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## We Are Better Than This: The Metaverse's Impact On The Fashion Industry



BY LIBERTY IMHOFF · FEBRUARY 2, 2022



A metaverse; photo c/o Textile Journey

What is the metaverse?

Even those of us that have been incessantly hearing about – and reading about – this abstract concept for months now still have the same question. No explanation has been imbued with enough clarity as of yet to properly tell us what a “metaverse” is. So, we will try – but even as journalists, Manic Metallic cannot promise that we will be able to give you a comprehensive look at what the metaverse is and why it exists. We can promise, however, that we will sum it up to the best of our ability and give you our best analysis of the impact that it will have on the fashion industry.

The metaverse is seen by Silicon Valley moguls such as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg as the future of the Internet. It is a means of interfacing with our current technology components. The metaverse can be accessed via virtual reality (or VR) – a virtual world – or via augmented reality (or AR) – an augmented world.

To tell the difference between the two, imagine that you put on a headset and peer through it. You see a world that is not real, yet you are able to interact within it until you remove your headset. You are within a virtual reality setting. However, if you either place a pair of glasses on your eyes or peer through your smartphone to access additional layers placed onto what is already present in your current world, you are engaging with augmented reality. To augment one's reality is to remain in one's current setting while adding extra layers to one's physical space.

Within these virtual and/or augmented spaces, one can connect with others by going to the movies, shopping, attending concerts, and even maintaining employment. There's one very key aspect of the metaverse to remember, however:



VR Headset; photo c/o BBC

## None of it is real.

When we speak about the metaverse, we must understand that we are speaking about a world that – despite corporations' best efforts – is not rooted in a tangible reality. We all recognize that the Internet is not real life, yet the tech industry insists to us that the metaverse will bring us all closer together. At a collective moment when many are recognizing the very real threats that face our planet and its inhabitants, corporations are opting to offer us a world in which we can escape reality.

And we will need clothing to engage within that new world. Enter the fashion industry.

The reason that we have been seeing so many fashion- and metaverse-focused articles recently is that the fashion industry senses an opportunity to make money through Silicon Valley's thrusting of the metaverse upon society. If we are told that a concept is inevitably in our future enough times, one supposes, then we will start to believe that is true. Other industries have jumped onto the metaverse train as well, but they are out of our scope. Fashion is not. And to those in our visually-focused industry, we have a lot of questions.



Metaverse; photo c/o Rolling Stone

## What is your true motivation for jumping on the metaverse train?

Do you believe in the creativity and innovation of what the metaverse has the potential to offer? Fashion in the real world is beholden to the whims of both consumers and investors. But then, is it not the same in the metaverse? Perhaps you see the metaverse as a way to express your creative impulses in a way that consumers would accept within a virtual or augmented setting. Humans are oftentimes conservative with their fashion choices in reality, but perhaps in a virtual atmosphere, they would be willing to take more chances with what they use to clothe “themselves” (their avatars). Perhaps investors would be willing to invest more in your brushes with fantasy since consumers might be more willing to purchase fantastical garments if they are not real.

This appears, then, as if underlying the desire to enter the metaverse with one’s fashion designs is a desire to make money. That is always the goal. If it is, just say so. Don’t pretend that you believe in this technology when it is simply a means to a financial end.



Fashion in a landfill; photo c/o The Guardian

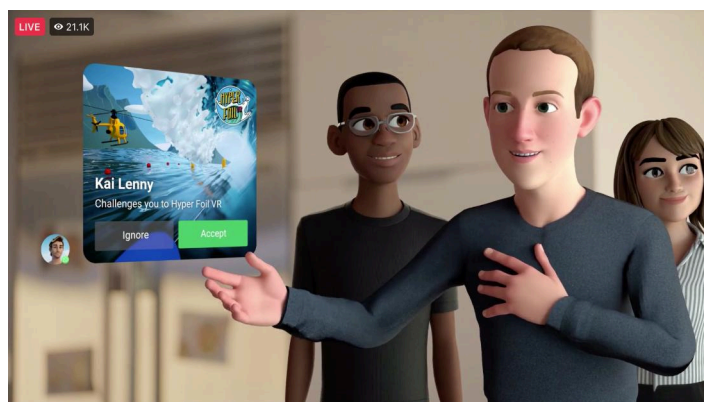
## Are you using the metaverse as a means of escaping the reality of a world that is in dire straits?

We live in a world that faces so many overarching issues that it gives one whiplash thinking about them. Climate change, economic inequality, racism, sustainability failures...we could go on. For example, large portions of Miami, FL risk being underwater by 2050 if action is not taken now. And we have discussed fashion’s sustainability and diversity issues in multiple Manic Metallic articles such as this one and this one. With so many issues that need to be faced in the real world, the temptation is strong to escape into a land where nothing exists except for that which can be conceived of in virtual or augmented form.

The problem with that train of thought is this: the human body will always exist until humans themselves no longer exist. We still physically and mentally exist, in all of our beauty and ugliness, in our love and our hatred, in our creativity and our self-destructive tendencies – we still exist. And so does the world around us. This world that we can touch every day when we awaken from our slumber, our loved ones standing in front of us with whom we can hold hands, the food that we can consume to power both our physical bodies and our minds so that we may continue to exist, and the clothing that we put onto our physical bodies every day so that we may cover ourselves and protect our bodies from any harm that may befall them....these all still exist tangibly. We must protect them with all fibers of our being, or there will not be a physical world left for us in which to exist.

We must not allow the siren calls of monetary success in both virtual and augmented reality to blind us to the very real troubles that face our species.

This next question is a question not just for those of us in fashion, but for everyone reading this piece:



Meta metaverse; photo c/o CNN

## Do we trust that an entity owned by private enterprise will do what is best for the billions of inhabitants of this planet?

When the World Wide Web was released to the public in 1993, it was a free enterprise meant to be used for the public good. With the Metaverse, while many of the platforms are free to join, involvement in many of the endeavors within it will cost money. The early platforms making up the metaverse are owned by Meta, Microsoft, Epic Games and Decentraland, among others.

If companies that stand to make billions of dollars from the metaverse concept are the ones insisting that we all take part in a concept that is not necessarily wanted or needed by wider society, perhaps we should start asking a few questions about the true motivations for the creation of this new means of technology. And while Manic Metallic is by no means anti-tech – in fact, we believe strongly in the promotion of technology’s use for societal advancement – we do believe that any new creation should aim to create a better world. And we are not entirely sure that the metaverse has proven its necessity or utility when we have a physical world that urgently needs our attention in order to ensure its survival.

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By delving further and further into the metaverse while our physical world spirals deeper and deeper into disrepair and destruction, the fashion industry will ultimately prove itself to be just as irrelevant as much of the world sees us as being already. Is that what we want as an industry?