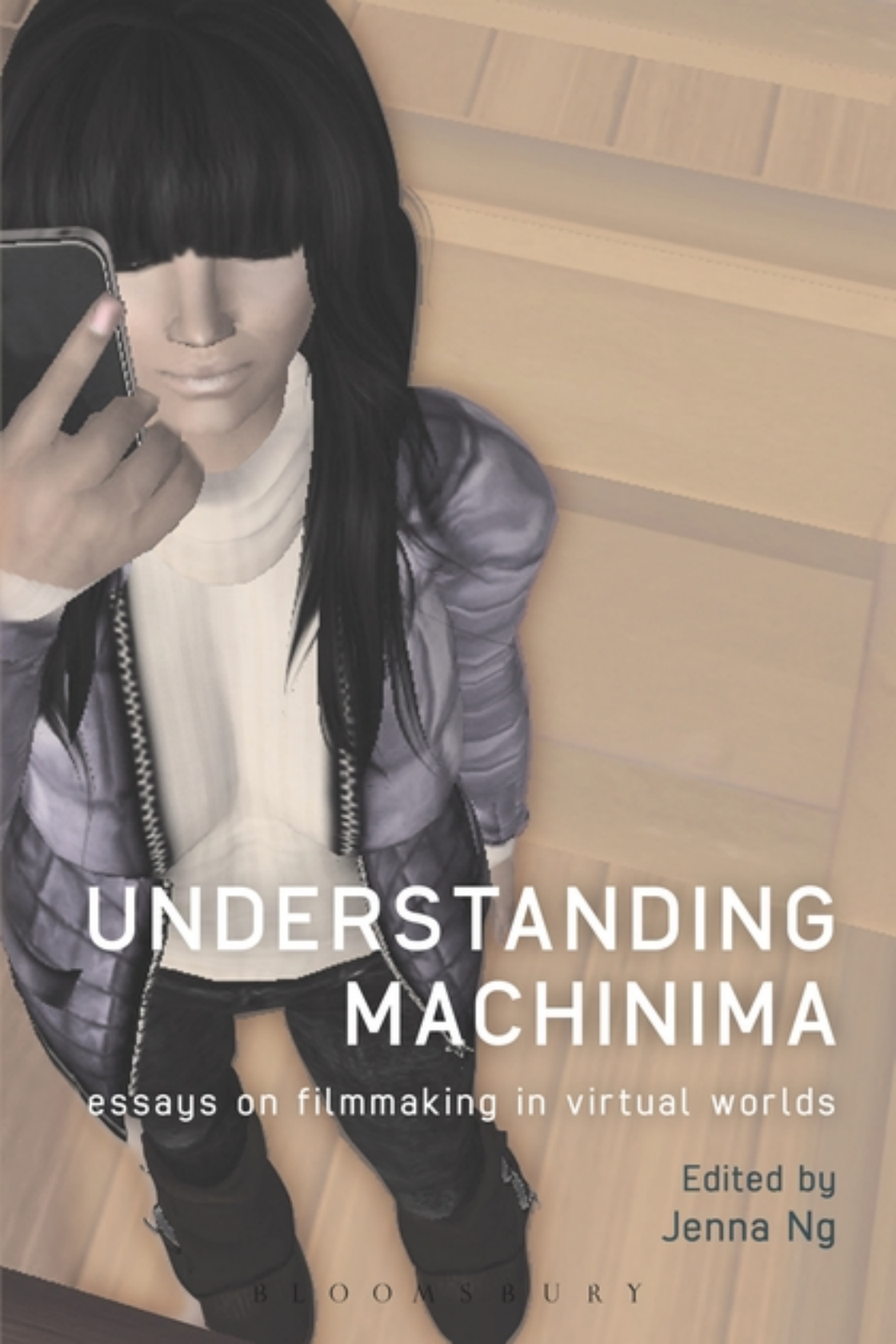

UNDERSTANDING MACHINIMA

essays on filmmaking in virtual worlds

Edited by
Jenna Ng

BLOOMSBURY

http://m.understandingmachinima.com/chapter10/

10

Call it a vision quest

Machinima in a First Nations context

Beth Aileen Dillon and
Jason Edward Lewis

Prologue

To begin: a story. In the fall of 2008, as Mohawk artist Skawennati was leading her team through their first machinima production, they started running out of building material. In the environment they were using, Second Life, the basic building material is called a prim, and one only gets a set number of prims per square footage of virtual land that one owns. What struck the team as odd was that they seemed to be running out of prims well short of the limit dictated by the size of the island they owned in Second Life.

But e-mails with Second Life's technical support team confirmed that they had been assigned the correct number of prims, and that that number should have been more than enough for the building they were constructing.

There the mystery remained until the day team member Bea Parsons strapped a new, extra-powerful jetpack onto her avatar, ignited the boosters, and headed up. She wanted to see just how high one could go in Second Life. She had gone about twice as high as she had ever done before when she made a startling discovery: way, way, way up in the clouds above Skawennati's island was an entire city, floating in the sky. It was beautiful and exquisitely built by craftsmen of far higher ability than Skawennati's quite capable crew. Aha, thought Parsons, that's where all our prims were going!

In the physical space of the lab, Parsons's excited shout drew everybody's attention. The rest of the crew geared up in Second Life and flew into the sky. Up there, they explored the buildings, confirming the high quality of the model building and assemblage. After a while, they encountered five other avatars inside a room, dressed in outrageous skins and clothing. Parsons immediately dubbed them "The Prim Pirates." The Prim Pirates did not take kindly to being told they were squatting on someone else's land until Skawennati, appearing as her Hunter avatar, proved that she also controlled the account under whose name the land was registered. After a long discussion, in which Skawennati alternately tried to convince them to come down and help build sets for her machinima series and threatened their sky city with destruction, the Prim Pirates simply teleported out of the space.

Skawennati's crew never saw them again. But they also did not forget that, on top of the existing irony of Indians buying virtual land and then colonizing it, there was now an additional irony of having to enclose that land to protect it from counter-colonization by a mysterious, strangely dressed, and somewhat belligerent group of technological adepts.

Introduction

Machinima provides First Nations people with a powerful set of tools with which to craft stories about themselves and their communities. It shares characteristics with many older media, principally cinema (Piggott 2011), but in its unique combination of opportunities for creative remediation, inexpensive production, and worldwide dissemination, we also see machinima as a medium through which First Nations people can take control of representations within the popular, mass media landscape.

As Skawennati's colleagues in the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace research network (AbTeC), we have observed the development of the

TimeTraveller™ project[A] since its inception in 2009. We argue that *TimeTraveller™,* as well as several other projects we will discuss, exemplifies the potential of machinima as a productive medium for First Nations creative and cultural expression. In this chapter, we will look at how new media practices, such as those embodied in *TimeTraveller™*, can be seen in the context of survivance—survival by resistance—and discuss how machinima in particular is a medium well suited to the remediation and narratives of resistance in First Nations culture. In the process, we will also consider the relationship between survivance and machinima's production processes, community of practice, and potential for extensive dissemination.

First Nations new media creation: tradition and technology

Sitting in the middle of concentric circles, Cree new media artist Archer Pechawis hits his hidebound hand drum and ignites an electric current through a wire activating a MIDI audio sample. As he sings and drums, videotaped footage shows Kutenai elder Bill Lightbown, Coast Salish elder Harriet Nahanee, and Pechawis's grandfather, Thomas Pechawis, speaking about what constitutes tradition. This performance, called *Memory*, (1997),[B] asks a question of central importance to First Nations new media: What is "traditional," and can our use of sophisticated technology be considered traditional?

The history of media technologies is one of Western instrumentalization that has sought to co-opt indigenous (including First Nations) cultures, decimate our languages, and deny self-representation (Lewis and Fragnito 2005).[C] Yet when put into our hands, as has happened over the past few decades, these technologies create opportunities that can benefit our communities by preserving our cultures, increasing the use of our languages, and promoting a self-determined image to a worldwide audience. The simultaneity of opportunities and dangers has led media cultural critics such as Steve Loft to think about Western technology in terms of the *shape shifter*—"neither inherently benign nor malevolent, but always acting and active, changing, transformative, giving effect to and affecting the world" (Loft 2005, 94).

Indigenous traditions survive because of their ability to change and transform in response to developments such as those wrought by communications technology. The occupation, transformation, appropriation, and re-invention of new media by indigenous artists exemplify the adaptability of Indigenous traditions (Hopkins 2006).[D] Forms of indigenous new media

art are as varied as the artists and their works, including but not limited to websites, virtual performances, multi-media installations, and games or game mods (modifications of commercial videogames). The technologies used may themselves not be traditional, but the ways in which they are used, re-purposed, and reshaped can be in the service of traditional or tradition-honoring practices.

A further aspect of traditional indigenous art we may see reflected in the practice of indigenous new media artists is a concern with working in a way that is of benefit to future generations (Taunton 2010).[E] Our AbTeC research network[F] engages indigenous youth in learning about advanced videogame design, modeling, animation, and programming technology through the Skins workshops (Lameman and Lewis 2011).[G] The workshops have resulted in the first-person game *Otsi!: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends* (2009)[H] and the third-person game *The Adventure of Skahion:ati: Legend of the Stone Giants* (2011), both of which adapt traditional Mohawk stories to game environments. Such projects connect creative expression in new media to tradition in a contemporary context that conveys our identities and concerns in the present (Claxton 2005).

Survivance

In this context of technology intertwining with tradition, we propose that indigenous new media is an area in which it is fruitful to think through issues related to "survivance," a concept popularized by Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor describes survivance as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (1993, vii). For our current purposes, we focus on the relationships among survivance, victimry, and story. Survivance is not merely "surviving," in the sense of not being consumed or killed by colonizing oppression. Survivance is fighting back. However, in Vizenor's view, resistance should not take the form of violence as it then results in victimry, or a conceptualization of the indigenous experience and worldview primarily in terms of having been victimized. His ideological commitment is to fight against views that relegate indigenous peoples to *having been*, as if indigenous peoples and culture no longer exist except in museums and archives. An attitude of survivance addresses the self-limitations of victimry by reinforcing the existence of living indigenous culture in contemporary society. Furthermore, in place of victimry—and its violent consequences—as a response to colonization,

Vizenor proposes stories, specifically stories that act as "word arrows," illustrating resistance through self-determined representations acting as vectors for recovering tradition and carrying it into the future as a living, evolving presence in the world.

A successful survivance strategy thus depends on integrating indigenous knowledge and ways of being into the process of making and telling stories, and on portraying self-determined representations to the world (Taunton 2010). Given that indigenous stories are continually changing, at once both individualized and communal, original and replicated, authored and authorless (King 2008), interactive new media technologies make for an apt fit as a means of story production and dissemination (Claxton 2005). The affordances of media such as experimental film, animation, and videogames provide a means whereby indigenous stories and art can embrace change as new forms while maintaining self-determined representations (L'opez 2008). Audiences may approach indigenous new media works from the perspective of being interested in indigenous expression, or they may come upon works through their connection to and interest in the medium that was used to create the work. Either way, having indigenous creators shaping those representations as producers, rather than being subject to others' interpretations, challenges the notion that indigenous art is a static relic of the past.

Survivance can also work in new media by way of philosophical integration. In her far-sighted essay "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace," Cree filmmaker Loretta Todd (1996) articulates the teleological challenge cyberspace poses for non-Western cultures, given that it was created to satisfy the Western need for expansion, control, and domination. She encourages Indigenous artists to integrate their own philosophy with the design of new media so as to infiltrate indigenous concepts of epistemology, corporeality, and transformation into the structure of cyberspace. Such an approach echoes Vizenor's interest in the adaptability, contemporariness, and critical stance found in survivance.

Fifteen years after Todd's observations, we can see numerous examples of new media works developing to combine her ideas on infiltration with survivance. For example, Skawennati's *CyberPowWow* (1996)[I]—a virtual space that uses the graphical chat program *The Palace* (1995)[J] for participants to explore new identities while reading, viewing, and discussing one another's writings and art—connects virtual communities to First Nations communities in the "real" world. Like Pechawis's reappropriation of memories of colonization in order to respond to that history, Cree musician and new media performance artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *NDN Spam* (2011)[K] is a collaborative website with videos and an interactive cookbook that reappropriates spam, a processed meat that was government-issued to impoverished reservations. In the

Alternate Reality Game *Techno Medicine Wheel* (2008),[L] in which an interactive narrative weaves the real world with new media, online players engage with traditional Squamish knowledge about medicinal plants presented as visuals and text. Players are challenged to locate and identify plants and interact with Squamish new media artist Cease Wyss at community gardens within the urban growth boundaries of Vancouver, British Columbia, thus merging cyberspace with physical space.

Machinima

The digital medium that interests us most here is machinima. Machinima is typically defined as a production technique rather than an aesthetic product. It uses real-time engines from videogames and virtual worlds to create cinematic computer animations. The artist then takes the output from these processes and creates the artwork, which may be as varied as linear video clips, recorded game sessions, or live performances (Nitsche 2005).

In relation to this process-intensive definition, Erik Champion (2009)[M] posits that machinima is primarily procedural art, drawing from philosopher Stephen Davies (1991), who argues that definitions of art are often functional *or* procedural. Functionalists emphasize that works of art must perform functions such as provide an aesthetic experience, whereas proceduralists assert that certain procedures must be used to create art. Machinima, as an emerging form that is developing along with the evolution of digital games technology, tends to emphasize technique (Berkeley 2006).[N] In turn, this means that the locus of aesthetic and conceptual exploration occurs most often in the production process. Furthermore, machinima production involves re-purposing code, graphics, and audio from an existing game or virtual world engine to create original works. Such a deconstructive mode in the production process of machinima lends itself well to question how Western technologies are structured, how they might be disassembled for cultural critique, and how they might be reshaped to better serve indigenous creators (Claxton 2005).

More broadly, machinima's foundation on worlds and engines used for mass-market production provides indigenous new media artists with vast opportunities to subvert depictions of indigenous peoples found in games played by hundreds of thousands of people. For example, *Soniyáw* (2008), a *World of Warcraft* (1994) machinima by Myron Lameman, plays on the stereotypes of the Tauren race (Figure 10.1). *World of Warcraft* is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game that co-opts several cultures for its races (Langer 2008), including a generalization of indigenous cultures into

the pan-Indian Tauren, a cow-like shamanistic race. In comparison, *Soniyáw* contributes to survivance through its use of names, story, and aesthetic style. Like the title *Soniyáw*, which stands for "money" in Cree, the player characters used as actors have Cree names instead of names from the built-in Tauren name randomizer that have no connection to indigenous languages. The story resists hack and slash or game lore-related narratives typical of *World of Warcraft* machinima by focusing on a main character who struggles so much with combat that he seeks alternative means of supporting himself by using traditional Cree gambling activities like the "hand game" to make money. In its use of design, language, setting, and action, *Soniyáw* simultaneously subverts in-game pan-Indian stereotypes as well as out-of-game stereotypes about North American indigenous culture and gambling.

FIGURE 10.1 *Soniyáw the Tauren in Thunder Bluff city*

As Tracy Harwood (2011) observes, the emerging generation of machinima makers are not necessarily gamers working from the inside out (in which the game engine is chosen by fans who wants to express their play), but also include artists who are working from the outside in (in which the game engine is seen as a tool independent of game culture) (cf. Nitsche 2007).[o] *Soniyáw* was created "inside out" from the perspective of a First Nations gamer interested in survivance through machinima in reaction to *World of Warcraft*'s stereotypes of indigenous cultures. Like Lameman, artists are looking for novel means to realize individual expression, and in that respect see machinima first and foremost as a tool for creating artwork. Skawennati's *TimeTraveller™* is another example of such a machinima work created by

a First Nations artist to explore a number of issues related to indigenous people, tradition, technology, and the future of our communities, to which we will now turn to examine in greater detail.

Machinima as First Nations practice

When Skawennati discovered Second Life machinima, she knew she had finally found the medium for making *TimeTraveller™*. Conceptually, *TimeTraveller™* originated as a cinematic companion piece to *Imagining Indians in the 25th Century* (2001), an interactive website[P] based on paper doll games and journaling to play with futuristic First Nations representations. Skawennati had imagined *TimeTraveller™* with an aesthetic similar to that of the first-person shooter (FPS) game genre, and Second Life not only worked in the first-person point of view, but natively supported the physics required for the flying, teleporting, time-traveling, and jetpack-wearing characters in the story.

Indeed, *TimeTraveller™* holds a cyberpunk-inflected narrative: it tells the story of Hunter, a young Mohawk man of the twenty-second century who looks to his past to imagine what his future will be. Frustrated by the state of the world in 2121, Hunter embarks on a Vision Quest, but unlike his ancestors he does not venture into the land alone. Instead, he uses TimeTraveller, a 3D virtual reality device that allows users to "travel" through time to visit famous people, places, and events. Along the way, Karahkwenhawi—a Mohawk woman from our present—finds a duplicate of the device and goes on a Vision Quest of her own into the future. The primary storytelling mechanism of *TimeTraveller™* is a Second Life machinima series composed of ten episodes ranging between five to seven minutes each. Every episode integrates First Nations cultural imagery (historical, contemporary, and futuristic) with imagery of high-tech equipment and processes. In the following sections, we discuss how *TimeTraveller™* embodies First Nations survivance by employing machinima as a venue for telling stories that reflect on our past and present as well as imagine our future.

Remediation

Machinima's essential definition as a remediative practice offers opportunities for First Nations new media artists to engage in critical re-imagining. Broadly put, remediation is the "representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 2000), and machinima remediates content from the game engine in use, including characters, levels, and sounds (Nitsche 2005).

Game-dependent camera effects, for example, influence the structural form of a machinima work. For those who have not played the game, the work stands alone because it is difficult to distinguish game elements from new elements created by the artist. However, those familiar with the game will have a deeper understanding of the artist's use of the game engine, causing them to question what they have experienced previously as players (Champion 2009).

While *TimeTraveller™* itself is not remediated directly from elements of its engine of Second Life, many of its references are re-appropriated from literature, media on the internet, and historical accounts. Such re-appropriation has a long history as a form of critique and resistance, from the collagists of the early-century avant-garde (Drucker 1994) to the mid-late-century "found footage filmmakers" (Horwatt 2008).[Q] The new media work *Memory v2* (2010)—an interactive drum that controls video play-back of the *Memory* performance discussed at the beginning of this chapter—is an example of such an approach within First Nations new media practice with its integration of found footage from interviews with elders.

In *TimeTraveller™*, images from the internet are re-purposed as textures for specific content, such as Google and Coca-Cola online advertisements in the flyover scene in Episode 01,[R] or the Mohawk flag in Episode 03.[S] Remediation is also at work in entire settings, which range from futuristic to contemporary to historical as Hunter "travels" through time. In Episode 01, we are introduced to Hunter's life in 2121, reminiscent of Neal Stephenson's (1992) cyberpunk novel *Snow Crash*, filled with slick skyscrapers, electric blue lights, and punk fashion. Hunter flies with his jetpack alongside a barrage of billboard advertising, pointing to companies like Google and McDonald's that remain prevalent in the fictional 2121 world. In Episode 03, we follow Hunter on his journey to learn Mohawk teachings and values about the Warrior Society and Tree of Peace in the context of the effects of mainstream media on Mohawk representation. In that episode, we also witness a machinima remediation of a historical television news report that was biased against Mohawk people during the Mohawk Crisis of 1990. Each episode thus reifies First Nations presence throughout time, using the remediation of media as a means of resistance against absence.

Resistance

Machinima lends itself well to strategies of resistance and subversion, since as it is based on radically modifying existing game engines or virtual

environments towards some other purpose. Machinima-makers define their practice as one where conventional gameplay is deprecated in favor of *playing with* the structure of the game rather than playing the game itself (Mitchell and Clarke 2003).[T] Simply by adapting gameplay to the cinematic form, machinima resists the path the game producers intend for the players.

Unlike games, Second Life does not have a single, unitary narrative or operational thread that can be subverted (Pinchbeck and Gras 2011). Second Life differs from commercial games in its lack of goal-orientation, relying instead mostly on the social interaction of users as well as an economy of user-generated content to serve as the reasons why people use it. User-generated content tends to be inspired by the individual contexts of users as opposed to a pre-defined narrative generated by the system (ibid.). The lack of a game narrative in Second Life thus makes it easier for *TimeTraveller™* to operate in a context that is different from most of machinima's self-reflexive invocation of game culture, creating its own narrative context that looks to First Nations culture and science fiction as its main reference points.

Such creative contexts and references may be seen in a number of ways. First, Skawennati develops a rich set of First Nations characters in Second Life, an act which we argue constitutes a powerful contribution to self-determination in cyberspace (Figure 10.2). When Skawennati first joined Second Life and created her Hunter avatar, skin tones were limited. She had to select "Latino" skin for Hunter because First Nations tones were not available. She was unable to find a traditional Mohawk hairstyle, so she

FIGURE 10.2 *Hunter (second from left in foreground) and Dakota men raise arms together*

selected a dreadhawk (which, in the non-linear way that creative decisions often evolve over time, has been kept because she sees it as reinforcing Hunter's cyberpunk image). Such lack of options is a common issue across all videogames and virtual worlds where one finds few indigenous characters (Lameman and Lewis 2011). Even games known for their highly customizable characters like *Fallout 3* (2008) often neglect to include skin tone and hair options that would support Indigenous representation.

Second, Skawennati customizes numerous objects in *TimeTraveller™*, a significant vector through which First Nations survivance strategies are enacted. Customization in machinima may involve making assets such as animations, textures, objects, and sounds. This technical production usually requires additional graphics and sound software that has both commercial and open source options, in the process modifying in-game characters, environments, props, music, and effects (Cameron and Carroll 2009). Such processes provide more opportunities for machinima makers to express themselves individually, since the assets can be interpreted independently from the game context. Second Life machinima in particular tends to involve an extensive amount of modification owing to the user-generated nature of the virtual world. One of the customized objects in *TimeTraveller™* is the digital version of sacred objects. In Episode 03, a smudge shell and bundle of sage are used for smudging in a ceremony. A wampum belt, traditionally woven with beads, sinew, and leather and used as a mnemonic device to keep account of treaties and contracts, also makes an appearance. The *TimeTraveller™* team also purchased hairstyle assets to be modified for use on their avatars to complement the traditional braided male hairstyles they made themselves. The use of such objects thus serves as examples that First Nations culture can be effectively transposed into new forms.

Other customized objects include clothing. Finding culturally appropriate clothing for characters proved to be a challenge, since most of the depictions of First Nations culture in Second Life stem from romanticized pan-Indian stereotypes. The team found some user-generated content that was appropriate for Episode 02,[U] since it takes place in the 1800s, including a bow and arrows, moccasins, raccoon hides, a pouch, a necklace, turquoise belt buckles, and feathered rifles. However, creating accurate dressing for the scenes from a contemporary time setting, such as in the first half of Episode 04,[V] was necessary, since exhaustive searches for these assets proved unsuccessful. As a result, the team created much of the clothing for the characters, such as ribbon shirts, fancy dresses, and jingle dresses (Figure 10.3).

Aside from historically accurate clothing, Skawennati and her team also created contemporary clothing, such as a collection of T-shirts featuring First Nations symbols. For example, in Episode 01, Hunter wears an Iroquois

FIGURE 10.3 *Jingle dancers assembled at a futuristic powwow in Episode 04*

Confederacy (Haudenosaunee) T-shirt to proclaim his Mohawk heritage and to indicate his rejection of Canada's jurisdiction over him, his people, and their territory. The production also created futuristic clothing, such as the *haute couture* "Ovoid" gowns in Episode 04 worn by the powwow dancers of the future. These gowns not only comment on how First Nations people will be participating in future culture but also suggest that West Coast culture, which did not historically participate in powwows, will come to partake in such pan-First Nations events (Figure 10.4).

FIGURE 10.4 *An "Ovoid" gown from the futuristic powwow in Episode 04*

The ways in which avatars perform their actions were also customized. The team made animations for full body movements, hand movements, head gestures, and touch that were based on First Nation cultures. At the futuristic powwow in Episode 04, avatars drum, sing, and jingle dance. Hand movements were made for a ceremony involving the smudge shell and bundle of sage in Episode 03 (Figure 10.5). The integration of the ceremony in Episode 03 echoes the merging of sacred practices and protocol with new media, as discussed by Claxton (2005). Head gestures were a particularly interesting contribution to the representation of First Nations communication. To avoid the exaggerated head gestures that are the norm in Second Life and which they felt were too Western, the team made a traditional Mohawk gesture of pointing with the chin. Touch animations such as kisses on the cheek and back-patting were made to show character relationships. Each of these animations thus manifests First Nations expression in a virtual context to create a distinct world in which to tell the *TimeTraveller™* story.

FIGURE 10.5 *The Lance Thomas avatar performing a smudging ceremony*

Finally, resistance is also seen in survivance showing the adaptability of First Nations tradition. In *TimeTraveller™*, First Nations characters are frequently represented as technological experts. The characters are active participants in virtual spaces rather than victims of the digital divide (Norris 2001), a technological separation that still occurs for many First Nations reserves that do not have access to the internet. In Episode 01, Hunter flies around using his jetpack in a city filled with sky-high shiny buildings. The *TimeTraveller™* glasses worn by Hunter and later also by Karahkwenhawi in Episode 04 show futuristic advanced

technologies in First Nations' hands. Karahkwenhawi, who lives in our present time, also uses her iPhone to take footage of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha statue at the Saint Francis-Xavier Mission.

Production process

The production process of machinima is also similar to indigenous traditions of learning. Skawennati and her team faced initial challenges due to their lack of familiarity with shooting in Second Life. Through experimentation and practice over a number of months, as well as relying on the existing online resources provided by the Second Life machinima community, the team mastered the necessary skills to the point where they could focus their efforts on writing the narrative and developing custom content reinforcing First Nations representation. Their process of learning through sharing knowledge and taking action by doing may be seen as an example of experiential learning, an approach that has also been described as central to indigenous tradition (Deloria and Salisbury 2004).

Machinima's affordance of flexibility during the production process is also akin to indigenous storytelling methods. Thomas King observes how indigenous storytelling methods prioritize contextual adaptability, taking into account temporal contexts, physical environments, communal characteristics, and the movement of the story itself (King 2008). Machinima is a medium in which taking such an approach can work quite well, as it supports interchangeable environments, audience interaction in the case of Second Life, and rapid shooting and re-shooting. For the *TimeTraveller™* team, it was particularly helpful to be able to quickly re-shoot scenes when avatars need to be re-positioned or additional dialogue is added. The immediate flexibility in machinima makes it possible to follow a script but also to improvise and adapt similar to methods of indigenous storytelling.

Community of practice

Machinima exists within a community of practice—"a specific group with a local culture, operating through shared practices, linked to each other through a shared repertoire of resources" (Cameron and Carroll 2009). Engine-specific knowledge is abundant in online tutorials and, in some cases, printed publications. Information to support modding efforts exists in the form of tutorials as well as archives of user-generated content. Active support is readily available

through discussion boards and blogs. Whenever Skawennati and her team ran into technical issues, they referred to the Second Life machinima community's numerous resources and interactive support.[W] This open sharing of knowledge in machinima's community of practice aligns with First Nations practices of survivance. Seen within the context of traditional First Nations learning emphasizing self-directed and communal practices (Grande 2004), the team's participation and engagement in the Second Life community of practice may be seen as an example of First Nations pedagogy becoming reified in a technological space.

The community of practice also influences how machinima is experienced. Most machinima involves building, shooting, editing, distributing, and receiving feedback from the community, before either modifying the machinima work or taking the feedback into consideration for a future work. In Second Life, machinima viewing is a social experience among maker and audience that can occur within the system while it is being produced. The audience can be involved in the production process and re-shoots without further rendering required (Pinchbeck and Gras 2011). In this unique context, dissemination is layered throughout the production process and facilitates a communal experience between maker and audience. *TimeTraveller™*, while remaining open to audiences who have not yet learned about First Nations history, relies on the audience's active participation in First Nations perspectives and knowledge. For example, Skawennati's version of the incident that incited the Dakota hanging in Episode 02 is not historically accounted for, but is, rather, her First Nations perspective on reports whose accuracy the audience must determine. The audience is also invited to interact with digital representations of sites of colonization (such as the Dakota hanging) or resistance (such as the Oka Crisis) as Second Life avatars moving through and viewing select living sets at AbTeC Island.[X]

Dissemination

TimeTraveller™ has been distributed through many of the methods available to machinima works: online, offline, and in mixed-reality contexts (meaning online and offline merging simultaneously or interlacing at different points in time). Each method affords a unique experience for the *TimeTraveller™* audience, a diverse community consisting of indigenous and non-indigenous youth, artists, history buffs, and Second Life enthusiasts.

TimeTraveller™ is unusual in that it is a machinima series with a companion Alternate Reality Game. The website (http://www.timetravellertm.com/index.

html),[Y] which appears in our present time by means of "a rift in space-time," promotes the twenty-second century *TimeTraveller™* product, namely sunglasses that provide "a fully-immersive experience that feels like one has traveled in time" (*TimeTraveller™* (2009)). The machinima series, then, is presented as a reality TV series from the future which follows Hunter on his adventures. The website is the access point to the episodes, as well as to information about how to buy *TimeTraveller™* technology and related merchandise.

To this extent, the *TimeTraveller™* Alternate Reality Game, embedded in both a fictional context and reality, may be read as an example of King's view (2008) that indigenous stories are *truth* rather than myth in that it contributes a First Nations understanding of historical events. The machinima episodes are also hosted online, in our contemporary time-line, on YouTube and Vimeo by Karahkwenhawi as she "discovers" them. Karahkwenhawi also has a Facebook profile[Z] through which she tells her story of discovery via status updates and links. The audience can interact with Karahkwenhawi through her Facebook page and help her on her search for Hunter.

The episodes are also posted on a Vimeo account that belongs to Obx Labs (the host of AbTeC at Concordia University).[AA] These links are usually accessed for professional development, such as selection at galleries or festivals, or for presentations about the project. In the episodes' future time-line, the maker of the *TimeTraveller™* device is a First Nations-owned virtual technology company called Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace. In our contemporary time-line, Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace is a research network of indigenous and non-indigenous researchers, artists, and technologists who explore indigenous self-determination in cyberspace. Imagining the research network as surviving into the future and mutating into an inventor of advanced technology is an assertion not only about the technical capabilities of indigenous people in the present, but also of the growth of those capabilities in the future.

The *TimeTraveller™* episodes are also shown in the context of festivals and events, particularly within the machinima community, such as the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in 2009,[BB] where it won the New Media award. The Concordia University Fine Arts Gallery also showed *TimeTraveller™* episodes at indoor and outdoor screenings; in the latter, the audience included people who were unfamiliar with machinima and/or First Nations new media.

TimeTraveller™ has also been shown "live" with Skawennati entering into Second Life as her avatar to present the project (Fragnito 2010). The *TimeTraveller™* episodes have been screened inworld in Second Life on the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace Island while simultaneously being

played live at real-world events hosted by AbTeC. For example, the release of Episode 04 occurred both in real life at a public event as well as in Second Life on the jumbo screen at the powwow stadium that had been created for the episode and left on the set. A local audience watched the machinima, while anyone with a Second Life account from anywhere in the world was able to share the experience by watching the same machinima episode inworld. These modes of distribution reinforce the trait of communal interaction in indigenous storytelling (King 2008) and facilitate the creation of a communal experience for the audience in ways that reflect King's (2008) and Vizenor's (2009) descriptions of indigenous approaches to storytelling. The audience is invited not only to interpret the story, but also to participate in the telling of it. In this way, machinima thus gives First Nations new media artists potential tools to expose new audiences in wide-ranging locations using communal indigenous methods.

Conclusion

TimeTraveller™'s production is still ongoing. To date, four episodes of the machinima series are complete and another six are planned. Each additional episode includes custom content for complex sets and several characters that highlight new indigenous representations in the series. In Episode 05, Karahkwenhawi finds herself at the deathbed of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. Episode 06 involves re-creating part of Alcatraz Island in 1969 and Episode 07 includes a portion of the thriving metropolis of Tenochtitlan in 1490, both of which required in-person visits to historical locations to ensure proper representation. Episodes 08 through 10 explore visions of a First Nations future that has been shaped through decades of self-determined growth.

In conclusion, *TimeTraveller™* utilizes the idiomatic qualities of episodic storytelling, custom content, and remediation in machinima to resist pan-Indian and neo-luddite stereotypes of First Nations peoples. The *TimeTraveller™* characters and stories exist within the machinima, but also within the Second Life world, and even in our present reality through the Alternate Reality Game. The project's production process offers an example to emerging First Nations new media artists on how to combine the past, the present, and the (imagined) future in a way that can be read as paradigmatic of survivance strategies for asserting indigenous presence. The dissemination strategies employed by the project suggest fruitful approaches to reaching various audiences made up of indigenous and non-indigenous communities with

differing interests. Finally, the richness of the narrative, the way in which it functions as a forceful conceptual and aesthetic critique of both indigenous and non-indigenous historical and cultural issues, and its core interest in imagining a powerful, hopeful, and playful future for First Nations people can serve as an example both for machinima-makers of any provenance and for First Nations artists looking for a medium through which to express survivance.

References

Publications

Berkeley, Leo. 2006. "Situating Machinima in the Mediascape." *Australian Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* 4(2): 65–80. http://www.swinburne.edu.au/hosting/ijets/journal/V4N2/V4N2abstract_berkeley.htm [Accessed January 6, 2012].

Boden, Margaret A. 2007. "Authenticity and Computer Art." *Digital Creativity* 18(1): 3–10.

Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. 2000. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Brown, Deidre. 2007. "Te Ahua Hiko: Digital Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Objects, People, and Environments." In *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse*, edited by Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, (pp. 77–91. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Cameron, David, and John Carroll. 2009. "Encoding Liveness: Performance and Real-time Rendering in Machinima." Published in proceedings of DiGRA 2009. *Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. http://www.digra.org/dl/db/09291.37018.pdf [Accessed January 6, 2012].

Champion, Erik. 2009. "Keeping it Reel: Is Machinima a Form of Art?" Published in proceedings of DiGRA 2009. *Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. http://www.digra.org/dl/db/09291.09190.pdf [Accessed January 6, 2012].

Claxton, Dana. 2005. "Re:wind." In *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, edited by Dana Claxton and Steve Loft (pp. 15–41). Banff: Banff Centre Press.

Davies, Stephen. 1991. *Definitions of Art*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Deloria, Philip, and Neal Salisbury. 2004. *A Companion to American Indian History*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Dowell, Kristin. 2005. "Exploring the Sacred in Aboriginal Performance Art." *Aboriginal Performance*. 2(1). http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/2_1/dowell.html [Accessed January 6, 2012].

Drucker, Johanna. 1994. *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923*. (1st ed). Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.

Fixico, Donald. 2003. *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.
Fragnito, Skawennati. 2010. "Indigenous Avatars: Talk About Wanna-bees!" Paper presented at Performance Studies International, Toronto, Ontario, June 12.
Grande, Sandy. 2004. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
Harwood, Tracy. 2011. "Towards a Manifesto for Machinima." *Journal of Visual Culture* 10(1): 6–12.
Hopkins, Candice. 2006. "Making Things Our Own: The Indigenous Aesthetic in Digital Storytelling." *Leonardo* 39(4): 341–4.
Horwatt, Elijah. 2008. "New Media Resistance: Machinima and the Avant-garde." *Cineaction* 73. http://cineaction.ca/issue73sample.htm [Accessed January 6, 2012].
King, Thomas. 2008. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Lameman (Dillon), Beth Aileen, and Jason Edward Lewis. 2011. "Skins: Designing Games with First Nations Youth." *Journal of Game Design and Development Education* 1(1). http://www.rit.edu/gccis/gameeducationjournal/skins-designing-games-first-nations-youth [Accessed January 6, 2012].
Langer, Jessica. 2008. "Playing (Post)colonialsm in World of Warcraft." In *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, edited by Hilde G. Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg (pp. 87–110). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Lewis, Jason Edward, and Skawennati Fragnito. 2005. "Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace." In *Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples Bridging the Digital Divide 29*(2). http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/aboriginal-territories-cyberspace [Accessed January 6, 2012].
Loft, Steve. 2005. "Aboriginal Media Art and the Postmodern Conundrum: A Coyote Perspective." In *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, edited by Dana Claxton and Steve Loft, (pp. 89–103). Banff: Banff Centre Press.
L'opez, Antonio. 2008. "Circling the Cross: Bridging Native America, Education, and Digital Media." *In Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, edited by Anna Everett, (pp. 109–26). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Mitchell, Grethe, and Andy Clarke. 2003. "Videogame Art: Remixing, Reworking and Other Interventions." *In Level Up Conferences Proceedings* (pp. 338–49). http://www.digra.org/dl/db/05163.36114 [Accessed January 6, 2012].
Nitsche, Michael. 2005. "Film Live: An Excursion Into Machinima." In *Developing Interactive Narrative Content*, edited by Brunhild Bushoff (pp. 210–43). Munich: High Text.
—2007. "Claiming Its Space: Machinima." *dichtung-digital: journal für digitale ästhetik*. http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2007/nitsche.htm [Accessed January 6, 2012].
Norris, Pippa. 2001. *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Piggott, Michael. 2011. "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Machinima?" In *The Machinima Reader*, edited by Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (pp. 177–93). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Pinchbeck, Dan, and Richard Gras. 2011. "Machinima: From Art Object to Cultural Practice." In *The Machinima Reader*, edited by Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (pp. 143–58). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Stephenson, Neal. 1992. *Snow Crash*. New York: Bantam Books.
Taunton, Carla. 2010. "Indigenous (Re)memory and Resistance: Video Works by Dana Claxton." *Post Script* 29(3). http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Post-Script/247034908.html [Accessed January 6, 2012].
Todd, Loretta. 1996. "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace." In *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, edited by Mary Ann Moser and Douglas MacLeod (pp. 179–94). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Vizenor, Gerald. 1993. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Middletown: Wesleyn.
—1998. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
—2009. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Machinima

Soniyáw. 2008. Myron A. Lameman.
TimeTraveller™. 2009. Skawennati Fragnito.

Art and performances

CyberPowWow. 1996. Skawennati Fragnito. http://www.cyberpowwow.net/.
Imagining Indians in the 25th Century. 2001. Skawennati Fragnito. http://www.imaginingindians.net/.
Memory. 1997. Archer Pechawis. Western Front, Vancouver, British Columbia.
Memory v2. 2010. Archer Pechawis. FADO Performance Art Centre, Toronto, Ontario.
NDN Spam. 2011. Cheryl L'Hirondelle. http://ndnspam.com/.

Software

Adventure of Skahion:ati: Legend of the Stone Giants, The. 2011. Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace.
Fallout 3. 2008. Bethesda Game Studios.
Grand Theft Auto IV. 2008. Rockstar Games.
Otsi!: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends. 2009. Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace.
Palace, The. 1995. Jim Bumgardner.
Second Life. 2003. Linden Labs.
Techno Medicine Wheel. 2008. Beth Aileen Dillon and Cease Wyss.
World of Warcraft. 1994. Blizzard Entertainment.