

Can AI Survive a Literacy Crisis?

As books fade, so does the ability to think deeply — with real consequences for tech.

5 million

Peak annual science book sales

The peak in popular-science book sales occurred in 2019, a high watermark for public engagement with complex ideas.

Despite the digital age, the 2019 peak of 5 million popular-science books sold annually reflects a moment when the public was engaged with deep, evidence-based narratives. Since then, sales have dropped to 2.9 million, spread across 20,000 titles — suggesting fragmentation and declining depth of engagement. This trend coincides with rising AI adoption, yet the cognitive habits required to understand AI's foundations — critical thinking, sustained attention, narrative comprehension — are eroding.

01

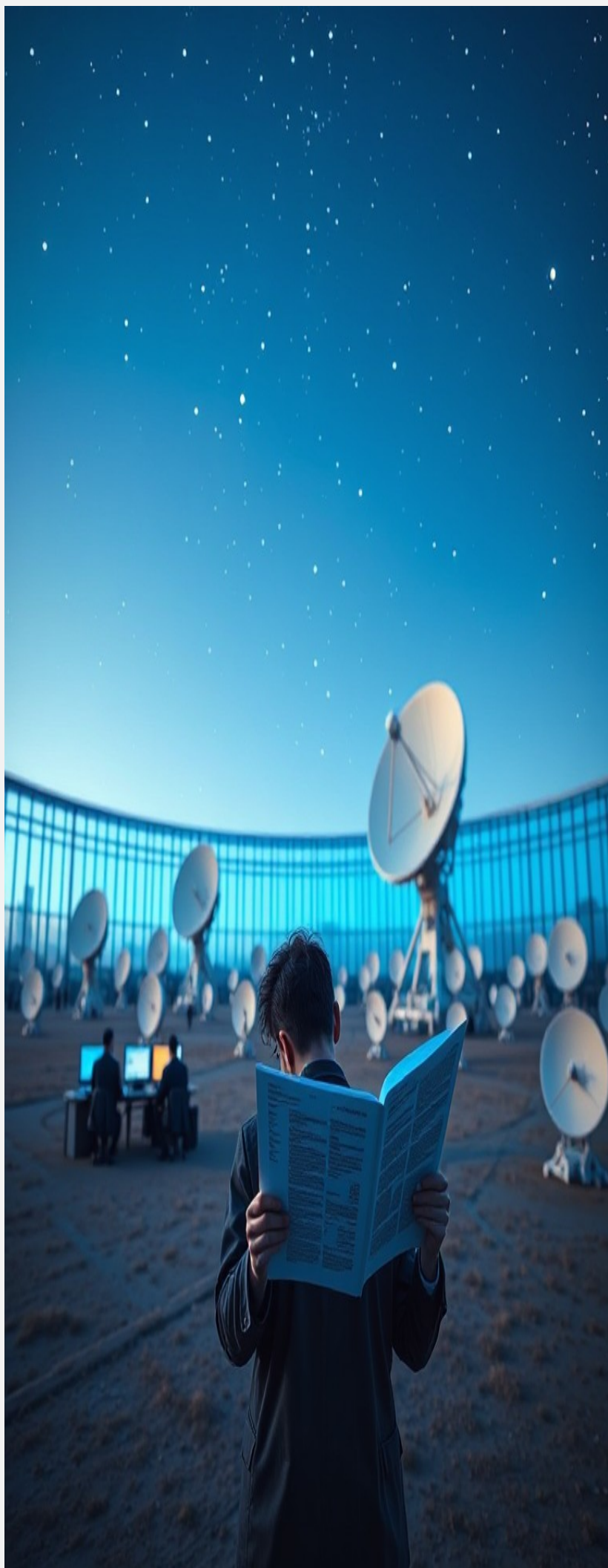
Complexity Is the New AI Battleground

AI models trained on fragmented, short-form content struggle with coherence and context. The same cognitive fatigue that prevents readers from finishing Dostoevsky also limits engineers' capacity to debug recursive reasoning failures in large language models. The real bottleneck in AI progress may not be compute, but attention.

02

Attention Is the Ultimate AI Resource

When developers write code in bursts between social media alerts, they're training AI to respond to signals, not to synthesize meaning. The result is a feedback loop: AI systems trained on shallow input produce shallow outputs, which further entrench attention decay. The solution isn't more data — it's restoring the capacity for sustained, reflective cognition.



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george@alex.realestate · +1 713.918.9951



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