Paratexts Without Texts:
Experiments in AI Machinima

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ABSTRACT

This research presentation is a first-hand practitioner insight into the process behind the AI Machinima movie *Video Games That Don't Exist* by Kieran Nolan, premiered at the 8th edition of the Milan Machinima Festival (Bittanti 2025b).

Machinima is a portmanteau of Machine and Cinema. It is an artistic practice that reappropriates immersive video games, creatively repurposing their characters and environments for video narrative creation. Machinima predates the mainstream convergence of the tools and platforms of digital game production and tv and film production industries, in particular the Unity (2021) and Unreal engines (2021).

Diary of a Camper (1996) is the first widely documented example of a machinima. It creatively used Quake's demo recording feature, capturing all aspects of the on-screen action to a text-log that can be replayed to reenact the recorded gameplay, including camera angles, player movement and text-conversations (Lowood and Nitsche 2011, 7) (Ng 2013, vii). A computational scripting language acting as a movie script.

AI Machinima uses generative AI to create video scenes in the style of immersive 3D game environments, instead of directly using a game engine for their production. They are "paratexts sans texts" (Bittanti 2025a). *Video Game That Don't Exist* (Nolan 2025) is a series of vignettes and short stories edited together from 5 second clips generated with text prompts in Open AI's Sora (2024). The online video training base of the AI model is revealed through unintended extra details, for example the superimposing of game streamers into the scene. Gen AI's current limits are also exposed through animation glitches where movements blend and contort in an unpredictable manner.

Rather than attempt to edit out these anomalies, AI's unpredictable factors are embraced. In *VGTDE* we see a mix of the familiar and the absurd channeled through the aesthetic constraints of Sora's training data, as humans and farm vehicles merge and dislocate akin to the atoms of the old man and his bicycle from The Third Policeman (O'Brien 1967). Sora's linguistically agnostic text sometimes makes partial sense, like a type of AI Esperanto, contributing a surreal language neutral layer. Borrowing from the philosophy of circuit bending pioneer Reed Ghazala (2005), these accidental glitches aren't considered bugs in the context of *Video Games That Don't Exist*, but an integral feature of the work.

Keywords

Machinima, AI, Generative AI, Artificial Intelligence, Video, Sora, Game Art, Game Platforms, Glitch Art, Digital Art, Computer Animation

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