Chapter 6
Playing With Text in Space

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the creation of text and its visualization through typographic design inside three-dimensional virtual worlds known as the metaverse, with a particular focus upon the way in which these environments may place the usage of text within a context that stands in contradiction to its traditional one – namely legibility. Readability can be displaced through the usage of text and typography as playful devices that may manifest as visual structures, the contents of which are meant to be understood through means other than reading – as it is understood in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, such spaces are aimed to bring about states of heightened engagement, wonder, and “play” by being immersed within the typographic conglomerations that constitute their essences. This subject is explored through the discussion of three such typographic playgrounds that the authors created in the metaverse.

INTRODUCTION

Metaverse are three dimensional, collective, online virtual worlds in which (unlike their gaming counterparts) all content is user-created. A further name by which these worlds can therefore be called is the term ‘builders’ worlds’, since an important attribute of these spaces is that not only is their content user-defined and created, but also the purpose of residing in these worlds is entirely up to and decided upon by their users, since the developers of these platforms provide no narrative that is to be followed, and there are no system defined goals or quests. Instead, metaverse residents are expected to formulate the raison d’être for their virtual sojourn out of
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a self-motivated inquiry. (Boellstorff 2008) From this it may follow that one of the most widely embraced reasons to stay in the metaverse is to be creatively active: These worlds possess attributes that are grounded in creative endeavor to the point where the best developed of them to date, namely Second Life®, has been defined as “a wildly provocative experiment in user generated content.” (Cervieri 2007)

Creative activity stands center stage from the onset, from the moment that metaverse land has been appropriated; initiating itself through the very shaping of the virtual geography, upon which virtual architecture is then built, to be traversed with many different kinds of vehicles, ranging from space craft to realistic replicas of Real Life carriers, such as cars, helicopters and sea craft. An important note is that all of these artifacts as well as the geography on which they are placed are essential constituent elements of an elaborate system of ‘play,’ that has been remarked upon and discussed by Brown and Bell, who researched play and sociability in online virtual worlds through an in-depth examination of ‘There,’ a collaborative online virtual world that can be seen as the partial precursor of the concept of the metaverse. Their findings point at strong ties between sociability, objects and play states; saying that play and sociability rely upon a number of interactional ‘building blocks’ for their satisfactory fruition. While talk, topic and identity all work together to make ‘play’ possible, an equally essential element is the interaction that comes about through objects. (Brown and Bell 2006) Such objects can manifest in many forms and address many different needs and typographic objects should certainly be counted amongst them.

In my 7 years in the metaverse I have engaged in many of the creative activities listed above. In many of my projects typography has held a center-stage position – which is of no surprise, since as a graphic designer I have had a life-long love relationship with the display of semantic material. It was therefore a foregone conclusion that I would carry my fascination with typography into my virtual three dimensional explorations as well – albeit, embedded into an altogether different format than the intrinsic one that holds typography as an informational device through which the content of the written word is to be eloquently expressed. What I have chosen to do instead is to place type and text as frivolous, oftentimes nonsensical game objects into my constructions. The following are some of the deliberations and inspirations through which I contextualize text and typography as playful artifacts in the metaverse, leading into a brief discussion of a recent work that was built under these precepts.

VIRTUAL 3D AND TEXT

In her book ‘The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923’ Johanna Drucker offers a model for the materiality of visual-linguistic signs that
The Marketer as Storyteller: Transmedia Marketing in a Participatory Culture
www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-marketer-as-storyteller/207436?camid=4v1a