



This issue was drafted on the Freewrite Alpha. I edited it in Obsidian on Mac and Apple Vision Pro. I created the cover illustrations with an Apple Pencil and Procreate on an iPad. The layout was done in Adobe InDesign. Halyard is the headline typeface and P22 Mackinac is used for the body. It was printed on my RISO SF5130 using aqua, fluorescent pink, yellow, and black inks. Videos, links, music, and other inspirations can be found at michaelverdi.com/zine/issue4.

Thanks for reading. Really. Half the reason I make these is so people will read them. The other half is just to make them. And I guess another half is to figure out what I think about things.

First printing

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Hi

It's been too long. Let me catch you up. Back in October I said I wanted to make a movie — like 90 minutes, big screen, popcorn. Over the last bunch of months I've been

clarifying exactly what I want to make and actually it's not a movie movie like I thought. Let me explain.

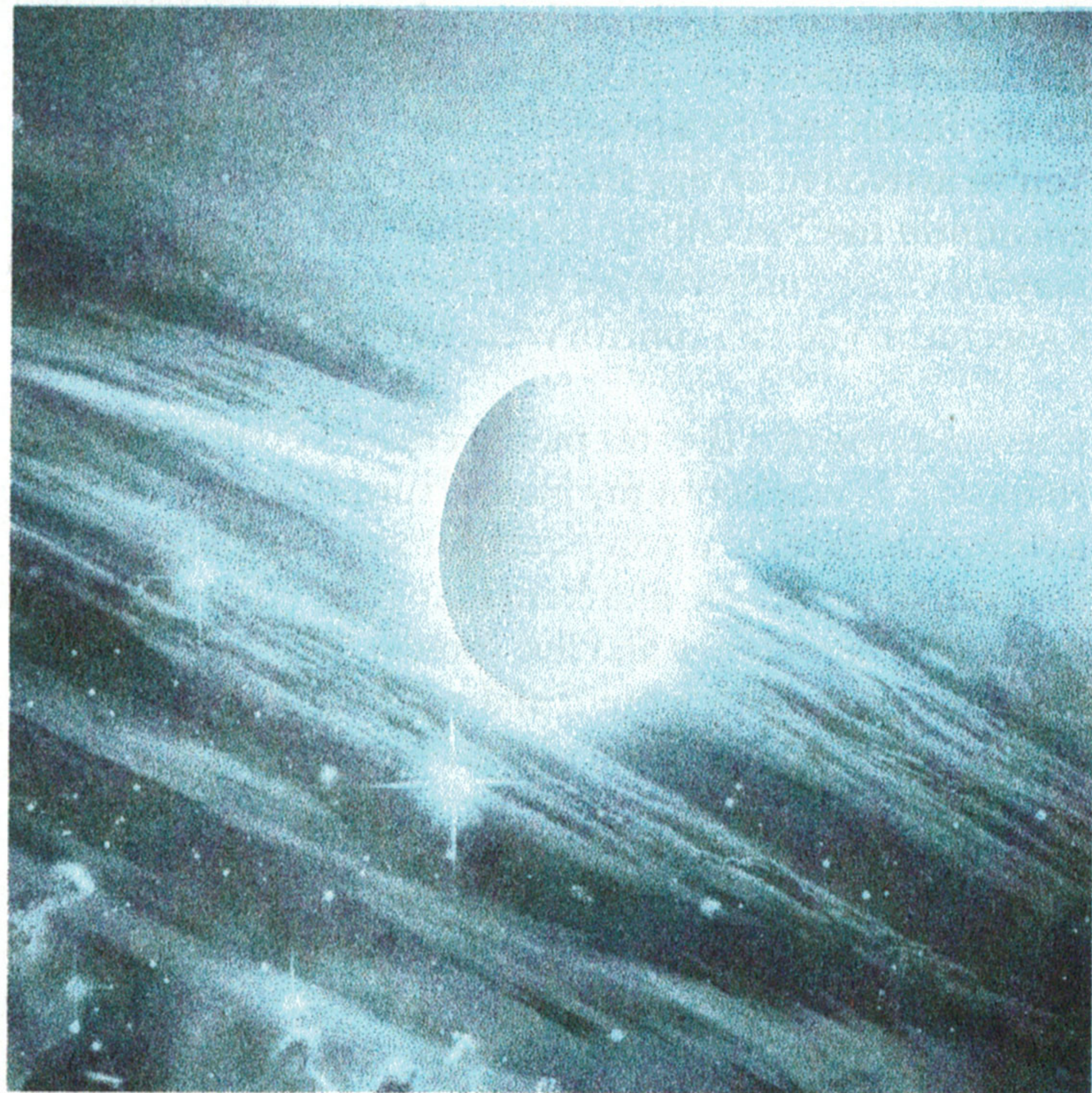
I watched the film *Past Lives* — one of my favorites from last year. The writer and director Celine Song based the story largely on her own life. Inspired, I thought about how I might turn my life and my imagined future into a film. I put together an outline and started writing notes, scraps of dialog, and pages of ideas. I thought this idea could be a film.

Around that same time I found the Scriptnotes podcast. John August (the writer of *Big Fish*) is the main host.

Most weeks he's joined by his friend Craig Mazin (writer and creator of Chernobyl and The Last of Us). Over the last 7 months I've learned a ton about screenwriting from those guys. On the podcast, whenever someone writes in with a question about doing something unconventional, they offer advice about how to approach it but they never tell someone they shouldn't try. They're very pro-experimentation. It's not something reserved for famous filmmakers as far as they're concerned.

So as I'm working on this idea, a few things happen. First, although I think I have a good idea and I think I might be able to actually write it, it's not feeling like something I would make. It feels more like just an idea I think is good rather than one only I can do.

Probably as a reaction to that, the more I write the more it begins to merge with what I've already written for The Phantom Moon, that zine I'm always making but never finishing. And when I think about what all of it might look like as a film I keep seeing something on a



theater stage or an art installation. I want to create a fantastical place you can visit for real. Imagine you're on the moon and it's a beautiful blue summer day. You've arrived in an egg shaped space ship and you encounter me. I'm telling you stories and occasionally playing video memories for you. But you aren't just a spectator, you can control what happens next.

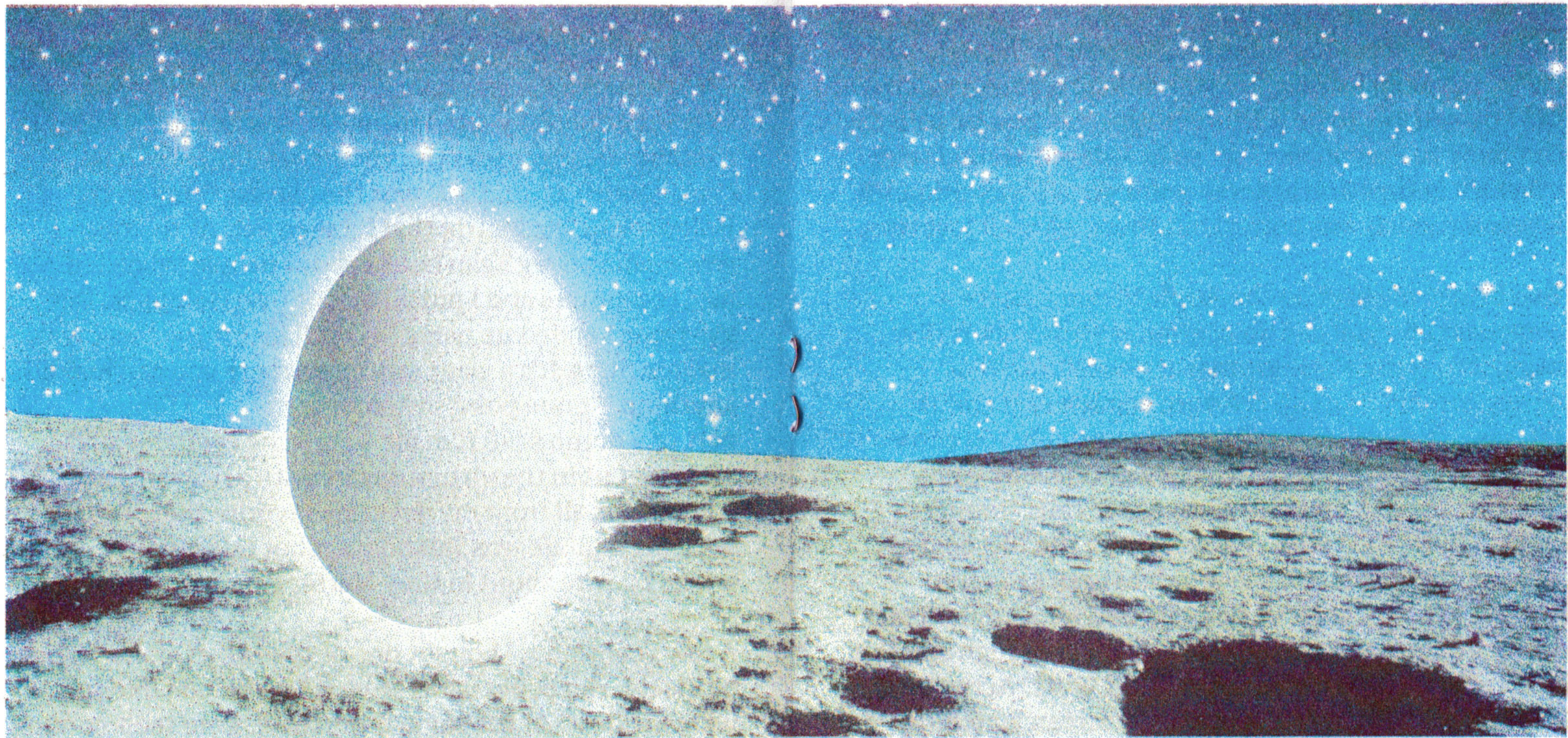
It reminds me of a theater piece I created 20 years ago, Holodeck. It was about my plan to turn the universe into a computer (a regular computer could get unplugged) that runs a Holodeck, like from Star Trek, where I'd upload my conscience and live forever. The Phantom Moon isn't a Holodeck but it shares some of it's DNA. It's the place that keeps all of your memories. Even the ones you've forgotten. I'd like to recreate it for you. This place where you can live inside your memories of other times and places. Maybe it's a film within a play inside another play. Part documentary, part fantasy.

Then the Apple Vision Pro came out.

Holy shit y'all.

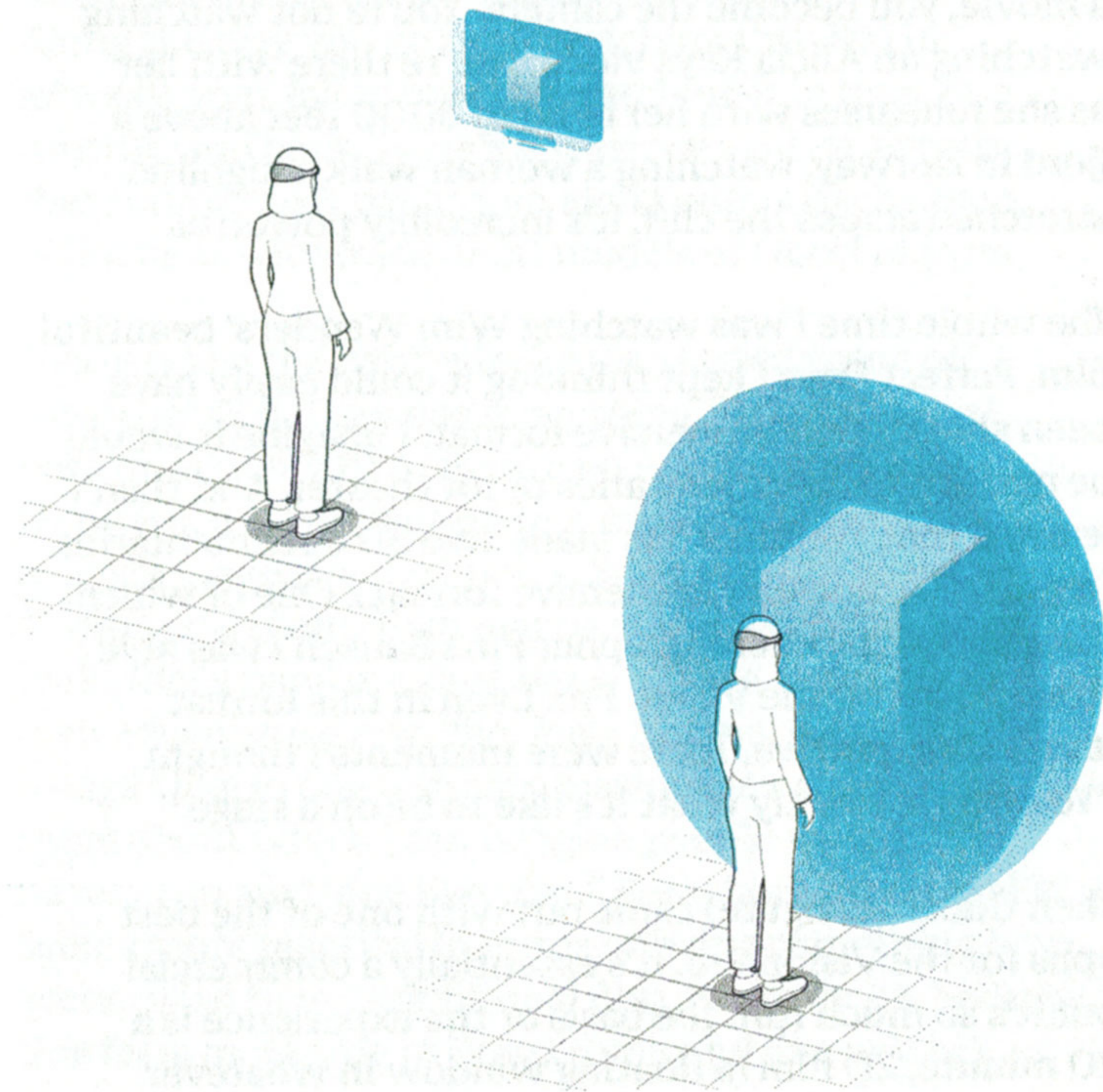
Ok I have to back up and tell you a few more things. Stay with me. 20 years ago, one of the inspirations for that theater piece was the virtual world SecondLife (Yes, it's still around!). It was the closest thing to the Holodeck or The Matrix that I'd seen yet. At the time, I was reading Greg Egan books about people uploaded into computers and I put all of this into Holodeck. But the thing I ended up using SecondLife for the most was making films. It's a giant sandbox where you can make anything. At one point it was even my job. I filmed part of a dumb sci-fi film for Scion (the car company). We shot out in the virtual desert with actors on two continents, all from my desk. My favorite thing I made with SecondLife was Talkbot (a robot talk show) which I wrote about in Grey Matter Gravy Issue 2.

A few years later, I bought one of the early Oculus VR headsets. You could use it to visit SecondLife like you were inside it. At the same time, there were tools coming



out for building virtual reality web pages. That's my mom on the back cover looking at something I'd made with them. But then Oculus gave up on Mac computers, the CEO turned out to be a Trump supporter, and he sold the company to Facebook. Hard pass. I played around with other VR setups and at some point got a PlayStation VR headset (which was better) but these were all just toys.

That brings me back to the Apple Vision Pro. It's a computer and you can do computer stuff with it (I'm using it to write these words). It doesn't feel like an experiment or a toy. A future version of it (think glasses not goggles) could be the computer you carry with you everywhere instead of a phone. But what I'm most excited about is what Apple calls "Immersive video." They're 3D videos that capture the 180 degrees in front of the camera. These videos aren't exactly new technology. They've been around for a while. The difference is that cameras are now good enough and the Vision Pro is good enough to make it work. Actually, it's amazing. Instead of looking at a screen watching



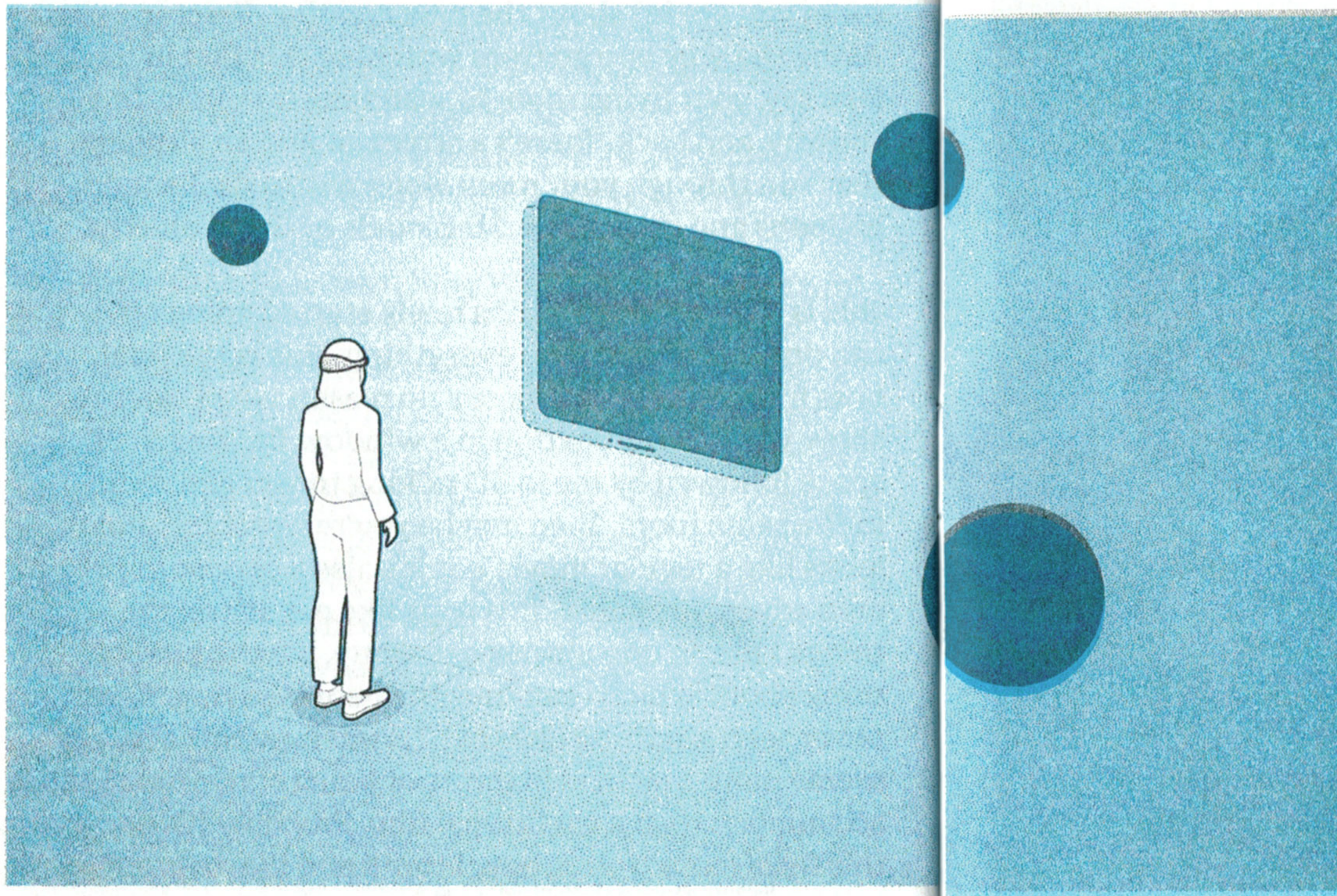
a movie, you become the camera. You're not watching watching an Alicia Keys video, you're there with her as she rehearses with her band or 3000 feet above a fjord in Norway, watching a woman walk a highline stretched across the cliff. It's incredibly powerful.

The whole time I was watching Wim Wenders' beautiful film, *Perfect Days* I kept thinking it could easily have been shot in that immersive format. I imagine it would be perfect for documentaries or for theater. And then I learned that Wenders has made two 3D documentaries (regular 3D, not that immersive format). One of which, *Pina*, about the choreographer Pina Bausch I was able to see in 3D on the Vision Pro. Even in this format it was transportive. There were moments I thought, "Yes, this is exactly what it's like to be on a stage."

Then Gucci (go figure) came out with one of the best apps for the Vision Pro. It's essentially a commercial but it's so much fun. The basis of the experience is a 20 minute, 2D film (a floating window in whatever

room you are in) about the new creative director. Along the way you go from watching this film in, let's say, your living room to watching it in Italy, to a runway, and back. There's a streetcar and an airplane that run through your room along with a dachshund, balloons and interactive 3D models of Gucci objects.

This is when the lightbulbs really started going off. I can do all of it. I can use everything. This is the final boss form of my film. There's no reason why I can't show you a 2D animation in a window floating in 3D space followed by me in 3D talking to you like we're in the same room. Then maybe you're watching what looks like a regular movie but it's also a choose your own adventure game. This feels like me. It's all the things I like in one ultimate mashup. It's the kind of thing about which I can imagine people saying, "I've never seen anything like that." Somehow this actually seems more practical in terms of being something I can accomplish than a traditional film. Probably it's because this feels more true to how I think and like to work.



It feels exciting to me. It also feels like I can finally let myself use these ideas that I've been collecting for 10 years. I'm actually a bit worried that if I don't use them soon they'll assimilate every new idea I have and become too important to ever ruin by actually trying to make them. It's time to do it.

This is the way.

