Translating Existentialism Using Visual Imagery

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Abstract

This MQP shows how a narrative is utilized to convey philosophy in the visual form of a graphic novel. By studying the works of iconic existentialists, we incorporated concepts of this philosophy into a narrative to ultimately create a graphic novel. This project showcases the potential of narratives as vehicles for philosophy to be portrayed in the forms of visual mediums.
Authorship Page

This report was written equally by all team members, even though sections were distributed amongst team members. Michael De Anda edited and formatted the report.

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to explore the aptitude of the graphic novel as a medium to depict philosophy through narrative and imagery. For this project, we are focusing on existentialism. Our end goal is to have a completed and bound graphic novel. We began the process by studying existentialism, and then applied our research to the creation of a narrative in the form of a series of vignettes. These short stories were then used to script the dialogue of the visual images that formed the graphic novel. Discussion and reflection on this process follows.
Understanding and Dealing with the Philosophy

This section focuses on the philosophy studied for the project. *Existentialism for Beginners* was used for placement and an easy introduction to existentialism. The team hoped it would also provide an example of the use of imagery to enhance understanding. *Irrational Man* by William Barrett was used as a deeper understanding for the philosophical material. It provided a solid foundation from which the team explored works by Sartre and Camus dealing with choice and purpose. The following paragraphs will detail the team’s understanding of each of the works, and then explain the incorporation of this research into the narrative of the graphic novel.

*Existentialism for Beginners* is a quick reference book for anyone who wants to learn a brief history of the philosophy and the main figures’ lives and contribution to this genre. Why this book is different from most beginner books on existentialism is its use of small caricatures to help illustrate the points it is trying to make. It does, however, fail to utilize the visuals as well as it could. Most of them have very little to do with the current text or do not help to bring out more meaning within the text. The book would benefit by utilizing these caricatures (or adding comic strips in) as visual representations of the philosophy in a witty and memorable way. The book also gives an overall look into the influential works of each existentialist and some of the people whose philosophy spurred the movement into existence.

The book starts by explaining how existentialism came into being from the ruins of religion and the need for people to reconcile new scientific discoveries with the way they lived. It goes on to state that existentialism was a rebellion against the idealism of Georg Hegel. Hegel’s writings embodied the status quo of philosophical thought against which existentialism
rebelled. The book goes on to say how Hegel believed in putting the state before the individual and that the intellect was more important than the rest of the human being and tended to view all philosophical questions from a vantage point outside of actual human experience.

*Irrational Man* by William Barrett provides a more in depth study of existentialist philosophers’ work, providing break downs and interpretations of each piece. A more sophisticated and scholarly written piece, *Irrational Man* explores existential philosophy in a deeper understanding. This book begins by placing the scene for the rise of Existentialism, then discussing corollary movements in music and art, and ends by exploring the existentialist philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre.

*The Existentialists*

Soren Kierkegaard is widely acknowledged as the founder of existentialism because of his focus on the individual. He was a prodigious writer who had more than thirty published works when he died. In his section on Kierkegaard, Barrett compares this philosopher to Socrates, labeling them both as ‘gadflies,’ people who pestered society in an attempt to widen their understanding. Like Socrates, Kierkegaard struggled to allow society to realize its ignorance in its social and religious structures. He was a devout Christian and raged against Hegel. Kierkegaard believed Hegel didn’t properly understand religion because Hegelian philosophy details the structure of religion as conceptual and ideological from a detached observer’s viewpoint rather than that of a practitioner. Kierkegaard’s philosophy of faith involves examining the aesthetics, the world of sin, the ethical, or the universal norm, and then
the surpassing of the ethical into faith. With courage, we are able to live ethically rather than aesthetically, however, in living faithfully, we may be called to do something beyond the ethical (Barrett, 166). Kierkegaard distinguishes the act of faith from the aesthetic through motivation. In arrogance, we act aesthetically, but in fear and trembling, we are able to make the leap of faith.

Like Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche spoke out against Hegel and his teachings for not living in reality and stated that philosophy must be lived. Nietzsche spoke out ardently against Christianity, exclaiming it is a dying institution failing to uphold to its own weak beliefs. He also stated that “God is dead” and humankind has inherited the privileges that were once associated to the godhead. Consequently, we are the keepers of our own destiny. This destiny, we forge through our choices. Barrett reminds readers that Nietzsche was not godless, for he had consecrated himself to Dionysus, the deity of the harvest and ritual madness. Barrett draws the reader’s attention to the rather chilling fact that Nietzsche shared in Dionysus’s fate by being torn apart through his psychosis.

Nietzsche’s philosophy explored the Superman (Ubermensch), not the comic book superhero, but the existential Superman that has gone beyond the ethical, gone beyond the moral, and in turn, empowered himself. He begins this idea by observing that humans are different from other animal species because humanity has broken free of nature by posing the question of its existence and destiny (Barrett, 179). Barrett compares the character of Faust in Goethe’s play to Nietzsche’s Superman because “[humanity] must become better and more evil; the tree that would grow taller sends its roots down deeper” (190). Faust made a pact with the devil to
obtain the powers of foresight and necromancy. Barrett points out an ambiguity in the Nietzschean Superman idea, the two ending ideas of the Superman are contradictory: “the titanically striving individual, or man who realizes his own individual capacities for wholeness within the world” (192). Nietzsche’s Superman is the person who has “broken the bonds of slavery of Christianity” and thus does not have to fit into a universal moral code and “can develop his individual self in freedom without traditional morality” (Gottlieb, meeting). The problem with the Nietzschean Superman, that Barrett even struggles to answer, is that this being is so free and isolated; it is difficult to comprehend future possibilities of existence, developing the question, “What next?”

Developing the idea of being, Martin Heidegger tried to rewrite western philosophy by going back to the foundations in Greek philosophy. He wanted to look into the foundation of thinking and studied philosophy almost as a science in a way similar to the scientific method. He looked deeply into the question “What is Being?” and said it was inextricably tied into Time as a concept. He looked into Being as more of a process, a dynamic verb, instead of a noun. He believed that human existence was separate from any other form of existence. Barrett paints the picture of Heidegger as a witness of the death of God who then contemplates the aftermath (209). Heidegger’s philosophy is a description of the world in which God is absent. This philosophy concentrated on Being. Heidegger used this as a verb in constant motion and always changing. The exploration of this concept can be depicted in refute of Descartes’s famous quote, “I think, therefore I am.” Heidegger, instead, reverses the phrase to read, “I am, therefore I think,” which means that Being presupposes man’s ability to understand Being, and
must therefore allow this truth to reveal itself (Barrett, 221). Heidegger then explains that man’s existence is finite because his understanding of Being is finite.

Sartre, the final philosopher discussed in Barrett’s book, does not seek to answer the root of humanity but understand the being of human. He fiddles with the application of Cartesian philosophy of God and the death of God. Because God is dead, humanity is allotted the freedom that Descartes only ascribed to God. As seen in “The Flies,” Sartre’s philosophy of freedom incorporates an understanding that one is free to create one’s own morality, therefore man is not subject to the moral code of God. Sartre’s philosophy also explores the Being-For-Itself and Being-In-Itself. For-Itself looks ahead into the perceived future, therefore cannot be actually possessed. It is a type of being that is transcendent, dynamic and always changing, to use Heidegger’s philosophy, always in a state of becoming. “In-Itself is self-contained... a stone is a stone” (Barrett, 245). This state of being is static. Being-For-Itself attempts to become Being-In-Itself, but cannot, because the future is unknown (Barrett, 245). It is this quality that makes humans dynamic beings, able to push themselves to a higher state of being than that in which they currently perceives themselves. Sartre’s philosophy of choice holds humans are free to make their own choices, act upon them, but then accept the consequences. Sartre defines the denial of the responsibility for ones actions, “surrendering one’s human liberty to possess one’s being as a thing,” as Bad Faith (253). Bad faith occurs when the being-for-itself denies its transcendence and acts as a being-in-itself.

Sartre, in No Exit, identifies human relationships of bad faith. In this play, three people, one male and two females are eternally locked in an ever-illuminated room with three chairs. This setting totally defied the ideas that each had constructed about hell. They soon realize
their torment is the excessive exposure to one another. Joseph Garcin tries to convince himself and the others that he is brave and manly, but is unsatisfied from hearing this from Estelle. He wants Ines to affirm these qualities. Ines Serrano is a lesbian who convinced a woman to kill her husband. She strives to attain Estelle’s attention, while ignoring Garcin, who sickens her. Estelle Rigault, a vain heterosexual woman, seeks to find a way to maintain her beauty, but struggles without a mirror. She also longs for Garcin’s compliments. The culminating line of the story, “Hell is other people,” is shown through the discord between characters. The three characters are constantly at each other’s throats. Sartre also depicts human relationships as co-dependent and needy. We use each other. Through human interaction, we try to get others to affirm qualities about ourselves that we, ourselves, do not believe.

Bad faith is also explored in Sartre’s play, *The Flies*. This tale is set in a fly-plagued Argos after the death of Agamemnon. The flies are the omen released upon the city by the gods, signifying the necessity of the Argives to repent. The people of Argos are driven by fear and submit themselves to the judgment of others. Orestes, the protagonist, returns to Argos and emerges from the crowd with the Tutor. Orestes, first questioning the reasons for his inability to form an attachment to anything, eventually comes to understand his freedom. Later, he sees Electra mocking the statue of Zeus, detailing to the statue that her brother, Orestes, will return and smite the statue and take revenge upon the King for killing his father. He introduces himself to her as Philebus. She tells him that the rest of the people of Argos are driven by fear, she, however, is motivated by hatred. Before the ritual of the tomb of the dead, Clytemnestra and Zeus, upon meeting Orestes, try to impose their morals upon him. This ritual lends itself to Sartre’s philosophy of human relationships of bad faith. In this ritual, the people of Argos open
a tomb and beg the dead to judge them for their crimes by tormenting them throughout the night. Sartre is depicting that humans depend on others to relate back to them qualities that they wish to believe about themselves. The portrayal of this philosophy in “The Flies” is masochistically co-dependent.

Because Electra did not show up to this ritual, convincing herself that her father would rather she celebrate life than waste her time on the dead, she is banished from Argos. Electra blames her punishment on Orestes, deciding that he is at fault because she only toyed with the idea of revenge. Orestes turns to Zeus for guidance. Zeus tells Orestes to leave the city because the gods demand peace. Orestes discerns that this is a moral code placed upon him from another, so he denies it and decides to take Argos by force. As he and Electra wait, hidden in the King’s chamber, Zeus describes to the king his feelings of pleasure created from the remorse of the people because they subject themselves to his morals, thus he wants to make examples of Orestes and Electra in front of Argos. When Zeus leaves, Orestes kills the king, admitting to the dying man that he rejected the morals of the gods because he is free. He then kills the queen. Electra attempts to celebrate this event with her brother, but soon becomes anguished and blames it all on him. After seeking refuge in Apollo’s Shrine, Electra abandons Orestes, chasing Zeus and pleading for repentance. Electra epitomizes Sartre’s idea of bad faith because she submits her humanity to her hatred and does not take the responsibilities for her actions. She has denied her transition, and, by subjecting herself to her anger, she acts as a being-in-itself. Orestes takes a stand in front of the people, proclaiming that he is free and willing to take with him their sins and flies as he departs, for he wishes to be a king with no kingdom. He then walks into the forest and is followed by the Furies. Sartre is portraying
Orestes as an existential equivalent of a Christ figure for the city of Argos; however, his morality does not come from a Divine Being. Orestes’s morality is his own, for he realizes his freedom of choice and the necessity to take responsibility for his actions. Sartre exemplifies his philosophy of individual morality through Orestes. Sartre’s idea of morality is that the individual is free to make his own choices, act upon them, and then take responsibility for these actions. Responsibility, here, is not tied to a larger moral code; rather, it is a causal link between one’s choices and how he or she deals with the outcome.

Jean Paul Sartre is probably the philosopher most identified with the formation of existentialism as a movement. He took the works of the previous existentialists and wove them together. When existentialism became popular as an international phenomenon, Sartre’s face was associated with it. His philosophy required individuals to be mindful of the choices made within their facticity, predefined circumstances. Examples of facticity are, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, technological availability, socio-economics, generation, etc. Sartre believed the only worthwhile goals are self-imposed by the individual, and conformity only leads to self-destruction. Trying to understand existence is doomed to failure, according to Sartre, but humanity must define itself by continuing to persevere towards an unattainable goal. This understanding of human existence struggling with its facticity is also studied in the works of Albert Camus.

Albert Camus believed that the most important philosophical question was whether life is or is not worth living and the ultimate question of suicide. In “The Myth of Sisyphus” Camus explored the legitimacy of suicide. He determines individual life and creation are the keys for life to be worthwhile. Camus’s central theme in most of his works was the absurd, the way
rational humans can confront an indifferent and uncaring universe. Camus called himself an atheist and always disavowed that he was not an existentialist. He believed that life itself was meaningless because of death and that man cannot make rational sense of life.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus begins by exploring the reasons to commit suicide. His purpose is to strip away the emotional context of suicide and pose it as a possible solution out of the absurd. He then deems that life is no more than the absurd. This recurring term, absurdity, is defined as seeking beyond the world for meaning, specifically in regards to two questions: “What is the meaning of life?” and “Why am I here?” Camus answers both as “Nothing, no reason” - I imagine - with a simple shrug of his shoulders. The roles of existence and freedom in Camus’s philosophical exploration of suicide are exemplified in his reflection of suicide are exemplified in his reflection of the story of Sisyphus.

In myth, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a boulder up a hill for eternity in the underworld as punishment for his trickery against the gods. Once the boulder reaches the top of the hill, it rolls back down, and Sisyphus must begin the task again. Camus’s reflection of this myth explores the structure of choice. In the case of Sisyphus’s punishment, he has the choice between ceasing this laborious activity, thus ceasing to exist, or continue existing and pushing the boulder up the hill. Is Sisyphus really free? To answer this, the social context for the range of answers must be inspected. The logic behind the chosen choice is subject to the sense of possibilities of the decider, which is subject to culturalization. The epitome of this concept is brought forth when Camus details that the boulder wins the battle when Sisyphus remembers and longs for the life he once had, but Sisyphus, as he returns to his task, is the victor as he pushes the rock up the hill. Camus’s interpretation of this myth lifts Sisyphus as the absurd hero.
because he enters into free engagement with the circumstance which is given to him in a way
over which he has no control. A second book written by Camus that reflects upon the ways in
which people deal with inherited circumstances is The Plague.

*The Plague* provides another existential display through narrative of the notion of the
absurd. This notion of the absurd explores whether an individual human can find meaning
within life, and, because he or she is human, is unable to find any that is independent of his or
her own choice. Humanity’s search for meaning will ultimately fail because the universe is too
vast and makes finding absolute certainty impossible. It is this contradiction between the
human need to find meaning and the unknowable nature of the universe that is the absurd. In
Camus’s view, death is inevitable and renders life meaningless, so there is no rational sense to
life. *The Plague* showcases many of these teachings within its pages. The fact that life is
irrational and we have no control over it and shows how humans react to the absurd. The book
also shows that humans are alone when confronting this search for meaning, even when
surrounded by other people. In the end, it also shows that no matter how absurd life is and
how little control an individual has because of it, a struggle will still exist against this absurdity.
Like Sisyphus, the individual has the freedom and choice to engage with predefined
circumstances.

The story takes place in Oran in Algeria in the 1940s. It shows the lives of many different
segments of the population as the town is swept by plague. The plague starts when thousands
of rats begin to die in the streets. The main character, Dr. Bernard Rieux, at the beginning of the
novel, sends his wife away; it is noted he has few, if any, close friends. As the rats are cremated,
the bubonic plague spreads throughout the town, but the few deaths are initially downplayed, until the death toll rises. The authorities are then forced to quarantine the town, resulting in the townspeople becoming introverted and isolated from the outside world. The narrative then approaches a closer perspective on the lives of certain characters affected by the isolation and their efforts to fight the plague. As the plague rages on, violence and looting begin on a small scale as the isolation begins to prey upon people. Eventually, the plague begins to decline within the town, but many of the main characters end up dying in the end. People begin to reunite with others from outside as the gates are finally opened. However, we find out that Rieux’s wife has also died while out of the city and that he is, in fact, narrating the tale and has tried to remain objective. In the end, Rieux feels that even in the face of everything that has happened, humans continued to fight against something they had no control over, thus are deserving of praise. Rieux’s fight against the plague, when he knows it is a hopeless battle, is an allegory to humanity’s fight against the absurd and its willingness to persevere, even in the face of the absurd.

Through reading Sartre and Camus, the team was able to uncover the use of narrative to showcase existentialism. The studied works by these philosophers all provided a context for the authors’ philosophies to unfold. No Exit provides a setting that guides the readers through Sartre’s teaching of Bad Faith in relationships. In The Flies, the reader is able to deconstruct the narrative to understand Sartre’s depiction of freedom of choice and Bad Faith in relation to facticity. Furthermore, these two works are written in play format, showcasing the conceptualization of environment and space through in a script while a story develops. The team found scripting useful in creating the narrative dialogue for the graphic novel. Camus’s
The Plague provides a story that deals with the ways individuals engage with their facticity. The works of these existentialists greatly deal with the concept of engagement in a situation beyond the control of the individuals. While some submit themselves to the circumstances, such as the Argives and the three people in hell, the protagonists in the stories, Orestes and Sisyphus, exemplify existential heroes that realize their transcendence and engage with their facticity by developing their own codes.

Application of Existentialism

The team developed a narrative that details the ways two individuals engage with their facticity. As previously stated, the team developed a series of vignettes for plot development, and then used these to script the graphic novel. Within these vignettes were instances of both Sartre’s and Camus’s philosophy. The team decided to focus on concentrating on the concepts of bad faith and engaging with facticity, portraying these in the vignettes.

The team used the Daniel character/Gale avatar relationship to depict Sartre's concept of Bad Faith. In a couple vignettes, Daniel uses his avatar to hook up with guys online. Through this process, he uses Gale to receive compliments from others to reinforce beliefs he doesn't actually believe about himself, but accepts the compliments as if they were directed at him. They call him beautiful, confident and sexy, all of which, through the classroom vignette, he does not accept of himself. What Daniel comes to realize, as the plot develops, is that he wishes he was actually Gale. The irony is that people use avatars online for freedom to be someone else, in a fictitious sort of manner; it is the opportunity to role play. For Daniel, he unleashes
himself in ways he feels he cannot in real life. This whole instance of bad faith is derived from the fact that Daniel has actually deceived himself about his relationship with his avatar, that instead of an escape, he has actually misconceived that he wishes to be Gale. For others, the online world of E-xist is an escape, but Daniel believes, or at least wishes, it to be his reality, but does not have the courage at the beginning to express this.

A couple instances of engaging with facticity are depicted in other vignettes. When Rick saves Daniel, he realizes that he could be labeled as a faggot by sticking up for Daniel, but he decides to still stand up for him. He has made a choice and he stands by it. In this instance, he has defied the social norms and has begun to develop his own code. This episode was developed from Orestes’s character, the one who realized his freedom, rejected the morals of society and god, and then developed his own morality. Rick understands that, in choosing, he negates all other possible choices, and his choice define his morality.

In another episode, when Rick decides to build the monument in response to Gale’s absence, he is dealing with the fact that Gale - the person who has taught him everything (a virtual mentor and friend) - is no longer going to be online. He understands he cannot change the fact that she is no longer online, but decides to make the best with what he has, therefore he builds.

The studies of existentialism provided the points of interest to include in the narrative and character development. These concepts were distributed among the two major characters and how they engage with their facticity. In conjunction with establishing a background to develop the existential concepts incorporated into this graphic novel, the team also read fiction literature that contained a philosophical exploration. This research allowed the team to see
how written novels can use a narrative to portray something other than a story through the plotline.
Narrative Process for E-xist

The importance of narrative within a literary work is well known. This project’s focus on narrative began by looking at works with strong literary narrative and also a solid background of philosophy. Having a robust narrative would allow the work to capture the attention of a reader and keep them engrossed without even the aid of the visuals.

Background Narrative Reading

*Dune* by Frank Herbert and *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare were the two main books reviewed. Both of these works have been extensively read, and the philosophical underpinnings of each can be found in many different books and papers online. The first reason these two were chosen, initially, is that they are both terrifically written pieces of literature and have amazing narratives with a philosophical backbone. Studying these two works was also a deliberate action because of the disparate genres and time periods from which they come.

*Hamlet* takes place somewhere within the 15\(^{th}\)-16\(^{th}\) centuries. This is quite different from *Dune* which is set 20,000 or more years in the future. *Dune* and *Hamlet* are also of completely different genres; *Dune* is a science fiction work and *Hamlet*, a tragedy. These two differences gave a wide range to the ways which philosophy can be shown within a narrative. Reading them both helped to show how a narrative could be interspersed with philosophy, and yet not be heavy handed in it.
Developing the Plot

Once a good working knowledge of existential philosophy and its lessons had been established, it was time to start working on the overall narrative. It was decided very early on that the narrative should drive the philosophy. If the philosophical underpinnings were too heavy-handed it was understood that the audience would be lose interest, and the story would suffer in overall quality. Browbeating the reader with existentialism was definitely not the intent, and so it took a backseat to having an interesting and engaging story.

Now the question is how to come up with the overall topic of the graphic novel? The team had a few firm ideas which needed to be included within the narrative. The first was the inclusion of existential philosophy as a backdrop to the story. The second was the idea of gender identity and sexual identity and how it is viewed by people of differing outlooks. The last idea, which needed to be addressed within the overall narrative, was how a virtual world could affect people in different ways.

The first stumbling block which needed to be overcome to start writing the story for the graphic novel was to decide about what was to be written. Deciding on the overall theme and ideas the team wanted to cover had been more important than the topic of the narrative up until this point. It was felt that the idea of technology, and especially that of the virtual online world, had not had a graphic novel written about it yet and was fertile ground for one, more specifically, exploring the anonymity and freedom which a virtual space gives its users. The novel would show how two different people’s lives could go within a virtual space with
complete anonymity, intersect for a brief moment and affect them both in the end. It was decided how their lives were changed by their interaction online, but the team decided to remain impartial to the idea of taking part within the virtual space; that would be left up to the reader.

It was finally decided that there would be two major protagonists within the story. This not only allowed the team to focus on only two major characters when writing the storyline, but also would help when it came time to shoot scenes. It was also felt too many characters would create confusion within the storyline, however, it made it easier, in the long run, to create visuals with less major characters. The next decision which had to be made was who the two characters would be. Eventually, it was decided since the subject of gender identity was one of the cornerstones, the team wanted to start the novel off with two male protagonists, and eventually one would transition male to female (M2F), that is, he was born male but considers himself female within and born with the wrong physical body. This led to the fleshing out of the two characters, what their pasts were like and whether or not it was going to be shown within the graphic novel. The writers would have more background information on the characters to help write the story, but it would not all be shown within the novel. It was, however, decided that in the beginning, the Rick character would be involved in a relationship, while the Daniel character would be more introverted.

Once the main protagonists were decided upon, a major timeline of events was established to help get the overall flow of the novel. It came together almost as if it was a 3 act play.
• A beginning where the characters were introduced and the reader gets to know a little bit about them.

• A middle wherein the reader is introduced to the online world and the lives the characters. This second section is also when the two characters meet virtually and get to know one another.

• Finally, the third section was how each of the protagonists eventually separate and are changed by their interaction online.

Each of these three major sections was then broken down into smaller chunks in order to make the writing work more manageable.

Now it was time to begin the actual writing of the novel. To make this process simpler, each section of the novel was converted into smaller vignettes. Each of these vignettes covered a major event within the overall storyline and generally consisted of between three and five pages of panels with accompanying dialogue. Since both people on the team would be writing vignettes independently of the other it, was decided that whatever style the writer preferred could be used and would be converted into the final dialogue bubbles in the end. Each week, a series of vignettes would be decided upon by the team and then each member would select certain ones to write. When each vignette was decided upon, a short summary of the scene would be written in below the title of the vignette. This short summary would then be expanded upon by the writer into a full scene. On any given week the amount of vignettes written by each team member was about equal. In the end the team ended up with twenty-
four separate vignettes. The compilation of all of these scenes came to be known as the script for the novel.

The biggest part of the script was the dialogue, which needed to be included within each vignette. This usually consisted of a line or two of dialogue per character per panel on each page. This amount varied, of course, depending on the amount of talking involved within a scene and the amount of panels per page. The team tried to keep the dialogue between characters as natural sounding as possible. Depending on the scene, it was also required to write in what certain characters were thinking, and this was done as separate dialogue within thought bubbles. It was also decided that the team wanted the dialogue within the real world and the offline to have some sort of visual distinction to it. These were differentiated through using chat bubbles for the real world and a textbox like background for online conversations.

**Storyboarding**

Once the script was compiled, it was time to put up a work-in-progress storyboard for the novel. This consisted of drawing out very basic panels for each vignette created. Again each of the writers did this in their own style, which was then adjusted when actually putting together the pages. This storyboard was very helpful later in the project when taking the individual panel shots in Second Life. It allowed the team to know approximately how many shots would be needed for each vignette before shooting. By the time the narrative was being put into its final form on the individual pages, the number of pages from the storyboard and the graphic novel differed.
The differences between writing for the graphic novel and any other sort of writing seem to depend on a few factors:

- How much the visuals say about themselves.
- The amount of space in the panel.

When the team first started to do the writing for the novel, it seemed logical that with the inclusion of the visuals, it was not necessary to write out detailed descriptions of surroundings. However, when writing the vignettes, it was necessary to write out the description of each panel in order to storyboard it later. In conclusion, more description for each panel is preferable. As always, even though visuals are included in media form, it is crucial to make sure the dialogue and subject matter of the graphic novel will keep a reader’s attention even without the visuals.

The point finally came when the team had to take what had been written and transfer it to the individual panels on each page. It was at this point that it became apparent that some of the dialogue would have to be pared down or cut out entirely. The panels within the comic, even on an 8.5x11 paper, are not very big. When starting to fit in speech bubbles and thought bubbles, real estate on the page starts to come at a premium. This leads to editing it down to just get the most important parts of any conversation. Another problem was that each panel was set up before any dialogue was put in. What happened then was that certain panels ended up having to be cut for various reasons. That leads to editing the number of necessary panels to fit the key points in the dialogue.
The following is an example of how the script varied from the final page in the graphic novel. An excerpt from a vignette is followed by the completed page. As can be seen, a whole section of dialogue was edited out due to artistic constraints.

Saleswoman1 was omitted completely in the final version due to the lack of a fourth avatar. Another factor in cutting out the introduction was not having a shopping mall like complex within SL in which to take the final shots. Since this was the case the narrative was altered significantly and three pages cut down to one. The final dialogue only being kept from the very end of the excerpt shown and even that altered slightly to better fit the scene.

Daniel Goes Shopping...Again

1: Daniel walking through the mall, we stay close in only showing him from the waist up.
2: Daniel from shoulders up looking right straight on.
3: He now looks left as we see him straight on from shoulders up.
   Daniel(thinking): Now where is that sale woman?
4: Daniel smiling and his face lighting up as he finally spots her.
   Daniel: Hello <saleswoman1>! It is so good to see you are here today.
5: Shows Daniel and the saleswoman talking across the counter from waist up.
   Saleswoman: Hi there, what brings you back here?
   Daniel:(thoughts): I am so nervous again.
   Daniel: I actually need some help getting some clothes...
6: Pulling in on the saleswoman.
   Saleswoman1: Well I would love to help but clothing isn't my department. I do however have a friend in that department who I am sure would love to help you out.
7: Now pulling in on Daniel from the side.
   Daniel(thoughts): Damn! I was hoping not to have to tell anyone else about this...
   Daniel: Ok...I am sure she will be a great help.
8: Shows the two of them walking through the store, women's clothes shown on a sign above them.
   1: Those two side by side as they approach a third woman, shown from waist up again.
   Saleswoman1: <Saleswoman2> I have someone here who needs your help.
   Saleswoman2: Well you know me, always glad to help out!
2: Saleswoman1 starting to walk away as the other two move closer.
   Saleswoman1: Ok, you two have fun!
   Saleswoman2: So what kind of clothes are we looking for today?
   Daniel(thoughts): This is so embarrassing...but I need to do this.
   Daniel: Well I wanted some more flattering tops and umm...maybe a few...bras.
Hello, can I help you find anything?

I needed a few new outfits.

Well then follow me.
Having a good process when coming up with and writing the narrative enabled the creation of a solid graphic novel storyline. Regardless of how the visuals were incorporated, the reader would have a solid foundation of what was going on through the written dialogue. The completion of storyboarding and dialogue before the visual elements, did however, make it much easier to set up the shots. The final goal was to move on to the artistic side of the project, create the art assets needed and then assemble the images with the written dialogue to create a visually appealing end product.

*The Influence of Maus*

The evolution of the art within the graphic novel took place in three steps:

- First, studying and understanding the rhetoric of other graphic novels
- Second, deciding how the visuals would be designed for this project.
- Lastly, the taking individual shots and compiling them as pages for the novel.

In order to determine how the art should be represented within the graphic novel, it was essential to see how it had been previously done to get an idea of how comic books and graphic novels use imagery, layout and theme. The best way to do this was to take a look at the only comic to have ever won a Pulitzer Prize, *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

In “Maus” by Art Spiegelman, the author tries to show the trials and tribulations of his father, Vladek Spiegelman, during the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War 2. This graphic novel depicts Vladek’s life in Poland and his later life in the Rego Park neighborhood of
New York City. The first half of the novel retells his father’s tale of the occupation of Poland by the Nazi Forces and the persecution which afflicted Vladek and his family during that time. It takes a no-hold barred approach to showing how the Jews were demeaned, persecuted, and, eventually, suffered death at the hands of the occupying forces.

The second half of the novel records what happened after Vladek and his wife were taken to Auschwitz and the suffering that they witnessed and endured there. All of this is shown through interviews the author conducts with his father over the course of many years and is interspersed by sections showing how his father acted in his later life in America. Even after the persecution of the Jews, it is shown that Vladek’s father has bigoted views towards African Americans and homosexuals. Vladek is also quite stingy later in life and is very hard on his first and second wife. The author tries to examine Vladek’s actions in his later life but is only able to understand this through his father’s stories.

In *Maus*, the Jews are represented as mice and the Germans as cats. This use of animals to represent nationalities and religions is continued throughout the novel. Even though each nationality is a different animal, the art style of the characters remains constant. In doing so, Speigelman hoped to show that dividing people based on these traits is absurd. All of *Maus* is also done in black and white, with special attention paid to small hidden meanings in the backgrounds of certain panels. The use of black and white allows the reader to color in the images of this graphic novel with his or her own emotions. This, coupled with the imagery and use of animals, makes *Maus* one of the most emotionally charged works of all time.
Once this reading was completed, it was felt that getting a handle on how to use the visual medium within a comic book context was the next logical step. To this end multiple short comics were created. The first prompt was to create a four-panel comic reflecting some existential concept. The second challenged the team to develop an idea using imagery to depict something words couldn’t in a 20-panel comic with minimal text. These exercises simply served as icebreakers to get the team used to assembling comic pages with an argument or story.
Creative Process

Dilemmas with Technology

Originally, the team planned to use rigged models to depict the real world vignettes and Second Life avatars for the stories set in the online world. The contrast between the comic-like quality of chosen rigs for the real world characters and the more realistic looking Second Life avatars would pose an ironic statement about the relationship between the online community and the real world. Are we caricatures of our ideal selves? The real life scenes would have been developed and shot using Maya, however, it was quickly decided to utilize only Second Life shots. This decision allowed for quicker assembly of assets to create and develop the shots. It also provided a variety of places to serve as settings for the vignettes. Team members would be able to represent a character using the Second Life avatar, then teleport to the destination that best suited the setting of any given vignette, and then position the camera for the shot to fit the panel on the storyboard. The inherited handicap in this decision was that an account may only represent one avatar at a time.

Shooting the Story

The main characters were divided by account. One member’s account had the representation of Rick and his avatar, Nero. The other had three: Daniel, Avatar Gale, and Real Life Gale. These avatars were created by assembling purchased assets bought in Second Life.
The team’s engagement with this facticity led to some interesting determinations about the current online community of Second Life.

For this project, the team was able to acquire a third account donated by Beth Hankel, another WPI student. Access to this account proved useful in capturing shots with two or more characters. In this process, two accounts were used to pose the avatars for shots, while the third was used as a camera, allowing the team to surpass the camera view limitation in Second Life. The third account also allowed scenes with more characters to be created more easily, exemplified by the episode in which Daniel gets bashed.

The other solution the team developed to surpass the account limitation for scenes involving a wider range of characters was to establish contact with other Second Life members. In this process, the team came into contact with several online community members that were more than willing to help. This solution proved more fruitful than expected when people began suggesting places to use as settings. While this may not be relevant to the overall project – other than the acquirement of the shots – the willingness of people online to willingly and freely help depicts an online user base in Second Life that is interested in community building and interacting.

Creating the Layouts

Once an appropriate number of shots were taken, the team edited the photos using Adobe Photoshop. In this photo-editing procedure, lighting was changed, background effects
were added, multiple shots were assembled into one coherent picture, and most artifacts of Second Life were removed, including logos and clipping. The finished photos were then cropped and assembled onto coherent layouts and given borders. After the layouts were created, the text was added. For this process, the team created assets to use for speech bubbles, thought bubbles, text boxes, and visual and effect accents. In case any changes needed to be made, these images were saved as Photoshop Document (PSD) files. Each vignette was assigned a letter, and then each page within the vignette was given a corresponding alphanumeric code. The alphanumeric code makes it possible for the pages to be viewed in sequential order after download and allows for the pages to be printed in the correct order. After all changes were made, the pages were saved as JPEG images, but the PSD files were also kept.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has shown the potential of a graphic novel to be a medium for presenting a compelling narrative with philosophical elements in a format because it provides attractive visuals. Images add to the impact of the message through the use of color and style. Furthermore, images add messages to the cultivation of the narrative that cannot necessarily be said through words. Narrative, however, cannot be overlooked as it is the binding that holds the content and the artistry together and creates flow and structure throughout the piece. Utilization of a game to create the images for this graphic novel allows for a coherent style to be seen across the entire piece.
Works Cited


Appendices

Appendix 1: The Original Narrative

Opening

“New boots, totally gives an edgy look,” she said as she studied herself. (these are Daniel’s words, but will be placed in a way to make it look like Gale553 is talking). She began walking around. “Love the outfit!” “Work it girl!” Passing people would holler as she strolled down the hall. “Where did you find that look?” A random passerby asked. “GooberX215,” Gale replied as she blew a kiss to him. “HAHA” She giggled as she continued walking, loving how everybody fawned over her. “I OWN THE ROOM” She thought to herself. She got up on the stage, grabbed the pole, and began dancing... performing.

“Hey Daniel,” Some guy walking by said.

Daniel turned to see who was talking to him, he recognized the face, “Hey,” He said dismissively.

“Gale is so beautiful,” Daniel said as he returned to his computer screen.

The guy continued walking. “Ok... talking to that guy is like pulling teeth” He thought to himself as he walking through the campus center with a soda in hand. He took a sip as he climbed the stairs. Glancing to the right, he noticed Rick. “Hey Rick,” He said, giving a friendly wave. “Oh hey dude!” Rick replied with a quick wave. He returned to his conversation, surrounded by his group of friends, and on his right arm, his girlfriend. “So do you guys want to go to the Cowboy tonight?” Rick asked his friends. “Yeah!” Sure! They responded. “I think I’d rather go to the club,” His girlfriend said as she sat up to fix her hair. She withdrew her arm from him and took out her compact to fix her makeup.

“Uhhh – ok, we can go to the club...” Rick said kind of rolling his eyes. He turned a sympathetic face to his friends as they all nodded along...

“Good” His girlfriend said as she finished touching up. She shut her compact.

Rick’s night out

??1: Rick and gf with two friends, one male and one female, sitting at cc table.

Rick: So where are we going tonight?

GF: I was thinking we would just hit the club tonight, maybe have a few drinks and dance.

??2: Pulls in closer to table showing just the top half of everyone at the table.

Friend1: Well that’s all fine for Rick but what about me? Set me up with someone.

GF: *sighs* Oh fine I will bring a friend along but can’t promise anything.

??3: A close up of Rick’s gf as she stands up.

GF: Ok guys see you tonight. Just meet up outside the club as usual.

??4: Shows her back as she walks off, can see the two friends sitting as Rick starts to rise.
Rick: I will talk to you two later, I have a class to get to. Try not to do anything stupid while I am away. *chuckles*

Friend1: Oh thanks, talk to ya later.

Friend2: Seeya!

?? .5: Shows Rick walking to the club towards his friends and gf as he waves. Two male friends present along with gf and one of her friends standing in a group.

Rick: Hi guys!

?? .1: Shows a closer shot of the group as Rick joins the little circle outside the club.

GF: Hi hun.

Friend1: What’s up Rick?

GF friend: Hi Rick. *giggles*

?? .2: Shows them all slowly filing into the club after showing the bouncer ID.

?? .3: Shows the inside of the club, people dancing in background as the group stops just inside.

Rick: Ok guys you find a booth and I will go get the first round of drinks. Three beers and two appletinis for the girls.

Friend2: Sounds good.

?? .4: Shows Rick walking up to the bar from the side. Can see the bartender leaning over the bar towards him.

Bartender: What can I get you?

Rick: Three beers and two appletinis please.

?? .5: Closeup of the bar top and the bartender as the drinks are set down.

Bartender: That will be thirty bucks.

?? .1: Rick from behind approaching the booth his friends are at, can see the others sitting down at it. Drinks are already set down onto the table.

Rick: Here you go everyone. Somebody else is getting the next round, that shit is expensive. *laughs*

Others: *chuckling*

?? .2: Rick sitting down next to his gf, we can see him, her and her friend seated on the one side of the booth. The two girls are talking as Rick sips his beer.

GF friend: Look at her gf. She is so fat and ugly…I can’t believe they even let her in here.
GF: *laughing* Ick, yeah she is gross. Look at her outfit, so nasty!

??3: Close up of Rick’s face as he looks over at the two of them looking disgusted.

??4: Shows just Rick and his gf as he leans toward her.

Rick: How about we go dance for a while?

GF: Sure. Watch my stuff for me <friend>.

??5: Shows the two of them dancing on the dance floor with other people around them doing the same n a pulled back view.

??1: Small caption in corner says “Later that evening”. Showing the group of them as they are leaving the club. Standing in a group just outside. Friend2 is missing.

Friend1: Ok, you guys all have a good night. I will give <GF friend> a ride home since <Friend2> already found himself someone to go home with.

Rick: Have a good night you two and don’t do anything I wouldn’t.

GF: Goodnight <GF friend>.

??2: Closeup of the two of them near Rick’s car. It is something sporty.

GF: Well I had a nice time tonight, how about you?

Rick: Yeah I guess…

??3: Closeup of GF face.

GF: Rick what’s wrong with you tonight?

??4: Switch to Rick’s face.

Rick: Why were you and <friend> making fun of that poor girl tonight?

??5: GF’s face looking angry.

GF: Why do you care about that stupid fat skank anyway?! Do you know who she is?!

??6: Back to Rick now looking angry.

Rick: No I don’t know who she is and neither do you! So why did you have to make fun of her?! It was pretty mean…

??1: Camera pulling back to show gf opening the car door angrily.

GF: Just take me home Rick, there is no way I am going to your place tonight!

??2: Rick walking around the car to get in.

Rick: Fine by me!
Rick joins TerraVirtua

Scene: Rick enters his apartment’s living room. The room is cluttered and filled with empty food containers and other debris. Rick crosses to the couch and sits turning on the tv, it is obvious he has been out partying.

Rick(thoughts): What a night…that fight with <gf> really pissed me off. (Flips through the channels on the tv with the remote, tosses it onto the coffee table and picks up a magazine and flips through the pages slowly finally stopping at an ad)

Rick(thoughts): (Looking down at the ad) TerraVirtua, hmph….enter a virtual world filled with over two million people just like you!...what a crock, must be full of desperate losers who can’t function in normal society. (puts the magazine down next to him on the couch and begins watching tv)

Rick(thoughts): I may have to break up with Hailey soon, she just seems to be getting even more shallow every day. Recently she has even been outright cruel to people a few times when we were out. I knew she wasn’t exactly the brightest or the nicest girl when we met but she is extremely hot….oh well I guess I don’t have to make a decision tonight but at least she could have come over. Angry sex would have been better than no sex at all.

TV: (Commercial comes on tv as Rick yawns) TerraVirtua! The online world where you can be whatever you want to be! Log on now and find the friends you never knew you had from all over the world! Log onto www.TerrVirtua.com today and create your account!

Rick(thoughts): Here we go again…it is not bad enough that these adds are in magazines now we have them on tv. (scratches his chin thoughtfully) Then again it could be interesting to make an account and screw around for a little bit…maybe I can even find a girl on there who would be more willing to help me release some tension than Hailey.(grins grabbing his laptop and bringing up the website)

Rick(thoughts): Ok, so we just fill in my info here….name….sex….age….e-mail address…password. Now I guess I need to download the actual game application that lets me connect. (sits watching the screen as it downloads) Jesus this takes awhile! (yawns and watches more tv as he lets the computer work finally looking down) Finally all done, now I guess I just click on this icon here and log in with my password and name.

Computer: Welcome to TerraVirtua! Please create your avatar that other users will see when you interact with them in the virtual world.

Rick(thoughts): (looking down at the avatar creation screen) Guess I need to create what I will look like in this thing….now what should I look like? (stares down at the screen as he flips through different options on the screen) Man you can be almost anything…animals…normal or strange looking people…even characters from other stuff…kind of neat I guess. Well I don’t want to go to strange it would make me feel weird. I guess I will try create a dude who looks sort
of like me normally…maybe with a few changes…a little bigger maybe…more muscular…y’know like me only better. There all finished! (grins down at his computer screen) Now to finally get into this thing and see what I can do.

**Nero’s first time online**

??1: See Nero and the Newbie area surrounding him. Normal neutral avatar pose from behind.

Nero(thinking): Let’s see if we can find some fun in this place.

??2: Shot of him opening a random menu.

Nero(thinking): Nope not it…how the hell do I get out of here? Maybe I should actually take a look at some of the signs around here.

??3: Close in shot of him peering at one of the signs scattered around the newbie area. The sign shows basic movement controls.

Nero(thinking): Well basic movement seems pretty simple. Now how do I get to another place?

??4 - ??6: Show him in different parts of the newbie area looking down at different signs. Leave each sign slightly indistinct. In .6 have him scratching his head in puzzlement.

??1: Another sign, this one close up as he reads it. All we see are the words on the sign.

Sign: To find help use the search function and head on over to one of our new player gathering areas!

??2: He appears in the new area, it has different people standing around. Some in different avatars. You can seem some are also new but some are more experienced characters there to help out.

Nero(thinking): Now just to find someone who knows what the hell they are doing and learn how to do more than move around.

Nero: Umm, Can anybody help me?

??3: Shows an avatar walking toward Nero, female.

Female: Hello, can I help you with something? I am one of the games in game staff here at the new player area. I can answer whatever questions you may have.

??4: Side shot of the two avatars standing facing each other as they talk.

Nero: Yes, thank you…I have a lot of questions. This is the first time I have ever been in one of these games before.

Female: Well it looks like you have moving and talking down fine, what else do you want to know?
Nero: Yes I did manage to get walking down, no what I was wondering was if it is possible to change the clothes in here for one?

Female: Yes, all you need to do is open your inventory and then select the clothes item you want, right click it and select wear. It will then switch it with whatever you had on there before.

Nero: Thanks that sounds simple enough. I was also wondering how you can meet someone here and then find them again later?

Female: Well the easiest way would probably be to friend them. Just right click them and select add friend and they will appear in your list and you can see if they are on later.

Nero: Thanks again. I think for now I have one final question, how do I find specific places I want to go to?

Female: Well there are 2 answers to that really. The first way is to search for a particular kind of place and then just pick teleport from the description window, the other way would be to have a friend at the place already who can teleport you.

Female: In fact if you have any sort of destination in mind right now I can go to one and teleport you to me so you see how it is done.

Nero: Sure I was thinking of checking out a club or something.

Female: Ok, let me port to it and I will then port you.

Nero: Ok.

Female: No problem it’s what I am here for. I hope you have a good time inside.
Daniel’s Life Online

Scene: outside a brightly lit club, giving a wave to the large bouncer at the door who is obviously familiar with her) Hi Dave, how you doing tonight?

Dave: Hey Gail! Looking good tonight, I am doing pretty well and you?

Gail: (smiles) Thank you much Dave, I am doing ok…hopefully better after I find some fun inside.

Dave: (laughing) Yeah like you ever have trouble finding someone to have fun with.

Scene: Gail walks inside the club. Loud music is being played inside by a dj in a booth above the large dance-floor. Bright lights from the ceiling shed a bright glow over the darkened interior as Gail walks to a bar along one wall and sits waving at the bartender.

Sam: Yo Gail whats up?! Want your usual?

Gail: Hi Sam, actually I would rather wait to see if anyone cute and studly will buy me one first. (Lets out a twitter of a laugh as Sam shakes his head and wipes off the bar)

Sam: (Chuckling) Ok, as you wish, always looking for a guy willing to buy a pretty girl a drink aren’t you? (Winks as he continues cleaning)

Scene: Gail sits at the bar looking around the club and tapping her fingers to the music waiting until a well dressed twenty-something looking male avatar wanders over.

Bill: (smiling) I couldn’t help but notice you sitting here all alone miss. Can I buy you a drink?

Gail: (Waving over Sam) Of course you can sir. Sam two of the usual for me and my…friend here. (Smiles at the newcomer) What is your name stranger? Mine is Gail.

Bill: (Sitting and paying for the drinks) My name is Bill and it is a pleasure to meet you Gail. You seemed rather confident and beautiful, two qualities I admire greatly in a woman, so I had to come over and say hi.

Gail: (Sipping her drink slowly) Thank you very much Bill, and what brings you to the club tonight?

Bill: Actually I was just hoping to run into someone exactly like you…maybe make a new friend or two while I was here. I had heard this was quite an impressive place and a good hangout.

Gail: Oh, it definitely is…its one of my favorite places here. (glances down at her watch and frowning) I am sorry to meet and run Bill but I have to call it an early night tonight, do you think we can meet up her again tomorrow night about the same time?

Bill: (Nods smiling) Not a problem Gail and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow night.

Gail: So do I. (Stands and gives him a small smile before warping to her home and logging out)
Scene: Switches back to Daniel laying in his bed as he puts aside his laptop and walks into the bathroom. Giving his wet hair a quick brushing he glances in the mirror and lets out a soft sigh before going back to the bed and laying down.

Daniel(thoughts): (As he slowly falls asleep) Now if only I could talk to someone like Bill like that in the real world.

Running In

Rick stood on the high dive looking out over the pool. He gulped, took a deep breath, and then hopped on the board, then jumped off, diving into the pool. He spun and splashed into the water. [cut]

Rick stood in the shower, enjoying the feeling of the hot water on his skin. The steam filled the shower. He washed his hair, then lathered his body with soap, washing the chlorine off of his skin. After he finished, he shut off the water and dried himself off in his towel then wrapped it around his waist.

He went to his locker, opened it and reached for his clothes.

“FAGGOT!” someone screamed before whipping him with a wet towel. Rick felt a sting under his right buttox where the towel had snapped him.

“Why didn’t you bang your girlfriend last night? HOMO!” His ‘friend’ mocked.

“Yeah what’s up with that? You don’t like pussy? You like cock?” Another jeered, grabbing himself.

“Shut up, bastard!” Rick retorted, “There’s more to a girl than what’s between her legs!”

“Yeah, her tits!” Someone yelled.

“I could have fucked her if I wanted to, but she has gotten to be a real bitch lately!” Rick tried.

“Well you know what you can do to get her to shut up!” Someone joked.

Rick finished dressing. Frustrated he grabbed his bag and stormed out of the room, pushing aside a guy that was chanting ‘Pussy’ over and over standing in his way.

‘They don’t understand... There’s more to a girl... More than sex... a... connection... With her... I have never felt...” Rick thought to himself as he left the locker room.

He saw a flyer on the floor for this developing online community. He had heard about it, but never really understood it. He collected it and read it. “The Place to Find: Freedom, Friendship, Love, Connection”

A digital couple stood holding each other, gazing into one another’s eyes. He studied it as he walked, when he bumped into someone. Their stuff went flying all over the place. Rick and Daniel scrambled to collect their stuff. Rick shoved the flyer into his pack and ran off.
Daniel screamed, “YOU FUCKING BASTARD!” As he reached for his stuff, luckily his computer was safe in his backpack. He scrambled to collect his notecards for his presentation that flew everywhere in the collision. He stuffed them into a rubberband and threw them into his notebook before running off to class.

Daniel arrived to class a split second before it began. He took his seat. The professor stood in front of the classroom. “I’ve been looking forward to these presentations! Let’s see something interesting. You all have chosen your topics in gender issues. So... why don’t we start with Daniel.” (This part would be cool if we separated the panels from the professor talking in front of the room to Daniel sitting nervously in his chair, keeping with the professor’s speech though)

Daniel’s palms grew sweaty, he gasped in fear. He grabbed his notecards, took off the rubber band and walked to the front of the class where he pulled up his slide presentation. ‘0 or 1 By: Daniel’ the opening slide read. His nerves grew as he stood in front of the class. As he cleared his throat, he felt a chill run down his spine.

“We’re waiting...” An impatient student in the class teased.

“So... I chose gender binaries for my topic...” Daniel began in a quiet voice.

“I’m sorry, I can’t hear you,” The same voice called out, mockingly.

“It’s an issue that manifests in society today, and has become accepted, so we do not even notice it” Daniel continued as he switched the slide to a picture of restroom symbols, and clothing stores.

“Can somebody get this guy a microphone, or get me a hearing aid!” The same student mocked. Some students began chuckling.

Daniel felt like someone had dumped a bucket of water on him... Sweating rigorously, he continued. “and...”

“My gosh! ENUNCIATE!!!!!”

Daniel looked up from his notecards over the crowd. Some students were laughing, those who weren’t looked utterly bored. He froze.

“DEER IN FREKIN HEADLIGHTS!”

Daniel dropped his cards. He felt his face grow hot. Without even thinking, he ran out of the classroom, grabbing his backpack on the way out.

“I hate presentations. I hate speaking. I can’t handle those types of social situations” He thought to himself as he ran home.
the cyber world. “Time to have some fun!” He exclaimed as he entered the coordinates of a club into his navigation browser.

Gail253 teleported to a technoclub. She walked through the doors, instantly greeted by the thumpa-thumpa sound of the music. She looked at the signs on the wall. A promotion read ‘Ladies Night! Free Drinks for Lovely Ladies!’ “What a hoax!” Daniel said, “Does anybody even waste time drinking online?”

“Hey,” Ryan9x6 said. Daniel positioned Gail253 to get a better look. Ryan9x6 was tall, slender, and well dressed. “Wouldn’t mind going home with you,” Daniel said as he reached for the keyboard. “Hi” Gail253 responded. “How are you doing tonight?” Ryan9x6 asked. “Fine, as always” Gail253 replied. “Care to dance?” Ryan9x6 asked. “I’d love to,” Gail253 responded. The two of them proceeded to the dance floor.

“So what’s a hot thing like you doing here?” Ryan9x6 asked as the two of them claimed their spot on the dance floor and started to move. “Just looking for some fun,” Gail 253 answered. “I think I could help with that,” Ryan9x6 wittily responded. “Maybe you can,” Gail253 said, getting a little closer. The two. As the music changed and the mood livened, more avatars appeared on the dance floor. Daniel sat back in his chair, enjoying the scene on the screen. “Girls like you are so hot,” Ryan9x6 said. “Yup, we sure are,” Daniel said but didn’t bother typing anything back. He ran a hand over his chest, teasing himself a bit.

“Wanna have some fun in the back room?” Ryan9x6 asked. “Are you any good?” Gail253 retorted. “Come find out,” Ryan9x6 taunted as he started leaving the dance floor. Gale253 followed. She arrived in a room textured with hardwood floors, dark walls and intimately lit. Many sex-balls were scattered in pairs throughout the room. “I was hoping to run into such a beautiful girl like you tonight,” Ryan9x6 said. The dynamic instantly changed. Daniel could feel the blood in his head; he grew excited and sat up in his chair. With his eyes on the screen, he thought of his longing to be with a man, but in a way- in a state- in which he currently did not meet. “I want a guy to touch me like he would touch Gale,” Daniel voiced to himself.

The players soon undressed their avatars and submitted themselves to the motion-capture balls. Daniel felt the blood running through his veins. His body felt hot and his heart pounded in his chest with excitement. The act of passionate lust consumed the screen, and when they finished, they dressed again. “This was really fun! The pictures and movie will be out soon, I can send them to you if you want,” Ryan9x6 said. “WHAT?!” Gale253 responded. Daniel shot up in his chair. “PiXXel Magazine” Ryan9x6 responded, “You’ll be in the next issue!”


‘I can’t believe someone would do something like that… Take advantage of who I am…’

He wiped the tears from his eyes and looked in his full-length mirror, welling up. (This is the point where we showcase Gale’s reflection back at him in the mirror, with a RL picture on the computer screen and the SL browser still open).

Daniel looked at his screen’s reflection in the mirror and decided to do something productive online to get over his anguish.
Nero meets Gale

??1: A scene of a somewhat open space, camera pulled back a bit as Nero ports into the area.

??2: Camera pulls in closer to Nero as he looks around.

Nero(thinking): Well it’s been an interesting night so far. That girls avatar was actually pretty hot and she was very talented at painting a picture with words.

??3: Shows Nero wandering through the new area slowly.

Nero(thinking): I think that’s the first time I have ever gotten off with someone just talking to me. I figure after that it’s time to try something else new.

??4: Nero stops in a fairly clear space, the camera showing us his top half.

Nero(thinking): Let’s see, I had heard about these sandboxes before where you can build your own stuff. This looks like what people have said and it’s a public space so I guess now I just have to try my hand at this.

??5: Nero is now standing with a basic object floating in front of him. Most likely a cube or sphere.

Nero(thinking): Ok, well getting the basic shape out wasn’t so hard…now to figure out how to change it so it actually looks like something.

??6: He now stands with the shape all contorted into something that resembles not really anything.

Nero(thinking): Blast! Let’s try this again…

??1: Nero stands with a new basic shape floating in the air. We see him from behind and can see Gale in the distance ahead of him.

Nero(thinking): This is a lot harder than I imagined it would be. I can’t seem to get the dimensions the way I want them or the size right. *sigh*

??2: He has moved to the side of the object he is working on and has noticed Gale.

Nero(thinking): Hmmm, maybe I should ask her for help…she has to know what she is doing better than me at any rate.

??3: Nero walking toward Gale.

??4: Nero walks up to Gale. Shot shows them both close up.

Nero: Excuse me. I am new to this whole building thing and was wondering if maybe you could help me out?

Gale: Well I am not the best builder around but I suppose I can do what I can to help.
Various shots of Gale with a simple object showing Nero how to change its size and shape.

Shows them both standing together and talking after she has shown him a few things.

Nero: So how long have you been coming here?
Gale: Oh, a few years now…I guess you could call me a regular.

A closeup of Nero.

Nero: *chuckles* Well then you must know a lot of fun spots to go here, right?
Gale: I suppose so. I know a lot of places both normal and not so normal in-world. So what do you do in rl Nero?

Camera pulled out a bit so you can see them both as they chat.

Nero: I am a college student actually. How about you?
Gale: Me too, guess we have a few things in common then. If you are really interested in seeing more of the stuff in here I would be more than happy to show you around sometime.

A wide shot of them standing and chatting.

Nero: Well since you know so many places here I would be happy to see more.

A shot of the upper half of them both pulled in close.

Gale: Ok, well the next few days are kind of crazy for me. How about we meet back here in say four days?
Nero: That sounds good to me. What time were you thinking?
Gale: How about we meet up at around 6pm…I need to run though. Was nice meeting you Nero.

Nero standing alone as the particles swirl from Gales port.

I will be here!

Pegged

Rick logged on to VirtuaTerra, meeting Gale252 at their normal meet up spot. “Can we try a new venue tonight?” Rick typed, feeling a bit excited and adventurous. “Sure, what did you have in mind?” Gale253 responded. “I don’t know, something adventurous, new, thrilling, different, fun,” Rick typed anxiously, his fingers trembling a bit. Gale253 responded with coordinates. “Where are we going?” Rick asked. “Just plug them in and find out, I thought you wanted adventure.” Gale253 replied and then disappeared. Rick sat back in his chair, gulped, then copied the coordinates into the navigation window. Nero42 teleported to the new location.
They arrived in front of a hip looking club. “You ready?” Gale253 asked. “Sure,” Nero42 responded. The two avatars walked into the club. Inside, a mix of house and dubstep sounded throughout the halls. An oddly mix of avatars filled the club, cross dressers, furries, Goths, bondage masters and slaves, and many in nothing but underwear.

“So what do you think?” Gale253 asked. “This place is…. Different,” Nero42 responded. Then Rick spotted a female avatar in the crowd, beautiful and different looking. “Any idea of what you’d like to do?” Gale 253 asked. “Her!” Nero42 responded. “Good luck ;)” Gale253 replied. Nero42 downed the rest of his drink and then proceeded to the other avatar.

“Hey, how’s it going?” He asked. “Pretty good, this is a damn good mix!” Jamie021 responded. “That’s a sick look! Where’d you get it?” Nero42 asked. “Made it myself,” Jamie021 said. “Wow, that’s skill! You must be experienced!” Nero42 replied. “You have no idea ;)” Jamie021 responded.

“Haha, so what kind of stuff are you into?” Jamie021 asked. “Chilling with friends, swimming, movies,” Nero42 responded. “I didn’t mean like that… More like, what would you want to do with me ;)?” Jami021 flirted. Rick shot back in his chair; excitement ran through his veins. “Oh... ummm making out, feeling you up,” Nero42 replied. “That’s it, and here I was thinking you were skilled,” Jamie021 taunted. “Ok, I’d like to take you home, bend you over a table and fuck you like crazy,” Nero42 said. Rick gulped. “Sounds nice... but,” Jamie021 began, “What if... you let me do that to you? And then maybe we can switch” Rick shot back in his chair, wide-eyed. “What the fuck?!?” he exclaimed. As he digested the idea, he began to fancy it more. Jamie021, without receiving an answer began to walk away. “Wait!” Nero42 called after her, “Let’s go!” Rick followed her to a backroom.

The two walked into a dark, eerie room with shackles, swings, and harnesses around the place. Motion-capture balls filled the floor. Jamie021 entered the room from behind him. Nero42 turned around, to his astonishment, Jamie021 stood behind him wearing a strap-on. “Ever been pegged before?” Jamie021 asked as she came closer. “Uhhhh, no,” Nero42 replied. “You should suck it, get a feel for it before, then,” Jamie021 suggested. “How?” Nero42 asked. “N00B! The Balls! Click them and submit your avatar.” Jamie021 Responded. Rick did so, his avatar got on his knees, first taking the rubber strap-on in his hands, then his mouth. “Yeah, just like that,” Jamie021 said. After a few more second, Jamie asked “You ready?” Nero42 stopped, “Ok.” Rick undressed Nero42. They selected a second set of motion-capture balls. Rick sat up, jarred. As Jamie021 penetrated Nero42.

When the two finished, they dressed. Rick didn’t know what to say next. “Thanks...?” Nero42 said. “That was fun... your turn” Jamie021 said. “I think I’m set for now...” Nero42 said.

After a long awkward pause, Jamie021 said, “So I guess I’ll see you at the club at some point.” “Yeah,” Nero42 responded. “Ok, good night,” Jamie021 replied before logging off. Rick logged off and shut down his computer. Stunned, Rick moved from his computer to his bed. As he drifted off, he reflected on the events of the night, questioning what they meant. Was it the act of being penetrated, or having a dominating woman that left him feeling this way? Even more, was this shock due to disgust or excitement? “I guess I’d be willing to try,” he said to himself before falling into a deep sleep.
**Rick in locker room**

1: Rick standing in the locker room after swim practice. He is alone in the locker aisle as voices come from off panel.

Voice1: Hey guys! Did you hear about Rick?
Voice2: No, what’s up?

2: Rick turning and tilting his head as he listens to the voices.
Voice1: I heard from Hailey that Rick asked her to stick her finger up his ass when they were fooling around.
Voice2: No way! What is he some kind of fag?

3: Shows a close up of Rick’s face as he grimaces.
Voice1: Yeah! Hailey was so freaked that she just left him there.
Voice2: Wow, what a loser.

4: Rick slamming his locker, his face between a mix of rage and shame.

5: Walks around to the other side of the lockers, the panel only shows him next to the lockers so we do not see who is talking about him.

Rick: You guys can shut the fuck up right now!

6: Rick turning away, fists clenched as he starts to walk away.
Voice2: That’s right Rick, just walk away you faggot!
Voice1: You fucking pussy!

7: Rick looking defeated head down as he pushes open the door to the locker room out into the hall.

From off panel: *laughter*

1: Switches to a shot of Rick leaning against the wall in the hall head lowered to his chest.

2: A close-up of a pair of lips, you cannot see anything of the speaker but the lips.
Lips1: Yeah so then he asked me if I would finger his ass for him.

3: Another close-up, different set of lips though.
Lips2: No way!

4: Back to the first lips.
Lips1: Yes way, isn’t that like completely gross? I couldn’t believe it.
Rick started to walk toward the two voices.

Shot of Rick, we can see his GF and her friend who is looking at him and starting to walk away.

Rick looking very pissed as he stands close to his GF.

Rick: What the hell are you doing?! Why in the fuck would you tell everyone what should have been private between us?!

GF: I don’t see what the big deal is…and if you didn’t want it spread around you never should have asked for it. So don’t blame me for anything.

Rick shaking his head as he turns away from her and starts to walk away.

Rick: That’s it…we are over…have a nice life.

Shows GF leaning against a wall looking disgusted.

GF: *under her breath* He is such a homo.

Daniel’s Therapist visit

Shows Daniel entering through a wood door into a well appointed office. Daniel has entered and is closing the door in the first panel.

Dr: (from offpanel) Good morning Daniel.

Daniel sits in a chair, a large bookcase behind him.

Daniel: Good morning Dr.

Camera now pulls back and we see Daniel sitting in a chair across from the Dr. A large window in the wall behind them.

Dr: This isn’t our usual meeting time Daniel. Now what was so urgent you wanted to have a special session today?

Daniel: Dr. I think I have finally figured out at least one reason I have been so depressed these last few years. We are both aware I have identity issues Dr. and I believe I am finally ready to start taking the hormones I need to become the woman I am supposed to be.

A close-up of the Dr’s face from the shoulders up.

Dr.: Daniel why do you suddenly think you are ready to take such a huge step?

Shifts over to a close-up of Daniel from the same angle.

Daniel: Well we have been discussing it for a long time and I think it is time for me to try coming out of my shell. I don’t believe that will happen if I don’t do this. I have been going
online as Gale for a good long while now and I do think it has helped me to feel more comfortable with myself as a woman.

??.1: Daniel calm and leaning back in his chair. As the Dr. leans forward and nods.

Dr: Ok Daniel. I believe you are ready for this and I will sign the paperwork for you to start your hormone treatments.

??.2: Daniel sitting up straight in his chair smiling at the Dr.

Daniel: You will?! Oh thank you so much! I finally am on the path that will bring me happiness.

??.3: Top view of the two of them as they sit back. Daniel smiling as the Dr looks over at him.

Dr: I do however have another question before we continue. You know transitioning takes a lot of money Daniel, will you be able to come up with the money for everything?

??.4: Daniel frowning as we view him from over the Dr’s shoulder.

Daniel: Well I was going to pay for it myself. However I just recently was fired from my job but this is something I need so I will find the money any way I can.

??.5: The upper half of the Dr. is shown centered in the panel.

Dr: Ok, as long as you think you can come up with the money I trust you to do so.

??.6: Shows the Dr. leaning forward and handing Daniel a signed paper as he leans to grab it.

Dr: Here is the signed paper you will need to start the treatments. I will see you at the end of the week for our regular session.

??.7: Shows Daniel standing and shaking the Dr’s hand.

Daniel: Thank you very much again Dr. I will definitely be here for our session. Thank you!

??.1: Daniel leaving the office and closing the door behind him. We get a good look at the outside of the door and the Dr’s nameplate on it behind him.

??.2: Daniel walking out to a bench and sighing.

??.3: Daniel sitting down at the bench and just staring at nothing for a moment.

??.4: Daniel pulling out his phone and looking down at it as he dials a number.

??.5: Close-up of Daniels face as he holds the phone to his ear.

Phone: Hello?

Daniel: Hi mom….is this a good time to talk?

??.6: Pull back a little bit showing Daniel from the shoulders up as he talks on the phone.

Phone: Oh Daniel! It is good to hear from you…is something wrong?
Daniel: Not especially mom, I just have something I need to tell you and dad and a big favor to ask.

??: Side view of him on the phone, still sitting.

Phone: Of course Daniel you can tell us anything. Go on…

Daniel: *deep breath* Put me on speaker so dad can hear me as well please.

Phone: ok, all set.

??: Daniel head tilted with a small frown as we see him from the front again.

Daniel: Ok, well this isn’t easy but you both know I have been seeing a psychiatrist. I need to tell you both that after a long deliberation I have figured out I am a woman in a mans body and that today I have decided to start the hormone treatments to become a woman.

??: A pullback of him sitting at the bench, leaning over and waiting phone to his ear.

Phone: (dad) Umm, I am not sure what to say…that is a lot to take in. (mom) Your father is right and you know we will need some time to process this…

Daniel: I know it’s a shock but it is what I need to do to be happy and I hope you both will be behind me on this.

??: Daniel from the shoulders up from the right side as he talks.

Phone: (dad) We love you Daniel and will be here for you no matter what you decide to do. (mom) That’s exactly right…we want you to be happy.

??: Close-up of Daniels face looking shocked.

Daniel: Well…I am very happy to hear that. I was so worried you would be upset…. I do have a favor to ask though as well.

Phone: (mom) What is it dear?

??: An over head shot centered on the bench Daniel is sitting on.

Daniel: I recently lost my job…and the stuff I will need to do this can be very expensive. I was hoping maybe you and dad could help me out with the payments?

??: Show Daniel from the left side.

Phone: (dad) We understand and will help you out anyway we can. Just make sure from now on you don’t keep any secrets from us.

??: Daniel starting to stand up from the bench.

Daniel: I promise I won’t and thank you both…you have no idea how much this means to me.

??: Daniel standing fully now phone in hand.
Phone:(mom) Ok, call us again soon to let us know how things are going. (dad) Yeah, don’t be a stranger. Bye

??:8: Daniel hanging up his phone standing fully upright. A few tears streaking his face as he begins to walk away.

Conversation Online – Gale Nero

Gale: So how did last night go?

Nero: Interesting...

I am not sure exactly how I feel about it, tbh.

Gale: Are you ok? Did something go wrong?

Nero: Not wrong, just unexpected

Gale: What did you do?! Lol

Nero: We went to the back room and she had her way with me.

Gale: You slut! ;)

Nero: It was a bit weird... She put on a dick...

Gale: Kinky. Well, to each, his own.

Nero: I’ve never ACTUALLY done that before...

Gale: But now you’re thinking about it?

Nero: No...

Maybe...

I don’t know...

It’s not normal.

Gale: By whose standards?

Heteronormative society’s?

FUCK THEM!

Nero: Wait. What? I feel like you have a personal problem in the matter...

Gale: Uhhh, I guess you could say that.
I used to tell myself that it was my personal freedom to be on here as I am. But came to realize that my avatar means so much more to me than a mere online presence.

Nero: I don’t think I follow.

Gale: I’m actually a dude in RL, but my avatar is the body that I wish for.

(internally) Oh no, I’ve freaked him out... There goes one friend.

(after some time) You there?

Nero: Yeah... just... confused.

You make such a convincing chick!

Gale: Uhhh... thanks?

I’m glad you met me on here so you actually got a chance to meet the real me, not the person who awkwardly goes through life coping.

Maybe one day I’ll be able to let people meet the real me in RL.

Nero: What do you mean?

Gale: I’m thinking of having the surgery.

Nero: I don’t really know what to say to that...

But I hope it’s what you really want
And if it is, then you find happiness.

Gale: You’re taking this better than I expected.

Nero: Well, after getting pegged, I have started looking at myself in a new light.

I guess I feel a little queer.
So it would be hypocritical for me to judge you for being different.
Besides, who cares what heternormative society thinks!

Gale: OMG! YOU GOT PEGGED!!!!!!

Daniel Gets Bashed
Daniel was walking home from school with a confidence he hadn’t felt before. Today, he took direction of his identity, and presented himself in more feminine attire. As he headed home, he enjoyed the feeling of the sunlight on his skin and the wind in his hair.

“Look at the faggot!” (frame is dark/black with white letters and a shadow of a figure with maybe glowing eyes). A group encircled him. And began mocking him. Someone took his bag and started tossing it around, letting some of the contents fall out. Others knocked the books out of his hands. They continued calling him names and teasing him. The bag hit the ground. Instead of retrieving it, the group turned their attention to Daniel, and started pushing him around calling him names. One punched him in the face, another in the gut. They started pounding on him. He fell to the floor and scrambled to get up. They pushed him back down and started pummeling him. Daniel wrapped his arms around his head to try to cushion the blows to his face.

Rick was walking to meet his friends in the spot where they said they would all meet. He witnessed his friends standing in a circle beating on someone. He was a bit shaken up and ran over to see what was going on. “Poo pusher!” He heard one of them say. Something inside Rick snapped. He pushed his way through the crowd, placing himself between them and the victim. “Lay off him guys!”

“Nah, he looks like a freak! He needs to get the sense beaten into him and the gay out of him!”

“Shut up! Just because he’s different, doesn’t mean he deserves a beating!”

“You’re probably one too! Want us to leave so you can fuck?” One said, he then stepped forward and took a swing at Rick. Rick dodged the blow and punched the guy back, knocking him over. Seeing the guy fall to the ground, the others took off. The guy on the floor collected himself, then began to head off. “You fag” He called, as he left, crying.


[have the panel zoom into a rick in the distance looking back over his shoulder with danie’ls thought in a jarring text box, bolded ‘NERO42?!?!???!’]

Let’s Buy Makeup

Scene: A bright, clean, white makeup department of a department store like Macy’s. Daniel walks through the department, looking at the different set ups. He anxiously glances around himself, nervous that people are judging him. He gulps as he approaches one of the makeup racks. He picks up a bottle of foundation and starts reading it. “May I help you?” A sales associate asks. “Uhhhh,” He responds, looking at her like a deer in headlights, puts down the foundation on the counter and starts backing away looking at possible escapes. She picks up the bottle, glancing over the label. “I think this one is more your color,” She said, taking another bottle and handing it to him. “Thank you,” he said,
looking down. She could see the shame and embarrassment in his eyes. “Nothing to be ashamed of,” She replied, “Could I help you find something to make those beautiful eyes sparkle?” Calming down a bit, he looked up at her. She smiled at him, not the usual sales associate smile, but a sincere and compassionate smile. “Sure, what do you recommend, this is all new to me?” He stated. “Sit down, let’s get a feel for what you like,” She said, motioning to the seat next to the sample products. She pulled over a desk mirror and walked over. He took a seat and gulped. “Ok, so let’s start with the foundation, this will even out your skin, covering up open pores and small blemishes,” She began applying the makeup to his face. “And to get that evenness, use one of these sponges.” “Next, we’ll apply some blush to your cheeks to pull out that lovely rosiness you have,” she said, taking a brush and a pink-colored blush and applied it to his face. When she finished, he looked into the mirror, liking the look so far. She then took a compact of eye shadow, and began applying it to his eyes, detailing how to achieve the blended look. “Apply this bit of white shimmer to the inner corner of your eye to give it an added pop.” She then applied eyeliner and mascara. “Now, with this set, I would go for a light pink color for lips with a bit of shimmer. Let’s try this,” She applied the lipstick to him, then applied gloss over it for a glistening finish. “And voila!” She said. He turned to the mirror, loving the look. He had the sensation of finally feeling himself within his own body. “Thank you!”

“Glad I could help, could I interest you in any of these products?”

“I’ll take one of each of the ones we sampled,”

“Ok.” The sales associate rang up the charge as Daniel cleaned up his face.

He payed, took the bag full of cosmetics and walked off with an added bounce in his step. The world was his oyster!

Nero and Gale Chat Again

Nero42: Hey

Gale253: Hey, how’s it going?

Nero42: Pretty good. Feel confident about my exam today, went to get some coffee at this little café down the street, and now am online chatting with you :D

Gale253: Good job on the test!

Nero42: Yeah, I was sweating it, but I reviewed my notes after the test and it all looks pretty solid

Gale253: Sweet. Coffee actually sounds pretty good, bit late though. But I know this place that makes amazing raspberry mocha lattes.

Nero42: I’m more of an iced coffee or cappuccino kinda guy.

Gale253: Well excuse me, snob :P

LOL JK!

Nero42: Yeah, suuuuuuure, whatever! Rolls eyes
So how was ur day? Anything exciting?

Gale253: Pretty sweet! Went to the store to get some makeup and makeup tips.

I was nervous as shit when I first got there, but the sales lady was nice and actually gave me a bit of a makeover.

Nero42: How’d that go? She doll you up nicely?

Gale253: Yeah, I was pretty impressed, sooooo of course I bought everything! LOL

Nero42: I must say, you’ve really come out of your shell since you made the decision.

Gale253: Well, I’ve had some pretty supportive and understanding people around me

Nero42: Oh that’s good.

Gale253: You included

Nero42: Me? Oh dear, you’re screwed :P

Gale253: Shut up bitch! :P

Actually, since I’ve known you, your building skills on here have improved

Nero42: U think?

Gale253: Yeah, well u had a pretty awesome teacher.

Nero42: Yeah, idk how u ever dealt w/ me!

I’m surprised you didn’t shoot yourself in the head

Gale253: there were times I wanted to....

Nero42: ruuuuude!!!! Ouch!

Gale253: awwww hugs

So any plans for the weekend?

Nero42: Umm, I think I’m gonna check out this event the group is throwing. It’s like a crazy building workshop that they will be paying people to help construct this backdrop for a machinima used for a project at a school in California.

Gale253: That sounds pretty sick! Have fun with that!

Nero42: I plan to, how about you?

Gale253: Surgery

Nero42: It’s finally happening?

I’m sure u r excited
Gale253: Yup, and a bit nervous.

Nero42: U’ll be fine.

And I’m here if you need to talk! You can count on it!

Gale253: Thanks

(some time passes)

Ok, since you mentioned coffee, I kind of feel like indulging in a cranberry walnut muffin from this café I know. I think I’m gonna get one.

Nero42: K, enjoy

Gale253: Catch u L8r!

Daniel goes shopping…again

??1: Daniel walking through the mall, we stay close in only showing him from the waist up.

??2: Daniel from shoulders up looking right straight on.

??3: He now looks left as we see him straight on from shoulders up.

Daniel(thinking): Now where is that saleswoman?

??4: Daniel smiling and his face lighting up as he finally spots her.

Daniel: Hello <saleswoman1>! It is so good to see you are here today.

??5: Shows Daniel and the saleswoman talking across the counter from waist up.

Saleswoman: Hi there, what brings you back here?

Daniel:(thoughts): I am so nervous again.

Daniel: I actually need some help getting some clothes…

??6: Pulling in on the saleswoman.

Saleswoman1: Well I would love to help but clothing isn’t my department. I do however have a friend in that department who I am sure would love to help you out.

??7: Now pulling in on Daniel from the side.

Daniel(thoughts): Damn! I was hoping not to have to tell anyone else about this…

Daniel: Ok….I am sure she will be a great help.
??,8: Shows the two of them walking through the store, women’s clothes shown on a sign above them.

??,1: Those two side by side as they approach a third woman, shown from waist up again.
Saleswoman1: <Saleswoman2> I have someone here who needs your help.
Saleswoman2: Well you know me, always glad to help out!
??,2: Saleswoman1 starting to walk away as the other two move closer.
Saleswoman1: Ok, you two have fun!
Saleswoman2: So what kind of clothes are we looking for today?
Daniel(thoughts): This is so embarrassing…but I need to do this.
Daniel: Well I wanted some more flattering tops and umm…maybe a few…bras.
??,3-??,8: Show the saleswoman trying on different things and showing Daniel.
??,1: Shows the two of them standing close together and talking.
Saleswoman2: Well it looks like you managed to pick out quite a few things here. Now for the bras we just need to know a few things. Then we can look and you will be able to pick out your own.
Daniel(thoughts): I have no idea what I am doing here.
Daniel: That sounds simple enough, what do you need to know?
??,2: Change the view of the two of them talking to a different angle.
Saleswoman2: Well the first thing we need to know is your chest measurement all the way around. So I will take that.
??,3: Close-up of Daniel with his arms up ready for measuring, he is trying to smile.
Daniel(thoughts): This is really really embarrassing.
Daniel: Ok, go ahead and take it.
??,4: Saleswoman2 standing back looking at Daniel, the camera is from over his shoulder.
Saleswoman2: Now that we have that next we need to figure out your cup size…it’s not a real exact science but I am guessing you are a B cup or maybe small C. If your not comfortable trying them on here we can just get a few of each and you can return the ones that don’t fit.
??,5: Switches to Daniel standing at a counter with Saleswoman2 behind it as he pays.
Daniel(thoughts): Whew, I cannot wait to get out of here!
Daniel: Thank you very much, you were a great help today.
???.6: Shifts to a shot of the saleswoman.

Saleswoman2: You are very welcome, it was my pleasure to help. If you ever need anything else in the future feel free to come find me.

???.7: Final shot shows Daniel walking out of the store holding two handfuls of bags and smiling happily.

Daniel(thoughts): I am so glad that is over!

Abigail!!:

Name change document on a table surface. Pen touches form, begins writing.

“Abigail” the first name reads. Shows the gender box on the form.

Next panel shows F checked.

The envelope is sealed and ready to be mailed.

Cut to panels of Abigail doing her make up – close ups, like makeup advertisements. For eye shadow, concentrate on the eye area, for lips, the lip area, etc –

Abigail studied herself in the mirror before she left. “These boots totally bring an edge to this outfit!” She said to herself before grabbing the envelope and heading out the door. As she walked to the mailroom in the campus center, she felt a surge of confidence. She noticed people looking at her and presumed these glances were derived from admiration. She was approached by a girl who complimented her on her top. “Thank you, she replied,” and continued walking. “I feel really beautiful,” She said to herself. Some guy approached her, “Hey, how’s it going?” He asked. “Fine,” She replied. “Are you new here?” “I guess you could say that,” She said. “Ok.” Throughout the conversation she continued walking, he followed her. “So ummm, I’m David,” He said, holding out a hand. “Abigail,” She replied, shaking his hand. “Abigail.” “Yeah, but call me Gale,” She told him. “K, Gale... so ummm... could I get your number... maybe we can go out,” He said. She stopped walking and turned to him. She blushed a little, her heart started racing. She did think he was kind of cute. “Sure.” He handed her his phone, she put in her number. “Great, I’ll text you,” He said. “K, bye,” she said as she smiled at him, winked and left. He smiled, waved and shied away. She opened up the slot of the drop off bin in the mailroom. “Finally, I feel... Myself!”

(Maybe show this scene from inside the mail slot and it clangs shut to end the scene)
Nero hanging out with online friends

??.1: Nero appearing in a swirl of teleport particles into a home online.

??.2: Camera from behind Nero as he walks toward a group of his friends sitting in what appears to be the living room of the home. We can see 3 people sitting down, 2 women and another man.

Nero: Hi all! How is everyone doing?

??.3: Camera shifts to the 3 sitting down, 1 woman and 1 man on the couch with the other woman in a recliner.

Man: Hey Nero, everything is going great. You?

Nero(offpanel): I am doing pretty good actually, not a lot going on right now but have met a lot of good people here lately. Present company included.

??.4: Nero sitting down in another recliner on the other side of the couch.

Nero: So what has everyone been up to lately?

??.5: A close-up shot of man1 from the chest up.

Man: Actually I was at the club last night and I met someone. We hung out for awhile and we are going to meet up again tomorrow.

??.6: Close-up of woman1 from the neck up,

Woman1: Well I am glad you met someone <man> but my week has been crap, work sucked but luckily the weekend is shaping up to be better I hope.

??.7: Woman2 close-up showing her top half.

Woman2: I can’t wait for the weekend either, but I did hear that I may actually get that promotion at work, so things are looking up. What about you Nero anything new?

??.1: Close-up of Nero sitting back in the recliner, hands behind his head.

Nero: Nothing much. School is the same old same old but luckily we have break coming up.

??.2: Nero now sitting forward in his chair as he looks at the others in the room.

Nero: I am just glad I have you guys here. You have all helped me get through some rough patches lately and to think a year ago I didn’t even know any of you.

??.3: Close-up of Nero’s face as he smiles at them.

Offpanel: Chuckling*

??.4: Long panel showing the whole group of them sitting around.
Woman1: Well we are glad we met you as well Nero, things wouldn’t be the same around here without you.

Man: Exactly, I am just glad you could make it tonight for even a little while.

Woman2: It wouldn’t have been the same hanging out tonight without you, we have gotten used to having you around. I know you can’t stay long though.

??5: Nero standing up out of the chair.

Nero: Actually with that I really do have to jet. I know these get togethers have become tradition but I need to cut my time at this one short, busy day tomorrow.

Others(offpanel): Awww

??6: Nero appearing in a small bedroom with the now familiar teleport particles around him.

Nero(thoughts): Who would have thought not so long ago that I would have my own “house” online. How things do change.

??7: Nero sitting down on the edge of the bed.

Nero(thoughts): If it weren’t for this world and all the stuff that lets me connect to hear I would have a lot less friends nowadays than I do.

At a point between scenes – inserted scene!

Abigail receives a text – for this scene just show the phone screens. (Maybe this could be the scene where she edits what she is thinking in the thought bubbles and translating it to text message) – thoughts in []

“Hey, it’s David”

[OMG The guy from the campus center! Wait, play it chill] “Hey David”

“What’s up?”

[I’m currently on (website) talking to a really good friend of mine... too geeky...] “Nothing. Just online”

“Cool. So I was wondering if you wanted to go out with me on Friday?”

[He wants to go out with me! AWESOME!] “Sure, where?”

“The club, say I pick u up @ 10?”

[OMFG] “Sounds like a plan ;D”

“Sweet, c u then”
FRIDAY:

Show Abigail getting ready, dressed for a night out – heels, possibly a little black dress. Panel these to explore a certain eroticism of how Abigail is presenting herself as hyper-feminine as if anticipating to seduce David with the last panel being a shot of her red lips saying ‘Desirable.’

Her phone rings, she answers saying, “Hey, be right out”

She gets in his car and they drive off.

She enters the club, with him following her. “Can I buy you a drink?” He asked her. “Sure, cosmo?” She requested. “Be right back.”

As he got the drinks, she started observing the club. Long had it been since she had been out to a nightclub. She couldn’t really remember, but she figured she didn’t really have fun. Daniel felt awkward at clubs, but tonight, she felt sexy, reborn - ready for adventure... ready to see where the night would take her. Hopefully to David’s bed.

He returned with two drinks and handed her red drink decorated with a lemon circle.

She took it from him. “To adventure,” She proposed, holding her glass up. “To adventure,” he agreed and clinked her glass [panel of the glasses clinking].

She took a sip, and then set her drink on the table in front of her.

“So, what’s your major?” He asked her.

“Gender studies,” She replied. “Oh, that’s cool,” He replied, she sensed a bit of confusion in his voice. “What made you want to study that?” He asked her. “I wanted the opportunity to explore socially constructed limits of gender identities,” She replied. “That sounds like quite a task,” he replied. “How about you?” she asked. “Mechanical Engineering,” he replied. “Oh... cool,” She said. Her glass was almost empty by this point. She downed the rest. “I love this song!” She said. “Would you like to dance?” He asked. “Of course!” They proceeded to the dance floor.

They began dancing separately, but as the night continued, they moved in closer. Before she knew it, he was pressed up against her as they grinded to the thumpa-thumpa music of the dance floor. Her heart raced to match the beat of the music as his hands moved down her back. He leaned in and kissed her. One soft peck, followed by another, and the third was a deep and passionate kiss. She held onto the back of his head. When he pulled back, she excused herself to go to the restroom. In there, she took a condom from a bin and slipped it into her purse. She fixed her hair in the mirror. Smiled, and returned, looking forward to see where the night would take them.

Nero and Gale talk

??1: Nero all alone after arriving via teleport at Gales house.

??2: Nero sitting in one of the two chairs in the center of the living room and waiting.
Gale arriving near the other chair in a teleport particle and smiling at Nero.

Gale: Sorry I am late, been super busy lately. How have you been?

Nero: I have been fine, just worried because you haven’t been around much lately. I am glad I finally got a message from you to meet here.

Gale: Well that’s why I wanted to see you…it looks like I may not be here much at all after today.

Nero: That’s definitely not what I wanted to hear Gale. Why the change? I mean I know you haven’t been around much but leaving completely seems totally unlike you.

Gale: A lot has changed for me in the last few months Nero…it’s not that I want to leave all my friends here. I just need to start taking care of my real life the way I used to take care of this one. I didn’t think it was fair of me to just disappear though so I left you the message so we could say goodbye.

Nero: I can understand having to take a step back but do you really have to leave completely?

Gale: Yes I think I do….I have been here less and less as it is and I just don’t think I need this place anymore.

Nero: I can’t say I am happy to hear all this but if this is what you want then I will stand behind you.

Gale: I am glad you’re not mad at me. I was worried I would lose you as a friend over this.

Nero: Can I ask you one favor before I go? I am sure you have other people you want to talk to before you leave.

Gale: Of course you can ask me for a favor, anything you want.

Nero: I was hoping we could exchange phone numbers before you go, just in case one of us ever needs to get a hold of the other badly.
???.5: A closer shot as we see Gale and Nero both standing.
Gale: Yes, we can do that… I just sent you a message with my number.
Nero: Thanks, mine is on the way as well. See you again sometime Gale.

???.6: A panel where we see Nero has ported back to what appears to be his house in the online world but the scene is very darkly lit, only showing Nero himself and the vague outlines of things around him as he sighs.

**Nero Copes by Building**

???.1: Nero appearing in a build area, the space around him is mostly free of anything. In the corner of the panel it says “a few days later”.

Nero(thoughts): These last few days have really sucked with knowing Gale is probably gone for good. I need something to take my mind off of it.

???.2: A faraway shot of Nero standing in the build area gathering his thoughts it seems.

Nero(thoughts): Over the last few months I have gotten much better at building things here….have even sold a few things to people. Maybe working on something big will help me to get out of this funk.

???.3-???.6: A few panels of Nero from different angles building with some simple shapes, each ones is a different shape as he tries to figure out what to make.

???.1: Nero stopping and standing with a light bulb going off over his head.

Nero(thoughts): I know what I can do….I will make a tower…the biggest tower that has ever been built here. A veritable monument to everything that I have learned and done here.

???.2-???.6: Shows different scenes of Nero working on the tower, the first is just a base and it gets bigger and taller with each successive panel.

???.1: Splash page of one panel showing Nero on the top of his tower looking down. The bottom of the tower is lost off the bottom of the page. A look of exultation on his face as he stands with arms raised looking down below him.

**Rick Gets A Job**

???.1: Nero standing outside near the bottom of his tower surveying his work.

???.2: Camera pans over and we can see a group of people off on the left side of the panel looking at the tower, Nero is now on the right side of the panel.

Crowd: That is an amazing build… I wonder how long it took him?
We see one person break from the crowd and start walking around the tower.

Shows the new man walking first one way around the tower then again around the other.

The man approaches Nero as he stands near the bottom of the tower.

Man: Hello, my name is Richard and I work for the company that makes this world. Do you have a minute to talk?

Nero turning toward the man.

Nero: Sure I do. Have I done something wrong?

Shows the two of them standing facing each other from the side.

Richard: No, no, nothing like that at all. *chuckles*

Nero: Oh good, I was worried I was about to get in trouble. *laughs*

Close-up of Richard as he talks.

Richard: Actually it’s quite the opposite…we have been monitoring you since you started this little project. This tower is now officially the tallest single edifice in the game.

Show Nero’s face.

Nero: Really? I mean that’s what I wanted when I started it but I never thought I would actually hit it.

¾ overhead view of them as if from the side of the tower.

Richard: Not only is it huge but it’s also very well done, have you ever thought of using your skills professionally?

Nero: Me build for a living? I didn’t even know that was a job. *chuckles*

Goes back to the close-up shot of the two men talking.

Richard: Well Nero that is exactly what I and my team do for the game. Most of the stuff is user generated but we make specific things in the world for important clients such as companies who want a presence here.

Nero: That does sound like a very interesting job you have.

Close-up shot of Richard from the side as he looks up at the tower.

Richard: Well since you built that, how would you like it to be your job Nero?

Shocked looking Nero shown from behind the shoulder of Richard.

Nero: Are you serious?!
Richard: Yes I am. I have sent you my contact info, if you decide you want the job all you have to do is get in touch with me.

??.8: Richard disappears in a swirl of teleport particles as Nero stands there contemplating and the sun sets in the background.

ENDING:

Rick is sitting in a coffee shop at a table with his laptop drinking an iced coffee. He is online, ordering a ticket to fly out to meet his new employer. Very excited, he confirmed the order and received his flight itinerary and a confirmation e-mail! “Yes!” He said to himself, then took a sip of his iced coffee. His phone pinged. He retrieved it from his pocket. He took it out and opened up a text message from Abigail.

“Hey, it’s been a while” He smiled, then replied.

Abigail was sitting in a coffee shop at a booth with some of her new friends. They were talking, enjoying their coffee. She also had a cranberry walnut muffin. Her phone beeped, notifying her of a text. She opened up Rick’s text.

“Yeah, how have you been?”

“Pretty good, out right now chatting with some friends over coffee”

“Cool. Online in a coffee shop getting my flight sorted out”

“So you’re ready to go?”

He opened up facebook and updated his status. “Coffee, plane tickets and messages from an old friend – life is good.” “Yup, I fly out in a couple weeks”

He heard a beep... The same one he had been hearing since he texted her. He stood up and looked around.

“That’s good! You ready for California?” She asked. She returned to her muffin, then sipped from her coffee. She heard a familiar ping. She glanced around and saw a guy standing up. He retrieved his phone, texted something, then put it back in his pocket. Her phone pinged. He spotted her. She stood up and walked over to him.... “Hey” the two said, finally meeting face to face.