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iPhone? My Dad Used to Have One! Welcome to the Post-Screen Era

Innovation

Simone Puorto
Founder | CEO | Futurist

Synopsis
In "Why the Metaverse won't be like Snow Crash," the author explores the cultural and linguistic influence on the perception of technological innovations, using Apple's Vision Pro as an example. The piece argues that societal reactions to technology are heavily influenced by the language used to describe it. By renaming the term "metaverse" to "spatial computing," Apple aims to reshape the narrative around immersive digital experiences, distancing from dystopian connotations and proposing a new, neutral, and optimistic perception. The author examines both the merits and potential downsides of the Vision Pro, highlighting its superior performance, user-friendly design, and potential to redefine the human-computer interface, yet expressing concerns about its size, limited battery life, and high price tag. The piece concludes with a prediction of Vision Pro being a stepping stone towards a future where XR devices become an integral part of our everyday lives, reshaping our interaction with technology.

The words we choose to describe the world around us shape our perception of reality, influencing how we embrace or reject ideas, beliefs and -of course- innovations. In this context, Apple's **Vision Pro** offers a refreshing (and long-due, if you want my personal opinion) departure from the dystopian overtones associated with the term *"metaverse."*

If you're familiar with the latter, you may also know that it originated from a sci-fi novel, evoking connotations of an oppressive and surveilled society, akin to Orwell's 1984. Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the most influential philosophers of all times, offers an insightful perspective on language, viewing it as a means of creating a representation of reality. He contends that most problems, prejudices and biases often arise from communication misunderstandings from a flawed or ambiguous representation of reality.

Linguist Edward Sapir supports this thesis, asserting that **humans are not simply passive observers of the objective world**. Instead, they are profoundly influenced by the language that serves as the medium of expression for our society. In a nutshell: **if we hate the Metaverse so much, it may be due to its linguistic connotations rather than its technological ones.**

Here is where Apple's Vision Pro boldly shifts the narrative from a Big-Brothery-*metaverse* to the more encompassing, neutral, and forward-looking ***"spatial computing."*** Rather than succumbing to Meta's juvenile narrative (the central character of Snow Crash is the quintessential cyberpunk cliché: a skateboarder-hacker-drug-pushing-pizza-delivery boy) and by creating a new term, Apple does what they do best, create a new market with new definitions, redefining our perception of immersive digital experiences.

Well - semantically, at least.

WHY THE METAVERSE WON'T BE LIKE SNOW CRASH

Ridley Scott's iconic *"1984"* Super Bowl commercial concluded with a scrolling black text that declared: *"On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."* Fast-forward to today and we can rephrase that to: ***"On June 5th, Apple Computer will introduce Vision Pro. And you'll see why the Metaverse won't be like Snow Crash."*** 1984 saw IBM portrayed as the Orwellian company in Apple's narrative, while in 2023, **Meta** holds the villain mantle (even though they are not even half the size of Apple). As the great Mark Twain once observed, *"History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme."*

Once again, Apple finds itself at the forefront of technological innovation, determined to shape a future that redefines not only extended reality, but -*de facto- the* human-to-computer interface, transcending the cheesy pitfalls of a pulp-magazine-kind-of-narrative. Spatial computing is not limited to changing how we interact with videogames and social networks, but also aims to transform our perception of the world around us. This device may not merely be a headset, but rather a paradigm shift in how we perceive and engage with reality.

In an illuminating conversation I had with a friend a few days ago, he made an argument that the term *"smartphone"* has become obsolete. According to him, the functionalities and uses of modern devices extend so far beyond mere phone calls to the point that using the word “phone” in the name is a *reductio ad absurdum*. When we reflect on our own phone usage statistics, we realize that making or receiving calls constitutes a very small minority of our overall interaction with these devices.

I think that this realization lays the groundwork for understanding the profound significance of Apple Vision Pro—a leap forward into a future where spatial computing reshapes our perception of technology. Think of when the first iPhone was introduced, and we had no idea that we would end up spending more time watching mukbang videos (if you don’t know what I’m talking about, don’t Google it…) on TikTok than sending 160-character SMS messages to our friends.

Similarly, we can only perceive a fraction of the possible future applications, use cases, and positioning pivots that Vision Pro will take. And this is another IDK moment for me: the (obvious) lack of a killer app during the Vision Pro presentation may not be such a bad thing after all, let's not forget that this was a developer conference.

THE YEAHS:

- One of the remarkable aspects of the Vision Pro is its superior performance. Users that tried the device report close-to-zero-latency, with the visuals exhibiting "retina" quality, devoid of visible pixels, creating an immersive experience that doesn't feel like peering into screens but rather interacting with the real world.
- Vision Pro’s integrated eye-tracking technology, allowing users to interact with the interface by simply directing their gaze. Interface elements respond to eye movements, enlarging icons and options and even opening apps with a simple finger tap. For marketers, this opens a whole new set of opportunities in terms of data tracking, making it some kind of heatmaps on steroids.
- One of Apple's core strengths lies its commitment to creating user-friendly products. The company has a history of transforming industries by reimagining how we interact with technology, and this focus on ease of use can potentially overcome one of XR technology's primary challenges: complexity.

- Forget about Quest's cheap plastic; being an Apple product, it adheres to their familiar design language: brushed aluminum, shiny glass, and soft fabrics. quite evident that they have out-engineered, out-designed, and outspent every XR headset company around. Vision Pro goes beyond being a mere accessory; it functions as a full-fledged MacBook. It does not just integrate with your laptop or phone but rather it might replace the necessity for such devices entirely.

THE NEAHS:

- Lack of corresponding entry-level equivalent device. Apple has chosen to launch the headset as "pro" device without a corresponding entry-level equivalent. This decision may underscore Apple's commitment to delivering a premium experience and emphasizes the significance of the Vision Pro in shaping the future of technology, but it can be a significant deterrent.
- The size remains a significant barrier to mass adoption. I can live with the 80's-Alberto-Tomba-ski-mask design, don't get me wrong. The hardware itself is undeniably impressive, boasting 24 million pixels across the dual panels, far surpassing most headsets. Additionally, the combination of the R1 chip alongside the M2 chip results in a remarkable system-wide polling rate of 12ms. The real-time 4K passthrough view of the actual world adds to its appeal. However, considering how people were reluctant to be seen wearing Google Glasses back in 2014 (or even RayBan Stories more recently), I have serious doubts about the widespread usage of Vision Pro outside, where true XR travel experiences occur. While the price may not deter die-hard Apple fanboys, unless the device is significantly reduced in size (ideally to one-third of its current dimensions), I don't envision it achieving mass adoption.
- The limited on-device battery power of Vision Pro, which lasts for approximately 2 hours, poses a significant challenge. Considering its potential to kill the monitor and smart TV market (which, in my opinion, it undoubtedly will), this becomes a notable drawback. Imagine wanting to rewatch the Lord of the Rings trilogy on Vision Pro—such an immersive experience would require a substantial number of external power banks (or wall outlets) to sustain the device throughout the extended viewing duration.
- The concept of a functional digital avatar created solely from a direct facial scan taken by the device feels a bit too reminiscent of the Black Mirror series, even from my tech-enthusiast perspective.

... AND THE IDK

- Sure, Vision Pro comes with a price tag of 11 Meta Quest II, positioning it as a high-end headset. However, this is in the same price range as HoloLens 2. Moreover, Vision Pro's value might not lie (at least in the immediate future) in mass consumer adoption but rather in its ability to facilitate new use cases and applications, not unlike the iPad Pro, which found its niche among individuals and enterprises.

CONCLUSION

Vision Pro, not unlike the iPhone, can be the device we didn't know we needed, with some claiming it may be the most advanced tech product ever created. This might be an overstatement, but the device will likely serve as a stepping stone toward future XR devices that Apple will continue to refine and develop. The scanning and volumetric capabilities of the Vision Pro, coupled with spatial video and images, can potentially revolutionize entertainment and communication - and, by association, travel. As usual, the device represents Apple's relentless pursuit of excellence in execution rather than invention, building upon existing technologies but refining them to perfection.

This may be an important catalyst for broader adoption and acceptance of augmented reality experiences. Imran Chaudhri, Apple's former Director of Design and co-founder of Hu.Ma.Ne, expresses a different perspective regarding XR devices. According to Chaudhri, all the Quests, HoloLens, and Vision Pros out there simply relocate the screens we already have closer to our eyeballs, representing a shift in proximity but not necessarily in usage. Maybe. One thing is certain: when my three-year-old child is in his teens, he will look at iPhones in the same way I look at rotary dial phones—as outdated relics from a long-forgotten, romantic time.

Simone Puorto — Founder | CEO | Futurist
Simone Puorto is a journalist specializing in tech, keynote speaker, podcaster, consultant, published author of four best sellers on marketing, writer for the main industry blogs, Metaverse Ambassador, and co-organizer of the first-ever travel and hospitality event in the metaverse (#HNmetameetup), crypto evangelist, MBA lecturer for schools such as ESSEC and Les Roches, Advisory Board Member for BWG Strategy, founder of the Travel Singularity consulting firm, CMO for TelltheHotel and E23 Delivery, and active member of the Italian transhumanist association. During his 25-year-career, he was General Manager for a boutique hotel chain and VP of Global Accounts for a French-American web agency. He has advised many hotel groups worldwide, helped to consolidate one of the leading Italian hotel chains, and acted as an advisor for countless startups. He defines himself as a "Renaissance Futurist" and lives and works between Rome and Paris.

Travel Singularity — travelsingularity.com
Travel Singularity is a consultancy firm for hotels and travel technology providers whose vision is to solve the growing need for connecting the dots between digital disruption and existing technology. Founded in 2017 as a partnership of educational consultants, the firm actively supports cooperation between biological and artificial staff and advocates for an open, collaborative, hyper-connected industry where humans can flourish and innovate, free from the repetitive tasks they are now obliged to perform daily. Its founder, Simone Puorto, is a journalist specializing in tech, keynote speaker, podcaster, consultant, published author of four best sellers on marketing, writer for the main industry blogs, Metaverse Ambassador, co-organizer of the first-ever travel and hospitality event in the metaverse (#HNmetameetup), crypto evangelist, MBA lecturer and CMO for TelltheHotel and E23 Delivery. He often refers to himself as a "Renaissance Futurist," supporting post-human, anti-speciesists, and transhumanist values. Over his career, spanning over 20 years, he consulted for hundreds of international hotel groups, travel tech vendors, and startups.