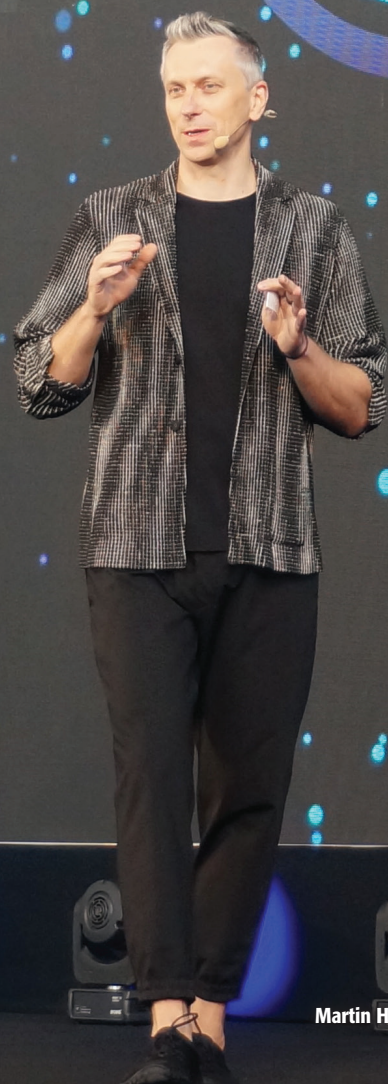




FUTURE PORT PRAGUE

Monica Frim



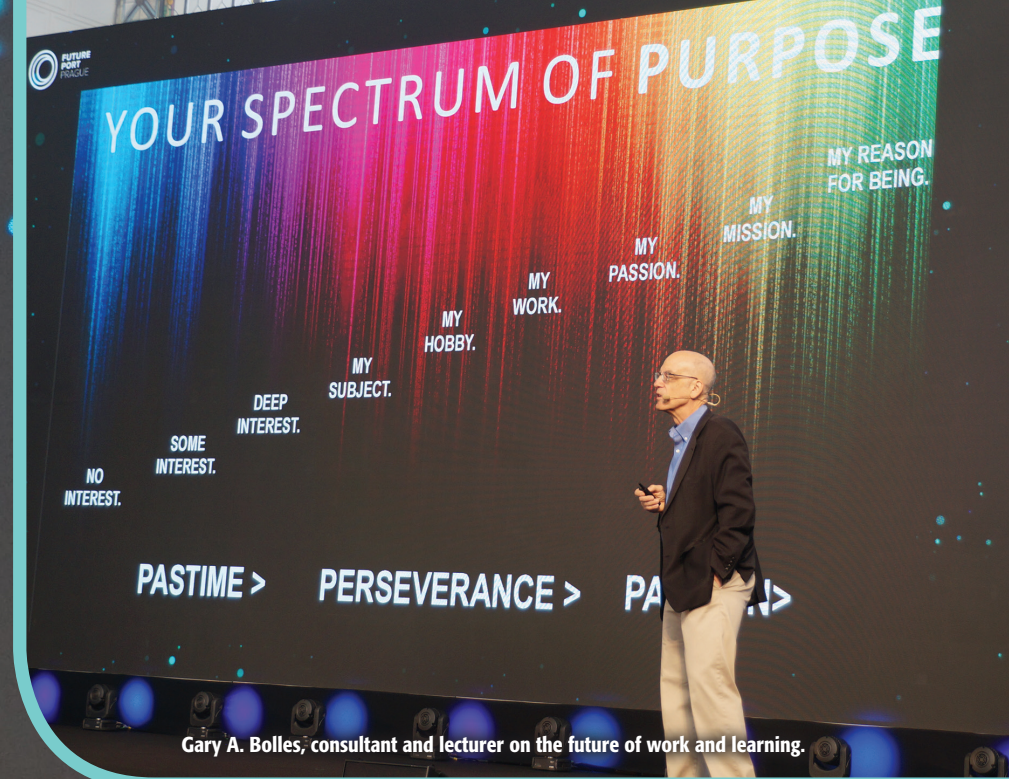
Martin Holecko, founder and CEO of Future Port Prague

AT FIRST GLANCE, it may seem as if time has stood still in Prague. Spires and storybook houses stand shoulder to shoulder with Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance buildings that seemingly compress a thousand years of history into a living textbook of architecture and inventiveness. So it may come as a surprise to some that Prague also stands at the vanguard of futuristic trends and technological advancements. The city annually hosts Future Port Prague—a combination of conference, festival and exposition that bills itself as the largest international visionary event in the heart of Europe.

Founded in 2017 by Martin Holecko, Future Port Prague provides a platform for trendsetting speakers and exhibitors from all over the world to share their visions and products for making the world a better place. At a time when negativity and uncertainty dominate the news, the visionaries and trendsetters who meet and share their bold ideas on this international stage contend that the future will be better than we think and they are there to tell us how and why. The crux of the conference/exhibition is that exponential technology will give everyone in the world access to food, education and medical care. Admittedly it's an ambitious goal, but the ball has already been set in motion. Now it's just a matter of ensuring it stays on a positive course.

'If you can think it, you can do it' has been a yearly theme. At the third annual Future Port Prague, held in September 2019, leaders in business, industry, education and politics shared their stories and achievements on stage, while other exhibitors showcased cutting edge wares in an adjoining wing of the Industrial Palace on Prague Exhibition Grounds or in the white tents that had been set up outside specifically for the exhibition. With imagery that included a free-hanging moon boldly dominating the main conference center, the conference underscored the theme of unstoppable technology and the new opportunities it brings to humanity.

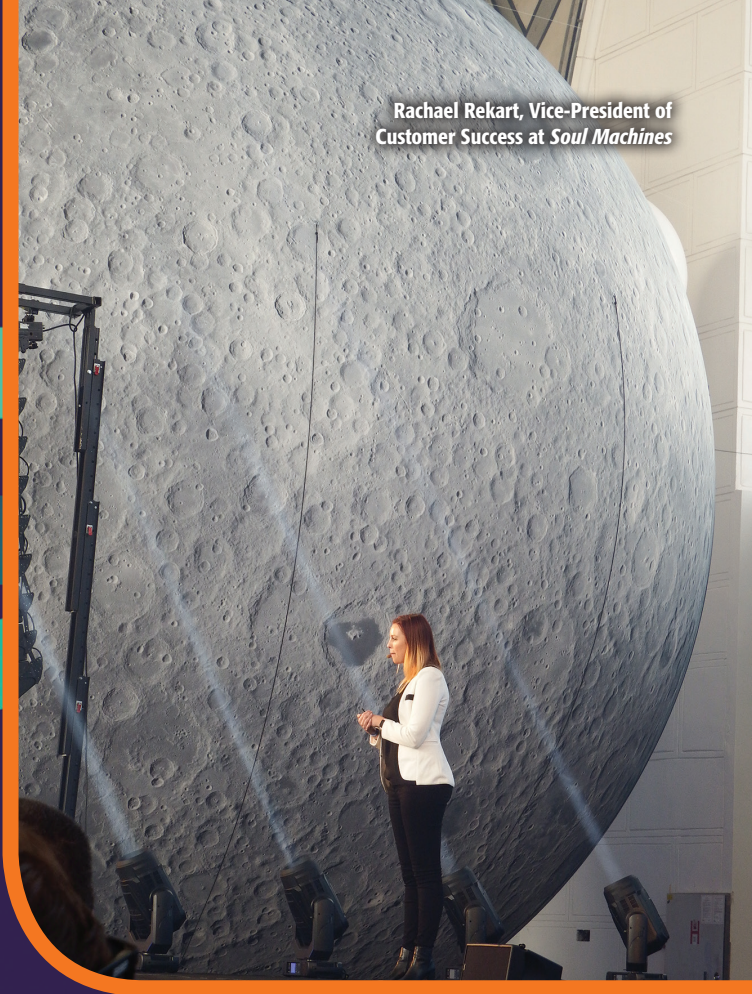
So how does one thrive in a world shaped by digitization and exponential technologies that develop faster than one can seemingly grasp? According to San Francisco-based Gary Bolles, an internationally-acknowledged expert on future trends in work and education, the answer lies in changing educational strategies and sharing them universally so that people everywhere will have the skills to adapt quickly and wholeheartedly to a digital work economy. "We have a need to upgrade humans but to also fix the system," Bolles said, a sentiment echoed by other experts in education during a panel discussion moderated by Washington-based Ana Rold, an advocate for lifelong learning and intellectual empowerment.



Gary A. Bolles, consultant and lecturer on the future of work and learning.

The conference soon became a head-spinning grab bag of information as renowned business leaders, educators, executives, engineers, designers, philanthropists and other visionaries shared products and know-how on a range of themes. Presentations on topics such as the future of learning, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, 3-D technologies, robots and new concepts in food confirmed the world was indeed changing at breakneck speed. The necessity for connectivity between humans and machines became a recurring theme as a whole new world of possibilities unfolded in which artificial intelligence figured prominently in all aspects of business and life.

Soul Machines, a company started in New Zealand by Greg Cross, demonstrated “digital humans” that look, speak and breathe like humans and have the ability to read and respond to others’ emotional cues with their own appropriate expressions. While these robots are indeed lifelike, they still require human intercession, although the company is working toward creating a digital brain that would give them the ability to provide personalized customer service in fields such as retail, telecommunications, education and health. A more questionable application is the creation of digital twins, a prospect that **Rachael Rekart, vice president of Customer Success**, admits could pose ethics questions that still need to be resolved. But their potential is boundless. Rekart gave the example of a digital Einstein coming back to life



Rachael Rekart, Vice-President of Customer Success at Soul Machines

so people could learn directly from the master. But what if, instead of Einstein, someone duplicated Hitler or Stalin?

Artistically, artificial intelligence has already been used to raise the dead... or, in the case of Antonin Dvorak, to create a composition, appropriately titled “From the Future,” out of one of his unfinished musical sketches. The string quartet PKF - Prague Philharmonia provided a welcome artistic interlude to the conference when the musicians performed the composition created by the virtual composer AIVA (Artificial Intelligence Virtual Artist) in flawless allegiance to Dvorak’s style.

Many who took the stage stressed the power of starting small, then shooting for the moon. A humble experience delivering food to the needy in **Atlanta** prompted **Ambuj (AJ) Jain**, to launch the non-profit organization Feed A Billion, whose goal is to end world hunger by providing meals to starving families anywhere in the world. Since its founding in 2016, the company has delivered more than four million meals worldwide, and, as a side benefit, mitigated some of the sociological effects of starvation.

Other companies’ technical solutions to food shortages include revolutionary ways of producing meat and meat

alternatives. San-Francisco-based New Age Meats gives credence to that old joke, why buy the pig when all you want is a little sausage. Founded in 2017 by Brian Spears, the company produces lab-grown kielbasas from the cells of a pig, and is a relative newcomer in the clean meat initiative that’s sparking debate all over the world. Nearby, JUST, Inc. uses a similar approach, but produces chicken nuggets from cultured meat, perhaps taking its cue from Winston Churchill who wrote: “ We shall escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat the breast or wing by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium.” It seems that Churchill had an eye toward sustainable food production long before biotechnology became a buzzword.

Vitor Espirito Santo, JUST’s director of cellular culture, keenly points out that cultured meat is not artificial meat since it is grown from bona fide animal cells. Neither is it a GMO (genetically modified organism). The meat is actually a healthier and tastier alternative to farm-raised animals because it’s grown without hormones or antibiotics. Espirito

Santo postulates that some vegetarians—those who eschew meat for ethical reasons—might eat it too, as no animals are slaughtered in the process.

From an environmental perspective, cultured meat uses less energy, less land, and produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions. However, the current high cost of production means it is not yet a viable alternative to normal animal husbandry. But stay tuned. Five years ago, lab-grown meat at one company cost more than \$300,000 a pound. Now some people are predicting that by 2022, culture-grown burgers, chicken nuggets or sausages will cost less than conventional meats and taste even better.

As we march boldly into a frenzied future of endless possibilities, it just may be more important than ever to stay humble and keep one foot in the past. Just ask the floor sweeper who would be president of a country. When **Andrej Kiska** couldn’t find work as an electrical engineer after the Velvet Revolution, he swept floors in New York, working up to 100 hours a week, before returning to Slovakia where he became a successful businessman and



Ambuj (AJ) Jain, founder of Feed A Billion



Andrej Kiska, President of Slovakia from 2014 to 2019

FROM
FLOOR
SWEEPER
TO PRESIDENT

Dream big to win big

Is AI good for Humanity?

Shalev Lifshitz, AI researcher and entrepreneur

philanthropist. But his most laudable achievement came in 2014 when he became the fourth president of the Slovak Republic. In a paean to humility and moral responsibility Kiska summed up his *modus vivendi*: “In New York I learned it’s important to keep going, and in Slovakia I learned it is the moral duty of all successful people to give back to society.”

Kiska embodied perfectly the conference’s leitmotif, that with passion and purpose anyone can achieve anything but one must do it with humility and with a view to improving humanity. He still wears the simple shirt he wore more than 30 years ago to remind himself to stay humble. He wore it for his presentation at Future Port Prague—the shirt of an unpretentious man who dared to be a president.

Just as one doesn’t expect a floor sweeper to lead a country, one doesn’t expect a teenager to be at the forefront of artificial intelligence (AI). Yet, like Kiska, **Shalev Lifshitz** works outside normal parameters to deliver the seemingly impossible. Now 17, Lifshitz is a Canadian entrepreneur and researcher who conducts research at

Canada’s top hospitals as well as the University of Waterloo into achieving human-level artificial intelligence in the fields of health care. His projects include developing better pathological diagnoses of cancer, better remote monitoring systems for patients, and interconnecting human intelligence and machine intelligence. He too spoke eloquently about the value of passion and using it for the betterment of humanity.

Artificial intelligence seemed to be the currency that bound speakers and exhibitors in seemingly unrelated fields. It wasn’t just powering up robots, drones, virtual reality headsets, cars and 3-D printers, but providing institutions like banks, hospitals, insurance companies and governments with personal information that we may not want them to share. **Michal Pechoucek**, CTO at Avast, a company that develops security and antivirus applications, provided insight into a data-driven world that is becoming exceedingly interconnected. Ironically, in a machine-driven world, we will need machines to protect us from machines. But we will need humility to remain human. ■

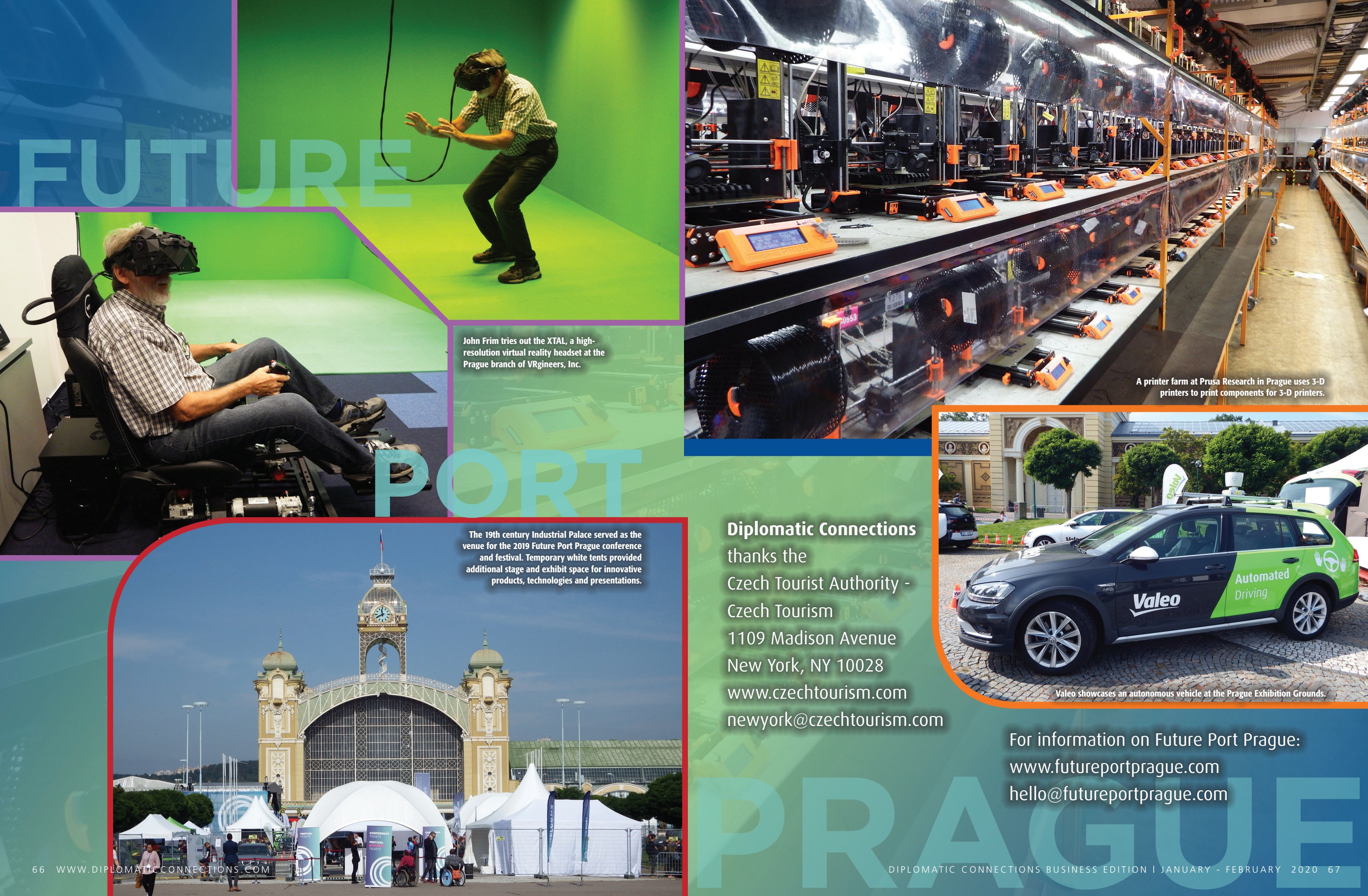
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Future of Privacy in the Future AI World

- more and more private data in the hands of current owners
- users will not care sufficiently about their privacy
- data driven governance over people
- online and physical world will be hugely interconnected
- AI will not be explainable, monitored and properly regulated, there will be AI race
- no trust and safety while connected ⇒ off-grid communities

AI researcher and CTO of Avast



FUTURE

PORT

PRAGUE

John Frim tries out the XTAL, a high-resolution virtual reality headset at the Prague branch of VRgineers, Inc.

A printer farm at Prusa Research in Prague uses 3-D printers to print components for 3-D printers.

The 19th century Industrial Palace served as the venue for the 2019 Future Port Prague conference and festival. Temporary white tents provided additional stage and exhibit space for innovative products, technologies and presentations.

Valeo showcases an autonomous vehicle at the Prague Exhibition Grounds.

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