



Goodbye, Metaverse. Hello, Real World!



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AI. AI. ChatGPT. It's all over the news. But what's really going on with all this talk of digital assistants and digital realities? What's the big deal? Let's explore how AI is changing the way we interact with the world, how it can help us make IT invisible, and why the future of computing may be more analog than we think.

Immersive virtual worlds where people interact with each other using virtual-reality headsets, haptic gloves, and motion-tracking suits have been a staple of science fiction for decades. The Metaverse, as it is often called, is a place where people can be anyone they want to be, where they

can do anything they want to do. "Ready Player One" is set in the Metaverse, as is "The Matrix." Well, in a way. In the past few years, there has been a lot of talk about the Metaverse becoming a reality. Large industry players have been investing billions of dollars in virtual-reality technology, and there are now a number of high-quality VR headsets on the market. But the Metaverse as "the new internet for everyone" is not becoming a reality. At least, not yet. If you've read the news lately, you will have seen that update, too. The technology may help us to be more productive at work, but that is a different story.

It's great to come to the office every day. The spontaneous coffee chats, the team lunches, the serendipitous encounters in the hallways, the productive brainstorming sessions. Of course, working for a global company also means that you need to find effective ways to figure out how to involve everyone in the decision-making process and build relationships, regardless of location. This can be done in a number of ways, and the pandemic years have shown us ways to achieve this that we might not have thought possible before. But still, nothing beats face-to-face interactions when it comes to building trust and relationships. Nothing beats the real world.

I've recently **published a book**, and while you will find it on the Kindle store, I just love the feeling of holding the actual physical book in my hands, turning the pages, dog-earing, highlighting, and taking notes. Some of the logical errors I only noticed when reading the book a second time in physical form, where on the screen it would look perfectly

fine. I loved every moment of designing the reading experience, from typography, to layout, to cover design. Ok, enough about books, you get the idea. Your company or your project gets featured on the newspaper, you take a photo of the printed copy and you post it on social media. A link to the article on a website is just not the same. Have you seen all those photos people post of Times Square in New York City when their company goes IPO?

Now, I'm not saying that we should all go back to the way things were before the pandemic and stop using all the great tools that we've been using to stay connected. But I am saying that we should not forget the value of the real world and the importance of face-to-face interactions. We're physical beings, and we need to interact with the physical world to be productive, to be creative, and to be happy.

What roles are computing and AI playing in all this? In my book "**Bedtime Stories from an AI**," I explore how artificial intelligence is changing the way we interact with the world. I believe that AI will change the way we live, work, and create in ways that we cannot even imagine today. But instead of AI replacing humans or leading to a dystopian future, the key is using AI to augment our capabilities, boost our creativity, and make IT invisible. Consider the way we use search engines. We don't need to know how they work, we just need to know what we want to find. We type in a few keywords, and the search engine does the rest. We don't need to worry about the underlying algorithms or the massive data sets that the search engine is indexing. We just need to know what we want to find.

In the same way, I believe that AI will become increasingly invisible, augmenting our own abilities and becoming a part of the fabric of the world around us. We engage with computing using natural language, and we interact with these systems using our voice, text, and gestures. Instead of an increasing number of apps and gadgets, we may just use a few ones that we are familiar and comfortable with. The terms "computing" and "AI" even may become obsolete, as we just use the tools that are available to us to get things done, without thinking about the underlying technology.

Some of the world's best known technologists want to explore space, fly to Mars, and build houses on the moon. Others want to go disappear in the Metaverse. I want to stay here, on Earth. We must solve those challenging problems we face as a global society today without escaping to other worlds, real or virtual. AI and computing can help us do that, but it all starts with us, here, right now.

This article, quite obviously, reflects my personal opinion – and that one only.