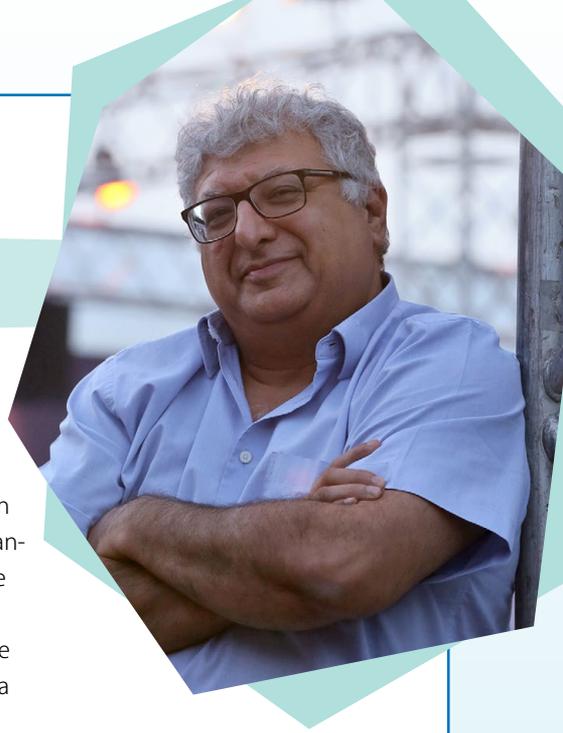


## What Is Real?

by Viraf Pocha



What is real?

Is it what you see with your eyes, hear with your ears, feel with your touch? These simple tests no longer apply in the world of Artificial Intelligence where the line between fake and fair is blurred to the point of non-existence. But wait a minute. Isn't that exactly what the centuries old art of storytelling is? Plato said 'Reality exists beyond our senses. Ideas come first. The world exists in their shadow.'

Learning and understanding have always been easier if there is an element of emotion and humanity in the method of sharing wisdom. Dry information on dry texts have always been difficult to plough through unless you are a dedicated scholar.

From that perspective this whole AI revolution can then be seen as just the next step in the progression of storytelling.

Theatre, film, drama over centuries enact human stories in an artificial environment where the audience is invited to suspend disbelief and become one with the story. With the use of colour, costumes and ceremony, actors bring alive ancient fables and make them real for audiences of their time.

So, from that perspective, social media posts are not fake. They represent a reality that "the faker" believes to be real or would like his listeners/readers to believe is real.

Professionals in the creative business look upon the advent of AI with great trepidation. They fear that real actors, real technicians, real production designers will all become redundant as a clever fellow who is good at manipulating pixels will soon create digital entertainment. Games or filmed entertainment or even live

performances will now be created by bits and bytes without the need of real people.

That may be true but does that make the end product any less real?

That opens the doors to wonder so vast that no single individual or even groups of the most imaginative forecasters can fill in a clear picture. Engineers, coders and digital artists will perhaps be the stars in the years ahead. No more Shah Rukh Khan or Tom Cruise with their human foibles.

Enter digital composites that look, feel and inspire us. The canvas of the future is blank. That is either an opportunity or an abyss for our future selves to master or lay our careers low.

So while all the inputs into shows, events, concert etc. maybe fake, one thing is for sure – the stories that they tell must be real. Their stories must touch our human hearts in whatever shape or form the world will fashion us in the coming decades.

What is real? What is truth? Can it exist in the imperfect world we inhabit? It is said that we remember truth. We don't invent it. Which Means that truth emerges generations after historical events only with the benefit of hindsight. A fact that Leaders of today who try and manipulate truth ought to recognise.

I would place a strong bet that real love stories, real drama, action that thrills its audience and begs us to want to know what happens next, will rule. That is the reality we must focus on. Not the tools.

Think of it like the sampler in the recording studio of a few years ago. Some smart engineers figured out a way of recreating a range of sounds from one violin to the lush soundscape of a hundred violins simply by the clever manipulation of black and white keys on an innocent looking keyboard that could trigger a range of sound that was unimaginably vast.

I sense the same kind of boom will

overtake all aspects of the creative arts. The skill level of the very best in today's world, will soon become standard as machines aid in the creative process. Everybody is talking about now machines writing code and the human hand is only used to tweak a few loose ends.

Creativity will become king. Ideas will rule as the tools of production become standard. I think that is tremendously exciting. I wish I was a hungry sixteen year old on the cusp of forging a career in this new landscape.

Sorry baba. If this thought terrifies you here's an early exit that you should take to avoid despair and disillusionment going ahead.

So now that I'm on a roll, let's imagine a future.

I strongly believe that the most critical aspect of creating reality in an unreal world will be incredibly rewarding if it is based on the foundation of two widely different approaches that can somehow be brought together to serve one another.

First, wild and untethered imagination to forge ahead in a world that has never existed in the past. Think about it. Our human body is about as perfect a creation as there ever was. No amount of manipulation or interpretation has created a form that has been universally accepted as a viable replacement. From Frankenstein's monster to the latest robot, that creation will always be measured against the human body in its finest, most beautiful state.

Second, will come some kind of data analyst who will figure out how to capture the desires of huge populations and somehow synthesize them into a simple form that is both relatable and desirable by large sections of the human population that will become its audience. Yes, there will always be room for a fringe or cult hero as we call them today but that may remain irrelevant if we are

to shape the collective consciousness of the world.

Ideas vs Data. Vision Vs Execution. Principals Vs Practicality. Life and art live within that argument.

When you make decisions do you choose ideals or adapt to our reality? What do you embrace? What do you avoid?

Somehow I believe both these truisms and talents must co-exist to produce successful, experiential entertainment. aim high. with feet planted firmly onto the ground. Seek truth. Avoid choosing sides. Idealist? Maybe. But if you look at history – those are the only stories that survived.

Let's face it. Only in our fantasies can there exist a creature more beautiful, desirable or impressive than a real person. Future success rests with those who can meet those fantasies with reality and fashion stories that inspire us to greater heights in the real world.

Plato again - Truth is eternal. Beauty is perfect. Justice exists even if no one practices it.

So, in a roundabout way, we have arrived at the same conclusion that Einstein made when he declared that there is no reality in the world. No time. No shape. No form that is absolute. It is all relative and that is our reality. So it can be argued that artificial intelligence and all the fake images it fuels, has made us more real than we have ever been in the past.