

... an experiment in deriving meaning from non-semantic content

Although used as a placeholder Lorem Ipsum is not random text. Instead, it has its roots in classical Latin literature, making it over 2000 years old. Richard McClintock, a Latin professor at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, looked up one of the more obscure Latin words, 'consectetur,' from a Lorem Ipsum passage, and going through the cites of the word in classical literature, discovered the source: Lorem Ipsum comes from 'de Finibus Bonorum et Malorum' (The Extremes of Good and Evil) by Cicero, written in 45 BC.



The usage of the 'Lorem Ipsum' aggregate as a placeholder for 'real' text resides in the notion that since the dummy text is embedded into an overall design system in which it is complemented through images, shapes and color, the viewer will be able to assign meaning through the associations which the surrounding visual material provides to what essentially makes no sense when read as a standalone piece of writing. I wished to take this notion into 3D, however with text that did not even have the association to 'Lorem Ipsum,' in other words by using text



that was truly meaningless.



To this end I compiled my own version of Lorem Ipsum by generating text in several of the less widely read languages which I then combined and further garbled up and in a word processing software. The result led me to the notion of asemic writing which is a wordless form of writing, deriving from the Greek word 'asemic,' that can be translated as 'having no specific semantic content'. Through this nonspecificity comes a vacuum of meaning which is left for the reader to fill in and to interpret since asemic writing has no inherent verbal sense. Nonetheless, asemic writing artifacts may have a clear textual sense which is brought about through formatting and structure, and as such they may visually suggest 'real' documents. Drawing meaning from these depend upon the reader's overall sense and knowledge of writing systems, or alternatively such meaning can also be understood or felt through sole aesthetic intuition.







A wide spread manifestation of asemic writing seems to materialize not through typographic means, but instead as a hybrid form of output that resides somewhere between drawing, doodles, signs or icons which are arranged and aligned in such a way that they resemble text, such as seen in the work of poets Henri Michaux and Christian Dotremont which is discussed by Nina Parish (Parish 2008). A very good visual collection of this genre can also be found in Michael Jacobson blog ‘thenewpostliterate’, which explores asemic writing in relation to post-literate culture.





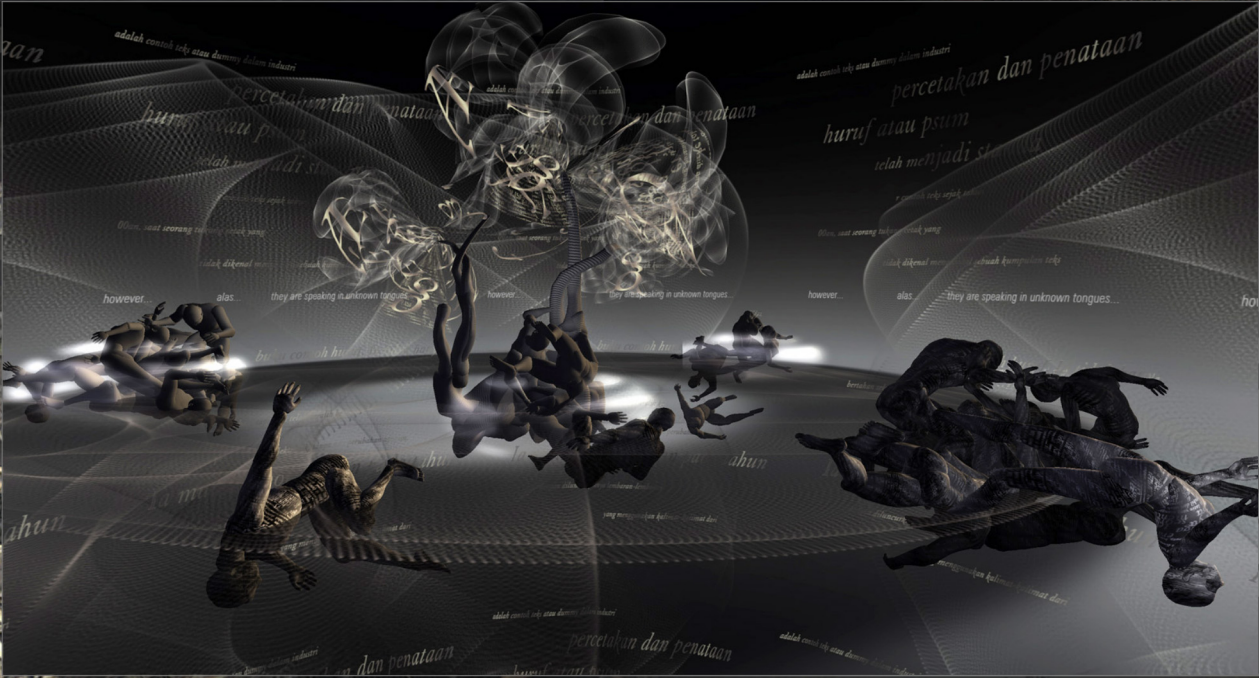


Although these artistic explorations that are engaged in creating literature out of visual form are highly compelling; my personal preoccupations, which ultimately reside in my background in graphic design, lead me in a direction in which I do not wish to forsake the aesthetic refinement which I find in typographic forms as well as in the overall structural beauty of textual output.

I therefore wished take my quest in a different direction by bringing together the concept of asemic writing and that of aleatoric poetry, which resides upon the chance encounters of words. Within this context Christian Bök refers to Gilles Deleuze by saying that *“writing by means of an aleatory protocol almost fulfills the dream of Deleuze, who imagines an ideal game of chance, one whose rules are themselves subject repeatedly to chance, resulting in an aimless outcome so futile that we have no choice but to dismiss the game as a nonsensical dissipation of time itself”* (Bök 2006). However, Bök takes the notion of chance altogether beyond nonsense when he further quotes Deleuze who tells us that *“if one tries to play this game other than in thought, nothing happens, and if one tries to produce a result other than the work of art, nothing is produced.”* (ibid)







"Asemia" (as I called the work) came about as a huge sphere and a landscape complete with inhabitants that resided in this sphere, and was exhibited in Second Life in the Spring of 2012, as part of a collaborative art project sponsored by the Linden Endowment for the Arts.





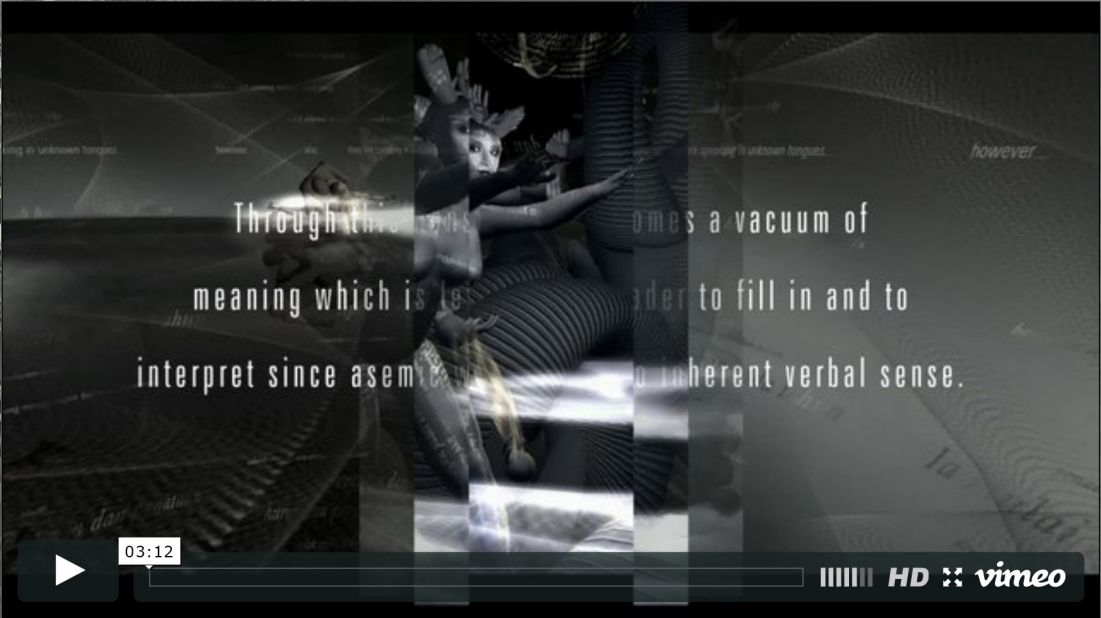


Almost all of the elements of the habitat, as well as its dwellers were carriers of 'text,' however text that was devoid of meaning, that did not resemble any known language and that repeated itself throughout, mapping itself equally on 'living' beings as well as the many solid rocks that were scattered throughout the space and that these beings were intertwined with and/or embedded into. The only exception to this asemic assemblage was a single line of text that wound its way around the center of the sphere and that could be read as 'alas, they are speaking in unknown tongues.'





The environment was grouped around a central tree, whose foliage was comprised of the same asemic text. Deconstruction, in the case of this installation, was not achieved through motion, transparencies, layering or any other such visual means, but instead the confusion was achieved through the very semantic absence itself. It was hoped that this lack of semantic content would enable the visitor to draw their own meaning by taking clues from what surrounded them, and how the text was used in conjunction with other visual elements. Yet another addition was a custom designed soundscape, consisting of human sounds such as screams, grunts, sighs, and cries – all of which were devoid of words and meaning, but instead conveyed emotions such as being bound, being helpless, being petrified within a fate.



Although the Asemic Avatar is quite different from its precursor Uranometria, both visually as well as through the presence of this soundscape; nevertheless I think that there are conceptual overlaps; to the point where it could be said that they are sister projects: In both locations what I aimed at was to bring about a sense of immutable fate and claustrophobia. In the case of Uranometria this was represented through the petrified avatar sculptures that could not join the free floating words around them but were confined to living inside the cage, in fixed positions and poses. These petrified sculptures made a re-appearance inside the Asemic sphere, however this time as the main protagonists of the piece, heaped in masses all over the floor, as is shown in Figure 8. In both installations visitors could join the fate of these solidified avatar sculptures by donning the attire that was provided at both locations, thus increasing the sense of presence, immersion, identification and empathy that both domains called for.

Bök, C., (2006) Aleatory Writing: Notes Toward a Poetics of Chance, Public: Art | Culture | Ideas, Vol 33, pp: 24 - 33.

Parish, N., (2008) Between Text and Image, East and West: Henri Michaux's Signs and Christian Dotremont's 'Logogrammes', RiLUnE, 8, pp. 67-80.

View more images of the sphere and its inhabitants here:  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/alpha\\_auer/sets/72157630435589142/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/alpha_auer/sets/72157630435589142/)

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