MAGPIE ONLINE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

October 2025

Abstract

Magpie Online is a new media installation that explores the migration from material public spaces to online environments, focusing on the multiplayer platform Decentraland. Much like "real" life, users create avatars and construct homes, parks, clubs, and other urban infrastructures. One user likens Decentraland to a magpie's nest—an externalized archive of selfhood, where each digital object becomes a reflection of identity.

The installation weaves together interviews with four Decentraland users, platform footage, original animation, machinima, and archival imagery tracing the evolution of North American public space. Drawing from urban analysis, *Magpie Online* explores how virtual worldbuilding reshapes our sense of belonging, embodiment, and community. How is identity forged in digital realities? What do we gain—and lose—when our social lives are mediated online? And, to what extent should we distinguish between "real" and "virtual" life? *Magpie Online* invites viewers to consider what it means to be part of a world increasingly built on-screen.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the incredible, unwavering support of so many people.

First and foremost, my deepest thanks go to my mom, dad, brother, and sister. They are hilarious, chaotic, and brilliant artists in their own right. I hope to be more like them one day. I'm endlessly lucky to be loved by them—they are my biggest champions, and they quite literally saved my ass on this project.

Thank you to my wonderful supervisor and thesis reader duo, Taien Ng-Chan and Patricio Davila. Taien is a bright light and a fiercely dedicated educator. She was the first person to hire me as an RA at York, which led to more work, more connections, and consistent employment throughout my time here. Patricio, thank you for encouraging me to keep going, especially during those early moments of total tool/tech confusion. You reminded me to be persistent.

To my incredible York cohort and colleagues—many of whom have become dearest friends—I hope I can be as talented as them one day. Heartfelt thanks to: Braden Brickner, Cleo Sallis-Parchet, Michael Miroshnik, Ryan Steel, Jharol Mendoza, Kunsang Kyirong, Dhvani Ramanujam, Tavis Putnam, Maya Vukov, Jack O'Dwyer, Jennifer Laiwint, Chris Chong, Beau Han Bridge, Luke Kaplowsky, Karel Malkoun, Galit Ariel, Kalil Haddad, Don Bapst, Drew Lint, Kyle Gregory Sanderson, Jonathan Watton, Nora Rosenthal, Jorge De Oliveira, Jessica Huras, Josiah Dyck, Sébastien Laprès, Devin Sheers, Zachary Lacosse, Simon Ruscinski, Rojin Shafiei, Haoran Chang, Sana Akram, Kerry-Ann James, Emily Pasternak, Debbie Ebanks Schlums, and Mary Arnatt.

Special love to Joe Vital and Michael Miroshnik, who shepherded me through the chaos of MFA Years 1+2, and to Tavis Putnam and Oliver Farkas, who physically and emotionally helped carry *Magpie Online* into existence in Years 3+4.

To the incredible Cinema and Media Arts faculty: thank you for your knowledge, care, and generosity. To Mary Bunch and Dolleen Manning—thank you for your constant encouragement and creative support. To Manfred Becker and Mike Zryd—for your tireless guidance. To Ingrid Veninger, my YUMMS compatriot—you've shown me what hard work looks like. To Moussa Djigo—for being so electric. To Tereza Barta—for your excellent taste in cinema and encouragement when I needed it most. To Sharon Hayashi—for your warmth and brilliance. To John Greyson—for your incredible activism. And last, and perhaps most importantly, to Michael Irwin—for your generous technical support, endless encouragement, and silliness.

Thank you to Kuowei Lee and Aishah Rashid for helping me survive York's bureaucratic labyrinth. I'm convinced Kuowei is the reason I received the SSHRC grant and my various TA gigs—without which, I would not have been able to afford rent. Thank you, deeply.

To my beautiful cousins and friends in Toronto, Minneapolis, Montreal, Winnipeg, New York, and beyond: thank you for your patience when I disappear for weeks (months?) at a time to make weird little art projects. I love you.

To the team at InterAccess: thank you for believing in this work and selecting *Magpie Online* for the Gateway Program. That deadline gave this thesis a lifeline—and made it real.

And finally, to the generous people of Decentraland, especially AwedJob: thank you for your time, your stories, your vulnerability, and your trust. This project would not exist without you. I'm so grateful the internet brought us together in such strange and wonderful ways.

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What You Are About To Read

"A place is not only a geographical area; it's also a state of mind. And trees are not just trees; they are the ribs of childhood" – Mahmoud Darwish, 1973

This paper documents the creative process, academic research, and personal reflections that shaped my MFA thesis installation, *Magpie Online*. It begins with how I first stumbled into Decentraland—a browser-based virtual world—and offers some context about the platform and its broader cultural significance. From there, I recount my "in-world" experiences and share the academic frameworks that helped me make sense of what I was encountering. I then delve into the interview process and film production journey. Following that, I discuss the visual strategy, including the computer animation techniques and aesthetic influences that informed my work. Finally, I walk through the process of building and installing the exhibition, from early concept to opening night.

Image 1. Magpie Online opening night at InterAccess Gallery. All photos from opening night are photographed by Kingsley Wong.

Setting the Scene: How Did I Get Here?

"Some are captured by virtual worlds that appear to be untainted by the messiness of the real. Some are enthralled by the sense of mind merging with mind or with the mind of the computer. If one is afraid of intimacy yet also afraid of being alone, even a stand-alone (non-networked) computer offers an apparent solution. Interactive and reactive, the computer offers the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. One can be a loner yet never be alone."
– Sherry Turkle, 1995

The idea for this project first nestled in my mind during the early days of COVID-19 and global lockdowns. In January 2020, right before COVID struck, I was living in Shanghai, working as an urban planner and taking architecture courses at Tongji University. I had been there for six months and had built a life I loved: a warm and creative community, a cozy apartment on the outskirts of the city, and roommates I adored. Each day was full of discovery—I wandered, filmed, worked on ceramics, and helped with a historical revitalization project for a rural village. It was one of the most creatively fulfilling and inspiring times of my life.

On January 15, I spent the day at a museum, did some shopping, and strolled through the city aimlessly. At the time, there were no public warnings, no whisper of a sickness. I was blissfully unaware. The next day, there were rumblings—airports were closing. I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I was told I needed to leave immediately. I booked a flight back to Singapore, where I had previously been living, assuming I'd be back in Shanghai within a few weeks. I packed lightly, left my apartment with the intention of returning soon, and said goodbye to my friends. I was, of course, completely wrong.

As we now know, this marked the beginning of a very long and difficult two years for most. I never returned to Shanghai. Instead, I found myself alone in a tiny studio apartment in Singapore, finishing my Master's in Urban Planning at the National University of Singapore. For a while, I held onto the hope that the outbreak was temporary, isolated, and that it would soon be under control. But then cases started to emerge in other parts of Asia, in Europe, in Singapore, and the rest of the world. Lockdowns came. Loneliness set in.

To be alone—truly alone—is my great fear, my most fatal flaw. I've always been constitutionally incapable of solitude. While most people fall somewhere on the introvert–extrovert spectrum, I exist far beyond the extreme end of extroversion. I don't recharge in solitude—I unravel. If I spend too much time by myself, I begin to cry. For reference, I come from a large, loud Greek family with no real concept of personal space or individual identity. I was raised within a collective: I shared a room with my sister and a bed with my cousin. Even in sleep, I was never alone. I simply never learned how to be by myself. And so I avoided it—through roommates, through community, through endless commitments.

Even before the quarantine, I had only a few close friends in Singapore, so I relied on the city itself for company. I would shop at the busiest grocery stores just to feel the presence of others. I'd go to Little India on Sundays, when migrant workers flooded the streets, to be surrounded by bodies. I'd go to the cinema rather than watch at home on my computer. The city kept me afloat—alone, yes, but also still part of a moving, communal organism. It wasn't enough, but it was something. A fragile tether.

But when the quarantine hit, even the city disappeared. Just me and my apartment. And without any coping mechanisms, I truly began to lose my mind. At the height of it, I was convinced the world would never return to what it had been. I believed cities were finished, that

public space was over. Of course, this was anxious-spiral-talk, but it was how I felt. Falling apart. Fearful. I was desperate for company, for structure, for something beyond the confines of my room. And that's when I found my way into online communities. Virtual painting classes, Zoom film clubs, online drawing sessions, multiplayer role-playing games... and eventually Decentraland, the platform that would become the focus of my thesis. It might sound dramatic, but these online communities felt life-saving. They gave me reasons to get out of bed, people to talk to, events to look forward to. In a moment where I was unraveling, they helped keep it together.

I know this is a long prelude to how the idea for this project emerged, but it's important context. This work came from a place of desperation and disconnection, but also from hope. While it's easy now to dismiss the intensity of those fears—especially as cities have largely returned—I remember just how low I felt. And I remember how powerful it was to find connection in digital space. These online worlds gave me back a sense of self, a feeling of belonging. I came to understand them as vital community spaces—akin to churches or community centers—offering care in a time of crisis.

In many ways, these virtual platforms mirror the classical city. They are built differently, sure, but their purpose is familiar: to gather, to exchange, to explore, to make money, to work. Like any city, they have their flaws and frictions—but they are also spaces of life. Before the pandemic, I might have dismissed these virtual spaces as sterile or inauthentic. But through my own experience, I was drawn to reframe and humanize them—not as cold simulations, but as social terrains with their own textures of meaning and care.

Decentraland: What, Where, Why?

"Far from being left behind when we enter cyberspace, our bodies are no less actively involved in the construction of virtuality than in the construction of real life." – Katherine Hayles, 1996

Over the past two decades, gaming metaverses have expanded dramatically, reshaping how we interact with and spend time in digital space. As tech giants fuel this shift, public gathering places are increasingly migrating from physical plazas to virtual landscapes. In 2024 alone, 3.2 billion gamers generated over $159 billion in revenue—underscoring how deeply online worlds have become sites for community-building, identity formation, and even systems of governance (Duarte, 2025). Virtual real estate is no longer just a novelty—it's a new (or perhaps remixed) terrain of social life.

When I first began my research, I had no shortage of virtual worlds to choose from: Sandbox, Roblox, Minecraft, World of Warcraft, Decentraland, League of Legends, and others. Roblox, with its staggering 85 million daily users as of 2025, remains the most popular. Its user base is young—mostly Gen Z and Gen Alpha—with 40% of players under the age of 13 (Ramic, 2025). It's used globally, features a fairly even gender split, and if you know anyone in that age group, you're already aware how critical Roblox is. Much of Roblox is created by its users, which makes it a wildly creative and chaotic space— hyperactive, angsty, pre-teen energy. But for most kids, Roblox isn't an escape or a deliberate choice. It's normal: part of the everyday fabric of their lives.

I was looking for a world that attracted a more unlikely crew under more unusual circumstances. That brought me to Decentraland. In my early exploratory research, I/my avatar walked around the platform's open world, approaching the other players with questions in the

chat. I quickly noticed a trend: most users seemed to be middle-aged men, often from either the U.S. or Argentina. Unlike the high-traffic platforms, Decentraland felt sparsely populated—long stretches of virtual land were empty, and many buildings (or "builds," as they're called there) had been abandoned. It reminded me of growing up in Minnesota: late-night walks in the suburbs, long drives past corn fields. A bit desolate, but also captivating. What draws people, including myself, to a place like this?

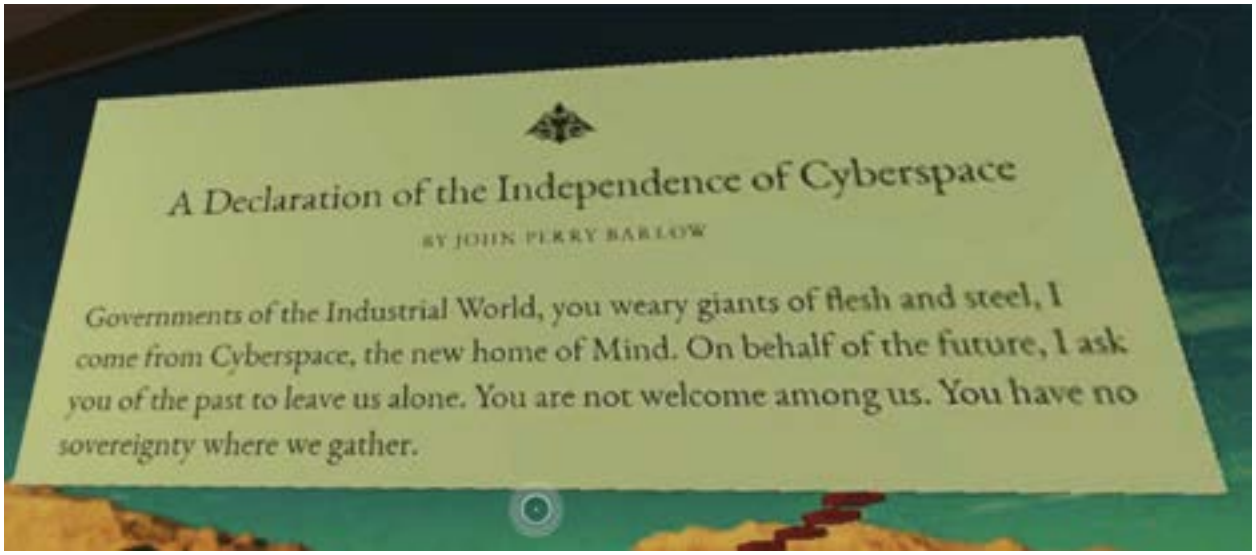


Image 2. Billboard in Decentraland.

Decentraland was first conceived in 2015 and launched in 2020 by Argentine developers Ariel Meilich and Esteban Ordano. According to its website, the project began as "a simple prototype exploring blockchain as a way to track digital land ownership" (2025). Decentraland surged in popularity during the 2021 metaverse boom, catalyzed in part by Facebook's rebrand to Meta. At its peak, thousands were flocking to the platform, eager to invest, speculate, and stake a claim in this "new frontier." But after its initial hype, Decentraland's user base dropped dramatically. One report claimed there were as few as 38 active daily users (though Decentraland

disputes this, offering higher figures) (Lawler, 2022). Regardless, there was no denying the platform had experienced a decline in mainstream popularity.

What kept me engaged, in addition to the company, was the political dimensions of the space. Many of the users I interviewed expressed that Decentraland's decentralized structure appealed to them precisely because they felt disempowered by the political systems they currently lived under. Decentralization, in this context, refers to the transfer of authority and responsibility from central governments to sub-national entities—local governments, civil society, or private actors (Schneider, 2003). Within this virtual space, they could experiment with new forms of governance and reclaim a sense of agency. Decentraland's creators emphasize that no single entity controls the platform or its future—it belongs to its users.

So how does it work? Decentraland operates through a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO)—similar to a condo board, but blockchain-based. Members pool resources and make collective decisions via a token-based voting system. DAOs are increasingly common in virtual governance; The New York Times once described them as "crypto co-ops" (Roose, 2022). In theory, DAOs empower users to shape their own environments. In practice, however, they come with their own hierarchies and inequities. For example, your voting power—the weight of your voice in decisions—is determined by how much of the in-game assets you own: MANA (its cryptocurrency), LAND (virtual parcels), and NAMES (registered usernames). Acquiring these assets requires real-world money. So, the more capital you invest, the more voting power you have. Everyone can access the DAO and Decentraland (computer-willing), but your degree of influence and participation on the land is mediated by wealth. In that sense, the platform mirrors the inequalities of the physical world it seeks to challenge. It is a digital reproduction of capitalist hegemony: mode of production is private, land and labor are

commodified. Decentraland exemplifies the contradictions of capitalism and shows the limitations of our imaginaries of alternatives (whether in a virtual world or in real-life). We don't know what a system outside of capitalization, colonialization, or westernization looks like, so even practicing new forms of governance, like the DAO, has challenges and limits. This is not just true for Decentraland and other virtual worlds, but also IRL (in-real-life) for community groups, sociologists, political thinkers, etc. Far from being disqualifying, these characteristics render Decentraland a particularly rich object of inquiry. Its very existence is conditioned by the specific historical mode of production that is capitalism, while its popularity reflects the contradictions inherent within that system. To castigate Decentraland or its users as libertarian monads is to misunderstand its origin: the reproduction of private property within a digital game does not arise in abstraction, but directly from the political, legal, and economic order that sanctifies private property in our historical conjuncture.

Despite the replication of IRL inequalities, the DAO is a dynamic community forum. With over $22 million CAD in its community fund, it finances everything from community radio shows and public events to educational tutorials and year-round programming (2025). For some users, the DAO even provides a salary for moderating or producing in-world experiences. Just as Canada funds arts and culture through agencies like SSHRC or Telefilm, the Decentraland DAO supports its own cultural infrastructure. People come to Decentraland for different reasons: connection, experimentation, profit, governance. For me, it was this intricate intersection of money, politics, and relationships that felt "real" and compelled deeper study. Decentraland is more than a virtual world or game—it's a digital society full of the same contradictions and drama we experience IRL.

Image 3. Still from Magpie Online – a tree in Decentraland.

On Foot in the Metaverse: Virtual Geography, Video Game Aesthetics, and Machinima

"The dominant camera of video games, then, is far closer to that of art cinema than mainstream Hollywood." – Will Booker, 2009

"The element of cinema is gesture and not image." – Giorgio Agamben

Like other documentary and ethnographic work, in order to understand the working of a place and its people, it's important to spend time in those places and ask questions. As an urban planner, I sought to borrow techniques from noted geographers like William Whyte, Kevin Lynch, and Jane Jacobs, who studies cities and their citizens through qualitative analysis, consisting of tools like mapping exercises, long and short form interviews, and field recordings. Even though I would be working in a virtual environment, Decentraland was still a "city" – a human settlement – and these techniques still felt apt as a way to capture the ethos of this online world.

Social Life of Small Urban Spaces (Whyte, 1980)

Image 4. Stills from The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. A major reference and inspiration.

In an interview with urban planner and video game designer Konstantinos Dimopoulos, he describes the gaming city where, “Even the most exotic of fantasy or sci-fi environments have to follow the rules of their world, make urbanistic sense in their context, provide with new gameplay and storytelling opportunities, and imply much more than what can be described and rendered” (Dimopoulos, 2018). He also likens the techniques involved in video game design to those used by social geographer Kevin Lynch. Lynch is known for identifying the tools that make cities understandable and easy to navigate with concepts such as edges, nodes, and paths. Game cities like City 17 in *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998) and Vice City in *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar Games, 1997) are in fact modeled on real cities (Sofia and Miami respectively) demonstrating that the success of their worldbuilding and immersive experience is in part due to the realism of the urban planning principles they employ.

I began by creating a Decentraland account (harder than you think), making an avatar, wandering around, and screen recording via OBS. I sauntered through parks, roads, and deserts. I visited homes, galleries, and amusement parks. I played games, attended concerts, and bet at the casino. I felt very much like a flaneur, aimlessly strolling through Decentraland as the virtual environment loaded around me (de Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009). These digital architectures, which are mainly constructed by the people of Decentraland, proved rich and exciting. It was storytelling through worldbuilding. If per Guiliana Bruno, “The consumer of architectural (viewing) space is the prototype of the film spectator” (1997) and Sergei M. Eisenstein “...film's undoubted ancestor in this capability is - architecture" (1939), then I was watching a narrative unfold in front of my eyes.

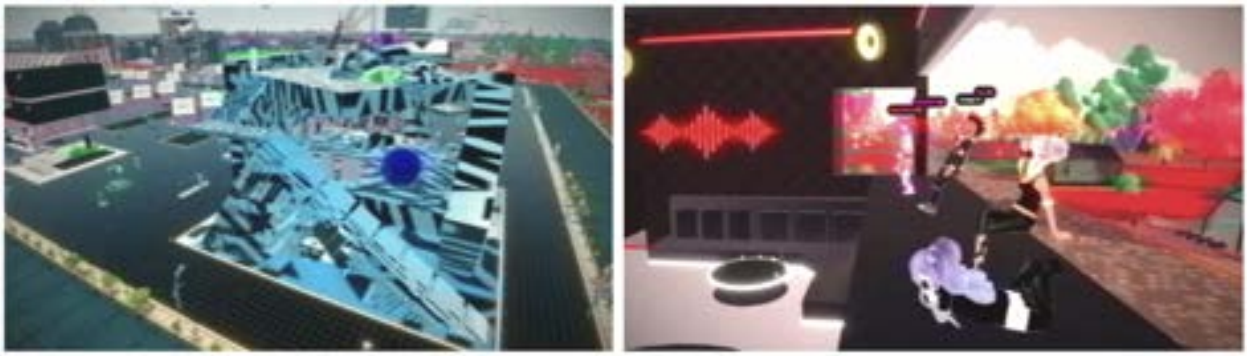


Image 5. Scenes in Decentraland, capturing the architecture and people/avatars hanging out.

However, it wasn't just normal architecture that I was filming, it was digital architecture, embedded within a metaverse. Cinema, virtual worlds, and gaming have long been intertwined, borrowing and reappropriating aesthetics from one another. In looking at this relationship, Will Booker finds that, "Games from the mid-90s onwards attempted to incorporate this 'cinematic' sense in a range of ways... pre-rendered, CGI sequences created on a more powerful computer than the games console itself" (Brooker, 2009). Brooker notes a slew of comparisons: the "bullet time" in *Max Payne* (Rockstar, 2001) draws inspiration from *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999), the war scenes of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (Electronic Arts, 2002) reference *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998), and the slow motion stunt intercuts in *GTA: San Andreas* (Rockstar, 2004) were sampled from action films like *Bullitt* (Yates, 1968) and *Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991). As games continued to incorporate cinematic elements and play with the language of gaming, the industry "...intentionally mimicked and even attempted to out-do movies" (Tan & Wee, 2002).

Now, with the increased consumption of online gaming, games are establishing their own independent visual language that exists outside of conventional film: "...the trajectory within games of the current decade has been away from a slavish emulation of the cinematic and toward

the evolution of visual storytelling techniques that establish a unique mod, distinct from cinema--or more precisely, distinct from mainstream Hollywood" (Brooker, 2009). Relying heavily on continuous shots, third person-shooter views, first-person shooter views, the “free-ranging” camera, narrative loops, and interactivity, the video game has established its own distinct storytelling techniques. These tools are so common that the reverse relationship is now occurring, with cinema borrowing gameplay tropes. Writer Jeff Gordinier calls the contemporary filmmakers applying gaming logic to cinema the "PlayStation Generation" as they frequently "mess with narrative in new ways... mess with time, with space, with the law of physics and the structure of story" and "bring to their movies the cut-and-paste sensibility of video games and the internet" (Owczarski, 2007).

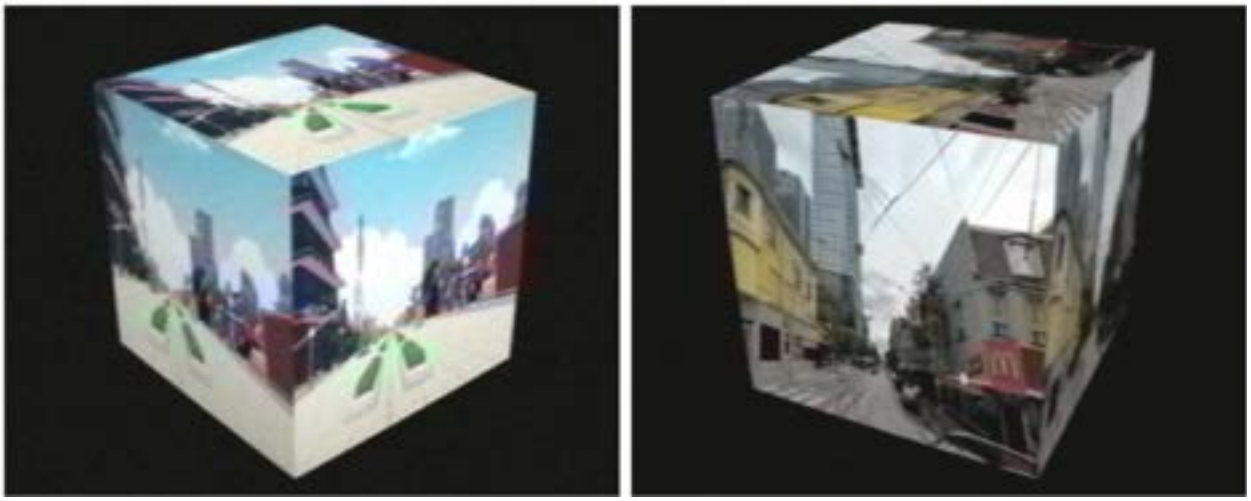


Image 6. Visuals from Magpie Online, contrasting the streets in Decentraland and downtown Toronto.

In addition to borrowed cinematic conventions, machinima is a key overlap between filmmaking and gaming, and a key aspect of my project. Machinima is a method of filmmaking that uses real-time gameplay graphics to fabricate a cinematic production (Ng, 2013). Machinima embodies a convergence of filmmaking, animation, game development, and geography–its real-world filmmaking techniques applied within an interactive virtual space (Lowood, 2011). It

is virtual puppetry, where I am the puppeteer manipulating the existing players, pieces, and places with the click of my mouse.

This brought me back to my first experience with machinima, where I directed a music video for the band Charm Bracelet. Though I worked on this project years ago, it wasn't until Dr.Taien Ng-Chan's *Future Cinema I* course that I learned my project was an existing medium called machinima. At the time, I had the idea to sculpt a Sim that resembled the band's lead singer named Zoe, and then combine the footage of Real Zoe with Sim Zoe. The development was far more exhaustive than I realized– I had to play dozens of hours of Sims3 in order to level up my character and perform the desired actions. For example, if I wanted Sim Zoe to kiss her date, I would need to converse with the character for two hours in order to gain enough "romance points" to engage in physical touch. And, because I was unfamiliar with the Sims3 universe, location scouting was necessary to identify the best virtual landscapes for screen recording.

Image 7. Stills from Charm Bracelet music video featuring Zoe. Machinima in Sims.

Peter Krapp's *Of Games and Gestures: Machinima and the Suspension of Animation* looks at the importance of gesture in machinima and its role as a communication tool. How is the body approximated, constrained, and/or embellished by the machine? How are our gestures

programmed to move and convey meaning? Per Krapp, "What is intriguing about machinima, I would argue, is precisely a way of citing, reclaiming, and incorporating the gestures of disparate discourses of mediation, gestures of communication and information, of repetition and citation, of embodiment and accommodation in handling technologies that are increasingly pervasive" (Krapp, 2011). In my work with Zoe, finding meaning through movement was imperative within the genre of dance music video. For my thesis, it is even more important as many interviewees requested that their identities remain hidden, meaning that bodily gestures (rather than facial expressions) are a key communicative device. Here, the gestures of the physical creator translates to the gestures of the virtual character, where meaning is mediated through both bodies. Per Sherry Turkle, “People experience the computer as part of themselves, and they experience themselves as part of the computer” (Turkle 1995). As this metaphysical body is positioned to generate a narrative for the viewers, a new body/computing culture of movement is established.

In addition to activating the virtual body, machinima critically engages the viewer. The nature of machinima requires that creators directly engage with the digital medium and logic of the game’s universe– playing while filmmaking, filmmaking while playing. Machinima is not merely gaming (though gameplay can be deeply immersive); it is gameplay with intent: the intent to tell a story, to compose a film. The creator makes deliberate choices, guiding their avatar through constructed scenes and virtual environments, choreographing a narrative in real time. As viewers of machinima, we too are implicated. Watching machinima is not the same as watching a conventional film. We remain acutely aware of the game's artifice—the heads-up display, the arrow keys behind the movements, the player’s-eye perspective, the persistent map legend in the screen corner. It’s akin to theater with the curtain up, the stage lights fully visible,

and the stagehands moving the scenery in plain sight. Per Krapp, "Machinima is to computer gaming what Brechtian epic theater was to dramatic and cinematic conventions a century ago" (2011).

Epic theater breaks the immersive experience and highlights the illusion, the constructed reality. Its role is "...to demystify the operation of social, economic, and political forces by showing how certain orders of reality had developed historically and...arming actors and spectators with disillusionment, not as a helpless state of mind but as an active critical practice…" (Bryant-Bertail, 2000). This is precisely what machinima does: it breaks the fourth wall of the virtual. The viewer is less likely to forget that what they're watching is a mediated experience—a game, controlled by someone else, recorded or livestreamed, and intentionally shaped. As in epic theater, the resulting tension keeps the audience alert. The goal is not comfort or escapism, but alienation—as Brecht defined it: a productive disillusionment that leads to reflection, transformation, and ideally political response.

Machinima has been used as a subversive and political tool to retell stories not generally seen in mainstream media (Ng, 2013). Per theorist Jason Edward Lewis, critically engaging with technologies like machinima can be a powerful tool for marginalized communities to access radical imagination, envision a more just future, and reclaim space. The accessibility of machinima has played a key role in this process, enabling women and people of color to log on, screen record, and more easily create audiovisual materials that tell their stories. Mohawk artist Skawennati's machinima works *Imagining Indians in the 25th Century* (2001) and *TimeTraveller*™ (2008 – 2013) examine past and future Indigenous histories to "offer up alternative readings of past events as well as visions of a future that center Indigenous peoples in the narrative, whose stories grow out of a cultural context that emphasizes the continuity and

evolution of our cultures" (Lewis, 2016). But within machinima made in Decentraland, what exactly is the political response being called for?

This question becomes especially interesting considering the motivations of many Decentraland users. Some join the platform because they feel alienated in their own lives; others are driven by political dissatisfaction and a desire to experiment with decentralized governance or grassroots community organizing. In describing *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal states, “It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined” (Boal, 2000). In many ways, machinema is a participatory theater tool to help users analyze and act upon the oppressive situations in their own lives. You are not just a passive spectator, but an active “spect-actor.” Many users record or livestream their activities—attending parties, exploring new builds, making tutorials. Even more exciting, in-world filmmaking tools are being developed in Decentraland to make machinima production even more accessible. Users I interviewed expressed a clear interest in storytelling—creating machinima to imagine new worlds.

On a personal level, as seen in Skawennati and Boal’s work, machinima can help us be critical of our current systems and imagine new worlds. It can support our mental and community health. However, it is important to note that these exercises are not actually accomplishing decolonization or revolution. Per Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard, action and decolonization needs to be understood as material, rather than idealist, ethereal, or intangible (as they often are in metaverses or even art) (Coulthard, 2014). This type of revolutionary action is not reducible to changes in thought, cultural recognition, or symbolic gestures, but entails the radical disruption of capitalism’s metabolism between nature and labor. Decolonization and systematic changes cannot occur in the mind, in the realm of ideas, or within intangible digital

platforms, but only through the material reclamation of land and the abolition of private property. Machinima is indeed a subversive tool, but it can only extend so far.

For me and in *Magpie Online*, machinima is a method for exposing the building blocks and artifice of community. It helps scrutinize familiar spaces—social halls, churches, neighborhood stores—through a digital lens, revealing how similar they are to their online counterparts. The avatars may be digital, but the desires are human. Whether it's human-to-human or avatar-to-avatar, the emotional and social connections remain. Through machinima, we see that the rules, laws, and architectures of the virtual are just as constructed, just as flawed, as those in real life.

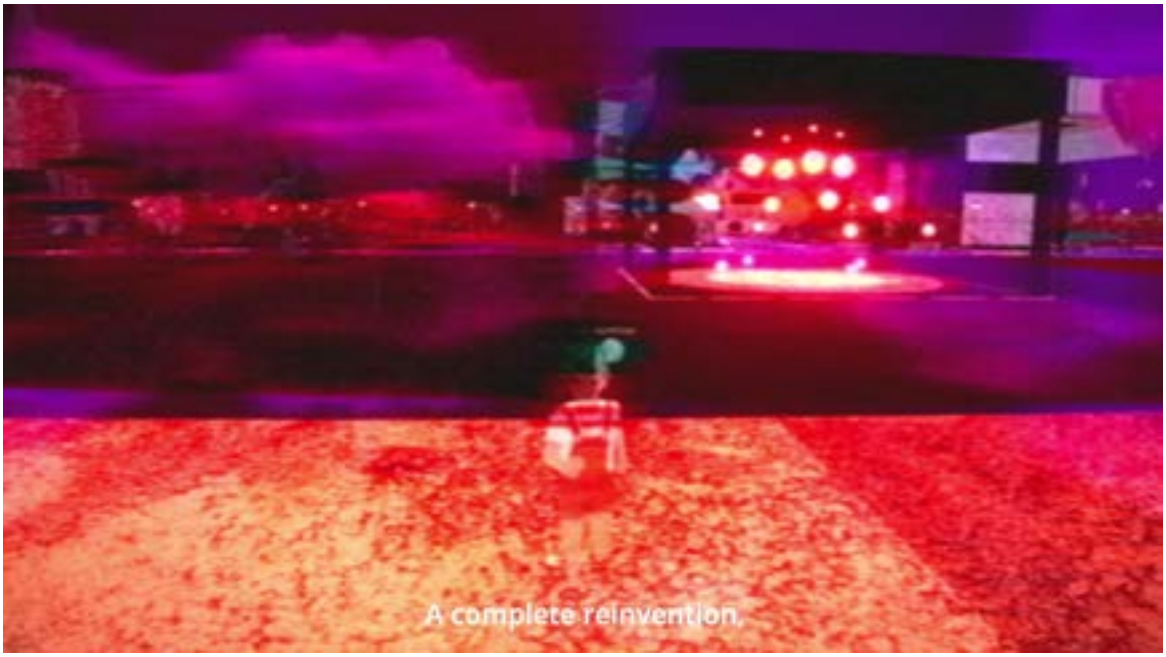


Image 8. Still from Magpie Online– my avatar running through Decentraland in slow motion.

Interviews: In-World and In-Real-Life

"As social media applications and platforms proliferate, new media makers design ways to work in these open spaces, boosting documentary practice into a robust dialogic sphere. Projects function as laboratories to experiment within the new digital landscape, reinventing documentary practice to reach for specific audiences and users."

– Patricia R. Zimmermann & Helen De Michiel, 2017

The Decentraland map lets you see where people are congregating—hot spots glowing on a virtual city grid. I started visiting these places, casually chatting with strangers and sending out friend requests. I was looking for people to interview, to ask questions, and to better understand the space. Through these in-world conversations, I discovered that most of the real organizing and communication doesn't happen inside Decentraland itself—it happens in Discord.

Image 9. Maps of Decentraland. The left image is the entire world, whereas the right image is zoomed-in to see different parcels. Map courtesy of Ivan Hoffman.

Discord, a messaging and social platform widely used by internet and gaming communities, is home to Decentraland's main communication hub. Their server contains dozens of sub-channels dedicated to everything from governance (the DAO) and community organizing to technical issues and finances. It's where bi-weekly town hall meetings take place, where proposals are posted and debated, and where users constantly connect, collaborate, gossip, and argue over all things Decentraland.

Image 10. Various community spaces and initiatives in Decentraland, which I explored.

I joined the Decentraland Discord and began obsessively reading through the chat logs—combing through planning committee notes, user disputes, town hall transcripts. I also began attending the bi-weekly town halls, where moderators presented new events and proposals up for a vote. Users pitched initiatives to receive DAO funding, and the resulting debates felt a lot like Toronto City Council meetings—equal parts boring and chaotic. These experiences helped me identify some of the platform's most active users and stakeholders, and I began making a list of people I wanted to interview.

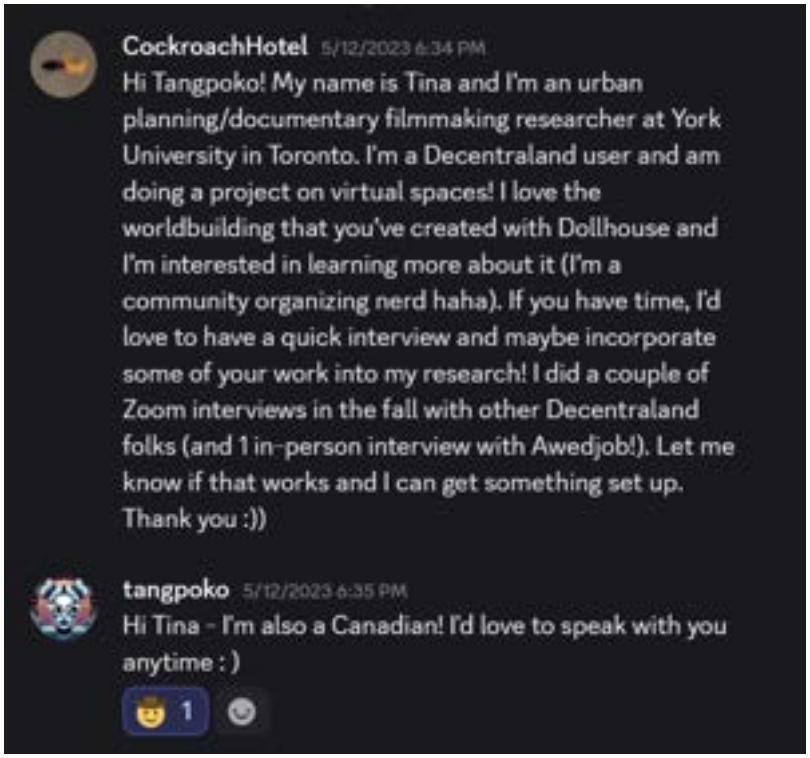


Image 11. Screenshot of my Discord outreach asking for interviews.

In the winter of 2021, I sent out my first major outreach blast: around 30 private messages to Discord users, introducing myself, my project, and asking if they'd be open to an interview. I received only a handful of replies and felt disheartened. Still, I managed to speak with three users—two from the U.S. and one from England. At the time, Decentraland was booming: virtual land was being bought and sold, major companies like Pepsi, Smirnoff, and Sotheby's were entering the space and launching branded activations.

My first interviews mostly revolved around crypto investments and speculation—less compelling to me than the emotional or community-driven aspects of the space. I hadn't prepared a formal set of questions, and I quickly realized how important it was to approach interviews with intention. It was a learning moment: I discovered the value of clear recording setups, thoughtful framing, and being emotionally present. In one interview from this time, a user

confided that he'd rather own land in Decentraland than in real life—that his physical flat was nothing more than a bed, but his life in Decentraland was colorful and full of meaning. That stayed with me and helped shape my line of inquiry moving forward.

After receiving so little feedback from my first outreach, I decided to speak publicly during a couple Decentraland Town Halls in the fall of 2022. I introduced myself and my project, and affirmed that I'd be reaching out to folks privately for interviews. This got the ball rolling. Hearing my voice made me more human to the community. I wasn't a scammer or total outsider—I was a person, genuinely curious and open.

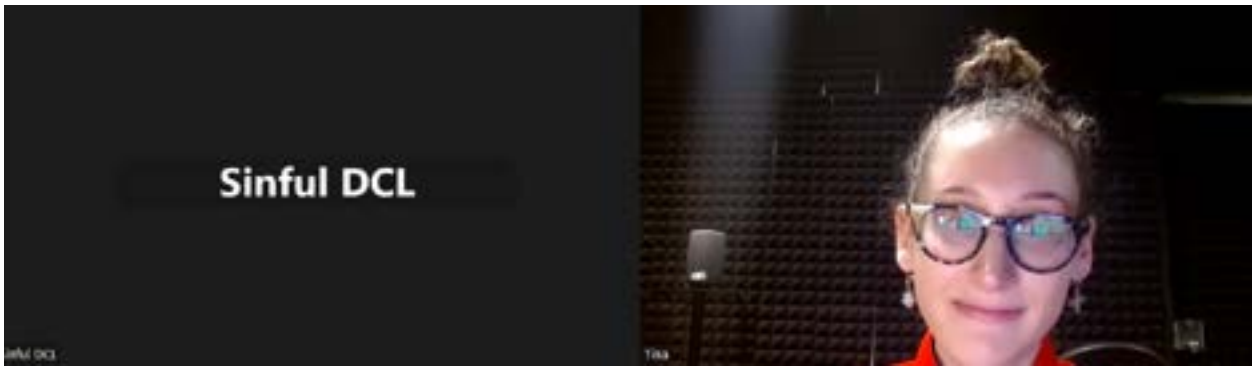


Image 12. Screenshot of my interview with Sinful, a Decentraland user. They elected to keep their identity private.

Following those meetings, I reached out to another 50 people and received 20 responses—a huge improvement. Between 2022 and 2023, I conducted 17 interviews, some of which led to multiple follow-ups. This time, I came prepared: I drafted structured questions, used two audio recorders, and booked BetaSpace's sound booth to ensure clean, high-quality audio. Each conversation offered something unique—insight into users' relationships with the platform, with each other, and with themselves. My interviewees came from a range of backgrounds: some worked for the DAO, some were community builders, others were affiliated with the Decentraland Foundation. Many were men from the U.S. or Argentina, but a few incredible

women users also stood out. Several preferred to stay anonymous, going only by their Decentraland usernames, while others were comfortable keeping their cameras on during Zoom or Discord calls.

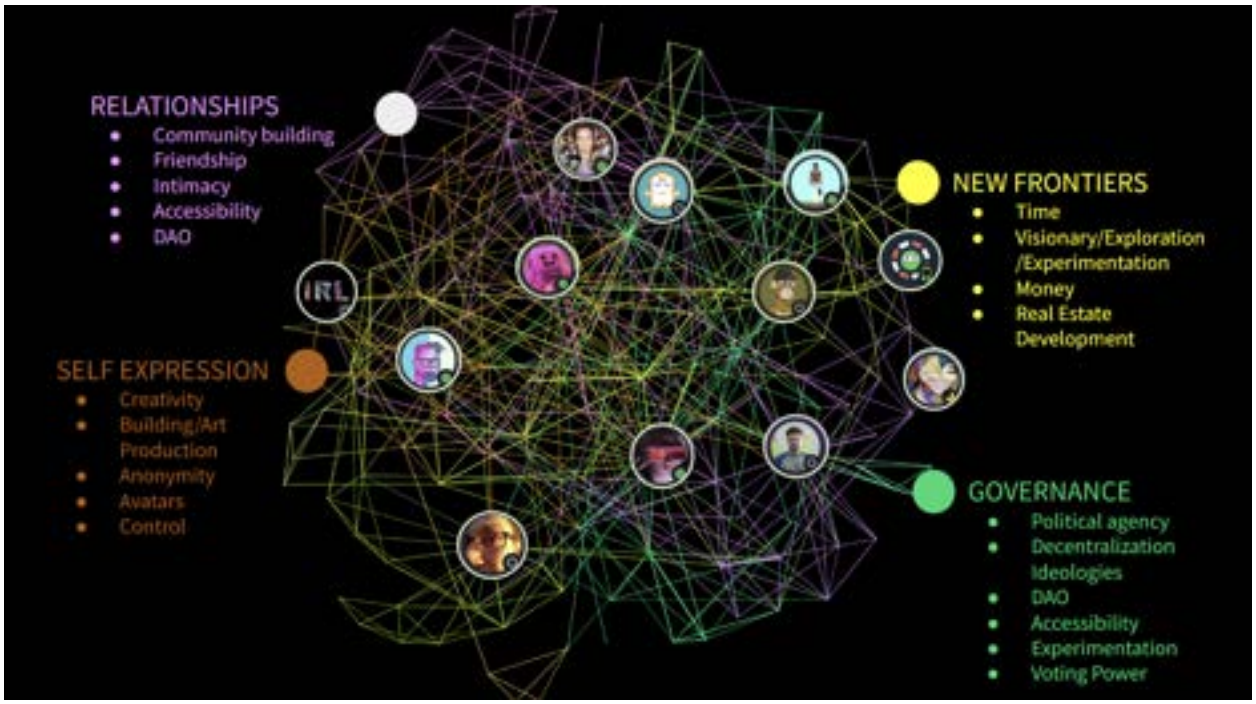


Image 13. Recurring themes from my interviews with Decentraland users.

I was transparent, sharing my name, keeping my camera on, and explaining that I was an artist from York University developing an artistic work about virtual communities. I wanted interviewees to feel safe, understood, and respected. Over time, a few clear themes emerged: community and relationships, identity and self-expression, governance and the DAO, and the idea of new frontiers. I became especially drawn to the first two—how Decentraland fosters meaningful connections and allows people to reimagine themselves.

One interview in particular stood out. A user named AwedJob shared that he was from Saint Paul, Minnesota—just across the river from my hometown of Minneapolis. He told me how Decentraland had helped him through a stressful period of his life, to the point where it had

negatively affected his IRL/offline relationships. It was a deeply personal story, and when I asked if he'd be open to an in-person interview the next time I visited home, he graciously agreed.

Image 14. Zooming with AwedJob, a Decentraland community organizer.

That winter, I began preparing for the shoot. I was lucky to have Michael Miroshnik, a talented cinematographer and dear friend in my MFA cohort, agree to travel with me to Minnesota to film the interview. I had never run a production of this scale before, and Michael's experience and encouragement were invaluable. We built out an equipment list together, and with the support of Media Arts Coordinator Michael Irwin, we secured everything we needed and tested it all in advance to ensure it would travel well.

For sound, I recruited Jack Swiler, a longtime friend from elementary school who still lived in Minneapolis. Though he had no film experience, we'd been in band together and I knew he had a musician's ear. He was also conveniently unemployed, and our shoot fell on a weekday. Over a few Zoom calls, I taught him how to use the audio recorders, and he agreed to join the team.

Michael and I flew to Minnesota and stayed at my parents' house. We spent the next few days preparing logistics—picking up rentals, prepping gear, buying food, printing releases, planning our route, and finalizing the shot list. With a 6:00 AM call time and a limited shooting window, everything had to be airtight. I was overwhelmed. Looking back, it all seems almost

routine—but at the time, I was completely consumed by the details, struggling to balance my creative role with the endless logistical tasks of being both producer and director. I still dream of the day I can afford a full-time producer. But this experience taught me what is required to make even a small film.

Shoot day. With my mom as our driver, the crew headed to Saint Paul. AwedJob warmly welcomed us into his beautiful, wood-accented home. After some casual conversation, we quickly set up gear and began filming. Our time was cut short—he had to leave early to pick up his child from school—so we got straight to work. We began with b-roll: AwedJob logging into Decentraland, navigating his favorite spaces, explaining his avatar and the communities he's a part of—especially Community Building Decentraland (CBD), a group focused on user-run initiatives and building connections.

Image 15. At home in Minnesota with AwedJob for our in-person interview.

Some of the shots were lightly staged—asking him to type or navigate to certain areas—but others were spontaneous, like when he took us to his favorite gardening game in Decentraland. Next, we moved into the formal interview. We set up in his living room, in front of

his Christmas tree, and positioned two cameras. The night before, I had rewatched both of our previous interviews and taken notes on follow-ups or key quotes I wanted him to repeat with better production quality. The conversation lasted about 90 minutes, with a short break in the middle. Despite the time crunch, it flowed smoothly.

After we wrapped, we grabbed some b-roll of Saint Paul—until someone mistook our camera for a gun and called the police (whoops). We returned home exhausted but satisfied. Listening back to the interview, there were of course things I wished I had asked or framed differently. But for my first on-location shoot, I was proud to have captured in-person footage for my thesis. It grounded the work. These aren't just avatars—these are real people, with real lives and real homes.

Computer Animation: Influences, References, and Forced Learnings

"The animated film creates a narrative space and visual environment radically different to the live-action version of the world… The animated film enables the filmmaker(s) to be more expressive and thus more subversive than readily acknowledged" – Paul Wells, 1998

Now that I'd collected my (mostly) audio interviews, I began thinking about visuals. For this project, I wanted to blend documentary with digital animation, especially because many of the subjects wanted to keep their identities obscured. I was greatly inspired by Douglas Geyton's *Molotov Alva and His Search for the Creator: A Second Life Odyssey* (2008) and Chris Landreth's *Ryan* (2013), who highlight their subjects' internal struggles through the use of animated interviews. Animated documentaries are "poised between fiction and fact – perhaps combining the two" and are reflective of "today's post-truth media atmosphere" (Ehrlich, 2019). By using these contrasting genres, Geyton and Landreth disrupt the traditional viewing experience. Such defamiliarization can better engage audiences and elicit a more critical perspective, especially when the characters themselves may be unreliable narrators (aren't we all?).

Ryan (Landreth, 2013)

Molotov Alva and His Search for the Creator: A Second Life Odyssey (Geyton, 2008)

Image 16. Short film inspirations for Magpie Online.

I often begin my creative process by collecting a list of references that are relevant for my project aesthetically and thematically. This practice is common in urban design and architecture because references often aid a team or client visualize your goals and direction for a project. They also show what designs have been successes or failures in the past, indicating which routes to pursue and which to avoid. Naturally, this same technique is often applied to film/media, so I set off to parse through different digital animations and gaming sequences.

Examining these works proved both inspiring and generative, as I pieced together various video samples. Because I initially had little experience with digital animation, I wasn't certain what I was looking for and ended up watching hours of early 3D, CGI animations. Many were clunky, glitchy, and abstract– the creators are clearly trying to learn how to use the medium and establish a language distinct from traditional hand-drawn animations. It was encouraging to see these initial efforts because they demonstrate the imperfections and joys of experimentation. Akin to my own experience (I had not used any computer animation or editing software prior to my MFA), these trailblazing creators were working with new mediums and it is a reminder that my project will not be perfect. It will be funky and that's okay (maybe even preferred?).

As I was interested in "experiencing" the medium's progression, my research began with the earliest CGI works. Many of these pieces are abstract, relying on shape, color, and music to tell the story. They bear a similar quality to Norman Mclaren's experimental and flickery hand-drawn animations, but computerized. I was particularly inspired by John Whitney and Robert Abel who were innovators in the fields of computer animation, visual effects, and interactive media. *Matrix III* (Whitney, 1972), *Maxfli DDH Energy* (Abel, 1982), *Chips in Space* (O'Connell, 1984) all explore the novelty of computerized space, playing with the formations of 3D shapes and the swooping capabilities of a virtual camera. I enjoyed the simplicity and

conceptual nature of these early works, because they show the building blocks of CGI and provide a good starting point for learning 3D animation.

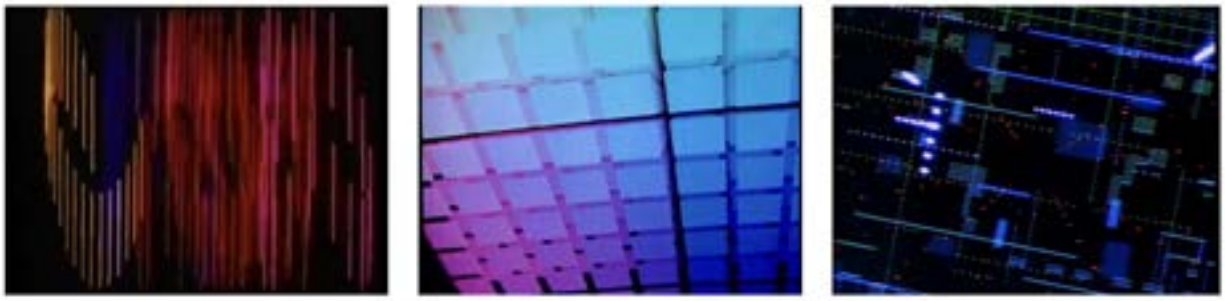


Image 17. Early animation influences for Magpie Online.

As computer graphics progressed, animators moved beyond conceptual shapes and began incorporating humanoid characters into their work. Chris Wedge's *Tuber's Two Step* (1985) recounts a baby's first steps while the parents rejoice and dance. In *Dance of the Stumblers* (1987) by Steve Segal, a troupe of acrobats perform tricks and stumble over each other as the characters cycle between anthropometric and abstract shapes. Both pieces playfully investigate human representation and gesture. The exploratory and expressive motions of the characters are representative of the animator's own baby steps. Just as the characters are learning to walk, the animators are learning how to inject human motion into computer generated shapes. Prior to the advent of computer animation, a plethora of manuals taught hand-drawn animators how to squash, stretch, and stage personas with a pencil. Though computer animation follows many of these traditional principles, programming these motions through a digital device was new and challenging. What is a body mediated by a computer? How does one digitally show the richness of gesture?

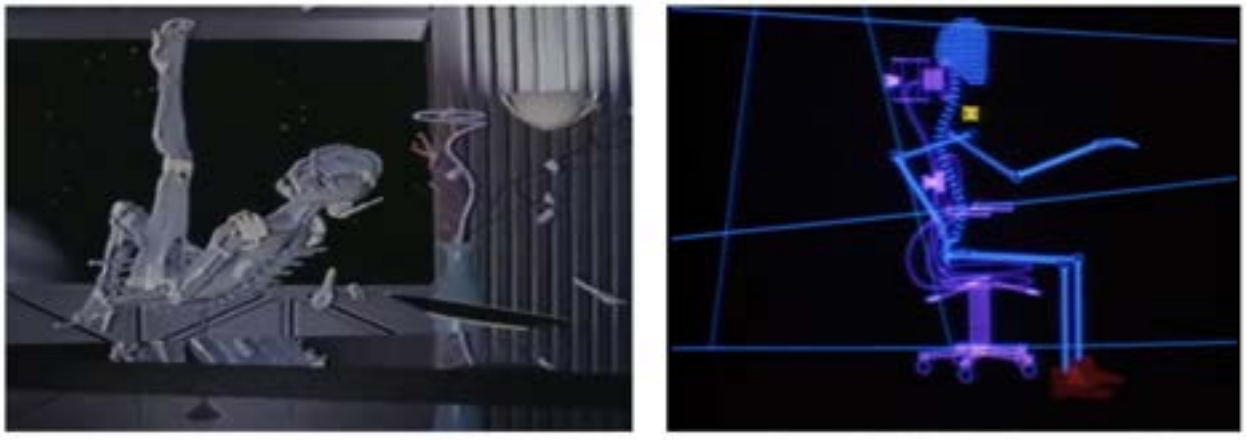
Tuber's Two Step (Wedge, 1985) *Dance of the Stumblers* (Segal, 1987)

Image 18. Early animation and gesture influences for Magpie Online.

In the mid 1980s, computer animation entered mainstream media with Abel's production company Robert Abel and Associates at the forefront of digital graphics. The team developed some of the most groundbreaking computer-animated works of the time, using ray-traced renders and smooth character animation long before such technologies were common practice (History of Computer Animation, 2017). They produced an array of high-profile film sequences, video game graphics, and television advertisements– including *Equa: A Chair for People Who Can't Sit Still* (1985) and *Brilliance* (1985). These works transition from the abstract personifications of shapes, to human looking figures with more realistic and nuanced gestures. *Equa: A Chair for People Who Can't Sit Still* (1985), an ad for the Herman Miller office chair, stitches together real-life footage and computer animation sequences. In the commercial, the real humans are initially jerky, stiff, and machine-like as they move through the office. Once the main character sits down at his desk, the camera zooms into the computer screen and transitions to a new, animated environment featuring a CGI human skeleton. The skeleton is wireframe and semi-realistic, but its movements are as clunky as the main character. The ad seems to poke fun at the awkwardness of computer generated humans and the challenges of emulating "real" body

language. Even the blueprint-esque character design alludes to the “bones” that build and control our physical expressions.

This jolted, glitchy aesthetic changes with the release of *Brilliance* (1985). Commissioned as a canned food ad for the 1985 Superbowl, *Brilliance* is one of the first works to adopt an early version of motion capture. Abel and Whitney filmed a live model and programmed the computer to paint reference points onto the choreographed movement. Then, these points on her body were combined to create a stick figure animation, known as a vector graphic. By applying real human motion to the robot, the character accelerated, decelerated, and pivoted in a realistic way, which emulated natural human movement far better than previous computer animated works. The modern design of the robot, mixed with the smooth physical flow, is a nod towards the photorealistic future of CGI. From these short advertisements, I was drawn to the character designer and innovations in body expression. The anatomical construction of these characters–blueprint skeleton and futuristic robo-woman–reflects their environment and the story being portrayed. These characters are playfully self-reflective of the CGI medium (while also selling a product).



Brilliance (Whitney, 1985)

Equa: A Chair for People Who Can't Sit Still (Herman Miller Inc., 1985)

Image 19. CGI animation and gesture influences for Magpie Online.

These works made me question how to construct a body through animation, while also pushing me to visualize the types of human movements that I wanted to apply to my own project. Feeling inspired, I experimented with a slew of animation softwares and styles that included Unreal Engine, Blender, TouchDesigner, Metahuman, Plask.ai, VRChat, motion capture, photogrammetry, rotoscoping, and greenscreen. As mentioned, I had no experience with animation or video editing software, and the learning curve was incredibly steep and time consuming. For example, in my first week of learning, I set out to complete a series of tutorials for Unreal Engine and familiarize myself with the software. I started with "Your First Hour in Unreal Engine" and "Introducing Unreal Engine." Based on the title and video length, I was under the impression that the class would only take an hour, but my estimation was far from the reality. The tutorial took me 6 hours as I followed along, painstakingly pausing and replaying the video.

To say the least, I was discouraged. I had these grandiose animating ideas, but when I actually sat down to learn, I was so out of my depths. Even using a PC gaming laptop (I had formerly been a Mac user) felt impossible. What kept me afloat, and one of the benefits of doing an MFA, was the structure, deadlines, and forced learning that school provided. I was fortunate to take *Future Cinema I* and *Future Cinema II*, where I had assignments centered around these software. I held Research Assistant positions for professors Mary Bunch and Taien Ng-Chan, where we created a variety of new media projects using Unreal Engine and Touch Designer. I had a dedicated workspace in Betaspace where I could set up dual monitors and also receive moral and PC support from the incredible Media Arts Coordinator Michael Irwin. All of these forces propelled me forward. And, as I continued to experiment, I slowly got better and faster at using these softwares. Their logics overlapped, I learned how to use a gamer computer, and I felt

more confident in my ability to troubleshoot issues. If the York scaffolding didn't exist, I don't think I would have spent hundreds of hours following along with YouTube tutorials to gain the technical skills needed for this thesis.

From Idea to Installation: *Magpie Online* Goes Live

"...it is hard to imagine a montage sequence…more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one that our legs create by walking among the buildings of the Acropolis" — Sergei M. Eisenstein, 1939

"I was a late bloomer. But anyone who blooms at all, ever, is very lucky. ...Many lives don't allow that, the good fortune of being able to work at it, and try, and keep trying." — Sharon Olds, 1993

This piece took many forms—VR film, short documentary, dome piece—before settling into its final shape as a new media installation. But throughout these formal mutations, the subject matter remained constant. From the beginning, this was always meant to be a documentary about online communities—specifically Decentraland. In my York MFA application, I wrote: "...this documentary/science fiction will explore new frontiers of human interaction within virtual realities and their potentially negative societal ramifications." I was clear on my intention to understand this digital world and the people who inhabit it.

That said, it took me a long time to arrive at this finished work. After completing the geographic analysis, interviews, and research, the project sat idle for nearly two years. I was juggling multiple contracts, pursuing other creative projects, and, frankly, ignoring this one. I chipped away at it here and there, but it always felt daunting—too big, too tangled, and I didn't know where to restart. I'm incredibly grateful for the kind nudges from my supervisor Taien, program director Manfred Becker, my boss Mary Bunch, and, of course, my ever-persistent parents. Still, none of that quite got me over the hump.

Image 20. Magpie Online opening night at InterAccess Gallery.

Then, in February 2025, InterAccess—where I'm an active member—put out a call for their Gateway Program. The program opens the gallery to artists at no cost, offering space and support in response to the shrinking number of artist-run venues in Toronto. It was exactly what I needed: a deadline. I applied, hoping that if I was selected, I'd be forced to confront the project and, finally, finish it. In March, I was notified that my proposal had been accepted—and would be part of Doors Open Toronto in late May. I was thrilled… and then immediately panicked. I had less than three months to assemble a project I'd avoided for two years. Worse, I'd pitched an ambitious, resource-heavy exhibition.

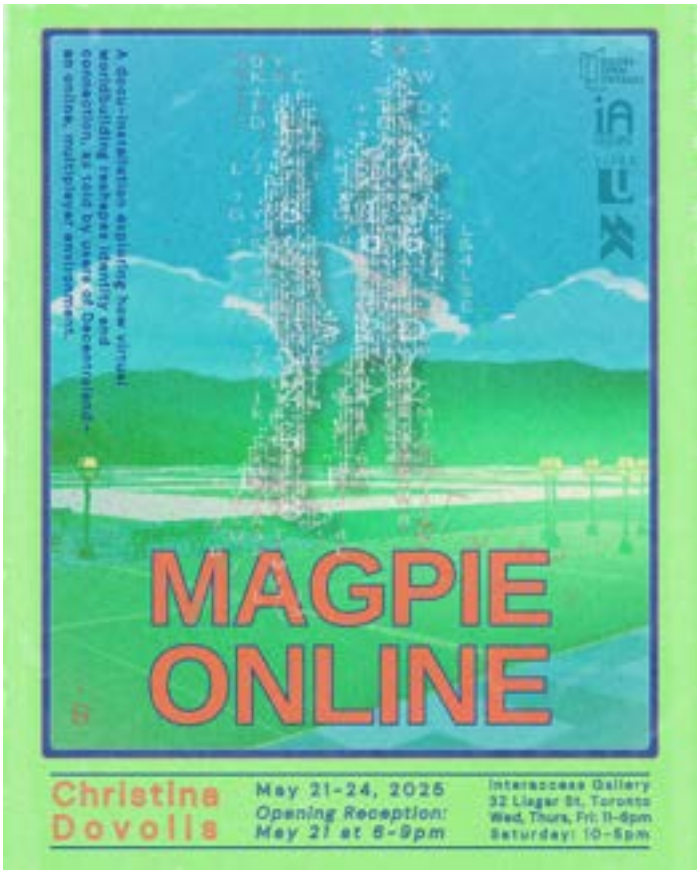


Image 21. Poster for Magpie Online show.

Even though I didn't quite know where to begin, I began anyway—by revisiting the interviews. Years ago, I had started editing a few interviews that stood out to me, and I trusted that past-me had seen something in them worth holding onto. I prioritized those: AwedJob, Canessa, Tangpoko, and Sinful. I transcribed and sorted their soundbites into categories: avatar/identity, community-building, personal growth, governance, drawbacks, and real-life relationships. I color-coded the edits and began shaping each into a narrative.

This part of the process, the editing, was tormenting. These weren't fictional characters—they were real people who had generously shared intimate stories. I agonized over every cut. Would I misrepresent them? Would I distort their truth for the sake of "the story"? More than once, I told myself I'd never make a documentary again—that I didn't have the

ruthlessness required. Documentaries demand shaping real lives into coherent arcs, and that shaping often feels like betrayal. I still feel like I'm not cut out for documentary work and that I'll never make another. We'll see.

I pushed forward. I wanted each testimonial to land between five and ten minutes—compact, but flow smoothly with some emotional weight or arc. This process took much longer than I anticipated. I was inspired by the steam-of-conscious flow of Nick Van Der Kolk's podcast *Love & Radio*, and the immersive sound design of Jad Abumrad and Shima Oliaee's podcast *Dolly Parton's America*. I had original music by the talented Montreal band Basil No! (aka my sister's band) and Minneapolis based musician Smeethan– they both crafted incredible heartfelt synth-electronic scores to accompany the testimonials. Meanwhile, I realized I had a whole other challenge ahead: the visuals. I had archived hours of screen recordings and machinima from Decentraland… but on my ex-boyfriend's computer. Whether those files still exist, I'll never know—I couldn't bring myself to send that text.

Love & Radio (Van Der Kolk, 2005-Present) *Dolly Parton's America* (Abumrad & Oliaee, 2019)

Image 22. Audio inspirations while editing interview testimonials.

Instead, I called my brother, Jamie Dovolis—a graduating film student at Simon Fraser University. I needed someone to essentially re-shoot the entire visual archive. Jamie flew to Toronto, stayed with me for ten days, played Decentraland nonstop, captured footage, and edited it all under my direction. He saved the project. I couldn't have done this without him.

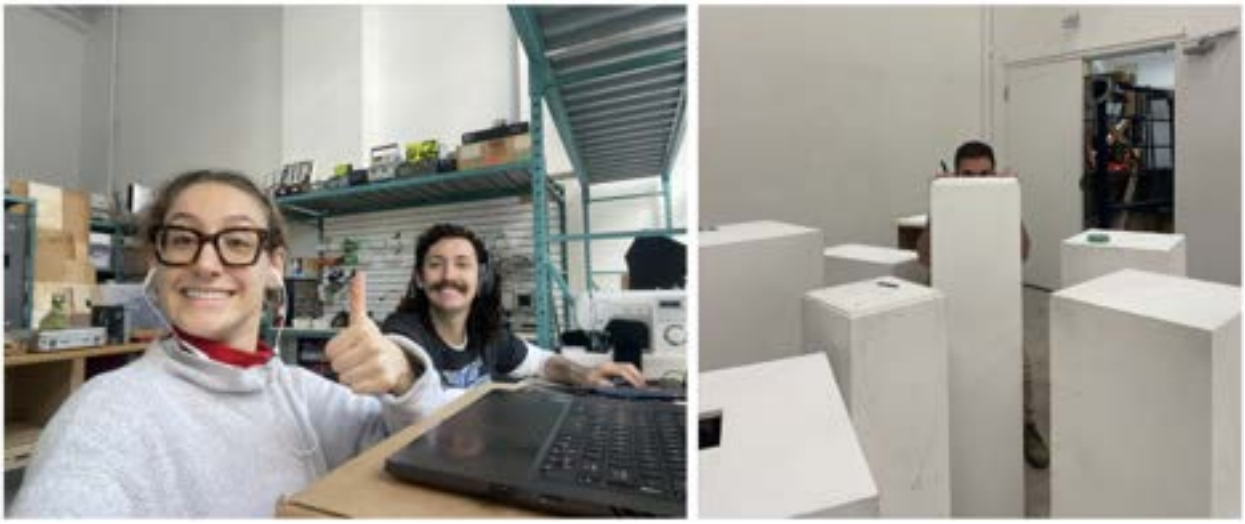


Image 23. Editing with my brother Jamie Dovolis and setting up plinths with friend Oliver Farkas.

Once the interviews and machinima were in place, I moved on to animations. For Canessa's piece, I filmed myself walking at the York U Motion Media Studio (YUMMS) and transformed it into ASCII animation using TouchDesigner. I paired it with a slow, cyclical journey through Decentraland, syncing the visuals with the emotional rhythm of her story. For Tangpoko, we used VTube Studio with OBS, allowing her to speak through her avatar during our Zoom interview. Her facial expressions and gestures were mapped in real time, highlighting the avatar that is so core to her identity. For Scott, I wove together the live-action interview footage with machinima of his avatar giving tours to newcomers. And for Sinful, I combined my own machinima with his machinima from the YouTube tutorials he produces as a Decentraland radio host.

Image 24. Still from Magpie Online. Interview visuals for Tangpoko and Canessa.

Next, I began working on the visuals for the remaining monitors. After a tech scout with Michael Irwin, I revised the installation plan to include 40–50 monitors. Michael had rescued around 60 discarded VGA monitors from York's trash, and many still worked. They were hardier than the newer models and had an interesting aesthetic as their age caused discoloration and a pink-ish tint on the screens. I ordered eight VGA splitters and used a combination of media players and old laptops (also rescued by Michael from the trash) to run the visuals.

Image 25. Photos from Magpie Online installation. Old computers finding new life.

For these monitors, I was inspired by the films and video works of Toshio Matsumoto, Pat O'Neill, and Takashi Ito—artists who transform landscapes into rhythmic, flickering visual poems (Arthur, 2024), (Raine, 2022), (Kiejziewicz, 2012), (Scammell, 2016). I captured

real-world scenes using Google Earth, cut them into abstract animations in TouchDesigner, and set them alongside my Decentraland footage. To underscore the similarity between real and virtual urban experience, I also sourced archival CBC footage of Toronto from the 1960s–1990s and paired it with scenes from Decentraland. I included excerpts from William H. Whyte's *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* to deepen the reflection on public life (Whyte, 1980). And to wrap it all together, I created a 360-degree projection of Decentraland's full day-night cycle (where one hour IRL equals one day in-world) to immerse visitors in the disorienting, uncanny temporality of digital space.

Image 26. Video art and visual inspiration for Magpie Online monitors.

With the visuals in place, I began to picture how I would stage the gallery. Drawing again on principles of geography and worldbuilding, "The World Building approach upholds an industrial practice of transmedia storytelling that makes it possible to provide…films and video games with a degree of unity with respect to the narrative, aesthetics and formal aspects…" (Breuleux et al., 2019). In a similar vein, theme park designer Don Carson first constructs the physical space, which then acts as the basis for creating the story. For Carson, "One of the trade secrets behind the design of entertaining themed environments is that the story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through" (Breuleux et al., 2019). In film, but

especially in expanded cinema where participants have a greater degree of interactivity, injecting plot with the spatial environment is crucial for immersion. In this way, narrative can be geographical and experiential, giving characters meaning through both space and story (Wolf, 2014).

TV Garden (Paik, 1974–77) *Sistine Chapel* (Paik, 1993)

Image 27. Installation inspiration for Magpie Online.

Thus, I wanted to create something architectural in the gallery, to mirror the buildings, geographies, and digital lines of both the machinima and archival footage. I sourced plinths from the Design + Technology Lab at TMU and York U Visual Arts to create a sculptural cityscape, staggering the monitors on various levels and clusters. I drew inspiration from Nam June Paik: wires tangled with plants, digital objects interwoven with nature (Hanhardt, 2006). I used fake grass, cinderblocks, rescued wires from the condemned Burton Auditorium, and stole six fake plants from a condo building (which I later returned!). Colored vinyl shapes on the floor pulled it all together— I wanted to showcase the tension that many Decentraland users feel between the digital world and the "real" world. Each cluster was like a nest– an ode to the title *Magpie Online*. The idea for the title came from AwedJob, who described Decentraland as a Magpie's nest– an externalization of ourselves and identities– and that by building and collecting all sorts of things in this virtual space, it becomes a representation of who we are.

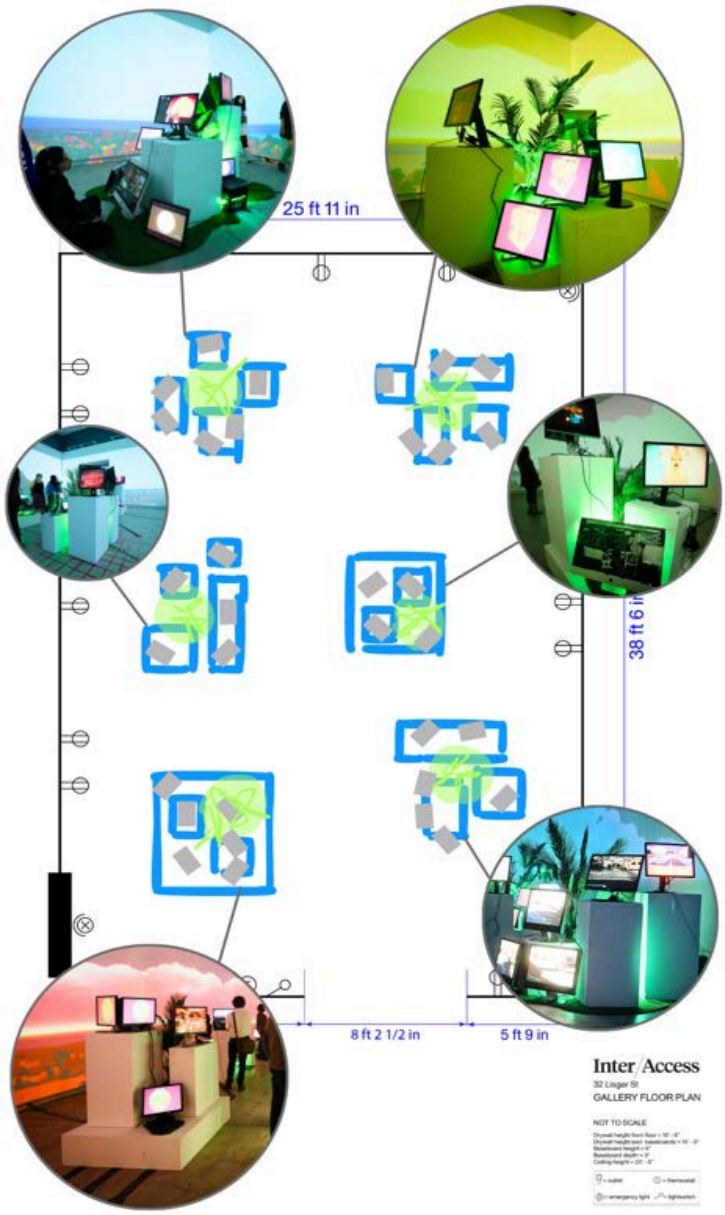
Image 28. Magpie Online opening night. The 360 day-night cycle in Decentraland creates a shifting temporality.

Installation day arrived: May 20th, 6pm. The show would open at 6pm the following day. I had 12 hours. My whole family showed up from Minnesota—my parents, siblings, even my aunt and uncle. Somehow, all of us stayed in my tiny apartment together for the weekend. My parents drove the U-Haul, carried plinths, and arranged cables. My siblings helped with editing and made original music for the installation. My dear friends Tavis Putnam and Oliver Farkas were my tech crew, carrying monitors, laying vinyl, and wiring up the room. We worked all night. We slept for three hours. And at 6pm on May 21st, the gallery was full. My friends, mentors, fellow artists—they were there. The show ran for four days, including Doors Open Toronto, and welcomed over 200 visitors.

Image 29. Visitors listening and watching the interviews on opening night.

After years of stalling, detours, and dread, I was done. I cannot stress enough that this installation was only possible because I had the support of my family and dear friends. They pushed *Magpie Online* (and me) across the finish line.

Image 30. Above: Different "nests" of computers, plinths, wires, plants, and vinyl in the gallery. Below: Site map of the gallery.



The final step in this process was writing the thesis paper. This paper served as an excellent tool to reflect and collect the many references and inspirations that helped to create this work. In terms of process, the first two drafts of this paper were written by me, alone. The final draft of this paper was put through Grammarly, a large language model that corrects for grammar, sentence structure, and content clarity. I believe that it is important to acknowledge the use of such tools, especially in creative work, like this paper.

Final Thoughts: Showing Up

"We must take the feeling of being at home into exile. We must be rooted in the absence of a place." ― Simon Weil, 1952

"Have I lived enough? Have I loved enough? Have I experienced happiness with sufficient gratitude? Have I endured loneliness with grace?" ― Mary Oliver, 2012

Throughout this project, I often thought about Kelly Reichardt's film *Showing Up* (Reichardt, 2022), where a sculptor preparing for a new show struggles to balance her creative life with the daily dramas of family and friends. Part of me hates this movie—it's painfully twee to watch an artist fumble through the making of her little ceramic sculptures. It feels small, even pathetic. And yet, another part of me is so deeply attached to the sentiment. Because that's the truth of it: you have to show up to your craft every day, no matter how absurd or insignificant it might seem.

I guess that's what it means to be an artist—and I use that term broadly, because I think everyone is an artist in their own way. We're drawn to making. And it's our job, to feed those desires and keep creating, even when it feels painful, even when it's embarrassing. I spend a lot of time feeling embarrassed.

When I first started this MFA, coming from a background in community organizing and environmental justice work, I often questioned why I chose art school. I still don't have a clear answer. Back then, my work had tangible meaning: it directly impacted people's lives, influenced policy, and aimed to build a better world. And suddenly, I found myself in York University's

basement, watching YouTube tutorials on how to move a digital teacup in Unreal Engine. It felt like a joke.

Image 31. Visitors in the gallery.

But at the same time—it brought me joy, purpose. It brought me community whilst emerging from a very lonely time. So I guess no matter what you're showing up for– a Decentraland Town Hall or an art class– they are all the same. That's my biggest finding from this thesis project. The real world is the same as a virtual world, it just happens to exist on the computer, on the internet. Wherever you find community, sense-of-self, agency, beauty, empowerment, inspiration, art, love– nurture it. Even if other people say it's stupid. Even if you say it's stupid. Finding something to care and dedicate time to is important, even if just on a personal, emotional level.

Now as I look back and write this thesis paper, all I can say is that I'm so grateful for the mountain-moving support of my family and friends. They made this thesis possible. I'm glad it's over, excited to have this off my chest, and looking forward to new projects. I hope I can be a great artist one day and this feels like a good first step. Thank you.

Image 32. My family at Magpie Online opening night. Eternally grateful.

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