Oral, digital, and analogical cultures around video games

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Draft

MiT7 Unstable platforms: the promise and peril of transition

May 13-15, 2011 at MIT.

ABSTRACT

This presentation explores how multiple discourses present in film, photography, video games and machinima maybe related in certain specific contexts. Moreover, we explore how conversations among children and adults as gamers or producers supported by classical films theory, can help to draw awareness to the rules of these interactions. We present a series of reflections that include more questions than answers that have emerged from working with children and adolescents when we used video games in schools and produced machinima as a tool for reflection and communication. The main goal of the project is to encourage the development of new forms of literacy within the framework of a participatory culture.

INTRODUCTION

Games are present in everyday life and their presence allows us to explore how people who use multiple discourses, interact with digital objects. We examine how these discourses interrelate when children use them to function in a changing and dynamic society where new tools and technologies for communication appear and disappear quickly. Moreover, what is interesting in this context is that both technologies and forms of communication are dependent on each other and concepts such as convergence of platforms or transmedia experiences are concepts that help in the analysis of new media experiences. We are interested in and we focus on how people receive and reconstruct messages conveyed by the mass media, so becoming producers in themselves. However, it is not easy to understand this interaction.

> "The significance of a basic medium to its civilization is difficult to appraise since the means of appraisal are influenced by the media, and indeed the fact of appraisal appears to be peculiar to certain types of media. A change in the type of medium implies a change in the type of appraisal and hence makes it difficult for one civilization to understand another" (Innis & Godfrey, 1986), p. 6 as appear in (Brockmeier & Olson, 2009) p. 3

Looking at specific situations for exploring how multiple traditions and discourses interact we focus on the school contexts and examine how teachers and children use oral, digital and analogical tools for communication. Adopting an ethnographic point of view, we explore the conversations and multimedia productions that were generated in a workshop designed to introduce the discourse of videogames into the classrooms, using these tools for educational purposes.

A triple layered theoretical framework has been the inspiration of the labor undertaken to understand how young people interact with adults using the discourse of new media. Firstly, from the perspective of popular culture, we focus on active audiences which reconstruct messages to produce new media contents (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009). Secondly we follow (Manovich, 2001) and his consideration of new media convergence and its relation to two historical trajectories: computing and media technologies. According to

Manovich, the synthesis of these two histories represents the translation of media contents to numerical data accessible partially with the use of computers. Thirdly we also have been inspired by those who have approached oral cultures (Olson & Torrance, 1991a) when meta-discourses have been generated without using written language.

In summary, we take as a starting point the video games discourses and we will focus on **three elements present in the classrooms everyday life which represent three forms of culture that** allow us to establish a progressive awareness not only of the game but also of some of the principles that are present in the use of audiovisual media, both digital and analogical. The first is an interactive oral culture, the second is machinima (Marino, 2004) and the last is classical film productions**.**

COMMUNICATION TOOLS, DISCOURSES AND LITERACIES

Let us to focus on the concept of literacy which has a long tradition when exploring how people communicate in specific contexts. We will explore two different traditions. Firstly those people who explored *the relationship between oral and written language* by considering that literacy is a way of controlling secondary discourses in the contexts where they are produced (Barton, 2007; Gee, 2010; Morrow, Rueda, & Lapp, 2009; D. R. Olson & Torrance, 2009). Secondly we look at those who focused on a multimodal approach and considered the concept of new literacies *in relation to the use of digital media* by also focusing on the social dimension of the communication processes i.e. digital discourses are meaningful in specific communities and people use them for specific purposes far from the traditional classroom environment where children learn to read and write as de-contextualized activities, independent of thinking or collaborative creativity.

Literacy as control of secondary discourses

To start with we wish to emphasize some of the ideas that have emerged over the last twenty years and are still valid today. Literacy is a way of being conscious of one's own discourse. A tool for controlling the tools that we use and so to transform them in more complex modes of use allowing new and more complex activities in communicative and interactive contexts (for example, Mitchell & Weiler, 1991, John-Steiner, 1994; Olson & Torrance, 1991b; Wells, 1990). Even today other authors are working in the same direction (Dobson & Willinsky, 2009) considering new communication tools that will generate different forms of literacy and thinking.

Among the most relevant ideas based on this perspective is James Gee´s approach (Gee, 1991) long before he was interested in the video games discourses. *What is literacy?* He was very interested in this question at the time but nobody has attempted to define it up until now. In order to answer it he focused on other concepts. *The idea of discourse*, according to him was "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network" (p.5). Because speech is given a meaning from the context in which it is generated, individuals give body to a discourse every time they act or speak. Given this perspective it is sometimes helpful to say that individuals do not speak and act but that historically and socially defined discourses speak to each other thorough individuals.

But how do people control their own discourses? To answer this we need to consider the distinction between two processes; *Acquisition and Learning. Acquisition* is a process of acquiring something subconsciously through the exposure to models and a process of trial and error without a process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional. This is how people come to dominate their first language. *Learning* is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher. In real life both processes actually occur simultaneously most of the time. Let us focus on language and discourses. All humans, with the exception of some people with serious disorders, attain one form of discourse naturally through acquisition. This is achieved through the use of our native language in face to face communication with people who are intimate with us. These are people with whom we share a great deal of knowledge because we have similar experiences and a great deal of contact. This is referred as the *oral mode,* and Gee (2010) considered it to be *primary discourse.* Secondary discourses are developed in association with practice which is developed through secondary

institutions, outside of family and friends. In that context Gee considered that *"literacy is control of a secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of languages in secondary discourses.* At this point he proposes a definition of literacy that we would like to emphasize here.

> "*Powerful literacy* is control of a secondary use of language used in a secondary discourse that can serve as a meta-discourse to critique the primary discourse or other secondary discourses, including dominant discourses" (p.8)

The question is how to dominate this specific literacy and how the acquisition and the learning processes themselves contribute to obtaining this domination. (Gee, 2010) clearly states the role of both processes distinguishing between what is the simple use of speech and what he calls "mastery in performance", and what would be the ability to possess the power of using a meta-discourse. This is what he said:

> "One cannot critique one discourse with another (which is the only way to seriously criticize and thus change a discourse) unless one has meta-level knowledge in both discourses. And this meta-knowledge is best developed through learning, even when one has to a certain extent already acquired that discourse. Thus powerful literacy, as defined above, almost always involves learning, and not just acquisition" (p.9)

But what does it mean if we look at media literacy? What we are proposing is that students can be helped in gaining mastery of the media discourses if we look for strategies that allow people to reflect on them. We will try to be more precise on that topic in the following paragraphs.

Looking for new literacies

Powerful voices are emerging that provide alternative models of literacy concepts rooted in processes of reading digital media. Not all opinions converge when we explore different positions about how to teach digital literacies. For example, Merrin & Gauntlet, (2008 / January 4949), suggests that students are more expert than their teachers in this area and that perhaps they do not need to learn. They are considered as digital natives (Bennett, 2008). A debate has spread about the effect that this could have on their abilities, the process of teaching and learning. By contrast, Buckingham (2010, p: 293) considers that "most of these young people seemed to know what they could potentially be doing with the technology but that they mostly lacked the social or personal motivation to actually do it for themselves. Even today, it appears only a small proportion of users are in fact generating original content. Most are simply consuming it as they always have done". Following this approach the concept of an education in context is relevant to this debate (Buckingham, 2010; Olson & Torrance, 1996; Olson, 2003). The media discourse could be learned and taught in a manner similar to writing, which means no direct teaching but a process of reflection that considers both the content of messages and the audience that these are to be transmitted to and all contexts that give meaning to these messages as a function of the goals of those who issue them.

We will focus on two lines of work which have clearly defended the need to develop strategies for the development of new forms of literacy among young people. The first has its roots in the The_New_London_Group (1996), from this perspective the work of Burn (2009; Drotner & Schroder (2010) Jewitt, (2008) or Ares (2010) are relevant. They assume that today young people become producers in media contexts by using multimodal discourses. The second is one that Henry Jenkins has developed from the concept of convergence culture (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2009) from his perspective discourses have sense in the specific contexts which emerge from different platforms and technologies. Let us explore briefly these two approaches.

Literacy and multimodality: looking for new discourses

A multimodal approach focuses on the idea of meaning making and situated practices when people interact with technologies. Multimodality offers an approach that can be applied to the prominent role of visual and other non-linguistic semiotic resources appearing on the computer screen and elsewhere. Image, color, animated movement, writing, sound-effect, speech and so on are present in the making meaning processes. All of these elements are semiotic resources,

which can be considered as signs in specific situations and a product of the social process. People bring together a semiotic resource (a signifier) with a meaning (the signified) that they want to express. That is to say, people express meanings through their selection from the semiotic resources that are available to them at a particular moment (Jewitt, 2006).

What does it mean in this context, that young people become producers? In this instance it may be useful to consider the Kress & Leeuwen (2001) proposal where he introduces what differentiates four essential concepts.

1. *Discourses:* They consider discourses as a socially constructed knowledge of some aspects of reality. They exist separately from their mode of realization. For example the mode of language amongst others. Discourses can be related to image, color, speech and sound effect, movement, gesture and gaze. All of these are resources for making meaning and they are considered to be *modes.*

2. *Designs:* These stand midway between content and expression. They are uses of semiotic resources. Semiotic mode Designs are means to realize discourses in the context of a given communication situation. They remain separate from the specific material production of the semiotic product. The resources, on which design draws from semiotic modes, are still abstract and capable of being realized in different materialities.

3. *Production* refers to media and material resources and includes the body, the voice, and the tools, which may extend to bodily communication and expression. For example musical instruments and materials used in producing artifacts (even a pen and pencil). Production is always physical work, whether humans or machines generate it be it a physical job or articulating a text.

4. *Distribution* as the process in which modes and media are further modified by what maybe the new media of distribution. For instance, a music video modified by the broadcasting apparatus of television.

This perspective insists therefore, on the processes that are present in the construction of meaning within a specific communicative context. Its interest in our work relates to how different aspects of media discourses need to be considered when multiple speeches present in everyday life, may be explored.

Literacy in convergent and participatory cultures

Let to focus now on Henry (Jenkins et al., 2006) approach to literacy. What is meaningful for us is the idea that new media changes are related to the new role of consumers. According to him

> "Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content."

> "Educators must work together to ensure that young people have access to the skills and experiences needed to become full participants, can articulate their understanding of how media shape perceptions, and have been socialized into the emerging ethical standard that should shape their practices as media markers and participants in online communities". (Jenkins et al., 2006, p.3)

The following are the most relevant of Jenkins' ideas regarding the digital world, and are especially relevant for our own work:

• *Low barriers to artistic expression.* Why do schools traditionally limit children's forms of expression? How to change this situation? This question began to be important in our work after reading Vera John Steiner's book, "Creative Collaboration" (2000) and encountering the "figured worlds" concept of (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Jenkins offers us an interesting suggestion when he explores the potential of the digital universe for education i.e. new ways of creative collaboration supported by digital tools. A digital universe transforms the idea of a civic compromise associated with the creation, production and distribution

of media content (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Thorburn, & Seawell, 2003). This idea complements others suggested by Mike Cole's the "Fifth Dimension" project (Cole, 1996) when he considered that social commitment was a direct action in the real rather than the virtual community.

- *Informal mentorship.* Surely this concept is not very far from that which other authors have been using for a long time. Lave & Wenger (1991), for example, introduced it when referring to "peripheral participation" as a way of learning among the interactive participants in a community. Analysis of the special features of this concept linked to a transformative action in the real and virtual world has inspired our work.

- *The idea of social connection* also acquired in the digital universe. New forms of collaboration that raise new challenges to the relationships between the individual and the social world. This topic has been one of the traditional problems of socio-cultural psychology. Jenkins also explored the generation of activities in a digital universe by considering such phenomena that will undoubtedly change the processes related to the "author" concept, which is much closer to the individual than to the collective activity (good examples would be Wikipedia, alternative reality, gaming or blogging).

Jenkins and their colleagues propose "Rethinking" literacy. He goes further than the traditional definition. Even textual literacy remains a central skill in the twenty-first century. When students engage with the new participatory culture they must be able to read and write. That is, he doesn't push aside old skills to make room for the new media literacies but instead he proposes that these should be considered a social skill.

Another interesting concept to explore literacies in a digital world is the idea of appropriation, which in some way relates to the idea of remixing different materials by combining all of them in order to get a new product. From the Jenkins perspective:

> Appropriation may be understood as a process that involves both analysis and commentary. Sampling intelligently from the existing cultural reservoir requires a close analysis of the existing structures and uses of this material; remixing requires an appreciation of emerging structures and latent potential meanings. Often, remixing involves the creative juxtaposition of materials that otherwise occupy very different cultural niches. (Jenkins et al., 2006: 32)

Following this perspective Lowgren (2010) also discusses participatory media that is marked strongly by creative appropriation. From his perspective the task of creating new productions must be understood as an ongoing process, a continuous interplay between "designers" and "users" present in specific practices of their communities. In this sense, the interaction processes between traditional consumers and designers moves to new ways of establishing relationships (22-23). Both of them are participating in creative and dynamic processes were the traditional roles have changed; they are at the same time information receivers and producers.

Coming from a socio cultural perspective, based on the idea of literacy as empowerment, Knobel & Lankshear (2010) Lankshear & Knobel (2011) and Paulo Freire (Freire, 1973, 1985) follow the perspective for approaching new literacies. They introduce the idea of DIY (Do it yourself) for expressing how young people approach new media. From their perspective, DIY is comprised of digital entertainment and expressive media – animation, live action video, music video, music spoken voice tracks, other artistic works – produced by everyday people to meet their own goals and personal satisfactions. All of these elements have specific meaning in some social group or a specific interest in something particular or it might simply emerge from having the opportunity to think with and explore the means for producing a media artifact of one kind or another (Knobel & Lankshear, 2010: 9-10).

What should be concluded from these different approaches to the concept of literacy, that has been presented in former paragraphs? Why should the concept of literacies be explored if we are interested in relationships between different discourses as present in the young people's everyday life? Because we understand discourses as social and situated processes present at that time in the classrooms. In this context the goal involved in institutional practices is to develop the acquisition of practices involving control of multimodal discourses.

THE CLASSROOM A MULTIMODAL SETTING: THE SPANISH PROJECT CHILDREN AS PRODUCERS

Our work during the past ten years has developed along several lines of collaboration with teachers and families in order to plan educational settings together. Taking historical-cultural theory as a departure point, we draw up activity systems mediated by symbolic tools, combining new and old technologies to build bridges between formal and informal education. In this way we search for something relevant that would enable us to establish relations between different facets of children's lives. We approach popular culture in Spain, ranging from the traditional stories that parents tell children or indeed those that children create at school, as well as favorite television programs, video games and the Internet. In these settings and especially *through collaborative situations, we have learned to tell stories using new and already consolidated technologies.*

But what were we working on? Why, as university teachers, have we spent so many hours with boys and girls between 8 and 13 years old or collaborating with their teachers and in some instances even adopting the teachers' role? The reason being is that we believe that schools should use many of the tools that are present in everyday life even though they may not have been designed specifically *for educational purposes. However,* this is not always easy for teachers. In this sense the situation of sharing goals with teachers has given us the opportunity to get close to the everyday life of children. And in turn, we offer teachers some theoretical tools that may help all of us to think together about the educational challenges that have to be dealt with.

Who takes part in "the workshop" and what are their goals? Teachers and children in third or fourth grade of primary school and the research team, as participant observers. Our educational goal (shared initially by all the adults) is to introduce mass media, analogue or digital, assuming that children are not only passive recipients of media contents but also producers of information and broadcasting. We also anticipate that the children's productions will move away from the school world or that at the very least they will make sense of them outside of this ambit. We particularly wish to generate in children a consciousness of close or remote audiences, which in many cases consist of people that they do not even know but who will be our potential readers. We emphasize that on several occasions in the school we noticed the difficulties of the children when they tried to move from oral language to written discourses in the digital, analogue or written world as well as the challenges they faced when they were trying to produce material for remote audiences.

How do the activities of the workshop occur? We emphasize here that at the beginning of these workshops we had in mind certain ideas of two classical Russian thinkers, Lev Semionovitch Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975). Both of them were concerned about why people try to transform the world by constructing scientific, artistic or moral knowledge, etc. From their perspective, language and thought interweave and decisively contribute to these transformations. Adopting their ideas as a starting point we work with children to develop a certain consciousness of the tools they use as human beings especially oral, written and audio-visual discourses. In this context we are interested in the design of educational contexts in which a dialogue with the mass media is possible whilst always supported by other people in the workshop.

When and where do the workshops take place? We usually work for four or five months with the same teacher and in the same classroom. The workshop takes place in weekly meetings of approximately two hours each. However, the duration of the sessions depends on the nature of the tasks. Even though we emphasized that the workshops would take place as part of the school timetable, the children seemed to understand that this activity was a complementary or extracurricular program, probably because of the use of the didactic methodology and the fact that the instruments that they used were not the ones that they were used to managing in other school tasks.

At this time we will look at one of the workshops carried out during the school year 2009-2010. The main educational goal was to introduce video games in the classroom as a tool for which to promote the acquisition of different discourses, both oral and written language and specific forms of audiovisual expression.

Now we will show how these three cultures – oral, digital and analogical – could be present in the workshop. It is therefore necessary to consider how the children, teachers and researchers worked in the classroom. A summary of the process is shown in Figure 1. In all of the workshops, which in this case took 6 sessions, children interact with video games, thinking and discussing the strategies that they used to move forward through their screens and also made an audiovisual product of their own recordings of the game, machinima processes, or what they have obtained in the real world.

Figure 1. Multimodal discourses in the classroom

We will show in some detail what happened in specific workshop sessions, by looking only at those moments that are relevant to demonstrate how these different cultures live and interact together. Firstly we will see how an oral culture was present and what its role was. For example we will see how the teacher's introductions in specific moments were relevant starting points for introducing digital culture, from her own perspective. Secondly, we will explore the way that children follow a digital universe, as much as when they recorded their game as when they made their multimedia products. Finally, we will give some thought to ideas that support the concept of how a digital culture could contribute to making media education easier, so helping young people to master the multiple discourses necessary to function as active participants in the society of the XXI Century.

INTERACTIVE AND ORAL CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

We will look at the dialogue that took place in the classroom at two different moments of the workshop in the first and the fourth session. The two transcripts are set in the introduction where the teacher is presenting to the students the activity in which they will be involved. It shows the role of oral culture in the classroom. Reading these pieces invites the reader to wonder whether the goals of the teacher and students actually coincide. It also observes that the approach to the digital world from the two discourses differs in both cases.

Looking for a reality show in the digital world

Teacher	*Ok guys, let´s see, please listen to me, pay attention for five seconds*
	Ok, so that we can get an early start
Student	*Is it going to be a boy or a girl?*
Teacher	*But you still don´t know what you are going to do?*
	You can't start yet because you still don't know what you have to do
	Of course I am here waiting, waiting to tell you what to do, Bea
	Bea, you don´t know what you have to do.
Bea	*Yes…*
Teacher	*What do you have to do? Let´s see, Bea*

Student	*We have to create a Sim*
Teacher	*No, that´s not it*
	See how you don´t know what you have to do?
Bea	*Ok, nothing*
Teacher	*No, What do you need to do?*
Student	*To pay attention*
	To play

As we can observe in the previous conversation it is not clear to the students what they need to do. Maybe they don't have any previous idea about how a game can be present in the classroom. This is for this reason that the answers refer to the idea of just playing, to design a Sim or simply to pay attention.

In the paragraphs below, the teacher assumes that they will move in a virtual world and clearly marks them a goal. The game doesn't seem to be important for her. She assumes that students already know how to play. She offers a model of a social scene, a television show, Big Brother, for the students to play. She considers that students will be something similar to television producers, but in a virtual world. She insists that students will become TV producers.

Teacher	*Ok, I am going give you a handout with explanations*
	about what you will have to do in this workshop
	Ok,
	but basically let me summarize it so that
	we don´t have to read it all, otherwise it is a bit boring
	What you will have to do in the language workshop is to create a reality show
	Does everybody know what a reality show is?
Student	*It´s like Big Brother, ok*
	It is similar to a Big Brother
Teacher	*Everyone knows what it is and how it works*
	Right?
	You are like the television producers
	And you are going to produce this show
	Are you listening to me?
Student	*Yes*

Let us to see how she interprets the instructions by presenting a model that reproduces a real TV show. By contrast, students are placed in the virtual world of the game. That is, the teacher has a model of social reality and takes it as a starting point for discussion and learning. The students however, are located in virtual life and they are aware that it is they who will create the characters.

Teacher	*What is the first thing a Big Brother producer has to do?*
Student	*A house*
Teacher	*Ok, he has to choose a house*
	And, what did you say, Sara?
Sara	*And select people*
	And select participants
Teacher	*Ok, but, do they create the people?*
Student	*No, we do*
Teacher	*No, people exist, television staff does not create them*
	You will have to select people that already exist
	and bring them together in a group that will have to cohabit in the house
	Then you are going to play, but always bearing in mind that
	What you are doing is a reality show
	And in the end what you will have to do is a summary
	of what the show was and who won it
	what conflicts have arisen, what love relationships, and that kind of thing
Student	*We have to create several Sims without any relationship between them*
Teacher	*She will give you all the details in a minute, ok?*

In the previous transcript the contrast between the teacher's mental representation of the school task and the student's ideas of the game is very clear. What this dialogue is showing is

the fact that discourses depend on the situations in which take place and need to be understood and interpreted in relation to the specific goals of the people which create the communication situation. The pre conceived ideas about the game and the school task inspire the way in which people approach real and virtual worlds and the objects that are present there.

Planning a multimodal text in digital worlds

Let's see what happens during the fourth session. At this time they have already played in previous sessions and they try to produce an audiovisual text. In order to do this they can use different materials; for example, their own recordings made during the games or even new information recorded by pictures or video recordings in real life. We noticed that this technique is common when video game companies introduce their games using multiple trailers that they upload to Youtube. It is for this reason that we suggested the teacher work in a similar way with the students.

Let us to see how the teacher presents the multimodal task once students have already played and have made their own recordings of machinima. In this case she goes into much more depth than in the first session, elaborating on the technique and above all the characteristics that the visual text must contain. The teacher focuses on three key concepts that they need to take into consideration for particular audience and finally, that they must the think about resources that they will use.

Let us to see how the teacher presents the multimodal task, once students have already played and have made their own recordings of machinima. On this occasion she goes into much more depth than in the first session, elaborating on the technique and above all the characteristics that the visual text must contain. The teacher focuses on three key ideas in her presentation of the task: First, the need to make a script; second, the consideration of a particular audience; and finally, the resources that they will use. At no time did she refer to the consistency of the multimodal production, as maybe she would do if they were presenting a task related to a written text. Only the researcher, who subsequently enlarged the teacher's input, will refer to this factor. Let's see a little of how the dialogue progressed.

Her first words show that **the audiovisual production is considered as an independent text different to that present in the game**. Perhaps an alternative strategy would have been to produce the audiovisual text or at least to plan it at the same time that they were playing. This separation of the tasks in the teacher's proposal is perhaps an example of the fact that both the video and the game discourse were different for her.

1. *Ok guys, <u>we are not going to play anymore</u>. You don´t have to look at the computer, you can look at me*
2. *It was finished already, but now you have to comprise <u>the audiovisual product</u>*

Following her message, we notice that the preparation of the video' script and the video as a product allow us to interpret that she considers these two process as relatively independent.

3. *Now we have to start to work on the audiovisual production*
4. *what you have to do in today´s class <u>is to prepare the script</u>*
5. *<u>of what you will later on do as a video</u>*

It was clear for her that the preparation of the script would allow the students to produce a better product, that the ideas need to be organized and not presented in a random manner.

6. *<u>Have you already thought of what you are going to do</u>?*
7. *A video*
8. *Ok, it is very important for you to have <u>an idea of what you are going to do</u>*
9. *because next time we are going to have recordings of what you have been playing*
10. *and if by then you don´t have an idea, if all you do is say "let´s do a video about this"*
11. *<u>and you choose images randomly</u>*
12. *<u>then you are going to come up with something really sloppy</u>, which is what happens sometimes*

Improvisation, as we can see in the next text, does not seem to be allowed for the students.

13. *So it is very important for you to draft a script previously*
14. *It is very important that you draft a previous script so <u>that you don´t improvise</u>*

But the teacher is even more precise about how the students must prepare the script. They need to consider possible audiences and to take into account how the differences between them will orient specific types of scripts. In this context she introduces an interesting example orienting the students to think about the cultural differences of their possible audiences. For example, according to her the script would be different if the country in which the show took place. varied because of the previous ideas that students can anticipate in their possible audiences.

15. *What´s a script about?*
16. *It is a question of thinking that you have to make a summary of the program*
17. *<u>but aimed at the audience, ok?</u>*
18. *You have to think about who you are making this summary for*
19. *who is going to see it <u>what people</u>*
20. *Those who have seen the program or those who haven´t?*
21. *Each one of you can take whatever approach you want, <u>imagine you are making a summary of the program</u>*
22. *<u>because it is going to be broadcasted in another country</u>, you have seen that happen sometime*
23. *so you can look at it that way, you can try to make a summary of the program*
24. *aimed at taking it to another country, <u>for people that have not seen the show</u>*
25. *<u>or make a summary for people that have watched the show</u>*
26. *<u>How would they be different?</u>*

Finally, the teacher refers to different elements that the students can include in the multimodal text that is their video production. What is interesting here is how very different materials could be combined as signs in order to produce the final text. Moreover, no indication is given as to how they could be combined. It is difficult to know whether the teacher wants to push the students' creativity or if she's not really conscious of the problems that the students could be facing.

27. *And then… <u>What things could you include?</u>*
28. *You could include images of the actual show*
29. *<u>but I remind you that you can include everything related to reality shows</u>*
30. *so you could show magazine covers*
31. *with some <u>of the characters photographed</u>*
32. *<u>segments of talk shows</u> or discussion programs that talk about your show*
33. *<u>opinions</u> about the reality, eerr, I don´t know*
34. *whatever you can think of, I don´t know<u>, interviews</u> they may have done*
35. *to the main participants, anything you think could be included*

In order to gain perspective of these two transcripts of the teachers introductions to the classroom activity, we will focus on the conversation content.

Literacy and orality in the classroom context

We also consider that **literacy and orality** are means to varied ends not necessarily an ends in themselves (Olson & Torrance, 1991; (Havelock, 1991). Both are refined and interwoven in our society. It would be a mistake to polarize these as mutually exclusive. According to Brockmeier & Olson (2009) tension can sometimes be perceived as there exists

on the one hand a force in favor of a restoring orality and on the other hand a force in favor of replacing it altogether by sophisticated literacy.

> "Their relationships is one of mutual creative tension, one that has both a historical dimension – as literate societies have emerged out of oralist ones – and a contemporary one – as we seek a deeper understanding of what literacy may mean to us as it is superimposed on an orality into which we were born and which governs so much of the normal give and take of daily life. The tension can sometimes be perceived as pulling one way in favor of a restored orality and then the other way in favor of replacing it altogether by a sophisticated literacy" (Brockmeier & Olson, 2009: 11)

These tensions are particularly relevant when trying to understand the oral tradition that is present in the classroom when the teacher interacts with the students through oral language. In some ways it is the oral language used by the teacher that can help students become aware of the discourses they use.

We should recognize that for a long time now, our own work has been influenced by the Olson's model, particularly when he considers that a meta-discourse enables control of other languages. In this sense, written or audio-visual speech can be controlled by an awareness of ones own speech. Orality can be reconstructed by literacy. In general terms Olson refers to various functions of literacy, not just the ability to rebuild another speech that seems to be associated with it. (D. R. Olson & Torrance, 1991a) considers that literacy, like orality, is a means to a variety of ends, not an end in itself. Olson mentions specific conditions and factors in relation to literacy. Firstly literacy is a way of fixing and accumulating texts; in this way literacy is an archival function. Secondly, there must be institutions for using texts. Thirdly, there must be institutions for introducing texts into those institutions, for example, family or schools. And fourthly, there must be the evolution of an oral meta-language tied to a mental language for talking and thinking the structures and meanings of those accumulated texts and the intentions of their authors and their interpretation in a particular context. It is a meta-language that permits speakers and writers to refer to a text, its properties, its structure, and to its meaning and appropriate interpretation (53-4).

But, how does this relate to thought? How can the reflection on language be converted into an intellectual advantage? According to Olson, language is used for representing the world; it makes it possible to reflect on and become aware of, the world. Writing is used for representing language. Here is where reading and writing have their role in thought. In dealing with written language, whether it is read or written, one is simultaneously aware of two things, the world and the language.

> "While the writing system is responsible for making some features of language the objects of thought, the oral meta-language may mark other features of language or discourse and turn them into objects of reflection as well. Hence, consciousness of language and reflection on text are not unique to literacy" (D. R. Olson & Torrance, 1991a) 266

As we said before Olson proposes a metalinguistic hypothesis in order to make language into an object of thought and discourse. In that context metalinguistic knowledge is a product of literacy. As such, writing is intrinsically metalinguistic. He differentiates 4 levels of analysis:

1) the world of objects

2) oral language that takes the world as its object (producing a linguistic form of world awareness)

3) writing that takes oral language as its object (producing a linguistic awareness)

4) an oral meta-language that takes writing or any other aspect of utterance or text as its object (producing metalinguistic awareness)

However, the issue is not simple. The problem is perhaps more complex than suggested by Olson. Other authors maintain stances that seek to combine both traditions. we can explore, for example, how David (Barton, 2007 4010) focuses on the relationship between oral cultures and cultures that are considered literate:

> "Those who have examined was of speaking in oral cultures have demonstrated that people use other means to achieve the effects attributed to writing in literate cultures.(…) the suggestion that oral cultures lack meta-linguistics terms, that is, words for talking about language, is easily countered by several anthropologists who have examined in detail the language of various cultures. Each of these studies of very different oral cultures demonstrates that non-literate people can talk about talking in very sophisticated ways" (Barton, 2007) p. 99

Much more recently the work of (Harris, 2009 4969) comes back to this topic. According to him, the relationship between oral and other discourses is dependent of the way in which both are defined. The author reviews the history of those relationships across several historical moments. He examines both the way in which Socrates and Plato valued the oral vs written language, like other modern linguists as Saussure and Bloomfield. The author also criticizes positions such as those who assert the primacy of writing over oral language, which may be supported in some interpretations of Aristotle. He proposes an integration in which the sign only has meaning in context and it is in these specific contexts that these relationships need to be explored,

Coming back to our context, the starting point for the educational situation that we were exploring is the playing of the game and the discussion of the game using multiples discourses. In this context we assume a metalinguistic hypothesis in order to make the games discourse into an object of thought. At this point we make a distinction between the two dimensions: 1) the world of the game and the gamers' activity around it and 2) the oral language that takes the world or games as its object (producing a linguistic form of the game awareness).

But let us go further and focus on the multimodal texts that the students produce, while working with machinima and the elaboration of multimodal products to discuss the game.

CHILDREN AS PRODUCERS: MACHINIMA AND THE DIGITAL CULTURE

Machinima, according to Paul Marino, (2004) is the art of creating animated movies in real-time by using a 3D game engine technology. The Gamasutra[1] review of this book explains that machinima has evolved into a film-making genre in its own right. We suppose that in using this technique people will be made aware of the rules of the game, its content and the audiovisual discourse of this digital universe. This implies a different form of reflection other than that which occurs when using an oral discourse in the classroom. We will explore some of the products that the children produce working on machinima when they play The Sims3 and Spore[2]. We will compare their productions with those of other gamers´ or companies[3] with uploads on YouTube, that the students, as members of the Gamers' community could consider as a possible models for their productions.

Following the instructions of their teacher, the students worked in small groups to produce a text in a multimodal format. All of them considered the product "a video". Any one of the students' productions could have been chosen. What we have selected is an example to highlight some of the features that characterize the digital culture that was present in the classroom as a companion of the oral culture that we can experience. The interactions can be observed in a YouTube production.

It would do well here to give an overview of what happens in a production that does not introduce any image that is related to the real world. It would be difficult to classify it in a certain genre. Looking at the resources used by the students we notice how the music and also the division of the production in several moments, shows a differentiation between them with the introduction of written texts. They elaborate small stories about their characters and juxtapose all of them, one after the other, without a clear relationship between them. Moreover, even

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[1] http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/2151/book_review_the_art_of_machinima.php.

[2] http://www.uah-gipi.org/multimedia/

[3] For example, http://il.youtube.com/user/TheSims?blend=2&ob=1 and http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=ur_VVDxNRb0&playnext=1&list=PL7FD327AF6F623800

though the main character was introduced at the beginning it would be difficult to say that they were actually contemplating the reproduction of a TV show as was proposed by the teacher.

The table 1 summarizes the different moments of this production. After introducing the characters they present some of the events that occur in the lives of the Sims. We note that the students have been generating these events while they were developing the game. We could say that it is more of a plan that runs parallel to the action and we can also observe some advance planning.

(0:00:10.1)	PARTICIPANTS
(0:00:47.3)	FIRST EVENT THE MOVE
(0:00:51.1)	The old house
(0:01:01.0)	The new house
(0:01:11.5)	SECOND EVENT: JOB SEARCH
(0:02:07.6)	THIRD EVENT: THE DEATH OF CANDY
(0:03:26.3)	FOURT EVENT: THE FIRE
(0:03:39.7)	FIFTH EVENT THE ROMANCE
(0:04:05.1)	WHO WILL WIN?
(0:04:13.5)	CREDITS

Table 1. The main moments of the student's production

Let us briefly present some of the shots that allow us to understand this media production and how children approached the task in a digital world with almost no help from the teacher or the researchers. We have selected some of the relevant shots to allow us to see the bigger picture of the content of this audiovisual product. Let us briefly make some comments about several sequences that the students clearly differentiate in this production.
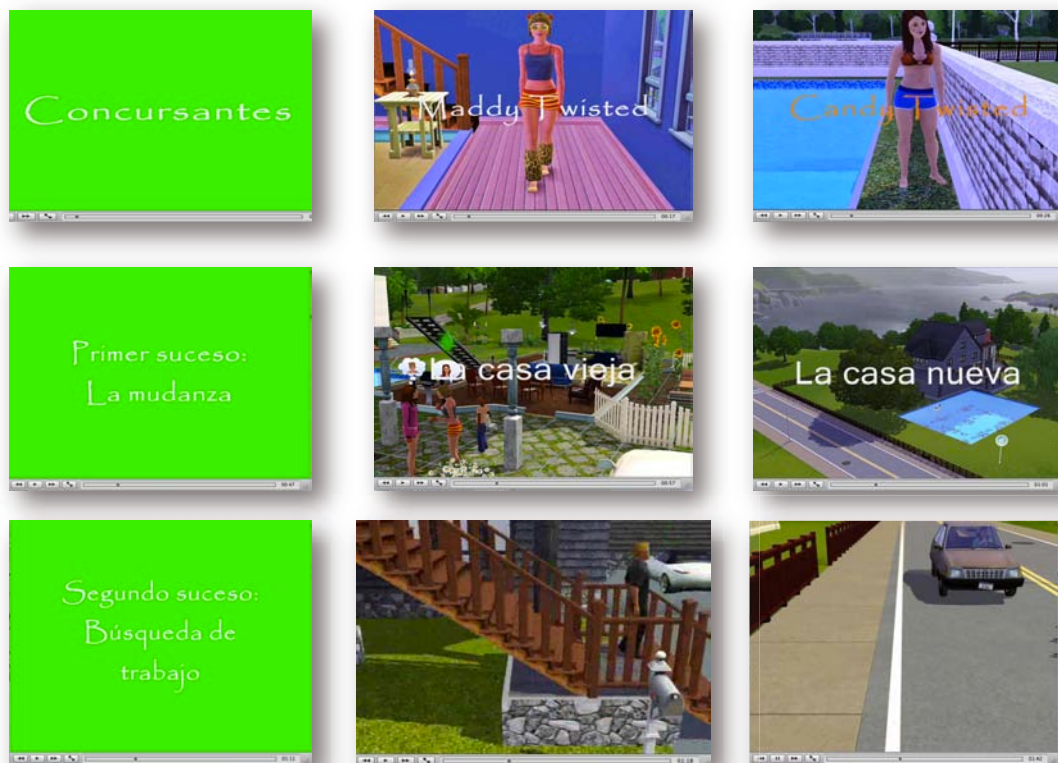

Figure 1. The characters. The events one, two and three

Focusing on the participants, five characters were introduced as can be observed in figure 1, though we have only reproduced two of them. It is interesting to observe that none of them has a Spanish name. The students seem to be inspired by the Sims aesthetics much more than anything else. Moving to the scenes, we notice that the first three events are very brief and there is no story in any of them. The activities are juxtaposed against each other.

- Focusing on **the first event, the move**, the students introduce just two shots in order to present the old and the new house. The old house and then the new house.

- **The second event: job search,** begins with a sequence in which the character moves down the stairs and goes to a car. Almost immediately the scene shows a girl in the pool. She is the main character of the next sequence. Then static secondary characters alternate in the presence of the pool and the car.

If we focus on the third event we notice that it is much more elaborate. There is a small story about **The death of Candy,** one of the characters. The students use specific resources for introducing the plot. For example, the girl interacts with the figure of Death, an activity that may have been suggested in the game. We note that at the beginning of the scene the main characters are standing next to the pool. The music clearly changes. Static images are introduced and then the figure of Death appears moving around the pool with a scythe. Several shots are focused on it. It is striking that Death and the girl greet each other and then the girl disappears. Then there follows the images of the empty pool.
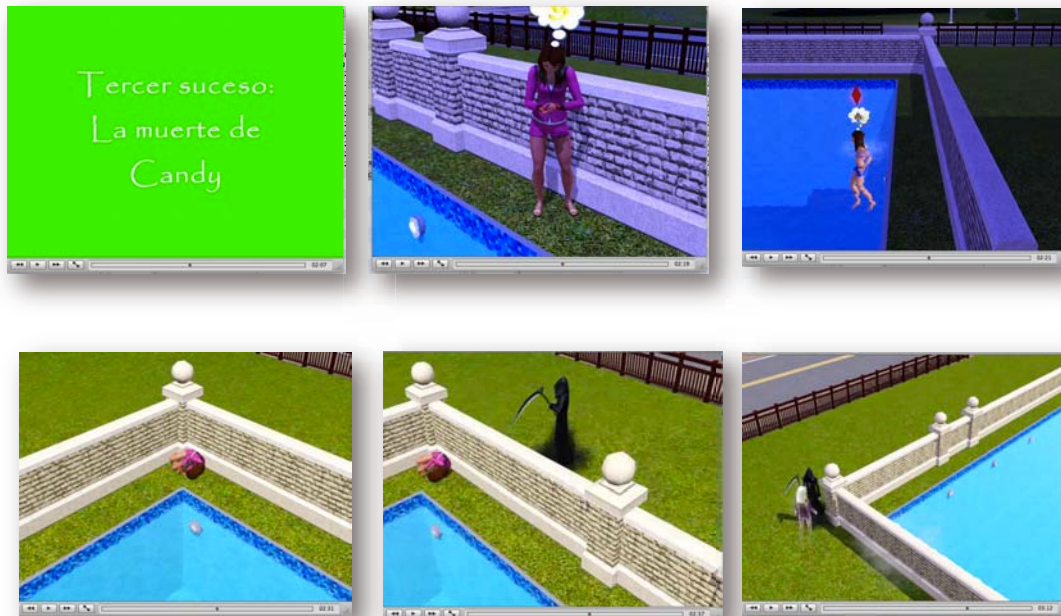

Figure 2. The death of Candy

Let us now go to the last two events (Figure 3). They are not very elaborate and the construction seems to be very similar to the two first events.

- **During the fourth event, the fire,** only two shots are introduced. One is presenting the Sim sitting at the table and eating something. A fire then breaks out. A general perspective of the house on fire is introduced and there are then no further consequences or activities.

- Finally they introduce the **Fifth event, the romance.** All the activities occur in the bed where a girl and a boy interact.

Then there are three following parts, that are very brief, and that form part of the end of the production. They are mentioned as: "Who will win? Discover for yourself", and a close with the final credits.
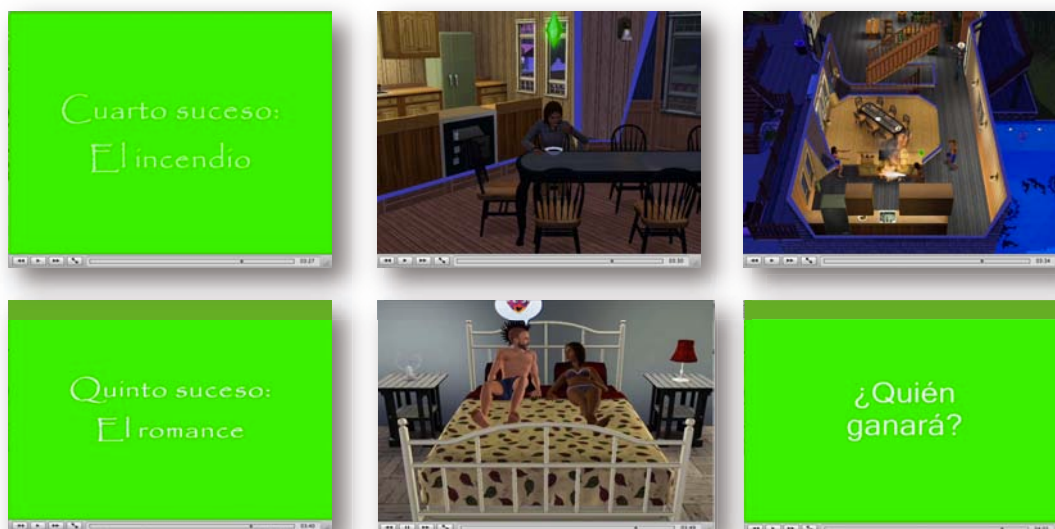
Figure 3. The characters. The events fourth and fith

Interpreting the students Machinima productions

Why has there been such a detailed description of the students' digital production? It seemed necessary to explore what were the features of this specific discourse. In general terms we should consider what is representative of the task that people face when they control digital literacy. Various authors have referred to it in a similar way to that of Olson and his colleagues when they talked about the relationship between oral and written language. In this context, Lankshear (1997: 298), for example proposed that the concept technological literacies may be defined as social practices in which texts (..) are constructed, transmitted, received, modified, shared (and otherwise engaged), with processes employing codes that are digitalized electronically". Social practices are undertaken through the use of computers and a range of hand-held devices. According to him engaging in the meaning making and communication in the digital age entails becoming well versed in different semiotics modes- visual, textual, and verbal.

Furthermore, other authors suggest that digital literacies need to be related to the convergence of media that is in itself related to a dominance of the screen, which may be becoming dominant. At this moment the visual mode may have priority over the written. Meanwhile, language-as-speech has new functions in relation to all of these (Kress, 2003). The elements closest to the issues we have introduced in this work, (Burn, 2009 4966) consider machinima as a form of animation, a digital production that requires new thinking in schools taking into consideration practices such as animation and artistic practices as a form of media production.

In order to go into detail of these ideas we look to the Manovich (2001) perspective when he approaches the digital world taking into consideration the idea of "digital compositing" which has a particular and well-defined meaning. It refers to the process of combining a number of moving sequences and possible stills into a single sequence with the help of special a compositing software such as after effects (adobe…) Most often the compos sequence simulates a traditional film shot. That is, that it looks like something that took place in a real physical space and was filmed by a real film camera.

> "In computer culture, montage is no longer the dominant aesthetic. As it was throughout the twenty century, from the Avant-Gard of the 1920s up until the postmodernism of the 1980s. digital compositing in which different spaces are combined into a single seamless virtual space, is a good example of the alternative aesthetics of continuity, moreover, compositing in general can be understood as a counterpart of montage aesthetics. Montage aims to create visual, stylistic,

semantic and emotional dissonance between different elements. In contrast, compositing aims to blend them into a seamless whole." **(144)**

From my perspective, Manovich (2001) allows us to interpret the students' productions when he considers that new media represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computing and media technologies. The synthesis of these two histories has a consequence; the translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through computers. The result is new media –graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts that have become computable. He prefers to focus on other categories than interactivity or hypermedia, for example, numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural trans coding. But what is interesting for us is that this translation is related to the fact that occasionally several sequences are combined into a seamless whole.

These types of sequences can be observed very often in machinima products and can be related to the students' productions. As used in the field of new media, the term "digital compositing" has a particular and well-defined meaning. It refers to the process of combining a number of moving sequences and possibly stills, into a single sequence with the help of special compositing software such as after effects (adobe…). The students who were producing multimedia products very often composed sequences that could simulate a traditional film shot but in this case using digital characters. It looks like something that could take place in a real physical space and was filmed by a real film camera. Students were combining images and sounds recorded on their computer and put them all together as if the digital recording were done in real life.

In this context the Manovich (2001) explanations are very illustrative and allow for an understanding of what happens in the children's productions. According to him:

> "As a general operation, compositing is a counterpart of selection. Since a typical new media object is put together from elements that come from different sources, these elements need to be coordinated and adjusted to fit together. Although the logic of these two operations –selection and compositing may suggest that they always follow one to another in practice their relationships is more interactive. Once an object is partially assembled, new elements may be added; existing elements may need be reworked. This interactivity is made possible by the modular organization of a new media object on different scales. (…) When the object is complete, it can be "output" as a single "stream" in which separate elements are no longer accessible" (139)

Quick time, Movie Maker and other similar software encourages people to think in modular terms. As users of these digital tools they can create complex compositing effects within a single movie, without having to resort to any special compositing software.

In summary, the analysis of the students' productions shows that they have faced problems that were not new to those who build stories using audiovisual discourses. The multimodal text must be meaningful not only for creators but also for receivers and several techniques exist to achieve this goal. It's hard to know what preconceived ideas existed for the students when they were faced with the production situation. What is clear is that they were confronted with problems such as those noted by Manovich in the text above. Reflecting on what would be the best way to help them compose the film and assemble different multimodal pieces; in the next section we will reflect on how classic film can help to provoke a reflection in the classroom introducing analog culture.

DEVELOPING NEW LITERERACIES FROM CLASSICAL FILM PRODUCTIONS

We will explore now how some **classical film productions particularly the Soviet theories of montage (an example of an analogical culture**) could help machinima authors solve the specific problems that they found when they needed to combine multimodal pieces to construct specific meanings for both them as creators and their possible audiences as receivers. There is an interesting text from Eisenstein, the soviet film director that could be considered a starting point.

> "The point is that the creators of a number of films in recent year have so completely "discarded" montage that they have forgotten even its basic aim and

function: that role set itself by every work of art, *the need for connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action,* the movement within the film sequence and within the film drama as a whole. Aside from the *excitement* of a story, or even its logic or continuity, <u>the simple matter of telling *a connected history* has often been lost in the works of some outstanding film masters, working in various types of films.</u> What we need, of course, is not so much an individual criticism of those masters, but primarily <u>an organized effort to recover the montage culture that so many have lost.</u> This is all the more necessary since our films are faced with the task of presenting not only a narrative that is *logically connected,* but that on e that contains a *maximum of emotion and stimulating power"* (Eisenstein & Leyda, 1975: 3-4)

"(…) two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition" (Eisenstein & Leyda, 1975: 5)

The questions suggested by this text, about the necessity of recovering montage, even as old as it is, is today reformulated by Manovich, who approached film culture from this perspective. Manovich distinguishes three interesting concepts to generate strategies empowering multimodal literacy.

"Seen in this context, the manual construction of images in digital cinema represents <u>a return to nineteenth century pre-cinematic practices</u>, when images were hand-painted and hand-animated. At the turn of the twentieth century, cinema was to delegate these manual techniques to animation and define itself as a recording medium. As cinema enters the digital age, these techniques are again becoming the commonplace in the filmmaking process.

Consequently, <u>cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation</u>. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a sub-genre of painting." http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html Download 2011 05 13

To understand what he wants to say it would be interesting to explore his concept of <u>compositing</u>. In general terms the idea allows him to explore "how to go *"From Image Streams to Modular Media".* **"Compositing** is the combining of visual elements from separate sources into single images, often to create the illusion that all those elements are parts of the same scene"[4]. According to Manovich:

"Digital compositing exemplifies a more general operation of computer culture: <u>assembling together a number of elements to create a single seamless object.</u> Thus we can distinguish between compositing in wider sense (i.e., the general operation) and compositing in a narrow sense (assembling movie image elements to create a photorealistic shot). The latter meaning corresponds to the accepted usage of the term compositing. For me, compositing in a narrow sense is a particular case of a more general operation of compositing — a typical operation in assembling any new media object." Manovich (2001: 132)

Exploring in depth the idea in relation to analogical and digital cinema he differentiates three ways of compositing that could be useful in understanding the students´ productions. He refers as much to the logic of the aesthetics of postmodernism of the 80s and 90s, as to the logic of the computer-based compositing, some years later.

- **In the 1980´s post-modern aesthetics,** the boundaries between elements were well-defined. Interestingly this aesthetics correspond to electronic and early digital tools of the period.

- **The 1990´s compositing** supported a different aesthetic, characterized by smoothness and continuity. The elements are now blended together and the boundaries have been erased rather than emphasized. The aesthetics of continuity can be best observed in

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[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compositing

television spots and special effects sequences of feature films which are actually put together through digital compositing.

- **But the aesthetics of continuity can also be found in other areas of new media.** For example, in many computers games. According to Manovich they present a single continuous trajectory through a 3D space.

Focusing on students' productions we notice how, even unconsciously, they have faced similar problems to those confronted by early film makers. What are we proposing to discuss with students? We will suggest some classical film productions, for example, the *Man with the Movie Camera[5] (Vertov, 1929).* The three main reasons to justify this proposal are as follows. First, the director is aware that he is facing the creation of a new kind of discourse; this fact could be an interesting proposal for reflecting with the students their own role as media creators. Second, the characteristics of this film are especially suitable, as we will see, to provide a framework for exploring the relationship between the art of machinima and classic cinema. And finally, some remakes of this classical film invite an examination of the new ways of creation. It permits people to be present as active receivers of the media messages in the construction of participatory culture.

I will go very briefly into detail on the three factors that could justify why classic films will contribute to digital literacy education.

First we ask how we know why the director of this film was conscious of the fact that he was facing problems of cinema as a new form of art, in order to express thoughts or to tell stories. To answer that question the manifesto that Vertev introduced at the beginning is a good starting point for the students' reflections. Like Vertov they face a new challenge, unknown to them until that moment, at least in a conscious form. Let us look at the film director's manifesto.

A record in celluloid on 6 reels.

(An excerpt from the diary of a cameraman.)

This film presents an experiment in the cinematic communication of visible events.

Without the aid of intertitles.

(A film without intertitles.)

Without the aid of a scenario.

(A film without a scenario.)

Without the aid of theater.

(A film without sets, actors, etc.)

This experimental work aims to create a truly international absolute language of cinema based on its total separation from the language of theater and literature.

The previous text, which appears in the first moments of the film, is an expression of the consciousness of the fact that a new discourse was emerging. Let us now focus on the characteristics of this specific film, *The man with a camera,* to understand its possible relationships with machinma. Exploring the recent work of (Turvey, 2011) we have a better understanding of how Vertov exalted in this film machines and their products:

> "To understand Vertov's dedication to machinism, one must bear in mind that he worked in a society captivated by the materialist analogy between human beings and machines and, more generally, the authority of the natural sciences" (Turvey, 2011: 138)

Continuing with his description, Turvey refers to the relationships between people and machines in an industrial society. The description (p. 143) could also be applied to images that are present in the Sims 3 videogame.

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[5] http://faculty.cua.edu/johnsong/hsct101/manmovie/mmcmain.html Glen Johnson

"After the prologue in which an audience arrives to watch a film in a movie teather, we see, first, a city's empty streets, still machines, closed shops, and sleeping people, including some who are homeless. Gradually, its inhabitants, including the cameramen, get up and got to work; streets are cleaned, transport systems start up, and machines being operating. People are show engaged in a wide variety of daily activities, from getting married and divorced to operating machines and manufacturing objects" (Turvey, 2011: 143)

Looking at some of the sequences that we have shown in the students´ movies it is easy to see that they elaborate a production that could be related (taking into consideration the content) to the previous description.

But there is yet a third reason to introduce Vertov in classrooms if students work on machinima. At this moment we considered a motivational dimension for their activities. *The Man with the camera* has been remade and we can explore this new kind of art as present in a recent Web site, *Man with a Movie Camera. The Global Remake*. It has been created as a form of participatory culture allowing spontaneous authors around the world to replicate Vertov scenes created in 1929 in the real context of their cities. Figure 4 shows two screens of this Web site suggesting that visitors produce for themselves a remake of the Vertov work but in the context of contemporary society. In figure 4 the first scenes of the film are presented showing the message of the director with recent recordings of contemporary city life. Moreover, figure 5 includes several screens that show scenes from the original movie with the current remake of the play.
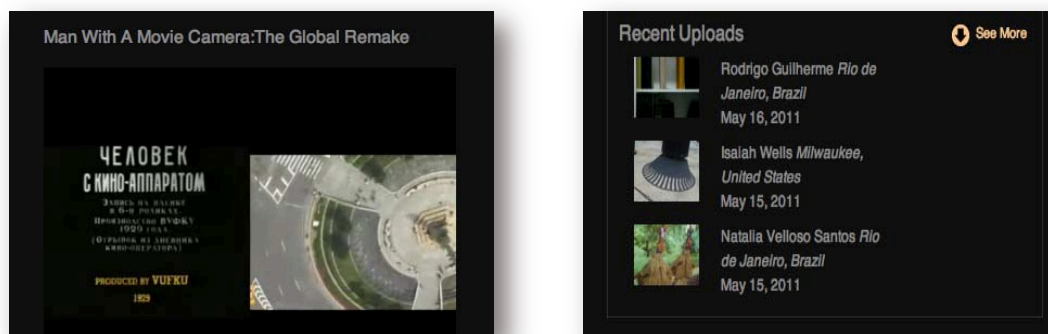

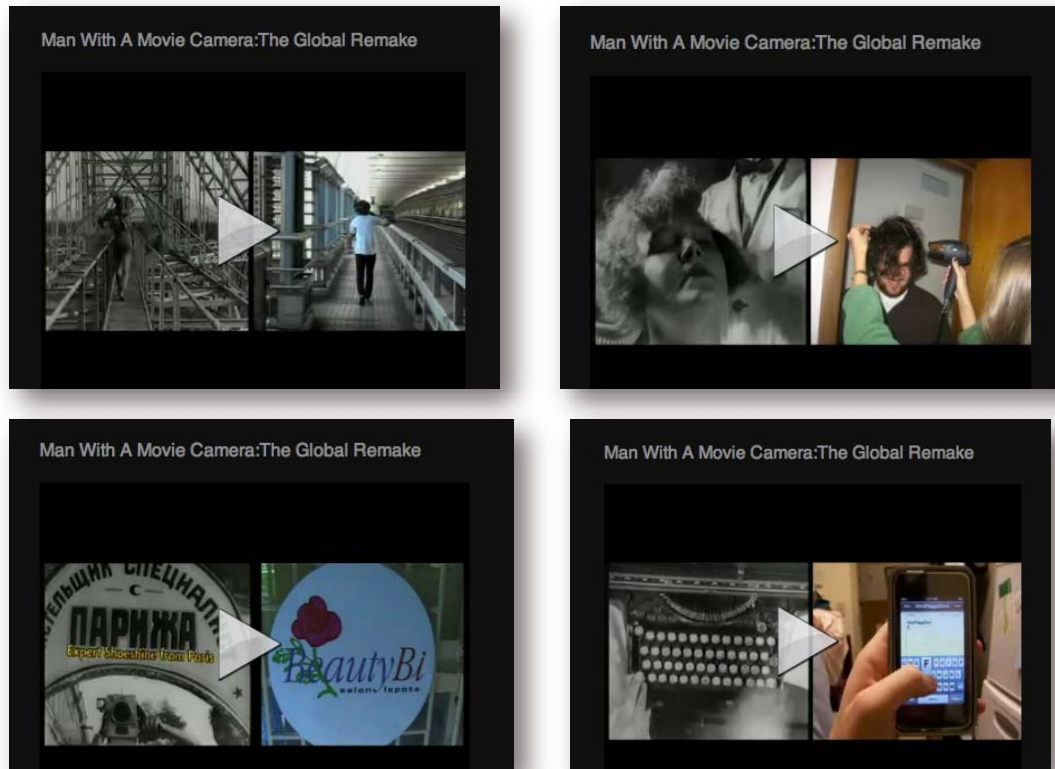Figure 4. A Global remake of the Vertov (1929) "Man With a Movie Camera"

Figure 5. The "Man With a Movie Camera" an example of participatory culture

The authors of this Web describe the goals of the site as follows: "The Global Remake is a participatory video shot by people around the world who are invited to record images interpreting the original script of Vertov's Man With A Movie Camera and upload them to this site". There is no doubt that the presentation of these images in the classroom, as well as the introduction of the analog culture, will help to generate interesting discussions around the role of montage in digital cinema and more specifically about the art of machinima.

BRIEF CONCLUSION

This final synthesis will focus on the concept of new literacies as a way of combining multiple discourses in specific contexts related to specific processes of situated cognition.

When discourse is explored outside of the context in which it was generated it has been difficult to establish relationships between the different systems of expression and communication that are present in everyday life. This paper has attempted to demonstrate that the concept of literacy associated to this discourses is a complex phenomena where relationships among oral, digital and analogical cultures need to be considered in order to approach to the idea of literacy. I would like to stress three main points in conclusion.

First, the main goal was not to establish a contrast between oral discourses and other forms of expression that perhaps have been more valued throughout the cultural history. Discourses when the context of use is considered could become a tool for thought to foster collective reflection. This is what may happen in the classroom and sometimes occurs when students and teachers are able to establish joint processes of discussion and thinking around new and old multimodal productions.

Second, joint reflection based on oral discourse can also be enhanced by the use of multimodal digital discourses very close to the daily lives of students. In this way the communication processes among students and teachers when using machinima techniques can be one of those tools that favor the use of new forms of expression, supported by digital components. The composition of these new forms of production can lead to situations similar to those experienced by the classic film directors, for example in the early twenties.

Finally reviewing these classical films in order to discuss the more recent digital productions, will undoubtedly help us to develop creative thought processes that do not involve expressive abandonment of any code, but rather, open up new ways of bringing together these old and new forms of discourse.

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