

**Falling Between Worlds:
The Comings and Goings of a Virtual Itinerant Wayfarer
in a Creative Community**

Tess Lorne Baxter BSc, BA, MA

The thesis, to stand alongside practice,
for a PhD in Contemporary Art

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Abstract

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Second Life is a long established virtual world, set up as a user created space, rather than a games studio designed product. This longevity is interesting, providing an example of how humans can develop a presence in virtual space, and where people, re-embodied as avatars, interact socially and make things imaginatively and artistically. My avataric pseudonym in this world is Tizzy Canucci.

Within the research, I use the insights of an insider wanting to share my experiences outwards, through words and video art, rather than being a distanced visitor. This engages with the aim of both autoethnography and practice based or led research, an important part of which is to articulate a critical approach to being an objective inside observer. This approach of research from creation is also a multi-disciplinary one, connecting widely, but most significantly to geography, film, literature and history.

As a geographic and cartographic spatial exercise, the research positions itself as research enquiry rather than answering research questions, as exploring

and discovering rather than starting with a preconceived frame. The various terminologies of film, video, moving image, animation and machinima, are discussed across time and material forms. I resist the label of ‘machinima’ for my practice as being too contained within digital game worlds. Exploring connections with feminist experimental film, animation and imaginative expressionism provides important insights, which leads to ‘video art’ as a better compromise. In terms of literature, translation and literary theory consider how humans communicate understanding through language, and extending it to understand how visual and audio material inter-relate as languages is a productive approach, rather than seeing technologies as mediating and determining.

These wider connections also see digital in its historical context, as a recent technological and social innovation of many – more pervasive, but not exceptional – giving a nuanced understanding of digital culture.

Declaration

This thesis and the accompanying practice is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

It comprises four parts:

This thesis, *Falling Between Worlds: The Comings and Goings of a Virtual Itinerant Wayfarer in a Creative Community*.

Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020 (Baxter and Canucci, 2020), which describes the video art made during this period. This has been published on paper, ISBN 9780995374944, and is available on request as a pdf file.

Isolated in a Box, an Exhibition of Practice: Printmaking original works (Baxter, 2020a). This is the planned ‘white wall’ gallery exhibition, cropped, reinterpreted, and reduced, and ‘isolated’ in a ‘black box’, reflecting the time of Covid-19.

This is not: Isolated in a Box, an Exhibition of Practice (Baxter, 2020b). This comprises digital images of *Isolated in a Box*, with a protest that by returning printmaking to digital it negates the visual and tactile objectives of returning digital images to printmaking.

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Lancaster University's offer of a fee waiver for the first year meant I could begin, and funding for the second and third years through the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) allowed me to develop my work further and I could otherwise. The AHRC funding was administered through North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NWCDTP), and I wish to thank Carole Arrowsmith for her help. Key academics prior to this were Dr Kate Bacon at UCLan, who inspired a broad perspective in undergraduate sociology, and Prof Daniela Caselli at Manchester University, who oversaw my exploration of literary studies for my Masters dissertation.

In terms of my video art, thanks go to Ivar Zeile of Denver Digerati, and Supernova film festival, which is one of the few that understands digital animation. After my first selection in 2016, I took on the PhD as practice based without hesitation. Much of my video art depends on the creativity of others within Second Life, and some of the most significant are named in the accompanying book to the PhD, *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020*. My development of practice into printmaking began at Iron Press in Lancaster. Run by Iain Sloan, his knowledge and curiosity about the artistic potential of printwork was inspirational, and enabled me to demonstrate the relationship between digital video art and the craft process of printmaking. This led to my placement at Edinburgh Printmakers; thanks are due to the NWCDTP for arranging funding and Alistair Clark and staff at EP for facilitating.

My family who lived at home with me were very helpful and supportive; thank you to Fiona, Harriet and Megan for being there. In one specific way,

if they had not promised to cover me in my unfunded first year, I would not have been able to start.

The final acknowledgement is an emotional one. Early in 2019 on a bicycle club ride, I came off for no apparent reason. I took a head injury and in the light of the statistics, it really was a 'moment brief between two lives'. I was very fortunate to make a relatively quick full recovery, even if shadows remain some time later. I do not remember what happened on that day or the four that followed, but from what I have been told, I want to thank the Lakes Road Club members there that day, the army medic with kit in the first car to pass, the North West Air Ambulance, and the staff of Preston Royal Infirmary.

1 Introduction

Overview

This PhD has an entrance and an exit, with a woven carpet in between. In the rooms on either side there are things that I have made, in my practice as an artist, and places that I have been as a resident of a virtual world. This was not a discrete period of my life packaged for examination, enclosed by a single set of covers, for ‘It takes time to know a place and its stories’ (Potteiger and Purinton, 1998: vii), and it is knowingly a part of the weave of my own life. Yet that weave is not fixed; we tear apart texts and creative work and re-weave the parts, in ‘textile gestures’ of reconstruction (Lévy, 1998: 48).

There is not a day one on which this PhD started, as it was developed out of an existing practice and background, and I exit it into a future with a practice that has changed, inherently influenced by experience. In between I have considered what I do and why in the process of exploring the ideas, views and history of the actions of other people. In this work, I do not deal sequentially with what happened, but instead weave them together to relate them as closely as possible – academic disciplines, art forms, literature and my own experience. And though I work in a what might be called ‘media’, my aim is not to mediate, but to translate meaning.

While this is unapologetically my own work, I recognise that I have built on the work of others, as a kind of human-made tapestry, not an outcome that fell out of an institutionalised, dispassionate process, as if measuring the impact of its dead weight might indicate worth or value. Indeed I resist the idea that concepts ‘do’ things to people; people are the live actors in this world. This work contains opinions but also justifications; I certainly started

with questions, but they are not completely resolved, for ‘All deliberation is a search for a way to act, not for a final terminus’ (Dewey, 2002: 193).

Which leads into why this matters. The original proposal was ‘creative communities in online spaces’, a broad idea that has been refined, which began with a sociological fascination in how societies, cultural processes and communities form and evolve. Second Life, as a virtual world, is a digital space where those human connections could reshape themselves, and it is remarkably long-lived for an internet space – but why did some things change while others remained the same? At a basic level this says something about being human, out of which comes another aspect; avatars are three-dimensional visual expressions of embodied self in three-dimensional space, so how do people reshape, copy or alter their sense of being human? As the research progressed, I was led into places I had been before but did not expect to return to in this context, of which translation and metaphor from literary studies were the most significant. This reconsiders what ‘media’ can be, and how they are understood; that people make connections in their minds across things they see and experience in different places. Of course, in this paragraph I generalise, and what follows is about ‘complexity, and indeed ambivalence... [in the] unfinished business in the continual controversies of social life’ (Billig, 1987: 225).

And as a society we depend increasingly on capitalist internet platforms, something discussed further in Chapter 2. When I wrote that, I felt I was risking going too far, but I have no such concerns now, following lock-down and home working because of Covid-19. Zoom rose fast and demonstrated internet capitalism at its most dubious, for talking short-cuts, using user data for profit, of security, personal protection and equality, and a lack of consideration of the psychological effects (Ahmad, 2020; Fu et al., 2013; Morrish, 2020; Ohlheiser, 2020; Paul, 2020; Schoenenberg et al., 2014).

Facebook and Zuckerberg's position is now coming under increasing pressure for its place in distorting the democratic process and tolerance of hate speech (Busby, 2019; Cadwalladr, 2019; Guardian staff and agencies, 2020; Hern, 2020; Styles, 2020). While people can be discriminating about media, these platforms are accepted by users who are happy to get something for free and ignore the consequences; as an individual who rejects them, one cuts oneself off from what has become the mainstream. A PhD cannot change all of this, but it should at least bear witness, and consider the alternatives, of which Second Life is one.

However, I should introduce myself first. User names were common in early online games and virtual worlds, where one's character could 'play' something distinctly different from one's offline life (Taylor, 2009: 1). In the case of Second Life, the area where I have worked, Linden Lab preferred to call users 'residents', so distinguishing it as a living space rather than a game with rules. I chose Tizzy Canucci on my first, or 'rezz', day, in Second Life on 1 January 2009; my first name linked to a photographic project I had recently finished, the second was one picked from a short list presented on the website when signing in. As my artistic life increasingly worked across both 'worlds', I used both names together more often, and quite consciously in *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020), which stands alongside this PhD.

This document could be understood without the catalogue, but it serves two important functions. At an aesthetic level, it shows the work as a collective achievement over time. The first work, *Our Music of the Spheres*, (Canucci, 2016e) was the first to be accepted at an exhibition, and along with *The Constant Falling* a few months earlier, this was when I realised that video as an art-form had more imaginative possibilities than I had previously realised. It was only later that I began to see it as an 'art practice' and discovered there

was already something called ‘machinima’. Secondly, at a social level there is an ethical reason which will be discussed further later; it recognises those who I have worked with, separated and connected by distance and technology, and I am able to give credit in the catalogue with a level of detail I could not do here.

The Research Question – or Research Enquiry?

Having a formal research question implies starting with a question and ending with an answer, which is clearly not what I have been saying so far. I write later about biography, drawing on Gay Becker’s view that lives are typically disrupted but we construct narratives to imply continuity – an idea which ‘is so deeply embedded in U.S. life at every level that it amounts to a cultural ideology’ (1997: 191). Narratives that start with a question and end with an answer are expected in research, confirming disciplinary conventions. As a bonus, ambiguous conclusions show that ‘more research needs to be done’ (Billig, 2013: 47) and justifies another funding application. Yet this is a narrative construction – another idea I discuss later – and it is something I practically worked with in *Innnominate* (Canucci, 2018e), where I refused the invitation to tell a story, while knowing that the act of writing words in a sequence will inevitably be interpreted as a story.

Practice based PhDs research understandings, not research questions; they are passionate explorations inspired by curiosity. They should set a context for discussion with the aim of leaving with a greater understanding, and how that relates to other people and work, not whether a question or an answer can be constructed (Loveless, 2019: 28, 40, 105).

So, these are the contexts for discussion:

1. What form does creativity in Second Life take, in an online space that has gained a maturity unlike others, its financial stability coming through its own economy rather than data mining.
2. Machinima has a history as a name for videos made in games worlds. However, has it become so dominated by commercial interests that it is just about the game. And if so, is art machinima better thought of in other terms, such as video art, alongside other creative sources.
3. What are the implications of being a space of shared creativity outside of copyright rules, and how does this link with creative commons and public domain.
4. How does this fit with the academic areas of media theory, art or literary theory. In particular, is it more about human activity and translating between different ways of saying things than the technology itself and its mediating effects.
5. What is the relationship with being human in virtual and actual space in terms of embodiment and creativity, which links to geography, philosophy, psychology and phenomenology.
6. Finally, how do multiple technologies and thoughts interact over time; the rejection of 'digital exceptionalism' (Marres, 2017: 172) which sees the new 'digital' replacing the old 'analogue' completely. I normally put 'analogue' into inverted commas as I recognise its common use, but not its categorical appropriateness.

The contexts are discussed in words in multiple places, most obviously here, but also significantly in the *Catalogue of Video Art* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020).

But my understandings have also been conveyed to others online, in my blog and my Vimeo, Twitter and Facebook accounts. However, they are also explored visually in my video art, with many responding to particular ideas or challenges. *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e) (Illustrations 24 and 11) was my first work accepted into a public setting at the start of the PhD, but it was while making it that I started consciously to bring other work ('analogue') into the virtual world ('digital'). By perceiving the physical and aesthetic connections between video editing and printmaking, I finished by bringing my video art ('digital') back into hand working ('analogue') through my printmaking. As a direct example, with *Rippled by Life* (Baxter, 2019c), Illustration 38, I took an image from my video art, processed it onto a polymer photogravure plate, then took the etched plate and hand inked it, printing it onto paper using a traditional press.

Rippled by Life (Baxter, 2019c) is part of understanding the process and can represent a stage of it, but it does not definitively answer any question, as there will be more artworks. Moving to the last months of the PhD, after video making had been heavily curtailed during 2019 due to a shoulder injury, I made *Menuetto Contained* (Canucci, 2020c) a video work that uses Beethoven not because he was a better composer than there has been since (even if he was), but because it contrasts with the digital. Practice continues to be woven before and after a PhD, as artists and like authors, who 'in their vanity, might wish to believe that the last words on an issue are to be found at the end of their books. Readers, however, know that the broad barrels of criticism are too full to be bunged by a small, final, full-stop' (Billig, 1987: 255).

The following sections summarise the content of the chapters.

The real and the unreal, the virtual and the actual

The virtual, as in a virtual world, exists and is real. This view, as expressed by Pierre Lévy, is central; the distinction should be made between the actual (that which has been made) and the virtual (that which exist in the imagination, waiting to be made), not the real and the unreal (1998). We never leave ‘the real’ when online, except in the imagination, and virtualisation does not destroy space-time, but reconfigures it (1998: 31). Crucially, the virtual is not the opposite of reality for the virtual is not false, imaginary or illusory. The virtual is often perceived as ‘not there’ simply because it cannot be specifically located, but it represents possibilities that may be actualised. *Actualisation* is the movement from problem to solution, which reflects the tendency for the virtual to go to the actual. *Virtualisation* is the return process, from a given solution and to a *different* problem (1998: 27). Lévy sees the virtual and actual as two different ways of being, but it is the process of transformation from one mode of being to another that is more important – to go and to return – which might also be interpreted as a continuing cycle. The problem with using the word ‘real’ as an analytical category is that it slips into its everyday meaning, so ‘fetishizing predigital culture as a site or retained authenticity’ (Miller and Horst, 2012: 13) and pulls theory towards ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172). This will be considered further in Chapter 2.

The label of ‘virtual worlds’ implies the virtual came from the digital and the internet, and fails to recognise it as a continuation of predigital experience. Lévy saw the link to language, where reading actualised text, which until then was a virtual object independent of the material substrate onto which it was recorded. A book may be actualised and virtualised through different editions, versions and translations, or by recording in a different form, or by combining the text with different material. The reader continues the

actualisations, giving meaning to the text at the moment of reading (Lévy, 1998: 47). Reading of any kind is transformative, as texts are written in one particular configuration of space-time, and are actualised in a different one, and it is not a question of trying to identify what is ‘real’ and what is ‘false’, because the ‘real’ exists both in the material object and the image (Tagg, 1988: 4) and in the processes going on in-between.

This idea of transformation, between text as media and idea as understanding, is reflected in the *mediality* of gesture and language as a *means* made visible (Agamben, 2000: 56–9), an idea that is close to Lévy’s (1998) concept of a transformative process between the virtual and the actual, and is quite different from the idea of *mediation* as things that actively intervene. The relationship between digital and predigital, between mediation and translation, and between different forms of art and language (or media) will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In digital spaces human beings are re-actualised, and the avatar in virtual worlds is a more obvious recreation of form than in other online spaces. The dream might have been to escape our bodily presence, but our experience as a ‘thing among things’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 136) means we cannot separate ourselves from the embodied experience of life (Haraway, 2003). This theme is developed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Second Life as a place; cartography as understanding space

Second Life is a long-established internet presence, as a virtual world that celebrated reaching seventeen years of age in 2020 (Second Life, 2020; Voyager, 2020). From the beginning, user created content predominated as build tools were presented to ‘residents’, and Linden Lab provided basic space and little interactive content (Boellstorff, 2008: 96–101). As a result,

content and the appearance of place are reflections of variable personal expression. Everything uploaded has to be free of copyright restrictions so images and textures can be viewed freely, even though copying, modifying or transferring objects between avatars can be restricted (Linden Lab, 2015). However, as everything has to be downloaded in ‘real time’ in order to be played, it avoids the realism and speed of modern games made by games studios and run from hard drives. Second Life has glitches, gaps, cracks and freezes that reveal its workings, but the outcomes of its crudeness and fallibility can be unexpectedly interesting. It is the opposite of the superficiality of today’s apps interfaces, that want you to stay on the surface and not see the manipulations of commerce and power lying behind (de Jong, 2012). This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

In my early years in Second Life, I curiously explored places, and took photographs, or ‘snapshots’ as they were named. However, I became increasingly interested in what could be done with and in these spaces, rather than seeing them as complete or finished places. While making images recorded what they looked like, making video allowed further exploration of what was going on, to be more interpretative and adventurous in the process. My intention was not to stay within Second Life as if it was a kind of ‘hermetically’ sealed space, and video opened up possibilities for comparing virtual and actual world situations by combining a variety of material. This is something that recurs in my practice, and in all the chapters that follow.

I see the research process more as exploratory than experimental, though the two are not exclusive. The geography of space and human activity is a cartographic process, and one cannot draw a map by experiment as it is a process of exploration and discovery, (Cloke et al., 2004; Massey, 1994). Furthermore, in any landscape there are more features than can be comprehended fully in a single map; to tell the full story one needs to tie

landscape, narrative and stories together intricately and expressively, and not see them simply as outcomes of each other (Potteiger and Purinton, 1998: ix, 22). It is also experimental, but in the terms of feminist creativity that Natalie Loveless talks about, of being ‘committed, cathected and sustaining’ (2019: 3). The relationship between time, space and experience is touched on in Chapter 4 and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

However, the more Second Life markets itself as a purely digital space, the more it loses the complexity and imagination of how it started. The importance of residents making things in-world has diminished, while buying content created using programs outside of Second Life, or just visiting, has increased. The marketing emphasis on having a place to live where one might make a relationship, a ‘new home, new chapter’ (Linden Research Inc, 2019), is a kind of 1950s suburban ‘comfort zone’ that mirrors a prevalent attitude in other online spaces (Bauman, 2017: 150–1). It contains the tensions of nostalgia referred to in Chapter 3 with the ideas of the artist John Stezaker (Leonard, 2017; Stezaker and Warstat, 2010), and in my own video artwork in *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d), and the connection with Todd Haynes’s *Far From Heaven* (2002) discussed in Chapter 2.

Audiences, immersivity and presence

Both Timothy Welsh (2016) and Raph Koster (2017) claimed that immersivity and presence existed before computers, in literature and cinema, while approaching from quite different academic positions. Similarly, John Dewey argued in 1934, that *immersion* was a state *short* of a totalising experience, and it was *saturation* that significantly combined object and emotions (2005: 289). The connection between the approaches of literature, games online and art, links to the view of human geography ethnographic research as ‘extended, detailed, ‘immersive’, inductive’ (Cloke et al., 2004:

169). The links between practice, ethnography and the digital is a significant aspect of this research and are considered in Chapter 2.

In online games, the ‘immersive fallacy’ emerged out of a pursuit of ‘realism’ – a belief that games absorb more attention the more real they look – but this has held back self-reflexive art within games. Representation and reality cannot be made identical, or so close, that users will believe nothing exists outside of digital world they are in (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 450–5; Welsh, 2016: 2), and indeed the gap is essential, for it is ‘where the magic happens’ (Lantz, 2005 02:07-02:26). It is the position I produce my practice from, which *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020) presents.

The digital has an ambiguous relationship with the audience, in contradiction to the ‘immersive fallacy’ that claims it is possible to hold an audience completely. The experience from other creative forms, including art galleries, books, cinema and video art, is complex, and this is considered further in Chapters 2, 3 and 5.

Mediation and translation

In the last section, I referred to mediality as being different from mediation. Raymond Williams argued that while all *active* relationships between being and consciousness are mediated, this mediation *cannot* be attributed to a separate ‘medium’ which, if removed, would reveal the true nature of objects. The medium is a *part of the property* of an object, but this does not mean the medium *is* the object (Williams, 1977: 98, 160). Another alternative view is ‘mediating conjunctures’ (Larrue and Vitali-Rosati, 2019: 51–3), which sees media as multiple, variable and dynamic processes going on in either specific

or general environments, rather than the pure performativity of mediation theory.

In translation theory, mediation is not about language rules determining outcomes, but instead is *something people do* to try to communicate effectively across boundaries, in so doing bridging cultures and making choices about the several possible meanings that all utterances have (Bellos, 2012). This idea from translation, which sees people as different yet capable of understanding one another (Bellos, 2012: 338), fits with the view of autoethnography as research sited in one's own cultural environment while acting as an 'insider' to 'outsiders' (Kelly, 2001: 259).

Mediation then should be seen as a process involving human action, not something deterministic and given illusory explanatory certainty by turning it into a 'thing' through 'word magic' (Bellos, 2012: 21). 'Media' is not a verb, and extending it into 'mediatization' makes it the agent rather than the people who make, use and read it: Stephen Barnard (2017: 202–203) identified this as a particular problem for digitally mediated reality, where a fetishised view of technology and sociality leads to objects being endowed with mysterious powers to shape the world. Framing 'the digital' as a 'thing', rather than perceiving it as a technological process, of digitisation, has a similar effect.

One of the key discussions is around translation and mediation, relating theory across disciplines and reaching a view on how it fits best with human activity and practice. This is discussed in Chapter 4, with reference to the connection with ethnography in Chapter 2.

What is in the PhD

The previous discussion referred to several of the key issues that will be discussed later, and their position in the chapters. The PhD is based on this body of writing and my practice, that connects and includes:

- The written dissertation of which this is the opening chapter.
- A planned final Exhibition during 2020. Due to Covid-19, this was relocated from a white wall gallery to a black box, entitled *Isolated in a Box, an Exhibition of Practice: Printmaking original works* (Baxter, 2020a).
- Printmaking work
- *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020), which links to the work on Vimeo (Canucci, 2020g).
- Online writing and conversations.

Some connections are more direct than others. Many ideas span this text and my virtual world blog at tizzycanucci.com (Canucci, 2019d), but they are written in different styles for different audiences. My art, video art and academic activities during the period of the PhD are listed on a webpage on my other blog, www.tessbaxter.com (Baxter, 2019a). I have continued to be active on Flickr (Canucci, 2019c), Facebook and Twitter, which are used by many Second Life residents, often using the names they have in the virtual world, and finally there are the conversations and interactions I had in local chat and instant messaging within Second Life. But it is important to recognise those different readerships; it would be inappropriate to incorporate words of the blog directly in the PhD, and vice versa. I have tried to keep the PhD and online writing *consistent*, but they differ in tone, depth and cross-references. Some of the ideas I explored in 2016 in the blog have evolved, but they are still online and it would not be appropriate to delete them.

Accompanying the PhD is *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020). It includes all the video art I made during this period and uploaded to Vimeo. Some of the work is relevant to the PhD, but other pieces were simply about 'being there'. This reflects creativity as the 'path' that Walter Murch (2001: 4) described for film editing – one can have an idea but one can never quite be sure what will emerge until one sees how the material interacts. Less 'significant' work is still important as a creative exercise and in developing technique and skills.

The catalogue is primarily an art document that links to the academic. It is meant to stand alone without references, but contains links to help the curious reader. As my video art works with the creativity of others, an appendix to the catalogue includes the credits in the videos, an example of which is shown in Illustration 8 bottom right. This links to my background of working with community cookbooks, where giving credit to all contributors was common practice. During my MA I found this to be a key characteristic of autoethnography (Kelly, 2001) which I reapplied in the context here. It reflects my ethical approach to this research, as I am working with material and people that lie outside of conventional copyright rules, and it goes beyond the requirements of academic referencing. This question of ethics will be returned to in Chapter 2.

The three years of a PhD normally involves false starts and realignments, and in the final thesis a distillation of findings. However, the making of the videos has *combined with* reading and writing, informed approaches to theory, and the recurrent themes. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz said of cultural analysis, it is about 'guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless language' (1973: 20, 29).

It is less about perfected statements and more about a debate that goes round and gets closer.

I opened the Introduction with the analogy of weaving, which Tim Ingold used in *The Textility of Making* (2010) and there are other significant writers who used the metaphor, not least Tim Berners-Lee (1999). Lines, weft and weave have different lengths and are woven together differently. They are not always tidy, and sometimes unruly, just as Brad Haseman (2006) described practice-led research as being. Indeed, practice-led research is similar to life and the unpredicted consequences matter; like coming off a bike, not everything happens for a reason (Fuglsang, in Palle, 2019). The analogy is discussed further in Chapter 4, but it is influential throughout my practice.

In summary, this is about the experiences of being in a virtual world, which are material, spatial and social, and a cultural process in which people live, develop and create (Williams, 1961: 61). It argues that the digital is not exceptional but has profound commonalities with pre-existing art forms, including literature, film, 'media' and games. My practice is video art that compares and contrasts these forms and the ideas in them. The work I produce could be called machinima, the name created for videos made in games worlds (Kelland, 2011: 24), but I have increasingly become unhappy with machinima as a label as too often it has been used to force a distinction that is too self-contained and limited. I am aware that I am not entirely consistent in how I use the terms in this writing, but this reflects its ambiguousness and my problematic relationship with it, and in talking to others I often use both terms together, and this can be seen in the references at the end of this thesis. I use Zotero citation manager and there are frequently discussions in the forum (RRCHNM, 2021) of how 'item type' does not quite fit the diversity of digital media, and the adaptations needed to reflect

the ethos of referencing. I choose the ‘item type’ of *artwork*, rather than *video recording* or *film*, for two practical reasons. Most significant of all, there is a field where I can explicitly describe my work as *Video art/machinima*, as well as other appropriate information for citation. I may contest machinima as a word, but I do not deny it as a thing. It is not simply a question of dropping one term for another; there is a lot of relevant history and theory attached to ‘machinima’, some of which will be referred to in Chapter 2 before the main discussion on terminology. This is returned to again in Chapter 3 in relation to platform capitalism and YouTube, with the rise and fall of Machinima.Inc (Krapp, 2011b: 164–5; Machinima Inc, 2018d; Spangler, 2019a, 2019b), and the rise of newer online streaming and video spaces of Discord (2021) and Twitch (2021). These tensions, and the terminology around film, machinima and video art, will be discussed in more detail at the beginning of Chapter 3, and in Chapter 6.

Furthermore I explore video art/machinima as both an insider and outsider. While in arts marketing around 2016, I realised how quickly video was becoming dominant (Marshall, 2016), and I got an iPhone, at a time when they were first being used to create mainstream film (Erbland, 2018). I wanted to play, as I had done with cameras before, but I did not want to make yet another video of the Lake District, beautiful as it is. I was also really interested in video editing, where still images and moving images are built together, and I had been making still images in Second Life for some years and knew about screen capture of moving images. I was drawn in as a curious visual artist. I had never heard of machinima when I started; I had no idea there was a history, even though I had spent many years in a virtual world. And so I approach the subject not from a position of machinima, but from the position of a photographer who was discovering the potential of a new image form.

I have always played games, starting with board games, and appreciated the value of simplicity rather than the complexity of rules, and this informs my perspective on video games. To cover the full range of video games over time would have been an exercise in itself, to the exclusion of other game insights and art forms. Indeed, this was one of the lines of conflict drawn by games studies around 2000 (Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, 2004: 35–54), as discussed in Chapter 3, where a line was being drawn between the new and the old, and a form of ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172). My approach has been to blur the boundary of games, to see the commonalities across time and forms, but also to undercut the highly gendered question of who qualifies as a ‘gamer’ when many games are pastimes, or play, on mobile devices (Alexander, 2014; Duggan, 2015). Again, this implies that I have tried to be constructively selective in the *type* of games covered by machinima, rather than to catalogue them; to set a discussion with other art and media forms.

Virtual worlds have a nebulous position as a game, as discussed later, but there were contemporary forms including massively multiplayer games, as referred to in Chapter 2. These notably included World of Warcraft (WoW) and Everquest, which T. L. Taylor discussed in *Play Between Worlds* (2009), at a similar time to Tom Boellstorff significant work, *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008). Later, Minecraft drew in a younger age of users with a similar approach based on building and user content, but again there are comparisons with non-digital forms, such as Lego (Moss, 2016)¹. Users of Minecraft also generated their own machinima, the mod on the Planet Minecraft creative community fansite demonstrating how engagement extends the game into creative innovation (benzrf, 2012).

1 See Illustration 37 for a more singular approach to Lego in Second Life.

In my practice I aim to expose the relationships between embodied humans and technology, of mediation and translation, the importance of creativity and making, and how we make sense of the things that happen in this environment. My practice is also about ‘being there’, working with and in the space of Second Life where social processes are going on, and finding what is ‘not privileged, but particular’ (Geertz, 1973: 23). It is also autoethnographic in approach, spanning the personal and the cultural, and moving between life and art, the actual and the virtual, the word and the gesture, to paraphrase Françoise Lionnet (1991: 104).

I also approached the subject as a social scientist, trained in sociology but with anthropological and geographic leanings, having come to art as something of a surprise. In retrospect, I always underestimated my involvement in creativity, and declined to call it art because I left the subject at school in 1974. Maybe because of that, my experience in politics, my degree out of school being in the sciences, and as an instinctive (or compulsive) inter-disciplinarian, I seek to *connect across* rather than to *dig down*. This dissertation is a resistance, if not a protest, at research that presents a false sense of certainty through conforming to disciplinary conventions (Billig, 2013; Mills, 1959), as

In an age of specialization, generalists are needed more than ever before – not only for synthesis, to paint the big picture, but also for analysis, since it takes a polymath to ‘mind the gap’ and draw attention to the knowledges that may otherwise disappear into the spaces between disciplines, as they are currently defined and organized (Burke, 2012: 183).

As a sociologist *and* practitioner I am curious about the relationship between doing and research and between practice and ethnography, as I see people as

actors, shaping and being shaped by the world in which they live, and I resist abstract ideas as being the determinant of agency.

The main areas of discussion in the following chapters have been referred to above and the following is a summary of the chapters.

Chapter 2: *Practice, ethnography and 'the digital'* considers how the research has been approached. It relates arts-based practice to more social science based ethnography, and questions assumptions about the digital as a technology and its social implications. It also contains the first 'Bridge', which is a literary strategy to create a suitable place to relate the theory being discussed to my own practice.

Chapter 3: *My practice, and machinima as art form* takes a creative rather than a theoretical view of practice, and specifically machinima/ video art. I discuss the continuing relevance of machinima as a label.

The longest chapter is Chapter 4: *Communication and language, as creativity and text*, where the theoretical connections between mediation and translation are discussed, and how they operate in practice. This leads onto two more 'Bridges', where I discuss how it relates to my practice.

While the question of time and space was touched on at the end of Chapter 4 in terms of language, it is the main subject in Chapter 5: *Space and time: 'Being there' as creative process*, which draws on theory from geography as well as technology and art. It finishes with a discussion of the avatar as object, and 'being' in virtual worlds as a re-embodied experience.

Chapter 6: *Machinima or video art?* brings together the question of what machinima is in the context of my practice and develops the discussions in

Chapter 3: whether it has relevance or has become a non-subject, and whether those with artistic intent are better abandoning the term in favour of being included within video art. As such this chapter could be seen as a ‘conclusion’ – but practice does not start and finish, even if there is an entry and an exit.

Chapter 7: *Afterword: the continuity of practice* discusses the future of Second Life and its potential for art. More significantly, I consider printmaking as an art form that emerged from my video art during the PhD, and returns the digital to the hand-crafted.

2 Practice, ethnography and ‘the digital’

Part of my writing process was to allow the theory and themes to emerge as the relationship between my practice and readings progressed. As a sociologist I was aware of methods and that certain ones would be important, but I was also aware that they were not directly applicable in a practice based contemporary art PhD. Originally, I did not intend to have a deliberate ‘methodology’ chapter, however one that considered my approach emerged.

Importantly, my approach was to build on and around theories, rather than test them – the key basis indeed of grounded theory as described by Geoff and Judy Payne (2004: 99). As with the definition of theoretical sampling, theories and processes emerge rather than being singular and defined in advance; they are more about “making comparisons”... that will maximise opportunities to discover variations among concepts’ and to reconsider categories (Bryman, 2012: 305). I had concepts and ideas in mind that I thought might be applicable, and I had used some previously. As before, I was interested in how they might productively be reapplied in settings different from their origin and intended use. Conversely, my initial reading on digital theory, which seemed central in terms of working online in a virtual world, increasingly became less relevant as theorists are de-exceptionalising the category.

So, within this chapter are four elements. The first is a ‘bridge’, the first of three, the other two being in Chapter 4, which all act as places of reflection on connections.

In the second section, I consider the relationship between ethnography as finding out by ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1988: 1), and practice based research as finding out through doing. *Ethnography* will be discussed in terms of its social

sciences definition and use, but also as *autoethnography* which has strength in literary studies and gender and race studies. There is much commonality, but also differences and emphases. Both ethnography and practice based research involve experiential embodied creative action and depend on a sense of ‘craft’ and of making something. This presents craft as equally a combination of body and mind, and denies the division between fine and minor arts and between making and thinking (Adamson, 2009: 5). I follow Clifford Geertz’s view that writing is never a statement of pure unarguable fact, but a ‘fiction’ in the *true* meaning of the word (1973: 15). Where autoethnography gets closest to practice is in the open acceptance and recognition of the worker’s background influences – that they are unavoidable and inherent to someone’s work and should be recognised, rather than pretending that pure dispassionate objectivity is possible (Ávalos, 2016; Billig, 2013: 12; Christian, 1990).

Sebastian Olma discusses creativity in terms of *poësis*, of making material in excess of itself, and *serendipity*, the precondition for innovation and poësis, which goes back to serendipity’s original meaning, where the combination of both *accident* and *sagacity* results is in *novelty*. Indeed, serendipity is not just chance. It depends on an individual having the experience, skill and knowledge to be in the best place, or to set up suitable conditions, for the most productive chance events to happen: to make the most of them in a creative ‘act of joyous resistance that pushes the world forward’ (Olma, 2016: 23). Whatever skills and techniques an individual brings, they still cannot, and would not want to, fully predict the outcome, as innovation, discovery and letting the research ‘subject’ speak are important. Tim Ingold considers this as opening oneself up to *astonishment*, as:

the sense of wonder that comes from riding the crest of the world’s continued birth... To outsiders unfamiliar with this way

of being, it often looks like timidity or weakness, proof of a lack of rigour characteristic of supposedly primitive belief and practice. The way to know the world, they say, is not to open oneself up to it, but rather to ‘grasp’ it within a grid of concepts and categories (2006: 18).

This willingness to serendipity and astonishment is the vitality that practice based researchers or ethnographers can bring to the research process.

In the third section, I discuss practice based, or practice led, research in more detail; the challenges, the limitations, but most importantly the benefits.

The final part of this chapter considers aspects of living with ‘the digital’. I follow the view that the digital is now in everything, and ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) should be abandoned as people live *in* and *with* the digital all the time (Barendregt, 2012). This might be a tension with the title of Marres’s book, *Digital Sociology* (2017) but there is a value of focussing on something in order to dispel its mystique, and I too see the value of de-exceptionalising the digital. Drawing on theory and research that is prefixed ‘digital’ is still important, even though I am interested in seeing how ‘pre-digital’ writing and theory can be combined and applied in that situation. I am not arguing that there is no difference with digital processes, but to recognise that technology constantly evolves over time, sometimes gradually, sometimes in bigger steps. However, it is perhaps now easier to see the continuities from the past than when computers and the digital were new (Olma, 2016: 7), and so to perceive nuanced relative difference by ‘comparing and contrasting’ rather than making claims about absolute differences between ‘digital’ and ‘analogue’. The latter word is an unfortunate ‘un-digital’ definition, establishing a post-hoc dustbin into which every ‘old’ technology is thrown as if there was a technical or media

commonality between them, despite their diversity of use and history, in order to force a rhetorical binary against the 'new'. One paradox out of this is that while the digital is seen as technically superior, the analogue becomes a fetishised site of authenticity (Miller and Horst, 2012: 13) and more valuable and desirable in contemporary art (Bishop, 2012b). The opposition of digital and analogue concentrates on technology itself, rather than what people *do* with technology, and as Glenn Adamson claimed about craft, the old is never 'simply eroded' but rather is transformed (2009: 2).

Comparing and contrasting simultaneously, Sebastian Olma argues that the digital is a *pharmakon*, both a poison and an antidote, with computers creating a 'bureaucratic obesity' (2016: 26) that stifles true innovation. One of the distinguishing features of the 'digital age' is the increase in quantity and availability of information, and the words in any discipline are now being published faster than anyone can read them (Billig, 2013: 27). So we make choices, either by letting academic conventions decide who we 'must' read and cite in order to 'fit in' (Billig, 2013: 66), or to make space for cross disciplinary working. This means making a personal, informed judgment about what is worth reading, to move consciously between close reading and theoretical width, and to explore the relationship between practice and theory, to enhance analysis, discussion and reasoning. As C Wright Mills claimed sixty years ago, 'Facts discipline reason; but reason is the advance guard of any field of learning' (1959: 205). In an age of digital facilitated #fakenews, this has never been more significant. The start of this PhD coincided with Trump, Brexit, and the first investigations and reporting of 'fake news' pushed through social media (Cadwalladr, 2017; Cottom, 2016; Dilanian et al., 2016; Newton, 2016; Tynan, 2016), and the writing up coincides with its wider acceptance as a political issue (Busby, 2019; Cadwalladr, 2019). Even academia is not immune to this, with its own

problem of ‘predatory journals’ (Anon, 2019; Beall, 2017; Hern and Duncan, 2018).

The Bridge (Part 1)

All creative people drink from a wide stream of culture, not just their own specialism (Dewey, 2005: 276).

In the ‘Introduction’ to *Digital Sociologies*, Karen Gregory, Tressie McMillan Cottom and Jessie Daniels highlight that sociology often ignores its greatest strength – inter-disciplinarity (2017: xxiii). The ambiguity of the digital, its variability and instability is a methodological issue for digital sociology, one that cannot be solved by disciplinary allegiance (Marres, 2017: 140, 142). And if the volume of publishing means that the ‘academic world is inevitably divided into smaller and smaller circles’ (Billig, 2013: 5), academia should perhaps recognise that researchers stepping outside of the circle to take an overview have an important role. However, the shades of meaning that can be read into the competing terms of multi-, inter- or trans- disciplinary is much debated, yet the end result is more semantic churn than accepted definitions. The debate would not be necessary if it were not for the institutional structures of academia that reflect their own needs, rather than allowing the freedom to take to a connected world view (Olma, 2016: 184–5). I have always regarded disciplinary unfaithfulness as a virtue rather than a vice academically, but I also regard that ethos as an essential part of making creative works (Gauntlett, 2007; Marcus, 2016), which should be exploratory and developmental, and ‘The Bridge’ in Illustration 1 compares. It reframes the academic approach – to focus on something in the world and animate the disciplines around it as a ‘going on’ (Ingold, 2010: 96); as a way of seeing things differently.

The focus of study is firstly how people use, live in and live with technology, and secondarily the technology itself – or a non-digital-centric approach as Sarah Pink et al. call it (2016: 7). It is also one of Daniel Miller and Heather Horst’s basic principles stated in their opening chapter in *Digital Anthropology* (2012). ‘The digital’ is an influence rather than a determinant, a ubiquitous part of the everyday (Marres, 2017: 7) and ‘a constitutive part of what makes us human’ (Miller and Horst, 2012: 4). In being an essential part of the internet, it creates a fluid space where, ‘heterogeneous networks’ informally connect users and subjects (Marres, 2017: 102). In my own practice I work in Second Life with material constructed by other residents; I draw material from across the internet, and in particular from Creative Commons sources; I place my own work on Vimeo and Flickr, and I talk to other users/ residents in-world, and through Facebook, Twitter and my own blog. This is the artist as ‘itinerant wayfarer... bringing forth their work as they press on with their own lives’ (Ingold, 2010: 97).

‘The bridge’ has greater academic significance in other contexts and around translation or mediation, which I discuss further in Chapter 4. But practically, in ‘the doing’, as a practice based researcher ‘Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness [and] span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds’ (Anzaldúa, 2002: 1). Illustration 1 also contains both my practice on entering the PhD, video art, and my later extension into printmaking, which I will consider further in Chapter 7. But both practices involve manual activity and craft as well as thinking, and by connecting these with new and old technologies, this builds ‘new bridges to the worlds of contemporary art and design’ (Adamson, 2009: 2).

My video *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c) took ‘The Bridge’, a poem by Edward Thomas (1979b), reflecting my own transitional stage:

I have come a long way today:
On a strange bridge alone,
...
this moment brief between
Two lives...
(Thomas, 1979b).

This was combined with imagery of a virtual world space: *Jane Austen’s English Countryside* in *Second Life* (Aeon and Milena, 2016). The top image in Illustration 1 is a still from the video and the bottom one my printmaking, the top going from literature to digital, the bottom from digital to hand craft materiality. It represents the links between my present practice and my new practice, across virtual and actual worlds, across different forms of media, and from my past to my present. The video and the print exist in different ‘digital-material-sensory environments’ (Pink et al., 2016: 12), so establish a new relationship which, through the act of looking, links the viewer to the differing processes of making, as well as reminding them of their own physicality (Winstanley, 2019: 284).



Illustration 1: Artwork that moves across forms, working with ‘The Bridge’ by Edward Thomas (1979b). Above: still from my video, *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c), takes literature into the digital. Below: *This Moment Brief*, takes that digital to hand-crafted material (Baxter, 2019d). These images as shown here, printed on plain paper, are merely representations of other images. They are not further creative translations of the moving image or the printmaking, and have lost significant qualities of space, time and texture. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

The use of various media could be interpreted as an artistic statement or position, in line with the description of *intermedia* by Ken Friedman and Lily Díaz (2018), which usefully distinguishes it from *multimedia*:

Until recently, however, the term multimedia has been almost exclusively associated with advanced information technology systems.... Even though this view of multimedia is widespread, the original definition is far more powerful.... because it emphasizes judgment and skill rather than technology; it is more flexible; and it serves users in appropriate ways rather than addressing every problem with expensive systems and ever-increasing support costs.... Our analysis will argue for multiple interpretations of multimedia and its uses, an interpretation that approaches the border to Higgins's [1966] concept of intermedia. Both approaches enlivened the early, robust art and communication experiments of the late 1950s and the early 1960s (2018: 40).

The distinction is useful, even if there is not room to expand the discussion here, but multimedia is more often talked about in terms of technology, in particular the electronic or digital, whereas intermedia's history is more about the ideas, aesthetics and form of combining different unrelated creative forms into art. This connects with current theory around about avoiding 'digital exceptionalism' (Marres, 2017: 172) where 'the digital' dominates that I will consider later. However, my approach to bridging forms relates not to theory or art history, but to my years as a model-maker, where finding ready-made things to combine to make something else was assumed and normal (Illustration 35), and to my previous publications, where I edited together my photography, writing and research on food recipes, landscape and social history, using twentieth century publications with new computer software to

prepare it for commercial print (Illustration 18). As with trying to define between multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, I regard the discussion as more an exercise than trying to be definitive and decide on categories.

(Digital) (Auto) Ethnography

This section is a discussion of ethnography, with particular reference to two approaches: digital ethnography and autoethnography. In a literal sense, all current sociology and ethnography is digital because that is how writing is constructed, published and circulated, and working in a virtual world and producing video artwork has clear technological connections. However, there is more nuance and implications.

As a resident of Second Life prior to starting the PhD, autoethnography had relevance as I researched it from a position of having been within the community for several years, rather than entering it for the sole purpose of doing research. As such, I as an ‘insider’ want to speak to ‘outsiders’ while remaining credible to ‘insiders’ (Kelly, 2001). However, digital ethnography and autoethnography are not fixed, formalised approaches or labels, and are better seen as approaches that bring together a distinctive set of features, most of which are in common with ethnography. Tom Boellstorff, in his pioneering studies in Second Life, used ethnographic techniques that allowed him to study the virtual world on ‘its own terms’ as a resident (Boellstorff, 2008: 61), but he described his work neither as digital ethnography nor autoethnography. Research that uses those labels provide useful viewpoints on key features, but I do not think that trying to create a rigid taxonomy of classification would be productive.

Ethnography itself is a way of doing research, and as an element of the research process rather than something that stands on its own. It has been defined in various ways, some more open and others more prescriptive (Pink et al., 2016: 2). In *Digital Ethnography*, Pink et al. base their view on digital ethnography on the wider definition of ethnology by Karen O'Reilly. She identified several key features of ethnography: it is iterative-inductive research that changes responsively through the study, it uses several methods and involves observations of human agents in their daily lives, which leads to a richly written account that incorporates both theory and a recognition of the researcher's role (O'Reilly, 2006: 2). It is in emphasis where digital ethnography varies. The human contact is often more indirect, observation and conversations are via technologies which may involve asynchronous as well as 'face-to-face' communication, and the writing may be supplemented by video, photography or blogging (Pink et al., 2016: 3) – and these are aspects of my research approach. While Pink et al. discuss ethnography, and digital ethnography across disciplines (2016: 4–7), they remain rooted within social sciences, principally sociology, anthropology and geography. I will return to the digital in more detail later in this chapter.

Autoethnography brings a different perspective, as it 'resist[s] hegemonic sense making paradigms by centring self-authored texts and the co-construction of meaning' (Cottom, 2017: 216). It has an origin in literary studies and gender and race studies, and the influence of feminism and the politics of race continues, in particular with the personal-as-political and the primacy of those *in* the study over those *doing* the study. It recognises that texts and creative works have authors who inevitably have a position; it refuses to see creativity as the product of the enlightened individual and denies the possibility of the single authentic, static position.

Autoethnography developed out of the work of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston was a black woman and an anthropologist who communicated her ideas through academic writing, novels, art and film (Charnov, 1998), but her work almost disappeared until it was revived by Alice Walker and others (1979). Françoise Lionnet's interpretation and analysis (1991) of *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (1986) was particularly important in the academic context: a way of speaking from within outwards, to produce a "figural anthropology' of the self' (Lionnet, 1991: 99), as a self-representation intended to intervene in dominant modes of understanding (Pratt, 1991). The literary academic Barbara Christian claimed objective distance was a self-delusion for the benefit of others, and she argued she should expose 'the tangle of background, influences, political perspectives, training' (1990: 67) that formed and informed her work; her area of study was not a pure intellectual pursuit, but a conscious *choice*, coming out of past experiences and becoming central to her own understanding of self and her cultural background. Presenting one's influences to the reader allows them to make an evaluation about the choices made and the conclusions reached within a study that can never cover everything. The approach recognises that one is never completely dispassionate: one has both a history and a position which are worked and reworked into narratives – partial biographical accounts – that provide direction and motivation in daily life (Becker, 1997: 25).

Tracy Anne Kelly argued that autoethnography consciously addresses two audiences – it works alongside and shares with 'insiders' who already know the setting, while wanting to present that culture and the experiences with 'outsiders' who have little knowledge (Kelly, 2001). She differentiates autoethnography, as culturally and personally aware and looking to two audiences, from autobiography, which is principally about self. In a similar way, though without calling his research autoethnography, Henry Jenkins (1992: 5) specifically stated that his work was not *autobiographical*, as it pulled

back to consider the wider experience of fans, but nonetheless was deeply personal. Indeed, autoethnography is produced from *a place of personal experience* rather than being the *personal experience* of autobiography, and my approach is similar to that expressed by Kelly and Jenkins. As a researcher, I was very aware of something else of which Jenkins writes about fan communities, and had been my experience in Second Life, that many residents, users or fans have horror stories of their treatment by researchers and the press that enter, reach hasty conclusions, and leave.

However, there are risks to the autoethnographic approach if they are not considered. Studying a group of which one is a member carries the risk of over-identification and trying to avoid criticism, though more conventional claims to more distanced objectivity carries the risk of the researcher projecting their preconceptions and a failure to understand the motivations of those being observed (Jenkins, 1992: 6). As Jenkins claims, ‘Approaching popular culture as a fan gives me new insights’ (1992: 5) that escape academic conventions and assumptions and play with textual materials, and it is possible to flow between the two positions, of being an academic with theories and resources and a fan or resident with prior knowledge of the ‘world’. While, as a writing practice and discursive activity, any kind of ethnography *may*, without care become solely constructed through and by the researcher (Cloke, 1994: 150) the ethnographer still needs to be as much in the text authorially as the culture about which they write (Geertz, 1988: 17). And so a self-reflexive understanding of personal positioning is essential, as is a desire to represent fairly and a willingness to give voice to others, even if one’s own voice as author is potentially strongest (Cloke, 1994: 150; Pink et al., 2016: 12–13).

Having discussed the views of several theorists around autoethnography, I will now turn to practice based or practice led methods and relate them to autoethnography.

Practice based research

There are a range of names that are closely related; practice based, practice led or, I discovered late in the day, research-creation (Loveless, 2019). It was not my aim to compare and categorise the qualities of each, a task in itself, but to find consistent areas and overlaps that were relevant to my research. They have commonalities, including finding appropriate methods for particular situations rather than pursuing methodologies set by disciplines, and being more about vision and understanding shared ideas than singular excellence (Loveless, 2019: 5–14, 28). In Loveless's definitions, what I do is certainly 'research from creation', as practice that generates written analysis, rather than 'research for creation', which simply produces an artistic outcome, but also extends to 'creation as research', which is the most complex form and least definable (Loveless, 2019: 52).

Jen Webb (2015), writing about researching creative writing, argued that practice and research were inevitably cross-linked; creative workers are always involved in research at some level, to establish a setting, background or context for the work. However, academic researchers have two requirements that move at different rates in potentially different directions: answering research questions and creating works of the imagination. The thinking processes are related but different, and the interests of the creative audience and the research audience, and the languages they use, are very different. Webb distinguishes between research *for* creative work, and research *in* creative work. The primary concern of the former is aesthetic, and of developing practice in technique, form and depth of ideas. The latter

has to maintain the values of research, of quality of findings, rigour and methodological approach.

Those ideas, expressed by a practice based researcher, were echoed by Gillian Rose in relation to research in general:

we are made through our research as much as we make our own knowledge, and... this process is complex, uncertain and incomplete. Complex, because our position is a very particular mediation... uncertain, because our performances of them always carry the risk of misperforming an assigned identity... [and] incomplete because it is only in their repetition that identities are sustained (1997: 316).

Similarly, Cloke et al. claimed that ‘neither researcher nor researched are stable and singular categories’ (2004: 368) and the act of researching inevitably changes both, in terms of what is seen and how they are seen. Similarly, the relationship between the artist and their practice is a responsive one that evolves over time as the ‘doing’ influences ‘thinking’, as older ideas are actualised and interesting new directions open up. Specifically, practice-led researchers work with material and ideas that are ‘unruly...[and] just becoming possible as new technology or networks allow (but of which they cannot be certain)’ (Haseman, 2006). Certainly, my own experience of my PhD is of evolving thoughts, practically and theoretically, as I struggle with knotty issues, as old ideas are exhausted, as circumstances ‘happen’, as personal connections are made, and as I discover new possibilities that emerge from the process.

I originally intended to write a section just about practice based research, but as the writing developed, I consistently found close parallels of thought

between practice based researchers and social science researchers who leaned towards ethnography. The ethnographer's interest in observing what people do 'in the wild' is shared by many artists, at the minimum of being interested in how people respond to their art, but often in order to comment on aspects of people and society.

Indeed, as Michael Billig pointed out, academics are 'hacks paid to write for a living' (2013: 13), and so have much in common with any writer. But all too often they use the formal language structures of 'those who take themselves seriously' (2013: 154–5) and avoid 'ordinary words [that] carry the whiff of junior school' (2013: 52). But not everyone, or all the time. Alan Bennett was an admirer of Erving Goffman, stating that 'Much of Goffman could be a commentary on Kafka. One puts it that way round, the artist before the academic, but the truth one finds in Goffman's work is the truth one goes to fiction for' (1981).

In a similar way, the approach advocated by Aldous Huxley as an author was that:

The most richly satisfying essays are those which make the best not of one, not of two, but of all the three worlds in which it is possible for the essay to exist. Freely, effortlessly, thought and feeling move in these consummate works of art, hither and thither between the essay's three poles—from the personal to the universal, from the abstract back to the concrete, from the objective datum to the inner experience (1971: preface).

This view was echoed by the academic C Wright Mills, who claimed that method and theory are a means not an end, and that answers are located in the 'continual shuttle between macroscopic conceptions and detailed

expositions' (1959: 126). Natalie Loveless (2019: 3) took a related view in her research-creation; as she moved more towards conceptual and feminist art practice, she felt the need to connect more with theory and history.

Clifford Geertz's claimed that 'anthropological writings are themselves interpretations' (1973: 15), but in my own case as a 'native' of Second Life, my interpretations were not always at the distance that he described, being first order ones. Nonetheless they are, as Geertz claims, 'fictions in the sense that they are "something made," "something fashioned" – the original meaning of *fictiō* – not that they are false, unfactual, or merely "as if" thought experiments' (1973: 15). As with the dislocation of the word *virtual* from its Latin origin in *virtus* (Müller, 2009: 296), it is as if there is a cultural need to redefine and put an absolute divide between the real and unreal, the worthy and the unworthy, mature seriousness and childish play, provability and superstition, truth and belief – which repeats the Cartesian divide between the 'merely cultural' and Reason (Gellner, 1992: 2).

However, Geertz also argued that the imaginative act involved in writing literary fiction or anthropology was the same, and what differed were the claims as to whether the events happened or not. Similarly, ethnography shares commonalities with creative practice. For Cloke et al., ethnography is 'extended, detailed, 'immersive', inductive' (2004: 169), where the main tool is the researcher themselves – which equally applies to making an artistic work. Furthermore, ethnographies are never complete nor tidy, and 'Field noting [is] an ongoing, sense-making process' (Cloke et al., 2004: 194–8) which is emotionally engaged.

Consequently my videos can also be seen as kind of field notes – direct observations of 'what goes on' that are edited and condensed to produce an interpretation from my perspective. As a practice based PhD, the importance

of my own aesthetic sense is more immediately obvious, though as John Grady (2004: 30) points out in relation to filmmaking and photography as a visual method, one can illustrate one's point better and convey more meaning if the quality of one's craft is good. Both my video art and writing are *equally* fictions as 'something made' – they have comparable status, but they say things in a different way. Meaning is inherent in each, and both are interpretations of 'what happened' or 'happens'. Clarity of expression is important in both writing and practice, and that kind of elegance is inseparable from aesthetics.

Just as ethnographic researchers share aspects of being in the world and making them alongside others (Pink et al., 2016: 7), so do practice based researchers. They follow how things are and how things work, avoiding the trap of what C Wright Mills called 'abstracted empiricism' (1959: 50–60) which follows standardised methods. It prompts the 'sort of curiosity that compels the mind to travel anywhere by any means, to re-make itself if necessary, in order to *find out*' (Mills, 1959: 105). 'Travelling into many places to find out' is a feature of this PhD. This was also the case for Tess Brady, a practice based literary student writing a novel, and her explanation of this also encompassed what Sebastian Olma meant by serendipity:

I kept a bibliography of my reading [that] makes interesting reading in itself because it illustrates the unusualness of the novelist's research. Unlike my colleagues in other more traditional disciplines I needed to acquire a working rather than specialist knowledge, not in one area but in a range of areas and disciplines. I needed to function a little like a bowerbird that picks out the blue things and leaves all the other colours.

To work with this metaphor, I needed to pick out the dark blue pieces of ecclesiastical history, the azure lines of cartography, the sapphire decorations of medieval manuscripts and the Nile blue theories of archaeology. I needed to be able to write on a range of issues and yet I knew I was not an authority in any of them... The skill [is] to locate quickly, sort through, and accurately select... of knowing where to look... It may sound easy but to be able to accurately and quickly isolate the turquoise from the aquamarine at one end of the spectrum and the indigo from the purple at the other, requires nerve, a great eye and a lot of know-how...

For example, I did not need to become an archaeologist... [but] I had to know where to find the article, and then I had to take time to read it, navigating my way through the discipline's jargon. But the real time was spent thinking about archaeology. Once I had comprehended the article and its issues I needed to work out which particular aspect of it could represent the whole in a way that could be told (Brady, 2000).

Extending the blue metaphor, colour appears as something solid and real, but it is a reflection of the ever changing, shimmering and vibrating surfaces of things going on (Finlay, 2002: 4). Our eyes interpret this 'going on' into a concept we can understand – that of different 'colours'. However, light is a linear spectrum of light from blue to red with open unconnected ends: a colour circle does not exist except that our eyes and brains join blue and red together with 'magenta' and think of it as reality (Silva and Topa, 2001). 'Reality' is a working understanding of the world where the virtual meet the real and concepts meet lived experience, but we communicate, create, and form cultural processes out of what we *perceive*. And so 'The creative

photographer [or artist] sets free the *human contents* of objects; and imparts humanity to the inhuman world around him [sic]' (Clarence John McLaughlin cited in Sontag, 1979: 187).

I do not seek to reject certainty or reality with this discussion, but to recognise that things are contingent and conditional. 'Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape' (Geertz, 1973: 20). And so, my videos act as field notes or artworks and are not about trying to achieve a neutral portrayal – which would be a kind of 'self-blinding' (Smith, 1986: xxii) in search of the 'neutral universal', and truths rather than positions (Cloke et al., 2004: 170; Geertz, 1973: 16).

Instead these 'notes' are also interpretations of being within Second Life and how I saw the connections into and out of that world. 'Being in' is perceptually quite different from 'looking at'; it is a process of creating and adding to the world, not just recording it (Pink et al., 2016: 7). While the videos are always interpretations, the process of overlaying video is a serendipitous experimentation that sets up an additional dynamic, which extends the original material. As previously discussed, this is partly chance, partly pre-existing knowledge, and partly an ability to set up situations. Some of the videos mix Second Life material only, as shown in Illustration 2, whereas others combine Second Life and archive material, as in Illustration 3.



Illustration 2: Overlaying
Second Life material on
Second Life material.

From top to bottom:
OK, OK (Canucci, 2018h);
Repeat Hikari (Canucci,
2018i);
*The Very Discrete is Now
Visible* (Canucci, 2016j);
Missing Kake Broek
(Canucci, 2018f).



Illustration 3: Overlaying Second Life material and archive material.

From top bottom:

Breaking Ice: a 70 Year Story (Canucci, 2017b);

Neither Paris Nor Sweden (Canucci, 2018g);

Future City (Canucci, 2017e);

The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo (Canucci, 2018j).

Ethics

The 'being within' Second Life was important and a key aspect of both autoethnography and practice. The extension of original Second Life and reconstructed archive material into other spaces was inherent, as I published my video art online and promoted it through social media. It was clearly visible to others, and the subsequent comments and criticism were interesting and welcome (and inevitable), even if politically inclined on rare occasions (Illustration 31), and this constituted another experimental and developmental stage. I perceive this as essential, not optional, as my work takes place in a cycle of shared and collaborative creativity.

The ethics of crediting work is important, and *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020) lists my works, and gives a comprehensive referenced listing of links, to works made by others that were included and further online writings by myself. The catalogue includes details that would not be relevant in an academic text. That said, the principle of autoethnography is to research from within as a participant and member, so could it be ignored? It was my experience with autoethnography that led me to review the book I completed just before my BA, *The Lake District and Cumbria in Recipes and Photographs* (Illustration 18). All the recipes were traditional and local, so not copyrightable except in the exact wording, and I trialled every recipe making my own interpretation. And yet my research for them had been based on community cookbooks where every contributor was named. Consequently, there is now a list online of everyone whose writing I looked at (Baxter, 2015); not because permission was needed, or I directly used their work, but because they *deserved* recognition. The information was not included in the printed book because that extensive crediting is lengthy and unconventional.

Similarly, the *Catalogue of video art* is not essential for this PhD, but it is a significant record of my practice. More importantly, it is an essential recognition of the context of the space within which I worked. In the case of Creative Commons work, credit is sometimes a condition of use, but with Second Life the Terms of Service of Second Life makes crediting unnecessary. However, there are many people who *deserve* recognition. These are people with whom I have worked, whose work is shown in my video art or which has contributed indirectly, or who have influenced my work or thinking. Many are included in final credits (for example, Illustration 8, bottom right) but I have used other methods to include more people, as shown in Illustration 4. In *There is No Cure for Curiosity* (Canucci, 2016k) the credits are longer than that strictly required, and they were worded to match the tone of the creators. My own Creative Commons conditions are stated, as always. In *Art Tartaruga* (Canucci, 2019a), I made a full 'listing' of the 37 artists in the exhibition at the end of the video, presented in a common style, even if I had not included them in the main visuals earlier.



Illustration 4: Giving credit. Above: *There is No Cure for Curiosity* (Canucci, 2016k). As always the creative commons conditions are listed, but the credits are longer than strictly required. Below: *Art Tartaruga* (Canucci, 2019a). A full 'listing' of the 37 artists in the exhibition was made at the end of the video.

My visual art on Vimeo and Flickr is all published with Creative Commons permissions, as in Illustration 4, top. Some of this follows the requirements of work used, but importantly, it offers my work for reuse and circulation, without assuming a universal claim as with copyright. If my work is selected for exhibition, that information is shared with the other artists, as discussed in Chapter 7.

The trouble with 'the digital'

In this next section I discuss a set of assumptions and problems around 'the digital'. I refer to it with care, often placing it in inverted commas, and resisting giving it an independent, assumed agency or societal presence. It is a means, or an aspect, of how things are done, rather than a thing-in-itself that is automatically better than the 'analogue' which preceded it. The discussion covers problems in practice and other more theoretical ideas, but it also establishes a significant historical context for both practice and theory.

Material on the internet has both content and contexts; while it may be developed and extended in that space, everything either is, or has been derived from, material that was uploaded to it from elsewhere. The challenge for the researcher is to understand the multi-contextual situations online, often new and changeable, and to appreciate that the context is not just 'in the machine' but extends beyond it (Marres, 2017: 57, 58). In this, digital sociology is both object and instrument, studying both the digital media practice and broader social phenomena (Marres, 2017: 37). Conversely social media and associated technologies are both an instrument for analysis of sociability and intervention in it (Marres, 2017: 18, 24). It is a tool that is built into the subject of the study.

The base problem of the overextended view is ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) that sees ‘the digital’ as something categorically different from what went before. It then becomes opposed to previous technologies, which are bundled together as ‘the analogue’. This binary division that glosses over whether there was any true similarity in previous technologies, which were developed for different purposes at different times.

Exceptionalism leads to over-claiming, as will be discussed with the ‘social’, as if the technology makes things happen rather than enables people to make certain things happen (Barnard, 2017; Pink et al., 2016: 7; Steyerl, 2016: 202). In terms of machinima production, there are practical issues around ‘social’, copyright and sharing that are relevant along with the ‘digital exceptionalism’ of ‘living in’ virtual worlds. These will be discussed in following sections.

A more contextual historical view of digitalisation is as an industrial revolution that has affected all technologies in a short space of time, in contrast to previous changes which have revolutionised different parts in stages. But is this a reflection of the stage of capitalism, the technology, or the combination of both, as Bart Barendregt (2012: 204–5) claims? These are questions that go beyond the scope of this PhD, but recognising the question is important for giving perspective to this discussion. The revolutionary effect of the invention of, for example, the printing press, of steam power, or of telephony should not be underestimated simply because ‘the digital’ is closer to our time. Older technologies continue to exist, while containing a greater or lesser amount of ‘the digital’; the digital did not totally replace what went before. For all the digital capabilities of my computer, I still sit here clattering a mechanical keyboard connected with copper wire to a DIN standard plug designed in the 1970s (RS Components, 2019).

‘Digital dualism’ establishes a binary division between ‘the digital’ and ‘the rest’. Below is a short list of examples from various sources, including academic literature and common usage.

Digital	Analogue
Online	Offline
Virtual	Real
Active/ Interactive	Passive
Fake/ Copy	Real/ Original
Distanced	Personal
Mind (virtual space)	Body (meatspace)
In-world	Real life (rl/ irl)
Immaterial	Material/ Physical
Mediated	Direct
More social/ cultural	Less social/ cultural

In all cases others have argued that the relationship is either a false one or a more complex difference than a simple binary; indeed, our relationship with digital media is more of an ‘entangling’ (Gregory, 2017: 3). This view of complexity and differing balances is echoed by Daniel Miller and Heather Horst:

There was never a non-mediated, non-cultural pre-digital world, and the perception of fast changing digital environments today does not mean we are more mediated or cultural now: from an anthropological perspective, all people are equally cultural, it is how it is expressed that changes (2012: 12–13).

I mentioned earlier my resistance to the word ‘analogue’. It is a form of anti-logos (Billig, 1987: 46); a word that is in common usage as a contradiction to another for rhetorical purposes, rather than being an invented description. For example, vinyl records, cassette tape, CDs and streaming are all *equally* ways of carrying and playing music, but each one is materially very different, and describing the first pair as ‘analogue’ and the second pair as ‘digital’ is almost meaningless. Indeed, CDs explicitly straddled the divide, as the inserts stated whether they were digital transfers of analogue recordings. Another arguable divide is that vinyl records, cassette tape and CDs are tangible multimedia objects, making streaming the ‘digital exception’.

CDs were rapidly superseded by streaming, but sales of vinyl have recovered from decline (Ellis-Petersen, 2017), demonstrating that choice is rooted in a complex set of preferences, and as Nathan Jurgenson (2012) argued, the digital *augments* existing technologies. Similarly, Boellstorff (2012: 50) and Pink et al. (2016: 148) argue that the online and offline are complimentary and mutually constitutive. The digital is now ‘in’ everything and entangled with it, but that does not mean nothing changed (Marres, 2017: 32), or that new possibilities for doing things did not emerge. But people choosing to do things is different from endowing technology with an independent power to shape the world (Barnard, 2017: 202). New technologies tend to displace rather than replacing; obsolescence is never predictable, linear, or complete (Wilson, 2007: 50). What matters is their perceived usefulness *in achieving desired ends*, and what ends people most desire is not always predictable.

‘Digital dualism’, and ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) puts the emphasis on the technology, when what matters is what humans do, and it is not about the new replacing the old. For, as T S Eliot said one hundred years ago (albeit referring only to the male):

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead... what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it... art never improves, but... the material of art is never quite the same (Eliot, 1919: 55).

These ideas inform my practice as an artist, but also how I have approached this PhD; to draw on a wider range of theory and ideas across art forms, technologies and thinkers and across time.

***The problem with 'social' and 'interactivity':
the passive or active audience as myth***

Phrases such as social networking, user created content or the sharing economy are a mixture of technical descriptions, sales pitch and hopeful aspiration, deployed as a means to an end, rather than a reality (Olma, 2016: 36). The aspirations came out of the emergence of 'Web 2.0' in 2005, which reflected a changing position rather than a revolution (Gauntlett, 2011: 5; Laningham, 2006; Marres, 2017: 49). Arguably, it was a 'relaunch' of the internet after the crash of the dot.com bubble, with a supposed change from presentation to interactivity, from viewed (or surfed) webpages to interactive, hyperlinked, dynamic sites.

AOL and CompuServe had successfully established 'walled gardens' of content in the 1990s. Optimism that Web 2.0 would sweep them away was a perceptual 'periodisation' that failed to recognise that capitalism moves from invention to monopoly, and internet companies developed less obvious

methods of confinement. In some parts of the world, research has found that fewer people think they are internet users than actually use Facebook: Facebook is the internet and there is nothing beyond it (Mirani, 2015; Naughton, 2015). Google, meanwhile, has established a near monopoly in internet search and uses it to combine data collection and advertising, and send traffic to its own services (O'Neil, 2016), most notably YouTube (Keese, 2016: 17). From the beginning of the internet, the ideal of 'free access' led to advertising becoming the means of funding for most internet sites and platforms, rather than subscription or 'paid for' models. Early advertising was obvious in intent and generalised. However, targeted advertising is more profitable, so platforms started to collect data on users, without due consideration to privacy.

In 2011, the academic David Gauntlett claimed that social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube were 'clearly *better* the more people are using them' (2011: 7): the internet seemed at the forefront of innovation, benevolently promising personal freedom and opportunity. The problems of far-right hate speech on Reddit (Romano, 2017), the misogynistic abuse of #gamergate on Twitter (Braithwaite, 2016; Lees, 2016), and concerns about Facebook being exploited to manipulate democratic processes (Cadwalladr, 2017; Lapowsky, 2016) were not foreseen. It was a change, as social media platforms such as Facebook transformed themselves from tech companies running social networking sites with some advertising, to marketing and advertising giants that gathered data from users with social networking interfaces (Lanier, 2018).

This change in what social networking is and whose interests it serves, centres on online platforms not simply being social because they call themselves so, which is 'the myth of "us"' (Couldry, 2015: 619). Indeed, in 2012 Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg claimed he could make any online experience 'social'

(Couldry and van Dijck, 2015: 2). And yet, social media works more effectively when sociality can develop on its own terms, where people make them socially meaningful by using them as performance spaces (Marres, 2017: 46–49, 54, 64). Five years later Zuckerberg ‘re-engineered’ Facebook through discourse from ‘social-network’ to ‘community’ in his ‘manifesto’ (2017), following criticisms that Facebook were not taking responsibility for the consequences of their social position and power (Boellstorff, 2017). The idea of ‘social’ is also complicated by many internet ‘users’ *not* being human. The extent to which automated bots, especially on Twitter, affect human interaction is ignored in the promotional terminology of connection and community (Marres, 2017: 74), and also in the ‘permanent fog of war... fanned by permanent fakes on Facebook’ (Steyerl, 2016). Nonetheless, while the bots and fakes are not human those controlling them are, and the algorithms that direct our searches, including academic ones, are not neutral but reflect human bias, preconceptions, fallibilities and imperfections (O’Neil, 2016; Recuber, 2017).

There is a highly unequal power relationship between platforms and users, and issues around privacy, user rights and monetisation have emerged out of controversy rather than through the openness of the social media platforms (Boellstorff, 2017; Holpuch, 2012; Lupton, 2017: 349; Marres, 2017: 24). The value of participation is different for users and platform, the former being interested in social interaction and the latter in commercial gain (Marres, 2017: 151). The platform’s ulterior motive of collecting data for monetisation wins out, driving participation that is directed, framed and instrumentalised into clicks for commercial ends (Marres, 2017: 153). Hito Steyerl is an academic, filmmaker, visual artist, writer, and innovator of the essay documentary, so parallels my practice closely, and I will return to her ideas in Chapters 3, 6 and 7. But she also takes a similarly political stance, and as she observed on this subject:

to expect any kind of progressive transformation to happen by itself—just because the infrastructure or technology exists—would be like expecting the internet to create socialism or automation to evenly benefit all humankind. The internet spawned Uber and Amazon, not the Paris Commune. The results may be called ‘the sharing economy’, but this mostly means that the poor share with the rich, not vice versa. Should any less unilateral sharing be suggested, the bulk of capital will decamp immediately (2016).

Social media does not ‘do things’ in itself, nor is ‘media’ a verb that can be turned into ‘mediatisation’, except in the conceptual abstraction of academic argument (Billig, 2013: 111), which has led to research emphasising the social and commercial, rather than the political. The problem of seeing mediation as simply the outcome of media is that it is a technological view that misses the bigger social issues of capitalism and economics, people and psychology, power and politics. Yet over the last few years political interests have increasingly exploited both users’ trust in information on social media platforms and the platforms’ commercial processes through ‘click bait’. Hate speech is not just a social act of users, it is also political, and the manipulation of democratic process is being undertaken both by sectional groups seeking political power, and nation states trying to influence the affairs of other countries (Cadwalladr, 2017, 2019; Cottom, 2016; Lapowsky, 2016; West, 2016). The implication for research is not just responsive methods and conditional findings, as Marres (2017: 107) argues, but also an awareness of the power structures within which research is undertaken.

This discussion has considered some of the most contentious aspects of how the internet operates, and especially in relation to power inequalities. I choose to work in spaces that are not in the business of collecting user data to

sell on for marketing and have more shared or collaborative content or ethos. This is partly political, but mostly because I find them the most interesting part of the internet. As explored earlier, internet companies often claim users are active, engaged, interacting, liberated and aware, and yet the commercial aspects push the other way, as users are presented with material that those companies choose while data is extracted from them. Yet the *active* user is supposed to be on the internet, and the *passive* consumer chooses to be fed by the 'traditional media'.

Distinctions about the internet being passive and active have been made historically, between 'Web 1.0' and 'Web 2.0', as discussed above, and comparatively, between 'traditional' media, such as TV and cinema, and online media. However, as Noortje Marres argues, 'society was already participatory' (2017: 150). Robert James illustrates this with the example of working-class cinema goers in the 1930s, who had:

considerable cultural competence and took from those cultural products elements that were relevant to their lives and used them for varying ideological purposes. Films and literature were never simply used as media where messages presented in the narrative were passively received by an apathetic audience (2010: 207).

As a modern example, the TV series *Gogglebox* is based on observing the lively social interactions of people watching television programmes that are supposed to be passively consumed (Channel 4 Television, 2013). In both cases, it suggests that arguments about distinctions are based more on the social class of the viewers than the medium.

In terms of participatory art and spectatorship, Claire Bishop (2012a: 38) argues that the active-passive distinction ends in deadlock, either with a basic view of spectators who do nothing and performers as authors, or in a more complex argument about whether there is more understanding in acting and doing or more insights in standing and watching. El Lissitzky claimed that art was not an end itself, as the real action happened when someone interacts ‘re-creatively’ with it (Debbaut and Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1990: 59–60), as I did with the collage based on an El Lissitzky poster (Illustration 5). Promotional shots of Virtual Reality headsets remind me aesthetically of defiant Soviet socialist iconography, both optimistically looking beyond the viewer to a future in a better political and economic place.



Illustration 5: *Just Another VR Promo* (Canucci, 2016c). ‘Recreativity’ with El Lissitzky: A digital collage of *All for the front!* *All for the victory!* *Все для фронта! Все для победы!* (Lissitzky, 1942), and a Samsung Gear promotional shot.

Textual works have always had an active component, courtesy of their authors, as Robert James claimed in the quote above about cinema goers. But the rate of chatter in any system is determined by the mode of reproduction; mechanical reproduction increased that pace (Benjamin, 2008) and digital reproduction accelerated it further.

Interactivity and user content were an essential part of online forums and conferencing (Marres, 2017: 49) and of games worlds. Multi-user games worlds began with a text-based MUD in 1979, an online development of

Dungeons and Dragons, which was a pre-existing textual work – a paper and dice based multi-player game. Text MUDs evolved into graphical MMORPGs, MMOWs and MMOGs, and the MMOG ‘EverQuest’ had a user base of around 420,000 in 2004 (Taylor, 2009: 21)². Virtual worlds were a variant of these kinds of games worlds, based on the same graphics innovation but without set rules and objectives, and an emphasis on sociability and user-created content. Second Life was born into this pre-Web 2.0 world in 2003, having been trialled as Linden World the year before (Boellstorff, 2008: 52). Users or players were called ‘residents’, rather than ‘users’, reflecting the different objectives, or lack of them. Marres argued that ‘engaging’ is a more accurate description than ‘social’ (2017: 46) – it is not just about people interacting with people, but also with content, things, ideas and spaces.

The myth of the real-virtual divide

Previously I argued that our relationship with digital media is more of an ‘entangling’ (Gregory, 2017: 3) and I now want to discuss this in terms of being online and offline, or logged in and logged out; there is variation in the exact terminology used in different places. In virtual worlds, it is usually ‘in world’ against ‘real life’, the latter sometimes shortened to ‘rl’ or ‘irl’, the former occasionally to ‘meatspace’. These phrases have a long history (Boellstorff, 2008: 151) and remain current. Even though, as I discuss in detail later, I believe ‘real life’ is an inaccurate phrase, I use it in Second Life because it is immediately and widely understood.

2 MUD: multi-user dungeons. MMORPG: massively multiplayer online role-playing game. MMOW: massively multiplayer online world. MMOG: massively multiplayer online games (Boellstorff, 2008: 51; Taylor, 2009: 21).

We never *literally* leave ‘real life’ to go into the virtual (Lehdonvirta, 2010; Lévy, 1998) – our bodies and minds remain connected, even if we feel we are elsewhere. We still need our eyes and fingers to navigate a virtual space, to make that journey through the imaginary. But *perceptually*, all games, not only the digital, can be seen as ‘a stepping out of “real” life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition of its own’ (Huizinga, 1949: 8). A game lies outside of the demands of ‘ordinary’ life – a kind of freedom – even if there is flux and flow between seriousness and play, the games world and everyday life. A game does not do the opposite of ‘ordinary’ life, it may equally be exciting or mundane, but most importantly it carries a freedom from serious consequences. Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson found that in ‘ambient play’, played on mobile devices, where games may be stylised and avoid ‘real life’ duties, but they still ‘resonate within and around the everyday’ (2014: 61), with routine habits and everyday social practices; this ‘everydayness’ is also true for virtual worlds, including Second Life (Boellstorff, 2008: 239). Huizinga argued that the collective space where players gathered together for a game was significant, and that a feeling of being ‘apart together’ (1949: 12) continued after the game had ended. Co-presence was also found to be a critical part of experiencing mobile gameplay, creating a sense of ‘here and there, now and then’ (Hjorth and Richardson, 2014: 61) and similarly, thinking about experiences that happened in Second Life while back in ‘real life’ are important. These reflect Timothy J Welsh’s Möbius strip metaphor, of being separate but always connected (2016: viii).

The uncritical separation of ‘real’ and ‘digital’ leads to a ‘real world’ or ‘real life’ ‘fetishism’, where ‘the digital’ is regarded as ‘lacking’ compared to an undefined mystic quality of the physical world (Barnard, 2017: 202–203; Jurgenson, 2012). In an earlier situation, Erving Goffman in *Frame Analysis* (1986) argued that ‘real’ is often used in contrast to ‘fake’, so is a comparative rather than an absolute distinction: John Hospers concurred, as

‘nothing is absolutely real or unreal’ (1964: 219). Immersive media depend on their relationship to the world outside, not on their complete independence from ‘reality’ (Welsh, 2016: 1–2). Immersion metaphors have a history through literature and cinema, and their adoption by digital technologies has internal contradictions (Welsh, 2016: vii–viii), and the idea of immersion will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Forcing the argument into a choice between blurred gradations or sharp defining boundary (Boellstorff, 2012: 41) is equally unproductive. Rather, the different positions are better seen as an ‘entangling’ or being ‘mixed’ (Welsh, 2016), rather than as completely different and separate. Being entangled or mixed is different from ‘blurring’, as the parts are both separate and in proximity or connected in multiple places.

Originality and reuse, collaboration and copyright

Here is another kind of art I like: the anonymous, the cobbled together, the hand-me down, the postscript, collaborations between strangers that marry together jubilantly, but don't quite fit... exactly this kind of random occurrence that Jarman seized on in his films. He directed just like he gardened, making hay with the spontaneous and unplanned. Is art resistance? Can you plant a garden to stop a war? It depends how you think about time. It depends what you think a seed does if it's tossed into fertile soil. But it seems to me that whatever else you do, it's worth tending to paradise, however you define it, and wherever it arises (Derek Jarman's intertwining of art, gardening, filmmaking and writing, according to writer and art critic Olivia Laing, 2018).

When we play well together, we have made an embellishment, a useless, spontaneous, joyous human decoration on the shape of necessity – a piece of junk art, a beautiful graffito (De Koven, 1978: 168).

Collaboration and machinima

Jenna Ng perceives machinima, as I do in my practice, as 'operating in the aesthetic playground of its own medial richness... [and in] intense dialogue with other media forms... [and] all other realities' (2013: xvii, xv). In my own work, I often incorporate other material including video and still images, and references to other media; examples are shown in Illustration 3 and in later chapters. Much of this is what I think of as 'found collaboration', as I am using material placed on internet sites including Soundcloud (2018), Free

Music Archive (2018) and Internet Archive (2018) that is either public domain or assigned a Creative Commons license by the creator (Creative Commons, 2018a), as well as Second Life. Dan Pinchbeck and Ricard Gras (2011: 152) claimed there was a typology of the 'individual' and 'collaborative' in machinima, but as authorial intent remains, collaborative is arguably a misnomer. Indeed, while I depend on material made by other people, the production process itself only involves myself directly.

There is also a question of relationships between the material, as I see myself through editing as putting the work into conversation, sound and image. The work will start with an idea, but the first material to be accumulated will be the visual images from Second Life. This vitally informs the choice of music and other visual material which follows, a process that often takes longer than recording the virtual world imagery. In no instances has the music come first, a common trope in Second Life machinima and in music video (Vernallis, 2004: x). The third step is to put the gathered material into conversation through editing. The Second Life material has primacy and the other material is secondary, but they become equal partners in the edit, with each playing a different role. Music establishes a pacing and rhythm which visuals do not possess; turning down the music reveals their gift to the visuals in the editing process, but the work still needs the sound to be complete and whole. It is 'a question of specific sensory ratios that are embedded in practice' (Mitchell, 2005: 261), and as Mitchell claims for cinema, not simply about sound and images, but of the complexity of how different aspects of sensory parameters interact, as 'Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer' (Ong, 2005: 70). Yet still, everyone experiences and senses differently. My work does have something in common with some music video, however, in the give and take between sound and image and the

unpredictability of how and when each visual image will come to the fore (Vernallis, 2004: x).

In machinima that are based on performance art within Second Life, I rarely incorporate visual material from the internet but I often use Creative Commons music (e.g. Canucci, 2016g, 2016h, 2016j, 2018c, 2018d). Stills from three examples are shown in Illustration 2: *OK, OK* (Canucci, 2018h), *The Very Discrete is Now Visible* (Canucci, 2016j) and *Missing Kake Broek* (Canucci, 2018f).

However, in other machinima I use a wider range of additional material chosen for their commonality to a creative idea and their emotional and aesthetic qualities. For example, *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c) and *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g) both rely on literary works (Illustration 6, 29 and 22, 28 respectively). Both include spoken word and text, and the latter also includes digitised decorated initials from public domain print versions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* scanned by the British Library (2013). As in *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e), shown in Illustration 23, type has become the visual translation of text and images (Würth, 2018: 150).

How At Once

How at once should I know,
When stretched in the harvest blue
I saw the swift's black bow,
That I would not have that view
Another day
Until next May
Again it is due?

The same year after year -
But with the swift alone.
With other things I but fear
That they will be over and done
Suddenly
And I only see
Them to know them gone.

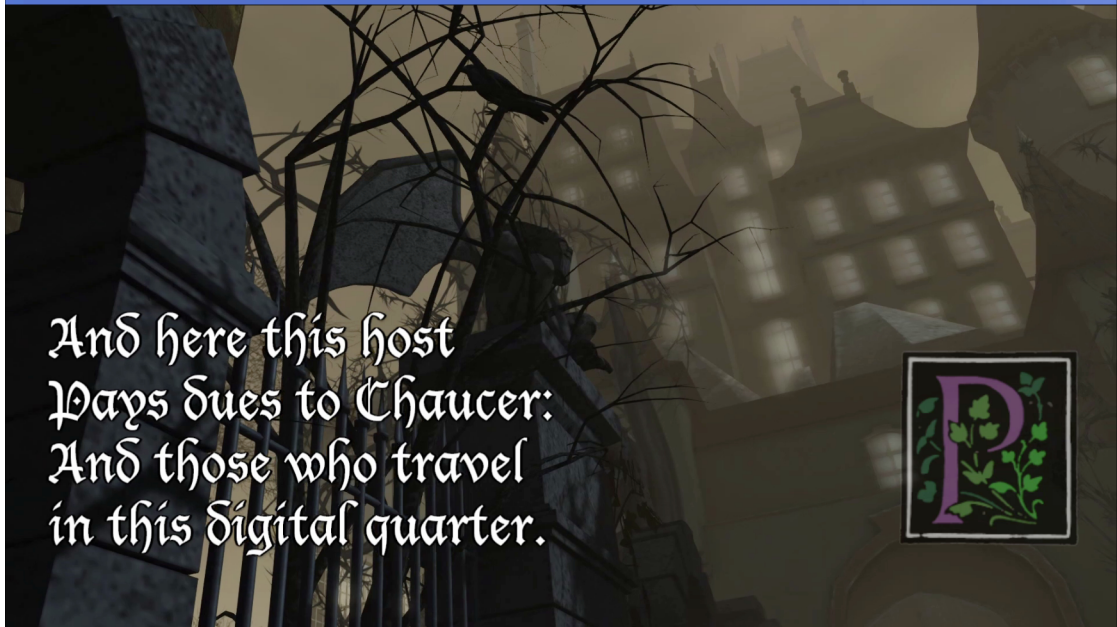


Illustration 6: References to literary works, where 'writing oscillates between language and image' (Würth, 2018: 153). Above: *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c). Two poems were spoken, and one presented in text with sparse visuals. Below: *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g) reinterprets Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Video from a virtual world, and a graphic from a print book.

The richest dialogue, however, is with archive film, and stills from four of these works are shown in Illustration 3: *Breaking Ice: a 70 Year Story* (Canucci, 2017b), *Future City* (Canucci, 2017e), *Neither Paris nor Sweden* (Canucci, 2018g), and *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo* (Canucci, 2018j). In an interview with John Stezaker, he concluded that it was a means of rescuing images from oblivion and giving them a ‘second chance’ (Leonard, 2017). Relating this to Creative Commons, Giacomo Poderi makes a historical link to commoners as a social involvement and so commoning spurs us to reconsider ‘neglected things’ with an ‘ethos of care’ (2018: 30). Another viewpoint sees them as ‘salvage narratives’, as ‘restorations of one moment in time, or adaptive reuse, which brings the past and present together in continuous narrative’ (Potteiger and Purinton, 1998: 22). And so the image, formed in one place of happenings, is viewed in another place where it takes on another set of meanings in the ‘discursive system of which... it bears a part’ (Tagg, 1988: 4). Digitised archive films are not simply reproductions of an original, but are ‘virtual objects [that] can be seen as illuminating the potential meanings of art and other objects... virtuality should be understood as a complex cultural interpretation of objects that forces us to rethink the tangible and intangible imprints of our cultural history’ (Müller, 2009: 296).

Aesthetically, this supports John Dewey’s claim that ‘[art] celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces and the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is’ (2005: 34). However, the process is more complex than just setting a ‘digital new’ against an ‘analogue old’, as the montage of interacting virtualities prompts cultural interpretation. Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López (2017) made a direct challenge for film academics to use visual methods of analysis, so presenting film on its own terms in its own language, rather than falling back onto the supposed clarity of academic writing; *Breaking Ice: a 70-Year Story* (Canucci, 2017b), shown in Illustrations 3 and 27, was my most direct

response to this. It generates a more complex *comparison* of archive film and virtual world material as video art. It includes written text explaining historical and social issues of place, but the text does not attempt a totalising narrative of the film. The images form ‘a contrast of footage that has associative, provocative connections, served to the viewer as the film unfolds. The difference between a documentary and an essay film is the doubt, consideration, sense of failing and the thinking out loud that one can do in an essay film’ (Ahwesh, 2019). The aesthetics and practice of montage, collage and bricolage will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

There are also occasions where I take up a set challenge, sometimes deliberately emulating work. In interview, Peter Greenaway challenged machinima to give up the frame, as being merely a convention of cinema (jayjayzifanwe, 2011), an approach he had taken in *Prospero’s Books* (Greenaway, 1991). *Zed & Two Oh’s* (Canucci, 2017i) used material drawn from two Second Life artists with the surname Oh, as shown in Illustration 7. The main location was *Hand*, an installation by Bryn Oh, and my avatar sat on a platform in front of a building, ‘wearing’ a green-screen behind her. In the editing, a performance by SaveMe Oh, recorded in another location, was laid onto the screen. A third layer was created in some sections using my avatar recorded against a green-screen background. The title is a play on words of Greenaway’s *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1990).



Illustration 7: *Zed & Two Ohs* (Canucci, 2017i), a layered composition using green-screens. Top: the poster, with two visual layers plus text. Bottom: The performance by SaveMe Oh is edited onto the green-screen, which is just behind my avatar sitting on the platform in Bryn Oh's *Hand*. My avatar, 'filmed' with a green-screen background stands in front, looking at herself and the performance, as a third layer.

In *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d), during editing I recalled Todd Haynes's approach in *Far from Heaven* (Haynes, 2002), which used artifice to reposition the 1950s nostalgic fantasy of Douglas Sirk, in particular *All that Heaven Allows*, to say something about society across both the past and the present (Higgins, 2007). This influenced my approach, as shown in Illustration 8. As with Haynes, my intention was to parallel, not copy. Visually, the typeface I used in the video and the poster (top right) has a similar style to Sirk and Haynes, and my poster echoes Sirk's style (top left). The panning effect through colour-intense trees in *Falling Between Worlds* (bottom right) parallels *Far from Heaven*. My story and that of Haynes are about inter-racial relationships, retelling an actual world story from the past to talk about the inequities of past and present. The credits of *Falling Between Worlds* include Mattie Delaney's 'Tallahatchie River Blues' which was recorded in the 1930s and referred to severe flooding in the region (Prince, 2010), and Revd Franklin Graham inauguration speech which began with an ad lib: 'Mr. President, in the Bible, rain is a sign of God's blessing. And it started to rain, Mr. President, when you came to the platform' (The White House, 2017). In American folklore, adopted from British folklore going back at least to the sixteenth century, rain is specifically at funerals (Bergen et al., 1889; Harris, 2015: 413; University of Detroit Mercy, 2017). Shown at *sIREN Conference: Arts and Digital Practice*, University of Edinburgh, 30-31 May 2017 it prompted a long discussion with two researchers from Baltimore who engaged positively and passionately; online it was contested politically, as shown in Illustration 31.



Illustration 8: Todd Haynes echoed Douglas Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* (top left) when making *Far from Heaven* (bottom left), repositioning 1950s nostalgic fantasy to past and present societal issues (Higgins, 2007). The typeface in my work, *Falling Between Worlds* (top right), emulates both; the credits (bottom right) include both 1930s music and 2017 politics.

My work is important as a body and is interdependent; while I believe my later work reflects greater experience, acquired skill and ability in expression, the relationship with earlier work is more complex than calling it an improvement or development would imply. Performance online is any case not so much appreciated in ‘practised virtuosity’ but through ‘unmediated, interactive, creative potential, some of which brilliantly exceeds and supersedes conventional aesthetic benchmarks and some that neither aims to, nor does’ (Irwin, 2011: 56). I do not regard short works as preparation for bigger ones, any more than poetry prepares a writer for a novel. This may reflect my previous creative expression through photography, for as Ian Jeffrey observed, the photograph was never ‘the basic unit of account’, and, unlike painting, photographic images are often seen in relation to one

another within the context of wider ideas and text rather than standing alone (1981: 7).

Before leaving collaboration, I want to consider a historical context. In my view, the desire to remix has not changed, even if the terminology has. As a food writer and through my Masters dissertation, I researched themes of collaboration in community cookbooks. These publications were a twentieth century predecessor of today's allegedly new participatory or 'remix culture' (Ito, 2011; Marres, 2017: 49) and were an example of mutual shared production that gave credit and status rather than financial gain. Recipes were gathered freely both from published books and friends, and collated in personal recipe books, with personal variations being widely shared (e.g. Bower, 1997; Floyd and Forster, 2010). The personal take or slant was more culturally and socially important than invention, whether that was in America or Britain, or currently in Mexico (Abarca, 2004). These 'reformulations' were not 'limited to the confines of our minds' (Sinnreich et al., 2009: 1246) but expressed in communal spaces. These were of little interest to capitalist production and so largely invisible. What has changed now is the encroaching power of capitalism (Lessig, 2002: 105–8, 2006: 337) with copyright policing on the internet automated, in the case of big business, and every infringement worth chasing as it is at minimal marginal cost (Lessig, 2002: 183). This has changed the relationship between originality, copyright, adaptation, and the communal, which is what I turn to next.

Originality, copyright and Creative Commons

Subjectivity, or individual expression, is not just the synthesis of influences that an author uses in his work (we know that originality does not exist, only the boldness of combining elements in a new way). Instead, it comes through in the choice,

and in the combinationary skill of the curator or installation artist, in what we could call a ‘second hand’ expression. (Kenneth Goldsmith’s position, in an interview by Imma Ávalos, 2016).

Claire Bishop (2012a: 10), writing about participatory art, also claimed that singular authorship was a myth and that there was a more nuanced shading between singular and collective creativity than a binary allows – ‘most contemporary art is collectively produced (even if its authorship often remains resolutely individual)’ (Bishop, 2006: 11). ‘There is something outside the work of art that the work of art is true to’ (Hospers, 1964: 192) and imitation *is* creation, and should not be simply dismissed as copying.

The conceptual relationship between copy and original is not universal but is culturally and temporally specific. For example, Athenians saw art as an act of reproduction or imitation (Dewey, 2005: 6). Chinese art’s relationship to nature has historically been ‘functional’, rather than mimetic, operating more like nature by providing variation and invention, without an artist ‘genius’ extracting new revelations. In this situation, *fuzhipin* (複製品), as an exact reproduction of the original, has equal value (Han, 2017). More recently, in Japan, Genga’(Dash) has been developed as a printmaking technique to display manga artwork most effectively; it reproduces the exact state of the original work, including dirt, damage and irregularities, with the benefit of not degrading in light like the original (Yoo and Kuramochi, 2015).

Copyright was introduced to protect the rights of the writer to copy their own work (*OED Online*, 2019). However, the newer term of Intellectual Property transforms the process to one around tradeable commodities, including brands and Trademarks. Copyright represents creativity-as-practice (or creativity-as-process), where the creative activity of *people* are protected;

intellectual property represents creativity-as-property, where *things* are protected to ensure profits for those who ‘bought’ creativity from others. Copyright has been extended in length through the last century in most nations, mainly driven by company interests. Most notable in this has been Disney Corporation in the United States, lobbying when copyright was about to expire on Mickey Mouse, which has resulted in intellectual property protection of up to ninety-five years after the death of the creator. This locks up a large body of work until it becomes irrelevant, for the sake of a small amount of work that makes a profit for big corporations, and not the original creator (Crockett, 2016). This prevents a lot of work from having the ‘second chance’ that John Stezaker favoured (as quoted in Leonard, 2017), as mentioned previously.

The importance of copyright issues on the internet have had a different dynamic, partly due to its theoretically infinite space which has had particular relevance for games (Harwood and Garry, 2014). While games companies claimed the right to control games as their property, gamers claimed rights as users of the game, which led to struggles over ownership (Taylor, 2007), user rights (Koster, 2006) and the transformative usage into art (Cornblatt, 2011). While academics have proclaimed that we are all ‘prosumers’ now (Ritzer, 2015; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), this glosses over the legal and political power that corporations can exert on individuals. Gamers believed that as interactive products, games companies would have nothing without users, and so asserted their position (Coleman and Dyer-Witthford, 2007: 947–8). An audience is still essential for cinema and a reader for books – but the tension is heightened in games, as they developed in the dynamics of the internet: they are worlds that can provide spaces for performances and protest (Cornblatt, 2011; Lowood, 2011), and user contact with games designers can be more immediate and direct.

Linden Lab avoided some, but not all, of this tension in Second Life as it provided creative tools and encouraged user generated content (Dellario, 2011: 91; Herman et al., 2006; Nagy and Bernadett, 2016). It is a condition of use that image textures imported into Second Life should be free of copyright restrictions so that objects may be reproduced freely on screen. The situation is different with audio, and music is often streamed *through* Second Life from online radio stations or Shoutcast streams (2019) that deal with licensing. Photography ('snapshots') is allowed everywhere in-world except where it is expressly forbidden, but the opposite is true for video capture (Linden Lab, 2011). It is a dated policy (Canucci, 2017a) that probably reflects the novelty and limited quality of online video in the early days of Second Life, in contrast to its domination of internet traffic now (Cisco, 2017; Marshall, 2016). However, the emphasis on user-creativity is diminishing, as making content increasingly depends on knowing and having external creative software. Second Life is increasingly being sold as a place to buy things that look good, rather than a space to make things that are personal, inventive and quirky: consumerism rather than creativity (Canucci, 2019b; Linden Research Inc, 2019).

The 'internet commons' were sometimes romantically viewed as paralleling precapitalist utopia, rather than existing on the margins of a feudal order (Coleman and Dyer-Witford, 2007: 935). They are sites that mostly remain on the margins and small, as they do not 'scale up' and are financially uncompetitive against platform capitalism. A recent example was my main source of Creative Commons music, Free Music Archive, who announced in November 2018 that they would be closing at the end of the year (Hohman, 2018a), was taken over by a commercial rental company, KitSplit (Hohman, 2018b), before being taken over by a music platform and licensing company Tribe of Noise (Free Music Archive, 2020). Meanwhile, commercial

companies, including YouTube, Apple Music and Spotify, determine the pricing they give to artists for plays on their platforms (Krukowski, 2018).

Commercial internet platforms adopt a range of buzzwords, including sharing, engagement, citizenship, community and connection, that are ‘ideological distortion[s]’ and mask their activities as advertising middlemen that broker personal data (Marres, 2017: 44–49; Olma, 2016: 174–9). For example, one cannot watch YouTube videos without allowing them to collect tracking data, denying the claim of being a ‘sharing platform’ based on egalitarianism or democratisation (Olma, 2016: 36) and instead exploiting personal data for profit (Lomas, 2016; Thompson, 2014). Monopolies establish power in the interest of those who own them, and ‘a vast power asymmetry is emerging that would not, I suspect, be tolerated if it were exclusively state power that was benefiting’ (Couldry, 2014: 893).

The choice of sources, of where to work and what with, becomes political – including whether to choose open source programs, such as LibreOffice (2018) and Zotero (RRCHNM, 2018) for academic work, as I do. For similar reasons, I choose to place my work on Vimeo and pay an annual fee (Vimeo, 2018a), as users are not tracked, advertisements are not imposed and, most importantly, they respect Creative Commons designations. It is certainly the case that creators of Second Life machinima often use copyrighted music which is detected by music rights agencies after upload (e.g. Merlin BV, 2018), in what is better described as ‘infringe and be monetized’ than authorisation. There is no penalty on agencies that make false claims on non-copyrighted material, and ‘copyfraud’, is the way that Creative Commons is eroded, or ‘enclosed’ (Coleman and Dyer-Witthford, 2007: 935; Mazzone, 2011; Needham, 2017). Because YouTube does not arbitrate and will ban users for failed appeals, it is almost impossible to successfully contest a false rights agency claim, no matter the level of evidence (Canucci, 2015b).

Copyfraud, however, is not limited to corporations, but has seeped into the ethos of public bodies (Mazzone, 2011; Needham, 2017).

'Radical Monopoly' (1973: 51) goes beyond the conventional idea of monopoly as dominating one market sector, something that government started regulating in the late nineteenth century. It is the dominance of a *type* of product rather than a single brand, and the monopoly goes beyond restricting *options* to restricting the *imagined possibilities* for choice. It not only limits commercial competition but also individual and non-commercial action: 'It constitutes a special kind of social control because it is enforced by means of the imposed consumption of a standard product that only large institutions can provide' (Illich, 1973: 53). Portals were an early attempt on the internet, for example America Online, Prodigy and CompuServe (Anon, 2000), but now includes the dominance of Facebook, which in some parts of the world is seen *as* the internet (Naughton, 2015), and the way 'to Google' has become a synonym for 'to search'.

It is not a question of whether these corporations are 'better' than the alternatives, but the effects on the ability of the individual to act (Illich, 1973: 54), on discrimination, prejudice and disadvantage (Couldry, 2015; Ramaswamy, 2017), or in the case of Facebook, of distorting electoral campaigns, democracy and liberty (Boellstorff, 2017; Cadwalladr, 2017; Tynan, 2016; Yoon, 2018). But 'Radical monopoly is generally discovered only when it is too late' (Illich, 1973: 55), and platform capitalism is able to present immediate pleasurable trade-offs to the individual that seem beneficent while concealing the trade-offs, loss of liberty and increased dependency. This slide into control is a continual threat to democracies – it was envisaged by both E. M. Forster in *The Machine Stops* (2001/1909) and Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (2007/1932).

The aim of this chapter was to lay out for discussion the main approaches that I will be taking. The two main threads are autoethnography and practice based research, which I sought to relate to each other particularly through their commonalities; the involvement of self in the research process, the centrality of creativity through writing and making, and a reflexive approach. The creativity includes many expressive art forms and writing, and different forms are capable of highlighting and communicating ideas in different ways.

I work in an environment that is superficially ‘digital’ – the virtual world of Second Life. What ‘digital’ means, however, has changed and is contested. The idea that there is a binary opposition between digital and analogue, or real and virtual, and in particular that the digital superseded other forms, demands further consideration. In contrast to the view of the internet in the early days, that relationship is subtle: there are differences between them, but also continuities and connections that extend through time. The final part returned to ideas of creativity, around originality and the copy, collaboration and reuse of material, and who controls their use.

The next chapter will continue the discussion around creativity, considering whether machinima can be an art form, and my own practice, relating one to the other to generate insights.

3 My practice, and machinima as art form

Or, Falling Between Worlds:

virtualities and realities through the montage of video art

Though certainly not a matter of true life and death, there are stakes in finding significance and connection with an arrangement of pixels (Welsh, 2016: 170).

I make video art. It is connected to machinima as they all contain video made in games worlds using the software as an animation engine. I think of my practice as working out from, rather than in, the virtual world of Second Life, which is a setting where I can create places myself or, more often, interpret places made by other people. The space is a means of creating aesthetic works, commenting and telling stories. The software I use are tools that can generate flexibility and unpredictability in use, and software evolves with the users through iterations. It is not just a question of reading or writing, nor of learning (Sennett, 2008: 194), but the necessary inventiveness needed in using the tools to find ‘an unknown reality latent with possibility’ (Sennett, 2008: 213). Furthermore, making machinima was not something offered to users, but a ‘found technology’ (Lowood, 2008: 185) that established an unintended use for a ‘readymade’ game.

Significantly, my machinima also incorporate material from sources besides the virtual world, in particularly contemporary music from the Creative Commons and public domain archive film – something I referred to in Chapter 2 as ‘found collaboration’. This material is left by creators in places where they know others might find it, with an invitation to (re)use it. They do not know in advance who will use it, in what context it will be used, or what

the user will find valuable. But it is a social circulation of creativity out of which they – or rather we – hope more creativity will emerge. I publish my work under Creative Commons license, so that it also becomes available for reuse, and this is explicitly stated in the credits in the video and on the publicity ‘poster’, an example of which is shown at the top of Illustration 4. It is machinima that operates ‘in the aesthetic playground of its own medial richness’ (Ng, 2013: xvii), and it is neither solely of the virtual world nor purely visual.

The word ‘machinima’ is problematic, however. While technically accurate, it is a specialist term that is little known outside of online and video games, and it fails to fit the breadth of what I make. However, machinima have been described as a compound media form – ‘things that look like videogames that act like cinema’ (Brown, 2013: 48) – and so have the capacity for variation. I also have a resistance to labels, something which, according to Chris Meigh-Andrews, is common in video artists (2006: 4). I *do* rather than *am*, and the consistent ‘doing’ in my life has been making through editing, cutting, and reforming, mostly in publishing on paper and earlier with model making (see Illustrations 18 and 35). My publishing activities also involved working with both writing and photography, something that now informs both my video art and my academic approach as a multi-disciplinarian and multi-media creative. Biography is an important aspect of creativity, even if academia tends to discourage it.

In this chapter, I look at the history and nature of machinima and question whether it was or is an art form, and whether it has a future. Rather than looking for answers within, I introduce theory from a range of disciplines to set against examples of my creative experience, using four headings. In the first section, I discuss the relevance of machinima as a label today and its relationship with gaming and video art. This is a discussion of meanings and

context rather than defining absolute positions; as discussed in the Introduction, in the citations I describe my work as Video art/machinima, which is how I often refer to it generally. I am aware that each label is little understood outside of the group that uses it, and so I am negotiating my personal creative tensions within a wider relationship. While writing the PhD, the landscape has changed, and there are signs that the label of machinima is being reappropriated, of which *And Now For Something Completely Machinima* (Grove et al., 2021) is a clear expression. However, when Ricky Grove in the podcast says that the Milan Machinima film festival ‘tends to be really art Machinima. So it might be a little strange to folks who are just doing sort of mainstream kind of things with games’ (Grove and Rice, 2021: 03:19) he recognises this continuing difference of intent.

I then look at the relationship machinima has with video art and film, both theoretically and in practice. Thirdly, ‘photomedia’ as a theoretical idea for light based media, also establishes an interesting, different perspective. Cutting and joining is inherent to all filmmaking but has a particularly critical role in my own visual art practice, and the chapter ends by looking at the role of montage, collage and bricolage.

Machinima – art form or ghetto?

‘Machinima’ is a contraction of machine-(and)-cinema (Payne, 2011: 242). The form began in 1996, but the name followed later, in 2000 (Kelland, 2011: 24). Computer technology was then *inside* ‘machines’, either specialised videogame machines and early ‘personal computers’ (PCs). PCs could be directly networked together for faster data transfer, but the connection to the internet using telephone lines was slow. The form initially involved hacking and modding (modifying) hardware and software and recording demo files as code, which could only be played back on the specific type of machine it

was recorded on. However, in 2000 the first feature-length ‘film’, *Quad God* was released, the ‘footage’ having been recorded from the computer screen using a video camera; this method of *screen capture* caused heated controversy with modders (Kelland, 2011: 23–4). But this is when and where games and videos met, and *The Machinima Reader* (Lowood and Nitsche, 2011) cites many innovative works in the period after this meeting. Nonetheless, even at that time, Katie Salen observed that machinima was ‘running on the spot’ (2011: 39) as the number of machinima grew while the form did not mature.

Technically, the material I obtain within virtual worlds is through ‘screen capture’ rather than ‘filming’. It is a digital recording of what was seen on screen, and results from how I chose to navigate the three-dimensional virtual space with a virtual (or metaphorical) camera. I also capture sound content, and a sense of emotion and feeling. Virtual worlds are primarily visual spaces, but also auditory, and tactile through haptic associations (Marks, 2000), and affirm W. J. T. Mitchell’s claim that ‘there are no [purely] visual media’ (2005: 257).

There is no universally used term for the material outcome of the act of ‘screen capture’. Editing involves using non-linear editors (NLE) so the predecessors of ‘film’ and ‘video’ are generally used in lieu; my preferred NLE is Lightworks, and in their product description they use ‘film’ and ‘video’ interchangeably even though the software is entirely digital (EditShare EMEA, 2019). But humans connect the digital metaphorically, through words and actions, with previous technologies – just as I click on a floppy disk icon to save this writing – something I will return to in Chapter 6.

Machinima had a promising future as an artistic form, that was hinted at by many writers (Dellario, 2011; Diltz, 2011; Hackleman, 2011; Hancock, 2011; Kirschner, 2011; Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011; Salen, 2011). However, it

suffered from an attitude that refused to accept a connection between games and other art forms, notably cinema and literature (Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, 2004: 35–54) – a reflection of ‘digital exceptionalism’. This is not to argue that the moving image says the same things as the novel, theatre or paintings (Bresson, 1997: 20), but to say that they all provide their own, but interconnected, interpretations of ‘reality’. Arguably, digital exceptionalism had ‘less to do with the characteristics of the internet and more to do with the needs... of intellectual projects’ (Miller and Slater, 2000: 5); early academic journals on video games took an impassioned exclusive position, not least *Games Studies*, which finally announced in 2017 that it would make sense to consider *all* games in future (Aarseth, 2017).

Machinima.com was set up by Hugh Hancock in 2000, five years before YouTube was launched, to develop machinima both as an art and a commercial ‘cinematic’ form, attracting outside investment (Krapp, 2011b: 164–5). He believed it was a part of a larger movement of ‘the democratization of visual media’ as technology made art forms more accessible, going ‘back as far as Gutenberg’ (Hancock, 2011: 32–3), which connects to my reference to the printing press in Chapter 2 and my printmaking practice. But as the commercialisation of the internet progressed, Machinima.com was taken over, and became part of the media-conglomerate Warner Bros (Hamedy, 2016), who sought to support ‘kickass gamer entertainment that fans love’ (2018b). Second Life, as a virtual world, is not ‘kickass’, but more of a space for living than a game with set objectives, winners and losers. Machinima Inc’s claim to speak to their audience ‘all in the native language of gamers’ (2018c) neither spoke directly to arts orientated creators within Second Life, nor to the audience that there might be for machinima and artwork outside of Second Life. Similarly, Machinima Inc’s appeal on their creator page to be ‘like a boss’ (2018a), alongside a showcase of YouTube celebrities who combined charisma, instructional

expertise, prowess and racy entertainment, was not relevant to the creative nature of virtual worlds. There is nothing inherently wrong with Machinima Inc's approach, but it is the commercial power of a brand defining a particular style and approach to machinima which is connected to platform capitalism and the business objectives of games studios. So machinima as a subversive form with a fractious relationship with commercial games companies and capitalistic structures (Coleman and Dyer-Witheford, 2007; Cornblatt, 2011; Methenitis, 2011) became channelled into providing profit for a media giant, Warner Bros. Consequently, I would suggest it became the 'gamer ghetto' that Hugh Hancock (2011) feared, dominated by tales of prowess and a fascination with gameplay. The volume of gameplay machinima reduced the visibility of the more imaginative forms, stultifying the development of machinima as an art form (Harwood, 2011: 11; Jones, 2011; Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011: 115–7).

After the above was written, WarnerMedia transferred Machinima from the Warner Bros division to Otter Media. In January 2019, most staff were laid off, with Rooster Teeth, a division of Otter Media, taking on a much scaled down operation (Spangler, 2019a, 2019b). In turn, and a developing question that will have to be dealt with in detail in further research, is whether new players, including Discord (2021) and Twitch (2021), have taken over the space that YouTube used to hold. For example, the *Completely Machinima* website lists Discord as a means of communication, alongside email, text and Reverb.chat (Grove et al., 2021). The *Anharmonic Online Film Festival* (anharmoniclawrence, 2020) accepted *out of isolation came forth light* (Canucci, 2020e) to live stream on Twitch, as one of a selection of moving image material that crossed what might be seen as film, video art or machinima – bringing together the range of influences I refer to throughout this dissertation in terms of my video art practice. Furthermore in a meeting preparing for the Virtual Worlds in Best Practice in Education conference

(VWBPE, 2021) based in Second Life during March 2021, the one social media platform that we all shared and could agree on was Discord. This question of asserting diversity alongside commonalities is very much part of the following discussion.

Hugh Hancock's view was probably exceptional. Robert Jones argued that machinima are 'transformative play' and not about 'film making innovators, but rather of gamers as insatiable fans' (2006: 277) – though almost a hundred years earlier filmmaker and critic Béla Balázs claimed you should love the material you work with (2011b: 6). While to a player, a game is a thing in itself, to the artist it offers affordances, possibilities and material to explore wider meanings (Sharp, 2015: 4–8, 53). Making machinima offers me a way of creating something that is *more than* a record, the potential of making a close reading of the virtual world and developing a 'thick aesthetic', especially when I combine it with actual world material. This goes beyond the 'thin aesthetics' of the surface appearance of the games world (Hospers, 1964; Sharp, 2015: 78). It reflects my fascination with the place, but *also* about wanting to be innovate and express that imaginatively. Machinima can tell a variety of stories about 'games, players, and most importantly, of the way we see ourselves' (Salen, 2011: 48), embodied as part of a living cultural performance in space and time (Nitsche, 2011b: 114).

Kathleen Irwin's view that 'virtual places, activities, and parallel worlds, representations and performances coexist and are composite, conflictual, and diverse' (2011: 56) is true of Second Life, which I find artistically interesting for being ambiguous, contradictory and limited and as a place where realism exists with non-realism. These spaces allow, as Chris Welby put it, 'a mediation between the predictable and the unpredictable elements of the situation... not about [them directly], but a part of this situation in its entirety' (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 79). This untidiness, inconsistency and

incompleteness also parallels fandom as a folk culture practice working on mass culture content (Jenkins, 1992: 283, 2006: 246), which links back to the discussion in Chapter 2 around autoethnography and the ‘unruly’ (Haseman, 2006) nature of practice based research.

But the interesting features of untidiness and unpredictability mean that virtual worlds are not passive performance spaces (Cameron and Carroll, 2011: 136). If all that was wanted was a video work based on a story board, it would be easier to make one using a dedicated animation engine (Kelland, 2011: 30). Second Life is open and incomplete, built from ‘user created content’ made by many contributors (Nagy and Bernadett, 2016).

Consequently, it has identity but not visual theming, and lacks the base inspiration of the narratives or themes in commercial games (Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011: 145). Because the content of the space is constantly being changed by its residents, data is held on online servers and has to be downloaded in real time to be interacted with. Consequently, the graphics are less smooth or detailed than commercial games that are held on fast access hard drives on the computer of the player. Second Life is constructed from reality sampling – ‘good enough’ representation – rather than reality simulation, which is the ‘as if real’ aspiration of many games, and of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in film (Brown, 2013: 49). The tentativeness of ‘good enough’ and its tendency to failure is important in my practice, as by ‘mining... the shortcomings of the visual forms produced by games engines... we get to see how far that visual language can be stretched and what happens when it breaks’ (Brown, 2013: 51), and the tendency for error provides the space for a ‘playful sense for potential deviations and alterations’ (Krapp, 2011a: 76).

I introduced Sebastian Olma’s view of ‘serendipity’ (2016) in the Introduction. Not merely chance, it is a combination of sagacity and accident,

sagacity being the knowledge and experience that sets up the chance for productive outcomes happening by accident. In his view, the creativity is an ‘act of joyous resistance that pushes the world forward’, counter to the commercial infrastructures of innovation that deter disruption (Olma, 2016: 23–4). The creative act can never be neutral or totally impersonal, but then arguably, neither can the academic; as C Wright Mills said, ‘I have tried to be objective, but I do not claim to be detached’ (1962: 11) and Barbara Christian argued that one ought to consider one’s ‘tangle of background, influences, political perspectives, training’ (1990: 67). In my own case, autoethnography in literary studies lead back to Zora Neale Hurston’s book, ‘Dust Track’ (1986), a writer who influenced both my Masters and Degree dissertations through other writers and academics, though I only came to realise this while writing this PhD. As Zadie Smith says in her introduction to Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, ‘To write critically in English, even to write a little introduction, is to aspire to neutrality... [and] one’s loves never seem partial or personal’ (1986: xxi). Neither being a fan nor being creative can seem to be neutral, impartial or impersonal, yet it still demands a close and deep engagement with the work to write about it. I enjoy working with academic texts, though how and where I reorganise texts in my mind is different from practical work. The former is primarily a conscious reorganisation of material, a re-synthesis, whereas the latter requires a period of letting go of everything to allow the emergence of something *more* as well as something *together*. It is like being ‘soulful’, where one allows oneself to ‘*fall in line* with a feeling, to go where it takes you and not to go against its grain’ (Smith, 1986: xxiii).

This reflects my practice, in that I want to find out what emerges from my fascination with place, rather than planning a creative ‘thing’. This fits with Brad Haseman’s view of practice-led research mentioned in Chapter 2, with practitioners often ‘led by what is best described as “an enthusiasm of

practice”... exciting... unruly... of which they cannot be certain’ (2006). My method is certainly ‘unruly’, usually involves collecting together a range of material with a distinct (but not definitive) idea in mind. When the different material is set against each other, it starts to ‘speak back’, informing a series of adjustments and reiterations, and similar to the creative process described by Peggy Ahwesh (2019). Moving image capture and subsequent editing is a process of ‘reassembly’ that develops through the process, the discovery of a ‘path’ (Murch, 2001: 4). Sherry Turkle describes this as ‘soft mastery’ (1996: 59), calling on Evelyn Fox Keller’s definition of working close to the subject, gaining familiarity, listening to what it is saying and then reworking it, as if one is inside it. The filmmaker Sally Potter described her own process similarly:

you think you know what you’re doing, you try and know what you’re doing, you try and *get* to know what you are doing – like knowing a person almost, the identity of the film evolves and seems to take on its own life, its own character almost. But you don’t really, until the film is complete, fully use the analytical part of your mind... because it can really take you into a place that doesn’t allow for all the many, many intuitive leaps that you must make... if it’s too tightly controlled by an analytical process (2009: 04:00).

Serendipity is present in all my work, but most apparent in overlaid videos, as discussed in Chapter 2, and shown in Illustrations 2 and 3. Peggy Ahwesh echoed the idea of sagacity as combining accident and wisdom: ‘You can go out and shoot... [casually] but in editing you have to be smart because ... you’re actually making this participatory meaning of the video’ (2019). This participatory aspect is also both an element of the autoethnographic intent described in the previous Chapter 2 and is discussed further in the next chapter. My work that is most dense with overlay are the videos based on

performances by SaveMe Oh, the effects of error, glitch and co-incidence being reworked repeatedly from performance through recording and editing, and four examples are shown in Illustrations 2 (top, below centre and bottom) and 9. But in all my work, I assess (using sagacity) whether to cut, retain or build upon ‘error’ (accident). As Timothy J Welsh argued about Truman Capote’s *Cold Blood*, ‘error’ subverts its own immersivity, making the reader *more* aware of their position and opening out possible meanings, folding the fictional, material and cultural across realms (2016: 33, 42). In any case, virtual worlds are not amenable to fine control and precision and the conditions are set up but the outcome is uncertain; as with street photography, ‘You are looking for that brilliant moment that 99% of the time you don’t get’ (O’Hagan, 2010).

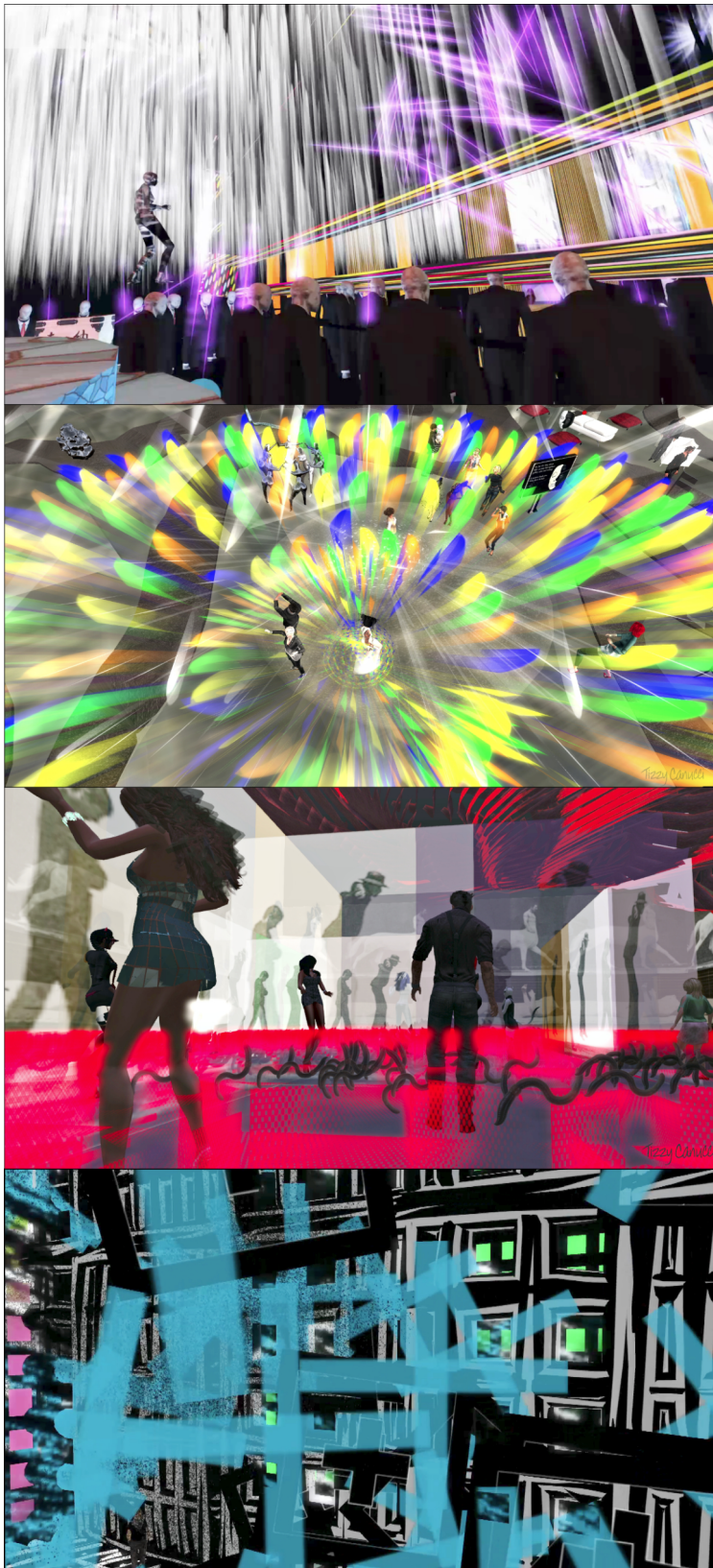


Illustration 9: Overlaying Second Life material on other Second Life material. From top down: *In a Bowl* (Canucci, 2018d); *Nitroglobus* (Canucci, 2015c); *He's Watching You* (Canucci, 2016b); *Symphony for a Lost King* (Canucci, 2016g).

Machinima's relationship with film and video

The recording, editing and distribution of the moving image was changed considerably by the shift from celluloid film through the invention of video and digital methods. By the early twenty-first century, most film for cinema was edited in digital form, even if most was still captured on celluloid film (Murch, 2001: 77). NLE software, such as Lightworks (EditShare EMEA, 2019) allowed material to be edited non-destructively, unlike previously when celluloid film was cut and spliced into edits. The options for indecision may be infinitely greater (Murch, 2001: 81), but this is *permitted* by the technology, not *determined* by it. It is still incumbent on the artist to make decisions, whether digital or mechanical. Professional equipment, including cameras, became more affordable with video, which led to an increasing interest in moving image work by artists (Paul, 2008: 96). After 2000 this included the players of computer games, following the first use of video to record a machinima (Kelland, 2011: 24). Video art and machinima are contemporary forms, and share aspects of motivation and technology. Video art came out of artists pushing technology as it became available, to see what was possible and then to work on the edge of those possibilities (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 3). I have already described the challenges of working in Second Life, and my practice experiments on the edge of what is possible, as well as engaging with material and cultural forms inside and outside of virtual worlds to explore the possibilities of the art form.

Video art also has a diversity of names, including artist's moving image, experimental film, artists' video, experimental video and artists' television (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 2), the full detail of which is not relevant to this discussion. But I have used the terms of 'film' and 'video art' when citing as they are used by the authors. This recognises the underlying diversity, that

they are not distinctly different, and that relevance can be made across the different names.

Both J. Joshua Diltz (2011) and Tracy Harwood (2011: 8) suggested ‘video art’ would be the future of machinima. I use the two terms in different places, machinima within the games world and video art outside as a more widely understood term. Chris Meigh-Andrews’s description of video art is a deconstructed reflexive form, that is indirect and conceptual rather than formalist (2006: 39). Florencia San Martín makes a distinction between conceptual art, conceptualism and contextualisation that usefully expands that definition. Conceptual art, as framed in the USA and Europe, is more about the formal aspects of the work. In other areas such as Latin America, conceptual art is thought of in terms of conceptualism *and* contextualisation, which connects outwards with other art forms and politics (2018: 66–7). In terms of my own video work, I would see my work as reflexive, and as also seeking outside context in its generally aesthetic rather than narrative style, and not simply ‘doing’ machinima as a portrayal of game play and realism.

From the start of cinema there was a question of whether film should show things ‘as they are’, after Lumière, or they should use ‘imaginative expressionism’, following Méliès, and the question continues in video games, and consequently machinima (Bardzell, 2011: 197; Burke, 2013: 25). The pursuit of ‘realism’ leads to the ‘immersive fallacy’, a belief that games will absorb people’s attention the more real they look, and that held back the development of games as a self-reflexive art form (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 455; Welsh, 2016: 2). Video art, however, works with stylisation rather than realism, as ‘Fidelity... does not always benefit art... Art actually consists in reduction’ (Balázs, 2011b: 78). ‘Imaginative expression’ has two characteristic elements that separate it from realism or representation. The first is anti-illusionism, and a desire to reveal the artifice of the art, and the

second is an embracing of montage (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 10, 63). In my own practice, I describe my work as coming out of Second Life rather than being within it, and it is the distortions away from realism and the comparison between different forms of reality that interests me. I agree with Derek Jarman in making ‘Strands of thought criss cross, but one thing is clear: the film must show the quaint illusion of narrative cinema threadbare’ (2018: 143).

It is a grand claim to suggest that ‘Machinima is to computer gaming as Brechtian epic theater was to dramatic and cinematic conventions a century ago’ (Krapp, 2011b: 159), and a linear recording of gameplay demands little apart from an enthusiasm for the game. However, to create something for an audience outside of the game on one hand and to introduce novel material to a games audience on the other, would go some way. Brechtian theatre set text against action, deployed music, and juxtaposed disconnected scenes (Unwin, 2014: 59), amplifying the ‘being there’ of theatre over clear narrative structure. Likewise, the editing process in video work interrupts and time-shifts gameplay (Krapp, 2011b: 159), and as with epic theatre, the contradictions, complex seeing and ambiguous narratives offer the watcher new perspectives, yet ultimately leaves them to reach their own conclusions (Unwin, 2014: 55–66). Conventional film pioneered montage as an essential part of the process of editing, and that generates temporal and spatial dislocations, though the dislocated ends are not left loose as new connections are made. Béla Balázs argued that movement within and across images established a ‘contrapuntal relationship’ (2011a: 130) between images and affect, an analogy with music that I will return to later in Chapter 4. The introduction of non-destructive NLE software in film allowed greater possibilities for experimentation, leading to new aesthetics in video art and machinima which go beyond the work’s superficial ‘story’ (Smelik, 1998: 125). *Here is your Sandwich, you Spoiled Thing*, (Canucci, 2018c), *The Very*

Discrete is Now Visible (Canucci, 2016j), *Symphony for a Lost King* (Canucci, 2016g) or *Zed & Two Ohs* (Canucci, 2017i) (Illustrations 2, 7 and 9) may be based on recordings of performances, but montage is where I turn them into something other than mere documentation. I will discuss the distinctions between montage, collage and bricolage later in this chapter.

Within my work and approach, there are also elements in common with feminist and women's film production. Rejecting the conventions of mainstream film, it often dwells on the mundane repetitions of life, with a reassessed structure and pace. Not simply concerned with content, it assumes alternative positions around sexual position, desire and language leading to a 'denaturalisation of the gaze', or a '*jouissance du voir*' as Chantal Akerman called it (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990: 318, 20). In virtual space too, 'the constitutive gaze is not dominant, but multiple' (Irwin, 2011: 59), and so in machinima 'the gaze is implicated and generative' (Brown, 2013: 51). Film, literary fiction and games all raise questions of art and life, media and translation, representation and place (Welsh, 2016: 60), as they move from biography through history to textual analysis. Meaning is created between the author, the spectator and the text, as the embodied, sexed subject is present in the process of production – even if theory often attempts to erase the author (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990: 22).

Artistic and academic connections sometimes reveal themselves through the process of making. An academic and active filmmaker, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, made comments on my work on Vimeo which led to conversations about video art. She edited a book about Chantal Akerman (Foster, 1999), who I discovered was an important influence on Todd Haynes (Lewis, 2015) who was significant in my Masters studies and in my own video making. The title of Akerman's film *Je, tu, il, elle* (1985) is echoed in the opening titles of Haynes's *I'm Not There* (2007), as letters fade in and out to reconfigure words

'he', 'her', 'not her', 'not here', 'not there'. In my own work, *The Digital Pilgrims*, my usual avatar portrays herself as Host, and similarly proclaims herself as 'Blender of Old and New, I am She and She is Many' (Canucci, 2017g). It was a statement of my own sense of self and artistic intent, and a reflection of my film and virtual world influences and that all the avatars were 'played' by me, as shown in Illustration 10. Embodied, sexed, my 'skin' changes with each pilgrim; the *I, she* being re-embodied in the *you, he, she* of three of my other avatars. Although a similar digital structure, each avatar reflects a different part of my own embodied experience: indeed 'all writing and personal filmmaking border on autobiography, even when placed in the third person, or filmed without direct reference to the filmmaker's body or life' (Turim, 1999: 9).



Illustration 10: Far right is Tizzy Canucci, the Host as narrator. 'I am One and She is Many' says the Host. The other images show characters in *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g) which were created out of my four Second Life avatars.

In *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e), I chose a futuristic ‘skin’, made and sold by Alpha Auer, a Turkish academic (Ayiter, 2018), in which lines delineated the contours of the body, shown in Illustration 11. The line, ‘Yet here we dance, our bodies rippled by life, as the grass around our feet’ was self-reflection on my own life stage, as an older person writing from experience, and specifically embodied experience (Krauth, 2010).

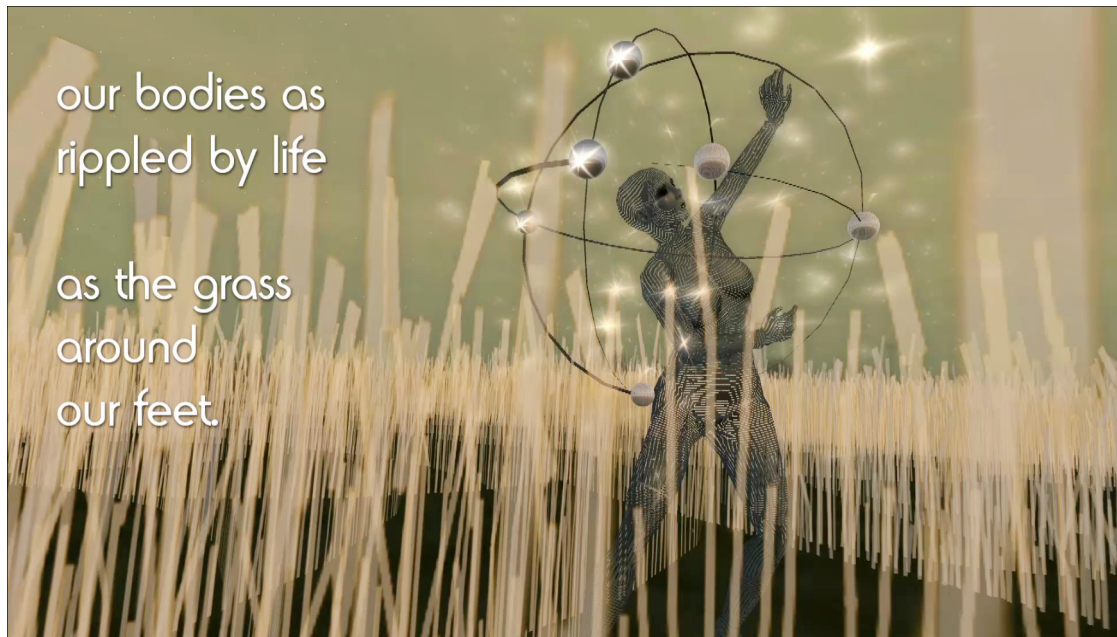


Illustration 11: *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e). Age and the futuristic meet in metaphor. It was later returned to the past through printmaking, as shown in Illustration 38.

And if in *Animalisa* (Johnson and Kaufman, 2016) latex puppets could portray a moving love scene between older people, so too can Second life avatars. In *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d), I chose to portray my avatars as sexual and sexed, as shown in Illustration 12, rather than as the sexualised avatars-as-objects that are prevalent in Second Life (Sanchez, 2010).



Illustration 12: *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d). The avatar as sexual, rather than sexualised.

Kirschner (2011: 23) suggests that machinima makers generally see themselves as live action filmmakers recording acted ‘reality’, rather than animators who generate new ways of seeing and form a representation of the ‘impossible image’, after Méliès (Burn, 2016). However, I have an interest in animation that at least equals that I have for film, and which began with the early *Pink Panther* cartoons (e.g. Freleng and Pratt, 1964; Pratt, 1967). Visually distinctive of their era, they created alternative states of logic and physical properties within their ‘world’. But live action film, supported by the Hollywood studio system and industry awards, was always regarded as of higher status and worth, the pursuit of perfection of appearance being paramount, where ‘Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author’ (Steyerl, 2009), and sharper, brighter, clearer, more detailed, more three-dimensional, more spectacular were what mattered.

Animation is ‘the Cinderella of the film business... The actual craft of all the people who work on these films is never considered’ (Oliver, 2018). Tristan

Oliver, most recently director of photography on *Isle of Dogs*, has had six features and at least five shorts nominated for the Oscars, but has never been invited to attend: ‘I wouldn’t even get a job on a low-budget live-action movie. People are so narrow in their view of things... [Animators] aren’t taken very seriously’ (IMDb, 2018; Oliver, 2018). The Studio Ghibli films of Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki follow and develop a tradition in Japanese manga and animation in taking time to *show* the story rather than driving a narrative (Criswell, 2015; Ilya, 2016). Yet still,

Because it is animated and from Japan, [Isao Takahata’s] *Grave of the Fireflies* has been little seen. When anime fans say how good the film is, nobody takes them seriously... Yes, it’s a cartoon, and the kids have eyes like saucers, but it belongs on any list of the greatest war films ever made (Ebert, 2000).

Concentrating on small movements or emotional feelings, animation gives time for the viewer to immerse themselves in the image with time for thought and reflection (Anderson, 2018; Criswell, 2015). This has parallels with the restructuring of pace by feminist filmmakers discussed earlier, as well as in their willingness to resist the institutionalised cultural conventions of the cinema industry (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990).

In my own practice, my earliest works, the prosaically named *SaveMe Oh at The Josef K Galleria dell’Arte, 9 June 2015* (Canucci, 2015d) used a technique of building moving images from a series of still images, similar to stop frame animation. It was very time consuming, but an interesting experiment that connected my past, working with still images or ‘snapshots’, to my newly adopted practice, the moving image. One of the technical challenges in *Second Life* is keeping the frame-rate high enough for video work; the standard editing rate is thirty frames per second. In *Second Life* it varies,

mainly because it runs in real time and has to be downloaded through the internet, rather than being stored on hard drives or discs. In locations where there are many avatars present or many textures to render, the amount of data increases and so rendering slows, and the frame-rate drops. The illusion of the moving image starts to dissolve as it visibly becomes a series of still frames, so the distinction between photography and video becoming less clear.

In my own video making, it is the flashes of imagination in hand-drawn Japanese animation that makes more aesthetic connection with the layered and abstracted qualities of my work than in the totally digital work of, say, Pixar. For Hollywood, digital animation permits the hyper-visuals or stylised action, while not transgressing realism – a technical act rather than an artistic and expressive one. In contrast, with the flight of Princess Kaguya in *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (*Kaguya-hime no Monogatari*) (Takahata, 2013) or the bomb blast in *In This Corner of the World* (*Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*) (Katabuchi, 2016), the animators pull away from realism to transport the viewer into a visualised sense of emotion and movement. Susan Sontag commented that photography was ‘a way of imprisoning reality’, and also a means to ‘enlarge a reality felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote’ (1979: 163). The preference for ‘realism’ then is not so much about its realistic qualities, but its capacity to be what the viewer wants (it) to be, and so commercial, a ‘homage to the subject’ (Sontag, 1979: 155).

Machinima shares animation’s feature of pared-down visuals and reduced visual information, which leads to a wider range of edits and clip lengths compared to live action. Objects can be recognised in fewer frames, so cuts can be closer together (Zhou, 2014 4:55-5:50): In my own work, this is most effectively demonstrated from 3:50 in *The Colouring of Snow* (Canucci, 2016h) with a succession of six-frame edits timed to the audio. Transitions can also

be comparatively slower than live action and used to control mood, for example in *The Constant Falling* (Canucci, 2016i) or *Waiting Edges* (Canucci, 2019e), where editing effectively displaces the need for narration.

In any case, stories are not necessary in a video of less than ten minutes, as it is more an experience or a mood (Zhou, 2014), which makes it is closer to the performing arts than, say, feature films or books (Goebel, 2017). I only rarely plan a narrative structure³ and even then, because of an absence of spoken dialogue, it is a sense of direction rather than a narrative arc. But narratives demand that characters make sense, and a lack of narrative allows more freedom to edit for aesthetics and visual flow (Crittenden, 1995: 87). As Derek Jarman described it, ‘making a film with no script you have to be on your toes: visual ideas develop as they run... [I was asked] if I had an image which I worked to. The answer is No. I have no idea how the scenes will look, and no wish to (2018: 201). The intent was that ‘Strands of thought criss cross... the film must show the quaint illusion of narrative cinema threadbare’ (Jarman, 2018: 143). This works with the ‘unruly’ reiterative approach I described earlier in this chapter, and in practice, my process is identical to that described by Peggy Ahwesh:

I love to edit. No, I don’t have a predetermined narrative before I edit. It’s like, the idea hits me as I was cutting. Chunks of edits grow, and I get narrative ideas... I’m not one of those who has an idea and then write a script, like a lot of traditional filmmakers. I like to shoot and then I edit and then I go back and shoot some more and then I go talk to people, or then go to the library and try to get more footage and I’m figuring out what I’m missing, and then I’ll go interview someone or

³ Exceptions are *Escape to Blue Jazz* (Canucci, 2016a), *Meet Me at Molly’s* (Canucci, 2016d) and *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d).

something like that. That's how I've always done it. It's very inefficient (2019).

The final link is between literature and film, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. The combination of text and visuals has been a feature of much of my practice, and more often intended to prompt thought than to be taken as a direct, literal narrative.

Photomedia

In the previous section I considered the relationship between machinima and film based on perspectives and ideas that mostly predated machinima. However, the introduction of computer technology has led to a wider ecology of media types. Jai McKenzie framed these in a different way, as *photomedia*, a term that covers all devices that use light and media, including 'photography, cinema, video, television, mobile phones, computers and photocopiers' (2014: 1).

There are three essential elements to photomedia; light, space and time. Out of the light-space-time structure emerges image-space, which is the end result of the capture, circulation and interpretation of images (2014: 4). Changing ways of seeing the world are not due to the characteristics of light changing; it follows changes in perception of the relationship of images with time (McKenzie, 2014: 17). This parallels how new forms of technology influence our social, cultural and psychological experience of objects (Berger, 2008; Sontag, 1979). Image-space establishes a diasporic relationship between an inner space of understanding, and an outer space of shared social and cultural meaning.

Roland Barthes claimed photography touched art through theatre, by recording actors in front of the lens, rather through a parallel with painting (2000: 31). It creates a sense of being there, and a ‘temporal hallucination’ (2000: 115) that is recorded, transfixed and recontextualised. Photography is not direct or immediate, more ‘a kind of dissociative seeing’ (Sontag, 1979: 97) that stores images for processing later. Despite the pursuit of instantaneity in photography (Virilio, 1994: 19–21), timescales have been reduced but not eliminated, and digital images on a hard drive remain as latent as film shot through a camera, a point where I disagree with McKenzie (2014: 93). The digital RAW file is the equivalent of a negative – unprocessed data recorded from the camera’s CCD that needs ‘processing’ into a usable file type, such as .jpg or .tif. It exists *between* the tangible and the intangible, viewable but not what is viewed *in practice*. Likewise, the negative may be tangible, but *in practice* the print and the album are the tangible objects (Holland, 2004: 144–158). For Sontag, images are ‘material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them’ (1979: 180): the image matters, the source and the negative is just the means. The photographic alternative to prints from negatives, positive transparencies, were rarely viewed directly except for assessing for commercial print; in practice they *became* photomedia, projected or scanned using light. Likewise, my videos and photographs remain inert on a hard drive until they *become* ‘activated’ onto a screen. It is after activation when things change in space-time and the photomedia digital image experiences an increased acceleration in circulation (Steyerl, 2009). It is not the quality of the image that changes things, nor the technology in and of itself, but the way that images are used.

However, *all* media, including print media, are dependent on light. The visual image has always been a transitional process of transmission and reflection between emulsions, dyes, pixels, pigment and light. That the digital does not need a primary, physical, tangible subject (McKenzie, 2014) is not

relevant either – the mind is the root of creativity where there has always been a store of secondary, intangible memories, subjects and ideas waiting to be actualised (Lévy, 1998). Virtual worlds come out of the experience and imaginations of those who made them, whether they are based on facts, purely fictional or fantastic, past, present or future.

The idea of light-space-time structure is a significant one, seeing the image more as a process than an object. The macro outcome of light-space-time structures is an image-space that changes with time, and in Chapter 2, I considered how archive film has a ‘second chance’ through digitisation and reuse. In Chapter 5 I will consider the general relationships of space and time to virtual worlds and machinima. But the microstructure is one of waves and patterns, rhythms, refractions and reflections. I will also return to this idea in Chapter 4, in the context of open and closed media, and their relationship to time and space.

Montage, collage and bricolage

Montage, and collage and bricolage, have a range of meanings spread across several art forms. In this section I am not attempting to produce a singular classification scheme into which I can place my work but recognising the processes at work and allowing a discussion. In this section I write about these films in terms of artistic and aesthetic techniques which combine material and in doing so create a third space (McKenzie, 2014: 98).

The OED makes a distinction between *collage*, as simply an artistic technique that combines different materials (2018b), and *montage*, the primary definition of which is a film ‘technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole’ (*OED Online*, 2018d). Within film, ‘collage film’ has a narrow definition, as a film made

using assorted materials, whereas montage describes the process of ‘the assemblage of a film through editing’ with a series of technical sub-divisions (Beaver, 2006). However, in a digital environment, neither definition fits; I am not using ‘film’, and even if I assume data is film, screen capture of a virtual world is not the same kind of material as a digitised archive film. Technically, as both are data, they are, but in terms of content, meaning or social and cultural position, they are not. The OED has a secondary definition of montage that gets closer in spirit: ‘a composite picture by combining several different pictures or pictorial elements so that they blend with or into one another’. This definition is connected to photomontage, (*OED Online*, 2018g), even if that only contains photographic material.

However, the most interesting definition of montage is the secondary one, as noun and adjective, and verb (*OED Online*, 2018e), which sees it as *using* a diverse range of material in a *process* of montage. Seeing it as usage and process leads to a more fluid view of montage, as an interpretation by the artist and viewer and it reflects my relationship with it, as well as those stated in interviews by artists and filmmakers John Stezaker (Leonard, 2017; Lillington et al., 2009; Stezaker and Warstat, 2010) and Peggy Ahwesh (2019).

Having argued that montage is most productively seen by artists as a creativity process, and not simply as a form of media use, I am going to turn to Décio Pignatari’s discussion in *Montage, Collage, Bricolage or: Mixture is the Spirit* (1981). Most of the paper is about an art form rarely mentioned in this context – music. But in drawing together a discussion that encompasses music, art, architecture, poetry, film, science and writing, he settles on a scheme of three forms (but not levels) of montage. *Montage I* is syntactic montage or montage proper, where parataxis and paramorphism are most significant. Here, disparate material is in juxtaposition, in a kind of polyphony that in turn structures, breaks up, and establishes similarities. This

definition includes Cubism and Mondrian, Sergei Eisenstein, Flaubert and Joyce. *Montage II* is semantic montage or collage, where there is more of an overt theme or code structuring it. This is the more common form of montage, and includes surrealism, Godard, Cartier-Bresson and Dostoyevsky. It also would encompass film essays that invite visual and auditory comparison rather than through narration (Martin and Álvarez López, 2017), a form which has influenced my practice and I have discussed in Chapter 2 and will discuss in again in Chapter 5, and is demonstrated in my video art in Illustrations 3 and 27. The final form is *Montage III*, a pragmatic montage of bricolage that brings things together for aesthetic effect, which includes punk, kitsch or pop architecture.

John Stezaker makes some similar arguments, as an artist whose practice has been in collage, and who has a personal fascination in exploring the gap between the language of film and collage as art (Leonard, 2017). Collage is not just an idea, but a means of establishing a different viewpoint that alters intentionality and meaning. By taking a (theoretically) infinitely repeatable image and working closely on a fragment he explores legibility and illegibility through a process of hiding or revealing, profusion and confusion, and a ‘coming together [and] falling apart’ (Leonard, 2017; Lillington et al., 2009: 96–7). Similarly, Giorgio Agamben argued that stoppage and repetition, which Guy Debord brought to light but did not invent, ‘are two transcendental conditions of montage’ (2002: 315).

These descriptions of montage as a process, interpretation and exploration of meaning has a strong resonance with my own practice. Overlaying material produces patterns and rhythms that are predictable only in the broadest intuitive sense, and the significant aspect is to work intimately with the fragments to establish familiarity, and experiment with patterns to find the most resonant ones. The pace of clips and edits, and when and how visual

material stops and starts, is key. This is primarily an aesthetic task with performance-based videos (Pignatari's Montage III), and both aesthetic and thematic when combining virtual world screen capture and digitised archive film (Pignatari's Montage I and II).

As with Stezaker, the found image is vital to my practice. When Stezaker was asked if images died, he responded, 'Yes, but with images this is not the last word. They can come alive again. Indeed a kind of death of the image, in obsolescence or dysfunction, is often required for it fully to come alive as an image' (Stezaker and Warstat, 2010: 75). Like him, I am not interested in nostalgia or a return to the past, but in detaching found images from their former everyday familiarity to set them against new material so that the old and new become 'entwined' (Leonard, 2017). This is combining realities across time, a 'hallucinatory pastiche' (McKenzie, 2014: 98), that generates a third, alternate space that plays with the flow of space-time by fragmenting the past into what is now. What I seek in, for example, *The Missing Mile* (Canucci, 2015e), *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo* (Canucci, 2018j) or *Future City* (Canucci, 2017e), is film from the past that I can bring back to life by resonating and entwining it with contemporary digital material. It is, as I discussed earlier under Collaboration and machinima in Chapter 2, about giving images a 'second chance' (Leonard, 2017).

I experimented with montage from my earliest works, but it soon became central in building a conversation between and within the visual, auditory, written and subject matter that is not so much about making something new as working through a complex 'creole' form (Brown and Holtmeier 2013 pp.12–3). The layering of montage, visual and audible, is where I consciously and deliberately amplify the 'excess of the image' to produce a 'multiplicity of "obtuse" meanings... outplaying narrative structures, evoking emotions [to carry] much of the affect' (Smelik, 1998: 125). This does not reflect a 'loss of

faith' in the autonomy of the visual (Tracy et al., 2015), but the reverse – a curiosity in how far video or film can be extended as an integrated and emotional expression. It is better seen perhaps as 'peripatetic' in that it is historically situated but not historically attached, and 'moves blithely between the realms of fiction and non-fiction, complicating the terms of both' (Tracy et al., 2015).

I referred to bricolage as a part of Décio Pignatari's *Montage III* (1981), but I want to return to it now, in terms of the doing rather than the outcome, and the 'doer'. The bricoleur, as described by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966: 1), is someone who has an assemblage of skills that *results* in heterogeneity or bricolage – it starts with the maker rather than the product. Sherry Turkle asserted that 'bricoleurs' were successful in computer environments by being able to successfully manipulate objects in virtual space, 'making connections... bringing disparate elements together' (1996: 61), rather than by understanding the underlying code. This is how I work, 'with a heterogeneous repertoire' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 17) of limited materials in a difficult space, which leads to improvisation, innovation and discovery. The bricoleur is in dialogue with the material at hand; a decision to place an object in one place often leads to restructuring of other parts, resulting in an end result that varies from what was imagined at the start (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 19). Referring back to Chapter 2, this has similarities with both ethnography, in particular being inductive (Cloke et al., 2004: 16) and of assessing materials and guessing about meaning (Geertz, 1973: 20), and practice based research, for example, acquiring a range of research information and experimenting to find the best fit (Brady, 2000).

Concluding thoughts

My practice starts from a multi-disciplinary and multi-sensorial position that reflects my creative resistance to labels (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 4), and attempts to bridge disciplines each of which has their own sets of ideas about the image is and does (Mitchell, 1986: 11). The surface appearance of machinima is of a video game or virtual world environment, yet in practice they are closer to cinema in how they are created and viewed (Brown, 2013). When fused from material from various sources, the method is ‘unruly’ (Haseman, 2006), forming out of disparate material that reveals a ‘path’ (Murch, 2001: 4) as it is edited. My previous experience (see Illustration 18) gave me experience in being in the right place and recognising opportunities that chance presents: Sebastian Olma’s serendipity (2016). I work with material produced by others, in a social exchange close to that of ‘remix culture’ (Marres, 2017), especially in my ideological commitment to credit the creativity of others, and *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020) that stands alongside the PhD reflects that. Chris Meigh-Andrews comments on the plethora of alternative names available, and in his definitions my work lies closer to artists video, which incorporates other art, than video art, which is a response in itself (2006: 42); I will nonetheless settle with video art. It is also a cultural performance that resonates with fan culture – inconsistent, incomplete and with a ‘good enough’ approach rather than a pursuit of ‘the perfect’: a process of drawing into the image and then releasing by revealing the artifice – a movement of perception that refuses complete explanation or analysis (Bresson, 1997; Welsh, 2016).

My practice is not filmmaking, but it works with certain forms and genres of film. Montage is particularly relevant, both visually and auditory, creating a contrapuntal movement between images and affect (Balázs, 2011a).

Importantly, mood and emotion are more important than explicit narrative, as it centres on (re-)embodiment and the gesture, repositioning the gaze (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990). As with some animation studios and feminist and women's film production, the form alters pacing, and emphasises the detail of mundane of bodily movement, rather than action or narrative progression. It recognises how filmmaking and writing always borders on the biographical (Turim, 1999), but in seeking to present the culture of which I am a part to others, it tends to the autoethnographic (Kelly, 2001). 'Being there' is inherent to ethnography (Geertz, 1988), as it is to my practice – an embodied presence and knowledge (Klein, 2010) navigating the space, with which the viewer can identify (Dixon, 2007), and as such is reflexive practice (Pink et al., 2016: 12–13). The process is not a mechanical one created out of the proximity of media, but a cultural and social process (Williams, 1977), and in my view, one of translation of a language familiar to those within games worlds to a wider audience.

The feminist approach that developed during the 1970s, also comes through in craft, where seeing it as an everyday activity and not necessarily separating it as fine art, has had a continuing influence (Adamson, 2009: 4). That I perceived video editing as being a craft process with an art product led to printmaking, a new practice for me, and something that I will pick up again in Chapter 7. It also echoes Hugh Hancock when he connected machinima and Gutenberg through technology (Hancock, 2011: 32–3).

Thinking of technologies in terms of light and as photomedia, and the idea of image-space that emerges (McKenzie, 2014: 1–4), has interesting implications for the navigation and recording of virtual worlds which are essentially three-dimensional on-screen spaces. Space and time will be returned to in Chapter 5.

So, having considered machinima's relationship with a range of art forms in this chapter, I will turn to machinima's relationship with literature in the next chapter: yet here too, the question of time and space has an important position.

4 Communication and language, as creativity and text

Perhaps the key to the ontology of making is to be found in a length of twine (Ingold, 2010: 100).

Mind weaving is the warp and weft of digital storytelling (McCormick, 2016).

I wrote about filmmaking and creativity as a means of discovery, or finding a path (Murch, 2001: 4), in the previous chapter. One starts from a known place with a quantity of resources with an idea in mind and a possible direction, but both will change and evolve as thoughts develop and the material ‘speaks back’. Writing has similarities; arguably you do not write what you know, but write to find out what you know. Background knowledge and experience are important, but they are not resources to be presented raw and unrefined; rather they form and exhibit an *act* of understanding, as ‘a method or a form of work, the procedures by which a person links “this event” to others beyond it’ (Brandt, 1992: 329). There is always a reflexive quality, as writings ‘not only describe or explain reality but also constitute reality’ (Brandt, 1992: 320) with meaning adapted according to the context of the practice of writing.

This chapter considers the relationship of machinima with language by considering them as different aspects of communication, rather than as completely separate forms. This is based on two key ideas: firstly that making and writing are different aspects of human creative drive, and secondly that people relate to different forms of creative communication more like a

process of translation, as a human act, rather than being unwitting receivers of an abstract or mechanical process of mediation.

Communication as writing, and the relationship with the making and the visual

As referred to in Chapter 2, Clifford Geertz claimed that ethnographic writings were *fictions* in the sense that they are something that is made or fashioned, which comes from the original meaning of *fictiō* (1973: 15).

Writing is not a question of fact or imagination, even if meaning is. In this chapter I intend to take the idea of writing as being fashioned, as objects are fashioned in a making process. Victoria Mitchell pointed out that there was also an etymological link between text, textiles and *techne*, the root being defined as ‘An art, skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is achieved or created’ (*OED Online*, 2010), and adding that:

Relationships between text, textiles and *techne* are of critical interest not only for what they reveal about textiles and language; there are implications in their association which may be relevant to an understanding of what it means to create forms through materials (Mitchell, 1997: 325).

She also referred to something else I discuss in this chapter; that the privileging of writing and the centrality of the visual in western culture is at the expense of the tactile and the sensory.

Tim Ingold also argued that the textility of making, as a skill or craft that comes out of tactile understanding of materials, has been progressively replaced by consideration of the outcome in terms of form and material (Ingold, 2010: 92). While textiles are not words (Mitchell, 1997: 326), in the

same way that ‘games are not media’ (Lantz, 2009), they have significant commonalities while being different. Kenneth Goldsmith regarded text as a ‘thing woven’ as ‘a fabric... unified, ordered, and merged into the voice that writes’ (Ávalos, 2016). Similarly in directing film, Sally Potter claimed that ‘a film is often a cluster of things, or concerns, themes, concepts or feelings that ‘thread themselves in and around a story’ (Potter, 2009: 05:54). And in digital storytelling, images, music, sounds and commentaries are multiple strands that are woven together in digital editing software (McCormick, 2016), as shown with my video art in Illustrations 16 and 18. But it is *writings* that are best compared to textiles, as actions, rather than *words* as objects.

This chapter developed over a period of time, and my thoughts evolved alongside the actions of practice and writing. Part of this was the act of writing and talking about my work in different spaces, including blogging (Canucci, 2019d) and conferences (Baxter, 2019a), where there was an interplay between my social and cultural environment and my cognitive processes. Audience reception is important for understanding whether one has communicated with others, empirical in the literal meaning of being aware and making observations. While wanting to express my own creativity and viewpoint, I also had the auto-ethnographic intent of wanting to share place and experience with others (Kelly, 2001). Creativity comes out of a depth of experiences, not snapshots of data (Brandt, 1992; Liddicoat, 2016a). The question of ‘what is machinima?’ continues, a discussion that was started in Chapter 3 and will be returned to in detail in Chapter 6. But machinima was *always* a means of recording game action; *sometimes* it was a means of expressing something beyond that, and novelty gave this apparent solidity for a while.

Most of the sources in this chapter are from literary theory rather than games studies, or film theory. I share Deborah Brandt’s aim to integrate the social

and the cognitive, which she did as literary theory to ‘understand how individuals *do* literacy as a cultural activity’ in the living of everyday life (1992: 317). In seeing the links between different positions, I agree with Timothy Welsh, who applied literary theory to video-games as ‘mixed reality’, which moves from products and things to processes (2016: 94). For Deborah Brandt, an author is both *in* the social world and *making* the world they write about, through a sense-making process (1992: 325–6). I feel when I am writing or making video I need to *internalise* the entirety of what I am doing, not just be *surrounded* by it, so I am both immersed in the work, and the work is immersed in me. And while that primarily involves the senses and the mind, I remain embodied as the processes still require bodily actions, and my experience of being in the world(s) is as an inherently embodied being (Krauth, 2010). The ‘body is a thing among things... We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 137–8).

It is clear that the body is present and a part of installation art (Hawkins, 2010: 324), but I am present in the space of my work, writing and artistically, both physically and intellectual, both as an avataric presence in a virtual world but as a flesh body in the actual world. I am the instrument of research, and so I inevitably have a position within the work (Hawkins, 2010: 234). Writing about art is then not so much a script *about* the work as a practice that *extends* the work, intellectually, physically, spatially and temporally.

The rest of the chapter has three main parts with two ‘bridges’. The first part considers non-verbal communication, in the context of gesture, continuity and the cut, all three of which have a connection with the body and with film. The next part discusses the relationship between translation, as a human act,

and mediation, as the product of media. This leads onto a bridge, and a discussion of reading across boundaries.

Before the next bridge, which is a vantage point to look at how I bring words and visuals together in my own practice, I consider fandom and reality, and communication across time and space, which will be discussed in a wider context in the next chapter, Chapter 5.

Communication as embodiment: gesture, continuity and the cut

Bodies talk (Duck, 1998: 8).

Communication is not just about the written or the spoken word, as when humans communicate, they also use physical methods, including images and gestures. This section takes communication and explores how it connects with bodily action, including gestures. This is particularly relevant for re-embodiment as avatars in virtual space, where words are mostly limited to communication in sentences or short paragraphs of text. However, theorists have been considering how gesture continuity and the cut affect film, which has a relevance with making videos. Making a video is a physical bodily act, but it too is about communication. How physical action and expression is influenced by the conventions of moving image editing and cutting matters. Understanding the history of film and how virtual world video works with or against that is relevant in understanding the art form.

The idea of transcending the body has its roots in Cartesian mind-body separation (A Jones, 2006: 174); the two errors of artificial intelligence are that the 'mind' is separable from the body as if were 'mere meat', and that cyberspace can be extracted and detached from the rest of the world (Bolter

and Gromala, 2003: 118–120), a reflection of the ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) discussed in Chapter 2. ‘The digital’ has become mundane, ordinary and everyday, a part of us and in us (Gregory et al., 2017: xxvii; Mayne, 2017: 72), and the body remains as important on the internet (Daniels, 2017: 335) as the actual world.

While the medium of Second Life may be virtual, the space is navigated as if embodied (Hayles, 1999: xiii), and avatars are a kind of reconception or virtual mapping of self (Sweeney, 2017: 429). The ‘performer’ in a virtual world is no less real, embodied or physical than in the actual world (Boellstorff, 2012; Lévy, 1998: 23), moving around as a ‘thing among things’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 136). Indeed, avatars are anything but neutral objects – they are artefacts with social and personal meanings which are often contested, sometimes political, and ‘material to work with’ (Taylor, 2009: 117), as discussed further in the next chapter.

Second Life, in common with other screen based virtual worlds, remains a predominantly textual world rather than a voiced world. Spoken language is possible, but it is poorly synchronised with lip movements and so unconvincing. In the 1970s, Masahiro Mori considered how the relationship between human likeness and emotional affinity, based on mechanical robotics and Japanese masks and dolls, also applied to computer games and animations (Gee et al., 2005: 153–4); his schematic diagram is in Illustration 13. The ‘Uncanny Valley’ is where dolls or prosthetics appear human most of the time, but small discordances create a disturbing, eerie feeling of being ‘not quite human’. The location of virtual worlds avatars is my own argument from experience: lip-synced speech decreases affinity, as it is realistic without being authentic. Similarly, avataric body language is not linked to what is being said except in the most general way. As an example, at the beginning of *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g), my avatar is moving using a ‘narration’

animation (Luik, 2019). It gives an impression of what is going-on but does not fit with the voice over; it is a series of gestures.

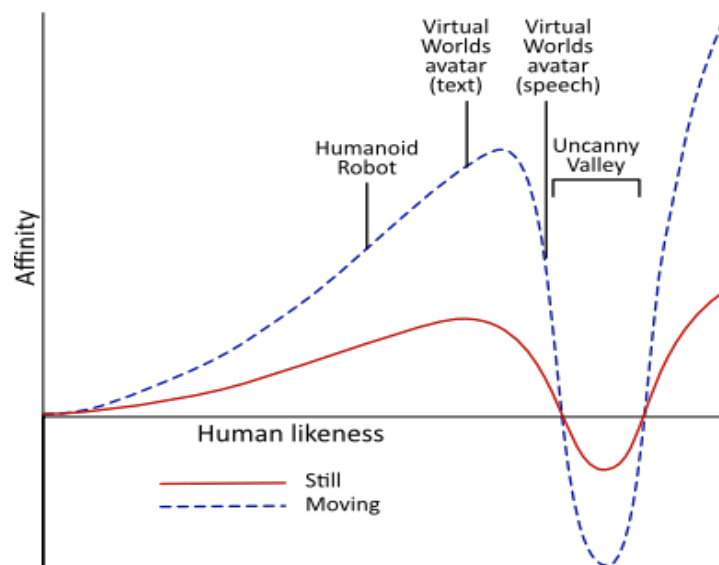


Illustration 13: The ‘Uncanny Valley’ (Mori, 2012).

The shape of the curves and the position of the humanoid robot is based on the original schematic, the position of avatars my own assessment.

Spoken language, is an act that requires physical movement, and so is inevitably accompanied by gestures (Bellos, 2012: 345), and psychologically, non-verbal messages are ‘at least as powerful as speech itself’ that operate as two mutually supportive languages rather than one being a part of the other (Duck, 1998: 8–9). Gesture has an important place in film, even with the capability for live action and actors. Giorgio Agamben claimed that cinema is centred on the gesture rather than the image; in itself the gesture says nothing, but rather it demonstrates the mediality of human language and that everything cannot be fully said in words (2000: 56–60). Framing the argument differently, Béla Balázs claimed that film restored gesture, but gesture did not replace words (2011b: 9–11). Balázs extended the physical human gesture of a speaker as an analogy to how the rhythm of images in a

film create ‘an optical music... no longer filmed objects, but the carriers of light and shadow, form and music’ (Balázs, 2011a: 129).

A video such as *The Constant Falling* (Canucci, 2016i) is little more than a sequence of avataric gestures linked by edits that interact to generate pace, emotion, and sense of place – as a ‘coherent rhythm of emotion and thought... that allows the audience to trust, to give themselves to the film’ (Murch, 2001: 72). Edits were used to control pace and emotional feel, creating pauses like a dash in a sentence (Balázs, 2011a: 133) and a space to reflect. The relative tempos of cuts and clips to the pace of the whole develops new meanings of space-time that relate to the emotional as well as the visual (Balázs, 2011b: 73), a view that ties back to Jai McKenzie’s idea of image-space discussed previously. Where film can *be* the scripted narrative and the word spoken between characters, machinima depends more on *gesture* to create feel and a sense of emotion or dialogue.

This has parallels to silent film and Lotte H Eisner’s use of the term ‘stimmung’, which linked mood to the use of light, as a ‘mystical and singular harmony amid the chaos of things’ to create ‘a musical condition of the soul’ (1969: 199, 203). However, David Lynch also credits ‘mood’ with establishing a particular kind of ‘feeling’ to his filmic universes where ‘worlds – both real and imagined – collide’ (Rodley, 2005: xi–x). He avoids conventional narrative with logic and legibility, and rather than tell a story, he seeks to create a sense of disorientation and a shadowing confusion that shows and hides and reveals in turn. With Lynch, the film *takes on* meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 58), rather than *containing* it. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued, film should impart ideas to the imagination, not tell, and ‘the meaning of a film is incorporated into its rhythm, just as the meaning of a gesture may immediately be read into that gesture’ (1964: 57).

I extensively use edits in my own work to create or enhance mood, often using dissolves, luma and chroma keying, and a few frames of black or white to control the pace. The length of each clip also establishes a pace, and a rhythm. The visuals are not isolated but are linked to the pace and rhythm of the soundtrack and music. It is this mood that moves the work along, rather than an explicit narrative, and the aim is not so much to show, but to create a ‘transfer of affect’, a sense of physically being there (Garrett and Hawkins, 2014: 158).

Gay Becker, writing from a psychological perspective about life disruptions in western society, argues that while life is characterised more by disruption than continuity, people’s *expectations* of continuity makes life events *seem* sequential, ordered, logical and even inevitable, and that people resolve contradictions in terms of narratives. She claims that the ‘construct of continuity is so deeply embedded in U.S. life at every level that it amounts to a cultural ideology’ (Becker, 1997: 191). In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Hollywood cinematic formula follows that ideology, with narrative and plot-line as central elements, a confirmation of the view of Katherine Nagels (2012) and John Tagg (1988) that it is the outcome of history, cultural process and institutional practices in a system of power. But what of film that steps outside of the this? Karen Barad suggests there is a:

‘quantum dis/continuity, which is neither fully discontinuous with continuity or even fully continuous with discontinuity... Scenes never rest but are reconfigured within and are dispersed across and threaded through one another. Multiple entanglements, differences cutting through and re-splicing one another’ (2010: 244–5).

Her arguments echo my experiential view; when I edit I think more about ‘joining’ than ‘cutting’, a choice which has implications deeper than a mere linguistic difference between nations (Murch, 2001: 5). Playing with the word ‘cut’ may be convenient for writing ‘on the edge’ theory (McKenzie, 2014: 61), but is a play on word-form in the English language that ignores how things really work. For Barad, ‘cutting together/apart’ are not separate actions, but an entanglement, where there is ‘a single event that is not one’ (2010: 244). After Derrida, Barad defines *agential cuts* as ‘holding together’ separation, as they differentiate, separate and entangle in *one move*, rather than sequentially. This again reflects my own feeling of my creative process as a considered and controlled, but experimental, realignment. It is ‘a process of composing and decomposing’, as Nicéphore Niépce described his new process of heliography in a note to Louis Daguerre on 5 December 1829 (Virilio, 1994: 19), even if I am realigning digital bits rather than a chemical crystals.

The creator is only partly analytical, for, as Sally Potter commented, fluency and the ‘many, many intuitive leaps’ must precede (2009: 04:00). What seems natural or easy, is the result of an intense decision-making process, and where what seems ‘right’ is simultaneously illusive, illusory, a compromise, evolutionary, and emergent from a constant state of falling between losing and finding oneself. ‘Like chess, or writing, it is a matter of choosing from among given possibilities, but in the case of photography [or any image making] the number of possibilities is not finite but infinite’ (Szarkowski, 2002: 6).

A sticky web:

'the digital' as translation rather than mediation

Mediation should be seen as a process involving human action, not something deterministic and a result of 'word magic' (Bellos, 2012: 21), where naming lends illusory explanatory certainty by making it a 'thing'. However, there is a particular problem in English where the same word can be used for the process (doing) and the product of the process (things), something which is accentuated in the social sciences, where reification turns quality into quantity and action into things reinforced by abstract(ed) academic writing that asserts conceptual forces over human practices (Billig, 2013). 'Media' is not a verb, and so extending it to 'mediatization' makes it the agent rather than the people who make, use and read it: Barnard (2017: 202–203) identified this as a particular problem for digitally mediated reality, where a fetishised view of technology and sociality leads to objects being endowed with mysterious powers to shape the world. 'Mediatization' is not just hype, rather it came from 'a disenchanting or jubilant fascination' (Nancy, 2000: 28, 50–51) with media, where the academic play on the indistinct meanings of the words 'message' and 'medium' resulted in mediatization being given symbolic power in modernity.

Combining media theory with literary theory is a way to 'de-exceptionalise' (Marres, 2017: 172) the digital, and to re-integrate it as a part of the everyday. By creating 'the digital' as object, what is 'not-digital' or 'pre-digital' requires a name, and the subsequent term, 'analogue' incorporates a wide range of technologies, many of which had little in common previously. Other technologies, such as phones, bridge digital and analogue; their essential use remains the same, it is how they are used and their limitations that have changed. It is the *process of digitisation* that changed the phone, not *being*

digital. The terminology is not neutral; it is tied to social ideas of progress and the effects of technology, and consequently to social status and significance through ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172). Timothy J Welsh takes this view in *Mixed Realism* (2016), where he brings the theory and practice of video games and literature together, to introduce proportion to their comparability, and to emphasise similarities more than differences.

Raymond Williams (1977: 98) argued that while all *active* relationships between being and consciousness are mediated, this mediation *cannot* be attributed to a separate ‘medium’ which if removed would reveal the true nature of objects. The medium is a *part of the property* of an object, but this does not mean the medium *is* the object (Williams, 1977: 160). In society, mediation reveals itself within the active process that is culture (Williams, 1977), out of which artefacts and things emerge, but it is not a thing in itself. It is the person who witnesses actions and things that makes them meaningful, and the medium merely facilitates (Dyer, 2017: 82). Raymond Williams is reluctant to displace the simpler idea of ‘reflection’ with ‘mediation’ as while mediation rejects the passivity of reflection theory it also perpetuates dualism, by returning to the idea of an intermediary.

On the other hand, there are broad two strands of thoughts on literary translation. One sees translation as a linguistic act of rewording seeking an objective transparency that allows the reader to ‘see’ through the translation directly to the original work. The other is translation as mediation, ‘a culturally based action of meaning making’ (Liddicoat, 2016b). In this latter view, translation is read as a product of the culture and language it has been translated *into* and the reader may or may not know or care where it has come from. Furthermore, a translator’s history and education are important in a making culturally effective translation where a literal one would fail to carry the meaning of the original. This literary concept of mediation is rooted

in a human act. As such it is different from mediation as something generated by media as objects, which tends to mist over underlying human action.

Basil Hatim and Ian Mason claim the translator is a *mediator* between the producer of a text and its receivers, who seeks to explain incompatibilities of meaning, through both bilingual knowledge and ‘bilingual vision’ (1990: 223). That affirms that in translation theory, mediation is not about language rules determining outcomes, but it is *something people do* to try to communicate effectively across boundaries, in the process bridging cultures and making choices about the several possible meanings that all utterances have (Bellos, 2012). For Homi Bhaba, the translator exists in a ‘third space’, between text and translation (Munday, 2008: 150) as an ‘intervenient being’ (Maier, 2007: 1). There is no such thing as a transparent, unambiguous translation or meaning, and the translator as mediator is ‘responsible for the relationship between texts, contexts, and their readers, accommodating the text into its new texts’ (Katan, 2016: 368) while the reader remains a highly active participant in the process (Hatim and Mason, 1990: 226–236).

‘Transcreation’ (Katan, 2016: 375) is a sporadically used term primarily in literary and commercial translation, but also has resonances in my practice. In transcreation, the role of the translator explicitly becomes a creative one, someone who takes ‘nourishment’ from both translating and mediating and the strange is understood *in relation to* the familiar (Katan, 2016: 376). My practice aims to offer and present comparisons, often by increasing complexity and ambiguity, with the aim of both explaining and promoting the process of questioning, rather than providing ‘a full stop’ of answers (Sharp, 2015). It accepts there is a risk of (mis)interpretation in controlled confusion, and this I believe is a central distinction between machinima as video art, and machinima as a straight record of gameplay. I concur with William Kentridge: ‘I’m interested in a political art, that is to say an art of

ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings' (The Whitworth, 2018: 1).

As Daniel Miller and Heather Horst argue as being one of the principles of digital anthropology, humanity does not get *more* mediated, even though the digital intensifies the dialectical nature of culture (2012: 2, 3). The internet is a space for new *forms* of mediation, though this does not lead to a new *reality* (Miller and Slater, 2000: 6), even if mediation can now spread faster and further (Pink et al., 2016: 82). The digital has become a 'constitutive part of what makes us human' (Miller and Horst, 2012: 4) through becoming an essential part of technology, but not simply a means to our human ends, rather an inseparable part of us (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 13).

Mediation is not a singular outcome of media, but the continual interaction of a triad – *arrangements* of social relations, *artefacts* as the material tools and products and *practices* as ways of doing, reading and communicating (Lievrouw, 2014). It may have an effect on how we see the world, but while always seeming real, actual life itself is established through cultural and social positioning involving accepted norms, conventions and representations (Goffman, 1986: 562). As a constant process that never stops, vector rather than scalar, we can never identify where one phase stops and the next begins. From this position, remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) is a superfluous concept as mediation is a continuous cycle so 're-' has no further explanatory meaning (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: 10).

Latour's description of technical mediation is more detailed and complex but he too rejects hidden processes and 'blackboxing' – instead 'things happen' out of the doings of a succession of definable human and non-human 'actants' (Latour, 1999: 179–182). Taking the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of *medium*, the second group defines it is a 'person or thing which

acts as an intermediary' (2017c). Within this group there are five definitions: 'a means or channel of communication or expression'; something of value that is agreed as a means of exchange; art that is described by the materials with which it is made; a channel of mass communication; the physical material onto which data, images, or sound are recorded. All these definitions have some relevance to practice based research in the social sciences and the arts, as they see media either as the material properties of a means of communication or in terms of Latour's actants.

The idea that translation sees people as different, yet capable of understanding one another (Bellos, 2012: 338), fits with the definition of autoethnography by Traci Marie Kelly (Kelly, 2001: 259) referred to in Chapter 2, where an author explains their own cultural environment, acting as an 'insider' to 'outsiders'. Autoethnography moves between the social and the personal 'mediated through language, history and ethnographical analysis... [as a] figural anthropology of the self' (Lionnet, 1991: 99). In analysing *Dust Tracks on a Road* (Hurstun, 1986), Françoise Lionnet describes how aesthetics and ethnography work together, and move between 'life and literature, reality and its representation, orality and literacy', rather than trying to make a linear progression. This is my experience of video making in using a place that is familiar to some but not to others, and of having to find a place on a 'bridge' to cross the gaps. Machinima cannot be completely separated from the place in which it was made, and so I am also 'writing ethnography' as a 'text of the physical, the spoken, and the performed, an evocation of quotidian experience' (Tyler, 1986: 136). I, the creative/ author have to convince the viewer/ reader that 'I was there' in that place and cultural process, and that I remain present in the video/ text, both as 'a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time' (Geertz, 1988: 10–17). In my own case this was literally in my practice, with 'The Digital Pilgrim' (Canucci, 2017g) as shown in Illustrations 6, 10, 21, 22 and 28.

The Bridge (Part 2):

Reading across boundaries: translation and mediation

Translators find matches, not equivalences (Bellos, 2012: 320).

In my practice, I see different media forms such as art and literature as offering different modes of expression that can be usefully interconnected. The challenges and practical difficulties are constructive, in exploring and comparing similarities, contrasts and ambiguities. In practice, translation recognises this difficulty, especially with some modes such as poetry and dance, and responds creatively through collaborative translation to fill in meaning (Bellos, 2012: 64). Individual artists are in a constant state of 'becoming', as they intervene in a world that is continually "on the boil"... in an endless process of transformation' (Ingold, 2010: 94). As the photographer Frederick Sommer said, 'We are the ones who put life into stones and pebbles' (Sontag, 1979: 190), or as the psychologist Steven Rose claimed 'real brains transform dead information' (1998). Media are what we *use* in the process of meaning-making and communication. Karen Eliot argues use is a specific objective of the artists' book, in seeking to transform the book as media into 'a verb, a process, a dialog, a performance' (Eliot, 2018: 42).

However, this openness to work across media forms is not universal. Film, and later video games, have sought to put space between themselves and the older form of literature. Balázs claimed literature and film had nothing in common because an author depends on the 'power and subtlety' of their writing and film depends on image and gesture (Balázs, 2011b: 19). However, as David Bellos pointed out, rather than maintaining a separation, film often conveys meaning in more than one way at the same time and not solely through language (2012: 71). Cinema is about transforming 'the real into the

possible and the possible into the real' (Agamben, 2002: 316), or between the virtual and actual (Lévy, 1998), a movement that may be so smooth as to conceal the medium. That said, I view immersion more as depending on a knowing awareness and movement of perception in and out of the experience (Welsh, 2016: viii).

In a similar vein, early games studies academics denied that games had *any* narrative content so literature and games were entirely separate forms (Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, 2004), a view on 'media status' that automatically also attached to machinima. Michael Nitsche argued that machinima should be seen as a 'media format based on procedural image production and reproduction', and in a somewhat isolated position, a media format rather than a practice (2011b: 114, 121, 2011a: 17). David Cameron and John Carroll, however, describe it as a 'community of practice' (2011: 134), emerging out of a living fan culture environment (Jenkins, 2006: 246, 256). Provocatively, Frank Lantz argued that 'games are not media' (2009) for a list of reasons: they were not new; they do not always go in computers; they are not simply content that is consumed; and they are not messages. And he went on to say that cultural forms, including film, music and literature, are 'more like hobbies and languages and disciplines and communities... [than content] we consume in order to receive the messages that they carry' (Lantz, 2009).

That there is an intermediary in the translation process is not at issue, but whether the intermediary is an *obscuring thing between* that hinders movement or a *bridging across* that is a crossing place for productive activity is a question. I have argued previously, spanning my practice in making video art, that they are better seen as bridges and places that create new meanings. Bridges represent the 'transgression' of limits (de Certeau, 1984: 128), and are social, connective, translational, transformative:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds.... tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Napantla es tierra desconocida... Change is inevitable; no bridge lasts forever (Anzaldúa, 2002: 1).

And so, in retrospect, one of the poems I selected for my video *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c) has more relevance to theory than anticipated, which is one of the features of practice based research. The poem 'The Bridge' (Thomas, 1979b), which I referred to in Chapter 2, echoes the transitional position of the bridge between worlds and across time:

I have come a long way today:
On a strange bridge alone,
Remembering friends, old friends
I rest, without smile or moan,
As they remember me without smile or moan.

All are behind, the kind
And the unkind too, no more
Tonight than a dream. The stream
Runs softly yet drowns the Past,
The dark-lit stream has drowned the Future and the Past.

No traveller has rest more blest
Than this moment brief between

Two lives, when the Night's first lights
And shades hide what has never been,
Things goodlier, lovelier, dearer, than will be or have been.

Illustration 1 shows a still from the video alongside my printmaking, reflecting a transitional position in my art practice.

Communication spanning fandom and reality

I combine being an artist, an academic and a resident of Second Life. The latter has similarities to Henry Jenkins's position of being a 'fan' (1992), which also created a flow to being academic. Likewise too, it is not just 'my' story, and so autobiographical, but seeks to convey cultural, social and personal experiences to others outside of the place' from a perspective of someone within it, which is similar in motive and method to autoethnography. It is more than a position or perspective, as while one is rooted in the cultural milieu one is 'embodying values, patterns of behavior, and community standards' (Kelly, 2001: 260).

This engagement is crucial to what I would argue makes autoethnography distinctive, of neither being where an outsider comes in and looks, as in ethnography, nor merely personal reflection biography or opinion. However, the theory's origins with Zora Neale Hurston should be acknowledged and her 'fluency in an astounding number of fields, from playwright, novelist to performer, folklorist, and anthropologist [and] a pioneering role in another field – filmmaking' (Charnov, 1998: 38). She used that creative ability to record, and to convey artistry by herself and others, and that is my intention in my writing here and my video art.

Julian Klein's view of writing about art and research expands this position by saying that the question is not 'what is artistic research?' but 'when is a research artistic?' (2010: 6). It is neither found in the verbalisation of knowledge nor in products, but:

has to be acquired through sensory and emotional perception, precisely through artistic experience, from which it can not be separated. Whether silent or verbal, declarative or procedural, implicit or explicit... artistic knowledge is sensual and physical, 'embodied knowledge' (Klein, 2010: 6).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty claimed that 'the seer is not a gap, a cleaving in the fabric of the visible' (Lingis, 1969: lvi), and the avatar is a *re*-embodiment and an active physical presence in space. This has had implications for the relationship between practice and research. While I was first writing this section, there were two performances by SaveMe Oh from which I produced videos, *Here is your Sandwich, you Spoiled Thing* (Canucci, 2018c) and *In A Bowl* (Canucci, 2018d). I cannot ignore everything else while writing academically: I have to remain *socially engaged* in the place by *being there*, as an *embodied presence*, while being *artistically creative*, in order to remain socially credible and to accumulate the embodied knowledge (Klein, 2010) out of which I can write and create. It is necessarily a fragmented approach and structure which allows me to 'move alongside' (Hillyer, 2013: 17) the work with which I am engaged.

Behind Mikhail Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* (1981) is the view that nothing is entirely new and the old is never supplanted; instead there is a continual reworking of existing material that introduces new ideas and layers of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981; Frølund, 2013; Manovich, 1996). Creative expression, then, is about a distinctive voice and elements of uniqueness

rather than complete difference (Morris, 2017: 44). Following Bakhtin, Lisbeth Frølund explores what she calls ‘hybrid animated text’ (2013: 88), taking a broad view of comparable ‘texts’ as any kind of intentional artistic device. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued, language and art are different modes of signification that cannot substitute perfectly for one another, but neither has primacy (Johnson, 1993). Nick Sousanis, a graphic artist and an academic, claimed that the boundaries of language can easily be mistaken by the borders of reality, and so ignores the possibility that the ‘visual provides expression where words fail’ (2015: 52, 59). But writing, drawing and weaving, again returning to the idea of textility, have a shared aspect in the practice of *graphein* as the graphic form (Mitchell, 1997: 328). It was the historic *limitation* of computers that divided script into ‘Word’ and graphic into ‘Paint’ or ‘Draw’⁴, which lingers on in academia with visual methods still having to justify themselves against the ‘Discipline of Words’ (Mead, 2009). But the older technologies of pen or pencil could do either words or graphics through the process of mark-making. Type may have ‘symbolical signification’ (*OED Online*, 2017d), but is still mark-making, and the choice of typeface or font is often a question of aesthetics. Using unconventional forms reasserts the rich possibilities of the graphic as sculptured or drawn marks; the ‘graphy’ as varied ‘processes or styles of writing, drawing, or graphic representation’ (*OED Online*, 2017b), and the glyph as ‘sculptured and drawn marks’ (*OED Online*, 2017a).

‘The traditional reading path for writing is linear, chronological, and causative, while that for images is spatial, juxtapositional, and comparative’ (Krauth, 2014: 71–2). In *Unflattering*, a graphic novel that came from his PhD thesis, Nick Sousanis (2015) graphically contested the forcing of written prose on research, as a constraint that channels and curtails the thought

4 Microsoft came to dominate the personal computer market with these programmes. Apple chose ‘Pages’, while the old Amstrad PCW had ‘LocoScript’.

process, resulting in a uniformity of product and leaving only ‘flatness’. This reflected a long running argument about the standardisation of research, where searchability, ‘calculability, predictability, efficiency and control’ (Bryman and Beardsworth, 2006: 4) become more important than innovative methods, thought and analysis.

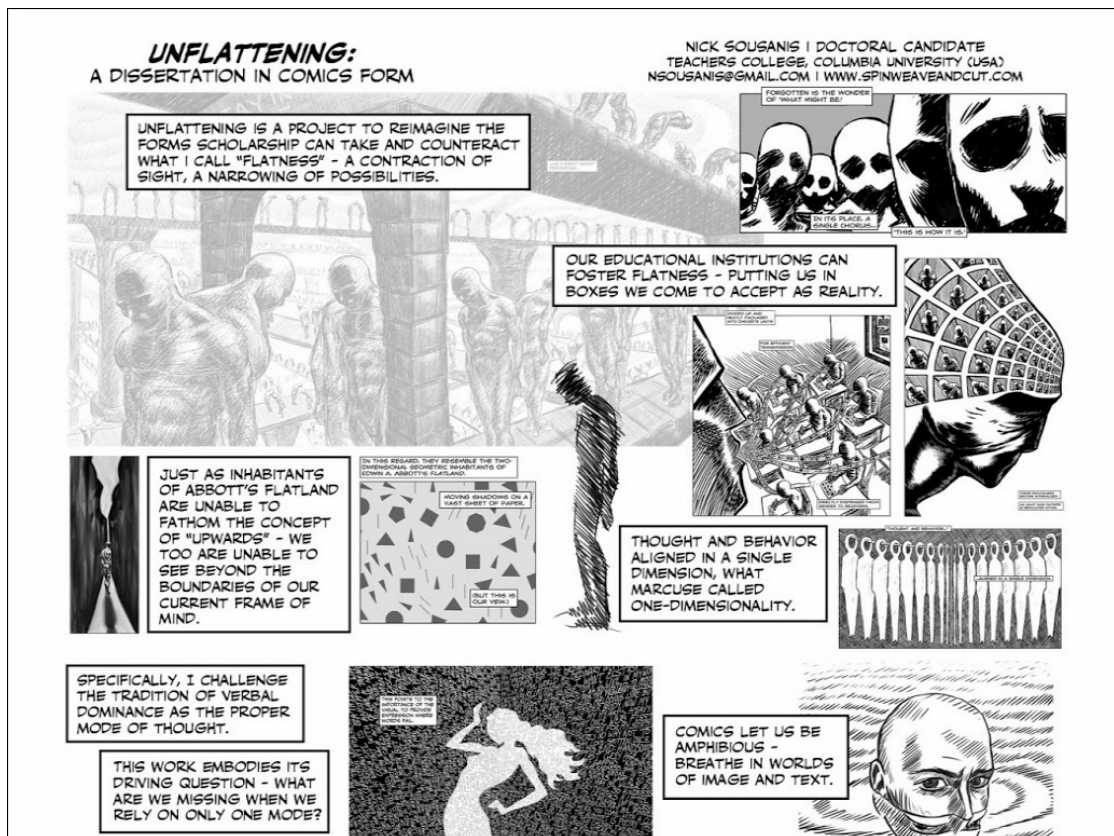


Illustration 14: A page from *Unflattening* (Marshall, 2015) by Nick Sousanis, in which he explores alternative visual ways of presenting academic study to make more complex connections. (This reproduced page is in the public domain).

By combining text and graphics in a visual flow Sousanis related ideas in different ways, shifting informational density and pace through his book, as shown in Illustration 14. I choose to write part of this PhD, but the graphic elements, including the illustration within the writing, the video art practice, and the printmaking practice matter as much. This written work is not self-contained either in time or space, and certainly expands into dimensions

beyond that of the flat page, and similarly within my video art, words and graphics actively work together.

Communication across time and space:

film, image-space, and text and typography

Jai McKenzie's view of photomedia, as referred to in Chapter 3, has three essential elements: light, space and time. Out of that structure emerges image-space, which is the end result of the capture, circulation and interpretation of images (2014: 4). This section considers the idea of image-linked-to-space and communication, before I move on to a wider discussion of space and time in the next chapter.

The history of machinima is rooted in contestation and reinterpretation of the games studio's intent, even if the form has increasingly become commodified and the rebelliousness stylised, as discussed in Chapter 3. In my own work, I always want to add to, reinterpret or occasionally challenge the original intention; I do not want to be too direct, but I include some ambiguity and obscuring, even though it has to remain coherent and comprehensible. It is in those moments of uncertainty that the viewer has to think, relating what they see to their own experience and making their own interpretations. I want to say something, but I don't want to say everything, which means having some idea of how the audience *might* respond – a point I will return to later. Lyn Hejinian (2001) claimed open texts recognise that language is unable to encompass either the world or the imagination that engages with it; David Bellos, as a translator phrases it poetically; 'Words on the page... hang like a dark veil over what a piece of written language means' (2012: 103). Writing contains many meanings, often transitory and unfixed, that become detached with time (Bishop, 2006: 44); we may want text to solidify language, but both people and language are too fluid (Allersley, 2018:

4). This mixture of obscuring and revealing is as true for the visual as for the written word, but the gaps or veils lie in different places, and creatively combining the two creates new patterns of understanding.

While the job of the film editor is usually seen as seamlessly moving the viewer from one scene to the next, film editing was transformed in the early twentieth century by the realisation that film did not need to show continuous action for an audience to follow it. It could be cut and displaced and a narrative would still be understood: the plot is not lost at the first full stop in writing nor the first cut in film. We learn and understand the conventions, sometimes appreciating or subverting, though the need to learn reveals them as culturally specific (Murch, 2001: 5–9; Nagels, 2012; Tagg, 1988).

Considering literature, Lyn Hejinian concurred with Yuri Tynianov (1978) that they are dynamic and ‘unfold’ outside of the temporal and into the spatial, so resisting closure and going beyond the physical sense of ink on paper. But his view that pure motion does not need time elevates a work to something that is inherently and essentially of worth, irrespective of the process of writing or reading. Art exists in the same ‘interaction or struggle’ as poetry (Tynianov, 1978) and it is inconceivable that this process can happen outside of time, just as the writer, maker, reader or viewer cannot escape time as a human being. This is unambiguously demonstrated by film and video, as the audio element is inherently connected to time.



Illustration 15: Ludwig van Beethoven – Sketches for the String Quartet Op. 131 (Beethoven, 1825; Tuppen, 2013).

Music may be transcribed *spatially* as a score on a page, as shown in Illustration 15, and video editing software creates a visual representation of the sound by showing a timeline of joins and edits, as shown in Illustrations 16 and 17, in addition to the visuals. But these transcripts, scores and edits remain silent and inert until played through in time.

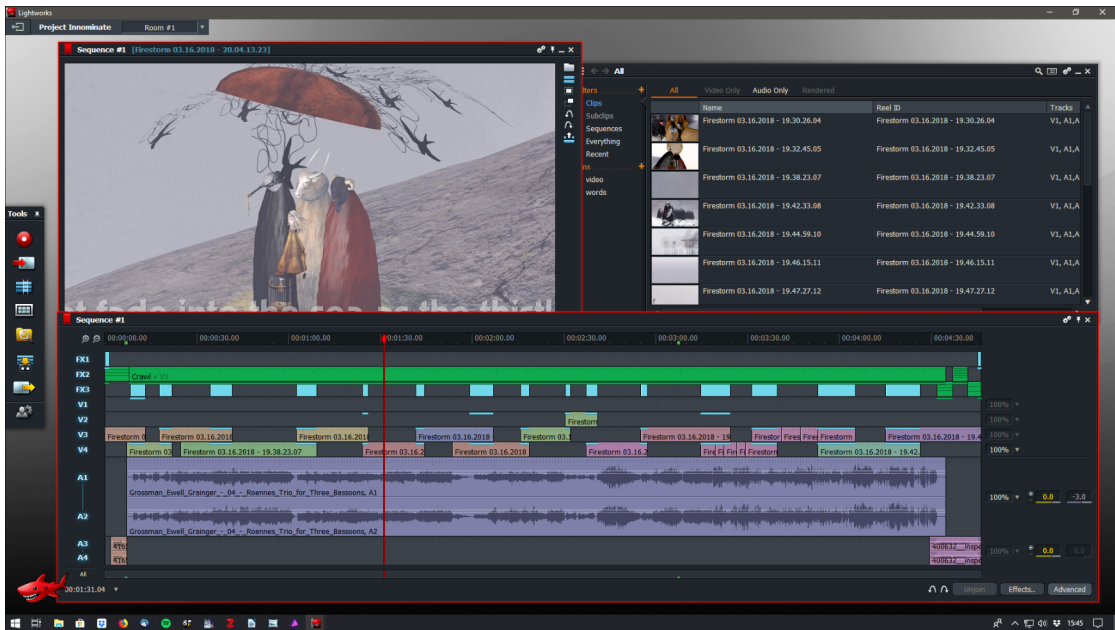


Illustration 16: *Innominato* (Canucci, 2018e) editing, using Lightworks software. Lines V1-V4 are visual editing channels and the blocks visual clips. A1-A4 are sound channels, showing volume information as a waveform. FX1-FX3 are effects channels, graphically showing the transitions between the clips (in blue) and text (in green).

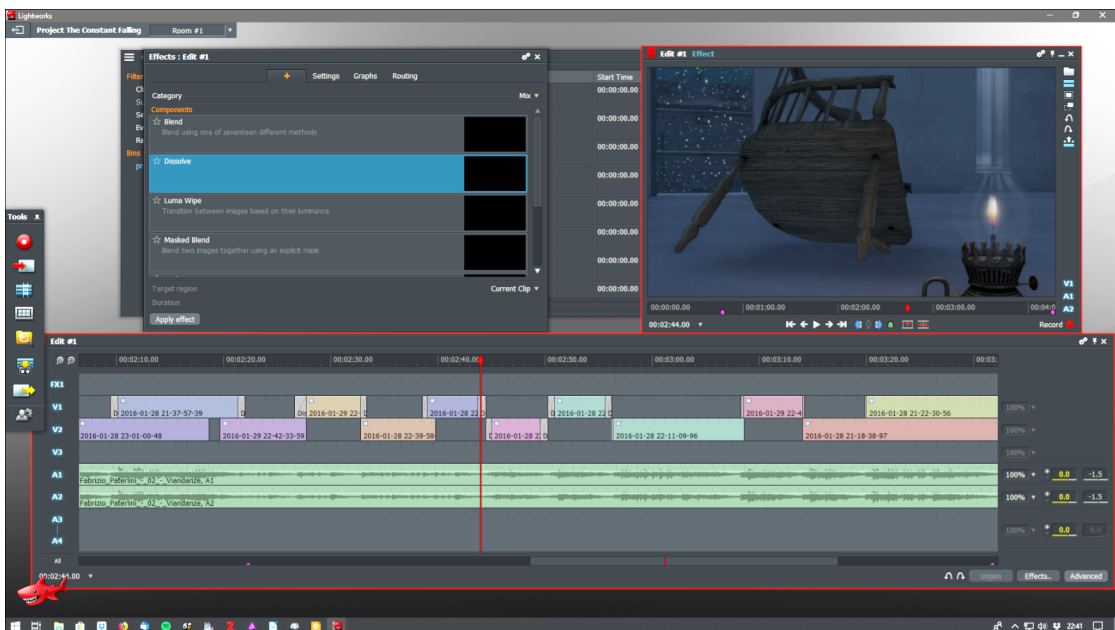


Illustration 17: *The Constant Falling* (Canucci, 2016i) editing, in Lightworks (newer version). The pace of the finished video is not just about movement within the image nor by the length of each clip, but in the transitions – the grey areas. This is most noticeable where two edits are placed with a ‘pause’ of black set up between.

A text or a work is not uniquely separate as one thing or the other, but a part of ‘a trail *along* which life is lived’ (Ingold, 2006: 13); it is about being *in*, rather trying to be analytical *about* (Ingold, 2006: 10). Aaron Hillyer claimed that literature evades essential classification as it *looks beyond* what it *is*. This is like Tim Ingold’s concept of animism (2006: 10, 14), which is not something that imputes life into something inert but a kind of transformative, dynamic potential that brings all kinds of things and beings into life and existence, continually and reciprocally. In the animic ontology, beings do not simply occupy the world, they *inhabit* it, weaving threads in the mesh of personal and social experience. In literature, the ‘essence’ can never be found as it is always being created anew (Hillyer, 2013: 9); it neither holds to the work, the writer or the reader, but it is in and between the threads of experience that are in constant movement (Ingold, 2006: 14). As Anton Würth said of his own artists’ books, linear plot, is substituted by the model of expansion, by the weaving together of the individual parts, creating the possibility of jumping in from different angles, of anticipating as well as reverting’ (2018: 157).

Antoine Compagnon is also concerned with the experience of self, and the movement that goes on: ‘practically we live and we read somewhere between... a double experience, ambiguous and divided: between understanding and loving, between philology and allegory, between freedom and constraint, between attention to the other and concern for the self’ (2004: 122). The gaps are psychologically in tension but none the less productive, and this is something I see in my own work. I make it for myself, yet I remain concerned that others can engage with it; I want to be able to express my thoughts but not perfectly without compromise and thought; I do not want to be so clear that I become predictable; I want to be understood but do not want to tell the viewer what to think. As Derek Jarman put it, when asked how he imagined his work, ‘The truth is I didn’t – you start with one thing and end with another’ (2018: 203). It is these spaces between

reader and author, object and self that reveal the ‘essential role of the human in its very taking place’ (Murray, 2011: 169). I write my thoughts with my aesthetics, out of which the viewer can make their narrative.

In poetry, the question of space takes on an inherent and combined relationship across the literal and literary. Philip Gross, a practising poet, spoke of the centrality of silence in poetry; ‘between the lines, we [the poet] plant the seeds, hints and implications of the unsaid, the unspoken irony, the clue withheld’ (2018: 11). The ‘white spaces’ are essential – gaps in(between) the words that are for filling or leaving, but primarily for thinking in. It is not mechanical punctuation, more of a double-take in a ‘white water slalom of sense’ (Gross, 2018: 11). For poetry, the physical arrangement of black marks and white spaces on the page are essential to the poem’s capacity for meaning; what is there explicitly and implicitly (rather than presence or absence, meaning and not-meaning) establishes rhythmic and harmonic flow. For Agamben, a poem is a linguistic form that deactivates language’s communicative and informative role so as to open new meanings and uses; a contemplation of language by language (2008: 140). To fragment or reconfigure it loses meaningful content, in the same way that cropping a photograph can change its meaning profoundly (Wells and Price, 2004). A poem is simultaneously a visual medium, expressed in a physical space, and a textual one, transported by reading into a new space of meaning, revived temporally by sound and performance.

Similarly, the sketch by Beethoven for a music score in Illustration 15 is mark-making where the white spaces and black marks on the page represent sound, qualities of sound, the spacing and absence of sound, and its capacity for meaning. In video editing, where two grey dissolves butt up against each other, as shown in Illustration 17, there is hesitation, a moment of black, that creates the same effect as white space on a page. The relative importance of

these spaces led to Agamben (2002: 317) claiming that cinema is closer to poetry than to prose; the playing with space and time, harmonics and rhythm, are significant factors that poetry, music, film and video editing have in common, but also games (Huizinga, 1949: 158).

Johannes Goebel argued that poetry has more in common with the performance and time based arts of dance, theatre and music, as it is intended to be read carefully and often aloud, so determining its own rhythm and pace (2017). The verse form provided inspiration for my practice, including the poets Edward Thomas (Canucci, 2017c), Rainer Maria Rilke (Canucci, 2016f), and Geoffrey Chaucer (Canucci, 2017g), but also in how I constructed text, for instance in *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e).

Giorgio Agamben sets up his discussion of Guy Debord's attitude to film and cinema using the term 'poetics' (2002: 313), so choosing to consider the relationship to aesthetics rather than to the techniques of a specific media form. The association between film and poetics has been identified, along with minimalism and assemblage, as one of the three strands of American poetic avant-garde film, though Claire Bishop suggested might be the 'avant-garde baton' (2012b) adopted by digital art to give it contemporary relevance. It also brings together features of my practice, which is often not directly narrative, and is unpredictable, unconventional, and based on my personal 'way of seeing' places and events (Peterson, 1994: 31–2). As in Hayao Miyazaki's animations for Studio Ghibli, the aim is primarily emotion not logic, as the partially understood provokes curiosity, whereas clarifying meaning through being explicit dispels the work's interest (Criswell, 2015).

Narrative can be seen in terms of movement that 'moves across a series of contingencies toward a... conclusion' (Mink, 1981: 782–3). Movement too is neither neutral nor passive, but an active doing in space and time. Narratives

are not something that occur naturally in the world, but are produced by people from life events, including cultural products such as film and writing, as a cognitive process of making sense of the world (Becker, 1997). When Umberto Eco (1989: 97) argued that an ink blot goes from being random to having significance if the paper was folded over to make a mirror image pattern, he essentialised significance in the physical manipulation. But pattern detection is core to human perception, a feature of which is pareidolia and imaginative perceiving, where people involuntarily see patterns in the accidental, abstract or random (Thomas, 2018). We cannot avoid seeking meaning, connections and patterns, even if the artist or author intended otherwise. And so too, art is not about transmitting pure understanding. Spectators or readers are *interpreters*, and we are all *translators* who *appropriate* works for our own meaning-making (Bishop, 2006: 16). It is the gaps left for the imagination that makes an artistic work interesting: saying too much closes down ambiguity or multiple interpretations and leaves no room for development or imagination; keeping a work open is an act of communication of *something, never nothing*, sited in a range of possibilities (Eco, 1989: 103). In the case of landscapes, Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton argue that there always implicit narratives, which are not obvious to most people, but are present and inscribed on places and based in experience and objects (1998: 19); this is how I think of narrative emerging from virtual spaces in my own video work.

For prose works, layout on the page is usually a concern of the publishers, and an exercise of aesthetics and acceptable design and typographic practice undertaken by someone other than the author. The exceptions are generally those that are unconventional or debatable narrative forms, such as instruction manuals, cookery books and poetry (Waldman, 1981), and creative media that offer fragmentary narrative structures, including comic art, graphic novels, zines and artists' books (Eliot, 2018: 38). My own first

book on food, finished prior to my studies, was built from threaded narratives, a page from which is shown in Illustration 18. There are two visual threads and multiple textual and thematic threads woven through the book, some of which run the length of the book, others for a few pages. I saw through all stages of writing and design, as the integration of the visual composition was as integral to the work as the components. To ‘flatten’ (Sousanis, 2015) the text by removing the visual structure would lose levels of meaning almost to the point of making it unintelligible.



Illustration 18: Page from *The Lake District in Recipes and Photographs* (Baxter, 2012). There are four threads, three textual and one photographic, that run through the book, overlapping and connecting, but not visible on every page. This page is one where all four are present.

Comic art further explores this; ‘white space’ between the visuals is important to the form, and separates the panels visually, but has a spatial and temporal significance that reconnects the text and gives room for thinking, as

demonstrated well in Illustration 19. It also deliberately subverts and plays with its own form by bridging the white space: once again, translating the looping narrative into linear text would lose the idea.



Illustration 19: Page from the comic art book, *Invincible: Justice and Fresh Vegetables* (Jousselin, 2018), showing how the form works with space. (Image originally published on twitter, and permission to reproduce here granted by Pascal Jousselin).

Silent film developed a relationship with text early in its development, with pages of text edited into the action to provide narration, information or commentary⁵. The predominant view was that they were necessary, but some commentators regarded them ‘as a literary intrusion into what should be purely visual territory’ (Nagels, 2012: 374). However, reflecting the idea of blank space and mark-making, the critic Epes Winthrop Sargent claimed the interruption allowed space for thought, while the filmmaker Jean Epstein regarded them as an essential visual ‘punctuation mark’. Boris Eikhenbaum claimed intertitles were ‘an artistic device of very great importance’, echoing the prevalent opinion of Soviet theorists. The surrealist poet, Robert Desnos, claimed that words, and visuals, and ‘everything that can be projected... letters as well as faces’, belonged (cited in Nagels, 2012: 374–5), which is an approach I have often taken in my own work; for example, see Illustrations 22, 23 and 24).

However, the idea that film should be narrative, literal or ‘stand as evidence’ was not natural or inevitable, but the outcome of history, cultural process and institutional practices in a system of power (Nagels, 2012; Tagg, 1988: 4–5). John Tagg (1988: 18–9) pointed out that the development of popular photography and film was determined by the industrial processes and the commercial interests of multinational companies. Eastman Kodak, for instance, promoted photography for its ability to record family and leisure activities, rather than its potential for artistic expression (Holland, 2004: 138–144). Nonetheless, every photographic image, still or moving, is the result of choices and the construction of meanings.

5 Originally called subtitles, they became known as intertitles when sound was introduced. ‘Subtitles’ then took on their current meaning as a continuous written version of the dialogue overlaid on the film (Nagels, 2012: 369).

‘On paper typography tells us great stories. On movie screen it opens and ends them’ (de Fournas, 2013). In his video on typography, this is written over two sequential frames, which are shown side by side in Illustration 20.

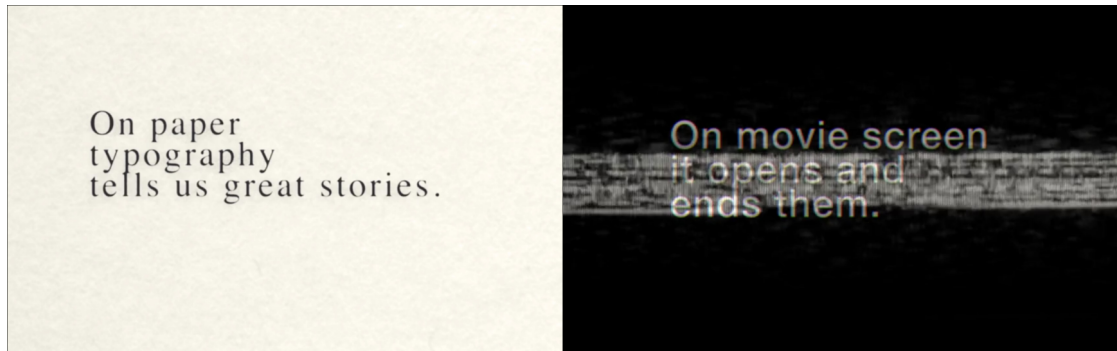


Illustration 20: Two stills from the video *From Paper to Screen* (de Fournas, 2013)

The choices of typeface, layout, colour and effects all add additional meaning, and are not just surface appearance (Lupton, 2009b) as ‘writing oscillates between language and image’ (Würth, 2018: 153). On the left, Thibault de Fournas used a serif typeface developed from early Roman styles based on pen and ink for print legibility; on the right a more contemporary non-serif font intended for better legibility on screens (Lupton, 2009a). The background texture of paper (left), and the colour fringing on the letters and video glitch (right) emulates and emphasises the texture of the medium on which they were supposedly printed on. The layout is as significant as in poetry, even if missed by most people; for instance, the droppers and risers touch which typographically is a choice not an accident. This argument could have been presented in words only, but the visual has more immediacy; even then some was lost in converting the moving video to a still image for this page. Visuals provide layers of information that can be assimilated simultaneously using different ways of understanding (Martin and Álvarez López, 2017), which emphasises the significance of space and time in meaning making.

However, including intertitles is now a conscious act for mainstream film, as for example Quentin Tarantino did in *The Hateful Eight* (2015) to mirror chapters in a book. In my own work, I freely incorporate text, which in part reflects my background and interest in graphic design and my love of typographic aesthetics. However, it is also a response to the limitations of machinima, where lip-sync is very poor, and in my opinion, the realism of a human voice does not sit well with the stylised visuals, as discussed previously. Voice and text are different ways of communicating and are not interchangeable word for word. In my own video art, I've felt that a poetic rather than a prose approach works better, with the words unfolding in lines through space and time.

The Bridge (Part 3):

Bridging words and visuals in my own practice

We create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representation (Mitchell, 1986: 46).

In the *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g) each character appears in turn in a moving image alongside a letter – a graphic recoloured from artwork scanned from public domain copies of *The Canterbury Tales* (British Library, 2013). Illustration 21 shows one example, without any accompanying words, from the first part of the video work.



Illustration 21: Still from the first section of *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g)

There are other allusions rather than direct references: the title of the work and the voice over, which is a reading of *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, Lines 1-18* (Hughes, 2007). The explanation of meaning comes at the end, when still images of the character and their letter are combined with text. The two lines of text sometimes are a direct translation in modern English of Chaucer's Middle English, sometimes they are my adaptation of the translation which deliberately plays with differences between then and now, and sometimes they are new text I wrote. Illustration 22 is from the last part of the video work where text appears alongside the letter, and shows the different approaches. 'Host' is myself as creator of the work and speaking my own biographical text, reflecting personality and identity as plural and alluding to all of the avatars in the video being mine. 'Miller' is again my text and a complete recreation of the Chaucer character for twenty-first century relationships with alcohol. 'Nun' was a blended text, the first line from the translation of Chaucer, the second a sly comment on Second Life sexuality. 'Clerk' are Chaucer's words, but I recognised a biographical connection.



Illustration 22: Host, Miller, Nun, Clerk from *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g). Each ‘acted’ in the first part, given an initial but no name. Through the end section, in stills images, they are named alongside verse.

A different approach was taken in *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e), which was made at a Second Life location, *Delicatessen* (Minotaur and Ragu, 2018), where visitors were challenged to write a story. I chose not to, and instead ‘no-named’ the work and put together a set of words drawn from features I saw in a ‘random’ stream – a still from the video is shown in Illustration 23. But I was aware that games create spaces for narrative to happen (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 387) without being asked, and that it is impossible to put together a string of words out of which meaning, and narrative, cannot be drawn (Waldman, 1981).

Flowers read towers revolving around birds and strange
 mountains that fade into the sea as the thistledown blows and
 swirling cities draw the couple while patterned cages’ cold
 creatures jerk words that fall to the blow of music marching

across the sky as processions bloom in grey branches (Canucci, 2018e).



Illustration 23: Still from *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e).

This idea returns to the relationship between the virtual and the actual, and demythologising the digital as exceptional, as Pierre Lévy claimed all reading was transformative, as it actualised text in a different space-time from where and when it was written; ‘the reader’s work involves tearing, rubbing, twisting, and repiecing the text to create a living environment in which meaning can be established’ (1998: 47–8). It is not a question of being ‘real’, ‘false’ or ‘virtual’; it is a cycle between the virtualised text and the actualised meaning.

Damian Sutton (2009: 144) applied Philip Sturgess’s literary criticism term of ‘narrativity’ to describe the *immanence and emergence* of story out of the photographic image. Narrativity only has movement and intensity, whereas narrative is a set of events involving a narration as a way of telling. This definition of narrativity presents a different way of considering games – as

Salen and Zimmerman argued, it is not a question of *whether* games are narratives, but *how* they are narratives (2004: 379). Narrativity also constitutes a form of translation, alternating between the ‘distinctness of narrative and transparency of narration’ (Sutton, 2009: 144). Narrativity explicitly extends beyond the content of the film or the writing, as the author draws on other texts and influences, and the viewer on their own experiences and cultural expectations. In mainstream cinema, the narrative has a directness that makes the editing and the narration ‘transparent’, a result of the cinema’s evolutionary history. In alternative cinema, however, narrative is subordinate, and so narrativity becomes more significant (Sutton, 2009: 158–9). As in an artists’ book, in this approach to video making ‘each single letter is a visual event’ that relates to space and shape (Würth, 2018: 144).

My last specific example is *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e), which draws together film and poetics, a feature of avant-garde film mentioned earlier (Peterson, 1994: 10). My words echo both the visuals and the lyrics of the chosen music, *Junction City Fields* (The Fucked Up Beat, 2017), establishing a film-poem. The connections are allusions to descriptions, or a mirroring of features; the valve radio seen in the video (Illustration 24, top) is echoed by the music, which incorporated an indistinct speech from the past. The title of the music itself has a parallel with a feature of the Second Life location, the rusted railway locomotive standing in a field of straw (Illustration 24, middle). The reference to rippling has multiple connections; wind through the fields, the lines in the skin that I chose for my avatar, and a reference to my own stage of life (Illustration 24, bottom). My life experience and interests lead me to seeing words as having linguistic meaning, as making connections through association, and having form as geometric marks, and that these relationships are fluid and variable in strength. As Grace Lee identified as a key feature in the films of David Lynch, it is in interest in the ‘thingness of words’ that goes beyond linguistic intent, for ‘naming changes,

contaminates and defines', but word and object are 'imperfect translations' as there is never a complete match (2018: 03:40, 06:10).



Illustration 24: Poster (top) and two stills from *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e).

In my own practice I work with, and play with, the ‘thingness of words’. For titles, I sometimes pull phrases from local chat in Second Life, or from the other videos that I have incorporated, for example, *Here is your Sandwich, you Spoiled Thing*, *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo* and *He’s Watching You* (Canucci, 2016b, 2018c, 2018j). In others, I take an aspect of the content and blend it using a play on words, which includes *Repeat Hikari*, *white on indigo*, *OK, OK* and *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g, 2017h, 2018h, 2018i). I have used analogies with other art forms, such as *Symphony for a Lost King* and *Art in Two Acts*. (Canucci, 2016g, 2018a). Sometimes, but rarely, they get straight, descriptive titles, for example *Breaking Ice: a 70 Year Story* and *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017b, 2017c). While the translations made between virtual world and film, between viewing and understanding and between object and writing all result in the *loss* of meaning, ambiguities including naming oblige the reader or viewer to add a different and personal view, so revitalising meaning (Lee, 2018: 8:24, 10:05; Würth, 2018: 136, 149).

The textual and the visual are, for me, varying forms of expression with different characteristics. Because I use text so much within my work, I am interested in those visual and written textures of similarity and comparability. I am going to pull out some words and phrases to lead us into the next chapter. Holes. Reweaving. Universe... collides. Entanglements. Flows. Black marks and white spaces. Cross-country course. Spatial descriptions that exist in, or are processes through, time. In the next chapter I discuss space and time more widely, picking up ideas from both this chapter and the one before.

5 Space and time: 'Being there' as creative process

games spaces are inherently spatial and navigable as (re)'embodied practice' (Hjorth and Richardson, 2014: 61).

Space is inherent to virtual worlds, as it is in the actual world. Virtual worlds are three-dimensional 'spaces for living' (Baldwin and Achterberg, 2013: 8), and avataric existence is an exercise in spatial re-embodiment in another world by association, both physically and 'in the mind' (Boellstorff, 2008: 8). Linden Lab use the word 'residents' for the users of Second Life which reflects this position, rather than the overly optimistic terminology of 'democratisation' and 'community' used by social media platforms. Regarding the virtual as unreal is an error; virtual and actual worlds are both parts of the *real* world (Lehdonvirta, 2010; Lévy, 1998), as discussed previously, and this will be reinforced in this chapter. Cyberian apartness (Miller and Slater, 2000: 5) is a perceptual belief that comes out of a sense of 'being elsewhere', and of presence and immersivity, but disregards the commonalities of realities. We navigate both as embodied beings, as 'things among things' (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 136), taking our own space within a spatial geography. The act of making machinima is itself an exercise in navigating and recording three-dimensional space, which is something it has in common with film and cinema. This chapter will explore these interconnected ideas further.

'Being there': immersivity and presence

Artists, whether in virtual or actual space, work with a haptic visuality that experiences and understands the space they are in through multiple senses, not just the visuality of the eye (Marks, 2000: 162). We may use a limited set of movements, but to claim it is only the 'cognitive processing of symbols, not immediate physical or sensory reactions... only indirectly conveyed by the

screen... [and] is categorically different from that of touching other materials or even other people' (Rosa, 2019: 97–8) is to over-simplify. Eliot is more subtle, seeing the artists' book as 'the reverse vortex of the digital world' where ideas, being multi-sensory, and tactility matters (2018: 52). And yet the 'being there' matters in all social and physical situations, whatever the relative merits, because having the sense of capturing both the significant and the banal is important (Welsh, 2016: 93). Creating art in those situations becomes an interpretative, technical and aesthetic 'problem' that has to be worked through from the material that is available, or alternatively an improvised performance, with a loose, more immediate feel (Cameron and Carroll, 2011: 137).

Being in an art space leads to the creator and the audience becoming a part of the work, both physically and intellectually (Hawkins, 2010: 324). Consequently, writing and researching simultaneously becomes a process of *being within* the work and *creating an extension out of* the work, something that I often deliberately work with. This relationship with place and the body positions the researcher-artist within a project of 'creative geography' (Garrett and Hawkins, 2014: 145–6), which has close parallels to autoethnographic intent through the importance of embodied presence and the desire to express cultural experience to outside audience. The researcher has to be skilled in using the techniques of their creative form, and not just the conventions – it is about 'building a cognitive and sensory relationship with technology' (Garrett and Hawkins, 2014: 152). As mentioned previously, the banal matters – activities on the internet happen in relation to everyday tasks and may affect social relations and structures in both those online spaces and the actual world. It is never truly an 'escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness' (Miller and Slater, 2000: 5); the technology merely facilitates, and does not determine, the sense of being in 'a world apart' (IJsselsteijn, 2005: 1–2).

However, presence and immersion – of determining being apart – are sought after ideals for games developers. Each of them has been defined separately, and they are closely linked in conveying ‘a sense of places, being and things that are not here’ (IJsselsteijn, 2005: 15). The problem with the recent surge in virtual reality was the belief that the technology would *create* immersivity: ‘The Goggles Fallacy’ of the VR headset (Koster, 2017 36:30-39:30).

Underlying that fallacy is another, the ‘Immersive Fallacy’, that claims that a perfectly realistic world will make the interface and frame fall away so the player believes they are a part of that world (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 450–1; Welsh, 2016: 2). But John Dewey, writing well before ‘the digital’ in 1934, argued that *immersion* was a state *short* of being a totalising experience – it was *saturation* that established ‘an immersion so complete that the qualities of the object and the emotions it arouses have no separate existence’ (2005: 289). He further argued that *interest* was also significant, as an identification of the self with material objects that combined human interaction and process. The idea of *presence* is also not a new concept but has a long history in stage, cinema, and photography (IJsselsteijn, 2005). It is the sense ‘being there’ rather than a spectator, which dates back in literature to Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* – where concerns were expressed about the dangerous effects romances might have on the susceptible mind (Welsh, 2016: 2).

The conclusion I draw from the above is that the terminology is loose, and ‘immersion’ is too often used as a ‘catch-all’ phrase (or sales hype) that misses the complex range of experiences, affects and emotions that people experience. The fundamental flaw with the ‘Immersive Fallacy’ is to believe the gap between representation and reality can be closed to make them identical; the gap is essential, for it is ‘where the magic happens’ (Lantz, 2005: 02:07-02:26). Rather, immersion is a seduction and a drawing in, creating a knowing experience of ‘attentive audienceship’ (Welsh, 2016: viii),

and relies on creating a believable fictional universe, rather than a realistic, unambiguous illusion (Welsh, 2016: 29). Michel Marie claimed similarly, in the case of the French New Wave films of Jean-Luc Godard, that it was not about pulling in the viewer and holding them there, but a series of drawings ins and releases (2003: 92). Timothy Welsh (2016), as primarily a literary scholar but also writing about games, argued that the experience was not about being totally ‘in’ or ‘out’, but rather was a *movement in perception* where we remain *simultaneously* immersed and observing; like the two sides of a Möbius strip which change visibility but are always present and connected (2016: viii). This is a similar, but more concise than Merleau Ponty’s analogy in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he first likens the sensible and sentient to two leaves, then argues they are inseparable as one, but finally argues it is not quite so, as it flattens the body (1969: 137–8). But these complex ideas coincide with Claire Bishop’s view of participatory art: that a more ‘honest position’ is needed than a binary choice between active or passive spectatorship (2012a: 8).

Some digital artists may simply want you to look at the surface, rather than ‘through’ as Jay David Bolter and Diane Gromala (2003: 59) suggest, but I agree with Marcus Banks that the visual image is an ‘intertwining’ of the material, the social and cultural, and form and content (2001: 50). I aim to present appearances and places but to sometime confuse and disorientate, not to ‘fully analyze or explain... [but to] *re-compose*’ (Bresson, 1997: 20). Laura Marks described these as haptic images that ‘move on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realizes what she or he is beholding’ (2000: 162–3). Indeed, virtual worlds are not fundamentally about appearances, but about actions on the server that are selectively rendered on the screen (Koster, 2017 36:30-39:30). By drawing attention to the artifice of Second Life at chosen times, I lead the viewer to try to explain for themselves the interplay between the recognised and the partially recognised.

In my own work, I am aware that not all of my audience understands the virtual world I create art out of, or the context of the archive material that I mix in. I am conscious of trying to break down the material to make it interestingly abstract, rather than unintelligible. The understanding of the art viewer is influenced by their view of the technology and processes that created and now present it, in a social rather than a purely aesthetic experience (Benjamin, 2008; Gell, 1992; Marres, 2017: 55). It is by looking at as well as looking through; if we only look *through* the interface, we cannot appreciate the ways in which the interface shapes our experience (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 12). Indeed the ideology of the frictionless interface in the name of user-friendliness turns computers into devices on which to consume content rather than to read or write it (Emerson, 2014: xi). And it is when writers are most aware of the way interfaces can conceal processes, create material limits and limit possibilities that ‘highly visual, tactile, literary object[s]’ emerge, with tangential rather than direct links to pre-existing literary forms (Emerson, 2014: xiv). To look at the world as if through a clear window is merely a rhetorical strategy (Geertz, 1988: 141); moving from one side of the window to the other, from one world to another and back, at times seamlessly and at others revealing what lies between, is where the inventiveness of creativity lies.

Space, place, locality

Space, place and locality are used and given differing meanings by different theorists, but in the context of this work, I regard the debate as more important than settling on particular definitions. The important point is that as humans we inhabit space, place and locality and this is where social and creative things happen, including making machinima. Virtual worlds provide open spaces for creativity, as environments where forms of locality and sociality can develop, in contrast to the attempts of social media corporations

to ‘engineer’ community in online spaces with all the idealised manufactured neighbourhood familiarity and deception of *The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998).

Arjan Appadurai talks in terms of *localities*, making a distinction between localities as an aspect of social *life*, and neighbourhoods as existing social *forms*. Localities are ‘primarily relational and contextual rather than... scalar or spatial.... a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts’ (Appadurai, 2003: 208). Favouring place as a term rather than locality, Tom Boellstorff argued that ‘Placemaking is absolutely foundational to virtual worlds’ (Boellstorff, 2008: 91). The characteristics of place are similar to locality, being both context-driven and context-generative. They are ephemeral unless worked on to maintain their materiality, yet their changing form is also characteristic. The materiality of places can be mistaken for ‘what it is’ and an end point, rather than seeing ‘locality as a structure of feeling’ (Appadurai, 2003: 210), or place as an aspect of culture indicating ‘a process, not a conclusion’ (Williams, 1961: 295).

In terms of how the internet works, Leah Lievrouw (2014) identified a triad of factors; *arrangements* of social relations, *artefacts* as the material tools and products and *practices* as ways of doing. Christine Hine compressed these factors one side of a dyad, a *cultural artefact*, and set it alongside a *space* where culture is formed and reformed (2000: 9). In combining these views, artefacts are physical and material manifestations of place, and culture reflects the process of creation. But Hine’s view presents ethnographic possibilities for observing cultural processes by going into online spaces, as field sites where it is possible to interact with people where things are happening.

An interest in space and place is also significant in the history of academic theory on both ‘traditional’ games and video games. The early 2000s were

characterised by some sharp exchanges between ludologists (Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, 2004) who attempted to establish a field for games theory on the basis that (online) games were a discreet, separate place where different social conventions applied, and other academics from various disciplines who saw them as a continuation from already existing cultural forms and social relations. Forty years before those exchanges, Erving Goffman in *Fun in Games* (1961) discussed what he called the ‘gaming encounter’, observing that in most game situations the game space has permeable boundaries, with participants moving in and out and others intervening. Bart Simon, drawing on Goffman, claimed that one is ‘never playing alone’ (2007), even in online spaces: there is always direct or indirect social or cultural interaction. The idea of the ‘digital dandy’, the flâneur exploring unconstrained by social and familial attachments, is the exception rather than the rule (Simon, 2007).

Both Simon and Goffman identify a flow between in-game and out-of-game, or in the terms used in virtual worlds, ‘in-world’ and ‘rl’ (‘real life’). In Second Life, ‘to go back to rl’ is a phrase used by residents to indicate their need to leave (across the permeable boundary), so tacitly acknowledging the simultaneous existence of both worlds. Etiquette determines that it is impolite to log out of Second Life abruptly when in the presence of others. Being in Second Life is a matter of diverted attention, rather than a complete transfer of being, a reflection of online and offline being connected and the relationship knowingly codified, forming levels of ‘mixed realism’ (Welsh, 2016) rather than totalised immersion. This confirms online communities as being *relatively* bounded and not *completely* separate (Hine, 2000: 27; Maddox, 2017: 11; Pink et al., 2016: 57, 102). Indeed, people’s lives and activities span both virtual and actual spaces and being ‘in-world’ is an integral part of life as a whole (Golub, 2010: 17 commenting on World of Warcraft), especially in games worlds with persistent environments. Persistent environments are online spaces that remain constantly active and ‘in play’, with players moving

in and out at will – game play does not stop because one or more players leave (Taylor, 2009: 21–65). Virtual worlds, are spaces for living without set game achievements or levels to complete and without a natural finish or conclusion, and represent dreams and aspirations (Au, 2020). They are also persistent environments; game spaces that remain active even when players leave. However, residents normally remain present in a sense, thinking about what has happened or will happen in-world; as Boellstorff claimed, the online and offline are mutually constitutive (2012: 50). Space and time are inseparable from experience, with knowledge of place, shared histories and biographical accounts building over time.

The sense of geographical space is always virtual, as it depends on having a map in one's head, or a paper map or an app such as Google maps (Illustration 26). All are *virtual representations* of the world, not the real thing, nor are they not strictly simulations as they approximate rather than replicate (Pink et al., 2016) and provide a selective, blended view of the world. Furthermore, virtual worlds are more than a simple mapping of space; Raph Koster (2017) argues that many of the 'real world' computer applications now in common use are virtualisations that are more accurately seen as partial virtual worlds than as stand-alone apps. He describes four subsets of virtual worlds, virtual worlds, mirror worlds, lifelogging and augmented reality (AR). The subset of virtual worlds is the original idea of virtual worlds, based on fictional places, but simply swap the data set for real places and one gets mirror worlds, such as Google maps. Lifelogging is a documentation of one's life, such as Facebook, Instagram or Strava, with Twitter a sparser chat version. AR is an overlay of one world over another, such as Pokemon GO, or Microsoft HoloLens. But what this shows is how 'the digital' is not just what happens in computers, nor is it fictional, invented spaces separate from the 'real world', as was the original idea of virtual worlds, but digital virtualisation is now widely pervasive through daily activities.

It is also important to recognise that aesthetics are a separate issue from the data. The movement of clients on the server, the records of the position of material and physical objects and avatars, and the chat logs, are the data; the overlay of visuals that are the graphical choice of designers, and users or residents or Second Life, are ‘merely’ the representation of that data. But there is an interesting continuity from the past; both Welsh (2016) and Koster (2017) argue that immersivity and presence existed before computers and ‘the digital’, indeed it originated and arguably remains most powerfully in text. But this is something I explore in more detail elsewhere, and I will now return to space and place.

As mentioned earlier, objects in ‘virtual’ environments have both physical properties and materiality (Miller and Horst, 2012) and the movement of physical objects, which includes avatars, from one place to another is inherent to living in the space. Each ‘region’ of Second Life may be a bounded cube on the map, the divisions being visible in Illustration 25, but they are easily moved between by teleport or avataric motion. As a spatial environment, Second Life is mapped to make it navigable (Linden Research Inc, 2018), and there is no difference between the two maps in Illustration 25 apart from the source of the data. Once in-world, the mapping system shows one’s locations and the direction one is facing, exactly as Google maps on a mobile does (Illustration 26).



Illustration 25: Above: Open Street Map (OpenStreetMap contributors, 2018).
Below: Second Life map (Linden Research Inc, 2018)

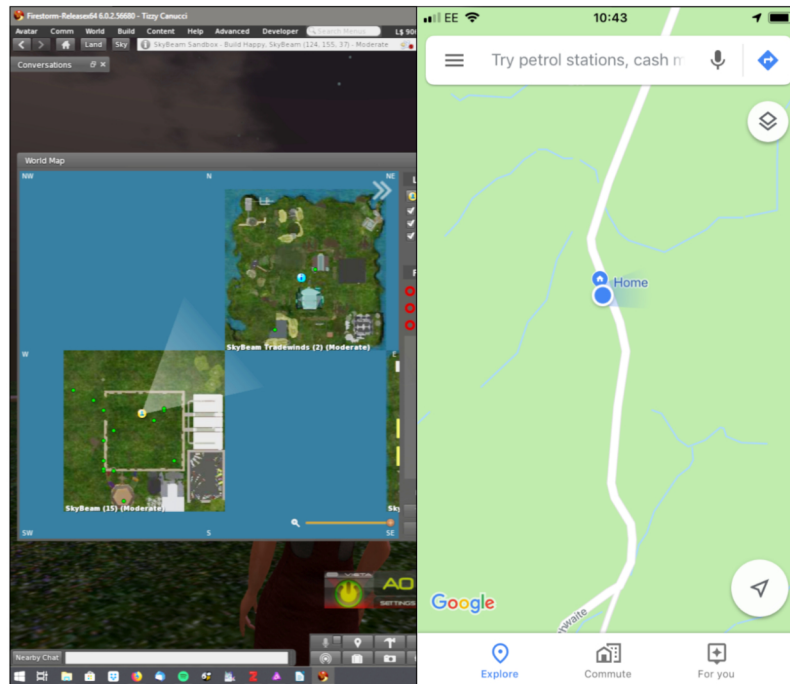


Illustration 26: Left: screenshot from Second Life, showing main map, location of my own avatar (yellow dot) with direction of view, and other avatars (green dots). Right: Google maps, showing my location (blue dot) and viewing direction.

The production of machinima can... be viewed as a cartographic practice, that is, a mapping of particular actions that trace out particular desires, including those of narrative, technical prowess, and expressions of pleasure. This perspective... acknowledge[s] the importance of the spatial... performances symptomatic of the desires... previous game experience and... cultural practices (Schott and Yeatman, 2011: 309).

Maps are not just about mapping space, but also processes of performance; of not just geography, but of emotion and the body; not only of static location, but also cultural processes. And machinima not only contribute to mapping the games world, but extends outside of it. Three clear examples of this comparative approach are *Future City* (Canucci, 2017e), *Breaking Ice: a 70 Year*

Story (Canucci, 2017b), and *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo* (Canucci, 2018j), stills from which are shown in Illustration 27.

Future City compares different visions of the city by overlaying a twenty-first century virtual world build (Ghost, 2017) with an American archive film, *The City* (Steiner and van Dyke, 1939), a left-leaning reformist envisaging of urban life in the United States. A comparable approach was taken with the audio, as the original soundtrack by Aaron Copeland and commentary by the sociologist Lewis Mumford (IMDb, 2019) was changed in pitch and mixed with contemporary music, *Hunted in the Capitalist Steppes/ Zero History*, which was composed by The Fucked Up Beat (2016), a band that also uses archive sound material.

The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo used a similar approach of overlaying material, in a visual juxtaposition of shipping containers in archive film and virtual world art. The virtual world material was filmed at an art installation in Second Life, *Non-perishable* by Marina Münter (2017, 2020b), and combined with *Industry on Parade: Outgoing Cargo, Workhorses of the Harbor, Refresher Course* (Dodd, 2011; National Association of Manufacturers, 1950s).

Breaking Ice: a 70 Year Story took a different visual approach, showing two video ‘tracks’ side by side, with a written commentary underneath that relates the two. It explores different perspectives on the Arctic, more in the style of an audiovisual essay (Martin and Álvarez López, 2017). It incorporates video recorded at a Second Life build, *Khodavarikha* (Footman and Koltai, 2017) based on an actual location on the Barent’s Sea (Footman, 2017), and an archive film, *The Great Northern Sea Route* (Frolenko, 1947), which was made just after the end of World War II as the USSR reopened the Barents Sea route for shipping.



Illustration 27: Stills of videos setting material from different worlds against each other. From top to bottom: *Future City* (Canucci, 2017e), *Breaking Ice: a 70 Year Story* (Canucci, 2017b), *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo* (Canucci, 2018j).

Combining material is an important aesthetic move in my work, and the use of thematically connected material, sometimes closely, sometimes tangential, is a tactic I seek. Occasionally this is explicit and formalised, as with *Breaking Ice*, but more often it is a way of filtering material, while leaving the connections for the viewer to find. But as a way of working, I am interested not in virtual worlds as bounded settings, but how they relate externally:

Instead... of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world... places are processes, too (Massey, 1994: 154–5)

This view, of places as social ‘goings on’ and not static locations, of existing in a wider social and cultural context and not isolated, is important to my work. The ‘production of locality’, as Appadurai (2003) called it, has had in Second Life over fifteen years to mature; it is not just about the physical appearance, which is ephemeral in virtual worlds, but a ‘structure of feeling’ (2003: 210).

The three machinima I have just discussed all incorporate archive material, which are not merely aesthetic objects from an archive but also have a time-specific cultural context. Two other videos, based on literary work, bring temporal relationships more to the fore. *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g) was a reworking of *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1997, 2000) in a virtual world, to compare and contrast the texts visually across time. It was a

generative approach influenced by academic ideas: the view expressed by Martin and Álvarez López (2017) on academic film analysis, and a description of the task of an ethnographer ‘to sound like a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time’ (Geertz, 1988: 10). A still from the end of the video is shown in Illustration 28 which shows the combination of Chaucer’s writing, scanned images and virtual world video. The detail of the relationship between Chaucer’s writing and my own text, was discussed in Chapter 4 with four smaller images in Illustration 22.



Illustration 28: Still from the final section of *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g)

Neither *The Digital Pilgrims* nor *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c), the next video I will discuss, came out of an analysis of what I ‘should’ make or what would be ‘best’. Both reflect what Barbara Christian called the ‘the tangle of background, influences, political perspectives, training’ (1990: 67) that researchers have, and I referred to previously in Chapter 3. When my father died, we found four tiles made in the 1970s based on *The Canterbury Tales*. We had no idea why he had them, but they are now framed on the wall in my office. *Edward Thomas* was one of the first world war poets I read at school for

my 'O' levels, and he reshaped my idea of what poetry and prose could be or do. He was the last on the study list and he was dropped as 'too difficult', but I had already read the selection. His work created a virtual world in my mind, of an early twentieth century rural England very unlike the dirty, smoky 1970s Lancashire where I was brought up. My objective was to tell of my relationship, and retell his verse in another, new context, to mark the century since his death in the trenches of Arras (Illustration 29).

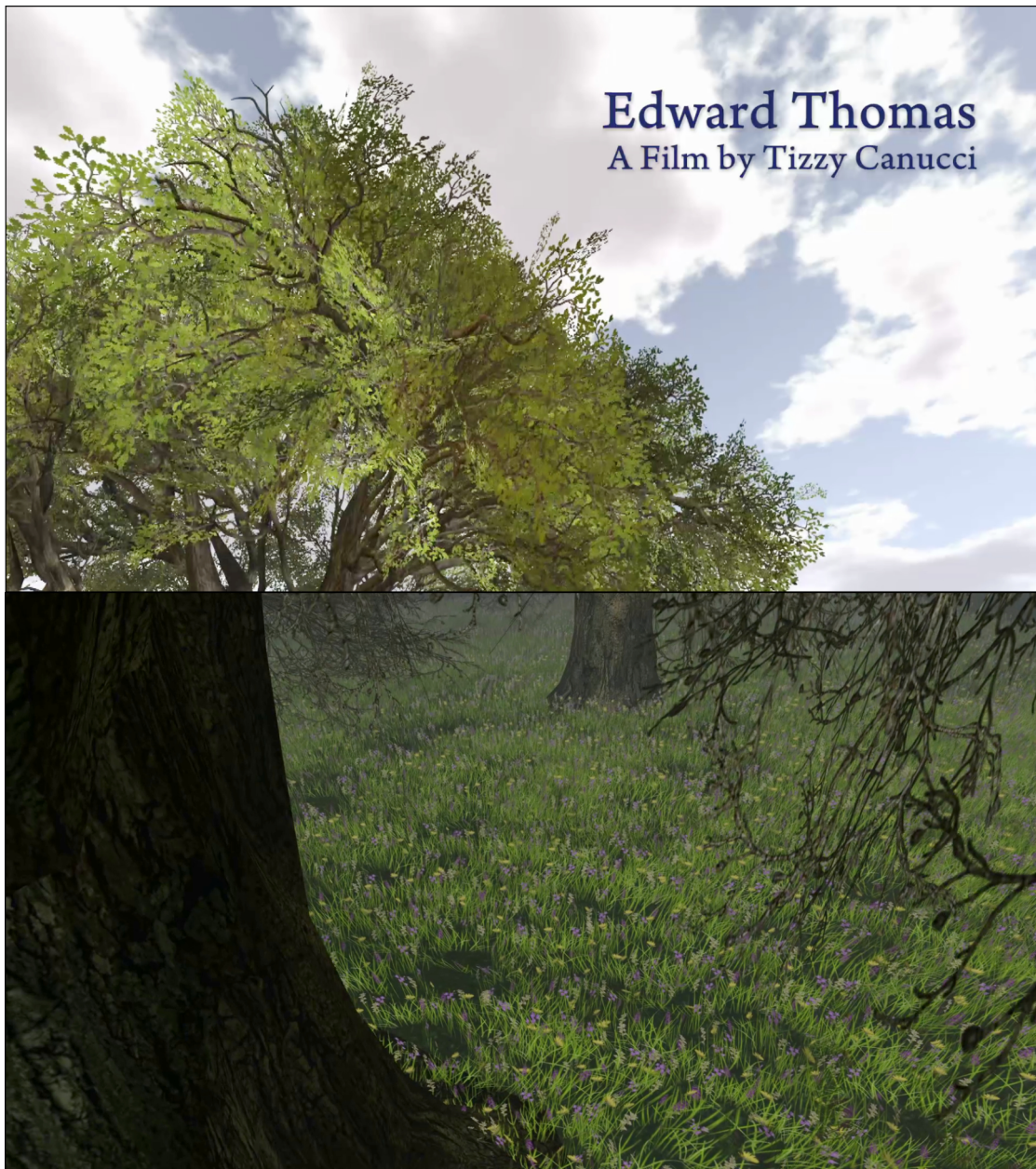


Illustration 29: Stills from *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c): simplified graphics to let the spoken word and poetry come through, the purely rural setting contrasting with the place of my upbringing where I first came across his poetry and prose. Top: my spoken perception of Edward Thomas's poetry. Bottom: reciting 'In Memoriam (Easter, 1915)' (Thomas, 1979a).

This link between time and place is important, for as Massey argues:

temporal movement is also spatial; the moving elements have spatial relations to one another... it is necessary to insist on the irrefutable four-dimensionality (indeed n-dimensionality) of things. Space is not static, nor time spaceless. Of course spatiality and temporality are different from each other but neither can be conceptualized as the absence of the other... we need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales (Massey, 1994: 264).

Space as 'interrelations' is a key element to my creative work. Space is socially constructed, and my recognition of that has led to my resistance to the *idea* that there is a separateness between the digital and 'analogue', and between the virtual-'unreal' and the 'real'. But she also emphasised that this socially constituted space is dynamic, something also I seek to express through moving image work:

'Space' is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global. What makes a particular view of these social relations specifically spatial is their simultaneity. It is a simultaneity, also, which has extension and configuration. But simultaneity is absolutely not stasis. Seeing space as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means that it cannot be seen as static. There is no choice between flow (time) and a flat surface of instantaneous relations (space). Space is not a 'flat' surface in that sense because the social relations which create it are themselves dynamic by their very nature. It is a question of a manner of

thinking. It is not the 'slice through time' which should be the dominant thought but the simultaneous coexistence of social relations that cannot be conceptualized as other than dynamic (Massey, 1994: 265).

Embodied space

But what is also interesting in Massey's spatial-temporal-social discussion is that the networks, simultaneity, dynamism and inter-relationships exist without the need of a mediating presence, whether the 'intricacies' interlock or not. This returns to my arguments in Chapter 4 that the interpersonal human process of translation is more relevant than the intervening abstracted concept of mediation (Billig, 2013: 111). People 'rub along', imperfectly but adequately, understanding, negotiating, translating and combining their experiences directly every moment in daily life (Duck, 1998: 1). From this psychological perspective also, space is socially loaded, for 'space carries forceful messages about relationships' (Duck, 1998: 10), both physically through body language and linguistically with words. While Sherry Turkle might have claimed that online worlds are 'worlds without origins' (1996: 47), this attempt to dissociate virtuality from reality is mistaken. People cannot shed their histories, their place in time and place so easily; they inevitably carry, transplant, and reproduce their origins, sense of space and time, and interpersonal relationships from one world to another.

Yuliya Grinberg suggested that data can also be seen as a 'second skin' (2017: 423), and so a virtual mapping of self. Studies of online identity have tended to ignore the avatar as a body, but avatars create a presence and are 'material to work with' (Taylor, 2009: 117). Consequently, cultural processes are not just working on the material virtual space but also inscribing on the virtual bodies that inhabit it too (Grinberg, 2017; Turner, 2008: 40): avatars are not

just place holders but sites of self-making (Ginsburg, 2012: 115) taking their place as ‘things among things’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 136) on the virtual stage.

The ability to be anonymous in internet settings can have benefits for minority groups (Tripodi, 2017: 267), the issues they still face resulting from existing social and personal conflicts rather than new ones created by the technology (Matias, 2017). Seeing the settings simply as a problem glosses over both the positive and negative nuances of anonymity (Haber, 2017: 387). The commercial aspects of the internet are the problem: ‘real name’ policies generate the cleanest, most valuable data attached unambiguously to individuals (Holpuch, 2015; O’Neil, 2016), which is the true motive for Facebook’s real name policy. However, Second Life and other virtual worlds still retain a policy of allowing residents to choose names, hence my own of Tizzy Canucci.

Within virtual worlds people create intimate shared spaces, inhabited by their avatars, and close interpersonal relationships can develop that span both virtual and actual worlds. As in the actual world, there need be conducive conditions to meet and mutual personal attraction. Relationships develop and are sustained in the ‘trivial interconnectedness and presence in one another’s spheres of life’ (Duck, 1999: 84), and the routine, communal action, and banal conversations about not-very-much are as common in virtual worlds as in everyday life (Boellstorff, 2008; Miller and Horst, 2012: 4; Pink et al., 2016: 33, 129). Virtual world proximity can be sufficient provided both parties accept each other’s limitations on how much they wish to share about their ‘rl’. Geographical separation is not uncommon in ‘rl’ relationships anyhow: about 10% of adults in Britain are in living apart together (LAT) relationships, although not all of them are long distance. Such relationships can be seen as being a stronger type of commitment than living together as

they are not bound by property or legal contract (Carter et al., 2016). Virtual worlds create a space-time proximity and a means of communication that is at least comparable to the other forms of contact that maintain LAT relationships. Furthermore, *all* interpersonal relationships involve some separation and so are ‘persistent’ and partially virtual: they continue to exist in the mind, without prompts or reminders, when the other person is absent. ‘Relationships survive distance, climate, revolt, pestilence and Act of God, as long as people *think* they last, but more importantly they survive because we *act* as if they do’ (Duck, 2007: 82). Still, some academics express fear around the loss of a supposed authenticity and genuineness in face to face contact (Miller and Horst, 2012: 12; Pinker, 2014; Turkle, 2011). However, new technologies have always faced accusations of fostering alienation, some of which are now regarded as ‘better’ than the internet, for instance, the telephone (Fischer, 1994: 366). Arguably, actual life is established through changing conventions and norms that are more ‘make believe’ than reality (Goffman, 1986: 560–562). In the end, relationships involve a mixture of reflection, planning and fantasy that establishes a sense of continuity – an evolving shared biographical account – formed from shared language, actions and memory.

But the space in which machinima is made is also marginalised – or has marginalised itself. The flip side of the ‘geek cred’ status of video games (Ito, 2011: 53) is that some people feel reluctant to be labelled as a ‘gamer’, and do not identify as such even though they play games (Alexander, 2014; Duggan, 2015). Endemic racism and sexism within gamer culture (boyd, 2014; Salter and Blodgett, 2012; Sanchez, 2010; Tomkinson and Harper, 2015), which broke out most conspicuously in #gamergate (Braithwaite, 2016; Lees, 2016), bars it from having the more universal, if still gendered, appeal of cinema (British Film Institute, 2017).

Even in the less fevered space of Second Life, Carleen D Sanchez argued it was still built from a position that assumes whiteness, and that ‘cyber border crossings are as salient as crossing the very real borders of nations’ (2010: 4). It is possible to perform whiteness or be a person of colour in Second Life – but how meaningful is it? Writing in 2010, Sanchez had experienced open hostility, and found it difficult to find non-white skins that matched the quality of white skins. I remember the latter being so: in my early days in Second Life I helped ‘newbies’ get started and finding an affordable black skin for a new girl was very difficult. However, the range of skins is now greater, and the variation more nuanced; when I wanted to make *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d), it was not difficult to find a good quality skin for my ‘alt’ (alternative avatar) Sam Purple (Illustration 30).



Illustration 30: *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d). My ‘alt’ Sam Purple with a skin from Redgrave (2019).

However, this machinima, with a story about love that crossed racial backgrounds, is the only video where I have had a comment challenging my motives or politics. The initial comment was placed on Vimeo (Illustration

31), and we continued a conversation in Second Life. The issue of race is alive in Second Life, directly connected with the politics of race in the actual world (Sanchez, 2010).



Illustration 31: Public comment made beneath *Falling Between Worlds* (Canucci, 2017d). A discussion continued in IM (Instant Message) in Second Life.

Considering virtual worlds as spatial and temporal places gives a wider, more nuanced perspective than considering them just in terms of technology and media. It is a way of looking at how people use the space and the positioning of things and objects, which includes their own re-embodied presence as an avatar. In terms of my own practice, it is a way of discussing and explaining the motivation behind the ways I have made video, and my perspective on the place which I use.

However, there is something of a problem: the more I have considered machinima, the more that it has increasingly felt like it is dying as an art form. There are more machinima around on the internet than ever, yet the more I look I feel the inspiration that started the movement has gone (Harwood, 2011: 11; Jones, 2011; Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011: 115–7; Salen, 2011: 39). The word ‘machinima’ continues because of commercial interests and nostalgia, but it has become inward looking and the artistic promise has faded. I follow my own creative impulses and often explicitly look outward, particularly by combining material from different internet sources, outside of Second Life, be it music or sound recordings. However, in the next chapter I will consider whether machinima has become a non-subject, and how a metaphorical approach might give it some continuing life as an art form.

6 Machinima or video art?

Terminological questions are important in philosophy. As a philosopher for whom I have the greatest respect once said, terminology is the poetic moment of thought (Agamben, 2009: 1).

In the previous chapters, I discussed machinima as an art form in itself; how it connects to the virtual worlds where most of it originates, how it compares with other art forms, and my own practice. In this Chapter, I will consider where machinima now is, or is not, and whether it exists in a meaningful sense for my practice. Does the name fit with what I create?

Machinima as non-subject

Antoine Compagnon writes that stagnation is the scholarly fate of theory – only released from being ‘domesticated, [and] offensive’ and ‘institutionalized, [and] transformed into method’ by those ‘who wander from one discipline to the next’ (2004: 2–3). I can empathise with this academically, but here I am suggesting it is also true in the context of my practice. Machinima in its ‘purest’ and most popular form has become a self-confinement within the games world in which it is created – the ‘gamer ghetto’, as Hugh Hancock (2011) referred to it. While elements may seem wild and offensive to outsiders looking in, it is the noise of a sub-culture trying to distinguish itself from the mainstream. Within the sub-culture, it is a stylised series of acts that have been institutionalised into an often macho gaming culture (boyd, 2014; Braithwaite, 2016; Salter and Blodgett, 2012; Sanchez, 2010; Tomkinson and Harper, 2015) that continues to reproduce itself in somewhat predictable ways.

It is not, then, in the ‘purest’ form of machinima where I believe that the most interesting work lies, but in that which is ‘cross pollinated’ by the wanderings of artists who explore and apply other influences which are drawn from older art forms. This is a reflection of art doing the same things as it always has done: the difference is just that it appears in different places, particularly as new technologies become available. As referred to in Chapter 2, Brad Haseman (2006) argued that practice-led researchers create work on the edge of what was possible with new technologies, which was echoed in terms of video art by Chris Meigh-Andrews (2006: 3). The cutting edge of the experimental leads to successes and also failures, but there are always optimists willing to take risks to gain a previously unseen aesthetic effect. There are also realists, warning of the limitations; between paint maker and artist, William Winsor expressed concern to J. M. W. Turner about his choice of materials and his use of fugitive colour, for immediate effect and ignoring permanence, and got the gentle rebuke; ‘Your business Winsor is to make colour. Mine is to use them’ (Winsor & Newton, 2011).

So, this is the paradox perhaps. There were those who had hopes of how successful machinima could be as an art form in the early days, yet almost all had concerns about the way it was failing, based on various arguments (Hackleman, 2011; Hancock, 2011; Harwood, 2011; Jones, 2011; Kirschner, 2011; Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011: 115–7; Salen, 2011: 11). From today’s perspective, I would argue that machinima failed *as an art form* because there were hopes or expectations of something too pure and distinct from what went before, its revolutionary technological promise was overplayed, and the connection of machinima as art to preceding art forms was greater than was thought. Indeed, outside of games, digital graphics programs and computer techniques are now everyday tools for artists if they want that to use them. Meanwhile, most machinima are now run-throughs, restricted in interest to

the game in which they were made. But it is the *term* that is dead, not the potential for art to draw together disparate ideas, including from games.

Hito Steyerl referred to different levels of images, as ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, a distinction which has more to economic and social status than visual or thematic complexity, with the poor image being the ‘illicit fifth generation bastard of an original image’. In my case this is my archive video art that incorporates archive work, a deliberately contrasting mash-up of different material, whose parentage is in the past and which may be orphaned or contested. But it is precisely the diversity of its parenthood that gives it a kind of vigour, and makes it ‘thick’ in the descriptive sense of Clifford Geertz (1973) or the aesthetics of John Hospers (1964). To extend the analogy, a thick stew or pottage was rich in sustenance, but was not acceptable to those of high status or economic wealth.

But Steyerl makes a further point, that the neoliberal restructuring of media production since the 1970s turned culture into commodity. It established monopolies and moved cinema into the multiplex. In the process, it marginalised the non-commercial, experimental and essayistic cinema – precisely the kinds of film to which I compared my own work, and machinima in general, in Chapter 3 (Steyerl, 2009: 4). The same happened to video games but faster, moving them from an experimental use of personal computers to the products of major global business. In this analysis, the disappearance of machinima as a distinct art form is the result of fundamental cultural, social and economic trends, and their continuation as recordings of gameplay reinforces the argument, the edgy, subversive, barely legal position they used to have (Cornblatt, 2011; Harwood and Garry, 2014) having been co-opted to support one of the world’s largest entertainment industries (Jones, 2011; Pinchbeck and Gras, 2011: 115–7). Machinima fell

for the same seductive features of film: narrative structure, sharpness and resolution, capitalist studio production, and male prowess (Steyerl, 2009).

Julio García Espinosa made a similar argument to Hito Steyerl, politically and philosophically, but in a previous context, claiming that ‘perfect cinema – technically and artistically masterful – is almost always reactionary cinema’ (1983: 28). What he categorised as *Perfect cinema* starts with a select number of people who have access to material resources, time and education, but the end result is a view of art as ‘impartial’ or ‘uncommitted’. Those with prestige come to appropriate the meaning of culture, a position which Espinosa argued was untenable (1983: 31). On the other hand, *Imperfect cinema* is partisan and committed through its basis in and development of poetics, art and politics. It is exploratory, in contrast to cinema that ‘beautifully illustrates’ the pre-formed ideas of the genius director to be passed on to the audience (1983: 32). In a similar way that machinima have been integral to supporting gamer prowess, status, and gender (Braithwaite, 2016; Machinima Inc, 2018a).

Georgio Agamben posed the question: ‘what strategy must we follow in our everyday hand-to-hand struggle with apparatuses? What we are looking for is neither simply to destroy them nor, as some naively suggest, to use them in the correct way’ (2009: 15). Agamben defined apparatuses as anything that might be tools of control, not just the state apparatuses of Althusser, including ‘the pen, writing, literature... computers... language itself’ (2009: 14). Every apparatus has an associated process of subjectification which, if accepted or given in to, becomes desubjectification (2009). And so, ‘pure’ machinima can be seen to accept the apparatus within which they operate – that of the computer, the games studio, and the given boundary of the network of the online world. ‘Cross pollinated’ art machinima contest the apparatus by bridging outside of its borders, temporally, physically and associatively, to

break down insularity and to connect to networks beyond and resisting using technology ‘in the right way’.

Cultural processes and human-object tool relationships inevitably develop together, and consequently computers ‘don’t just do things for us, they do things to us’, although they are also ‘objects to think with’ (Turkle, 1996: 26, 47). Nonetheless, internet companies particularly want to make the *user* stay ‘on the surface’ of their products (Turkle, 1996: 23) and use them in ‘the right way’, as if alternatives were unthinkable. Writing earlier, Ivan Illich made similar arguments, and claimed that people end up working for tools and institutions, rather than preferred situation of people having ‘tools to work with’ for their own and shared ends. Illich described the option of working together as *conviviality* – the ‘autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment’ (Illich, 1973: 11). The opposite, a position of working for tools and institutions such as the internet companies described above, he called *industrial productivity*; ‘the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others’ (Illich, 1973: 11). Coming from a political, and specifically socialist, standpoint, Illich saw the problem as a strategic one: that the ‘conditions for convivial work’ need to exist in a ‘convivial society’ where each member has free access to the tools of the community (1973: 13). But the internet has developed from an environment of tools-to-work-with and objects-to-think-with to one dominated by large corporations seeking monopoly positions. Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook present themselves as essential ‘tools’ given to the user for ‘free’, but the tools are part of a system of exchange, as the company’s primary purpose is to extract data from the user for only partially disclosed purposes, but inevitably involving capitalist profit (Busby, 2019; Cadwalladr, 2019; Loveless, 2019: 101; O’Neil, 2016; Thompson, 2014; Weise and Frier, 2018), as referred to in Chapter 2. The idea of ‘new frontier’ separatism and benevolent organisations could

only be maintained while the internet was novel, though digital technology came out of long-standing institutions which were far from socially neutral, even if Silicon Valley purported to be different (Jurgenson, 2012: 85). Ivan Illich's idea of 'radical monopoly' was discussed in detail in Chapter 2, but the relevant aspect here is that 'over-efficient' tools upset the balance of what people will do for themselves and what they think they 'need' to buy ready-made.

There are, however, still places where the ethos of 'conviviality' continues, but it is more relative than absolute. Second Life itself is built from 'user created content' made by many contributors (Nagy and Bernadett, 2016), but it is a stand-alone commercial platform; OpenSimulator (2018) now represents a faded dream of an open web of virtual worlds. The Open Source Initiative (2018) is an umbrella for the many open source software programs available. Creative Commons (2018b) is an organisation that facilitates the legal sharing of knowledge and creativity through licensing designations; I designate my work as 'Attribution, Non-commercial, Share Alike' (BY SA NC), except where I use material designated with more open permissions. Finally, there are archives that have been established to make shared and public domain material more available, most notably Internet Archive (2018), but also including smaller organisations, such as Free Music Archive (2018). I upload all my work to Vimeo, and while they are not open source, they do not impose the litany of unfair practices of YouTube listed in Chapter 2, and I willingly pay a subscription. I use material from all these sources, apart from OpenSim, and the shared contribution is important to my work, and has been listed in *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020).

Through these discussions, I have returned to my own influences, because that is what I know and it is what makes my practice distinctive from others. I

would like to claim that my video art is a more colourful and imaginative thread in what has become a rather drab weave. I am positioned within the environment where I make my work, physically and socially, and it is my observation of it that I want to show, artistically and academically, to the community within and those outside of it: the autoethnographic intent of Traci Marie Kelly (2001: 259) discussed in Chapter 2. Most ‘machinima’ is confined within its own game-world, and one that is self-confined and self-referential. As Salen and Zimmerman lamented:

What if game designers focussed their efforts on actively playing with the double-consciousness of play, rather than pining for immersion? Imagine the kinds of games that could result: games that encourage players to constantly shift the frame of the game, questioning what is inside or outside of the game (2004: 455).

Metaphor: Artists Moving Image, Experimental Film, Video, Machinima and Motion-based art

Taking a more general view of games, pre-dating video games:

The great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start... In the making of speech and language the spirit is continually ‘sparking’ between matter and mind, as it were, playing with this wondrous nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words. Thus in giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature (Huizinga, 1949: 4).

And:

Like making music, creating images, or telling stories, engaging in play is what it means to be human. Games do not have to justify themselves by appealing to something outside themselves (Zimmerman, 2013: xii).

These views of games connect different art forms, rather than thinking of them as separate, with the first introducing the idea of metaphor. The significance of metaphor is that it is a human, imaginative way of thinking that helps the mind make inferences in new situations, and to make new and different connections out of the predictable (Becker, 1997; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Artists Moving Image and Experimental Film are labels for fluid categories of practice that try to escape the limitations of predictable and conventional approaches. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, there is a logic in assuming that the former are primarily produced by artists extending their work into film, and the latter by filmmakers working outside of the conventions of the studio system of cinematic filmmaking. Considering Jai McKenzie's frame of reference (2014: 90) establishes a different relationship, however, as to recognise the commonalities between light-based media does not make history irrelevant, though it does diminish disciplinary distinctions. Arbitrary essential differences between photography and video dissolve, and the 'in between', having the characteristics of both, ceases to be an empty gulf and actively plays with ideas of image-time. McKenzie claimed Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) was an example, but Marker also practised in *Second Life* (Marker, 2016; Steyerl, 2009) and some of his work is still accessible, as shown in Illustration 32.



Illustration 32: Chris Marker's installation in Second Life, with Guillaume-en-Egypte prominent; 'the ginger cat who serves as his pseudonym, mascot and muse' (Marker, 2016).

The terminology – including film, video and machinima – is often a hang-over from previous technologies, and one of the difficulties of writing about it is that literal meanings do not match colloquial usage. But the terminology also reflects vested interests in keeping the words separate, of status and commercial exploitation and social and economic capital: Vadim Rizov claimed that in the three years before 2018, the number of films originating on 35mm film stock had remained about the same, but 'they fall into an increasingly limited number of categories: auteur films by directors too old or stubborn to change and with the clout to follow through on that; period pieces; and enormous blockbusters' (Rizov, 2018). But even if a movie was *shot* on film, most cinema theatres *show* films using projectors that utilise DCP (Digital Cinema Package), a digital file format downloaded over the internet. Domestic video was a more short-lived technology; on the edge of the technically possible it briefly flourished until the DVD arrived, which in turn was superseded by online streaming from the internet behemoths of Netflix, Amazon and YouTube. The result is that video art no longer uses video tape

and experimental film no longer uses film, unless it is artistically important to foreground the materiality of the recording process. Even then, it will be probably watched on a device that works with a digital transfer.

The terminology also *dates* art forms. In the case of film, it had a longevity that allowed the art form to develop a semi-independent meaning and existence from its material origins, but video was only briefly a popular technology, though its affordability gave video art a developmental boost. Digital is different, in that the name of the recording or storage materials cannot be used as a metonym; to talk of ‘hard-drive’ or ‘memory stick’ does not specify what is stored on them, which *might include* still and moving images, but also audio, text, spreadsheets and the plethora of other things that are done on a computer. Newer names tend to *combine* the medium and ‘substrate’, for example digital moving image, digital animation, or digital motion art (Supernova, 2019b). The other option is to use an old name metaphorically, such as video or film.

The history of machinima was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but there is an additional relevant point here. Video and games met in *Quad God* in 2000, the same year that the word ‘machinima’ was coined (Kelland, 2011: 24). As a contraction of machine-(and)-cinema (Payne, 2011: 242), the word alludes more to art in the mechanical age of Walter Benjamin (2008) and the mass experience of film watched by audiences in theatres, than to the individualised experience of today with the diversity and pervasiveness of computer technology from desktop computer to laptops, tablets, smartphones, Smart TVs and the internet networked integration of the ‘Internet of Things’. ‘Machinima’ was anachronistic at its point of invention, and as much tied to a technological time-period as video. It never broke into common usage, and remained locked to its origin in computing, gaming and online sharing, mirroring academic writing about video games during that

period which claimed an innate, essential difference from other art forms (Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, 2004: 35–54). Furthermore, recording straight gameplay results in machinima that are documentary narratives, more akin to the realist ambitions of television than the innovation of video art (Meigh-Andrews, 2006: 42).

Against the domination of commerce, as discussed in Chapter 2, individuals and small groups trying to establish machinima as a wider, more inclusive and more imaginative art form were unlikely to be heard or promoted. While I admire the motives of those who wish to hang onto the name of machinima, capitalism has bought, defined and pwned⁶ machinima, particularly in the form of Machinima Inc (2018c), and then shuffled it away when it suited (Spangler, 2019a, 2019b). My argument is a pragmatic one about *how things have evolved and how things are* rather than *what perhaps should be or might have been*. Machinima may have popularity, but almost exclusively as an inward looking reflection of the games from which they are made, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Supernova Outdoor Digital Animation Festival is one of the few ‘film festivals’ that nurtured all forms of digital animation and acted inclusively towards machinima, but did not chose to have a section named ‘machinima’ in the 2018 program (2018). Instead, virtual world and games-based works were *included* in the ‘experimental zone’, rather than *exiled* (or excluded) into a section with the unfamiliar and little understood title of machinima. ‘Motion-based art’ is how Ivar Zeile of Denver Digerati and the organiser of Supernova has described the work within the Festival: ‘We use the term as a catch-all because we have to explain that as our niche, but it’s really much

6 ‘colloquial (chiefly U.S.)... To inflict a humiliating defeat on (an opponent), esp. in an online game. Also: to gain unauthorized access to or compromise (a computer, network, etc.)’ (*OED Online*, 2016).

greater than that' (Rinaldi, 2018). As such, it removes any reference to a particular technology that would inevitably include, exclude or compartmentalise or would change or become obsolescent. It recognises the hybridity of technologies, even though the final display format has one thing in common, being digital. Video art, machinima, digital animation, film – they are all methods of producing image that can be displayed on a screen, and the outcome matters more than the process of getting there. This is a position very close to how I feel about art machinima – its future is in hybridity, not purity.

In my own work I use both natively digital material and digitised material that was originally recorded on film, magnetic tape, wax and shellac. But what I call 'natively digital' is not accurate about it entirely, although it is true for my video considered alone. Much of what is imported into *Second Life*, the images and objects, were drawn or photographed and then turned into an imported texture or mesh: they too are hybrid. And when Sherry Turkle claimed that objects online had no 'simple physical referent' (1996: 47) and that signs replaced the real, she underestimated the part that imagination and (re)presentation played in previous visual forms, and the importance that different ways of seeing are for (re)interpreting 'reality' in artistic creation (e.g. Berger, 2008).

It also passes over the importance of metaphor in language and in making sense of the world; 'Metaphor lies at the intersection of what has been and what can be' (Becker, 1997: 60). It makes an imagined future comprehensible in terms of a known present, in a 'synthesis of interpretation and creation' (Becker, 1997: 60). The iconography of computer tools – the trash bin, the folder, the magnifying glass for search, the 'brush' for format 'painter' – are relatable through metaphorical, recognisable graphics, rather than dry explanation (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 45; Emerson, 2014: xi). Many tools

do the same things *in effect* as their pre-computer equivalents, just through a different technical process. An example is the yellow mark that can be made on a virtual page in a word processing document *as if* using a highlighter pen, which becomes identical to highlighting ink on text when printed. More specialist examples are the numerous darkroom techniques replicated in photo-editing software, such as the burn tool. Both of these examples are shown in Illustration 33.

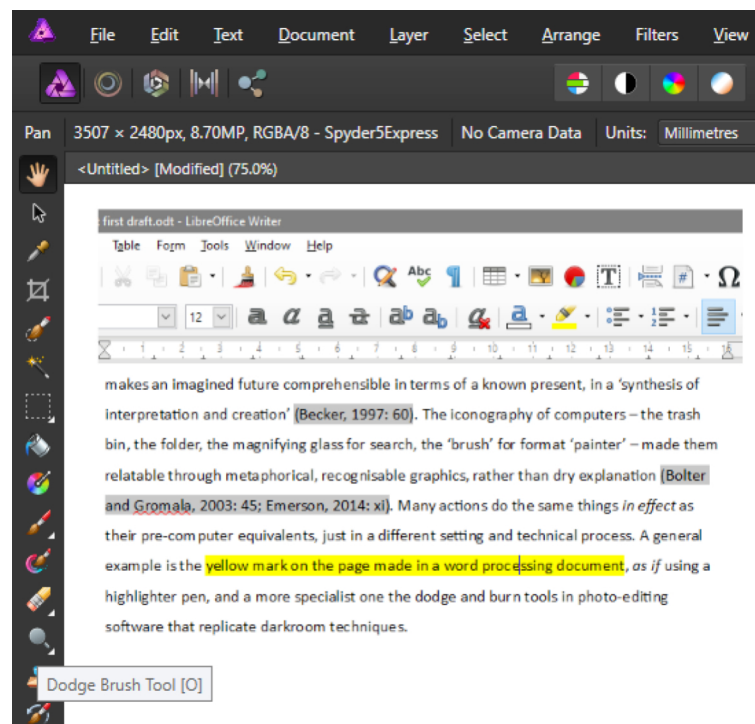


Illustration 33: A screenshot of a LibreOffice document in the Affinity Photo program, showing the 'highlighter' pen and a range of tools down the left toolbar, which replicate pre-digital tools in a digital program.

Metaphors are not a kind of cheat, for 'metaphorical thought is normal and ubiquitous in our mental life' (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 245) and allows the human mind to make inferences in new situations. However, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argued that there are four fallacies around metaphor, the first two of which are most relevant to this discussion. The first fallacy is that metaphor is only a question of words, not concepts: in the case of computer

software, icons may also have text equivalents, but the primary aim for either is rapid visual recognition to convey conceptual understanding about the action quickly. The second fallacy is that metaphors are based on similarities (2003: 244). Computers do not literally contain the tools pictured on the icons, nor does the software operate in the same way as that tool would: it is ‘doing’ *as if* or *as like*. Tools within computer programs are a synthesis of metaphors overlying familiar processes, and metaphors applied to new processes.

Metaphorical concepts were used throughout the development of visual processes. Photography came from Latin or Greek words that became the French *photographie* in 1834, not as literal description, ‘light written with one’s own hand’, but as a sense of the process (*OED Online*, 2018c; *OED Online*, 2018f). The literal meaning could be discovered through translation (although the ability to translate depended on social factors of education and class) but the words are meaningless without some knowledge of how the practical process works or what the outcome looks like. The same was true for *cinématographe* in 1893, which literally translated is ‘movement-drawing’ (*OED Online*, 2018a; *OED Online*, 2018c). Video was derived from the Latin, ‘to see’, and was derivative, being intended to have a comparable function as the pre-existing word of ‘audio’; it was originally applied to television in the 1930s (*OED Online*, 2018h). The location of the objects in common use led to a development in understanding of them and extended the meaning of the words beyond their literal derivation, translation or emulation.

Whatever the derivation, cinema came to be associated with a form of popular entertainment that engaged people in large numbers in auditoriums. Video lost its original visual connection to television and gained a new cultural meaning associated with the videocassette and the videocassette recorder (VCR) as an affordable, popular form of recording and playback of

moving images, which people watched individually or in small numbers. In the process, the name of the technology becomes a ‘stand-in’ for an associated social and cultural experience. In the case of video, VCR technology itself all but disappeared, leaving the word with its cultural meaning standing alone, which transferred to something-that-never-was-technologically-video – a digitally recorded, edited and viewed moving image that is viewed online, with no direct connection to a physical object made of plastic and magnetic tape. It is a metaphorical connection, in that it is about the concept, the social experience, and the outcome, any similarity being in what emerges and is external to the technology (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 244). Of the two main video platforms online, YouTube’s ‘About’ page is pure marketing sentiment (2018a), but their ‘snippet’ displayed on a web search says: ‘Enjoy the videos and music you love, upload original content, and share it all with friends, family, and the world on *YouTube*’ (2018b). Vimeo is more direct on its ‘About’ page: ‘created by a group of filmmakers who wanted an easy and beautiful way to share videos with their friends... an insanely supportive community of creators began to blossom’ (2018a). Their snippet reads: ‘Vimeo | We’ve got a thing for video: Join the web’s most supportive community of creators’ (2018b). Both use the word video and each use other words implying creativity and sociability. There is an interesting parallel with the development of photography referred to earlier: YouTube adopt the surface position of Eastman Kodak mentioned in Chapter 4, which promoted the recording of familiar sociability over artistic expression (Tagg, 1988: 18–9), even though they fail with issues around trolling, paedophilia networks, and terrorist content (Dredge, 2013; Orphanides, 2019; Timberg et al., 2019). Vimeo also talk about sociability with friends, but also about it being a place for *creators*, combining the early divide in film between the perceived potential for realist recording (Lumière) or ‘imaginative expressionism’ (Méliès), as referred to in Chapter 3 (Bardzell, 2011: 197; Burke, 2013: 25). But interestingly, Vimeo refer to *both* film and video, something that

emphasises a creative bridging, and demonstrates a greater interest in creators who take a deliberative approach to the making of moving image material. While video and film may have both drifted away from their original meaning in the move online, becoming metaphorical rather than literal in the process, they have not become synonymous.

One of the comments on my video, *Innominate*, on Facebook, and shown in Illustration 34, was ‘Machinima. Is. NOT. Dead!!!!’ (Despres, 2018). I believe its spirit lives on, but under another name. My view is that the ability for artists to re-appropriate ‘machinima’ as a form that is neither tied to game play nor restricted to those who are insiders, is all but nil. Branding and the commercialisation of machinima goes beyond wordplay or meaning; the space for an outward looking art form has gone, and without a habitat, the sub-species of ‘art machinima’ clings to the edge of extinction. And so, this is a manifesto for realignment: that machinima outside of the gaming mainstream should seek alliances with art forms with which it now has more commonality. Machinima is dead, and as was foreseen by Joshua Diltz (2011) and Tracy Harwood (2011), the future of machinima is video art.

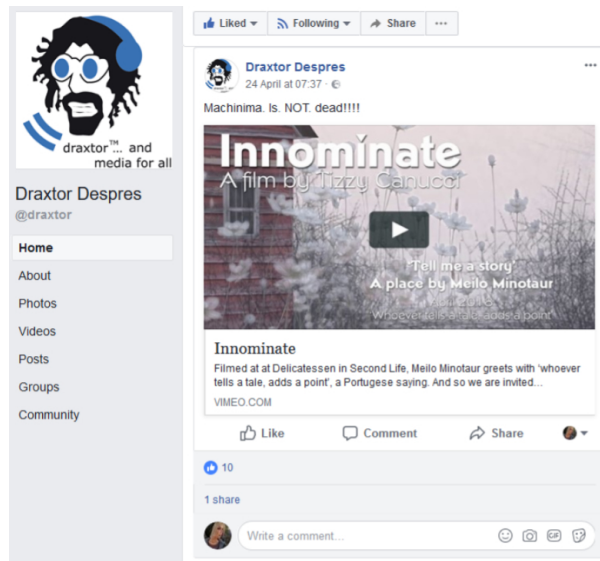


Illustration 34: Machinima is alive – but what exactly is it? Drax is an active user and promoter of Second Life and has a long standing YouTube channel (Despres, 2019).

Video art is what film can be and what machinima could have been – not telling a story with the wisdom of the maker, but of passing over possible meanings for interpretation – a gift for the recipient to make their own. Yet this still lies in the contradiction of the gift as antithetical to exchange in western society, with a ‘distinctively modernist oscillation between defiant critique of capitalist modernity and optimistic investment in its possibilities... between gifts and exchanges, generosity and interest, freedom and obligation, persons and things’ (Colesworthy, 2018: 5). It is more about the complex and contradictory nature of being human than technical perfection (Steyerl, 2009).

This is in one sense my conclusion, but there is no finality or definitive answers to creativity. Ethnographies and creativity both require reflection – a reflexiveness to think about what happened and what it might mean both in the past and the future (Pink et al., 2016: 12–13). As an artist, the covers of the PhD do not contain the work: I entered the PhD with a practice and I will leave with one. I summarise my video practice in the booklet that goes

alongside the PhD, *Falling between Worlds: Catalogue of video art 2016-2020* (Baxter and Canucci, 2020), but it is still not the work itself. As ‘unruly’ (Haseman, 2006) ideas have been sparked through my PhD, my practice has, quite rightly, evolved. Clearly, I have written about some of that on the way, and the final chapter will round off the reflexive element, and also contain an afterword.

7 Afterword: the continuity of practice

Practice as ongoing part of self, an unfinished progression

I'm interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings
(William Kentridge. In, *The Whitworth*, 2018: 1).

In the first line of the Introduction I described the PhD as an entrance and an exit with a woven carpet between, with a movement both through and within. As Paul Valéry said: 'a work is never completed except by some accident... for, in relation to who or what is making it, it can only be one stage in a series of inner transformations' (Palle, 2019; Valéry, 1971: xvi). And so, parts variously overlapped, were reworked, were deleted, were overwritten, proved to be dead-ends, were discovered with delight – and many parts proved as unruly as was claimed for practice-led research (Haseman, 2006). I have presented my work as reflexive (Cloke, 1994: 150; Pink et al., 2016: 12–13) through the chapters rather than leaving it as justification at the end, and if there is a conclusion, it was in the last chapter. This chapter is about the interaction that goes on between the creator and what they make, and where it leads; a PhD in any case is a prolonged discussion around an argument that is never truly concluded (Billig, 1987: 255). I brought a practice into my PhD, and I leave with a practice, but it is not the same. The process of reading and writing changed my ideas, as did having the time to make more work and explore it more deeply.

We return to recurrent themes throughout our lives (Becker, 1997), and however objective we may be in the work we do, it inevitably constitutes a kind of story or biography that has been informed by experience and history (Loveless, 2019: 24, 27). I did not come to printmaking completely by

accident, as I had been interested in that process as an expressive art form for a long time. But to make a connection between video editing and printmaking, movement and colour, was a new idea, coming out of a perception of layering being important in both – and if the digital really is not exceptional (Marres, 2017: 172), it becomes about seeking the commonalities and differences in practice between video and print, and light on screen and pigment on paper.

The artistic intent was to reinterpret or translate between two, reinterpretation being one of my central principles in producing video art based on shared material and referred to in every chapter, and translation being the subject of Chapter 4. In practice, when I envisage the possibilities of going from screen to print, I cannot think of it as merely a mediation determined by the different media. Re-envisaging is a human process more like the reinterpretation involved in translation.

As I also stated in the Introduction, I see the process more as *exploratory* than *experimental*, although the two are not inseparable. The geography of space and human activity is a cartographic process and one draws maps through a process of exploration and discovery, but it is also still experimental (Massey, 1994), and relates to creativity as being ‘committed, cathected and sustaining’ (Loveless, 2019: 3).

The separation between different art forms is debatable and indistinct in any case. Roland Barthes (2000: 3) decided that while he preferred photography, he could not intellectually separate it from cinema, Lewis Hine complained ‘If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn’t need to lug a camera’, and Man Ray said ‘I photograph what I do not wish to paint and I paint what I cannot photograph’ (both cited in Sontag, 1979: 185–6). They simultaneously claim and refute their medium: it matters as part of the expressive process, but it is

awkward, at most comparatively better, and maybe something else would be easier. It is certainly not a transparent window through which to view the genius vision of the artist.

The film director as constructed by the studio system offers a formula, while thoughtful or challenging films are often classified as ‘art house’ or ‘specialised’ and given limited release (British Film Institute, 2017). The distinction has been reinforced as a marketing category by monopolistic capitalism and is associated with the ‘questionable [social] prestige of art house attendance’ (Marks, 2002: 208). Similarly, the YouTube gamer celebrity is constructed as the personal expert offering transparent windows on games to clarify and resolve, rather than question or obscure. Formerly, machinima exposed the glitch and error of games with their stylised graphics and low frame rates, on the edge of legality (Coleman and Dyer-Witheford, 2007; Harwood and Garry, 2014; Methenitis, 2011). Now they are complicit with platform capitalism, driving celebrity and YouTube revenues (Machinima Inc, 2018b) and recording the latest awesome graphics from a commercial games studios running on computers of unimaginable capabilities compared to ten years ago. For Descartes, Culture and Reason were antithetical; ‘doubt and Reason must jointly purge our minds of that which is merely cultural, accidental and untrustworthy’ (Gellner, 1992: 2) and digital technology offers the possibility to reproduce endlessly with perfection. Yet the artist often works *with* accidents, limitations and failures of the ‘merely cultural’, and that is certainly my approach in both video art and printmaking.

But while I want ‘glitch and error’, I do not want return to the failing technologies of data storage on cassette tape, 26k modems, or the ‘Blue Screens of Death’ of Windows 95 – I appreciate the reliability of ‘plug and play’, modern graphics cards and broadband. However, I am now much more able to *choose* the areas of failure, working with stylised and error prone

Second Life on a more stable platform. But while theoretically ‘the digital’ is infinitely reproducible without degradation and all but immortal, in practice this is limited. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the priorities of twentieth century camera and film companies was to encourage photography as a convenient recording method rather than as a means of artistic expression (Holland, 2004: 138–144) but in the twenty-first century this has been taken further, where data is accumulated in ‘the cloud’ – in forgotten places rather than in personal folders and albums. And this immortality has a cost; data centres of accumulated digital ‘guff’ consumed nearly 2% of global electricity in 2012, with projected growth rates of three to ten times by 2030 (Cook et al., 2017). ‘The digital’ becomes more a category with human implications than just a technical description.

The early history of photography was of subject and technique, but the photograph as material object is now subservient, with the “colonization’ of taste’ being driven by appearance, notably over-saturation and resolution (Moseley, 2019: 231). The techniques were essentially craft based, and the different textures and optical brightness of the materials provided the basis for experimentation and expression (Moseley, 2019: 232–3). In my own printmaking, I have tried to explore these possibilities using images mostly drawn from my video art; it is the interaction and the changing meaning and implications of the visual image that motivates.

As referred to earlier, discovery and exploration has been important in my work – not just in the making of the video art. Three books have been important in the last six months, two of which I came across not in algorithmic search engines, but in bookshops in different countries that had books from small publishers on their shelves: *Freedom of the Presses: Artists’ Books in the Twenty-first Century* (Weber, 2018) in Denver and *How to Make Art at the End of the World* (Loveless, 2019) in Montréal. If all we depend on is

what search engines prioritise, the guesses they make, and the leverage of capitalism, we will miss – are missing – significant meaning (O’Neil, 2016; Recuber, 2017). The third book is *Polymer Photogravure* (Harmon, 2019), which has been significant in the development of my practice; one half was written by Clay Harmon, and the other half by thirty artists who provided differing contexts and experience, similar to how *Artists’ Books in the Twenty-first Century* provides context by having chapters written in very different styles, each by one of sixteen authors. They demand a close reading more characteristic of literary studies, rather than search engine academia skim reading, which increases the ability to contextual and content (San Martín, 2018), to find passion and creativity, texture and depth, alongside the singular viewpoints that I referred to in Chapter 3 in the context of machinima and video art. In a research world where literature is being published faster than it can be read (Billig, 2013: 27), the ability to make choices about what to read (that is, how *little*) and to be serendipitous (Olma, 2016) has regained importance.

Do I not make everything?: ‘The digital’ and the digitised

I made a living from modelmaking for eight years; no one ever asked if I built the house I had made a model of, such as the example shown in Illustration 35.



Illustration 35: An example of my modelmaking work from the 1980s.

And yet when working in the virtual to make video, this is raised as a question, with an implied questioning of whether the video is merely derivative, and so the true value of the work.

I certainly ask myself what I *add* when I make a video in Second Life, something which often depends on context. The point is not to just to record, but to explore, as discussed in Chapter 3. I make video works as a process of discovering Second Life. I go to *find* what is there not just to *copy* what is there; I make an *interpretation* of what is there, to *add* to it, and to *work with* other artists' creativity, including musicians, who in the classical tradition are interpreting the creativity of composers. I have what Tim Ingold described as an openness to *astonishment*, which is a 'sense of wonder that comes with riding the crest of the world's continued birth' (2006: 18). That openness also comes, as Ingold claimed, with a sense of vulnerability or weakness. I do not want to 'hold the world to account', but 'to respond to the flux of the world with care, judgement and sensitivity' (Ingold, 2006: 19). As Ingold further claims, all research depends on observation and all observation is based on participation, which brings certain aspects of the world into focus.

Repeat Hikari (Canucci, 2018i) was selected for the *Supernova Digital Animation Festival 2019* (2019a) (Illustration 36) and I was in conversation with all the artists who created the three-dimensional space I made my work within, without a second thought. There is a common shared understanding, that work is open for others to use but not simply to copy, that all creations are transitory, and that there is value in openly sharing work in spaces outside of Second Life. I think of my practice as engaged practice; it is firstly made to be seen by others, retrospective analysis is second, and personal achievement behind that.



Illustration 36: Video still from the opening sequence of *Repeat Hikari* (Canucci, 2018i).

In practice, writers envisage a potential readership, not so much as a determinant but as a guide; ‘To feel that we make sense when we write... we must be able to see at least a glint of the public significance of what we are doing and saying (or a glint of its insignificance or nonsense, that is, its nonaccountability)’ (Brandt, 1992: 326). This applies also to artists, and moving images find the equivalent of readers in audiences. In academia, the

reflexive approach described by Pink et. al. for digital ethnography has a similar drive to engage, through ‘the subjectivity of the research encounter and the explicatory nature of ethnographic writing as a positive and creative route through which to produce knowledge or ways of knowing about other people, their lives, experiences and environments’ (2016: 12). As an ethical approach, their position matches my ethical approach described in Chapter 2.

My printmaking practice has yet to find the same engagement as video art, but the question of reinterpretation is just as important. Most of the images I use are from my video art, though some are individual ‘snapshots’. Although I could use them freely as they are not copyrighted, I will only use images where I feel I have added something. That said, turning the image from screen to print involves a reinterpretation of the colour, textures and, particularly in the case of video, movement, such as in Illustrations 39 and 40. Surprisingly, the materiality and colour pigments of the ink, and of working with textures, were evocative of my previous modelmaking (Illustration 35).

Returning to video art, the discussion in Chapter 3 referred to the status, and the counter-conventional approaches of animation and feminist film, which perhaps provides an explanation as to where my work is exhibited. I have had considerable success in art exhibitions and art based academic presentations, but almost none in film festivals. The one exception is *Supernova*, and as mentioned in Chapter 6, and its full title has been the *Supernova Digital Animation Festival* and the *Supernova Digital Motion Art Festival* – being on the fringes of serious filmmaking almost denies it an easy label for its title (Rinaldi, 2018). In the art context, curators are interested in the ideas and expression within an image; in a film context, the aesthetics of a

particular kind of technical quality are a hurdle that even studio animation barely struggles to get over (Oliver, 2018).

My videos broadly fit into three groups of interpretations:

1. Performance art by other artists within Second Life, for example, *OK, OK* (Canucci, 2018h), *Here is Your Sandwich, you Spoiled Thing* (Canucci, 2018c), *In a Bowl* (Canucci, 2018d), *Symphony for a Lost King* (Canucci, 2016g).
2. Locations, builds and art installations within Second Life, for example, *Art Tartaruga* (Canucci, 2019a), *Repeat Hikari* (Canucci, 2018i), *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e), *The Constant Falling* (Canucci, 2016i), *There is No Cure for Curiosity* (Canucci, 2016k).
3. Archive and literature, which conspicuously incorporates material from outside of Second Life, for example; *Breaking Ice: A 70 Year Story* (Canucci, 2017b), *Future City* (Canucci, 2017e), *The Digital Pilgrims* (Canucci, 2017g), *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c).

Although the implication in my description of the first two groups is that they are contained within Second Life, they still include material from outside of it. Most of my videos include Creative Commons music which essentially determines the pace of editing, and how the visuals are assembled and interpreted. However, it is important to recognise this is a flow; the work starts with visual images, which inform the choice of music, and the visuals and the audio are then put into conversation through the editing. In many instances Second Life creators have imported work and ideas from outside – for example *Art Tartaruga* was made in an installation that held multiple

figures in the shape of Lego figures, and some, such as the one in the poster, incorporated actual world graphics (Illustration 37).



Illustration 37: Poster for *Art Tartaruga*, (Canucci, 2019a) a video that worked with the creations of many artists, spanning Second Life and actual world material.

The third group, of which the first was *Our Music of the Spheres* (Canucci, 2016e), is where I have explored how I can use a wider range of internet material from outside of Second Life to mix the past and present more effectively (Illustration 38). This was not a rejection of the digital, but a recognition that it is simply a new way of working with what exists, much of which has been digitised. Digitising does not simply copy but it reinterprets and gives new meaning (Müller, 2009: 296), forming ‘salvage narratives’ that bring ‘the past and present together in continuous narrative’ (Potteiger and Purinton, 1998: 22). The ‘analogue’ is not something that has been supplanted and only suitable for leaving in the past, as it is *reinterpretable*, reflecting a characteristic of language and writing (Eliot, 2018: 38–40). It reflects how human culture is constantly being reworked; the digital without any past is a delusion.

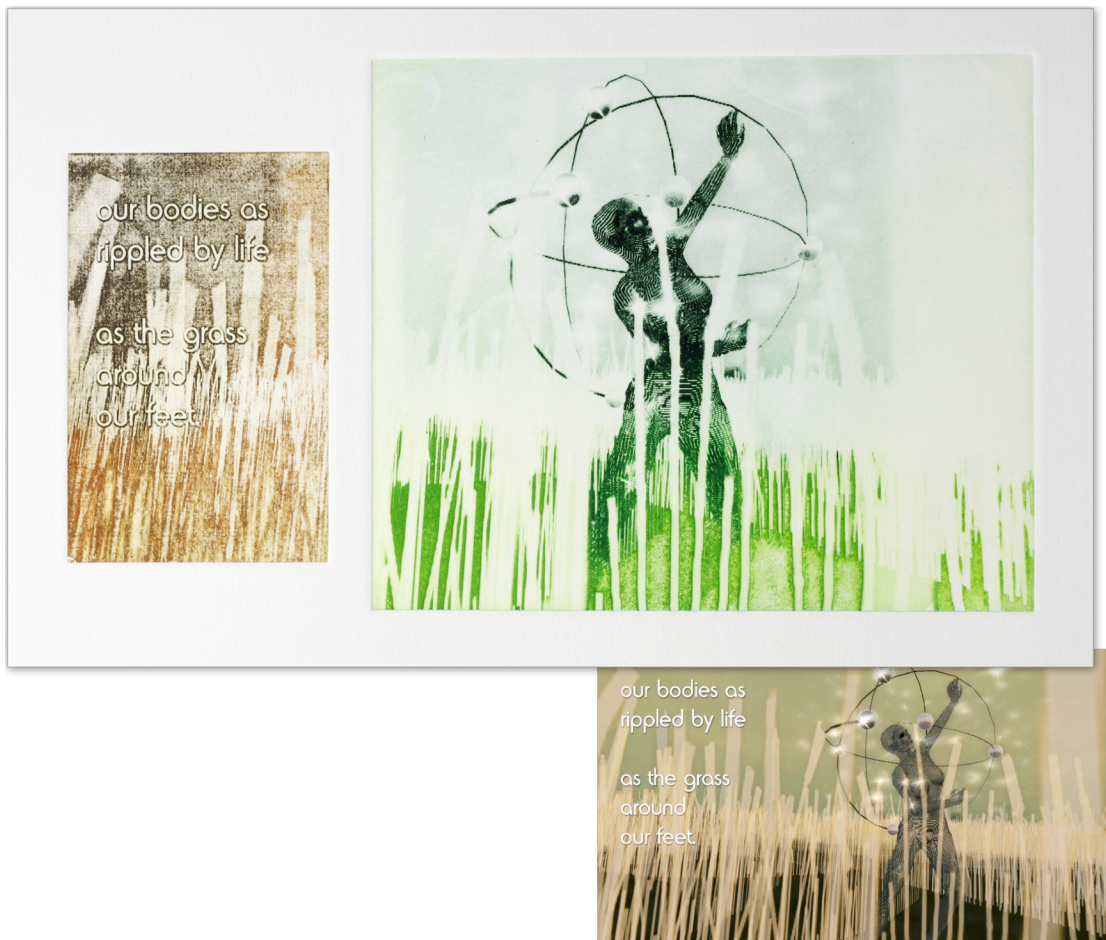


Illustration 38: *Rippled by Life* (Baxter, 2019c). Top: a print from a polymer photogravure plate, inked by hand using Cranfield inks, and printed on Hahnemühle paper. Below: the original digital video still, as shown previously in Illustration 11.

But this also practically questions the significance of *the digital*, and views it as being, more accurately, a *process of digitisation*. I questioned in Chapters 2 and 4 whether media is better seen as mediation, as a *process* that involves human action rather as a *thing* that bypasses the need for explanation, as a form of ‘word magic’ (Bellos, 2012: 21). In terms of the thing, ‘the digital’, a fetishised view of technology and sociality has given it a space and status separate from what went before (Barnard, 2017: 202–203), and ignores previous or continuing connections. As Raymond Williams (1977: 160) argued, the medium is a *part of the property* of an object, but this does not

mean the medium *is* the object: correspondingly, the *digital may be part of* the property of an object, but this does not mean *the digital* is the object. And if *the digital* is not an object, there is no need to create an anti-logos (Billig, 1987: 46), a rhetorical category in opposition, *the analogue*. The capability of a technology is often latent and never unambiguous, and it is through use that it gains meaning (Grint and Woolgar, 1997: 32, 101); ‘the digital’ may be useful descriptively, but using it as a category forces a distinction based on technology and ignores the content, connections and meaning. In Chapters 3 and 5 I used digitisation in the context of archive film, which is how the word is commonly used, to describe a transfer to a digital medium. What I am arguing here is that ‘digitisation’ has a wider meaning – if ‘the digital’ is ‘in’ everything and entangled with it (Marres, 2017: 32), *everything* is digitised but *nothing* is totally digital.

Where I leave. Or rather, where I continue with life.

My digital video art and mechanical printmaking

Modern craft would best be seen not as a paradox, or an anachronism, or a set of symptoms, but as a means of articulation. It is not a way of thinking outside of modernity, but a modern way of thinking otherwise (Adamson, 2009: 5).

While my video art mixed past and present, bridging video art and printmaking takes that a stage further. It continues the cycle of actualisation and virtualisation; what was imported into Second Life, was then reinterpreted and actualised through video, was then virtualised through new creative thought, and was then re-actualised into print. The hand-produced print has a significant material and visual character that distinguishes it from its origin; it is a reinterpretation and translation, and so carries a different sense and set of meanings. A still taken directly from a film

and printed may be faithful to the film, but it is not the film, and so is diminished.

Furthermore, that loss is continued in these pages in Illustrations 1, 38, 39 and 40 where both the digital moving image and the crafted produced print lose significant qualities of space, time and texture in their reproduction on plain paper.

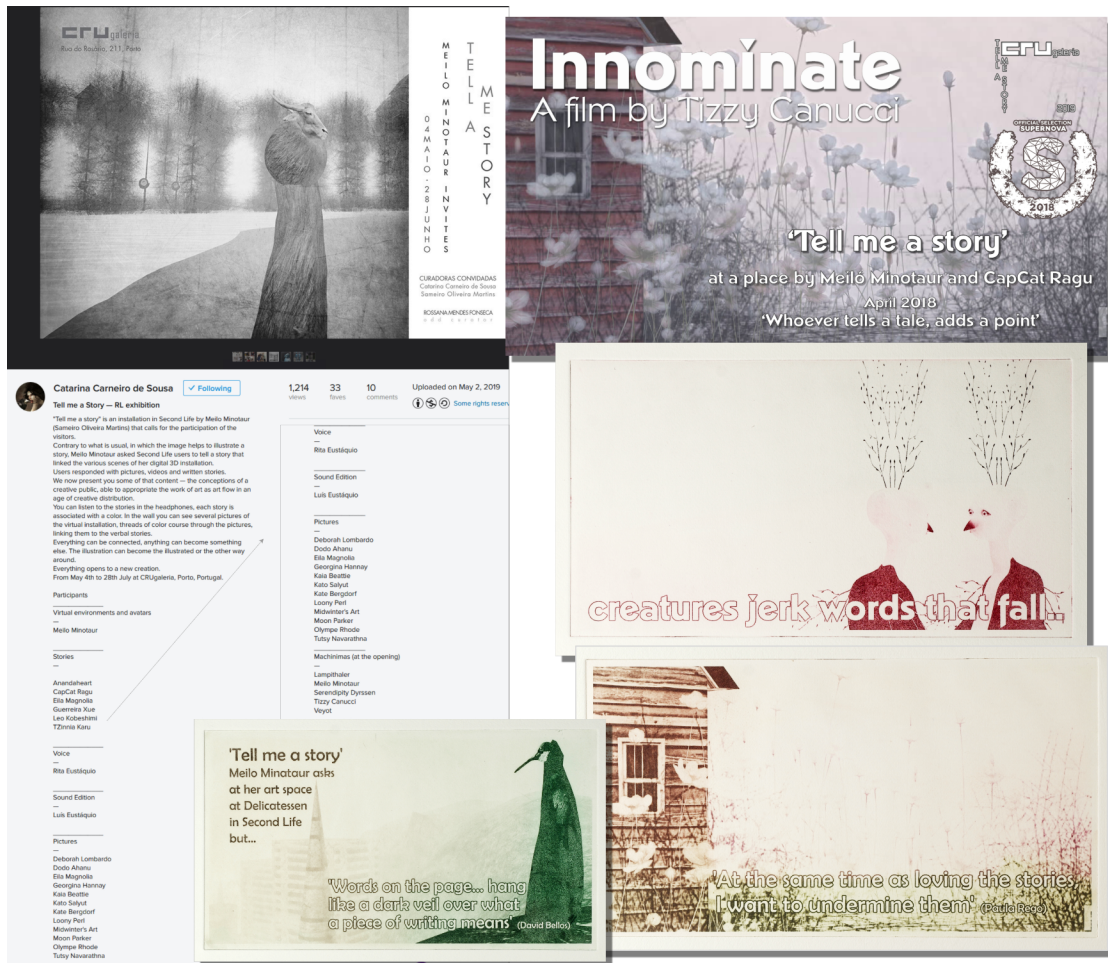


Illustration 39: My poster (top right) and three stills from *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e) returned to printmaking (right). The video art was made within the Second Life installation, *Delicatessen* (Minotaur and Ragu, 2018). An art exhibition (Sousa & Martins, 2019) (lower left) was put on in Porto, Portugal, out of the work made by various artists in the installation. The description (lower left) shows the exploration of relationships between film, print and stories.

Printmaking, by using compound and different methods, demands thought about the image and the way it can be rendered and reinterpreted, which Paul Coldwell, talking about printmaking with Paula Rego, claimed brought it back to the tradition of storytelling (2020). In a similar instance, Illustration 39 shows the poster of my video using a still for *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e), with three connected prints on the right. The lower two are stills from the video, the upper one is another image I captured at *Delicatessen* (2018) in

Second Life. This space was created by Meiló Minotaur and CapCat Ragu, the pseudonyms of Portuguese artists Sameiro Oliveira Martins and Catarina Carneiro de Sousa respectively. The invitation at *Delicatessen* was to ‘Tell me a story’, with the Portuguese proverb that ‘Whoever tells a tale adds a point’. I ‘refused’ the invitation by Meiló Minotaur to tell a story, but in the knowledge that any choice of images or words I made would be interpreted as a story by the viewer or reader (Waldman, 1981). With the prints, I chose to include quotes on two of them, one of which was ‘At the same time as loving the stories, I want to undermine them’, which came from an exhibition of Paula Rego’s work in Edinburgh (Rego, 2020), and relates to her interest in *oral* story-telling where the story is reinterpreted for and by the audience (Coldwell, 2020). In terms of practice, these parallels only became apparent as my printmaking developed and connected with my video art. It is a means of escaping ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) and recognising how we reweave parts of writing and visuals, in ‘textile gestures’ (Lévy, 1998: 48).

In Illustration 40, I produced the poster for *Repeat Hikari* (Canucci, 2018i) using a still from my video, which was a reinterpretation of the original installation art by Amelie Marcoud. The poster remains faithful to the visual appearance of the video, and while reframing it, does not reinterpret it. In my print, *Face and Repeat*, the ink and paper gives a different dimensionality, texture and colour balance to the combination of two images, which shifts the visual dynamic and perception between the digital on-screen origin and the craft-made paper follow up.



Illustration 40: *Repeat Hikari* (Canucci, 2018i). Left: The poster intended mostly for online use, but printable (Canucci, 2018i). Right: *Face and Repeat* (Baxter, 2019b) was printed on a traditional press, using two video stills etched onto two polymer photogravure plates.

In adopting printmaking as a practice, I thought there might be similarities in the creative process; as Julian Klein claimed ‘artistic knowledge is sensual and physical, “embodied knowledge”’ (2010: 6), but it is not inevitably the same experience. Both video editing and printmaking are physical activities, and the prolonged period taken to edit a video using a computer mouse is significant (Illustrations 16 and 18), even if the outcome is digital and does not have the material ‘weight’. However, in both approaches I was interested in working with the accidental and the overlapping, of setting up different prints or edits against each other to see how they interact. The investment of time to gain experience is what achieves results, linking to Sebastian Olma’s reassertion of serendipity as the combination of both skill and chance (2016).

There are three specific points I want to raise about the connection between the act of video art and printmaking; interaction, density and familiarity. 'An image must be transformed by contact with other images, as is a color by contact with other colors. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation' (Bresson, 1997: 20). So I am looking for the emergent out of interacting light, ink, colour and texture – how one thing is obscured by another, but each is still interacting and present, revealing itself partially and increasingly on viewing. It is not possible to attend to both equally at the same time, certainly not with a single look, and it resists the idea of the perfect image or story. It is more in line with the description of the spirit of anthropologist (Geertz, 1973: 20, 29), the filmmaker or animator rather than the live action film director (Bresson, 1997: 5–10; Oliver, 2018; Steyerl, 2009), and literature rather than video games (Welsh, 2016). As the photogravure artist Paul Winstanley claimed, it is not just about how different methods simply achieve different things, but how they contradict and work with each other (2019: 285).

Density is also how I think of refining a work, both writing and the visual, and whether one part is comparable to another or whether it is too sketchy, and whether there are gaps or awkward breaks. The sketchy parts need to be made denser, either by putting more in, or making them more compact. It is not measurable in a literal way, nor do I seek an even density – it is what *feels* right.

Familiarity reflects the importance of getting to know the material you are working, which leads to decisions. Repeated viewing of video clips is the way of learning the complexity of what is there, particularly when it involves the creativity of someone else, and editing video with sound tightly means an equally familiarity with the chosen music. Making polymer photogravure plates for printmaking means knowing how the computer printout will work

on the plate and the amount of etch, and then getting to know how the ink works into and with the image before printing. All three factors are linked to time; they are close to the academic method of ‘close reading’ in literature studies with the extra time devoted to one text, or the time spent in a gallery viewing an artwork. It extends beyond instant recognition, or following a story line, where the creator has decided what they want the viewer to see; instead it reflects the creator as the curious explorer who has discovered something but not everything.

If there is anything I do it is art – something I would not have said three years ago. I work with and at the breakdown of the aesthetic, visual and audio, and technology. It is not planned in advance nor predictable, and perfection is not the motive – even if the editing and print methods are tight and thorough. It seeks the oddities and exceptions, the value in the work of others, and works with material that is gathered rather than scripted, which means compromise, accommodation, ambiguity, error, and most importantly, reinterpretation and respect for the work of others. I want ambiguity and error, for that is where curiosity and art lies.

8 Coda

Metaphor has been a recurrent theme in different contexts, and was specifically discussed in Chapter 6. As I write this, Covid-19 is disrupting how humans live on this planet, but at a personal level after an injury last year, I find myself for the second time in two years dislocated and in a personal lockdown. This emphasises that:

people work with metaphor as they grapple with the disruption to life. When life must be reorganized, metaphors can provide a transforming bridge between the image of the old one and the new one... Metaphor lies at the intersection of what has been and what can be (Becker, 1997: 60).

In the course of making *Flame Tears the Soul* (Canucci, 2020a) and reworking those experiences, I encountered similar expressions of loss, emptiness and emotional crisis in Ludwig van Beethoven's *Heiligenstädter Testament* (1802), to which I will return shortly.

During 2019 I was unable to use the computer because of an injury and subsequent government bureaucratic failings. My first response was to take two further months at Edinburgh Printmakers to develop printmaking during January and February 2020, and I had computer access, space and time for video art after I returned in March. It was a significant reawakening; artistic creativity emerges out of thoughts and inspiration that have time to develop. The printmaking was considered in Chapter 7 so the Coda considers the recent video art, and how it connects with previous explorations of theory.

Menuetto Contained (Canucci, 2020c) used Second Life visual material I had collected during 2019, but been unable to use, and there was a deliberate move to work across time, ‘digital’ and ‘analogue’ as discussed in Chapter 2, and combine visual and audio by using Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 20 in G major, op. 49, no. 2. II. Tempo di menuetto (Veeseey, 2009). Streaming video into Second Life has never been successful, and I was approached to make a work for the trial of a new streaming method at the *Blue Orange* venue, where I previously made *Swirl Eight* (Canucci, 2017f). As an event it was a success, with about seventy people present and eighteen effectively shown videos by different artists, even if the long-term usefulness is limited as the method depends on Flash, which has security issues and will reach end of life in December 2020 (Adobe, 2020). However, in making this video, I noticed there were many Beethoven250 events celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth in 2020 (Beethoven Jubiläums GmbH, 2020), which led into *Flame Tears the Soul*.



Illustration 41: *Menuetto Contained* (Canucci, 2020c) on screen at the event in Second Life, and showing some of the seventy avatars present.

Squares Circles String (Canucci, 2020f) again came out of an approach from a Second Life resident, Thoth Jantzen (Djehuti-Anpu). I had previously used his artwork in *Glass and Light Breakwave* (Canucci, 2015a). In discussion, he said he had lost a part of the artwork, so the video stands as a record as well as an interpretation, something discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The following work, in *Of Shui Mo Virtual* (Canucci, 2020d), I again reworked the ‘digital’ with the ‘analogue’, which was what Fiona Fei was doing in her art exhibition, 窗户 *Chuānghu* (*Windows*) (2020b), recreating an ‘architectural installation in the style of ink wash... a modern take of today’s urban environment... where all the “walls” are see-through, acting as windows’ (Fei, 2020a).

Next, I initially thought of *Transmission is Ten* (Canucci, 2020h) as just a personal record, as I made it at a club in Second Life I had been going to most Friday evenings since 2016 (Illustration 42). However, I realised that it had more significance in three ways. First, it was celebrating a club that had been set up ten years ago by a group of individuals, some of whom were still regulars in Second Life, which reflected the longevity of Second Life as an online space (Linden Research, Inc, 2020) and the dream of the internet as a free and open creative space (Introduction, Chapters 2 and 5). Secondly, the club was more crowded than I had ever seen it, reflecting the effect of Covid-19 on internet use, and a corresponding increase in the number of users in Second Life, returning or joining (eregion, 2020). Thirdly, it reflected my autoethnographic intent, of expressing my presence in the space, my interest in its value, and my desire to communicate that to others (Chapter 2).



Illustration 42: Poster for *Transmission is Ten* (Canucci, 2020h), which shows the number of people (as avatars) present at an event that marked ten years of existence as a music orientated social space on the internet.

isolation (Canucci, 2020b) was made at the art installation of the same name by CapCat Ragu (2020), an artist whose work I had previously worked with in *Innominate* (Canucci, 2018e), as discussed in Chapters 4 and 7. The interest reflected both my engagement with the expressive qualities of the artwork, and my resistance to how art sometimes deals with science. It struck me for its clarity and understatement, and the commonly adopted symbolism of Covid-19, face coverings and visual images of a virus, were absent. Instead, it was a dark, quiet emptiness, with the outside world, isolated yet visible, strangely located inside in four towers. The experience is of looking in on the outside, and of a void between being there and not there. In response, I used sparse music, and my avatar stands solitary, reflecting my own sense of distance and strange separateness. The word ‘isolation’ was edited into the video to slowly fall twice at the same size and position, firstly next to the towers (Illustration 43), then through a period of complete black. In the installation, the virus is not visible and has an implied presence, something that I referred to

previously about Edward Thomas's approach to the First World War, and which lay behind *Edward Thomas* (Canucci, 2017c).

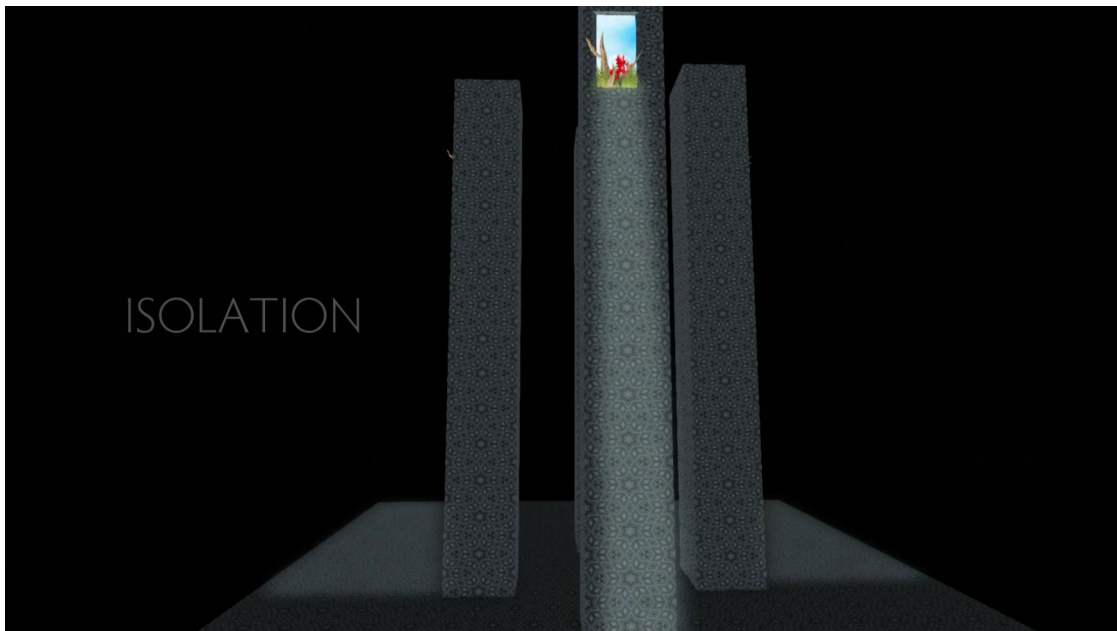


Illustration 43: *isolation* (Canucci, 2020b). The word falls slowly through the blackness, first in space past the towers in the installation (Ragu, 2020), then in time through a period of complete black.

Brian Massumi in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), argues that any reuse of the scientific is legitimate, and 'sciences' should not get upset about others not getting it 'right' (2002: 9). However, prior meaning is not so easily denied. Ordinary face coverings are easy iconography that demonstrates social attitudes, yet denies the life and death status of medical face masks for health workers. Images of the virus are problematic; the virus is only visible with an electron microscope so a visual image is constructed, dismissible as 'photoshopped' in other contexts, and presents the virus as mere spectacle, something that can be spotted, kicked, dodged or played with, as if the human is in control. A similar debate exists around war photography, and whether it turns human suffering into mere spectacle, where aesthetics contradict consequences (Ramamurthy, 2004: 198).

The approach by CapCat Ragu at the installation *Isolation* is more about using metaphors as ‘mediators of disruption’ (Becker, 1997: 60), as a cultural resource that enables them to reconnect with a changed social order. By equating or substituting one conventional point of reference for another, metaphors enable the reassessment of cultural and social meaning and their recreation in a personal context. This connects with Zeno’s paradox (Bergson, 2012), a philosophical investigation that claims all movement can be broken down into a set of moments of immobility, and it is only in the human mind where these moments of immobility are connected into a continuous movement. In a practical sense, the paradox and challenge of lock-down and isolation is that mobility is frozen and reconnection constricted.

Historically, the human experience of isolation has taken different forms. In monasteries, it was a way of giving oneself to God; in prisons it is imposed on others as punishment, and through solitary confinement to break their will; and in lunatic asylums, a means of confining those deemed insane away from the rest of society. It is not playful, and indeed, care home residents were reported as just ‘fading away’ (Hill, 2020) through isolation due to Covid-19, as their last sense of meaning in their lives and connection with other family members, folded. This sense of the future collapsing and life as not worth living was an important part of my next work.

Flames Tear the Soul (Canucci, 2020a) was in response to this year’s theme for *Supernova* Denver, ‘World on Fire’ (Denver Digerati, 2020), and combined with Beethoven250 through using Symphony No. 3, *Eroica* (Czech National Symphony Orchestra, 2020). To work with a complete symphonic movement by Beethoven was for me very ambitious, even if the second movement, *Marcia funebre*, had a logical connection. Beethoven composed the symphony the year after he retreated to Heiligenstäd for the summer, where he wrote

the *Heiligenstädter Testament* (1802) as he tried to come to terms with the inevitability of his increasing deafness. In the words of one translation he was ‘compelled to withdraw myself, to live life alone’ (Beethoven, 2014), ‘withdraw’ becoming ‘isolate’ (Beethoven, 2013) in another translation (Illustration 44), which connects with the practice of ‘self-isolation’ in response to Covid-19 (NHS, 2020). He also wrote of the collapse of his hopes, dreams and memories, something that coalesces in the mind to give a sense of a future worth living. He writes of his art being the only thing he could cling onto to retain a sense of meaning. I experienced the same collapse two months after my head injury, and held on to one thing; the PhD.



Illustration 44: Six still images from *Flames Tear the Soul* (Canucci, 2020a). Right top and middle; archive image of the *Heiligenstädter Testament* (Beethoven, 1802) with text excerpts overlaid in English, and Tizzy Canucci as the ‘fire dragon’ behind. Textures in the top four images are from the performance art of SaveMe Oh. Bottom left: the *God Blast You* installation by Marina Münster (Münster, 2020a). Bottom right: an avatar at another SaveMe Oh performance.

In *Flames Tear the Soul*, the visual material I used were mostly performances by SaveMe Oh, with a small amount from the region of *Cornhub* (Milena, 2019), again material I had collected but not been able to use during 2019. More recently, I had made some video of Marina Münster’s *God Blast You* exhibition before it closed (2020a). I wanted to use her work because of its political engagement, as a protest against domination by men who exploit

and manipulate society for their own interests, which I had responded to previously with her work in *Deliberare Humanum Est* (Canucci, 2018b).

This work exemplifies what I have done through my video art and this research; the combination of the personal and public in ‘macroscopic conceptions and detailed expositions’ (Mills, 1959: 126) and the bringing together of virtual imagination and actual life (Lévy, 1998). To deliberately disrupt the idea of a digital-analogue divide and to deny ‘digital exceptionalism’ (Marres, 2017: 172) by working with material across time and space and to explore how technologies have always interacted in forming cultural processes. It is a deeply personal, yet also a deeply connected work.

The final piece of video art in this period marks a more artistic settlement. I returned to CapCat Ragu’s *Isolation* installation for a celebration event, with a music selection provided by Paloma de Coco as ‘DJ’, who I also knew. I rarely use a main location twice or more in a work, the exception being *Furillen* (Canucci, 2016f, 2016h, 2016i; Footman, 2016, 2020), and I had not intended to this time; however, SaveMe Oh had appeared to do one of her spontaneous performances (Illustration 45). As with *Flames Tear the Soul* (Canucci, 2020a), *out of isolation came forth light* (Canucci, 2020e) was a long video that came together naturally; previously I had always had to consciously reconsider structure once the video went beyond about six minutes. It deliberately works with geographical influences; Paloma de Coco is Portuguese and that influenced her selection of music, CapCat Ragu is the Portuguese academic and artist Catarina Carneiro de Sousa, and the pieces of music selected for the video, *Luarne Raneficte* (2017) and *Navimort* (2017), were by the Portuguese musicians M-PeX and André Coelho. It might be seen as ‘machinima’ as discussed in Chapter 6, but this was not about my ‘gamer prowess’, and while the games world is the setting, the ideas and connections extend beyond. This applied even to the title; a reference to the Biblical

quotation on Lyle’s Golden Syrup tins, ‘Out of the strong came forth sweetness’ (Buttery, 2012), which connected to my thoughts about the social history of isolation referred to previously. As pieces of video art within practice based research, these last works are not just a report or a record of what was there, but about connecting with wider meanings, metaphors and aesthetics, and recognising the human nature of the people who were involved.

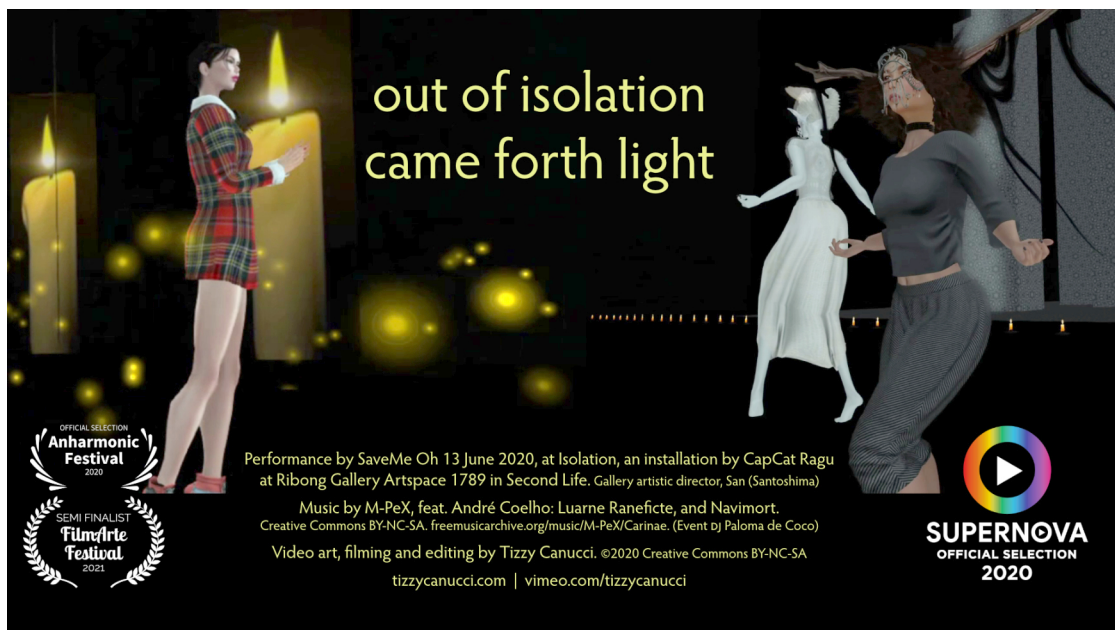


Illustration 45: *out of isolation came forth light* (Canucci, 2020e). SaveMe Oh to the left, CapCat Ragu to the right front, with Meiló Minotaur behind.

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