Cinematography:
Composition & the Camera in Machinima
“WALL-E”

How many different shots?
What angles, types of shots?
NUMBER ONE QUESTION:

What are you trying to communicate?

Not just, what will look cool?
SHOT SIZES & TYPES

• A close up is a “tighter” shot while a medium full or full is a “looser” shot

• Can apply to whatever subject or object--animals, bugs, a box of cereal
Establishing Shot

• A wide angle shot that shows the location of the scene.

• Helps to familiarize the audience with where the scene is taking place
Wide Shot (WS)

- Includes the subject's full body and some of the surroundings
Medium Shot (MS)

- Includes about half of the subject’s body and less of the background
Close-up (CU)

- Includes the subject’s head, neck and sometimes shoulders
- Gets into the emotional space of the character
Extreme Close-up (ECU)

- Includes only part of the subject’s face
- Heightens facial expressions and intensity of actions
- Beginning students are afraid of close ups, meaning they don’t use them enough.
Shot Sizes

- A couple of ways to label but just be consistent within your own system
Two Shot

- Includes two actors and shows their relative distance from one another
- It’s usually a medium shot
- A three shot has three characters, etc..., up to a “crowd shot”
Over the Shoulder (OTS)

- Includes two actors, but the face of one and the back of the head/shoulder of another

- Also called a “dirty shot” (compared to a “clean shot” that is not OTS)

- Psychologically brings characters closer together
Point of View (POV)

- The camera captures what one of the characters sees from their perspective.
- The other character is often looking straight into the camera, if there is another character.
- Cinema constantly goes in and out of POV mode.
Cut Away (CA) or Insert

- A shot of an object in the scene that allows for an easier transition between shots--should be narratively driven

- Shot is usually outside the immediate action

- A clock is a common one but not always the best
Cut In (CI)

- A shot of an object in the scene that is within the action
- Ex--hand pulling a gun from a drawer, or hands typing a letter
High Angle

- The camera points down from above
- The subject often looks more vulnerable or insignificant
Low Angle

- The camera points up from below
- The subject often looks more powerful or intimidating
Bird’s Eye or Aerial

- The camera points directly down onto a scene or subject, like a bird looking down onto the scene
Worm View or Crotch Shot

- The camera points directly upward, looking straight up at the subjects
- Worm/bird...get it!
- Most shots are at “eye level”
CAMERA MOVES
Camera Movement

- Motivation is key!
- The camera should only move if it has a reason to.
- Does it follow action, reveal something, shift focus to another part of the scene, or have an emotional effect?
- Just because it can move doesn't' mean it should.
- Good camera work often goes unnoticed.
- **Pan** -- stationary camera rotates side to side, left or right
- **Tilt** -- stationary camera cranks or bends up or down
- **Pedestal** -- camera moves only vertical up or down
- **Track & Dolly** -- the camera moves on a track, often following action. OR move in on emotion
- **Jib & Crane** -- the camera is mounted on a crane and moves to follow action or establish a scene
• What you exclude in the frame is just as important as what you include
The Rule of Thirds

- Avoid placing the subject dead center in the frame (there are exceptions--news anchors)
- In a close up, the eyes often fall on the top line
The Rule of Thirds

- The horizon of a landscape usually should NOT be in the center of the frame.
- Exaggerate either the sky or the ground, for example.
Leading Looks

• Directs the eye and indicates where character is looking off-screen (vector)

• More ease when room for leading look, more tension when not

• Especially important with moving shots

• Often will motivate an edit.
Backgrounds

• Pay attention to where your subjects are placed in relation to the objects in the background

• A cluttered background distracts the viewer’s attention from the subject

• Text especially distracts the eye
Balance

• Leading look changes balance, has weight

• Masses--scale, volume, space (white/empty)

• Tonality--relation of bright & dark; eye drawn to bright

• Color--amount in frame, saturation, hot/cold
CLOSING WORDS

• Be conscious of what your shooting and how; each choice changes the effect of the shot on your audience

• A few minutes usually makes the difference between a good shot and a bad shot

• Let your instincts guide you