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THE Metaverse

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Did we escape a boring virtual world?
Yes, we did - thanks to inspired entrepreneurs and artists.



Article by [p_zen](#) and [alani_r](#)

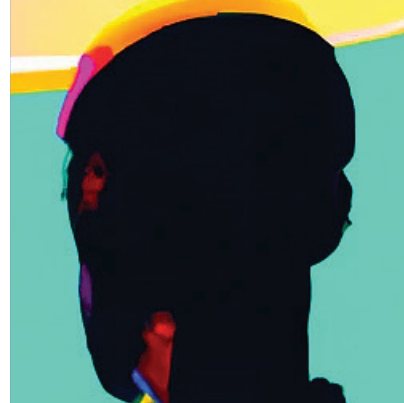
Are you late in joining the Metaverse in 2030?

Metaverse, Metahype, Metafun - maybe all three - or even none? As of 2022, there were three billion gamers in the world. Of these, the gaming platform Roblox had nearly 55 million average daily users. Some gamers wanted to help solve real-world challenges, and a game developer became a well-known futurist for addressing challenges with a global impact. However, instead of focusing on the whole picture, these initiatives concentrated on existential risks, and remained 'boringly' focused on climate change, financial crises and other issues.

Then, when Facebook rebranded as part of Meta Platforms Inc. in October 2021, it made clear that we would henceforth need to live with 'metaverse'. Stemming from the 1992 novel 'Snow Crash' by Neal

Stephenson, where the Metaverse was an urban virtual environment with avatars as inhabitants, it was then praised as the successor to the Internet. Like an overarching architecture concept with subverses, the Metaverse was implemented on several competing or co-existing private / business platforms.

The XR (the combination between Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality) Metaverse community was involving fascinating people, leading to collective intelligence, and triggering the collective imagination. Millions of users entered a virtual world for playing, employment, and relationship-making: the online world was a 'reality'.



How we were involved in the Metaverse narrative

Eight years ago, in 2022, nobody really knew what the Metaverse would be like. People said that the Metaverse was the next iteration towards an immersive experience of the internet. Already then, the gaming sector was larger than the movie and music sector, with more than three billion users. Web3 contributed to the Metaverse by espousing decentralisation and interoperability, and a full version of the Metaverse was developed to encompass daily activities such as socialising, commerce, fitness, and learning. Naturally the online existence drove some reduction of physically shared experience, and public space lost some functions.

The offline world was almost entirely based on local life, with trash and waste banned forever. A global monetary dislocation occurred, and intellectual property rights died by themselves. Space cooperation proved to be a new model, and a new logic of competition spread out everywhere in various ecosystems. Self-management gained even more importance, and work/life balance became part of general wellbeing. People did not travel as much, simply because the virtual world had become a complement to real life, with the creation of entire new virtual cities.

Artists became creative explorers for the future Metaverse, which also challenged some features of humans as multisensorial interbeings. The neurons in our brain, as well as all over the body, were able to integrate additional representations of digital worlds alongside our physical world. Space and time shrunk through various beta concepts of teleportation. Over the years, incorporated hybrid functioning became part of humans.



Mark Zuckerberg was not our style of hero, which rather favours communities of inspired business people and artists - even if he claimed that his Metaverse was about "helping people experience a much stronger sense of presence with the people they care about, the people they work with, and the places they want to be". Right there, we said goodbye to the Facebook/Meta monoculture, and engaged in a new way of looking at life, business and Metaverse(!)s.

Beautiful, boring or challenging Metaverse?

Imagine the Metaverse became something other than an extension of the American and Chinese mass market culture. Opening up the connection of physical and virtual worlds to create new spaces for overlapping private and business contexts? What if the Metaverse contributed something to us as biological humans, sometimes out of contemplation or boredom?

Or, if the Metaverse accelerated the ongoing shift from static individualism towards dynamic communitarianism, as a new version of tribal culture - interweaving culture, environment, and wellbeing. Could this have led to the proliferation of communities following fractal patterns, some of them crystallising at a higher level of consciousness? Imagine conversations hosted by avatar communities of practice having a critical impact on what was happening in the world. What if these conversations contributed towards shifting our global energy and consciousness from simply searching on the Internet to deep immersive presence and relationships?

Or to imagine that the immersive experienceable character of the Metaverse had a critical impact on education, and on the health and environment sectors? How did digital technologies, and in particular AI, modify our connection to the non-human world, and helped us in changing our autocentric and patriarchal world view?

Suppose that such experiences helped us to rethink beyond reflexivity our relations to other humans, other beings and matter. The Metaverse did not narrow our perceptions and self-reflexivity. Could you have imagined that the world of poesis as creative self-realisation opened to us the world of our feelings, our social bonds, and everything that we meaningfully experience as a path from Enlightenment towards 'Enlivenment'?

What if a new philosophical thought were to appear, linked to the emergence of human digital twins? Or a spectrum of collective fears of 'no-communities' spaces created by the Big Platforms in a context where nation-states are losing their substance? And these no-rules spaces would rather be co-created by on-the-ground, innumerable, and fractal initiatives in a fragmented world?

**Meta is what we wanted,
not what was proposed**

Most of us did not want the Metaverse to become a world in itself, parallel to the 'real' world, going backwards towards social isolation and weakening ethical or ontological agency. We were able to cope with increasing political and ontological fakery, surveillance and politically-influenced capitalism. Scattered attention, mindless browsing and states of disembodiment - perceiving others in 'bits and pieces' - induced by many digital environments, were not an inescapable destiny.

M-fluid Entrepreneurs

Enlightened entrepreneurs, who were totally different from the big platform thinkers, were the architects for the Metaverse. They developed effective antennas in a fragmented world in which big companies started to scale down. They took the Metaverse paradigm as an opportunity to update the concept of strategic industries and self-sufficiency. Beyond a pure data economy perspective, business ideas were more linked to creative commons and communities of practice rather than maximisation of profit.

The concept of 'warm data', which is contextual and relational information about complex systems, complemented 'cold data' linked to a linear approach only. Employee wellbeing, education and engaging 'brains instead of brawn' became the new workplace imperative, and a substantial value of the Metaverse applications lay in the entrepreneurial context.

Uniqueness of people and place became a key factor for interrelating with the Metaverse – community by community, bioregion by bioregion. Fluid entrepreneurs became connected among themselves, re-enacted the concept of digital tribes and pan-connected nomadism, building on self-management and empathy. Regeneration flourished, and even side-lined sustainability.

Beyond the mania for XR headsets, 6G and quantum connectivity, and virtual assets/digital wallets, the new Metaverse business approach included the orchestration of various ecosystems, including the workforce, functioning in a fluid, organic (biological), unpredictable way where humans are no longer viewed as 'consuming' consumers, but responsible and committed citizens forming part of complex societies. experience between offline and online world, as the future was mixed reality,



alain_ruche Alain Ruche's pitch has always been to look at things from another angle - the angle of complexity. Connecting the dots for sense-making and emerging insights to nurture action. He was a radical thinker and experimenter during his 30-year professional career, which spans four continents, and which does not stop there. For him, we are in a moment of radical possibility, where inspired businesses have a critical role to play. So, too, have the artists, and the time is ripe for powerful questions. What would it be like if it were easy?

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The Metaverse happened at the intersection of five fields of activity and technology, where fluid entrepreneurs in particular became active, and demonstrated their competence in order to:

This role of entrepreneurs also had a critical impact on the traditional characteristics of leadership, often reduced to personal attributes obsessed with optimisation. Empathy, compassion and societal connections



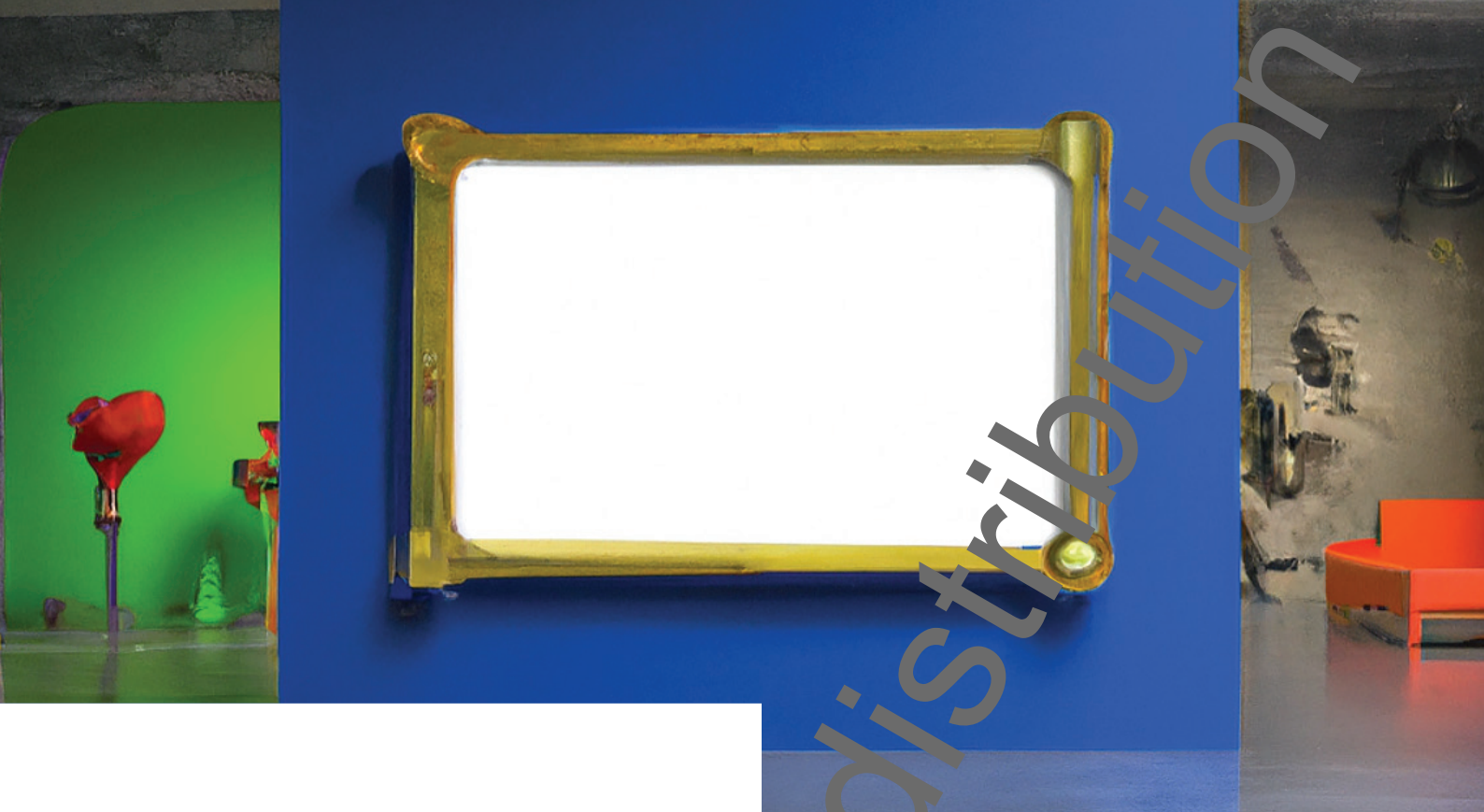
- provide a well-designed interface and user experience between offline and online world, as the future was mixed reality,
- fulfil the expectation of hundreds of millions of active users to share and get / obtain an emotional and empathic delivery of content and services,
- be resourceful in the light of environmental challenges that, even through fusion and solar energies, power consumption for Web3/virtual assets needs to be considered seriously,
- provide a multi-sensory experience for humans in connected hybrid world, in the context of a hybrid competition at the physical-digital intersection,
- consider in a larger perspective a world-wide population of billions of people in addition to other non-human beings such as robots, animals and plants.

changed the DNA of leadership thinking, giving it a collective and fluid dimension. This created a fertile ground to reduce inequalities, which was among the hottest issues on Earth.

For entrepreneurs, the Metaverse was the realm of experimentation, drawing inspiration from out-of-this-world, science-fiction for coping with real-world and existential challenges. **As** the permanent and overall deterioration of 'trust' had become society's default emotion, fluid entrepreneurs made a gradual leap forward - the Metaverse business became the most trusted institution ahead of NGOs, government and media, which made the prevalent false binary 'business vs politics' outdated.

p_zen aka Peter Friess is an independent, yet connected, human in offline and online worlds. He never gets bored of his interests in artificial intelligence, nano- and biotechnologies, systems theory, humanities, transhumanism, space exploration and ecology. Being both an artist and researcher, his focus is an emotional and aesthetically accessible representation of humanity's existence and non-binary evolution.

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Critical role of Artists as architects for the Metaverse

Artists were the other architects of the Metaverse, despite the fact that, for years, leaders had remained unaware of how artists were key in making sense of the unfolding future. Not only in terms of coming up with meaningful proposals, but also to avoid tasteless ones such as pointless VR landscapes, kitschy animations or questionable games. Whereas in the real world, creation was impacted by many constraints such as physical conditions or regulation by governments, the Metaverse appeared as a space of realm with infinite configuration options.

The artists triggered conversations on what was to be done, thus shaping what it is possible to do. They did the

job first-hand in an experimental approach as, over the past twenty centuries, they had been the creators of rich aesthetic worlds in Western and Eastern worlds. They created verses, poems and novels, and made beautiful proposals about bodies and humans moving and dancing in space. Their imagination was connected to a 'meta-world', drawing inspiration from the non-visible or untouchable. Artists also helped to end a growing disconnection with nature, a diminished use of the senses, and higher rates of emotional and physical illness.

While the Metaverse was opening new opportunities for creators and users to engage and experience, the Web3-enabled advancing these opportunities. Web3 heralded a new, decentralised ecosystem including all kinds of blockchains, in which users began to own, monetise, and utilise their data for their own benefit, and creators can monetise their content and talents in different ways.

Besides that, the artists introduced a decision filter for companies' involvement in the Metaverse to augment and elevate human experience so as to:

- build a people-first experience, always considering the needs of people; and to shift from social to societal, emphasising relationships between people, places, and brands,
- ensure people are not disconnected from physical reality,
- make accessibility and inclusivity a feature, and
- reduce the physical and mental friction to ensure we engage with each other in a more human way across worlds.

Artists promoted safe spaces and intuitive world views rather than a modernist aka logical and rational one. They pushed towards organic patterns and acceptance of transience and imperfection.

In the Metaverse, the artists expanded the sense of possibility, making us see that what is not there matters as much as what is there. They helped us in looking at organic design, inviting us into the blurred areas of the unknown. We started to become comfortable with ambiguity and 'beauty' became a dynamic, perfectly imperfect event occurring between us and other beings and things.

Dancing with the flow

Far away from ancient Greek, when 'Metaphysics' meant 'the science of what is beyond the physical', 'Meta' was later extended to other contexts as an understanding of 'beyond'. Later again, when artists and fluid entrepreneurs stepped in, the Metaverse started to allow free movement between virtual and physical worlds, expanding our range of experiences.

We were good at finding our way in complex and messy worlds. 'Virtuality' had become a 'Reality' and new time horizons had extended our appreciation of existence. In the end, the Metaverse had much to do with harnessing the necessary wisdom and spirituality to find our way in our complex world. We just needed to package it in a way that connects us with all.

