

COMPUTER SCIENCE
SEMINAR

You Are Already Living Inside a Computer

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Abstract: Futurists and philosophers have made dramatic predictions about the future of computers. Artificial intelligence might end the need for human work, or it might enslave humanity, or it might facilitate a kind of rapture into machines, where people's consciousnesses could upload and, through simulation, become immortal.

Realized or not, those future visions offer a stark contrast with the reality of computing today: One where digital machinery is embedded in the ordinary, human world rather than leading away from it. The computational aspects of ordinary things from smartphone apps to internet-connected toasters have become goals unto themselves, rather than just a means to an end. As it spreads from desktops and back-offices to pockets, cameras, cars, and door locks, the affection people have with computers transfers onto other, even more ordinary objects. And the more people love using computers for everything, the more life feels incomplete unless it takes place inside them. Reality might have beaten the futurists to the punch, by turning computing into a way of life.

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