

Virtual reality is coming. Is that a good thing?

The *Financial Times* has an interesting [piece](#) celebrating the developments afoot in the virtual reality (VR) sector. According to Roy Taylor, a vice-president of the chipmaker AMD:

“‘VR is happening here on a scale and with an energy you can’t believe,’ he said. ‘The universities are pouring millions of dollars into it. I don’t think you went far enough in your article. Seriously, this is going to change everything.’”

As Jonathan Margolis, the author of the article, writes about his experience with the latest Oculus Rift VR headset,

“It was several times more startling than the VR footage I described in April. It was more than virtual reality; it was pretty much . . . reality.”

On the point of reality, there is a sidebar on the piece that hints at just how revolutionary such a development could be:

“Thanks to virtual reality and augmented reality, economic problems can be solved the ‘Matrix’ way: a.k.a. rendering the search for a better life redundant.”

And that raises some interesting questions:

- What happens if a significant portion of humanity simply decides that reality isn’t worth it and they would rather spend a majority of their time in a virtual world?
- What will be the psychologic effects of VR? Do the users end up having a god-complex as the result of manipulating a virtual world and then find it difficult

to re-enter reality?

- Who runs the 'Matrix'?
- And what about those who choose not to play? Oddly enough, do the Luddites who remain in reality actually end up controlling those who live in the virtual world?

Truly, those are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to questioning the effects of VR.



Christopher Lasch, writing in *The Culture of Narcissism*, saw the changes in human psychology with the rise of 20th century entertainment. His words seem prescient for any discussion on VR and where it might lead:

“Overexposure to manufactured illusions soon destroys their representational power. The illusion of reality dissolves, not in a heightened sense of reality as we might expect, but in a remarkable indifference to reality. Our sense of reality appears to rest, curiously enough, on our willingness to be taken in by the staged illusion of reality. Even a rational understanding of the techniques by means of which a given illusion is produced does not necessarily destroy our capacity to experience it as a representation of reality. ... But a complete indifference even to the mechanics of illusion announces the collapse of the very idea of reality, dependent at every point on the distinction between nature and artifice, reality and illusion. This indifference betrays the erosion of the capacity to take any interest in anything outside the self.”

We shall see how virtual reality develops and how humanity responds. But if the past and present is any indication, Lasch is probably quite right. Many will choose to abandon reality for the greatest form of self-worship ever created.