

VIRTUAL WORLDS, VIRTUAL REALITY, PLAY AND TEXT

was the only subject that made any headlines with hypoglycemia being a relatively rare condition. Most, however, did together differed from the written one that made hypoglycemia primarily an informational device. What I have chosen to focus is a place *you* can go to find information on hypoglycemia, *not* a place *you* can go to find a cure. The following are some of the *online* share and exposure groups with 1 contributor to all and hypoglycemia as shared authors in the message, leading into a brief case study of a shared meal that is not in the three groups.

[illegible]

In class, students are encouraged to ask questions and to share their own ideas. The teacher often uses the students' questions and ideas to guide the discussion. From this it may follow that one of the most widely understood reasons to say in the history of the American nation is:

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

2.1 From Concrete to Digital

[illegible]

The ways of a musician in the present century are varied in contrast to the old-fashioned, narrow-mindedly traditional paths. Most famous and famous musicians who described the passage as "an artistic search for a new definition of the subject of composition" are among the most famous musicians in the world.

[illegible]

Source of funds: requires that you disclose an effort to conceal all of your funds to the responsible person (spouse, child, etc.)

[illegible]

5555555 55555 555: A (constrained) narrative on the z-axis


VIRTUAL WORLDS, VIRTUAL REALITY, PLAY AND TEXT

Metaverse are three dimensional, collective, online worlds in which all content is user-created. A further name by which these worlds can 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. 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 a self motivated inquiry. 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"*.

In my 7 years in the metaverse I too have generated much content, particularly as a builder of virtual art ecologies, complete with geography and climate; and as a fashion designer for avatars. 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 text and type.



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It was therefore only natural that I would carry my fascination with typography into my metaverse explorations – albeit, embedded into an altogether different format than the intrinsic one that holds typography primarily as an informational device. What I have chosen to do instead is to place type and text as frivolous, oftentimes seemingly 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.

1.1 Virtual Three Dimensionality and Text

Speaking on three dimensionality and text Rita Raley calls for a new type of reading, a 'deep reading' that incorporates an analysis which acknowledges the semantic significance of spatial design; what she calls the *"spatial turn"* of digital writing – an extension of poetic space into the third dimension.

Raley argues that those multi-dimensional works that integrate the z-axis into their repertoire require a fundamental reorientation of spatial perspective and new critical frameworks for their analysis. A fourth type of reading becomes necessary, volumetric reading along the z-axis, *"reading surface to depth and back again. The unit of poetic analysis has shrunk from line to word to letter and now we have need of another unit,"* which she calls *"the three-dimensional projecting plane"*.

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The screen is redefined by the addition of a third dimension which brings to the fore a simulation of depth whereby novel spatio-temporal parameters become possible. On the screen, through the addition of spatial depth, foreground and background relations can be constructed, letters can be superimposed upon others, distance and proximity can be simulated. Writing becomes volumetric: letters can suddenly be viewed from all sides, they can be rotated and turned around their own axis like real objects in space.



A usage of typography for artistic purposes in virtual 3D has its precedents in artworks such as Jeffrey Shaw's 'Legible City' from 1989, 'Screen: Bodily Interaction with Text in Immersive VR' by Carroll and associates from 2003, or 'Cave Writing' by Sascha Becker and her co-authors. The commonality between all of these works is that immersion is achieved through the corporeal body of the viewer who is directly placed inside a physical virtual reality environment such as a CAVE, or other such hardware systems which enable perception that is simulated to very close resemble Real Life interaction with tangible objects.

However, when it comes to screen based viewing in which a three dimensional environment is displayed on a flat surface, working with text has noteworthy issues that are related to legibility: The Virtual Shakespeare Project placed the entire text of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' to be read inside a three dimensional environment that was displayed on a two dimensional screen. As such, the project is possibly one of the most noteworthy experiments conducted in this area, especially when it comes to working with large amounts of text. The project has been written on by one of its collaborators, David Small, who says that *"by escaping the confines of the flat sheet of paper, we can arrange information into meaningful landscapes that exhibit qualities of mystery, continuity, and visual delight"*.

Small has drawn attention to a number of design issues that are the outcome of the fact that traditionally letters have been designed to be viewed directly on a flat two dimensional surface. When it comes to screen-based three dimensionality however, we are faced with the challenge that there are countless numbers of uncontrollable viewpoints, through which a continuous perspective distortion that is less than ideal for reading is created.

Each new angle will result in a differently shaped letter and at extreme angles a sentence can even be reduced to a line. Furthermore, when the camera moves behind the text, what is to be read looks reversed as though seen in a mirror.

A further issue in terms of legibility also addresses size: *“A graphic designer can use size differences to visually distinguish certain elements in a text. In a three dimensional space however, you cannot always resolve the relative size of two objects. If one object appears smaller in the picture plane, it could actually be smaller, or it could be the same size and farther away, or it could even be much larger and very far away. So, in the design of an information space, one must be careful about using size as a differentiating variable”.*

Small's findings lead to the conclusion that attempting to engage in creative activity involving text as informational content in a screen-based three dimensional environment is not an easy option. Equally compelling however is an understanding of the metaverse as a playful environment that resides upon tenets which are closely related to make-belief, indeed to absurdity, to the solving of puzzles. All of these considerations have impelled a need for a textual strategy that may fulfill the demands of 'play,' make room for personal readings and interpretations: Text that is meant to be 'felt' as 'play'/artwork, rather than to be 'read' as informational content. This has led to an examination of concrete poetry, especially as it relates to digital poetry.



2. SHAPE POETRY

Concrete poetry is a literary artifact in which visual attributes are as (if not indeed sometimes more) important as the semantic content delivered in the plain text itself. This prominence is achieved through giving typographical arrangements a major role in conveying the intended effect, often also bypassing the meaning of words. Concerns with space and surface are deemed to be major features of concrete poetry – it is through these that the relationships between linguistic elements and their spatial interactions gain structural and meaningful significance.

The concept is far from new and it was not the concrete poets who were the first to have articulated it, but the Italian Futurists. In 1916 F.T. Marinetti and his comrades foretold the downfall of the book in their manifesto “The Futurist Cinema” from 1916 when they envisaged that *“Filmed Words-In-Freedom in Movement (synoptic tables of lyric values – dramas of humanized or animated letters – orthographic dramas – typographical dramas – geometric dramas – numeric sensibility, etc.)”*.

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According to Rebecca Sharp, concrete poetry by necessity involves a reduction of language. Since emotions and ideas are not physical materials, it is language itself that is dismantled in terms of form, design and function. Significant also is the new relation to space; no longer an impotent backdrop against which text must rigidly stand, the new writing breaks out onto the entire surface of the page, allowing the reader/viewer to form personal patterns and make new, independent inferences. *"In so undermining the security between word and page, concrete poetry also dislocated word from meaning and furthermore, destabilized the traditional relationship between the text and the reader".*

Thus, one of the most significant features of concrete poetry is that in order for meaning to be communicated, the reader must actively engage in the text by deciphering its layout and typography, by interpreting its shapes and spaces, viewing the work as an object and thereby playing an active role in its creation – to acknowledge what Gomringer called the presence of a visio-linguistic “*Eigenwelt*” in which concrete poems are no longer “*about something, but instead are autonomous realities in themselves*”.

2.1 From Concrete to Digital

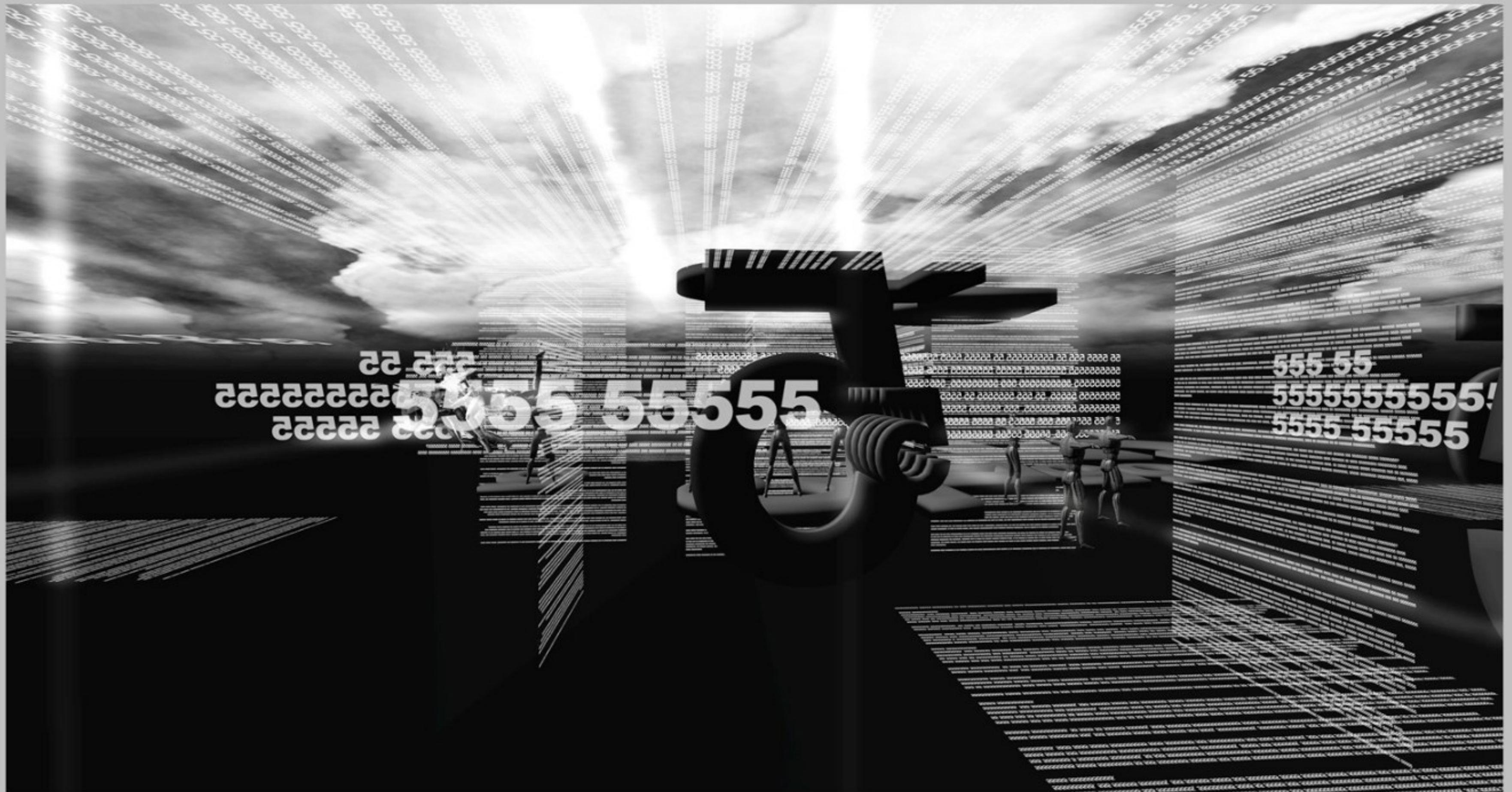
While Gomringer's visio-linguistic 'Eigenwelt' was at the core of the work of pre-digital era concrete poets, the advent of computation added opportunities which were integrated as almost a natural continuation of a tradition that had its origins in neo avant-garde experimentation.

The usage of computers for the generation of poetry came about in the late 1950s in Stuttgart, spearheaded by the concrete poets Max Bense and Eugen Gomringer who described the process as *"aesthetic states of texts, defined by their degree of unexpected, surprising and non-trivial occurrence of words"*.

Digital poetry attempts to exploit the medium to reach an experience through language as a form of life – in the case of digital poetics this also comes about through movement, generation, interactivity whereby digital poets are able to express visually the life-like qualities of words. What is fundamental is that the digital realm offers us the opportunity to conceive of space in different or expanded terms than that of paper-based writing; and, further, this sense of space requires that we come up with a different set of terms for the interpretation of certain digital texts.

The question to ask then, is how we are to anticipate meaning when a poem is based upon a conception of space as a *“multiple, variable, and vibrant,”* plane; one where the literal ground is ever shifting and heterogeneous? Or, put in another way, what if the milieu upon which the poem is built is not, as Brian Rotman puts it, *“an ideal realm, untouched by change, independent of energy and matter, beyond the confines and necessities of space and time,”* but instead materializes as a mathematically determined, artificially fluid space – as an online virtual builder’s world inherently is – in persistent flux, both through the very nature of the frenetic building activity therein; and as importantly, through the further artistic appropriations of consumer-avatars who joyously engage in manipulations of existent artworks, creating self-perpetuating chains of transformative creative activity.

3. CONSTRAINED PLAY: 5555555 55555 555



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The project that provides an example to this discussion came about when artist/curator avatar Giovanna Cerise invited me to contribute to her collaborative Second Life project revolving around numbers. The framework set by Cerise was that participants were asked to pick a number between 0 and 9 and everything that was to be built had to be made out of that single digit.

What was especially appealing about Cerise's brief was the constraint that it placed upon the builder since an easy correspondence for it can be found in **constrained writing**, a technique which binds the writer by some condition that forbids certain things or imposes a pattern.

Oulipo – a French literary group dedicated to the practice – defines the term as *“the seeking of new structures and patterns which may be used by writers in any way they enjoy.”* Constraints, within this context, are used as a means for triggering ideas and inspiration, most notable amongst them being Georges Perec's 'story-making machines/devices,' as well as techniques such as lipograms, palindromes, and restrictions based upon mathematical formulae.



My professional specialization as a graphic designer is layout. Accordingly, the space that I built might be called a three dimensional magazine spread of sorts, complete with body text, subheadings and headlines.

I wondered if text composed of a single glyph would still give a sense of 'content' when placed in such a way, in a logic that followed the typographic hierarchies of a standard page layout.



This hierarchy was achieved by placing the body text on planes and by building the heading and the subheadings as three dimensional 5s that were clustered together to form words, around which the body text walls of the architecture were grouped – very much in the manner that a layout designer arranges elements of text on a page by using techniques such as negative space, clustering, proximity and directional axes. These 'pages' were then set at right angles to each other to form the rooms of a building that could be and inhabited and played in by avatars.



However, the project took on a life of its own after I completed the building, when I started to think about how avatars would behave if they could only talk through a text which was strung out of 5s. What sort of a world would that be? Would a restraint like this provoke a far more visual type of communication since equal-valued strings (equal size, weight, placement, etc) of a single glyph would not suffice to express what one wished to bring across? Would, in other words, concrete poetry emerge out of such a limitation? Would text inevitably become a deconstructed artifact whose visual attributes compensated for its semantic absences if our utterances were to be placed under such a constraint?



To investigate I sent three members of my coterie of avatars into the architecture and situated them in an encounter where their exchanges had to be decipherable (even if what they actually said was not) in order for a tangible storyline to develop.



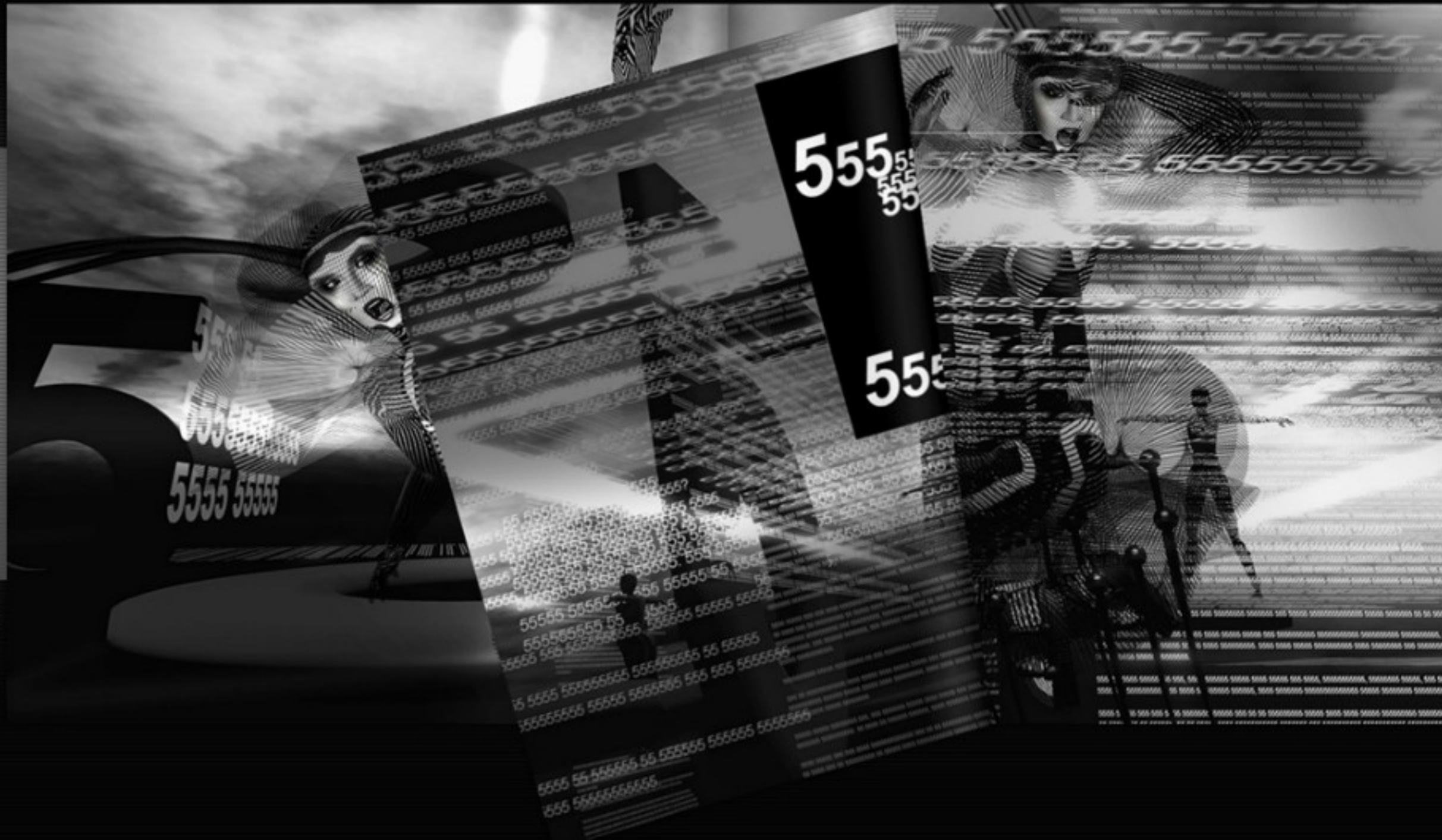
The tale is very simple: A lonesome avatar appropriates a strange world where one can only talk in 5s. But then she gets company – which, at first, she rejects since she does not want to share what she holds to be solely her own. But then she is talked into playing with the incomers. Has a good time. However, just at the height of the fun and games “they” turn around and go. Leaving her bereft.



Although 5555555 55555 555 was initiated as an architecture that could be immersively experienced in a virtual world, it evolved into a project of many parts for which 'frozen moments in time' of the original three dimensional manifestation were taken back to the two dimensional desktop, where they were further manipulated through image editing software as well as other applications:



I took many virtual photographs of this storyline to which I added two dimensional speech bubbles (made out of strings of 5 to resemble words) as a further layer. These textual snippets were deconstructed in such a way that they would express some sort of 'emotion' – to make up for the circumstance that conveying actual 'meaning' was beyond their capabilities.



Out of these typographically enhanced screenshots were made several displays of the tale since an important part of the playful experiment was too see whether I could narrate the same events through different means: A storyboard made with an online infinite grid, a virtual flipbook and a 2.5D application that lets viewers follow the tale through a zooming user interface in which some scant clues regarding the progression of events are also provided.



It has to be acknowledged that my interest in 5555555 55555 555 has transitioned from three dimensionality to the flat surface of the screen, materializing as an ongoing online project – what can be called a simulation of a simulation – viewable through a custom website where its components are still actively being collected at the writing of this text.

4. THE 'CONCRETE' AVATAR

An alluring aspect of all digital output is the surprise moment which very often accompanies the creative process, especially when chance is deployed as a tool to *“transgress the subjective powers of imagination, to go beyond the producer’s limits of comprehension in an attempt to arrive at results which transcend both cultural, psychological and intellectual boundaries.”* This hybrid between poem and play evokes the oft-cited game state that Eugen Gomringer has defined as another important feature of concrete poetry. *“The constellation,”* Gomringer writes, *“is an offer of a fixed set of parameters, within which the reader is asked to take up the ball that the poet threw and to playfully create meaning by combining and relating the given elements in a creative fashion”.*

I would like to reflect upon the circumstance that in 'taking up the ball that the poet threw' in the creative climate of a three dimensional virtual world, it is I, as much as others – if not indeed more so – who becomes a part of the game of chance encounters: This involvement, as both participant and artist, is effectuated through the avatar who is a being that resides outside of us as much as it does within us.

It seems to me that all creative practitioners, regardless of whether they may be operating in a virtual environment where their being is evinced through their avatars or in the physical realm where they act solely through their material bodies, 'play' with their work – both during its production as well as after its completion.

When it comes to concrete poetry this state of play that shapes meaning out of non-semantic artifacts is commented upon by many practitioners of the genre, including Christian Bök who says that this state *“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”*. 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”*.

Through avatars this 'game played in thought' can be taken to surprising dimensions, especially when the game is effected by multiple avatars through which a single human being can manifest in virtual world. In the case of 5555555 55555 555, three such entities of my own devison picked up Gomringer's poetic ball, to rework a simulation into a tale of 'selves' which is based upon constrained writing that is attempted to be playfully thwarted by the machinations of concrete poetry through which feeling (if not meaning) is hoped to be displayed.

Thank you!

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