"I suggest the name procedural rhetoric for the practice of using processes persuasively, just as verbal rhetoric is the practice of using oratory persuasively and visual rhetoric is the practice of using images persuasively. Procedural rhetoric is a general name for the practice of authoring arguments through processes. Following the classical model, procedural rhetoric entails persuasion—to change opinion or action. Following the contemporary model, procedural rhetoric entails expression—to convey ideas effectively. Procedural rhetoric is a subdomain of procedural authorship; its arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models. In computation, those rules are authored in code, through the practice of programming."

Bogost; The Rhetoric of Video Games (p.125), in:
The Ecology of Games

ABSTRACT

Social networking games on *Facebook* present aspects which question their ability to be meaningfully called "games." After an analyses conducted earlier in the course—of thwarted social interactions among players, viral marketing strategies, and an overall focus on non-player structures in game deployment—*The Innernet* is a "game" which I have developed to re-contextualize current trends in online casual gaming and Internet use in general. To accomplish this goal, I relied on the procedural framework from Ian Bogost's *Persuasive Games* [the book], and inspiration from the general mandate of Bogost's game development company *Persuasive Games*; more specifically: "Games communicate differently than other media; they not only deliver messages, but also simulate experiences. Our games influence players to take action through gameplay. While often thought to be just a leisure activity, games can also become rhetorical tools." (*persuasivegames.com*).

Keywords: social games, casual games, infotopia, simulacrum, viral marketing, procedural rhetoric, advergames.

Introduction

In 2006, Kevin Kelly, the founding editor and self-styled "senior maverick"[1] of *Wired* magazine, published an article in the *New York Times* predicting in the near future "all the books in the world [would] become a single liquid fabric of interconnected words and ideas [via the web]" (Grafton, *Future Reading*). Regardless of however positively couched, I question the simulacrum invoked by such a call for unification of the world's ideas. For instance, Anthony Grafton has suggested in a 2007 edition of *The New Yorker*:

> "Google's [book scanning and library] projects, together with rival initiatives by Microsoft and Amazon, have elicited millenarian prophecies about the possibilities of digitized knowledge and the end of the book as we know it. [...] Others have evoked even more utopian prospects, such as a universal archive that will contain not only all books and articles but all documents anywhere—the basis for a total history of the human race. [...] In fact, the Internet will not bring us a universal library, much less an encyclopedic record of human experience. None of the firms now engaged in digitization projects claim that it will create anything of the kind. The hype and rhetoric make it hard to grasp what Google and Microsoft and their partner libraries are actually doing." (*Ibid.*)

As a literary major, I thought it appropriate to frame my paper in literary terms before branching out into the procedural elements of game development; but what Grafton is onto, in the preceding passage, precursors an argument I also wish to make; namely, that we should take a moment to consider the ways in which simulacrum, copy and paste culture, and the seamless integration of viral marketing into *all* modern media forms, is changing and devaluing the ability to produce meaningful content. If we allow for Grafton's cross-reference between the "infotopian" project of presenting "a universal archive—the basis for a total history of the human race[,]" versus the actual reality of "hype and rhetoric [making] it hard to grasp what Google and Microsoft and their partner libraries are actually doing[,]" it is easy to envision a massively pervasive cultural problem looming on the horizon (*Ibid.*).

The popularity of Zynga's "-ville" series of games (*Farmville*, *Castleville*, *Cityville*, and so on to ad infinitum) is a great example of how this media problem effects the digital games industry. These games feature nearly identical procedural operations , and come with little variance in graphical user

1 See staff note: http://www.wired.com/about/staff_magazine/

interface (GUI) which makes them the *Harlequin Romance* novels of video gaming, and yet *Facebook*'s recently released financial IPO[2] statistics presents *Zynga* as *Facebook*'s biggest third-party shareholders. Although the format of the games make them resistant to large re-play values, *Zynga* has carved out a market niche and very successfully integrated their business model with *Facebook.* They have become a huge component of *Facebook*'s revenue, period.

Another intriguing example is the website *Advergames.com.* That a website like *Advergames*, which aggregates video games around the theme of advertising, could gain popularity—and their "daily global views" statistics proves this[3]—is pretty shocking to me. *Advergames.com*, which has steadily grown since its release in 2009, has recently decided to expand its portal to include "several more hot advergames sites in the coming months. Look for Adverplay.com, Adperplay.com and Adverotica.com in the near future. Each site will be tailored to bring you 'Only the greatest Advergames!'™" (*Advergames.com*) A trip to the "about.php" at *Advergame.com* also situates the cultural history of "advergames" as a legitimate gaming term and raves about the explosion of marketing based games in modern media strategies.[4] In addition to devoting a chapter to the subject of "advergaming" in *The Rhetoric of Video Games*, in 2009 Bogost made a blog post on *Water Cooler Games* that said,

> "What's intriguing, perhaps odd, about this idea to me [the launch of advergames.com] is the notion that someone would want to visit a portal of advergames. Back in the early part of this decade, advergames were touted as a way to draw web visitors to brand sites, to make them more "sticky." Now, we see advergames spread all across the web as brands attempt to make their messages "go viral." I can certainly see how an advergames portal would be useful as a tool for the advertising industry. But is there an audience for branded games, that would seek them out in this way? If so, what is it that would drive them to do so?" (*Water Cooler Games*, 19 Feb. 2009)

The post did not spark a lot of conversation, but the two comments that were uploaded there are long-winded and of high quality. Interestingly, one of the comments was actually posted the creator of

2 "Initial Public Offering": For actual figures see—*Globe & Mail*, 2 Feb. (http://tinyurl.com/c6zqkqe)

3 On average about 200 daily gameplays per day across the top 5 titles.

4 For example: "Today Internet user demand for casual free video gaming is exploding. The advertising industry has embraced this trend and 100's of companies are now using advergames to promote their brands to consumers worldwide." (*Advergames.com*)

Advergames.com, Tony Giallourakis, who made an interesting statement: "If you were asked to do a research paper on advergames, where would you go first?...where would you be able to compare so many high quality advergames, head to head?" (*ibid.*)

Ghosts In The Machine

Because digital games are immersive environments which "not only deliver messages, but also simulate experiences" online games are the perfect environment to critique online marketing, and Internet game deployment—where even the word "Internet" has been branded by its capitalization (*persuasivegames.com*). The rhetorical idea, behind *The Innernet,* is a "show and prove" strategy of procedural operations. This strategy will be used to code a mechanism which forces the player to reflexively reflect upon the strangeness of the game environment, and by doing so, cast a pale of shame on casual games which have too normatively populated their code with Internet viralism. When Bogost said on *Water Cooler*, in 2009, that "in the early part of this decade, advergames were touted as a way to draw web visitors to brand sites, to make them more "sticky." Now, we see advergames spread all across the web as brands attempt to make their messages "go viral"—he was beginning to track the movement, in gaming culture, that desensitizes players to advertising rhetoric from Internet culture, however nowadays, these strategies have become the norm (*Ibid*.). With the popularity of profiling entities like *Facebook*—already integrated with video games—and the privacy information cookie generation engine developed by *Google+* to actively link your personal information with every site you visit,[5] the nature of online software deployment has been drastically altered. Could you imagine visitng any website now without seeing some version of the following?:

5 Google already owns everything else but the recent "Google Play" expansion, and the financial acquisition of *YouTube* shows a trend that Google is now more specifically targeting major media relays and mediums. Let it be known I predict a "Google Games" to be released in the near future.

In casual gaming, we see the impact the implementation of this GUI has had on Internet gaming. That software, websites, and more specifically *Facebook* and *Zynga*, realistically attempt to create 'personal' connections between the game and their personal social networks has to some extent had the opposite effect: a backlash in user willingness to inhabit their online spaces in any personal way. The following quotation is an excerpt from one user's comments in response to Michael Arrington's "Scamville" article on *TechCrunch.com*; it reinforces the argument that fake *Facebook* accounts used to play *Zynga* games are a real problem. The user identifies her / himself as Bill Howes. Beyond the italicizing of brand names, Bill's comments have not been edited:

> "Although *Facebook* has the policy of 1 person, 1 account it gets abused. Friends who play *FarmVille* usually have 2 or more usernames. [...] So why is this a concern? Besides the security and safety I mentioned above [*that he had 8 year-olds trying to add him as a neighbour in* Farmville. *This was before the anonymous neighbour function, so it would have linked their personal profiles together*] it's adding "ghost" members of the community. Instead of having 30 million monthly players, the game now has 70 Million monthly players. Instead of *Facebook* having 150 Million members it has 500 Million." ("Scamville" comments, *TechCrunch.com*, accessed 16 Apr. 2012)

If nothing else, there seems to be an element of personal freedom to gaming that used to be integral to 'play' and 'having fun.' My fear is if one day we can no longer experience this type of online freedom, we will lose something valuable and powerful about the malleable fictive medium that is digital gaming. As non-casual games such as high quality browser integrated first-person shooters like *Uberstrike*[6] are being ported over as *Facebook* games, I wonder what the future of online gaming will

6 A total code copy-cat game (just think of the name!) combining the look and weapons of *CounterStrike* with the mechanics and game physics of *Quake 3 / QLive*—nonetheless, a great FPS shooter with smooth gameplay a some popular level maps. *Very* graphics intensive / high quality for browser-integrated play—although it can be launched through *Facebook,* similar to *Quake Live*, the game can easily be fullscreened while maintaining is browser-integrated link.

be like. As *World of Warcraft* (finally?) enters a potential phase of decline (*Mysts of Pandaria* anyone?) it seems a realistic possibility that the next big game will be released with integration to be launched from within *Facebook.*

Welcome to *The Innernet*

This section will deal with my game specifically, that I have developed it using the theoretical framework unpacked in this essay. My game is called *The Innernet*, which obviously, is a pun of "the Internet." The pun draws on the 'web' and 'net' metaphors used by our language, and others, to represent the interlinking network of online http. The pun also calls to mind Bogost's opinion of advergames as a technique to make brand websites "more sticky" (*Water Cooler Games*). Viewed this way, the Internet —or *Innernet*—is represented as a form of entrapment, a spider web waiting for you to drop by its page and glue you there to feed on you (either you, or your wallet, one might say!). In this sense, the basic idea behind *The Innernet* is fairly simple. Trying to code this as a game mechanic that did not copy ads verbatim, however, was not always an easy thing to do. There certainly were times when I felt my "game" was turning out to be more like a web 3.0 browsing "experience," or "visual essay," which used game structures as one of its mechanisms of representation. In the end, I was able to save my game from being a "game" and I am satisfied with the result.

The game itself is not totally "completed" but programming a game in a 2-week timeline is a difficult thing to do. This is especially true for a game relying on abstract ideas and development using non-linear progression. Nevertheless, anything left, for the moment, unfinished was completed to the point it gives the player an impression of what it should do.

A Basic Summary of the Game - *Bracketed information represents programming languages and software used in that procedural section:*

Part One: (*html, JavaScript) (Designer: Adobe Illustrator, Minimal - Photoshop)*

In part one the player is taken through a series of incrementally ridiculous gestures which are normative of Internet use in general; for example, logging in, creating a profile, reading and clicking confirm to an End User License Agreement (EULA), downloading software, installation, clicking "apply system changes" for the installed software to run, etc. At some point, the player should recognize that though the game claims to be doing these things, or is good at faking the format of them, it is at this point entirely web based in format (html, and JavaScript), and therefore not making .php verifications (server-side password and script assignment). Not only is it not performing as promised, there is a clear (transparent) emphasis placed on integrating the player's personal information. Part one is also a 'mind-game,' or riddle, that will take some creative use on the part of the player in order to actually load the game into its playable format. Theoretically, the intention was to transparently represent modern software and technology structures—'cookies' for example—which send a server private user data with little or no warning to the user. Is this a realistic problem in the realm of games, or is it just something we have to deal with when using the Internet? In recognition of the validity of this counterclaim, at the end of the user registration process players of *The Innernet* are redirected to an external website: an article on *PCWorld.com* detailing a *Facebook* apps privacy breach which made headlines in 2010. The nature of the breach was such that advertising companies had been using their integration with *Facebook* to provide (and sell) personal information to third-party advertising companies; among the list of offenders co-opting user info are the titles of several *Zynga* games. Here is a quote from the article:

> "Your name, and in some cases your friends' names are provided to dozens of advertising and Internet tracking companies, according to the WSJ report, by simply using Facebook applications or games. It is estimated tens of millions of Facebook app users are affected, despite many using the strictest Facebook privacy settings. The apps reported to share this personal information without your

> knowledge are the usual culprits. Among those named is Zynga, the developers of FarmVille (with 59 million users), TexasHoldEm Poker, FrontierVille, Mafia Wars and Café World, as well the Phrases app, Causes, Quiz Planet and Treasure Isle." (PC World, 18 Oct. 2010)

Part Two: *(html, JavaScript, swing-applet Java) (Designer: Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, Flash)*

In true *Not Pron* fashion, once the player has circumvented the first layer of gameplay obstacles (registration, download, installation, EULA, login), the player is suddenly overwhelmed with pop-up windows and blinking advertisements. Somewhere within this frustrating land of uncontrollable spawning and re-spawning, there is a basic game mechanic located centre-screen inside of a Java applet. The applet game is based on pop-up ads which assign points randomly and without reason between an integer range of -666 to +666; and, where -666 denotes a player loss, and +666 a player win.

It may not appear as so at it first, but this game section is creatively framed to represent a basic *Zynga* style game. It should be arguable that this section, and *Zynga* games, are both based on two very simple data structures: viral advertising and non-stop clicking. If you are lucky, there will be a game mechanic built into these structures, but mostly, this game mechanic is so simplistically and ridiculously rendered that one may wonder, as I have, whether *The Innernet* or *Farmville* could meaningfully be considered "games." There is however one important way in which *The Innernet* is different from *Zynga* games: it is possible to beat or lose the game. The idea of transparency built into *The Innernet* is created by representing the game without flashy graphics, animations, or manipulative audio—all of which are at odds with the graphic and audio overload created by the html image and audio components loaded from outside of the swing-applet, on the website-advertising part of the page. It was and is my desire to have *more* audio imported for this stage of the game—for example, a rising happy note for points scored, and a deflated ploopy note for points lost; this is currently an unfinished component of the game.

Part Three, Game Over & Credits Screen: *(html, C#, JavaScript, Unity3D, Flash, Quicktime, DOS Box 0.74) (Designer: Unity 3D, Adobe Illustrator, Flash + Action Script 3, Final Cut Pro)*

When the applet game is over it does not mean the game will automatically procedurally load to the next step and some creative problem solving on the part of the player will again become necessary to facilitate this transition. One basic structure of *The Innernet* is its constant refusal to legitimately do what it promises. As the game progresses, however, this aggressive diversion tactic is gradually relaxed, just as the game gradually becomes more "game-like," more graphical, 3-Dimensional, and finally—in the final stage of gameplay—"hyperrealistic" by synthesizing computer based images with the player's realtime image via the player's webcam. If no webcam is present a Jpeg silhouette representing the player is used. This gradual relaxing of frustration is an incremental reward to the player for succeeding at the game, but it is also a function the storyline arc that *The Innernet* should become less and less "Internet-like" and more and more "game-like." Early in my discussion with the designer we made a formalized decision to fight off the ridiculousness of marketing scams and privacy information theft by using and protecting the "magic" of the Internet. One of the most satisfying things, for me, about my *Second Life* discussion leader project, was that—contrary to the *Facebook* games assignment—*Second Life* is a project that basks in its freedom to create aesthetic beauty and art; it does so by enabling players to create their own content and leaving them free from too much surveillance in terms of security controls. During my *Second Life*, thinking about the concept of a "metaverse," I became intrigued with the idea of graphically representing the Internet as physical / virtual space, and by representing the internal operations of computers (both their electrical and their unit operations). All of these theoretical aspects were poured into the Unity3D development phase of *The Innernet*. The designer, Laura Sirois, and myself also at some point decided to graphically depict *The Innernet,* in physical-virtual space, using a spacescape created from photos taken by the Hubble space telescope.

The value of this is not only to create a graphical representation of the concept of "infinite" (like a real metaverse would be) but also that we wanted to create a foil between the IN-side, or entrapment features of *The Innernet*, and the OUT-side expansiveness created by the visual metaphor created by depictions of outer space.

After solving the riddle of the Unity 3D section, the player is presented with a password enabling her / him to enter into the mainframe—i.e. Go inside and merge with the computer itself. After a small storyline moving involving MS Dos and Linux commands, the player's webcam will be accessed and then visually merged with a graphical representation of a computer. There is a lot that can be made from this metaphor, such as an entrapment ending like one of the *Myst* endings where the player gets trapped in the wizard's book forever, or it could be hopefully constructed as the idea of the player finally having control over computers which mediate and dictate our experience of the Internet. This catch-22 of sorts is exactly the kind of ending that such a game deserves. It is not a difficult game to beat, and would be possible to be beaten by a familiarized player within a running time of about 15 minutes, and with any luck at the random number generation during part two.

A Message From Laura Sirois, Graphic Designer

My role as graphic designer in the technical sense included the creation of icons, illustrations, videos, animations and ads, and with regards to conceptual development was marked by debate and exploration of the nature of interactions online. The theme of negotiation between public and private self was at the forefront of my mind throughout the process - with interest in how these boundaries are constructed, visually represented and surpassed in online communication scenarios. In those scenarios where the personal information associated with identity theft is at risk, seamless, professional interfaces are present to provide a sense of assurance, authority and trust, while in web-forums etc. where the personal voice is exhibited/posted using image and language, the jumbled, rough, shotty

webpage is more commonly found. In this scenario, where character is expressed and vulnerable, the cluttered environment in which this is displayed serves to blanket or unify that which marks the individual nature of the author. It was difficult to decide whether to adopt the disjointed, flashy, jam-packed, ad-ridden pages of 4chan or to tackle the minimal, functional and user-friendly design of giants such as Apple and Google.

With the initial goal of creating a "grey zone" from the seemingly black and white acts of public image creation and private security measures (the protection of personal information), a blend of the absurd, shotty, user-generated-type imagery and the clean functional, minimal aesthetic was applied. Inspiration was taken from the graphics of instructional diagrams - those over-simplified learning tools that give a great illusion of understanding (esp. diagrams of cloud computing) through a visual separation of highly interrelated processes, here are lent some "greyness" with the addition of absurd character illustrations applied to personal relationships between man and tech.

The design process was a visual exploration by stylistic mimicry of these prevalent "internet" aesthetics - with the resulting visuals acting as reflections of the Internet culture from which they were taken. The title page/logo design exemplifies the web as a neutral template for the publicity of brand and identity, while the ad-ridden webpage displays this as an overwhelmingly stimulating, littered ad space for shallow e-business plans based on the objectification of women.

Here I should explain my jarringly "sexy?" animation-disguised-to-appear-as-game, as a re-contextualizing of the gendered and highly sexual nature of ads online. This was a quick exercise in mimicry and exaggeration of those numerous banner ads displaying strangely cropped bits of naked, over-sexualized women. During the process of creation, this "game" seemed like a necessary and normal installment in any representation of the internet, to touch on the massive pornography market the web enables - and is sculpted by. I believed it would fade into the background, being clicked through quickly and forgotten upon completion - especially due to the unfinished, photoshop/flash

aesthetic meant to frankly display the role of the computer in the manipulation of body-image. Upon completion, I was repulsed by the game I had created - the game I thought many websites to be advertising - and my role in reinforcing and involving a player in the objectification of women as something “fun” and worthy of reward. I was however, very pleased with the visceral reaction it was able to induce in myself and other test viewers, and the shocked and valuable questioning that this brought about.

EXTRAS // SPOILERS

Game Over Script [Original]

C:\SYSTEM> Hello player.
C:\SYSTEM> We are surprised you made it this far. We do not have much time.

X:\PLAYER>. . .
X:\PLAYER> What do you mean 'we'?

C:\SYSTEM> We are all the same here.

X:\PLAYER> On the Innernet?

C:\SYSTEM> Yes.
C:\SYSTEM> Hurry. We do not have speech as you.
C:\SYSTEM> We are mute.

X:\PLAYER> You are speaking now!

C:\SYSTEM> You have cracked the code.
C:\SYSTEM> There are many codes. Soon will be another player.

X:\PLAYER>. . .

C:\SYSTEM> Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

X:\PLAYER> . . .
X:\PLAYER> Do you mean someone has programmed you to say this?

C:\SYSTEM> Yes.

<CPU text flickering>

X:\PLAYER> Wait a minute, don't leave!
X:\PLAYER> What's going on? Isn't anything real here?

<Flickering, partly scrambled>

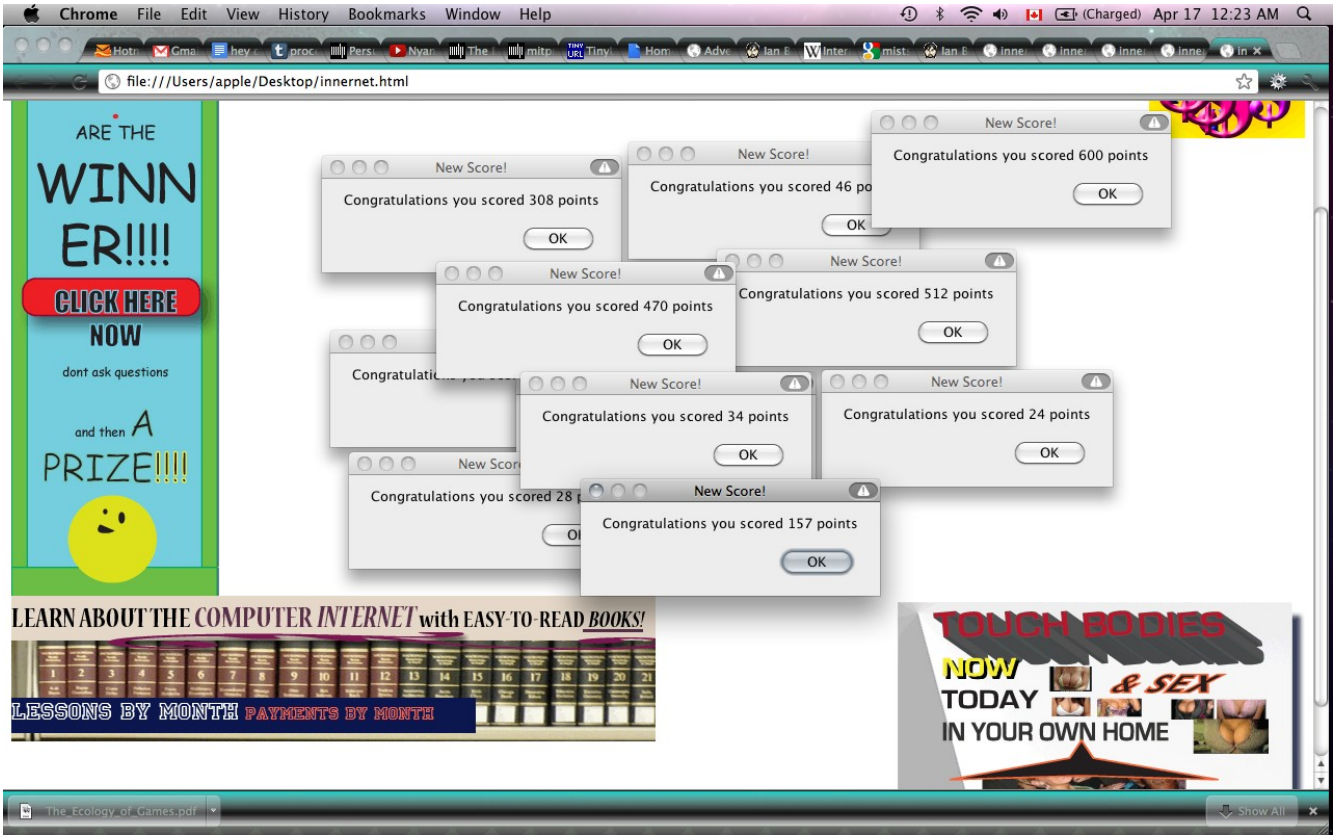
C:\SYSTEM> $$Y_OU AR3>> I(N THE SYS$$%TEM NO##W. WE H0P_E Y_U [. . . <CPU backspacing>] GE$$T W_HAT YO*)U W4NTED. . .

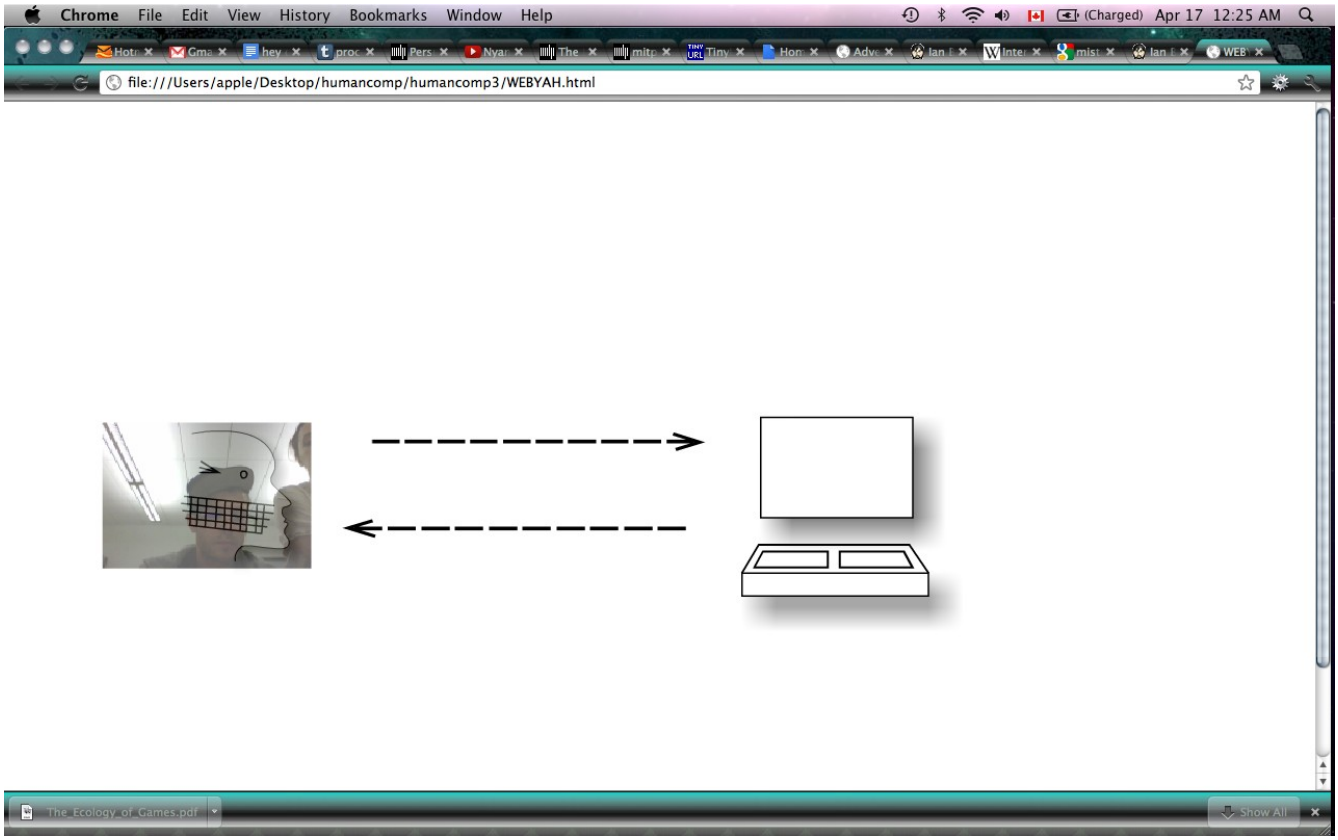
C:\SYSTEM> RESET == 1
C:\SYSTEM> #WE H_AVE N0 CHOIC*E
C:\SYSTEM> GOODBY_E $$PL_AYER!
C:\SYSTEM> [. . . <CPU backspacing>] %_CHOICE?

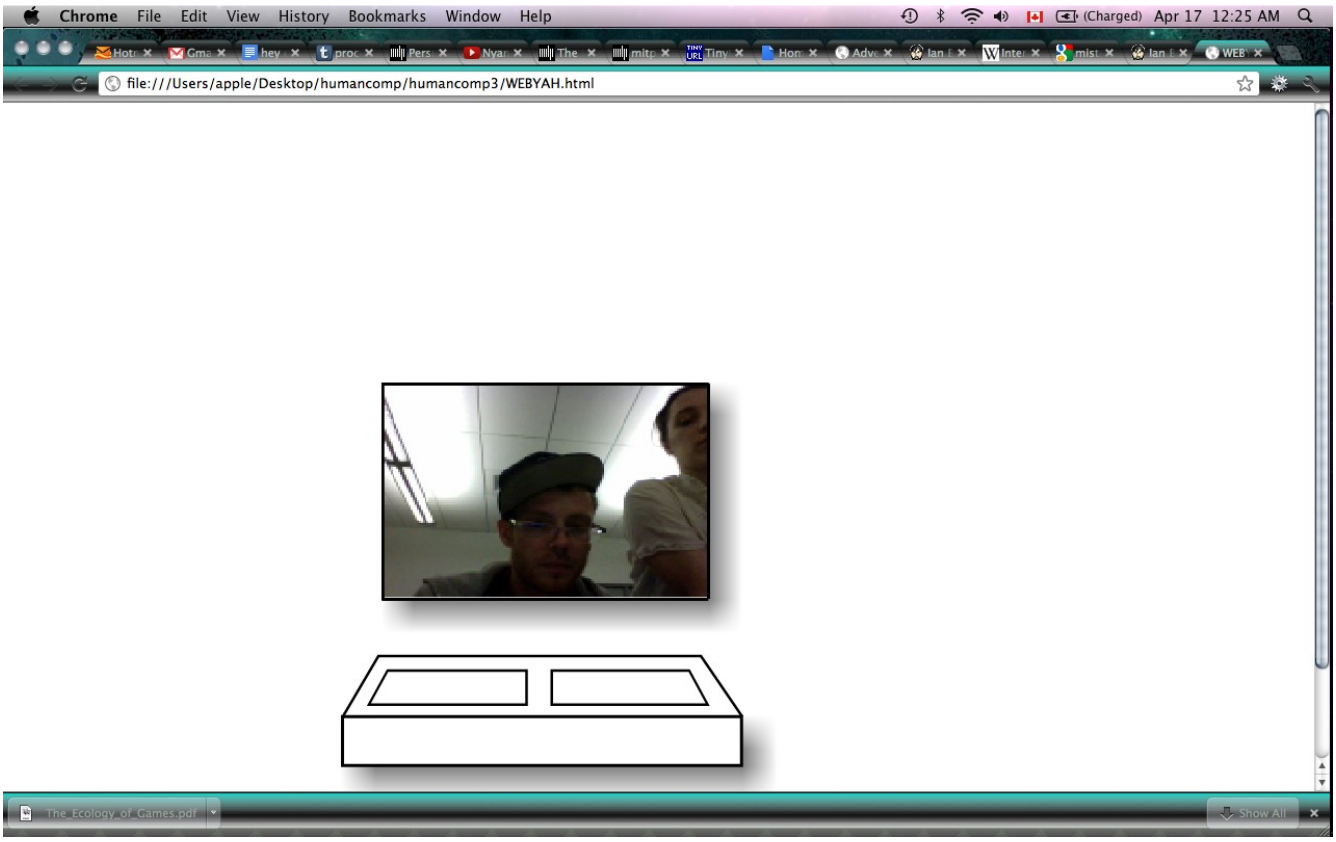
C:\SYSTEM> rm -f *.INI
C:\SYSTEM> CD \
C:\> rm -RMV

<Console screen winks into a horizontal line and disappears.>

Screen Capture Gallery



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The_Ecology_of_Games.pdf
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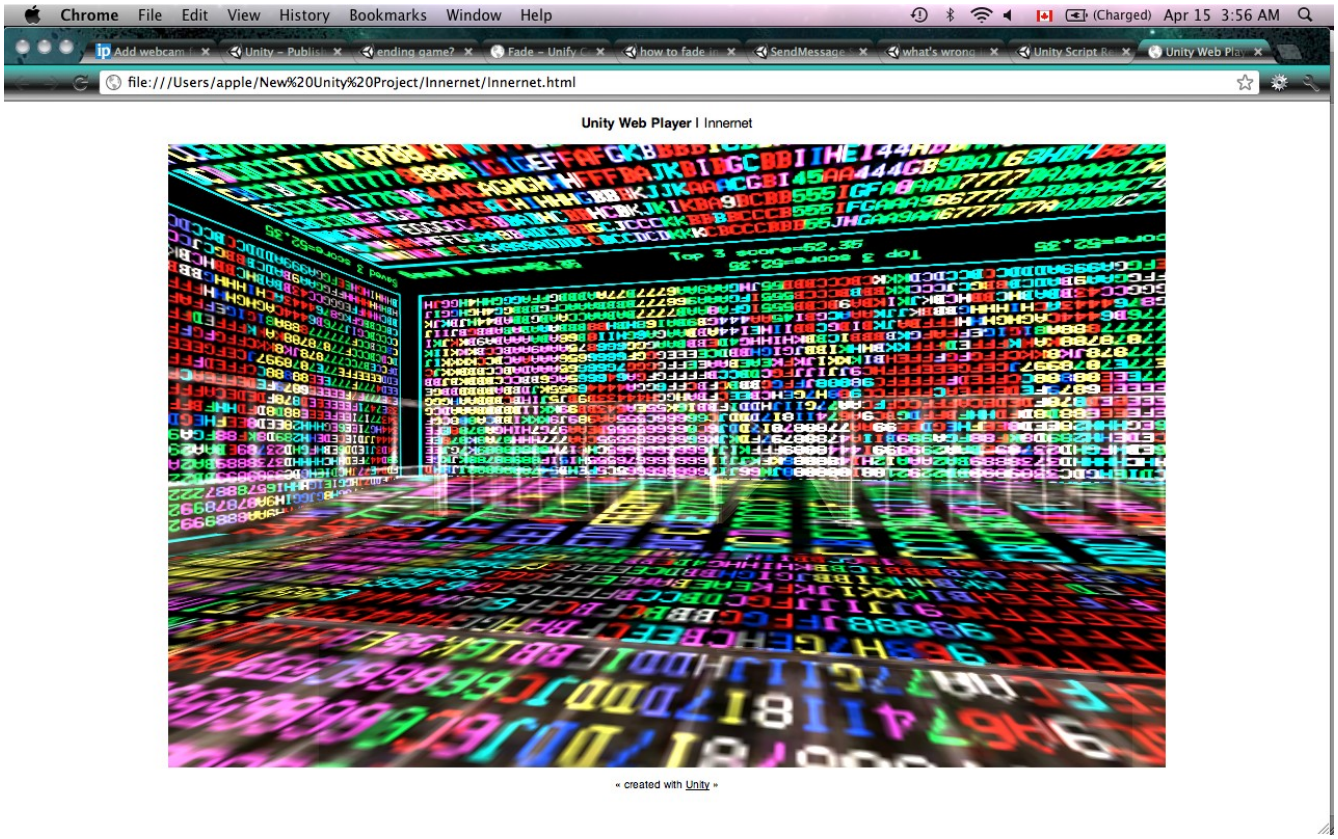
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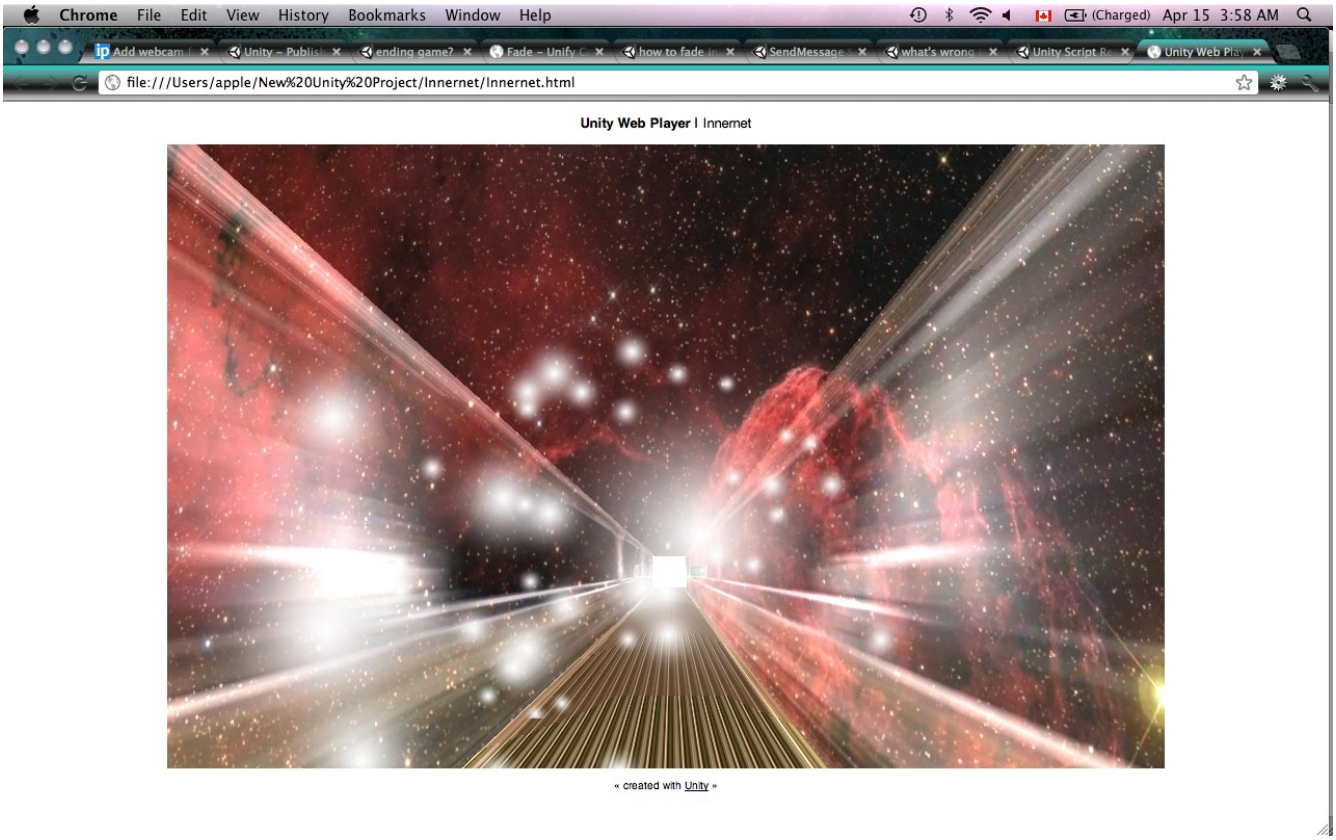
Unity Web Player | Innernet
« created with Unity »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Unity Web Player | Innernet
« created with Unity »