

Film meets future

The metaverse remains an unknown quantity for many, but cinematography is already embracing the next iteration of the internet

INTERVIEW. Robert Shepherd





How can filmmakers leverage the metaverse to create new and innovative forms of interactive content, blurring the lines between fiction and reality?

QUENTIN JORQUERA: In 2017, I worked on a project called *Sergeant James*, a short VR film by director Alexandre Perez. At the time, it was quite bold to do that. The film was ahead of its time, only one year after the Oculus Rift came out, and it was a huge success! Now, Alexandre is working in collaboration with Quantic Dream on the next Star Wars video game... a perfect example of blurring the lines between the video game and film industries. I believe this is what the metaverse is all about. However it isn't much more than a concept for now. We're far away from the oasis and frankly, for having tried a lot of what companies today have to offer and showcase as metaverse, it's all pretty much unusable for anything else but chatting with random people. That being said, VRChat might be the best candidate out there right now for a potential embryo of a metaverse. Of course, it doesn't mean that filmmakers shouldn't dive into the subject: they have an array of tools to use, virtually for free, in order to

ease themselves into the virtual world. Game engines like Unreal Engine are a great example of that. It's all about familiarising yourself today with the tools that will build the metaverse of tomorrow. Obviously, there is no metaverse without VR. Headsets are getting cheaper, more accessible and game engines are daily becoming more VR friendly. It really just takes a bit of will, creativity, curiosity and of course time to create a VR project. From there, your vision can only extend to all the possibilities of these technologies.

PHILIPP WOLF: Imagine stepping into a world where the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred, where you can explore breathtaking landscapes and interact with characters on a deeply personal level. This is the world filmmakers can create in the metaverse, a realm where stories come alive. They can craft immersive environments that react to users' actions, weaving social interaction into the fabric of the story. The result is a groundbreaking, dynamic form of entertainment with the potential to bring together diverse voices and create a truly inclusive experience.

How could the metaverse be used to create completely new genres of films, ordinarily impossible to achieve through traditional filmmaking techniques?

QJ: The metaverse doesn't just mean a change in audience perception of your work because of VR goggles. With the right tools, you can make a traditional film meant for flat screening, but shot entirely inside the engine, using the platform as a live collaborative system. You can also create a live film outside of the engine, shot in volumetric capture, and allow your spectators to walk around the scenes, helping find clues to solve your murder mystery plot, for example. The metaverse means interactivity, remoteness, scale (you could have an almost unlimited number of participants), the potential of doing everything live and, by essence, a cross between two worlds – the virtual and real world. This frontier can be tampered with by bringing the real world inside the metaverse and vice versa. Imagine at any time while watching a film, being able to extract yourself from the camera's POV to walk around the film set and learn about the craft of how the scene was made. We could also use it to facilitate remote work in the film industry – a director could be working on a set miles away, while the crew and cast could

THE INTERVIEWEES



QUENTIN JORQUERA

Director of photography & virtual production consultant
Freelance

Quentin Jorquera is an experienced DOP and VP consultant, born in France to a family of Spaniards and Italians. He grew up in the South Pacific – between New Caledonia and Vanuatu – and trained in Paris, through both a classical artistic education and film school. Currently operating between the UK and France, he has worked on high-profile projects such as *House of the Dragon* and *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*.



PHILIPP WOLF

Executive-in-charge, corporate strategy
DNEG

Philipp Wolf, executive-in-charge, corporate strategy at DNEG, Montreal. Credits include *Dune* and *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*. As a VFX producer, he's collaborated with Guy Ritchie and David Yates. Wolf is a member of VES board of directors, and co-chair of VES Health & Wellbeing and the Animation and VFX Committee, Producers Guild of America. Wolf initially gained recognition by a VES award nomination.



see, hear and interact with him through AR goggles...

New genres will arise from these new interactive, collaborative tools because more people from different cultures and backgrounds will be able to collaborate on projects. But storytelling has always been about the same things since the dawn of time – human grandeur and decadence.

PW: Picture a film immersing you in a vibrant, ever-changing dreamscape, where you can communicate telepathically with other characters or even manipulate elements around you. The metaverse empowers filmmakers to create such experiences, transcending limitations of traditional filmmaking and giving birth to entirely new genres. With interactive narratives, multi-linear stories and a fusion of gaming, animation and live performance, artists can explore themes and subject matter previously unimaginable in traditional film. Moreover, filmmakers can experiment with the metaverse’s ability to simulate unique sensory experiences, such as synaesthesia (senses blending, like tasting colours or hearing shapes) or telepathy, further expanding the creative possibilities of storytelling.

Will the emergence of the metaverse bring about a new era of collaboration between filmmakers, game developers and other creatives?

QJ: By definition, the metaverse is being built on foundations from the game industry. So yes, there will be more

interactivity and collaboration between the two worlds. It’s already well engaged thanks to virtual production. But for now, the collaborations are more technical than artistic, tools and workflows are being shared, but only too few artistic ideas. I would like to see more video game storytellers participate in the film industry and cinematographers working on video games. The metaverse could be a collaborative tool, but also a place to enjoy the final products, watching films, playing video games (I would love to be able to play a good old flat

screen video game from my couch with my friends living abroad, just like they were next to me), seeing exhibits together and attend life events or lectures from a distance... A collaborative sandbox with the proper tools will obviously bring on new collaborations. Soon enough, our kids will be making short films inside the metaverse with their friends from all around the world. I hope the metaverse will bring on more of these creative collaborations, once again, blending the frontiers between industries, between reality and digital...

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PW: Absolutely! This collaborative future is on the horizon with the metaverse, a shared space where diverse creative minds unite to push the boundaries of their respective fields. By pooling their unique talents, these teams will shape the metaverse into a playground where engaging stories and mesmerising worlds unfold. This new era of collaboration will not only break down barriers between different creative fields, but also redefine the way we think about entertainment.

What role will VR technology play in shaping the future of cinematography in the metaverse?

QJ: VR technology is a key element in bringing cinematography into the metaverse. The tools of cinematographic work used inside VR are already being developed once again thanks to the virtual production industry. Today, it's possible to use VR to scout virtual

environments, shoot with a virtual camera and by extension, make an entire cinematographic project inside the engine. VR hardware needs to keep evolving, bring higher definition and pixel density, greater frequencies and better lensing systems to become fully usable for cinematography. Tomorrow, we might be able to scout real locations live in VR, attend production meetings, shoot previs and even the real thing itself. VR tech is your gateway to the metaverse, without it, Second Life will be the closest thing we'll have to a metaverse...

PW: VR will play a significant role in shaping the future of cinematography in the metaverse. Filmmakers can craft breathtaking visuals with 360° camera angles and first-person perspectives, transporting viewers into the heart of the narrative. It will inspire new storytelling

structures, such as branching storylines and shared experiences that could not be achieved with traditional filmmaking techniques. As technology evolves, it will be crucial to prioritize accessibility, ensuring all people can experience the wonders of the metaverse.

What are the potential advantages and challenges of creating immersive storytelling experiences in the metaverse for filmmaking?

QJ: Metaverse filmmaking is going to bring accessibility, scalability and visibility. Not only will people be able to work together easily, with minimum cost – either entirely inside the virtual world or between two worlds – it will also allow them to share work instantly, create film festivals, learn new skills faster and iterate work on the spot. Realistically, we are far from having tools that will allow for such an ideal vision to come true. VR headsets are clunky, about 40 to 70% of users experience motion sickness according to *VR Today* and there is not one platform which has been able to create a convincing and democratised metaverse concept yet. The metaverse will be open source, cross-platform, iterative, easily accessible and collaborative in its core and engine, or it will never last.

PW: The fascinating part of the metaverse lies in its potential to revolutionise storytelling, offering unparalleled audience engagement and opening doors to groundbreaking narratives. Filmmakers can collaborate with diverse creative teams, weaving together talents to create deeply immersive experiences. However, the road to harnessing the metaverse's potential is not without its challenges. Technological complexity and ethical concerns are obstacles filmmakers must navigate, striving to balance the extraordinary benefits. By fostering an environment of collaboration and shared learning, the metaverse can become a space where filmmakers and other creatives can overcome those challenges and collectively push the boundaries of storytelling. ●