The Placement Diaries: Week 37 - Notes on the Metaverse

27th May 2022

It's almost the end, and I don't know how I feel about it, because on one hand, I'll be glad it's over, but on the other hand, I'll be upset that it's over at the same time, since this year has gone by really quick. Of course, this week involved another trip to the Hub, where I attended a fairly informal talk about the metaverse, and what it's all about, especially since the metaverse is all the rage at the moment, so for now, I'll add in my two cents and opinions about that.

On one hand, I find the idea of a metaverse really cool, and whilst this isn't a new thing (as companies would like you to think), it feels new at the same time, especially now that it's starting to gain some mainstream adoption, which to me, is both a good and a bad thing at the same time. It's cool that we're collectively starting to look towards the future, and using what we can in order to innovate forward, by doing things that we could have only dreamed of previously. However, I also fear everything that's going to come out of this, especially with companies such as Meta already colonising that emerging space, with those companies being so big that there's literally no room for any competition at all; they're so big, it's impossible to compete with them.

I already know the damage that Meta (previously known as Facebook) has already done, and I know how their version of the metaverse is going to end. As a company, they've already colonised the internet, to the point where Facebook (and all its children) is now unavoidable and inescapable. Even if you don't even have an account, they'll still track you in mysterious ways, mainly through using cookies and trackers which you have no choice, but to accept in order to be able to use anything, all in the name of being served targeted ads, not to mention that the social media platforms themselves are highly addictive, and designed in a way to keep you on there for longer.

If the current state of the internet is already highly addictive and immersive, Meta's idea of the metaverse will only amplify that, to the point where everyone will have no choice, but come to believe that the metaverse is reality, when it clearly isn't. Everyone will be controlled in new and different ways, only now, it will literally interfere with reality, and soon enough, it will be nothing but a mandatory video game with none of the fun that video games have, since it'll end up being a place where everyone's on there, jumping on to the bandwagon since they have no other choice, not to mention the sheer amount of carbon emissions this will cause, and the amount of energy this will consume, in order to power the whole world in a new, but unnecessary and expensive way, where those who can afford it will benefit from it, essentially becoming leaders of the

metaverse, whereas everyone else will have to miss out, since they won't be able to take part. Where would this leave everyone? Also, is it worth it to destroy the current planet in order to favour a dull and fictional, but overwhelmingly dystopian one instead, especially given that NFTs are a key part of the metaverse?

I'm aware that I sound like the tin foil hat wearing conspiracy theorist luddite future town crier, but it's good to raise these issues as early as possible, to make everyone aware of the consequences before it's too late, to nip this in the bud before it inevitably spirals out of control. I already know that the damage has been done with social media and the internet thus far, but I have a feeling that Web3 (as this new hyper capitalist iteration of the internet is called, and one that all the money and power hungry folks want, regardless of whether it has any implications) will end up doing more harm than good in the long run, to the point where the next iteration after this will simply involve disconnecting from everything, and going outside again in order to experience the real world, to be shown that the metaverse is quite literally an illusion.

In this case, I'm doing my best to avoid it for as long as possible, and I hope that more people will be aware of these implications sooner, rather than later, because now is the time to stop it whilst it's still young and fresh in everyone's minds, instead of everyone regretting this in 10 years' time, since at the moment, this just all seems like a fad, enforced and wanted by marketers who love to jump on to the newest and shiniest things, convincing everyone else to join them, which is what they inevitably do, since it feels like they're missing out something if they don't jump on the bandwagon otherwise.

So, those have been my takes on the metaverse in a nutshell, and I could debate this all day, but it'd get tiring really quick. I'm all for virtual reality as a creative medium, along with innovation in general, and I'd love to be able to explore it in more detail, but I'm against it becoming the default way of life, since there needs to be a balance between VR and actual reality, because otherwise, the saying "we live in a simulation" will be taken to a whole new level, and it would be taken literally, which would make this all the more dystopian.

However, with that said, I'm against centralised companies taking an open and decentralised thing (such as how the internet once was), and turning it into a walled garden filled with surveillance in places where you'd least expect it. Additionally, I'm also fully against NFTs since they're more trouble than they're worth, what with destroying the whole environment in order to say that you "own" a jpeg (or literally any other digital file) of something that's widely available for anyone to own. In a way, I find that ridiculous, not to mention the sheer amount of obvious loopholes which are out there, along with the colossal waste of time, money, and energy that are NFTs.