the music to demonstrate explosive energy or rapid action, and cross-fades back to the narrator G-Man over the course of the first word of each lyrical line.

The use of these kinds of visual cues amounts to a rhetorical choice to use semiotic devices, as Kress and VanLeeuwen explain in their theories of visual rhetoric. Semiotic devices are aspects of visual rhetoric that represent some theme or concept that is recognizable by the audience. These visual effects and transitions serve as semiotic devices to express energy, as they are used in action films and action-oriented music videos. As a result, they serve linguistic choices directed toward the audience’s experiences with similar energetic sequences. Burke’s explanation of action addresses this visual choice, as it helps the audience identify with the action-oriented tone of the video. Marino’s use of these kinds of visual semiotic devices with a respect for the audience’s expectations, therefore, addresses the fifth research question posed through this thesis.



Figure 7: Human resistance members as seen in *I'm Still Seeing Breen*

The video continues in this fashion throughout the two verses and the refrain scenes, only showing the G-Man when the song's lyrics are being sung. Beginning with the second verse and refrain and continuing through to the breakdown, the in-game sequences become increasingly more violent and action-oriented. This coincides with the second act of *HL2*, where the protagonist gains weapons and begins to fight against the inter-dimensional oppressors. The song's lyrics also demonstrate a shift in the sentiment at this point in the video, which refers to lost family members and emotional desolation (Breaking Benjamin).

The breakdown portion of the song, with its much harder charging bass line and lead guitar riffs, further demonstrates a shift in the action. The G-Man is absent from these scenes, while the in-game action intensifies. Chase scenes, images of weapons firing, masked policemen charging a building, and frequent first-person shots of vehicles in motion combine with the lead guitar solo to create a sensation of individual action.

Again, contextual knowledge of the game from which these images are taken aid in forming an overall understanding of the artist's intent. These scenes are shown to denote individual resistance against oppression and personal strength, since the action almost always shows a single character acting against an enemy force. The repeated use of Alyx, a female character who acts as a sidekick and guide for the player's avatar, further reinforces this concept of individual strength. By showing Alyx in several dangerous scenarios in rapid succession, but never showing her dead or injured, Marino establishes this character as a heroic example for the audience to identify with.

The final segment of the video begins immediately after the final repetition of the refrain, during which the G-Man repeats, "It's all right," nine times. This line becomes a kind of unifying mantra as it is repeated over images of members of the human resistance, who are obviously civilians shown earlier in the video with a new uniform skin applied and armed with modern firearms (see Figure 7). The final scenes of the video are taken from the final act of the game, during which members of the resistance are seen fighting against the occupation force, tearing down the omnipresent monitors, and generally engaging in actions against the establishment. The final scenes are taken from the last act of *HL2*.

## **Analysis**

"I'm Still Seeing Breen" combines elements of *HL2* and "So Cold" to build an immersive and interesting piece of participatory discourse that, when considered in context of the gamer community and the game itself, as well as the time in which it was designed, produces an effective argument in favor of strength through unity. In this section, I will explain how each of my five analysis questions are answered by this video.

## *Exigence*

First, by examining the historical context in which this video was released, we can understand the exigence of the rhetorical situation the video's creator, Paul Marino, was addressing. The video was initially released 5 March 2005. This places the release date in the context of several dark moments in American history. The war in Iraq was prominent in the media, with ever increasing troop casualties topping nightly news broadcasts. Members of the conservative movement, having just reelected President George W. Bush, were galvanized in their efforts to unify their influence. Liberal democrats were unhappy with these events and seemed unable to unify against their opposition. News reports on local stations, and even on international networks such as CNN, heralded the "War on the Middle Class." For members of the political or ideological minority, times were dark and dreary.

Additionally, troop rotations to the concurrent war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq had reached a fever pitch. Members of the US Armed Forces were entering the fifth year of combat operations, meaning that many soldiers were now experiencing their second or third combat tours. The author was preparing for his second combat deployment at the time of this video's release. Many soldiers had already seen their marriages fail, their families fall apart, and their friends die in the war. Artists such as Breaking Benjamin, with their dour sound and maudlin lyrics, often found their way onto the playlists and into the CD collections of those soldiers. Soldiers felt disconnected from the world during their deployments, and by listening to songs that spoke to their anguish, these troops could at least feel a sense of unity with others.

These conditions all combine to create the external conditions, or exigence, that Marino had to consider when producing his video. Public conditions were bleak, and by recognizing and addressing those conditions in his video, Marino takes advantage of those

exigent conditions. This addresses my first research question, and demonstrates what Bitzer considers the first of his three-part rhetorical situation. The result is a video that entices the audience by identifying with their concerns and draws their attention. This ties directly into Marino's goal of uniting his audience within the machinima community.

### *Audience*

According to Paul Marino's blog, *Thinking Machinima*, of 5 March 2005, his intended audience consisted of members of the machinima community who not only had knowledge of *HL2* but also had an interest in machinima. Marino also explained that his intent for this video was to spread support for independent machinima. In order to draw his desired audience to his project, Marino distributed his video on his blog, on *Machinima.com*, and *YouTube.com*. He also made a high quality copy of the video free to download from his blog. By using these distribution outlets, as well as tagging the videos with popular key search phrases, Marino was able to ensure that a wide audience was exposed to his video. Also, by selected specific key phrases, such as "so cold," "breaking benjamin," "HL2," and "machinima music video," Marino was able to ensure that interested parties could find both his video and the blog. Users who are interested in those subjects would be able to find and enjoy the video, and then share it with other interested parties. By May 2009, over 100,000 viewers had seen "I'm Still Seeing Breen" in various incarnations around the Internet. This represents Marino's audience, which addresses my second research question.

### *Constraints*

By combining a song with such strong sentiments of repression, anger, and disunity with a game whose story embodies these traits, Marino expresses an

understanding of the rhetorical situation of his audience. However, as Bitzer would say, he also demonstrates his awareness of the rhetorical constraints such a statement must conform to. Since his desire is to use this piece as a promotional piece for his art as well as an argument for increased participation in the community, Marino had to ensure that some considerations were made. The video does not show any blood actively being spilt, nor did he select a song with explicit lyrics. The video does not outwardly express a desire to overthrow the establishment, though that is a trope that is used throughout the video. Also, the way in which Marino sampled the video content and stuck carefully to the Fair Use standards of copyright law, Marino ensured that his video was not in violation of federal law. This is an important constraint all machinima artists must consider.

### *Language and Visual Components*

As explained earlier in this chapter, Marino's understanding of his audience influenced the various decisions he made throughout the production process. To address this audience, Marino combined a carefully selected song with a series of interesting and inventive visual components to produce an engaging music video. These decisions, and their examination in earlier sections of this chapter, answer my fourth and fifth research questions. However, there are some additional rhetorical choices Marino made during the production phase of this video that also address these questions.

Marino's choice of the song "So Cold" represents a well-informed linguistic choice. The song is representative of many aspects of gamer culture, based on its inclusion in gamer-oriented film. By selecting a song the audience is already familiar with, Marino's language is further associated with the setting, as Burke would say. This connection between language and setting addresses the audience's expectations and



Figure 8: A bunraku puppet as an example of a human representation that falls into the Uncanny Valley.

primes the viewer for Marino's message. Therefore, this linguistic choice reinforces Marino's overall rhetorical goal by framing the message within pre-established cultural devices. This analysis reinforces my assertion that Marino's linguistic choices were sound in accordance with my fourth research question.

By using *HL2*, Marino demonstrates an adherence to and appropriation of Valve's aesthetic. The environment is stark and unpleasant; the characters are easy to associate with; even the dim lighting conditions demonstrate provide a feeling of unease. However, even though the modality of the environment and the character design is high, Marino avoids the Uncanny Valley of humanoid representation through his selection of game

media. The Uncanny Valley refers to the believability of a humanoid representation (Mori). When a character has high modality, it resembles a human being so closely that it is all but indistinguishable. This can be achieved through realistic movement eyes, eyelids, hair, or muscle groups. When these motions are neglected altogether in favor of a cartoonish representation of a humanoid, this is not too disconcerting, as the audience does not have to reconcile the image with that of a real human. It is only when a representation approaches true humanoid form and behavior, but falls short for some reason, does the incongruity create a sense of cognitive dissonance and become off-putting (Mori). Film representations of zombies, for example, are disturbing because they look human but lack human movement. Bunraku puppets, which approach human form but lack some key features, such as flowing hair, natural mouth movement, and natural eyes, are very disturbing (Mori). Figure 8 offers an example of a bunraku puppet that fits Mori's definition of an uncanny humanoid image. By selecting a system that incorporates so many aspects of human form and function, as demonstrated by the face synchronization seen in the G-Man sequences, Marino demonstrates his understanding of the importance of the Uncanny Valley as a constraint and avoids it.

At the same time, Marino uses aspects of the Uncanny Valley and low modality objects to help develop a well-defined sense of cognitive dissonance. For example, in showing the hulking alien Striders patrolling the streets, and the masked policemen breaking open doors and brandishing torturous-looking weapons, Marino helps to delineate those who are against the normal-looking civilians. This approach is very effective as a method of galvanizing association with a protagonist population. Marino could have incorporated the Vortigaunts, an alien race that has allied with the human resistance against their oppressors. The non-humanoid aliens, however, would conceivably confuse audience members who had not played *HL2*. By limiting low modality aspects to those components of the video that are arrayed against the human

resistance, Marino helps to keep the audience associated with the “right side.” (Kress and Van Leeuwan) The careful use of the Uncanny Valley represents a clear visual rhetorical choice, and therefore addresses part of my fifth and final research question.

## **Conclusion**

Given this historical backdrop, rife with disappointment and despair, a piece of rhetoric that associates with the sentiments of the time can provide a strong pathos-based argument. By combining a stark setting, such as a devastated city, with characters the audience can identify with, such as these well-designed and animated characters, an artist can address a large audience and incite that audience to participate in the community. This is similar to the approach Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein used in *Battleship Potemkin* to inspire support for the Communist Revolutionary movement (Kress and Van Leeuwen). While Marino explains that his goal was simply to produce a machinima video that would allow him to “stretch his legs,” a skilled artist such as himself would definitely understand the rhetorical situation into which he placed his work. By understanding and addressing these aspects of the rhetorical situation, and by using visual language to construct his argument, Marino successfully produced an interesting and engaging piece of machinima.

## **CHAPTER 4: HOW TO BUILD A FLAG THAT WAVES IN THE WIND**

In a creative community, especially those within emerging technologies, there are many ways to participate. Sharing knowledge in technical documents dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during which widespread circulation of technical manuals helped to spread trade-specific knowledge throughout a growing community of skilled tradesmen. Elizabeth Tebeaux explains in her article, “Technical Writing in the Seventeenth Century: The Flowering of a Tradition,” that by documenting how to effectively combine skilled labor with new technology, trade guilds were able to expand the effective use of that new technology (Tebeaux 210). While these manuals described how to build military fortifications, commercial ships, and navigational equipment, the concept has carried forward into the present day. Knowledgeable people record how they do interesting things using the present technology in order to spread the use of their knowledge throughout their respective discourse communities.

In producing an effective technical document, language, framing, and credibility are absolutely critical. When producing a manual on building a fort to defend the nascent colonies of the New World, military theorists were tapped for their ideas (Tebeaux 215). When producing a manual to build cargo ships that can survive the winter storms of the mid-Atlantic, guild leaders approached shipwrights whose cargo ships survived the crossing (Thebeaux 217). When people want to construct interesting and effective three-dimensional representations of real world objects in *Second Life* (hereafter referred to as *SL*), the popular three-dimensional virtual environment, artists and designers look to people who have experience with the construction toolset. Tutorial machinima videos fill the technical development role by demonstrating the thought processes and building tools used.

Torley Wong (aka Torley Linden), a former techno musician and current designer for Linden Labs, has produced 383 independent videos for *YouTube.com*. Over half of these videos are user-generated machinima tutorials explaining how to use the design toolset in *SL* to its fullest extent. Among these tutorials is the video entitled “How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind.” This tutorial explains how to build a flexible flag and a pole and how to set the physics conditions on so that the flag appears to flap in the wind. This machinima is an excellent example of using machinima for instructional purposes.

This chapter will examine Wong’s use of audience and language through the planning and execution of his tutorial. Since the goal of this video is to educate rather than to entertain, the rhetorical choices Wong made throughout the production process of this video will be examined with an eye toward that goal. As in the previous chapter, I will explain the context in which this video was envisioned and created, including a brief description of the producer. I will then provide a description of the video, with examples of specific rhetorical components. This description will also include portions of my analysis as they pertain to specific aspects of the video. Finally, I will present additional analysis on more general themes, framed within the context of my five research questions.

## **Second Life: A Virtual World**

In order to best understand the context in which Wong’s video exists, it is important to understand the exigent conditions presented by the game environment. Since this tutorial explains how to do something within *Second Life*, it is important to understand what *Second Life* is. *Second Life*, unlike other engines for machinima production, is not a game. *SL* is a three-dimensional virtual environment developed and produced by Linden Labs. In this environment, users create avatars and interact with fellow community members, called Residents. In this world, Linden Labs creates the

most basic components, including the terrain and basic design toolset. Linden Labs then makes these components available to the user, allowing each Resident the ability to build whatever they want, from clothing to buildings. Without user participation, *SL* would be simply a vast empty wasteland, not the bustling community of over one million members it was at the time of this writing.

According to the official *SL* FAQ, *SL* has some game components. The interface has some components reminiscent of game systems, such as the keyboard and mouse command interface or the various uses of the mouse cursor to interact with the environment. New users are required to download the free viewer client, build an avatar, and are then deposited in a new user environment. This environment was originally called Orientation Island, later called Help Island, and existed as a number of different islands created to help new users become familiar with the basic controls and concepts of *SL*. In these instances, a game-style quest structure was used to guide new users through a series of tutorials. Users are given a set of instructions and tasks to complete from onscreen displays, as well as pop-up tutorial windows that briefly explain how some tools or subroutines work. After completing the tutorials, which are voluntary, users are then encouraged to explore the rest of *SL*.

After the introductory area, *SL* as a whole no longer uses a quest structure to shape the user's experience. There are some areas in *SL* that have a game rule system in place, but these areas are the exception rather than the rule. Linden Labs, the company that released and maintains *SL*, explains that the *SL* is open-ended and allows users to experiment and create anything they wish using simple, yet powerful, set of design tools. Users can construct buildings, design and create clothing, interact with other users, or even play games within the environment. Anything a user creates belongs to that user, rather than belonging to Linden Labs. As such, it is more accurate to describe *SL* as a

virtual world rather than as a game (Linden Labs).

Everything in *SL* exists as an object with some conditions or settings applied. As an object-oriented environment, and an open-ended environment at that, the aesthetic of the engine is open-ended, as well. The characters can be any shape or size the user wishes. There are no limitations applied to color palates. Even environmental controls are open to the user's manipulation. There are a handful of aesthetic constants in the interface, such as the viewer client's button color or sound effects, but even these can be overridden using the tools provided with the *SL* client. With some experience in programming, design, geometry, and aesthetics, it is possible for a user to completely customize their entire *SL* experience, from the user interface to their avatar's possessions.

This open-ended nature does provide some difficulties to new users. The basic use of *SL*'s user interface is explained through the use of in-world new user tutorials, such as those found on Orientation or Help Islands. However, there are no such in-environment tutorials for object design and construction with that level of depth. One-line tutorials pop up at the first activation of an interface tool, but these are often insufficient to fully explain the functionality of the tool. While the interface tools, such as the Build menu or New Script window, closely mimic the object-oriented design tools game designers use, the use of these tools can be difficult for new users. A significant portion of the author's graduate school experience has been in designing construction projects in *SL* for various class assignments, as well as teaching his peers how to use the *SL* suite of tools. Even over the course of 18 months of in-depth use of the *SL* tool set, I have barely scratched the surface of the full functionality of the suite. Given this experience, the need for a set of instructional materials becomes apparent.

### **The Producer: Torley Wong (Linden)**

Torley Wong is the producer of this machinima video. He is an employee of Linden Labs, formerly an independent electronic musician, and a prolific machinima artist. According to his various blogs and videos, available from a variety of online video repositories, Wong's goal in life is to help others unlock their creativity or, according to his autobiography, "amplify your awesome." Wong's curriculum vitae outlines his extensive experience in a variety of professions, including music, online community management, usability testing, technical writing, and *SL* environmental design.

Wong's wide skill set speaks to his admittedly eccentric and eclectic knowledge base. He explained in at least one biographical blog entry that he is diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a type of autism. He refers to his entry into *Second Life* as a place he could "truly call home," based on its open-ended aesthetic and his discomfort with face-to-face social interactions (Wong). The avatar and object-oriented system that is the hallmark of the *SL* experience provided Wong with sufficient mediation for him to circumvent his self-consciousness over his mental disorder, and allowed him an avenue to self-expression and social interaction on more comfortable terms. Over the course of two years, Wong's avatars became some of the best-known Residents, or community members, in *SL*. As it turns out, according to comments on several of Wong's media projects, Wong is helpful, insightful, knowledgeable, and eager to interact and assist virtually anyone who needs aid (Wong).

Wong's desire to help others and work within the community, as well as his ability to fixate on specific parts of a system and learn as much about those components as possible, led to his hiring by Linden labs as "Resident Enlightenment Expert." A significant portion of this job is to provide tutorials, such as the subject of this analysis. Machinima projects provide Wong with an avenue for providing a wide audience with

a set of topic-specific tutorials with a personal feel. *How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind* is no exception. This analysis will demonstrate that this machinima combines Wong's technical expertise with specific rhetorical choices to produce an effective tutorial experience.

## **The Video**

*How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind* opens with a simple title screen and the *SL* sound effect for teleportation. In *SL*, this sound signifies that the user's avatar is teleporting from one place to another. In this video, the sound signifies that the tutorial has begun, and the viewer's orientation should shift to accommodate a new environment. It is also possible that by using this sound effect, Wong is also explaining that the viewer has been teleported to the setting of the machinima. Sound effects of this nature are present throughout the video at concept or scene changes, as later analysis will demonstrate. By combining his experience as a musician with an understanding of the auditory cues based on the engine's default aesthetic, Wong establishes his credentials that he is, at the very least, familiar with *SL*.

Wong then introduces the topic, using language such as "we are going to make a 'flexi-flag!' Haha!" This kind of informal, conversational language helps the viewer relate to the material and is indicative of Wong's teaching style. Wong seems to take great pains to avoid extraneous or particularly difficult language throughout the tutorial, which indicates that Wong places a premium on clarity to a wide audience. The machinima is distributed on *YouTube.com* and *SecondLife.com*, both of which serve a large variety of users at a variety of educational and skill levels. As Burke would say, Wong's choice of language, even early in the video, demonstrates Wong's understanding of his audience. This level of consideration for audience understanding permeates the entirety of the video.

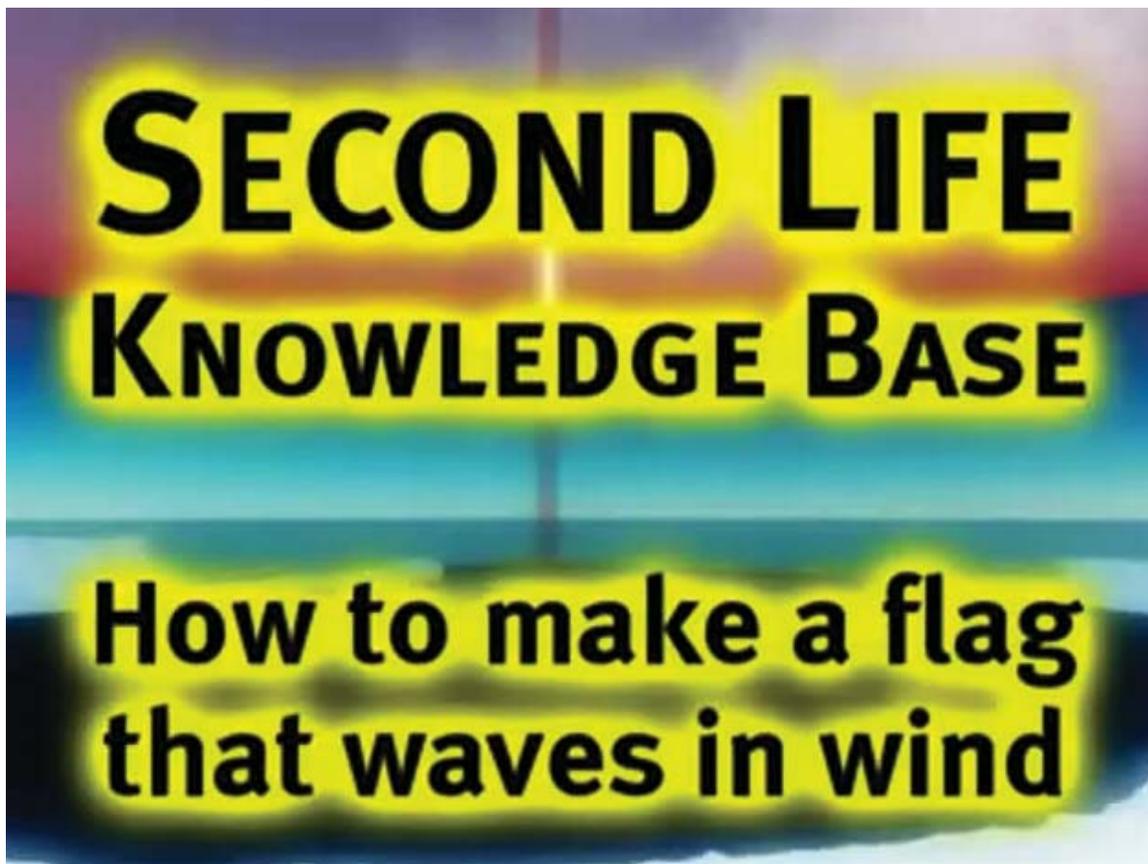


Figure 9: Screenshot from *How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind*

The introduction also indicates that Wong created this tutorial machinima using *SL*'s integrated video and audio recording system. The lack of watermarks present on many screen capture programs, such as the Fraps video recording program, and the realistically high frame rate of camera motion makes this evident. Lesser programs simply do not achieve the same frame rates the *SL* screen capture subroutine does. Also, Wong's use of a real-time voiceover, combined with in-game sound effects captured as events occur onscreen, create a sense that Wong is not merely demonstrating an academic or textbook explanation of how *SL* operates. According to Burke, this combination of agent and agency, in this case, builds Wong's credibility as a knowledgeable instructor.

Next, Wong describes the setting for this machinima. As with *I'm Still Seeing Breen*, the choice of setting establishes the tone of the video and, as Burke would say,

prepares the audience for what's coming. The tutorial takes place in a sandbox, or public building area, called Harbinger's Haven. This plot of land is free for all *SL* Residents to use as a testing ground for their latest construction projects. While Wong, as an employee of Linden Lab, almost certainly has his own plot of land on which to build, it is likely he instead opted for this sandbox for two reasons. First, most Residents do not have the resources to lease their own plot of land. Real estate in *SL* costs real-world money to lease. Given that this tutorial is listed as an introduction to building in the *SL* environment, it is unlikely that viewers of this tutorial would be willing to expend the resources necessary to lease a plot of land until they know what to do with it. Therefore, setting a video introduction to building techniques in a public sandbox provides the viewer with another valuable piece of information. Not only does Wong explicitly state where he is, he implies by being there that other successful Residents use this location for testing building techniques. By choosing this location and explaining its importance, Wong empowers the audience and prepares them for the information to come. This decision addresses my second research metric, demonstrating an emphasis on the needs of the audience.

Second, by selecting Harbinger's Haven, Wong further provides users with an introduction to the community setting of *SL*. Harbinger's Haven is a free sandbox, as well as a site for finding free building tools and textures (including some of Wong's own textures). Wong takes the time to thank the proprietor of Harbinger's Haven, Bellisa Dion, for allowing him to host this tutorial on her territory as well as for providing the building tools and textures for free. Wong demonstrates in less than a minute the advantages of community participation in *SL* by demonstrating a small number of contributions from several Residents. This choice of setting helps to build viewer confidence in the *SL* community, as well as reinforcing Wong's credibility.



Figure 10: Example of Wong's use of captions

Wong's avatar then moves to a clear work area and begins to build the flag. He demonstrates that he is cognizant of the media in which he is working, as well as compensating for media limitations and his own communicative difficulties. He does this by advising viewers that he will be speaking quickly through the tutorial but, as it is a video, they should feel free to rewind and review the process if they feel they have missed anything important. He then begins generating and editing prims, or primitives, the basic building blocks of *SL* construction. Wong assumes the audience is familiar with at least some aspects of building, as he does not explain how to enter the building interface or what a prim is. However, Wong does explain some of the more advanced tools and concepts, such as various techniques for resizing using both the graphic user interface controls on the main viewer and the numerical value system. By assuming the audience

possesses a level of technical knowledge with the *SL* building system, Wong excludes some members of the wider audience. These excluded, less experienced members are addressed elsewhere in other tutorials.

Throughout the video, Wong makes liberal use of onscreen captions. These captions help to address some concepts or filling in some holes that may arise through the real time narrative, as is the case in Figure 10. The captions also reiterate key concepts, reinforcing their importance. Wong also uses captions to make jokes, which helps to break up the monotony of a tutorial. The captions are designed in the same font and stylistic format as the opening titles. This kind of uniformity throughout the project keeps the audience focused on the information, rather than distracting the audience through inconsistencies. Consistently using the same visual techniques and themes, such as using the same Linden Labs-style font throughout the video, is a visual technique that demonstrates professionalism and builds the ethos of the producer.

Wong also makes liberal use of the camera controls throughout the construction process. This technique is not only a cinematic tool used to improve visibility of onscreen components, nor is it used exclusively to draw attention to critical visual aspects. Wong uses the camera controls in order to demonstrate the importance of camera manipulation during the construction process. As I have stated in several workshops on *SL* construction, effective camera manipulation makes construction possible. By demonstrating how to manipulate the in-environment camera system to get the best possible viewing angle, Wong implicitly demonstrates the importance of understanding the *SL* environment.

In addition to explaining basic construction concepts, such as shininess and precision in resizing, Wong explains several shortcuts or “old tricks” to accomplishing simple repetitive tasks. For example, through the combined use of narration and

captions, Wong explains the technique for copying prims using the shift-click command combination. He then uses this technique several times, repeating the command combination and reiterating its importance. By demonstrating the utility of this and other command shortcuts, such as onscreen rotations, resizing, and using the snap-to-grid function, Wong reinforces an adherence to established construction community norms. He uses similar teaching techniques to reinforce community language, such as the term “flexi-prim,” which he refers to as “the common *parlance*.” This kind of linguistic instruction expands the viewer’s *terministic screen*, which is an important goal of a tutorial. In a social community such as *SL*, it is important not only to know how the technology works, but also to know how to talk about that technology. By including some instruction of the community language, Wong helps the audience become further integrated into the *SL* community. This further reinforces the importance of Wong’s use of language, which addresses my fourth research question.

Building a static flagpole is a relatively simple process; one that Wong spends about two minutes explaining. Creating the flag to place atop the flagpole comprises the majority of the tutorial. This is understandable, since by default users create static prims, but the flexible prims necessary to simulate cloth are much more complex and require significantly more explanation of the tools. It is in the explanation of the flexible path subroutine in the *SL* building suite that Wong demonstrates not only the greatest level of understanding but also a formidable teaching technique. Wong also demonstrates his assessment of the audience in the language he chooses to use and in the demonstration of the various tools he implements.

Wong begins by creating a simple, thin, cube prim. He then explains, in a combination of simple terms and visual demonstration using the game engine, how to apply the flexible path feature to the cube prim. He explains that the flexible path only



Figure 11: Example of Wong’s use of humor to explain a difficult concept

applies to the z-axis, demonstrates how the prim moves along that axis, and then shows how to use the rotation controls to accurately simulate the positioning and movement of a flag. He also applies his trademark humor to the situation by making references to hip-hop culture, as demonstrated in Figure 11. This helps to provide levity to this difficult portion of the rhetorical situation. Wong extends the levity briefly by describing the upright flag as “lazy,” indicating to the viewer that the realistic pull of gravity on the newly created flexi-prim is not what he is looking to create. He also promises to address the situation of the “lazy” flag shortly.

Wong’s explanation of the application of textures follows. He explains, again with a combination of narration and onscreen full-motion examples, several tricks of the trade to creating a realistic flag that can be seen in all conditions from virtually any



Figure 12: Combining visual demonstration and humor to explain the *SL* physics engine

angle. Wong even demonstrates some of the potential errors a careless *SL* builder can encounter when applying textures, such as incorrectly matching the rotation of a texture on both sides of a seemingly transparent prim. He also demonstrates how to correct these follies using the selection, rotation, and flip tools. By mimicking the kinds of errors new builders can make with an honest tone of voice, Wong further connects with his audience of inexperienced builders.

Some of the most difficult aspects of the *SL* construction toolset to explain are the various settings available for flexi-prims. These eight numerical values include gravity, softness, drag, wind, tension, and forces X, Y, and Z. Experienced *SL* builders have difficulty explaining what exactly these controls do to flexi-prims. However, Wong

accomplishes the difficult task of explaining most of these functions using a combination of narration, visual examples, and humor. By applying each of the forces to the flexi-prim flag, now positioned atop the flagpole, Wong succeeds in demonstrating how the controls work and how to increase the modality of the flag by making it stand upright. He concludes his explanation of these various physical forces by advising users to “play around” with the controls and gain an “empirical understanding” of the system. Here again, by combining the visual and auditory options available in machinima, Wong succeeds in not only addressing a difficult topic, but also in advising that the viewers take ownership of their own learning process by experimenting.

### **Analysis**

Overall, Torley Wong’s explanation of building techniques is very effective at addressing its specific rhetorical situation. Wong set out to explain how to use the *SL* tool set to an interested audience, and did so through an interesting combination of visual and auditory techniques. This video demonstrates very clearly the utility of machinima in producing an effective contribution to an online discourse community.

### *Exigence*

Wong acknowledged the exigent conditions of the situation. Due to his position as an instructor for Linden Labs, Wong became aware of a gap in the community’s knowledge base regarding build techniques, especially with regards to flexible path controls. Wong also demonstrated that he was aware many people were not able to build objects simply because they did not know where the system’s permissions allowed their experimentation. He further understood the capabilities of the tool set and how best to use each to in certain situations. Finally, he understood that his previous machinima

tutorials had been successful in addressing their specific conditions, and that his distribution methods (*Youtube.com* and *Secondlife.com*) were sufficient to ensure wide circulation. Wong clearly understood the Bitzerean exigence of this rhetorical situation.

### *Audience*

Wong also demonstrated an understanding of his audience. At the time of publication, Wong had been immersed in *SL* for three years. He had interacted with fellow Residents, provided solutions to their problems, and built a wide network of friends and colleagues in the environment. Feedback from these interactions, as well as comments made regarding his previous tutorials, helped to shape his understanding of the audience. Furthermore, his experience with the challenges of social interactions due to his autism influenced his understanding of some audience members' needs. By keeping his language, tone, and personal nature to a common level throughout the video, Wong demonstrated his understanding of the rhetorical audience as well as some of the constraints (Bitzer 7,8). This is also a great example of Burke's agency being scaled to address the audience requirements.

Wong's understanding of the nature of his audience, and maintaining a level of teaching commensurate with that skill level addresses my second and third research questions. First, he determined what his audience needed to know and should already know, based on their level of expertise. He doesn't waste time explaining basic concepts, such as how to use the basic object creation controls. Including that kind of instruction would have not only lengthened the video but also would have alienated the more experienced audience members who would want to make something as advanced as a flag that waves in the wind. By focusing on the more advanced concepts of the tool set, Wong focuses on his core audiences' needs and his goal of providing that core audience with the skills they need to build advanced and interesting constructions. This clearly

demonstrates Wong's understanding of the limitations he had to address in producing this project, which can be considered constraints for the purpose of this analysis.

### *Constraints*

There are a number of constraints at work when addressing any teaching situation. For example, it is critical to keep a professional tone, even if that tone may be softened with colloquial language. This is especially true for a widespread social environment, such as *SL*. Additionally, *Youtube.com* maintains a very strict time limit on user-generated videos of no greater than ten minutes. When producing a tutorial machinima with the goal of addressing such a large topic area, it can be difficult to adhere to these constraints. Wong successfully adhered to each of these constraints by maintaining a professional, if jovial, tone of language and demeanor. This is to be expected from an employee of any major company, but especially from someone who lists "being nice" as his most critical skill on his curriculum vitae. Additionally, Wong understood that he needed to speak and work quickly, which, after viewing several of his other videos, seems to be his preferred cadence of speech. Early in the video, Wong advised the viewer to rewind the video as necessary if he or she feel something was missed. By allowing for these conditions, Wong demonstrated his understanding of the constraints of the rhetorical situation.

### *Language*

Language was a major tool Wong used throughout the video. As stated above, Wong combined professional terms with those commonly used by the *SL* community to foster their integration into the viewer's lexicon. Wong also augmented this sometimes-dry language with humorous asides, such as the "Shake dat prim" caption during the flexi-prim demonstration. Wong selected background music that would fill pauses in the narration, but that would not distract from the overall experience. Furthermore,

his use of technical jargon was limited; this is a critical consideration in producing tutorial machinima for mass consumption. Using a modification of Burke's concepts of terministic screens and orientation, Wong chose to use language that would be recognizable to the audience, as well as inviting the viewer to incorporate some new terms into their own terministic screen.

### *Visual Components*

A lively, fun, and decidedly cartoonish aesthetic was prevalent throughout the video. Wong's avatar, for example, was a human woman dressed in an elaborate green and pink gown. This was in keeping with Wong's personal affection for watermelons, as his various blogs, video blogs, websites, and tutorials explain (Wong). This color scheme also helps his avatars stand out against the video's setting.

Additionally, Wong's use of on-screen demonstration, integrated into the narrative of the tutorial, is unavailable in any other prepared instructional material. A printed document, such as a pamphlet or textual blog with images, cannot reinforce the importance of camera manipulation as well as live demonstration can because the audience does not see the camera being manipulated. A machinima tutorial, such as this one, has to include a presentation of all the tools necessary to build an object because the narrator is actually building something. The audience gains first-hand experience in the importance of understanding these tools.

For example, Wong makes liberal use of the camera controls throughout the tutorial. This is because, when building a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional display, a designer has to know how to manipulate the camera controls. This is the only way to examine the object from all angles and to control all the fine details, such as placement of component prims within the object. By showing how to use those camera

controls throughout the design and construction of his flag and flagpole, Wong makes great use of this teaching moment, further demonstrating his ability to understand the material and well as the nature of machinima as a medium. This addresses the importance of understanding visual language in teaching, which addresses my fifth research question.

## **Conclusion**

Compared to textual “how to” documents, machinima tutorials such as Wong’s effort offer a more in depth, procedurally-focused explanation of the techniques and tools used in virtual construction. Demonstrative teaching techniques, such as Wong uses in this video, are common in software instruction. Technical communication instructors, based on my experience as a graduate lab, teaching, and research assistant, use software demonstrations frequently to supplement print documents, such as instructional manuals and reference texts. Students who are shown how to use software packages, rather than being left to their own devices, tend to be more successful than students who are merely told about the software. This instructional principle is used in military training doctrine, secondary education, and at the collegiate and university level. By using this technique to teach the gamer generation about the intricacies of the *SL* construction toolset, Wong takes advantage of the unique audio-visual capabilities machinima filming techniques offer.

## CHAPTER 5: RED VS. BLUE, SEASON 1

So far, I've examined a machinima music video and a machinima tutorial and determined the success of these pieces at addressing their respective rhetorical situations. In both of these cases, the artists made their work available for free on the Internet with no restrictions on replay conditions or availability. For the most part, this concept of open availability of user-generated content is a key aspect of the gamer community. *Machinima.com* and *YouTube.com* both demonstrate this by not charging hosting or membership fees for users to post videos or view videos (YouTube). By making machinima content available for free, the community can save their money for other purposes, such as purchasing games. The proliferation of free or inexpensive development tools, such as Fraps or Windows Movie Maker, further supports the collaborative and gift-sharing nature of the machinima community. Given an audience and tools, a machinima artist can participate in the community without spending a lot of money.

Generally speaking, gamers will talk about products they enjoy. This is a cornerstone of the multi-billion dollar videogame industry. Word of mouth spreads quickly through a close-knit gamer community, especially when that community takes advantage of the web-based communication systems most games incorporate as a matter of course. The proliferation of add-on programs for *World of Warcraft*, user-generated modifications to the original game design for specific purposes, is one example of community support being influenced by word of mouth. In order for a character to learn the best way to play a certain role, systems within *World of Warcraft* encourage connecting with members of the community. Invariably, these communities will recommend certain add-ons or mods to address certain needs. While these products are available for free, this is the business model most for-profit gamer sites use in order to

proliferate their market share.

Similarly, all multiplayer games include one or more communication system for players to use. Whether text-based or voice-based, these systems allow players to communicate privately or publically to other members of various teams. In addition to coordinating attacks in a fast-paced multiplayer first person shooter, such as *Halo* or *Unreal Tournament*, players use these communication channels to build friendships and extend their social networks. When the team succeeds, the players can celebrate their victory and continue to build their friendship. When new games or add-ons are released, this community of players will coordinate their purchasing and play schedules so that everyone is ready to go and can continue playing with their friends. This is critical to the survival of MMOs, as I've personally encountered throughout my game experiences in *World of Warcraft*. When friends stop talking about the fun they have in a game, those friends stop playing. When friends stop playing, the business model breaks down.

There is a growing cottage industry revolving around machinima production for profit. These machinima fulfill the same basic principles of user-generated machinima, but are generally only available for free for a limited time. After an introductory period of only a couple of weeks, the machinima are removed from the public's view and archived. This economics model supports the sale of recorded copies of the machinima from a website or brick-and-mortar retail store, provided the viral nature of the original release garnered enough of an audience. The business plan thrives on community participation, and feeds on this interesting aspect of the gamer community.

Rooster Teeth Productions, LLC., is a small, Internet-based business that has taken the community participation business model as their own. This company, started by a handful of friends, produced one of the longest running and most successful for-profit machinima to date. *Red vs. Blue* is a situation comedy machinima produced using

the Microsoft X-Box videogames *Halo* and *Halo 2* as their source material. The series spanned five seasons and was originally released for free through various web-based channels. However, each passing season was archived at the start of the next season, so users were unable to review previous episodes. Rooster Teeth then released each season on DVD through their online store. This business model has supported Rooster Teeth Productions for several years, allowing its partners to focus on their love of games and machinima.

In this chapter I will take a different approach than I used in previous chapters. Since *Red vs. Blue* is a series, it is too long for my technique of integrating analysis into the summary. Therefore, this chapter will begin with an examination of the game engine, *Halo*. Next, I will describe the basics of the series, with emphasis on production techniques. I will then analyze the rhetorical components of the series in its entirety, with an emphasis on the five research questions.

### **The Game: Halo**

The *Halo* series of games are first-person shooters in the tradition of *DOOM*, *Quake*, and *Marathon*. These games, often derided as the embodiment of all that is wrong and anti-social in games and game culture (Clarke 88), place the player in the boots of the game's main character. By centering the camera in the position of the character's eyes, the player is immediately fully immersed in the storyline and gameplay. When the player moves forward or back, the camera moves to show the avatar moving forward or back. When the player moves the mouse, the avatar's head moves to look around. Most games add a crosshairs in the center of the camera's field of view and a graphic of a weapon in the corner of the screen, simulating the visual perspective of the player holding a weapon and aiming it at targets.

The result of these procedural choices, as Bogost would say, is an immersive game environment that draws the player into combat and storyline. The player is forced to consider the situations in the game as though he or she were actually faced with those problems, such as being attacked by evil aliens bent on interstellar domination and, subsequently, having to shoot those aliens with an array of futuristic weapons. This concept of conflict resolution through superior firepower and adopting the Burkean orientation of the protagonist's plight is the cornerstone of a successful first-person shooter.

*Halo* is one of the most popular modern first-person shooters. Created by Bungie Studios, *Halo* tells of the adventures of a futuristic marine encased in a powerful suit of armor. The gameplay features a beautiful game world, rich in texture and realistic lighting conditions. Throughout the single-player campaign, the game's action is plentiful and the combat is fierce. The main character, named only Master Chief, defies the odds and fights a diabolical alien race with a dizzying array of futuristic weapons. In a departure from many first-person shooters, *Halo* includes powerful and fast vehicles the players are free to drive, including jeeps and tanks. All of these features combine to produce one of the most entertaining, addictive, and best selling single-player games in the history of the X-Box.

The single-player campaign described above is only half of the game, however. Bungie used those same tools to create their multiplayer game system, which has seen a significant expansion of the game's popularity throughout the gamer generation. *Goldeneye: 007's* split-screen multiplayer game system drove its sales to over 8 million copies, according to Martin Hollis, the lead designer for *Goldeneye* (Hollis). A similar split-screen game system was incorporated into *Halo*, with similar commercial results. *Halo* also allows a local Ethernet to connect several X-Box consoles, resulting

in large multiplayer games using this same split-screen game design. According to Burnie Burns, the writer/director of *Red vs. Blue*, the *Halo* multiplayer system not only brought his development team together in close proximity, which is the only way to play the multiplayer game due to the lack of Internet support (Bungie), but also made his machinima project possible.

### **The Series: Red vs. Blue (Season One)**

*Red vs. Blue* is a machinima situation comedy series. The series focuses on the misadventures of two opposing squads of soldiers. As Private Simmons, a member of the Red Army, explains, each of the two squads is assigned to defend a base in a box canyon on an alien planet. As a running joke about bureaucracy, it appears that the only reason the Red Army is defending their base is because the Blue Army has their own base in the box canyon. Neither squad has received orders aside from to defend their base and all the property on their base, especially their flags. This is the same scenario players engage in the Capture the Flag rule set used in most multiplayer game modes.

The ludicrous nature of these soldiers situation is augmented by the characters' personalities. Each team of soldiers, both the Red and Blue teams, is comprised of some of the most incompetent and least motivated soldiers I've ever seen. They lack discipline, but are well initiated in the time-honored tradition of complaining about current conditions. Rather than acting like the kind of motivated super soldier, such as Master Chief, upon which they are based, these characters behave more like the geeky gamers who play *Halo*. Their dialogue focuses more on their irritation with another character's stupidity, which more often than not places whole teams in mortal peril. They're in over their heads, which creates a comedic setting.

The series ran online from 2003 to 2007, totaling one hundred short episodes,

between three and seven minutes each, spread across five seasons. Each episode was broadcast on Friday, would remain posted for a couple of weeks, and was then pulled from Rooster Teeth's website to conserve bandwidth. This also limited the availability of each episode, so while they were initially free to download or stream from the website, after the episodes were archived viewers had to either contact a fellow fan for a copy or buy a DVD archive of the season. At the conclusion of each season, Rooster Teeth made the DVD archive available for purchase. The Season One collectors DVD, the focus of this case study, runs for approximately 80 minutes. In the reviewed version of the series, the nineteen episodes are edited together into a continuous feature-length film.

### **Procedural Rhetoric, Visual Techniques, and the *Halo* Engine**

In order to take advantage of the utility of the *Halo* game engine to address their rhetorical situation, there were significant constraints that had to be taken into consideration. Throughout the director's commentary track on the DVD, Burns describes the many difficulties and advantages filming a sitcom as a machinima. These procedural considerations, as Bogost would describe them, help to augment *Red vs. Blue's* aesthetic, as well as the ethos of the video.

Filmed using multiplayer mode of the game, *Red vs. Blue* is shot using a single camera setup. That is, one camera is used throughout the filming to record each character's actions and dialogue, rather than having all characters perform their lines and actions in front of several cameras, as is the usual case with situation comedies. Director Burnie Burns explains on the DVD's commentary track that the multiplayer gameplay mode made creating *Red vs. Blue* possible by allowing for the possibility of recording video content using one player position as the cameraman and additional players as the actors. The cameraman's point of view could be positioned and moved as needed to

simulate various camera angles and filming techniques. The footage would then be edited to remove aspects of the game engine, such as the player's weapon and head's up display. Figures 13 and 14 show the results before and after the editing process, as captured in *Halo*. This interesting remediation of the game system allows the machinima artists to record the action on the screen as though recording a true situation comedy. The presence of a crosshairs on the screen is the only visible trait of their filming technique.

This film technique also demonstrates the limitations in expression each character is afforded by the game engine. Unlike *Half-Life 2*, where characters have access to a full range of facial expressions and gestures available, each soldier in both the Red and Blue Armies, as their respective forces are known, are uniformly dressed in powered armor suits with full facemask helmets. Their hands are always wrapped around the grip of a weapon, and their faces are never shown. The only way to determine one soldier from another is by the color of their armor, a limitation in expression the producers exploit to great effect over the course of the first season's storyline. Characters only shift slightly while speaking, with their heads nodding up and down. All other animations are directly related to their combat actions and moving around the battlefield. The actors must express anything else verbally. This includes any emotional content, such as displaying pain or anger.

Since *Halo* lacks a video recording subroutine, such as is available in *Second Life*, and since it is played on the X-Box videogame console, the producers have to record their video content using a device called a capture card. A capture card allows a computer to display visual and audio data from any device with coaxial, s-video, or composite video output. Most capture cards, such as those produced by Pinnacle Studios, include recording and audio/video editing software as well. While more expensive than PC-based machinima production, console games and capture cards do offer additional options



Figure 13: Screenshot from *Halo*, without the framing devices Burns uses.

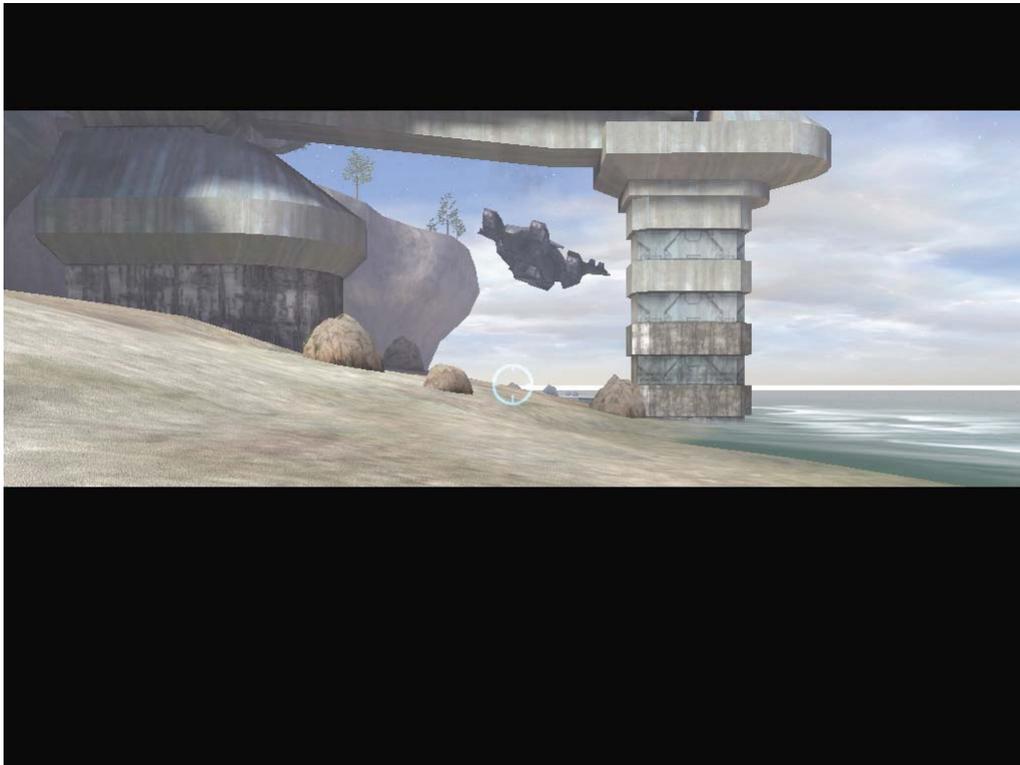


Figure 14: The same image from Figure 1, remediated in the style of Burnie Burns

and challenges for machinima developers. Consoles are dedicated gaming machines, and therefore are optimized to display the best animation that the hardware can produce (Machinima.com).

According to director Burnie Burns, however, this does not mean that the X-Box console, while producing high-quality animation, is a user-friendly system for machinima. As explained above, Burns remediated the in-game camera, effectively using one player character as the cameraman. This means that the camera can capture from any angle that a player character can occupy. This technique also makes the camera easy to manipulate -- simply pick up the controller and move the cameraman into position. Remediation in this nature demonstrates the ingenuity of the production team in circumventing the procedural restrictions of the game. Remember, Bungie Studios never intended for *Halo* to be used as a video production system.

One noticeable camera technique Burns had to adapt throughout production is the strange letterbox effect in the entirety of the series. While the remediated cameraman filming system works well, the capture process captures the entire game screen, including the player's weapon, radar, ammo, and health meter. In the center of the screen is the player's crosshairs. In order for the camera recording system to be effective, Burns was forced to crop out over half the screen, including the weapon and various onscreen displays. Figure 14 demonstrates the end result of this cropping step. Burns left the crosshairs as, according to the DVD director's commentary, "something the viewer is just going to have to get over." (Burns) This filming technique, however, effectively frames the action and provides a built-in point of salience, as Kress and VanLeeuwen would say (Kress and VanLeeuwen 177). The crosshairs is always onscreen and, therefore, is always a point of reference for the action. This helps keep the audience's attention centered on the main point of salience, or most important point onscreen, usually the center of the



Figure 15: Screenshot from *Red vs. Blue, Season One*

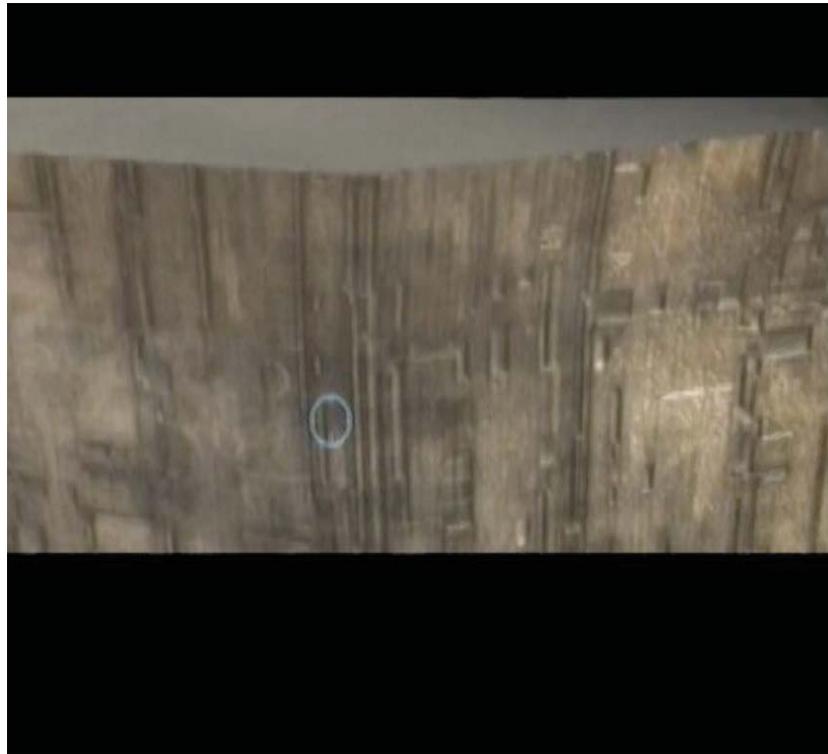


Figure 16: Screenshot from *Red vs. Blue, Season One*



Figure 17: Screenshot from *Red vs. Blue, Season One*

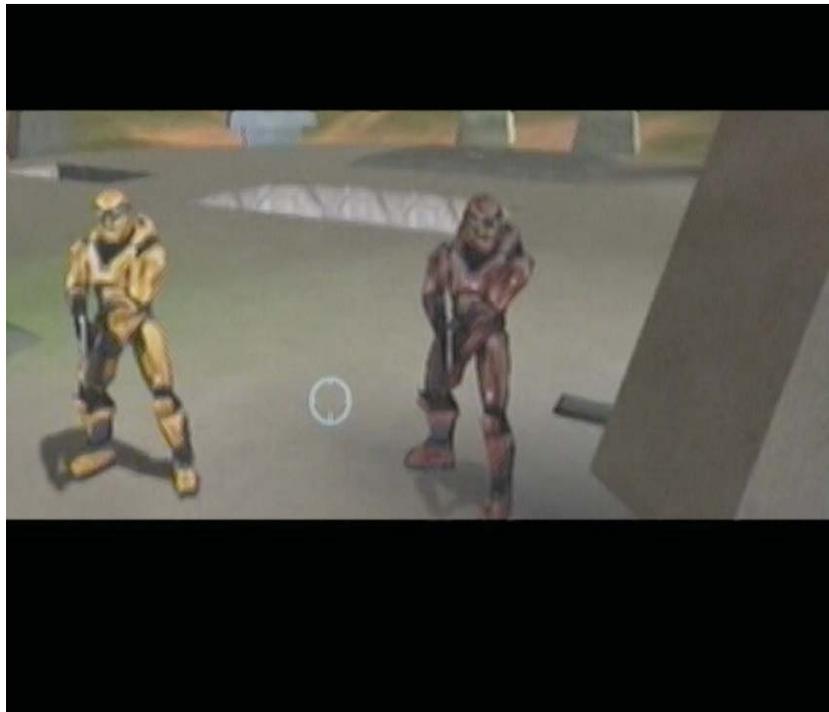


Figure 18: Screenshot from *Red vs. Blue, Season One*

frame in this series. This also allows for background elements to remain unnoticed until they become critical to the narrative, as when a Blue tank somehow manages to sneak upon two otherwise-occupied Red soldiers (see Figure 15).

Unlike the dynamic camera system available in *SecondLife* and other games, such as *Quake* or *World of Warcraft*, the “live” cameraman cannot go anywhere to achieve varying shots. For example, the first scene of the first episode simulates a crane shot panning up the outside wall of the Red base to center on two members of the Red Army (See Figures 16-18). Since the cameraman is a player character, and since the game does not allow characters to fly, Burns and his team had to create a method for simulating a crane shot. This is the same technique as a film team would use to introduce a new setting, such as the several panoramic scenes of the exotic locations in the *Lord of the Rings* films. Where director Peter Jackson, used a helicopter or crane assembly to achieve this same kind shot, Burns was limited to placing the cameraman onto a jury-rigged crane assembly created in-game, in this case the in-game tank. By raising the tank’s turret gun, the cameraman could “climb” up the wall and achieve the shot. This kind of ingenuity not only provides visual intrigue to the film, but builds the design team’s technical ethos. While simple to achieve, this sequence looks polished, sets the scene for the episode, and grabs the audience’s attention. Also, Burns’ primary audience at the time of *Red vs. Blue*’s initial release had just been exposed to the sweeping grandeur of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which made extensive use of these kinds of camera techniques to convey the epic scope of certain scenes, not to mention the use of crane-style shots throughout *Halo*’s single player campaign. It makes sense to use these kinds of shots as necessary to help set the proper mood. Kress and VanLeeuwen would call this kind of cinematic technique a semiotic device, or a symbol that, through a collective understanding of visual language, represents an understanding of the scope of the film (Kress and VanLeeuwen 216). Using a cinematographic technique that is generally associated with epic film indicates to the

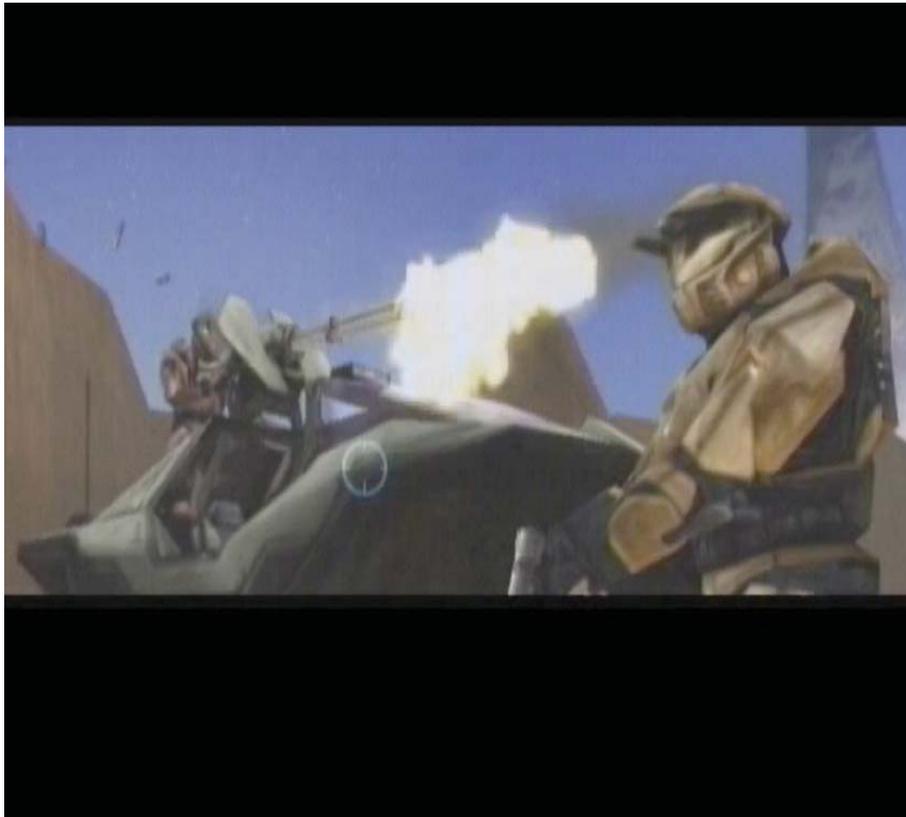


Figure 19: Screenshot from *Red vs. Blue Season One*

initiated viewer, which Burns assumes will be his primary audience, that this series will be epic in scope.

Another important procedural device made available through the *Halo* engine is the use of over-the-top explosive violence. *Halo* is full of opportunities to use firearms and explosives to varying effect. There are hand grenades, tanks, Gatling cannons, rocket launchers, and powerful alien technologies available for the user to make full use of in the game. Bogost would say that the presence of these powerful weapons in the game, as well as the “take no prisoners” rule set used in multiplayer combat, would constitute an effective procedural device encouraging the use of these weapons. Additionally, Burns’ characters in *Red vs. Blue*, in emulating immature soldiers with the behavioral traits of gamers, also have these devastating tools available. Therefore, it fits the creative procedures Burns fosters throughout the series to use the in-game concept of almost

excessive violence to great effect. At various points, Burns has characters shot in the head with a sniper rifle, blown up with a hand grenade, blasted into dust by tank cannon shells, pinned down thousands of rounds of heavy machine gun fire, and blown to pieces by aerial bombardment. Since the series follows several combat troops in their combat-related misadventures, it makes sense to use these tools effectively in the plot of the film.

The use of these weapons also addresses the semiotic code of the action comedy genre. From the slapstick comedy of Bugs Bunny cartoons to the arguably excessive violence of the comedy troupe Monty Python, violent imagery has been incorporated into the gamer generation's orientation. According to Burke's explanation of orientation, exposure to images in various contexts helps to integrate those images into a subject's worldview. Bugs Bunny slapping one of his cartoon enemies in the face with an oversized glove is funny to someone who has seen comedy of that nature before. Monty Python's technique of ending a sketch abruptly by dropping a 16-ton weight onto the head of the main character achieves a similar result, albeit with an absurd level of violence. The use of comedic violence, by the tradition of these examples, has become a part of the language of comedy. The explosive weapons used in *Red vs. Blue*, such as a tank shell hitting the jeep to which several characters are running, are just a new extension of the semiotic code that begins with Bugs Bunny's oversized glove, according to a liberal reading of Kress and VanLeeuwen (Kress and VanLeeuwen 7).

By addressing the technical constraints with an eye toward their audience, as well as making effective use of the visual procedures available in the *Halo* game engine, Burns and his team were able to create a visually stimulating comedy masterpiece for the gamer generation. As the next section will demonstrate, Burns made some equally interesting and effective rhetorical choices when writing and considering the actors' language.

## Linguistic and Audio Choices

If the first thing an audience member picks up on while watching *Red vs. Blue* is the assortment of semiotic cues from the various cinematographic techniques Burns uses, then the second thing is the distinctive language of the characters. From the first aborted philosophical discussion between Griff and Simmons on the Red team, to the Blue team's Church's dying expression of hatred toward his team member, the writing of *Red vs. Blue* is nothing short of comedy gold - for its specific audience. The rhetorical choices Burns made when preparing audio for *Red vs. Blue* further demonstrates an understanding of audience considerations, as well as the evolving rhetorical constraints of as *Red vs. Blue*'s audience began to grow.

### *Language*

Aristotle explains that a successful rhetor will see the available means of persuasion (Aristotle 36). In this, the rhetor must understand the soul of the audience and shape his speech to best match their soul, through a combination of the three rhetorical appeals of *ethos* (the moral background of the speaker), *pathos* (the emotion of the speaker), and *logos* (the logic of the speaker). By understanding how the audience will perceive certain terms, and by understanding the auditory symbols the audience is willing to accept as true, as Burke and Bitzer both express in their work, a piece of rhetoric can be strengthened and speak to the needs of the audience. Burns, having immersed himself in the gamer generation since the 1980's, according to the DVD director's commentary, is understandably well-versed in the types of language that speak to the needs of the gamer community. Most of the time, especially in combat-oriented multiplayer games, such as *Halo*, a significant portion of that language is comprised of exasperated or panicked curses, slurs against a player's personal habits, and jokes at the expense of a player's

mother. The use of derogatory or profane language in a military-oriented situation comedy, especially a machinima made using *Halo*, is almost perfectly matched to the audiences' expectations.

As the series progressed and became more popular, a greater cross-section of the gamer audience began to follow *Red vs. Blue* on a weekly basis. As an examination of forum registrants showed, this widening audience began to include younger members. According to the DVD's director's commentary, Burns and his team began to tone down the level of profanity in the series. The need for this was twofold. First, the team realized that, as Bitzer would explain, as the audience changes in composition, so too do the constraints change. Younger members of the audience, especially those at middle-school age, between 11 and 13, mean a societally-imposed restriction on the amount and degree of profanity that may be present in a speech. Whereas the first half of the series used profanity quite liberally, later episodes saw reduced occurrences.

Second, according to Burns, the team had expressed a desire to shift away from cursing as much in their videos. Other Internet projects of their type, including Home Star Runner, completely avoided using profanity in their videos. The *Red vs. Blue* team saw no reason why their project couldn't do the same, especially if it meant increasing the size of their audience.

Burke would say that this type of readjustment of language represents a widening of the show's terministic screen (Burke 1341). By removing words some might find objectionable, such as conservative parents of interested children, Burns' team increased the likelihood of that portion of the audience not being offended by the overall presentation of the series. Additionally, restricting the linguistic content to exclude profanity also demonstrated a willingness on Burns and his team's part to preclude those words being included in the *child's* vocabulary and terministic screen. This helped to

reinforce the team's ethos with the parents, since all they were providing was a mild escalation of the same kind of slapstick comedy their children were already enjoying in other forms of media.

### *Communication and the Uncanny Valley*

More than what the characters say in the course of their misadventures is how the characters deliver their lines. Here again is an example of Burns using a creative solution to a technological constraint to augment the way *Red vs. Blue* addresses the rhetorical situation. As explained above, the animation system presents some specific challenges to the production team to overcome when expressing emotions. Additionally, Burns' cast was split between Austin, Texas, and Los Angeles, California. As a result, Burns had to come up with a way to connect his staff to record their lines that could possibly explain how to address the expressive limitations of the game engine. The production team addressed both of these problems by having the cast call in to a central location on the telephone. Telephone communication is lower quality than other forms of digital recording, and, depending on the quality of the network, can sound similar to military radio communication. Spoke lines sound scratchy, tinny, over-modulated, or otherwise not quite right. In much the same way visual representations of human models that don't look quite right can form cognitive dissonance, as occurs in Mori's uncanny valley (Mori), spoken language that doesn't sound quite right may also produce a kind of cognitive dissonance. Most audiences have a reasonable expectation that when humans speak, their language sounds natural. However, gamers who have played through *Halo* understand that in the specific context of the game world, speakers who wear the same kind of armor as the soldiers of *Red vs. Blue* wear have their voices modulated. This is, presumably, a result of the full-face helmet that comes with the suit of armor. As a result,

the poor quality recording of the casts' voice acting works to the series' overall rhetorical advantage. By understanding the limitations of the system, the availability of the cast, and the advantages and constraints posed by the audience, Burns was able to turn an obstacle into yet another positive aspect of the series' *ethos*.

## **Conclusion**

By understanding the audience requirements, rhetorical and technological constraints, and the importance of using a variety of cinematographic techniques, Burnie Burns and his team were able to produce one of the most popular serial Internet comedies in history. Using machinima as the primary development technique provided the team with the tools necessary to create something the public truly enjoys. *Red vs. Blue* continued in its original form for a total of five seasons, and has been revived as *Red vs. Blue: Reconstruction* and *Red vs. Blue: Relocated*. Several Internet and gamer communities, including the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, have recognized it as one of the most popular and most revolutionary pieces of machinima in any format. By understanding the culture and the nature of its audience, as this analysis has explained, Burns and his team have helped to make for-profit machinima a viable option for future machinima producers.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I've examined three distinct forms of user-generated machinima videos. I've demonstrated that machinima artists use a system of audience analysis that is informed by their experience in the gaming culture. Through their experience, they have developed an understanding of their audience's needs and applied that understanding to their work. Their method of audience analysis and the subsequent synthesis of linguistic and visual elements closely match the rhetorical theories of Bitzer, Burke, and Kress and VanLeeuwen. Be they music videos, for-profit situation comedies, or free tutorials, machinima videos give the videogame generation a medium that is uniquely their own. These artists address the unique set of constraints the audience places on discourse participation, as well as the questions of *ethos* and aesthetics that are indicative of the gamer community.

### **I'm Still Seeing Breen**

*I'm Still Seeing Breen* demonstrates how music videos made with machinima techniques, and a keen understanding of one's audience and overall rhetorical situation, can be particularly interesting and engaging. The image of a fully articulated, very realistic older gentleman singing a song about despair and anger is an image that rings true with a variety of audiences, especially those of the gamer generation. By combining the bleak aesthetic of *Half-Life 2*, one of the best-selling games of all time, with a song that addresses the kinds of sentiments felt by millions of disillusioned gamers, Paul Marino successfully demonstrated what Bitzer would call a close understanding of his audience. Understanding the needs of the audience, according to most leading rhetorical theorists, is the key to composing a successful piece of rhetoric. By demonstrating the

kind of technical proficiency necessary to produce visually stimulating video, and by using a game that is so easily acquired, Marino implicitly invites fellow members of the gamer generation to think differently about the games they play. Responses to *I'm Still Seeing Breen*, available through Marino's blog as well as social video sites such as YouTube.com, attest to his success at increasing the popularity not only of viewing machinima but also of contributing to the gamer community's body of machinima.

According to Bitzer's theory of audience analysis in within the rhetorical situation, the goal of successful rhetoric is to incite an informed audience to undertake an action. In this case, according to his blog, Marino wanted to get people more involved in the machinima community. After Marino released *I'm Still Seeing Breen*, a number of videos on *Machinima.com* and *YouTube.com* that mimic Marino's cinematographic style, including synchronizing characters' facial movement with spoken dialogue, followed within the next several months. Marino and his colleagues at the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences cite the importance of community participation and increased notoriety of machinima projects. As gamers become exposed to well-made machinima, not only are they enthralled by the technique. Creative gamers can recognize the procedures and software necessary to replicate key components of the machinima. Projects such as *I'm Still Seeing Breen* give audience members a goal to aspire to. Based on the community response to this project, Marino achieved what Bitzer would call a positive audience response to his rhetorical appeal.

### **How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind**

Torley Wong's instructional machinima, *How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind*, uses an understanding of the *Second Life* design system and a fun-loving instructional style to demonstrate how to make something. While a printed technical manual or

textual web document, such as those available on the *SL Wiki* and other *SL* community sites, would have achieved some of the same goals, Wong opted for a machinima video. Combining visuals with textual and audio step-by-step instructions increases the number of communicative modes the viewer experiences.

A machinima video offers tutorial instructors such as Wong the same kinds of teaching opportunities celebrity contractors, such as Bob Vila, and television chefs, such as Rachel Ray, have enjoyed for decades. Video tutorials provide realistic representation of how to use tools and techniques, as well as the immediate results. Villa uses video technology to show amateur carpentry enthusiasts how to build a table by actually building a table, step by step, on film. Rachel Ray teaches her audience how to make lasagna by showing the audience the tools, ingredients, and techniques she uses in lasagna production. These instructional programs follow the evolution of technical communication by combining the latest available technology with technical teaching techniques. This is effectively the same kind of technical instruction Elizabeth Tebeaux describes in her study on 17<sup>th</sup> Century technical manuals. These publications combined the new technologies of printing presses, including movable printed type and copper-plate drawings, with the time honored tradition of teaching technical skills (Tebeaux 210). By showing how to use the right tools for each job, tutorial machinima such as Wong's effort offer technical instruction similar to that included in technical manuals dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Wong simply uses the technology that best suits his rhetorical goal. Since he is teaching how to build objects in *SL*, it makes sense that he demonstrate how to build those objects in a machinima, recorded in *SL*.

However, by incorporating an understanding of the audience's needs for levity in the face of often dry material, such as a technical explanation of flexible prims or the proper application of textures, Wong demonstrates an understanding of the audience's

particular requirements. Creating a successful instructional machinima requires a thorough understanding of the needs of the audience. By combining technical experience with the ability to explain and demonstrate the utility of the design tools, as well as keeping the audience's attention through the application of humor and viewer-oriented terminology, Wong's tutorial becomes more than just a simple "how to" video. Burke's concept of the audience's orientation of reality, especially with regards to a rhetor's choice of language, explains that in order for a piece of rhetoric to be most effective the audience has to accept and understand it. Wong, having been immersed in the gamer generation and the society of *SL*, understands how people in a digital culture learn and what kind of language is needed to keep their attention. By applying a culturally influenced combination of terminology and delivery, *How to Make a Flag that Waves in Wind* succeeds in making potentially difficult or unwieldy concepts entertaining and interesting. This ensures that the video gets through the viewer's Burkean orientation and maximizes the teaching value. Dame Rhetoric, as Aristotle would say, ensures the success of Wong's effort.

### **Red vs. Blue**

Finally, *Red vs. Blue* is one of the best-known and most successful Internet situation comedy series of any kind, especially machinima series. In order for any situation comedy to be successful, the production staff has to understand how the audience perceives the situation and, based on the staff's assumptions, create a series of comedic circumstances the audience will perceive as funny. *Red vs. Blue*, as a for-profit sitcom, is successful because the staff understands the culture of the gamer generation, especially with regards to multiplayer gaming. By remediating the *Halo* game engine as a cinema production system and by writing the series so that it addresses

the audience's cultural expectations, Burnie Burns and his team produced one of the most visually interesting and hilarious machinima series. Its blend of excessively violent slapstick, satirical dialogue, and an understanding of bureaucratic comedy speaks to an ever increasing audience, while setting the series in one of the most popular game environments in recent gaming history draws in the gamer generation.

As rhetoric, Burns' work succeeds because, as with the previous examples, the video's content is oriented to address the audience's specific expectations. Burke theorizes that the most persuasive rhetoric takes advantage terminology and experiences from the audiences' orientation of reality. This is because statements that relate more closely to the audiences' orientation are more likely to be accepted, rather than deflected. Audiences enjoy comedy made about situations they understand. The videogame culture has its own set of terms and key concepts that are particularly humorous in the context of a videogame-centered orientation. Because Burns understands the language due to his immersion in gamer culture, he is able to incorporate that language into the production of *Red vs. Blue*, positioning the series squarely in the gamer culture. Burke would say that by understanding and adhering to the audience's linguistic expectations, Burns increases the likelihood that the audience will accept his premise. Having been in the situations Burns represents informs the audiences' perception of the situation. Subsequently, when something funny happens within that situation, using the same kind of language that is used within the gamer culture, members of the audience who's orientation is influenced by gamer culture perceive the humorous event as funny. Thus, comedy is a rhetorical exercise, and by creating a machinima comedy series Burns makes use of the cultural medium to address this rhetorical exercise.

## **Possible Applications of Machinima as Rhetorical Exercise**

As the gamer generation continues to grow as it has since 1970, the rhetoric of that generation continues to evolve. Understanding how members of the gamer generation create, communicate, and persuade each other becomes more critical as they begin to take up more and more responsibility in their larger communities. In politics, business, and entertainment, the impact of videogames and videogame products, such as machinima, continues to become more prevalent. According to Sean Silverthorne, Editor of the Harvard Business School magazine *Working Knowledge*, and John C. Beck and Mitchell Wade, authors of *Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever*, citizens who grew up with games as part of their culture are now rising through the ranks of businesses and the education system. They've started businesses, families and political movements. Their participation in game communities has exposed them to different management, leadership, and communication styles. According to Beck and Wade, "Gamers have never known a time without games, and see them as a perfectly valid tool for solving problems, relating to other human beings, and discovering one's identity." (Silverthorne) They perceive challenging situations differently than previous generations, and integrate their previous experiences more readily since they have a wide skill set. They've experienced a wider variety of situations through the games they've played.

For example, the game *Assassin's Creed* requires a player to gather intelligence, garner public support, and negotiate obstacles with a variety of techniques and tools in an open-ended urban environment. There are any number of solutions to various problems the player encounters, each with their own sets of advantages, disadvantages, and consequences. In one instance, a player is confronted with a heavily guarded gate to a city. The player can fight his way through the guards, sneak past them using acrobatic skills, or blend into the crowd outside and walk past the guards. Many of the

most popular games released over the past twenty or more years, from *Legend of Zelda* in 1987, to the *Final Fantasy* series of the 1990s, to *World of Warcraft*, offer this kind of open-ended problem solving game experience. Even violent action games, which focus primarily on combat to solve problems, still offer puzzles and challenges the player cannot simply run through with guns blazing. As Ian Bogost explains in his book *Persuasive Games*, complex game experiences shape the players perception of the system and force the player to consider solutions to problems within that system. When players enter the business world, they are capable of applying those same problem solving and analytical skills to the systems they perceive.

According to Burke's concept of orientation and terministic screens, as an individual experiences the world around him or her, those experiences shape their perception of that world. Gamers, according to Beck and Wade, among other game studies theorists, experience so many more situations than previous generations earlier in their life that their perception of situations is much more open. As a result, different marketing and management techniques are required in order to best relate to the gamer generation. Beck and Wade state, "[managers] will either try to sell to people using completely wrong language, or they'll be trying to train using boring old methods like in classrooms and lectures. Either way, if they fail to adapt they're going to waste a lot of the shareholder's money sticking to methods that don't work anymore." (Silverthorne).

### *Gaming Across the Curriculum*

Clemson University's Gaming Across the Curriculum (GAC) Initiative is an effort to take advantage of the unique opportunities games and the gamer generation can offer in the classroom. This initiative began in January 2009 as an effort connecting students and faculty to discuss the possibilities of including videogames into curriculum planning.

Games give gamers experiences they would not ordinarily have, such as the chance to learn resource and personnel management in a closed system through the use of strategy games. In traditional management courses, students can only read about prevailing theories in texts without gaining any practical experience at applying those theories. Games allow the students a chance to, at the very least, apply the basic mechanics high concepts in a simulation. According to Beck and Wade, a combination of textbook instruction and simulation can not only get the gamer generation actively involved in their learning process, but helps to, as Bogost would say, bridge the gap between theoretical and practical instruction.

The GAC initiative at Clemson University is one way to encourage innovation in teaching using available technology. It is likely that machinima can play a role in this initiative as well. Keith Morton, also of Clemson University, has examined the utility of machinima in his forthcoming dissertation. Morton's research examines the pedagogical implications of machinima content, both in production process and demonstration purposes. Several other organizations across Clemson University, including the English Department's Multimodal User Group and Serious Games Colloquium, are actively investigating the use of machinima for various teaching purposes. I have presented my research on machinima production to students and faculty on several occasions, each time answering questions about how this medium may be used in a variety of classroom settings. These examples all demonstrate how machinima can fit into a modern curriculum.



Figure 20: Penny Arcade comic strip addressing mass media marketing techniques. 6 June 2001

## Marketing to the Gamer Generation

Failing to understand the nature of the gamer generation is tantamount to failing to understand a rhetorical audience. In a connected and well-organized culture, such as the videogame community, negative reviews of a marketing campaign or product can travel more quickly than a company's professionally-organized public relations campaign, with devastating results. Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik, the creative team behind one of the most successful webcomics on the Internet, *Penny Arcade*, comment on the inability of marketing and mass media to address the gamer generation. From their examination of early, "MTV-style" commercials for the Sony Playstation in 2001 (Figure 1), to the Mountain Dew cross-promotion with Microsoft's *Halo 3* in 2007, Krahulik and Holkins have examined over ten years of gamer culture through their comic strip and associated news posts. They consistently report that mass media, has simply ignored gamer culture, attempt to force the games into the mainstream with tired techniques, or insists on ineffectual business models that simply slap the "gamer" label, and a higher price tag,

onto products “designed for gamers.” (Holkins and Krahulik) Their criticism of media, passion for games, and ability to relate to true members of the gamer culture through their artwork and commentary has positioned Holkins and Krahulik as leaders of the gamer generation (Totilo). They have even gone so far as to establish a gamer community-supported, multi-million dollar international charity called Child’s Play, which provides videogames and toys to terminally ill children, and an annual electronic gaming convention, Penny Arcade Expo. The products and companies the pair vilifies, such as the *Halo 3* Mountain Dew promotion, however, rarely stay afloat (Holkins and Krahulik).

Beck and Wade advocate the increased integration of aspects of gamer culture into training and management programs, as well as marketing. Doing so well takes advantage of the gamer generation’s skill set and experiences. Ineffective attempts receive unforgiving scorn by the likes of Holkins and Krahulik, as well as running the risk of being disregarded by the gamer community. The difference between success and failure lies in understanding the gamer culture and integrating that understanding into the final product.

Each of the machinima artists I’ve examined in this thesis has successfully produced machinima projects that address their goals from within the gamer generation’s paradigm. It stands to reason that machinima projects, if they are created using rhetorical principles and planned with the audience’s needs in mind, can help connect industry, education, marketing, and the gamer generation. The rhetorical analytical methodology I’ve developed for this thesis can serve as a boilerplate for rhetorically sound machinima production if the artist understands the principles from which it was designed.

For example, consider the development of a marketing campaign for a gamer oriented product based on machinima projects, using my methodology as a development guideline. Understanding the exigent conditions of the situation serves as a strong



Figure 21: Screenshot from a Toyota Tacoma machinima advertisement, produced in *World of Warcraft*

focusing point for the project, and can support the overall project if the artistic development team is immersed in the gamer community. The team would understand the situation from a gamer perspective, which is important in designing a response the audience will associate with. Using machinima will demonstrate an understanding of the importance the gamer generation places on game content and self-expression, not to mention parody and satire. Because the project is a part of a marketing campaign, access to necessary technological and financial resources shouldn't be difficult.

By understanding the gamer culture, the development team would also understand what the marketing campaign's machinima should not say to avoid alienating the audience. This can be achieved by reviewing as counter-examples the failed campaigns *Penny Arcade* routinely examines. The team's experience in the gamer community would also inform their selection of various semiotic devices, such as cinematographic techniques, linguistic styles, comedic situations, and opportunities for effectively

integrating cognitive dissonance. The result would be a machinima-based advertising campaign that would speak to the audience's needs.

The Toyota Tacoma machinima advertisement, created in *World of Warcraft* and released in October 2007, is an example of the kind of machinima that can augment an advertising campaign. This machinima follows a team of characters who are preparing to fight a dragon in the game. The players communicate through a scratchy voice chat, mimicking the voice recording techniques used in *Red vs. Blue*, as well as actual in-game voice chat. The players ready their weapons and equipment when one of the team members activates a truck. His team members exclaim that there are no trucks in *World of Warcraft*, but can only look on helplessly as the truck driving character vanquishes the dragon. The video is littered with references to gamer culture. This machinima is funny, but it combines that humor with a pitch for their real-world product in terms gamers can relate to. The commercial explicitly states that this truck is so powerful it can kill a dragon. The cognitive dissonance established by the presence of a truck in *World of Warcraft* ensures that the image remains in the viewer's mind. This is a good example of what machinima can do for advertising, and there was no mention of anything made "exclusively for gamers."

### **Machinima as Rhetoric**

By understanding how to produce machinima and how to use that technology to address the audience's needs, machinima artists stand poised to fill a niche between the gamer community and earlier generations. Machinima can be used to teach, to entertain, and to bring communities together. I've established a rhetorical analytical methodology that can be used to examine what rhetorical principles guide machinima production. This methodology can be used to guide the production of machinima for a variety of

purposes, from entertainment to instruction to marketing. Machinima can be a useful communicative medium, especially when it's done well. Through further research, analysis, and experimentation, machinima will give artists the tools necessary to describe their world in business and education.

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